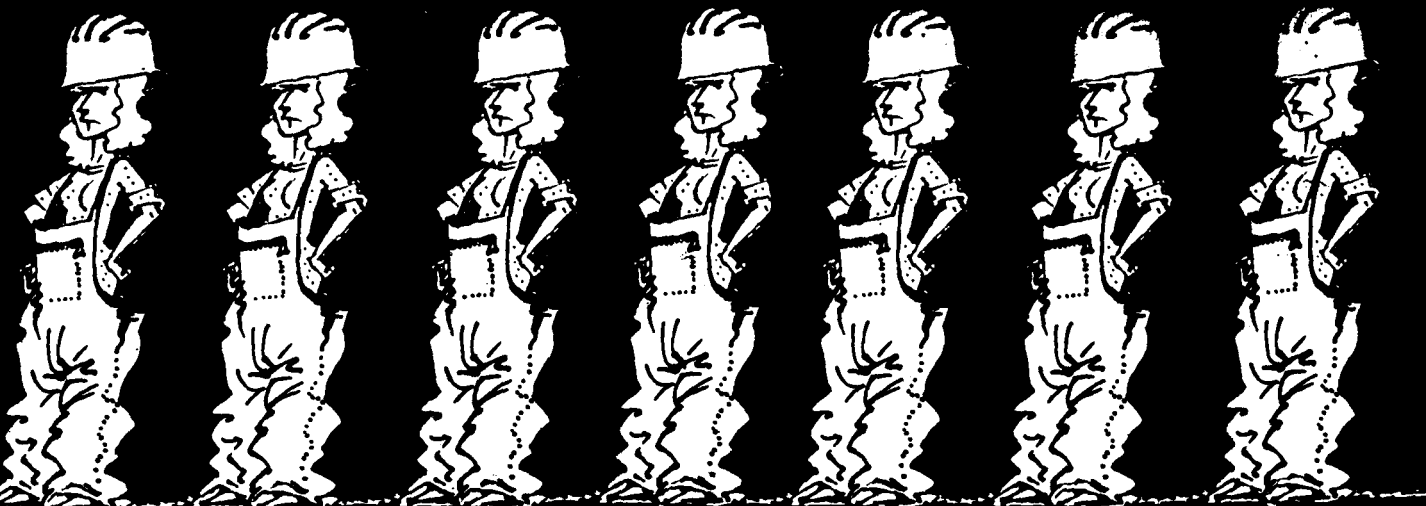


Education
Professional training
Education
Working conditions

EEUU
SSO



European parliament and women's rights



Parliament
debates
women's rights



François Mitterrand's victory

François Mitterrand's great victory, which has resulted in a Socialist becoming President of the French Republic for the first time, is a major event for France and for Europe as a whole.

For several years an apparently irreversible trend was leading to a loss of position for the European left and a massive return to power of the forces of conservatism. Today the trend is reversed and the French Socialist Party, assembled round its candidate, who conducted an exemplary campaign throughout, is proud of having opened up a new road which, we are convinced, other European Socialists will now be able to follow.

We know how valuable the active solidarity displayed by the Socialist and Social Democratic Parties proved to be in this victorious struggle. We will not forget the date of 19 March in Paris when all the leaders of the Socialist International and the Socialist Group of the European Parliament were gathered round François Mitterrand. It was a ringing reply to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and those who affirmed like him that the election of the Socialist candidate would isolate France in the world.

François Mitterrand has won a victory for France, for Europe, for Socialism, which is rightly described as still being a novel idea in the world. Let us now move ahead, all together, towards other victories.

*Claude Estier
Deputy Chairman of the Socialist Group*



Yvette Roudy

In January 1980 the European Parliament decided to set up a committee to draft a report on women's rights in the Community.

By agreement between the political groups this ad hoc committee was not to be permanent. Its specific task was to report on the current position of women in Europe with practical proposals.

A French Socialist, Yvette Roudy, was appointed chairman of the committee, and its rapporteur was Johanna Maij-Weggen (Christian Democrat - Netherlands).

The initiative for creating this committee came from the Socialists. This may seem somewhat paradoxical in view of the connection between the position of women and social reform as a whole. Indeed, the creation of a committee of this kind may well be thought to help keep women in the very ghetto from which they are trying to escape!

However, it was widely felt that this question would only be discussed by a special committee with the means to see the job through. This arrangement, though fraught with ambiguities, seemed to be the most effective solution.

When the report was presented, Yvette Roudy pointed out that the European Parliament contained rather more women than the national parliaments. So many European MPs felt they had a particular responsibility and accepted the need to discuss the problems.

She also deplored the absence of women in decision-making bodies - a fact clearly illustrated by the lack of any European level committee for women.

'For as long as this situation continues,' Yvette Roudy said, 'there will need to be special mixed committees and inevitably it will once again be the women who do the work.' Until women were equally represented everywhere there would continue to be a need for special committees.

For the Socialist Group, Ernest Glinne stressed that **feminism and socialism were intimately connected.**

The battle waged by feminists and by women who were not of Socialist convictions should be more than a simple demand for equality between men and women. That would lead only to equality within a system whose very structures were being re-evaluated.

Through its refusal of any type of domination, and also through its international dimension, the struggle of women must continue to be the struggle of all Socialists.

Liberation of women was linked to the liberation of all human beings. The degree of freedom enjoyed by women, was the standard for measuring freedom in general.

Women must participate in all forms of social, political, cultural and economic activity. Integration into the system of production was not sufficient to assure women's liberation, but the struggle of women was irrevocably bound to the struggle of men for another form of work organization based on an economy designed to serve mankind. This statement of principle by the Socialists also justified their reservations on certain aspects of the resolution.





In a context of crisis...

The resolution places women in the present economic context of crisis and unemployment.

Starting with the assumption that women are the victims of this crisis, the resolution is divided into chapters which each contain proposals seeking a better definition of the *status* of women and to improve living conditions in general.

First of all the resolution calls for genuine implementation of directives already adopted at Community level for improving the equality of women at the economic and legal level. These are the directives on equal pay, equal treatment and equality in social security.

It is suggested that the first directive be amplified by provisions requiring the Member States to prepare statistics in which the specific structural problems relating to the employment of women are clearly defined.

A supplementary directive on equal treatment for male and female workers in the Member States' fiscal legislation, taking account of the relationship between family income and the number of dependents is also advocated.

On the directive on equal treatment, new provisions should enable its implementation to be more tightly controlled. Moreover, there is a specific recommendation for national committees to be set up to assist women who take cases to the relevant legal authorities in accordance with the provisions of these nine directives.

The directive on social security is unsatisfactory and deserves close attention, particularly at a time when established social rights are being jeopardized.

Parliament feels that the provisions which allow the Member States to continue granting women derived rights from their husbands must be regarded as transitional.

On the other hand, the observance of the Community directives should be an essential precondition for granting support from the Community's regional and social funds.

Finally, the demand for equal treatment of men and women at the legal and economic level calls for an increased information campaign giving details of the directives and the rights arising from them.

The participation of women in economic activity should be stepped up, especially as increasing unemployment affects women in particular. Women are concentrated in the most vulnerable employment sector, as well as being burdened by the traditional stereotypes of male and female jobs.

The effort to combat this problem therefore should not be confined to specific directives and action by the

European Social Fund but should encompass a wide ranging policy in the agricultural, industrial, social and regional sectors.

The aim must be to increase opportunities available to women (and men) to amalgamate their domestic and professional roles and facilitate the participation of women in political, economic and social life.

The spirit of the directive on social security maintains the concept of man as the 'head of the household' as women only have derived rights. The European Parliament feels that legal equality must include the recognition of personal rights.

If these rights are to be established, the social services to enable roles to be shared must be increased. Particular attention must therefore be given to women's health protection, to the right to responsible and freely chosen motherhood and the right of infants to benefit from the support of society from the moment of birth. (The Socialists' viewpoint on this matter will be discussed later.)

Moreover, the position of migrant women and women employed in family businesses or in the sparsely populated areas should be improved.

Parliament recommends a **general reduction in working hours** and a redistribution of employment between men and women to create more jobs for women. It also discussed at some length problems of part-time work. (We shall discuss the Socialists' position on this subject, as they did not share the majority view which was in favour of part-time working.)

Parliament's resolution considers that women's job opportunities could be substantially improved by introducing a greater variety of working hours enabling male and female employees to choose between a large range of part-time jobs.

However, the social and financial disadvantages of part-time employment must first be eliminated. Part-time workers must enjoy the same rights as other workers, including the same working conditions, social benefits, occupational and industrial training and promotion prospects. Shorter working hours must not be used as a pretext for fresh discrimination against women.

