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Women in Our New World



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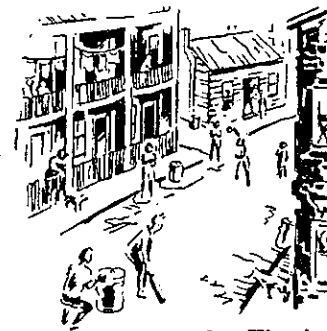
“Women and Children First!”

“Women and children first!” Perhaps you are thinking that’s a curious phrase for us to put at the head of the page! Do women and children ever come first? Are they so important?

We think so: and we want to tell you why.

Mrs. Joan Reed is a young Sydney mother. She’s travelled a good deal, but now she’s living in one of our suburbs, and bringing up her family takes up a good deal of her time. Let’s hear what she’s got to say:

“In our street . . .”



“In our street the children have regular cricket games, with garbage cans as wickets. They are beautiful children. The bigger ones play, and the little ones sit in the gutter.

We parents look out and watch them sometimes, and think: That’s all our suburb—our city, our country—has to offer the children—garbage

cans and the gutter, and the street to play in! And after that, what? Over-crowded schools, dead-end jobs, low wages, over-work—and perhaps death by atom bombs.

They're wonderful kiddies, but that's all that lies before most of them in the future. People don't matter."

And yet someone said, not so long ago:

"Of all the valuable capital the world possesses, the most valuable is people." People—girls and boys, women and men.

Those words were spoken by the Premier of a socialist country—Soviet Russia. And they make us think—what is Socialism really like?

How do people really live in a socialist country? Is it true that they are "regimented" and have no freedom? That the children are taken away and raised "by the state"? That there is no family life?



Of course, not one of these things is true.

Let's imagine then, that we have a Socialist Australia, and see what has happened to one family, the Morris family—and how they live under socialism.

THE MORRIS FAMILY. There are six of them Margaret, Alec, and their four children — Johnny, aged fifteen; Roy, thirteen; Betty, eleven, and the baby, Rosalind.

Margaret works in a machine-building factory. In the capitalist days she stayed at home and tried to raise three children on the basic wage. They lived in a two-roomed, condemned cottage, with leaky ceilings, one gas-ring, no sink, no bath, and a mud floor in the laundry.

Alec was a laborer, in a soap factory. He worked back four nights a week and slept most of the weekends.

When Socialism began to get under way, Margaret went to work. She didn't need to. By then, Alec had got himself trained as a carpenter, and had become such a good tradesman that he was earning several times his old wage; and prices had fallen by half, so there was plenty for the family.

They had moved into a self-contained flat in a converted mansion. The old house—in fact, the whole street,—was being pulled down in a huge slum-clearance scheme. Not before it was time, Margaret said!

For a while she was busy—admiring the three big rooms with their fresh paint and clean walls, making new curtains and bedspreads, cooking flash meals on the new gas stove, buying new, modern furniture. Then in the end it was all finished, and she had nothing to do. The flat ran itself, compared with the old place.



Everyone but herself, she thought, was busy. They talked of the new schools being built, how much more production their factory was getting, how much cheaper things would be if they could over-fulfil the next production plan; about the new canteens and dressing-rooms, the day nurseries at the factories. They were all taking part in these things. Margaret felt out of it.

So she took a job at the Eureka machine-building plant. Alec was rather snooty about it, until he was reminded that women were now equal with men, and could go to work and earn the same wages as men, if they wanted to. Margaret learned quickly, and in a few years was one of the most skilled workers at the factory, and well in line for further promotion with higher wages.

NO LONGER 'THE OLD DAYS.' When she had been at the Eureka plant three years, Margaret discovered that she was going to have another baby. For a moment she was dismayed. Then she remembered — this was no longer 'the old days'. This new child would not be a burden. She would not have to scrimp and save, and lose her job.

She was put onto lighter work, and six weeks before the baby was due she went on leave, on full pay.

The doctor at the pre-natal clinic in her suburb said that all was going well.

"Don't worry about the birth, Mrs. Morris," she encouraged. "You'll have no hospital expenses, of course, and there's the new painless birth treatment for everyone now. I felt nothing at all when I had my last baby, and he was born in two hours!"

"That painless birth must cost an awful lot," commented Margaret.

The doctor laughed.

"You forget—we've got socialism now, Mrs. Morris. New inventions are not used to make a profit for a few wealthy men. The people own the country—you own it yourself. Everything's for the people now."