Other arrangements such as working at home, carried out mainly by women, which the Commission is asked to report on, are also analysed.

Increased social and family services

The resolution notes with concern that a number of married women working outside their own country are

compelled to carry out two activities, thus performing work of a length which would be regarded as unacceptable under the legislation of each country concerned.

It should be part of Community education policy to encourage the training of boys in certain tasks which would eventually enable and encourage men to participate in household work.

Noting that a large number of women disappear from active employment between the ages of 25 and 35, it advocates improving and harmonizing the rules on maternity leave, parental leave and leave for family reasons.

It also notes that social services for the family are in difficulty whereas they should be encouraged to prevent women from bearing the brunt of the crisis.

Dangers of new technologies

The impact of new technologies on employment implies the need to help women to adapt to change and to eliminate the adverse effects which new technologies could have on women.

Women in positions of responsibility

The resolution deplores the continued under-representation of women in employers' and trade union organizations and other professional organizations and asks the Commission, in drawing up legislation of particular interest to women, to seek further opinions from women's interest groups or specific experts when it finds that women are not represented on its consultative committees.

The importance of education

A specific education policy is essential for equal opportunities for girls. The coordination and intensification of educational policy measures at Community level will play a decisive role in the struggle against unemployment of women and young people.

Particular measures are *proposed* such as the development of mathematical, scientific and technical education, the development of language tuition, civic education and the sharing of roles between men and women.

The resolution also stresses the principle of co-education, a better ratio of boys to girls at all levels of education and study of the discriminatory aspects of teaching materials, etc.

Finally, this chapter calls for improved professional training and specialization not only at school level but also in adult education.





Disadvantaged groups and regions

The plight of young migrant women, and women living in sparsely populated areas was also raised.

On migrant women the Commission is asked to envisage the possibility of including in a European statute for foreign workers provisions for the wives of foreign workers based on the following principles: granting a work permit in the host country accompanied by all the normal conditions of employment and social benefits; accommodation in the host country; training and tuition in the language and culture of the host country and the right to retraining and further training in order to ensure adequate levels of occupational skills; adequate medical cover, particularly for contraception, pregnancy and maternity; and facilities enabling satisfactory links to be maintained with the population, the language and culture of the country of origin so as to create the conditions necessary for re-integration into society on repatriation.

It also stressed the situation of women married to workers of a different nationality who are unable to pass on their nationality to their children.

The ad hoc committee considered the plight of unpaid women working in the family business — generally on the farm — which makes a very considerable contribution to economic and social development in the Community. Their legal and financial status is often deficient and could be improved by the right to recognition of their occupational status and to participate on an equal legal and financial footing with the husband in the business; the right to training in the necessary professional skills, the right to full participation in specialized professional organizations at all administrative levels, and the right to a fair system of social benefits.

Particularly in the less-favoured regions, efforts should be made to take the position of women into account through the various Community funds.

Health care and abortion

The resolution acknowledges current efforts between the Ten to promote cooperation in the field of health care, particularly as regards information.

Through the experience of motherhood, women are confronted with specific problems which require training in health, preventive measures, aid and research.

Although this opportunity for responsible parenthood is one of the main characteristics of the new 'role' of women, the resolution recognizes that, in view of the present scientific understanding of birth control and of the risks involved in the most commonly used contraceptive measures on the one hand, and economic, cultural and psychological factors on the other, this choice is far from fully guaranteed.

On abortion, the resolution

— deplores that, because of this situation, the number of abortions practised as a means of birth control is constantly increasing and that

— on the one hand, in countries where there is no legislation on the voluntary termination of pregnancy, clandestine abortion remains the rule and often has serious consequences for women and for their physical and psychological well-being;

— on the other hand, in those countries where legislation in this matter does exist, specialized hospital facilities are often inadequate and there may be a tendency for abortion to be treated as a normal practice and one which is in itself sufficient to solve the problems experienced by women in this area;

— notes nevertheless that the relevant legislation in the Member States varies so widely that women in distress frequently have to seek help in other countries and requests the Commission to press the Council for decisions at national level such as to obviate the need for journeys of this type which make any form of social aid impossible and lead to unacceptable commercialization, and to ensure that every woman who finds herself in difficulty can obtain the necessary assistance in her own country;

— considers however that abortion must not be treated as a last resort;

— calls upon the Commission to set up a programme to reduce the number of abortions, in particular by:

- early provision of adequate information for young people,
- a broad and suitable range of reliable means of contraception;
- full recognition of the needs of single parents and special provisions for parents of large families;
- appropriate provisions for day nurseries.

(On this matter, the Socialists took a different view).



Women in developing countries

European policy on development aid and external economic relations has not yet taken sufficient account of the position of women in the developing countries. The Commission is asked to take account of the following factors in its policy on the third world:

- great restraint in applying western cultural principles, particularly as regards employment and family relationships, and allowance for the fact that in most developing countries the number of single women and female heads of families is far higher than in western countries;
- the need to protect female employees who often have considerable family duties to perform, from unreasonably long working hours, low wages, and unsatisfactory working conditions and social provisions;
- measures to ensure that women do not lose their traditional occupations, for example in agriculture and commerce, and at the same time are provided with employment opportunities in new areas of employment;

- promotion of a policy to improve basic needs (housing, food, clothing, education and medical aid) by making them priorities under development aid;
- specific measures to combat illiteracy;
- special attention to the situation of women as regards health care;
- encouragement of the involvement of women and women's organizations in developing countries in all existing and future development projects and provisions for evaluations procedures on the basis of which the effect of the project concerned on improving the position of women can be determined.

Other recommendations...

The resolution expresses the European Parliament's regret at the fact that the new Commission does not include a single woman.

Measures for information on the careers of women civil servants are also called for.

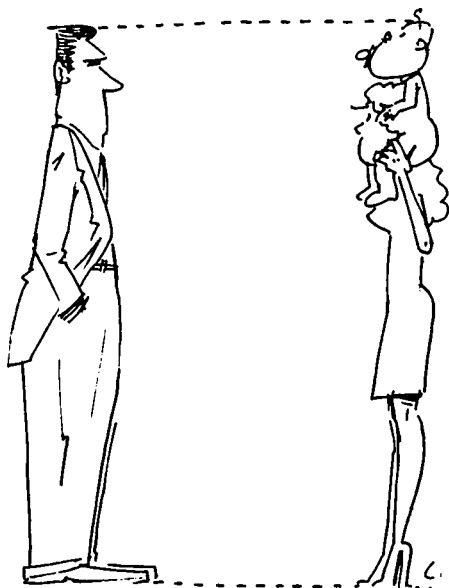
The Commission is further asked to conduct a systematic enquiry into the practices of procuring and trafficking in human beings for the purposes of prostitution and to carry out a study of ways of harmonizing the suppression of such activities within and between the ten Member States.

Finally, the European MPs are convinced that the present structure of the Community budget makes a genuine Community policy in favour of women impossible and requests the Commission to ensure adjustment of expenditure on the policies referred to in the resolution.

They accordingly call on the Council to cooperate in this connection with a view to setting up a special European fund for women of a duration of no less than ten years.

The resolution decides that the ad hoc committee on women's rights be discharged from its duties immediately but that it be reconstituted in two years' time with the task of initiating a new parliamentary debate on the basis of a progress report showing the extent to which the proposals contained in this resolution will be put into effect.

The relevant committees will be required to consider the exhaustive catalogue of questions concerning specific problems and discrimination against women and to draw up a list of priority measures within three months.



An ambiguous resolution and a controversial vote

In the vote on the resolution, Yvette Roudy, chairman of the ad hoc Committee on Women's Rights, expressed all the reservations which could be made with regard to this text:

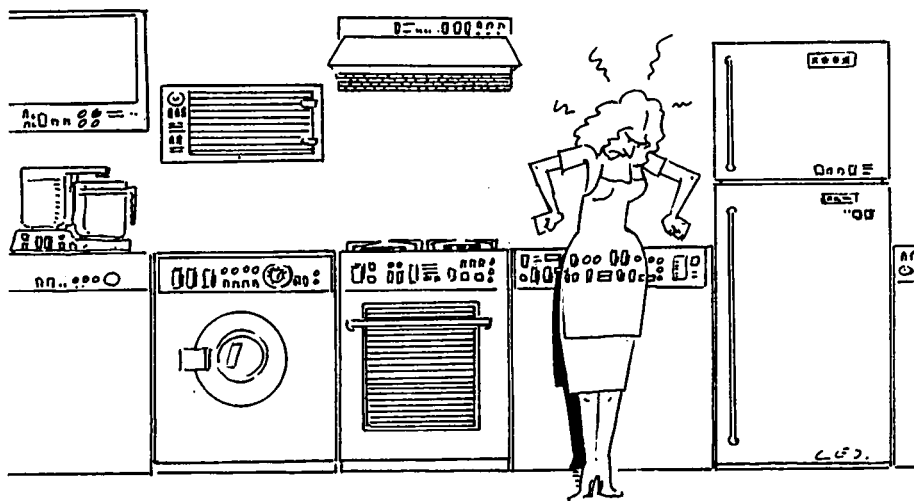
'There was a time when I dreamed of a great resolution brimming over with enthusiasm, boldness, purpose and courage, in favour of women's rights. Well, it would appear that I will have to wait for another opportunity because dreams are one thing and reality is another. What is the reality? The fact is that we can hardly call ourselves progressive in this Parliament... This resolution closely reflects the character of this Parliament, which is capable of taking little steps forward from time to time but never great strides. In spite of everything, I shall be voting for this resolution and I think that we should all do so for a very simple reason, namely, that it will benefit many women.'

It is true that the Socialists had some reservations on the text, particularly with regard to part-time work. This is a dangerous formula for women in employment, both as regards promotion and job protection.

The Socialists came out in favour of reducing working hours for both men and women but were firmly opposed to a formula on part-time working.

Part-time working creates two kinds of workers in the same company. Full-time workers on the one hand, and those only partly involved in the life of the company on the other. The latter have little prospects of promotion but are the first to be affected by redundancies.

Instead of calling for part-time work for some, the Socialists are in favour of reducing working hours for all. This will enable all women and men to participate in economic activity if they desire whilst preserving sufficient free time for the family, leisure, social and cultural activities.



The main argument over the report was on abortion

Scarcely any members of the group of European People's Party (Christian Democrats) followed the rapporteur (herself an EPP member) because the resolution raised the problem of abortion. The Socialists were not satisfied with the wording but their amendment was rejected. Their amendment proposed that the Commission should require the Member States to approximate their legislation in particular on the basis of the following principles:

- women residing in the Community shall have the right to take a decision on this matter;
- prosecutions for the termination of pregnancy to be abolished;
- the costs associated with the termination of pregnancy to be borne by public funds.

As Yvette Füllet, one of the Socialist group spokeswomen put it : 'We can no longer ignore this basic problem of women's rights. It should be the first in a long series of choices through which women will assume personal responsibility for their private lives. This freedom of choice is of very recent date and in some cases it still does not exist.

'I hope we will deal with the problem without emotion and without hypocrisy, for in reality the right to abortion has belonged only to a privileged minority able to travel to a neighbouring country, while the poorest women were and still are obliged to resort to medically doubtful methods entailing not only inescapable risks but much psychological and moral suffering as well.'

'It is because I think it is easier to mourn babies that were never born than to provide work and a decent standard of living for those that were; because I think, as you do, that the denial of basic rights such as contraception and abortion in some of its Member States is unacceptable in this Europe of hope and freedom, a Europe which is becoming an integrated economic zone and tending towards judicial unity as well; it is because of all this that I called for legislative harmonization in the Member States of the Community in regard to contraception and abortion.'

'Millions of women abort in secret. The risks are great, the methods dangerous, and the suffering unavoidable. There are many of us here who consider abortion to be the last resort. We do not want it to be lumped together with other methods of contraception.'

It is important that the European Parliament should have been able to pronounce its views on this matter. This particular paragraph provoked the protest of the entire right wing of the Parliament which consequently rejected a resolution that, taken overall, was unlikely to have a revolutionary impact on the position of women, and thus also of men, in Europe.

Of course, genuinely equal opportunities for women could not have been achieved by means of a report and a resolution of the European Parliament. This report faithfully reflects the burden of stereotype attitudes and preconceptions... and ultimately calls for measures which themselves could be the source of discrimination. The Socialists remain convinced that although this was work worth doing a greater effort is necessary. As François Mitterand has put it : 'At the European level one of the first moves must be this : to fight for the application of the most favourable social and human legislation in each of the countries of the Europe of the nine. That means that legislation most beneficial for law and order, freedom and the achievement of that basic status without which there can be no civilized society.

It means a fight for equal pay, for shorter working hours, for employment, and the creation of the necessary public facilities. We intend to transform economic and hence also social structures, and with them the relationships created by production which are the source of slavery, alienation and exploitation of man by man, and woman by man.'

Thus feminism and socialism cannot be dissociated, as the Parliament debate has shown — by default !



Training plays a vital role...



Magdalena Hoff (D) spoke in the debate on behalf of the Socialist Group. This report may have provided a long overdue impetus: 138 million European women have been waiting too long already for guaranteed equality of opportunity.

The explanatory statement accompanying the motion for a resolution shows that the position of European women in present-day industrial society is still marked by an outmoded view of women's role and by the general opinion that women have an allegedly *natural* task to perform in the home and the family. This results in the allocation of set roles in public life, at work and within the family. In all aspects of life women have to contend with prejudice, disadvantages and discrimination. The adoption of legislation has done nothing to alter this. The motion for a resolution may be just another piece of printed paper, but anyone who takes the trouble to read it will come across demands hitherto unprecedented in intensity and scope in any previous document of the European Community. The 54 paragraphs of the motion for a resolution contain at least as many proposals and demands aimed at improving the position of women. The demands are largely aimed at the parliamentary committees, but also at the Commission and the Council of Ministers. Of central importance for us Socialists in this was the disproportionately high rate of unemployment

among women, equal pay, educational questions and social inequality.

Other points, which also played a part in the discussion, were the problems faced by women working unpaid in small and medium-sized family firms and in agriculture, programmes of research into women's problems and information campaigns which carry our concern outside this House to those actually affected by these problems. The first section of the motion refers once again to the three European equality directives, which call for equal pay for equal work, equal opportunities in employment and equal treatment by the social security services.

Although these directives have set in motion appropriate basic legislation in the Member States, in some cases they have also resulted in an improvement of legislation. But there is still a great deal to be done to ensure that this legislation is actually enforced. It is particularly annoying to find some Member States translating the aims of the directive into reality hesitantly or only in part. The Commission is urged to be more consistent than hitherto in taking appropriate action.

To find a yardstick for the discussion of this subject and to ensure that patience is not lost, it is worth while casting a glance at history. I would like to take the example of equal pay, although other examples, such as the right to vote, could be taken. In 1869 the demand for equal pay for men and women was first voiced at the General German Social-Democratic Workers' Congress in Eisenach. Two years later, in 1871, the first German Weavers' Congress adopted a resolution tabled by August Bebel, which called for the admission of women working in the factories and workshops to the trade union on an equal footing and for equal pay for men and women. The situation in France was similar. In 1882 the programme of the French workers' party was supplemented by a demand for the abolition for all statutory provisions which subordinated women to men.

The Community Directive on the principle of equal pay follows on from this tradition. Today, 112 years later, this

demand has become law, but in practice the situation has changed little. Women still have to go to the courts to fight for their right to equal pay. This shows how slowly progress is made with any measures and demands that concern women. This is clear in education and vocational training more than any other sector. Equal treatment and equal opportunities are not simply a legal problem.

Although there are legal safeguards to ensure that girls are admitted to all State schools, there are still many factors that favour unequal development. Many school books, for example, still refer to the traditional allocation of roles to the two sexes, there are still different curricula for boys and girls, and the appointment of counsellors and teaching staff is guided by the traditional allocation of roles and above all by the divided employment market. A study made by the Commission on equal education and vocational training opportunities for boys and girls reveals that there is still a need for improvement in the education of girls in all Community countries.

Nevertheless, it must be said that there has already been a considerable improvement in the position of girls in primary and secondary education as compared with past generations. In theory, this ought also to put girls in a more favourable position with respect to university education or vocational training, but this is not true. Boys continue to prefer technical courses, girls courses in the social sector.

Three times as many women drop out of courses in medicine and the natural sciences and twice as many from courses in economics and the social sciences as men. In the case of vocational training girls continue to opt primarily for clerical and other so-called typically female occupations, especially in administration. In career terms, such occupations are a dead-end. In addition, clerical jobs are particularly insecure as a result of technical advances. From this it can be deduced that this is a major cause of the disproportionately high rate of unemployment among women. The training of girls in the craft and technical trades is not yet far enough advanced.

Nor is there any sign of progress. For example, in 1979 girls were being trained in 106 of the 126 recognized craft trades. In 1970 girls could get a training in only 76 trades, as against 95 in 1976.