Margaret thought about this, on the way home. "Everything is for the people, because we have socialism!" Because we took the country away from the wealthy monopolists, and began producing things for the use of the people, and not for profit!

The Communists showed us how to do it.

Funny, thought Margaret, how she had regarded Communists as strange, wild people, who stirred up strikes and stood on soapboxes making long speeches! She had thought they were all Russians, and ought to go and live there! Then the Browns had come to live next door. They had a baby, and Margaret used to talk to Mrs. Brown over the back fence. Mrs. Brown often minded the Morris children so that Margaret and Alec could go to the pictures. And then she had found that Mrs. Brown was a Communist. This surprised her, and

she began to turn that over in her mind. She had never joined the Communist Party; but she felt she knew, now, what it was all about.

"WE'RE WORKING FOR OURSELVES NOW!"



A pity we didn't know more about Communism years ago, she thought now, clicking open the front gate. She waved to Alec, who finished work at four, and was out in the garden carefully weeding his lettuces.

"Hello, Marg," he called out. "What did the Doc. say?

Everything all right?"

"Fine," she answered. "How are the lettuces?"

"Lousy!" he called back. "Some so-and-so of a slug's eaten two of them! I've done the potatoes for tea, Marg, and the cabbage, but I didn't feel equal to the lamb's fry!"

He stood up and dusted his hands, and they went into the flat together. Alec was talking nineteen to the dozen about his job. They were beating the boys in the next street hands down. "They only got half their production quota filled, so we're all set for



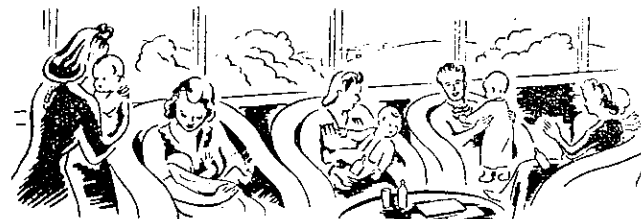
the banner. I suppose we'll have to send some of our chaps into their street next month to show them how to build houses!"

Margaret laughed. What a different Alec from the old days! He was forty-

four now; but younger than when he used to come home from the soap factory, years ago, too tired even to read the paper.

So Rosalind was born. The birth really was painless. Margaret had another two months off on full pay, then went back to the factory and baby Rosalind went with her to the factory day nursery. It was a big, airy room, with little white cots, and a trained children's nurse.

There were four babies besides Rosalind, and when the mothers took their half-hour off to feed the children, they sat chatting, admiring each other's babies—each mother, of course, thinking how much the nicest her own was!



They talked about the factory, too. Funny, thought Margaret, being so interested in **work**! But, of course, it's **our** factory now. No more bosses! We're working for ourselves, and the better we work, the more good things we get: One of the mothers was such a good worker on the machines that she earned more than the manager. They laughed about that, too, and how different it was from the old days.

THE TALENT OF ALL THE CHILDREN.

Now, when you go to see the Morris family, Rosalind is three years old—an independent young lady who goes to kindergarten and is quite conscious of her importance in the scheme of things!

Margaret is preparing a salad tea, because it's quick and they're going out in the evening. She looks at the clock. Alec is a bit late—probably stopped to have a beer with the boys, and talk gardens and house-building. He'd better not be too long, or we'll be late for the theatre, thinks Margaret. They've got concession tickets for the new show, through the trade union.

Alec comes in. "Bit of a celebration," he explains.

"Boozer!" laughs Margaret. "Will you wash the tomatoes? We're running a bit late."

Johnny is going to his Aero Club after tea. He's going to be a pilot on the new Sydney-Alice Springs-Perth air route. He has a whole library of books on planes, and has already done some flying. He will become a pilot, too, because he wants to, has talent for it, and lives in a Socialist Australia, which needs the talents of all its children, and sees that every child gets the opportunity to develop its talents.

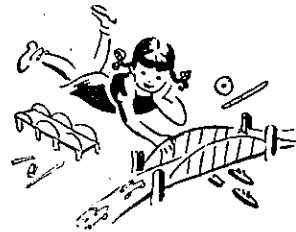
Roy and Betty are going to a rehearsal of a play in the Children's Club. The Club has a real theatre, complete with revolving stage, which is their pride and joy. Roy is going to be an actor, but Betty, although she likes acting, thinks she might prefer to be a writer, or a doctor.

It's up to them. Socialist Australia needs actors, and writers, and doctors too, and will see that it gets them.

"ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE NOW!" It will get them from among the working people, the ordinary people, who run the country now. It will get them from among the people who, under capitalism, would be slaving away to keep slum houses clean, or standing for weary hours in front of a machine doing dull, repetitive work to make profits for the boss. It will get them from among children who under capitalism would be playing cricket in the streets, with garbage-cans for wickets; or who, because they have nothing to occupy their lively minds, would be learning to be little criminals.

Rosalind Morris is not going out. She's going to bed, and a neighbour is coming in to mind her.

"Mummy, why can't I go out?" she asks. She is playing with Roy's meccano set, wielding a screwdriver dangerously.



"Because you're not old enough yet, darling," Margaret replies, with an anxious look at the screwdriver.

"When I'm old enough," Rosalind declares, "I'll go out every night and build a bridge over Sydney Harbour!"

"They've got one, silly," Roy puts in.

"Well, I'll build a bridge over Melbourne Harbour!" persists Rosalind.

"You can't," chips in Betty. "Melbourne hasn't got a harbour!"

"I can!" retorts Rosalind, becoming desperate, "I can—can't I, Mummy?"

"Maybe you can," says Margaret, laughing. "Wash your hands now, anyway—tea's ready."

Rosalind will build her bridges, thinks Margaret. Maybe we can make oranges grow in the Central Desert. Maybe there won't be any Central Desert, once we get going on it! We're going forward—the future is ours.

We are a prosperous, happy family. There are thousands and thousands of workers' families like ours, all over Australia, with healthy children growing up confident and full of big plans. Plans which they will really carry out! Of course, there's lots to do yet—lots of difficulties; but we're fixing those. We're going forward. Things are getting better every year.

Rosalind will build her bridges. Maybe we'll build a bridge right across the Pacific Ocean, and hop over to America for the weekend? She laughed out loud. Anything is possible now that we have Socialism—now that the workers themselves have taken control.

IT ISN'T A DREAM. But let's get back to the present.

What I have described isn't a dream, it's a reality. Things are like that, and even better, in Soviet Russia. I have been there, and seen it.

I have seen the theatre with the revolving stage in the Children's Club. I've met the worker who earned more than the factory manager. I've seen the people, happy and prosperous, with healthy, confident children, going forward to a magnificent future.

I have described a Socialist Australia, because this is our country and we shall build socialism here the way we want it. The Russian people are building it the way they want it.

Russian workers celebrate by drinking vodka! Alec Morris prefers beer. Very well, let it be beer!

In any case, it will be our country, and it will be up to us to make it what we want it to be."

Well, that's the way Mrs. Reed pictures life for an average family in a Socialist Australia. You'll see from that what we mean about putting women and children first—giving them the very best the country has to offer.

And it's no dream. In one country, as she says, it has already happened.

Of course, we've got a lot to do first. Many working men and women have got that kind of picture of a socialist Australia clearly in their minds, and are doing now what they think necessary to bring it nearer. How, you may ask? Well, in a very active way. By working, fighting, struggling.

Mr. Edgar Ross—he's the editor of the Miners' Federation newspaper, "Common Cause"—knows all about that struggle from the inside. He believes that women have got a big part to play in it. He asks women to think about what they can do. He asks the question—

"And what about Strikes?" Let's hear how he answers it.

Women have played an important part in many industrial disputes, assisting their husbands, brothers and friends to win their demands by maintaining the morale of the striking workers.

In the great steel strike on the South Coast of New South Wales which was fought out at the end of 1945, the womenfolk proved to be a vital auxiliary to success, and showed their understanding of the struggle by organising a variety of relief measures for the men.

Sewing bees for the repair of clothing, concerts, children's parties, and toy-making gatherings were typical of the many activities undertaken by the women, activities which helped not only to improve conditions, but also to sustain the morale of the strikers.

Similar activity was undertaken at Newcastle, when the strike spread to that centre. And the women took care that the children did not miss out on their Xmas festivities.

Women have certainly played an important part in industrial disputes.

The women on the coalfields, for instance, have always actively backed their menfolk in their struggles for higher wages and better conditions, organising the supply and distribution of foodstuffs, working on publicity committees, and even demonstrating in support of the workers.

During the New South Wales mineworkers' big struggle to regain the conditions taken from them during the lockout of 1929-30, when the men stayed underground for days at a stretch, the women demonstrated in support at the pit-top, packed and carried food for their heroic menfolk.

In every important struggle, in fact, the women have been the armies of the rear, no less important than the shock troops in the front lines.