Nevertheless, the prejudice of firms, parents, schools and even girls themselves still means that the number of girls being trained in this sector remains small. An increase in this number will depend on girls themselves being willing to break new ground. This is also true of all the other sectors. As long as women and girls fail to act and take up their own cause, progress will be very slow.

Particularly important in this context is the subject of further education, to which greater attention should be paid. For many women wanting to take up employment again and those in jobs without a future further education is the only path to a new job. In the debate on the position of women in society education is a key issue. It was not for nothing that the question of education and earnings formed the basis of the women's movement last century.

As a supranational organization, the Commission has a special task to perform here. To foster European understanding, it must ensure that the Member States recognize each other's school-leaving certificates and that disadvantages suffered specifically by girls, and particularly by foreign girls and women, are eliminated. The Commission's efforts are still in their infancy, and the Council has so far taken little action worthy of the name as far as the public and Parliament can see. The Council has a great deal of ground to make up. The 138 million citizens of Europe have waited far too long for equal opportunities and justice. The Socialist Group will not back down. We will keep a very close watch on further developments and we will ensure that progress is made.

The role of women in health care



Annie Krouwel-Vlam (NL) discussed the problems raised in the field of health. She did not merely comment on these problems but made a number of specific proposals...

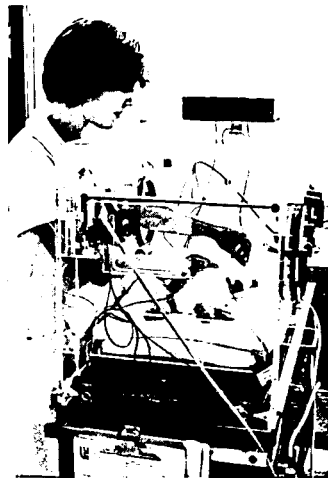
In the wide field of health care women have always occupied a completely different position from that of men. From time immemorial women have also followed the traditional pattern of roles in health care, being those who wait on, look after and help others. In addition, in their role as mothers, women come into contact more than men in their role as fathers with all kinds of people and institutions involved in health care such as general practitioners, centres that advise on babies and children, hospitals, out-patients departments and specialists. On the one hand, she is an independent woman, on the other, she is the wife of a sick husband and/or the mother of sick children who need her care.

In many cases, she is also the one who joins the doctor and various health institutions in looking after sick members of the family.

Women are in many ways deeply involved in health care, as patients themselves undergoing medical treatment, as consumers, in that they still determine the family's pattern of consumption as regards food and medicines that are not on prescription, as unpaid workers, in that it is above all women who do a great deal of voluntary work in health care, and also as paid workers in many sectors of health care. Now that the wages and working conditions of the largely female staff of all sectors of health care have

been substantially improved, we find men taking an increasing interest in these occupations. It is disappointing that, because of the large turnover among female workers in health care, for whatever reasons, the small number of male workers, being more career-minded, have over the years gained control of the managerial posts, particularly in in-patient health care.

Measures must be taken in the area of part-time work and shorter working hours to enable men and woman fair shares of the many tasks in the field of health care.



The joint assumption of responsibility by men and women can ensure optimum health care in and outside the home and may result in a significant improvement in the position of women.

My Group is therefore very pleased that the report on the position of women includes a section on women in health care and that it refers to ways of putting an end to the disadvantaged position of women. In general, my Group therefore fully endorses what is said in this section.

If the Commission is serious about improving the position of women, my Group expects it to put forward proposals on the following in the near future in view of the urgency of the situation. Firstly, **incentives** in the form of training and retraining opportunities, giving women good career prospects, even enabling them to occupy senior positions in health care institutions. Secondly, **measures to initiate scientific research into the causes of what is known as the housewife syndrome with all its social and economic consequences.** The results of such research may lead to practical measures in the form of prevention, assistance and

supervision by social institutions. **Thirdly, the introduction of courses of education and training to make women more self-confident.** They must learn to stand up for their right to information on their own bodies, for example.

In addition, they must learn to speak out when they meet doctors rather than acting as patients with no right to a say.

As regards **abortion**, my Group is fully aware that the paragraphs in the resolution on this subject represent a compromise among the many different views on what is a very difficult and delicate question. But everyone should realize that the full development and independence of woman also depends on their freedom to decide whether or not to have children. It is a grave misapprehension to believe that material facilities in the form of children's nurseries and additional facilities for the parents of large families will reduce the number of abortions. The decision to interrupt a pregnancy has deep-lying causes, and it is to misjudge women to believe that the causes are material. It is ultimately for women to decide whether and, if so, when they want to have children. That is their responsibility. Women who become pregnant without wishing to have the right to an abortion under proper medical supervision if they so desire, without financial obstacles being placed in their way. Each of the Member states will have to solve its own problems in this area, because if one or more Member States lag behind, The problem will only be increased elsewhere.

Realizing that this important and sensitive subject must be dealt with as thoroughly as possible, but that clear rules must apply to the female citizens of the European Community, my Group has tabled two amendments to this text, which seek to take account of social developments and what the many, many women in Europe want.

My Group also calls for particular attention to be paid to **the foreign women in the Community.** They have to contend with very serious problems in their relations with the health care services because of language and cultural barriers. They often live in very isolated circumstances and miss the traditions of their countries of origin, where they

usually receive support and good advice from their grandmothers. My Group recommends that a proper medical service include interpreting centres, telephone interpreting services. This is a form of assistance which would require little in the way of financial resources, but could do a great deal to overcome the language problems experienced by foreign patients. In addition, a service of this kind would prevent a situation in which young children, who usually understand the language of the host country, have to act as interpreters between their mother and the doctor, for example, with all the misunderstandings and frustrations this entails. From my own experience I know that girls of 8 or 9 often accompany their mothers to the gynaecologist, for instance, where they have to translate difficult medical concepts and be present during the examination, which may have unfortunate consequences for the relationship between mother and child. Hence our recommendation that interpreting centres be introduced.

Finally, health care is also a political concern. The European Parliament would therefore do well to consider this aspect during this wide-ranging debate on the position of women.

Unemployment amongst women



Heidi Wieczorek-Zeul (D) spoke on the causes of unemployment amongst women, who were the first victims of the crisis. At the same time as they were being squeezed out of the job market a renewed glorification of their role as mothers and housewives could be observed.

If the debate we are now having is to have any effect at all, the Members of this House must, I feel, ask themselves what we ourselves can do to change the position of women. I should therefore like to see each one of us thinking about the self-critical question: Is it not still true to say that the careers of male politicians are built on the tacit sacrifices of their wives? Is that not the situation we find in politics almost everywhere? And is not the at least threefold burden on women who go into politics the reason why women are under-represented in politics and in all sectors of the economy?

We must therefore start at home and not simply make demands of others. Starting at home also means taking a look at the pyramid of posts of the European Parliament's own officials. I can give you the following figures: in groups A1, A2 and A3 there are 65 men and no women. That is a scandal for this Parliament and it should also lead to a commitment to see that changes are made. That must be one part of the follow-up to this report. At the Commission the situation is, of course, no different. The scandal of this new all-male

Commission has been mentioned often enough. What else has to be done to change the situation in practice? Just consider how this vicious circle of discrimination, sexism, in other words discrimination against the female sex, is also perpetuated in the Commission. Appointments to the most senior posts, A1, A2 and A3, are made only by men, and it is, of course, logical that they should be correspondingly represented among the staff of the Commission. To be sure, we must make demands of others, but we must begin at home. That seems to me to be one of the conclusions to be drawn from today's debate.

The ad hoc Committee on Women's Rights also faced the task of combining the problems encountered by women in such a way that our Member States and the Commission itself would be forced to refrain from considering them individually, on a sectoral basis, but at long last to implement an appropriate, integrated policy to the benefit of women. The majority of women in this country and in the European Community — and they form a genuine majority of 130 million — can no longer be fobbed off with additional social gifts by this Commission and under this policy as they have been in the past. Here again, this debate must result in action being taken.

I am really rather surprised that greater emphasis has not so far been placed during the debate in this House on the question of **unemployment among women**, because I believe this is a central issue. I will again quote the figures so that this is absolutely clear: women account for 36.8 % of the labour force in the European Community, but while the unemployment rate among men rose from 2.9 to 5.5 % between 1974 and 1980, the corresponding figure for unemployed women, proceeding from the same initial figure, is 7.5 %. In other words, women are disproportionately hard hit by unemployment.

Mrs Majj-Weggen rightly says in her report that there are a number of reasons for this, and she gives them in the report. I feel we should stress once again that we have a general reduction in the total volume of work. Look at the figures: by 1985 a further 6 million people in the Community will be looking for a job, while the total number of jobs is

decreasing because, of course, our governments are confining themselves primarily to monetary policies. The logical conclusion to be drawn from this is that the weakest are being pushed out of the labour market and, of course, that the attempt is being made to get rid of women first.

This social backward movement is accompanied — and this is a criticism I level at a number of male Members — by a transfiguration of the new role of the mother and housewife. I say this to some of those who have spoken here: the same interest groups which in my country, the Federal Republic, for example, fetched and enticed women into industry in the 60s as a willing and cheap labour force now contend that a better place for women is at home with their families. Economic interests are at the back of this. It is not a question of suddenly wanting to enable women to achieve this new self-realization and self-image.

We should make this very clear, Mrs Roberts, even in this House, because we are, of course, having a debate amongst ourselves. No one wants to force women to work, but they should be able to decide for themselves whether they want to work, and the same should apply to men. There should no longer be prescribed roles, forcing men in one direction and women in another. That is what this report set out to achieve.

A second point that is rightly referred to in the report is that **one of the reasons for the disproportionately high rate of unemployment among women** is that increasing rationalization is taking place in occupations and activities which have hitherto been principally the reserve of women. In my own country 55 % of all women are concentrated in 10 types of work very much threatened by rationalization. The relevant figures are known. What we are also experiencing is a movement of capital, which should be looked at very closely. Women in the industrialized countries are being increasingly forced to compete with the cheaper labour potential of the developing countries, the countries of the Third World, a process which is solely the result of the individual company concentrating on profits and profitability and which is moving certain

industrial sectors out of our countries, even though this does not lead to really independent industries, independent development in the developing countries, because their labour force faces a similar situation. I therefore believe — and this is a conclusion to be drawn from this report — that, like the workers of the Third World countries, women must have an interest in the process of world-wide restructuring, the new international division of labour not being left to market forces. If you leave this to market forces, you can do away with women's right to work in the future. Then you will have even higher unemployment figures. One demand is therefore that the European Community should and must at last develop a forward-looking structural policy for the most important sectors of industry. It must submit a structural report which enables the establishment of a genuine economic and industrial policy.

Another point I wish to mention is that there are a number of initiatives aimed at bringing the process of rationalization under control. As jobs are frequently lost as a result of rationalization, I should like to take up a proposal put forward in this context by a Minister in the Federal Republic. He proposed that a company's contributions to the employees' social insurance fund should in future be related not to the total wages and salaries paid by the company but to its total net product. Where machines eliminate jobs, social insurance contributions should take account of them. That is one of the conclusions to be drawn from an assessment of this kind.

As the volume of available work is on the whole decreasing and as this principally affects women in the sectors in which they have been traditionally employed in the past, we must call for special programmes to help women and for legislation, such as that in Sweden and Austria, aimed, for example, at involving more girls in training, either by means of fixed quotas or by setting certain objectives. We would like to see more emphasis placed on this in Mrs Majj-Weggen's report.

I welcome the fact that this is the first report to say on behalf of the European Parliament that **we advocate a general reduction of working hours** and a redistribution of labour. After all, ladies and gentlemen,

if there is a general decrease in the work available, this is the only way in which we can unite to create work for everyone, including women. I therefore welcome the fact that this has been included in a report for the first time. For my Group this is one of the main pillars of this report, and if it fell, it would affect the balance of the whole report. I should like to make that very clear.

The final point I should like to raise has so far been largely overlooked in the debate. This concerns the position of **foreign women** working and living in the European Community. They have to work in the worst of conditions. They are among the worst paid. They do the most unpleasant and most monotonous work. Many Member States stipulate a waiting period for women joining their foreign-worker husbands before they are granted a work permit, a period in which they have no legal status of their own since their status derives solely from their husband's residence permit. During this period they are exploited by firms which employ them illegally. As a specific marginal group, they suffer enormous problems over integration. These women, who are the worst off of all women in the European Community and are a result of the European Community, deserve our special solidarity because they have no lobby to represent them. I am therefore particularly pleased that Mrs Maij-Weggen's report calls for a social statute stipulating the rights of these foreign women workers and employees and that we are calling on the European Community to take appropriate action.

To conclude, I should like to say that this report must be followed by action, and I say this to the very few representatives of the Commission present. Parliament will be discussing this matter again in committee in two years' time. We will check to see what has happened, because there may be reports, there may be printed papers, but we owe it to the women of the European Community, many of whom went to the polls to elect this European Parliament, not only to produce written documents, but also to ensure that they have practical consequences.

Social Security: A Web of Inequalities



Derek Enright (GB) listed inequalities in social security. Many national systems were still based on the inescapable financial dependence of women on their husbands.

If there is one thing that is absolutely clear in the Treaty of Rome — and this is not always realized in the United Kingdom — it is Article 119. You can have your theological arguments about other articles, but that article is unequivocal and clear. It is little noticed largely because it has a relatively small part in the budget. Yet in the provisions from the three directives which have come from the Commission there has been a tremendous advance for women within the Community. When I came to examine over this last year what the Community had done, what the Community had put into practice in terms of directives and then examined what Member States, and in particular my own Member State, had done, I came to realize for the first time that in fact the Community was well ahead of the individual Member States in this area. I think that it is very important to realize this.

Indeed, my own country is currently being taken to the European Court at Luxembourg and in every case women are winning justice. Unlike Enoch Powell, I would not call going to the European Court treachery. I would call it common sense fighting for justice. I thank the Commission for the part that it has played so far.

I would like to concentrate upon one of the directives which is not due to be implemented until 1984 and which is mentioned very prominently in the resolution: equal treatment where **social security** is concerned. It is there above all that women are disadvantaged, especially in the United Kingdom, in a quite disgraceful way.

First of all the presumption is that wives are financially dependent upon their husbands. That is the assumption in United Kingdom law. Therefore it leaves a psychological disposition which is essentially paternalistic. It is that sort of psychological attitude which we, as men, as well as the women in the Community, must fight against.

Let us just look at a few of the results of this. I hope that the Commission will examine it very carefully and will be prepared to take the United Kingdom to the European Court once again when the directive comes into full force. First of all there is unemployment benefits. In fact even before that there is the whole question of unemployment. Female unemployment rates in my constituency in the city centre of Leeds and in places like Batley, which have seen a rapid decline in the textile industry, are approaching 40%. Yet this is totally disguised in the way in which we collect our figures. I would put to you that it is not merely morally reprehensible but is sheer moral turpitude.

Where a single mother is out of work for up to a year she can collect unemployment benefit, but once she has been out of work for over a year, she can no longer do so. And therefore many of the expressions that we have in the report that say that we want the man or the woman to be able to choose how they work and who goes out to work are, in effect, nullified by this. Single men do not have this sort of thing happening to them but married women do — there is a clear case of discrimination and injustice here.

I would also say on this particular theme, in regard to the single mother, that if I were to meet, for instance, Miss Hooper and her four children — assuming that she had four children — in the street and I said, «come along and have a coffee» and bought her supposed children lemonade, then in fact, in the United

Kingdom, she would be liable to having that deducted from her benefit. If on the other hand, she came along and saw me, a single parent, with my four children and bought me drinks, then that would not be deducted from mine. This is a clear absurdity.

Although it is only a very small example, it is indicative of a much more serious situation. If we take disablement and sickness we find exactly the same thing happening. A married man who gives up his job in order to look after his aged parents who are sick and disabled is entitled to an attendance allowance; a married woman who gives up her job for the same reason, no matter how vital that income is, is not allowed to have that attendance allowance. Similarly, if a man receives a disability allowance, he receives it at a 60% rate. If a woman who is married receives it, she receives a rate dependent upon how much housework she can do. She is assessed. So they go round and they look and they see how much Hoovering she can do, and how much mopping; the same does not apply to men.

If we look at retirement pensions we find exactly the same lack of equal treatment. I therefore think it crucial that when this directive comes into full force, the Commission should set about examining its own initiative — not waiting for the Council of Ministers to say we are doing it wrongly, but of its own initiative — what is really happening.

I would now like to say a few quick words about the developing countries. Under the Lomé Convention we agreed that we would discuss this matter with our African, Caribbean and Pacific colleagues, and we also said in the debate on world hunger that this was a crucial area because women have a very important part to play in the economy of the Third World and it is very often European big business which is using and exploiting them. That is quite apart from health considerations, where we can be of substantial assistance.