APPLY THIS TEST. Well, what choice would you make — to assist to break strikes, or help to win them?

Apply this test: Where do your interests lie—with the workers striving to better their conditions, or with the employers?

HOW DO YOU LIKE THE 'GOLDEN AGE'?

Bad housing with few modern conveniences; a never-ending struggle to make ends meet while rearing a family: the ever-present spectre of unemployment, ill-health, poverty — is there any doubt that this has been the lot of thousands of women of the working class in Australia?

But while we were tightening our belts to win the war against Fascism, they told us that all this was

going to be ended. There would be a 'New Deal' after the war.

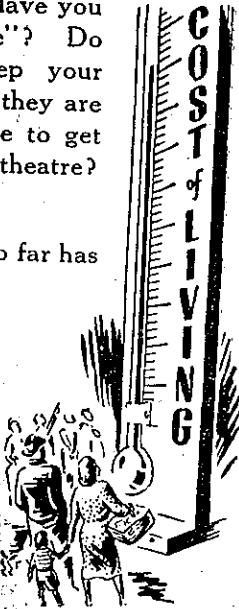
Mr. Chifley repeated this story recently: looking into the future, he saw a 'Golden Age' for our people.

Well, what do you think of what you have seen of the 'Golden Age' so far? Have you found it easier to "keep house"? Do you find it less difficult to keep your children fed and clothed while they are going to school? Are you able to get more outings and visits to the theatre? Is the housework any easier?

No—the only 'Golden Age' so far has been a golden age for the black-marketeers, as prices of meat, vegetables and clothing have skyrocketed, with many of the things we sorely need absolutely unobtainable.

And — if we are to believe the experts — there's worse to come. Beyond the horizon, they tell us, there's a depression looming. So we can expect to see the long dole-queues again, our young men 'jumping the rattler' in search of work, children without proper food and clothes, and ill-health in our poverty-stricken homes.

UNLESS, we should add, the people vitally concerned do something to ward off the depression



and force the 'new deal' they have been promised!

And that means a fight to raise wages and see that they buy more by keeping prices controlled; a fight to **make** the big companies that are making record profits use some of them for the welfare of the workers; a big fight to see that the monopolies are controlled so that they are not allowed to run us helter-skelter into another depression.

ACTION IS THE ONLY WAY. Have you ever known the workers get anything without fighting for it?

That's why we have strikes—because the employers refuse to give decent wages and conditions unless they are forced to. Strikes mean hardship for men, women and children; but if the workers just 'took it' all the time, we would be far worse off than we are today.



Since women suffer the most from low wages—which means poverty in the home, sickness and a dull, uninteresting life—they should play a big part in the fight for a bigger pay envelope. That makes sense, doesn't it?

That is why our policy is to help women to become active in supporting moves by the trade unions for higher wages and better conditions.

During the war many thousands of women found themselves working in industry, and they now know why it is necessary to fight all the time for wages and conditions. Big campaigns by the unions won increases during the war for women, who have always been expected to accept worse conditions than men.

But the fight for equal pay and equal conditions still goes on. It is fought by both men and women in the unions—by men because they realise that present conditions make women serve as a reserve of 'cheap labor', and by women who have found out that working together in their unions is the way to progress and success.

So, every day, in factories and offices—on the job women are finding that unity is strength.

WILL YOU HELP? We believe that women will never get all the things to which they are entitled until the present system is changed, and we have a socialist society run by the people, instead of by the big monopolies.

But unless women stand side by side with their men today—whether they are housewives or workers in industry, then we won't even improve everyday

conditions; moreover, if another depression is forced on us before many years are past, we will be too weak to fight against it.

We want to see a bigger pay envelope, with plenty of choice of food and clothing at reasonable prices; better homes with up-to-date conveniences; plenty of jobs for everybody.

The unions are fighting for these things today. Will you help in the fight?

The women of the minefields have formed their auxiliaries to help the Miners' Federation and throw their weight into the struggle. There are now also auxiliaries attached to the Seamen's Union, the Federated Ironworkers' Union, the Railways' Union, and others. Recently, the Seamen's Union took a big step forward, when it appointed a woman to organise these activities, and assist in overcoming difficulties during periods of industrial disputes.

So you see how important women can be in the struggle for a better life for our people—including, and particularly, the women themselves."

"A better life for our people"—all the people! That, as Mr. Ross shows, is what the unions are trying to bring about and that's the important thing. We Communists believe, with Mr. Ross, that only under a socialist system can the people really build a good, rich life for themselves, free from the fear of unemployment and depression.