In conclusion, I would like to make a personal appeal to Mr Richard on one particular matter which affects women in the United Kingdom and ask him to use his good offices to ensure an end to this disgraceful state of affairs. I refer to the situation in working men's clubs in the United

Kingdom. Where they are affiliated to the Club and Institute Union women are not allowed to be members of their committees or to vote for those committees. You may say that this is unimportant but there are a large number of people who enjoy these working men's clubs, for whom it is an essential part of their social life. It is therefore important that they should be able to exercise control over their social life. But that was one of the exemptions made from the Equality Act by, I must say, our Labour Government under Harold Wilson. It is an anomaly which needs to be removed very rapidly indeed.

So as men we must fight for justice and the only way we can fight for justice is to adopt this resolution.

Contraception and voluntary termination of pregnancy: the freedom to choose



Yvette FUILLET (F) defended the Socialist point of view on contraception and abortion. Young people must enjoy freedom from prosecution in connection with abortion and the provision of free treatment.

On behalf of the Socialist Group and on my own behalf, I would like to call your attention to an aspect of these rights which I feel deserves priority: I am referring to contraception and voluntary abortion in the Community countries. Those who have already spoken have expressed various opinions, some of which I share, and others which I consider very backward. We can no longer ignore this basic problem of women's rights. It should be the first in a long series of choices through which women will assume personal responsibility for their private lives. This freedom of choice is of very recent date, and in some countries it still does not exist. I hope we will deal with the problem without emotion and without hypocrisy, for in reality the right to abortion has belonged only to a privileged minority able to travel to a neighbouring country, while the poorest women were and still are obliged to resort to medically doubtful methods entailing not only inescapable risks but much psychological and moral suffering as well. It is because I think it is easier to

mourn babies that were never born than to provide work and a decent standard of living for those that were; because I think that the denial of basic rights such as contraception and abortion in some of its Member States in unacceptable in this Europe of hope and freedom, a Europe which is becoming an integrated economic zone and tending towards judicial unity as well; it is because of all this that I called for legislative harmonization in the Member States of the Community in regard to contraception and abortion. This should be done on the basis of three principles: women living in the Community make their own decisions; prosecution for abortion should cease; and the voluntary termination of pregnancy should be free. I demand this law in the name of European women, for it contributes most to the right to freedom and without it there can be no civilized society.

How can we ignore the Treaties, which say that we must defend and maintain the well being of the citizens of Europe? How can we speak of the free movement of working women when they are subject to different laws affecting their most profoundly personal decisions: whether or not to have a child and when to have one? I appeal to those of you here today who want to build a Europe where women will have a place for themselves, to those of you who do not want demographic policy to be used as a means of attaining certain economic goals, to those of you who want to grant women their rights before insisting upon their duties, to all of you: be well aware of the importance of the vote you will make tomorrow.

I tell you, but you already know, you cannot help knowing that millions of women abort in secret. The risks are great, the methods dangerous, and the suffering unavoidable. There are many of us here who consider abortion to be the last resort. We do not want it to be lumped together with other methods of contraception. We say to the women of Europe who are watching us today: this directly elected Parliament, this Parliament of hope will give proof of its greatness and its power. Free exercise of the rights of man depends also on the recognition of the rights of women. If contraception and voluntary termination of

pregnancy do not concern women, whom do they concern? If we cannot include these topics in a report on women's rights, I wonder what sort of document would be a suitable place for them? I can see there only a hypocritical example of the way the choice of maternity has been approached for thousands of years. For my part, I know that we cannot cry for those who are not born until we can ensure happiness for those who are.

Women must demand power...



In the view of Anne-Marie Lizin (B) the European institutions can display their willingness to appreciate the problems of the workers, particularly women workers, by showing a readiness to undertake a real employment policy and an industrial policy for each sector. She also described the problems of women farmers.

We have heard many speeches today, both good and bad. Some have asserted that the family is the ideal social order; others have mentioned poetry — fortunately, up to now we have been spared the 'feminine mystique'. Is it 'poetry' when, at 23, a woman finds herself alone with two children and, if she is lucky, a seamstress' diploma in a region where there are no more jobs? Where is the 'poetry of the family' when someone who, like me, is a magistrate in a small town, and finds herself dissolving as many marriages as she has performed over the same period? Is it 'poetry' when, at seventeen, a girl finds herself a mother without financial resources because there was no-one who dared to show her how to obtain an abortion, or when she must bear the psychological scars of an abortion performed in abominable circumstances? Is it 'poetry' when, as the widow of a small farmer, in addition to your grief you find yourself suddenly classed as a minor before the law, with no right to go on running the farm which you built up with your husband? Is it 'poetry' when both husband and wife are unemployed, obliged to live on

a barely adequate income and to be sneered at by those who think of the unemployed as parasites? This is not poetry, but hypocrisy, the kind of hypocrisy which forces men to believe themselves strong and women to behave like dependent minors, the kind of hypocrisy which often speaks in public about the role of the family while trying to draw the veil over prostitution, the kind of hypocrisy which asserts that women must always accept maternity as a happy event.

The report presented to us — despite its many shortcomings — has at least the merit of not indulging in hypocrisy of this sort. It takes into account the concrete realities of the lives of women, and if some consider the list too lengthy, I can only say that the difficulties are many. What are these realities? The economic and social setbacks experienced by all workers in the present readjustment process of capitalist forces affects women very seriously. Their right to work is compromised to a greater degree than that of men by the changes now taking place. Entire factories — I will use an example in Belgium, the FN — are laying off their unqualified workers — that is, those with a seamstress' diploma — while in the same factory men are being hired to work machines. Their right to unemployment compensation is being attacked in each of the European countries. Unemployed women are the victims, especially in my own country, of an attempt to strengthen the discrimination which justifies the reduction of their already small allocations on the basis of their family situation, and not on the basis of their right to work. These measures aim at considerably reducing allocations for those who are not 'heads of families, and are contrary to the directive on social security. Delays in the application of this directive tend to render it ineffective, and our wish, which is contained in an amendment I proposed to Mrs Maij-Weggen's report, is that the Commission propose measures to expedite action on this specific point.

Time is very important today for working women. The crisis does not allow them to wait. The European authorities will demonstrate their concern for the situation of workers, and particularly women workers, by constructing a true employment policy and a



sectorial industrial policy. We are engaged in building an economic community, and this is the primary factor which the Commission and the Council must take into account.

I will also speak of a particular category of working women, women in agriculture, whose labour goes unrecognized in European society. Women in agriculture are rarely in charge; they are usually assistants, who, in addition to keeping house, also do work on the farm. Their work is considered to be of negligible economic value. In reality, in each agricultural unit, there is a part — certainly at least half — of the labour which is based on the work of these women. The Socialists, therefore, have proposed measures which were incorporated into Mrs Maij-Weggen's report and which are aimed at proving access to professional training for women working in agriculture, to extend the system of social protection regarding maternity, widowhood, invalidity benefits, and the protection of professional status, by means of a directive concerning company law. In the report we have called upon the Commission to provide funding for replacement personnel so that women in agriculture can have a minimum amount of time available either to obtain training or to devote themselves to defending their rights. To achieve development in the areas we are discussing, however, there are not many

choices open to us. Women must demand power; they must choose to involve themselves personally in the fight. The good will of allies must certainly not be rejected: the Commission has been such an ally in many cases and for many years.

The Council, on the other hand, has not shown the same good will. Allies, however, even if they include the Commission, can never take the place of a personal will to acquire power. And when one sees the reactions set off in the minds of men, here and elsewhere, by the demand for equality, it is to be feared that one day women will estimate their strength at its true value and at last demand their right to superiority!

Socialism and feminism are indivisible



Ernest Glinne (B), Chairman of the Socialist Group, has drawn attention to the fact that the initiative to set up the *ad hoc* committee came from the Socialists. For them there is a close link between feminism and socialism and the struggle of women for their rights should be supported both now and in the future by all Socialists.

It is with satisfaction and pride that I take part in this debate. It is owing to the proposal and the insistence of the Socialist Group that the *ad hoc* committee on women's rights was created. The quality of the

work accomplished by the members of this committee, the interest shown in this debate by members of Parliament and particularly by the representatives of European women's groups, the relevance of what has been said here by Socialist and other Members — all this proves that the Socialist Group and the Parliament as a whole judged rightly when they decided a year ago to create the *ad hoc* committee on women's rights, which since that time has met regularly under the chairmanship of our colleague Yvette Roudy.