But, here and now, women have an im-

mediate task—sharing in the fight for better conditions. Without that, many other improvements won't mean much. "After all," points out Miss Doris McRae, a well-known Victorian school-teacher, "It's useless receiving a Baby Health Centre chart, setting out the most nourishing foods for baby, if the family budget just won't get near it."

Miss McRae knows a lot about the particular improvements that women work for here and now to give their families a better start in life. Let's hear her explain just a few of them.

LOOKING AFTER MOTHER AND BABY.



"You often hear women say, 'I've never been really well since my second baby was born. I got about too soon.' Returning to a home with one or more little child-

ren, a woman finds herself at once continually on her feet.

To meet this situation, we need more maternity hospitals and wards and also rest homes, where women can remain, free to rest mind and body. We need a system of home help, with government and municipal assistance.

When we watch with pleasure the babies so beautifully tended, so healthy and so happy, that we meet in trams and trains today, we nod wisely and say: 'It's the Baby Health Centres.' But we need more of them, so that every mother can have the advice of the specially-trained nurses on how to look after her baby. And we press for these in every centre of population, we must work to develop the health department's infant welfare vans, which visit country centres; and also to improve the pay of the Sisters in charge, so that more women may be attracted to these forms of community service.

THE FIRST FEW YEARS. We learn that most children are born healthy, without defects, and that if they attend Health Centres they remain healthy for the first twelve months; but after that age, if they are removed from medical supervision, unchecked defects appear in teeth, eyes, ears or tonsils, so that at the age of five a great number of children have physical defects which undermine their health. This is one reason, among many, why we work for nursery schools and kindergartens, set up and controlled by joint municipal authorities, State and

Federal Governments, and in constant touch with Health Centres.

What a boon these places are! Children love to be with others of their own age and interests, and grow and develop amazingly under the skill of trained supervisors. They lose their shyness, their dislike of certain foods, their odd moods, and blossom out. Fondness for their homes and their mothers deepens with their short absences in new surroundings. Mothers, too, are rested by having a little freedom, and find time to catch up on work, and to relax a little.

"OUT OF THE DARKNESS . . ." The day comes when mother takes her child for the first time to a State School. Should she live in an inner suburb, the chances are that the school will be a forbidding, barrack-like building, set in small grounds, with a narrow entrance, and drab, gloomy rooms; and there will almost certainly be large,



crowded classes, and too few teachers, so that the average youngster doesn't get a chance to learn happily.

When parents realise the damage done to the minds and bodies of their children in these conditions, they will

demand, in anger, that their children pass out of them into modern, well-planned, attractive schools, just as a hundred years ago parents brought their children out from the darkness and servitude of the coal-pits.

These and other changes can be made if parents and teachers—on mothers' clubs, school committees, parent-teacher organisations, and local councils—keep up a constant and united struggle for these urgent reforms.

What has been done in some suburbs can be done in others if we persist in our demands!

Well, those are only a few of the things Miss McRae—and all of us women—want. It's all part of 'a better life for the people.'

But there's one other side of things that must be mentioned, because it's a side of life where women's needs are often forgotten. They're always telling us that "women's work is never done." Of course, that's true today, in one sense. The mother of a family often has to work away at the ironing or the mending long after the regular household routine—washing, cooking, cleaning, putting the children to bed—has been finished. For the working mother, there's the double burden—she has two jobs. It's a heavy burden, and the community owes these women a debt.

But we believe this burden **need not** be so heavy.

In pioneer days, women had to make do with butter-box furniture; they had to make their own bread, cure their own hams, design and sew the family's clothes, preserve the fruit, do the washing in a make-shift copper out of doors, and sew by the light of home-made candles.

But running a home need not be such a labour now. We **know how** to do away with much of that drudgery. Our workmen and designers **know how** to build us more convenient kitchens and laundries; our factories **know how** to make more time-saving devices; our tradesmen **know how** to build homes which can be kept clean, bright and attractive without endless work; our technicians **know how** to bring us light, power, hot water at a touch.

If we were running things ourselves, we would use this knowledge to turn the country's abundant raw materials into such products for the people; and women would have more leisure.

If we were running things ourselves, we

would be able to steadily reduce the hours of work for all workers, and the working woman would also have more leisure.