The particular interest felt by our group in the problem of women's rights should not be surprising to anyone. In fact, feminism and socialism are intimately connected. I would even say, as François Mitterand did on 5 May, the day of women and of Europe, that feminism and socialism should be inseparable. For us socialists, the battle waged by feminists and by women who are not of socialist convictions should be more than a simple demand for equality between men and women, for that would lead only to equality within a system whose very structures are being re-evaluated. It is at this point that the struggle of women becomes part of the struggle of all socialists, for, as Maria Delourdes Pintasingo very rightly said, *'In women all forms of domination are recapitulated, and for this reason the revolutionary potential of their movement is immense.'* Or, again, from the

same author, *'The society whose validity is in question is not that of one country or another, or one regime or another, but it is rather a society which already envelops all other societies and within which it becomes impossible for any national group to forge a new destiny for itself.'*

Through its refusal of any type of domination, but also through its international dimension, the struggle for women is, must be, and must go on being the struggle of all socialists.

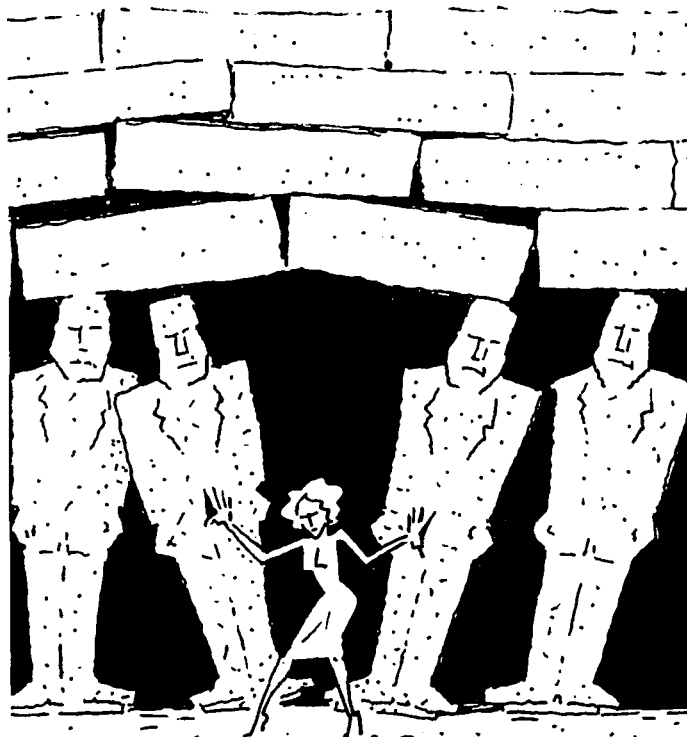
Is it necessary to underline here in this Assembly, which has many times sought to defend human rights wherever they are violated, that the liberation of women carries within itself and presupposes all other forms of liberation for human beings, for workers, for those who are still colonized, for the young, etc. ? In the poem, *Queen Mab*, Shelley had already written in 1813 : »Can man be free if woman is in slavery ?' The liberation of women is connected with the liberation of all human beings. The degrees of freedom enjoyed by women, in every society, is thus the standard for measuring freedom in general. In order to be truly free, women must participate in all forms of social, political, cultural, and economic activity, particularly through access to all forms of training and to all professions. It is necessary to emphasize that integration into the system of production is not sufficient in itself to assure women's liberation, for, obviously, the woman who has a tiring and unsatisfying job on an assembly line is exploited to the same degree as is her male co-worker. The liberation and the struggle of women are irrevocably bound to the struggle of men for another form of work organization, based on an economy meant to serve man. This is why we socialists consider the humanization of work and the reduction of working time to be of the first importance. Such a reduction should not only permit a new distribution of available work but also it should contribute to a better development of both men and women and permit them to better fulfil their family obligations.

On this point, it would be an error to underestimate the economic importance of domestic tasks. It would also be an error not to take into account the importance for children of time spent in the

family. It is another error, however, to believe that only women should perform the housekeeping tasks, should bear the responsibility of caring for and educating the children. Paternity involves the same responsibility, the same fundamental duties as does maternity. The mutual respect felt by both members of the couple living together suggests that these duties be shared.

Although we socialists are in favour of the reduction of working time for everyone, men and women alike, we are firmly opposed to the development of part-time work. Such work creates within a company two kinds of workers : full-time workers on the one hand, and on the other workers who do not participate fully in the life of the company and who often have no chance of promotion, while when lay-offs occur they are the first to fall victim to unemployment. Instead of demanding part-time work for some, we ask for the reduction of working hours for all, in order that all men and women who wish to do so can participate in economic life while retaining sufficient free time to devote to the family, to leisure, to social-cultural activities, etc.

As François Mitterand said with much firmness and clarity of vision : *'One of the first battles on the European level should be this one : the application in each Member State of the best social and human legislation, a legislation which most favours justice, liberty, and the conquest of that fundamental law without which there can be no civilized society. We will fight for equal salaries, for the reduction of working hours, for employment, and for the creation of the necessary collective organizations. We wish'*, he concluded, *'to transform the economic structures and therefore the social structures and the relationships of production which generate slavery, alienation, and the exploitation of men by men and of women by men.'* As I said at the beginning, feminism and socialism are truly inseparable.



The report must force parliament to act



As the ad hoc committee, having completed its work, was to be disbanded, Marie-Claude Vaysade (F) proposed that a parliamentary body should be set up to ensure that Parliament followed up its own proposals.

Contrary to what one might have thought, this report was not made because the committee existed, but rather because in the countries of Europe there are certain problems encountered by women in their daily lives. I believe that our Parliament is now obliged to make some choices if the report is to be anything more than a Utopian document reflecting only good intentions. It is a question of choices to be made if we really want some of the proposals in this report to become the reality of the future feminine condition. In order for this to be accomplished, it is important that in this Parliament we continue to pay close attention to the problems of women, or at least be mindful of the feminine perspective regarding the general problems with which we must deal. In her report, Mrs Maij-Weggen proposed the dissolution of our committee, and that it should be re-formed after two years to evaluate, together with Parliament, the work accomplished in the intervening period. I agree with this proposal, but I think it will only be effective if, during this time, there remains a body in

Parliament whose task it will be to check whether what we have put in the report has been remembered by Parliament as a whole, and for this reason we have presented an amendment. The Socialist Group proposes the creation of a supervisory committee, a lightweight structure of only 20 or 25 members, who would meet four times a year at the most — I think that would be sufficient — but who, in following the general work of the Parliament, what goes on in the committees, and the principal debates, could make sure that the problems and rights of women have really been taken into account. I would like to urge Parliament to follow us in this direction, so that we may have a feminine consciousness on the alert in this Assembly for the entire length of our term.

Emancipation of women is tied to a change in the system



A. Koutsocheras (Gr) explained why PASOK Members of Parliament would vote for this report.

In 1979 the Women's Union of Greece, which has close ties with Pasok, carried out a study

on women in the Common Market in an attempt to determine what effect Greece's accession to the Common Market would have. Would women receive any real benefits from Greece's accession to the Common Market? The position which the Women's Union of Greece took was that the Common Market, by its very nature, and in view of its aims and objectives, is not interested in promoting even basic rights for women. The six countries on whose initiative the Common Market was formed wanted to create a large market in which they could move freely without being hindered by national protective measures. The basic aim was clear from the start — to strengthen the capitalist structure and to develop production within a capitalist system. The Community is an exclusively materialistic brotherhood which has not been able so far to present itself in a humane light. The Europe of the large industrialists and the multi-national groups is only concerned with promoting the economic interests of its member countries. Insofar as the system is based on accumulating capital for profit, the Community is in no position to take an interest, even indirectly, in the struggle for women's liberation, because this would require a reorganization of society which would lead to an increase in production costs. Women's liberation means changing the system and changing society. It is for this very reason that we must struggle at the political level for women's liberation. As regards our strategy within the framework of the existing system our objective is to achieve whatever improvement we can in the situation of women through the cooperation of men and women, for this reason Pasok will support the proposal and women in Europe may be sure that the women of Pasok will fight side by side with them for reforms without forgetting their ultimate long-term goal, which is to liberate both men and women. For this reason Pasok will support the proposal and socialism.



Reasons for abortion

The problem of abortion is by no means new. From time immemorial — whatever the society, political or social creed, or life-style — women have had and sometimes disposed of unwanted pregnancies.

Many different methods of abortion have been practised since ancient times.

The authorities have taken different views over the years, issuing the strictest prohibitions at one time and at another encouraging the practice or even making it compulsory. But the reasons behind the choice remain the same.

The attitude of the authorities is dictated by political and/or economic priorities.

Whilst the motives of the state are cruelly materialist, the motives which prompt a woman to have an abortion are many and varied.

Is abortion just a temporary solution with distressing after-effects ?

Abortion must be accepted as being a necessary evil, as a transitional stage. A transition towards what? To answer this question we must examine the background to the issue.

In the present circumstances there can be no question of banning abortion once and for all.