How would we use it? This story, told by an ex-servicewoman, gives some ideas on the subject:

"IF YOU HAD THE CHANCE"

"We pulled our greatcoats warmly round us and climbed into the back of the military tender. For over two hours we'd been sitting in the huge hall listening to the concert, and now we were off on the ten-mile drive back to camp.

Elaine was the first to speak, as we spun over the roads leading out from the city:

"It's a funny thing," she said from her seat in the corner, "I've never had the chance to go to a concert like that before. Not a real concert, I mean."

(It certainly had been a real concert—the city's symphony orchestra, and a famous visiting woman singer.)

"Funnier still," chipped in Mary, who had been humming the tune the soprano had sung for her last encore, "that we have to wait till there's a war on to get there."

"Even then we don't all get it." It was the Sergeant Janet, speaking this time. She was older than the rest of us. Her husband was 'away' somewhere with the navy, and she had a twelve-year-old daughter at school. A sister was looking after her

while Janet did her bit as a cook in the forces. (Some cook, too—what Janet couldn't do with a bit of bully-beef . . . !)

"For instance," she went on, "I would have liked my kiddy to learn the piano. The teacher at school said she might have had a real gift for it. Of course, I could never afford it, worse luck."

Babe, the pretty young clerk, put in:

"Yes—there's lots of things you could do, if you had the chance."

We all knew what she was thinking of. A few weeks ago we'd put on a short play at a camp concert, and Babe had surprised all of us, and herself, by making a very good job of her part in it. We were proud of her.

We fell to thinking over what Babe had said. "Lots of things you could do!" Here on the unit, we've worked pretty hard, but then, if we wanted things — more recreation, more ways of spending our time off — we set about getting together a committee to provide these things. That was how we'd got to that free concert. That, too, was how we'd arranged picnics and trips on stand-down days, and fixed up something for interstate people when they got a few days leave.

And what about 'afterwards'? Couldn't people do something like that 'back home' — in suburbs, country towns, city blocks? Something to make women's lives richer and fuller, to give them a chance of widening their interests and developing all their many-sided abilities?

Some of us had a vision of how the job could be



begun in our own districts. Slowly, bit by bit, people coming together to plan and discuss — to work. First one part, then another, according to the needs of the district. A centre 'community centres', you could

call them—that would include libraries for children and adults, reading rooms, and a story-teller for the children. Gymnasiums with sprung floors, equipment and showers, games rooms for active and quiet games. Rooms for crafts and hobbies. A little theatre for concerts and plays and films. A chance to hear, and learn to make, music—build up a choir, or a band. Club rooms, for old and young. School children would gather there for after-school activities; the adolescents would be attracted there from street corners; the old would find they need no longer be isolated and alone. There would be a chance for all the family to be happy—interested—alive. . .

If we worked for it. And why not?"

Well, why not?

Look back through these pages for a

moment. You'll notice that Mrs. Reed says:
"Of course, there's lots to do—lots of difficulties; but we're going forward."

And Edgar-Ross says:

"Have you ever known the workers get anything without fighting for it?"

And Miss McRae says:

"What has been done in some suburbs can be done in others if we persist in our demands!"

And the ex-WAAF says:

"And why not?"

Think for a moment of any improvements that have been brought about in your own district in the last few years. Has the school building been repaired? Then it was because the local people, through the school committee, pressed for it. Is there now a pre-school centre for the littlest ones? Then it's likely that it was built because the mothers worked for it. Have the girls working in the local factory got better lockers—a bigger lunchroom—a higher wage? Then you'd certainly be right in thinking that they got it by demanding it through their Union.

In fact, it boils down to this: If we want

things better, we only get them by coming together, asking for them, demanding them, working for them!

As a matter of fact, women have always been good at this kind of thing—seeing where things were not good enough, and working together to better them. What about yourself, for instance? It's a safe guess that during the last five years or so you've given some of your time—perhaps a great deal—doing one or more of the following things: Helping in a hospital auxiliary; raising money for the Comforts Fund; making or mending or packing clothes for UNRRA; supporting a prisoner-of-war; helping with functions to raise funds for the local kindergarten or for the school Christmas party; serving on a parents-and-citizens' committee; giving out 'how-to-vote' tickets at an election; or working with some form of housewives' association to improve conditions in the home. Isn't that so?

Women who do these things do so because they see that urgent improvements are needed, and they know that the only way to get them is to come together with

others who want the same things. That's what the unions are doing, for instance. That's how we all struggle for a better life for the people—all the people.

And wherever they come together to struggle for a better life for the people, women will find that the Communist Party is with them in their struggle—right out in front.