Women who seek abortion are in such distress that they are prepared to suffer the physiological and psychological injuries inflicted by the « operation ».

Whatever the cause of their distress, it is sufficiently intense to drive them to any lengths, regardless of all legal, penal, moral or religious barriers. Thus, whether it is forbidden or not, and whether the legislators or the critics like it or not, the truth of the matter is that abortion exists.

If abortion is suppressed, the physical and moral damage caused is even more serious and distressing. This is neither desirable nor necessary, but it is the fact of the matter.

Abortion is therefore an evil. Even under ideal medical conditions, it remains an evil which women have been obliged to accept.

Whenever the issue of abortion is raised, there is always talk of attacking malpractices but never of getting to grips with the problem itself.

Abortion in a stable, democratic society ought to be the last resort. But for the great majority of women it is the **only** way, their only means of birth control. How, at this advanced stage of civilisation, can we continue to wash our hands of these barbaric practices ?

Abortion should no longer be considered a crime. A special service,

fully qualified to deal with medical and psychological needs, should be introduced.

These are two urgent requirements which must be met if we are to avoid millions of illegal abortions.

Above all, it is vital to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place. Women must be made fully aware of the nature of their bodies, of their potential and how to find fulfilment.

The aim should be for women to lead happy lives and to find a sense of inner harmony. Birth control plays a key role here.

None of this can be achieved unless there is a certain degree of equality, understanding in relationships between men and women, and a widespread and thorough campaign to inform and educate.

It's a question of education and information !

Education must be built upon the firm foundations of information. Many Community countries have undeniably tried to popularize the various methods of modern birth control, and a number of centres have been set up to this end. But this is only a drop in the ocean. The intellectual élite — who take the decisions — and most of the population — who are on the receiving end — are worlds apart.

Life in *intellectual* society with its protection from material hardships, its abundance of resources and useful contacts tends to breed ignorance of the day-to-day realities of life for women in rural areas, working-class women and deprived women. The very concept of abortion is perceived differently by these women.

There are the constraints of moral, religious or family traditions. There is

the lack of contact with someone who is properly informed, such as the family doctor — there are no gynaecologists in villages — and there is the problem of being brought up in the midst of conservative values and poverty.

It is time to get to grips with reality. The truth can no longer be ignored or distorted. Women are far from being on an equal footing with their male counterparts, and the only way to bridge this gap is through a continuous programme of information and education.

This programme should by no means be geared exclusively to women : there is probably a far greater need amongst men. To release women from their bonds of slavery requires radical change in men. The speed with which this change is brought about will be proportional to the adequacy of information. It is first a question of breaking down the strongholds of resistance before tackling the problem of ignorance.

In the meantime, abortions, whether legal or not, will continue to take their toll.

A number of women have written to us explaining why they were prepared to go to any lengths to have an abortion :

« my husband drank too much..., I didn't want another child »

« after three children in three years my health left a lot to be desired, and a fourth child would have been disastrous »

« I already had one handicapped child, and I didn't want another »

« My husband and I didn't want to bring poor children, who would be deprived from the start, into the world — working-class children don't have the same opportunities in life ».

Children for children's sake... or for the needs of the State ?

The main aim of our governments in encouraging couples to have children is certainly not to make sure that they lead healthy, happy lives.

Muslim countries ban abortion on religious grounds but Tunisia is now faced with an alarming population explosion. The only means the government has found of curbing the soaring growth rate has been to authorize and even encourage abortion.

The West takes the opposite view. Birth rates are falling so it has an ageing population.

Within a short time the retired population will outnumber the active. Since the active population provides financial support for the retired, it is

not surprising that some governments are adamantly opposed to legalizing abortion, for they believe this would result in a further drop in population figures. But as this argument alone is unacceptable from a moral standpoint, they advocate respect for the life and identity of the foetus on moral and religious grounds.

Moreover, and this is far more serious, the steps they do take are usually inconsistent. It is one thing to encourage parents to have children, but quite another to deny families even the wherewithal for meeting the additional expense.

To punish people who resort to abortion because they cannot cope with the responsibility of another child is a blatant contradiction, not to say aberration.

Abortion - is it a shared problem?

It would be unrealistic to claim that the problem of abortion affects only women. A sound education on birth control — all too rarely given — would result in every child being planned and wanted. Obviously it can be argued that «accidents» will happen. In such circumstances, the couple should make their decision calmly. But all too often, the mutual understanding and respect which should form the basis of a relationship are far from apparent.

In this case, a woman can and indeed must take the decision on her own. She will inevitably have to shoulder most of the responsibilities involved in conceiving and bringing up a child.

Regrettably, it looks as though abortion is becoming an exclusively feminine problem because men cannot and will not accept their share of the responsibilities.

Ten countries with ten different laws

The following comparative study of the different laws in the Member States does not set out to award prizes to some countries or point an accusing finger at others.

Abortion is an important issue approached differently in the ten countries because of mentality, tradition, religion and sensitivity.

It is a question of conscience. Just as it is impossible to condemn someone who refuses to contemplate the very idea of abortion so it is impossible to prevent a majority declaring themselves in favour of it. This would amount to denying others the very freedom you demand and obtain for yourself

Belgium comes into this category. Public opinion is strongly in favour of extensive liberalisation of the law rather than wholesale repeal. To go

against the will and the rights of the majority violates the very meaning of the word « democracy ».

Since the end of the amnesty granted by the Public Prosecutor, prosecutions and sentences have been taken place again in an unhealthy climate of injustice and incomprehension.

So much for observations of a moral nature.

Study of the different laws reveals that in nine countries contraception is allowed, though this is only recent in the case of Ireland (1979), and it is sometimes reimbursed by Social Security, as in France, Germany, Luxembourg, Great Britain and Denmark.

The use of contraceptives is illegal under Greek law only.

There is far less uniformity on abortion. In three countries, Ireland, Greece and Belgium, it is simply illegal. In the Netherlands, abortion has just been legalized on certain conditions — a five-day wait and the doctor's consent. In other countries, abortion is subject to the opinion of a committee, as in Germany, or a time-limit. A pregnancy cannot be terminated after the tenth week in France, whereas the limit is twenty-eight weeks in Great Britain, although this figure is likely to be reduced in the near future.

Abortion is free of charge in Italy, Great Britain and Denmark.

So uniform laws on abortion and contraception clearly cannot be introduced overnight.

Table comparing the laws
in the ten Community countries

	Germany	Belgium	Denmark	France	Great Britain
Contraception	Reimbursed.	Not reimbursed by social security, except for some types of pill. Current trend to class these as luxury medicines, and therefore non-reimbursable.	Available from the age of 15. Not reimbursed by social security.	Reimbursed by social security.	Free of charge. Available to all.
Abortion	Opinion of 'committee' required (since 1976).	Illegal.	Legal and free of charge. 12 weeks (since 1973).	Legal - 10th week, not reimbursed by social security (since 1975).	Reimbursed by social security - 28 weeks (since 1967).
	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Luxembourg	Netherlands
Contraception	Illegal.	Legal since 1979 only.	Available to all.	Now law, either for or against.	Freely available and free of charge.
Abortion		Illegal.	Freely available and free of charge until 3rd month of pregnancy (since 1978).	Not a punishable offence within first 12 weeks (since 1978).	Legal, on condition of five-day wait and doctor's consent.

The Netherlands have just approved of abortion under certain conditions (five days' delay and with the doctors' agreement). For other countries abortion is either subject to the opinion of a committee (Germany) or to a delay. Pregnancy cannot be terminated after the tenth week in France or the 28th week in Great Britain.

Abortion is free in Italy, Great Britain and Denmark. Despite opposition from the Pope and Roman Catholic pressure groups during the recent referendum, Italy's legislation is still in force.

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Conclusions

The legalization of abortion, under strict medical supervision, is at present the **only** way of controlling the plague of illegal abortions. There is much to be said in favour of abortion. However strict the laws are, abortion continues to exist. Hundreds of thousands of women seek abortions. According to most opinion polls, a substantial majority is clearly in favour of the extensive liberalization of abortion laws.

In those countries where abortion is banned, a system of class justice emerges. Well-to-do women usually know where to go if they want to have an abortion in good conditions, whereas the others all too often lack information and the means to pay.

Opponents of abortion, who are obsessed with the threat of a fall in the birth rate, must accept that none of the studies carried out has shown any correlation between the legalization of abortion on the one hand, and a fall in the birth rate on the other.

Finally, it is the right of the woman, or ideally the couple, to decide whether or not to bring a child into the world, which does not mean that abortion should be considered an everyday occurrence or a means of birth control.

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