

# EDITORIAL

IT IS SAFE TO PREDICT THAT THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE WILL END WITH PLEDGES OF UNITY TO FIGHT THE TORIES EVERYWHERE EVEN ON TO THE BEACHES. BUT BEHIND THIS ROUTINE RHETORIC LIES HIDDEN THE INABILITY OF THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP TO MOUNT A COHERENT OPPOSITION TO THE THATCHER GOVERNMENT.

Over the Falklands/Malvinas, the party's opposition was 'more of the same but with a liberal smile'. On the economy, their reflation-as-miracle solution shows that no lessons have been learnt from the economic disasters under Wilson and sunny Jim (who is now trying to win a pension from the trade unions by encouraging them to 'defy the law'). Over Lebanon and Ireland, a ghostly silence hovers over Walworth Road. No doubt conference will pass resolutions wishing

love and peace to Palestine and Israel, Catholic and Protestant but these hypocritical calls for togetherness in fact do nothing to disturb the status quo — nor are they meant to.

Although it can make no political capital out of the issue, the leadership is quite pleased to have the conference dominated by the registration of Militant and other political tendencies: at least, this debate hides the bankruptcy of the party on other issues. Obviously, Big Flame supports the right of Militant to remain in the Labour Party — though we have no enthusiasm for the content and form of their politics. But we regret how this issue continues to dominate Labour Party politics. This domination makes

clear the inability of the libertarian left inside the party to determine or even influence what are its political priorities. The left can gain control of many more CLPs without being able to affect the political direction of the party.

The right wing and centre of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy know that their power to influence national politics hinges on the result of then next election. A Labour defeat will mean either the vindication of Thatcherism or a coalition government committed to proportional representation. This Labour-TUC alliance has fought dirty in the past and the expulsion of some party members and dissident CLPs is something it can do even

before the first round of cocktails at Brighton or Blackpool. The compromise between the unions and the party will be stitched up yet again: a compromise between the unions built not on political agreement but on the fact that each owes the other so many favours that they can't risk separating.

The choice offered the left in the party (with or without Benn who may, yet again, decide to play safe) will be 'shut up' or 'beat it'. As preparations are made for the heroic tilt at the iron lady (sic), those who joined the Labour Party with hopes for a socialist, feminist, internationalist Britain will be left with a past and maybe a future — but no present. Their attitude to those who refuse to join this social-democratic fix resembles that of a mature parent to a wayward child who refuses to grow up. Our answer to them is that it's never too late for a second childhood.

## Women in Zimbabwe

**IT IS QUITE traditional for women to make gains in periods of national liberation which are then rolled back after independence. This pattern of events is occurring in Zimbabwe as Greg Dropkins reports**

*"A woman has no property at home and she had no children. When she gets divorced, she goes away naked. It is painful that even when she is working, she still owns no property of her own"*

In the old Rhodesia, the situation of most African women was of living on small plots in the barren Tribal Trust Lands, trying to grow enough

food to support their children, and waiting for money to be sent home by their migrant husbands working for the white bosses. During the war, peasant women were active in sheltering the guerillas and some fought in ZIPRA and ZANLA (the armed wings of ZAPU and ZANU). They expected major changes, first of all in the system of land ownership, since

this had been created by the white settlers, who destroyed previous patterns of communal village life. But the signs are that the new Zimbabwe has not meant independence for African women.

### Promises

The land which women need is owned by white farmers (employing African labour) who produce for export and the domestic market. There are also smaller farms owned by African men in the African Purchase Areas. The government's land reform and resettlement programme is limited in several ways. The Lancaster House agreement rules out nationalisation without compensation, allowing the state to buy back (at market price) only those lands which whites are willing to sell. And, unsurprisingly, the money promised by the West to fund these purchases has not materialised. But also, the government has accepted the argument that the economy depends on a profitable commercial farming sector and that this, in turn, depends for now on the white farmers and their expertise. So the resettlement areas are the worst,

unused, white lands. The government had projected to resettle 50,000 families a year. By the end of 1981, a total of only 15,000 had been resettled.

*"The headmen won't give women any land. They say that we don't have any right to it."*

Only the "landless" can qualify for resettlement, but this is a false measure since it excludes the many families who have a meagre bit of land incapable of growing enough food to support them. It also directly excludes women: a woman can only qualify as "landless" if she is a widow and all her children are under 7 years old. So the main category, women with migrant husbands — who may or may not send home a fraction of their earnings — do not qualify for resettlement. In fact, the men often have second families in town. As one woman put it, "Our husbands should only be allowed one wife, or else we should be allowed more than one husband."

The government has 3 models of resettlement. The "Model A" schemes, heavily promoted, give a family ¼ of a hectare of land inside their new village, and 5 hectares outside it. (1 hectare = 2½ acres). The land is held by the "head of household" — only 10% of these are women. The legal title of head of household actually increases men's power, because traditionally women had some unwritten rights to retain the money they earned as midwives or by selling a few vegetables.

### Shared

In one sense, the cooperative farms (Model B) are the radical alternative to the individual private plots of Model A. Land, cattle, tools, fertiliser, and housing are shared communally. Most cooperatives are formed by ex-guerillas, with experience of collective struggle during the war. But women wanting to join farming co-ops face many obstacles. Lacking any technical training, women usually end up in sewing co-ops rather than cooperative farms. On the farms, there is usually no collective childcare, and the woman is expected to service her husband and look after her mother-in-law on top of her collective farm labour.

Besides the special oppression of women, the co-ops find themselves in conflict with civil servants, which include returning exiles who spent the war years in higher education in Europe and USA. The Government has tended to discuss co-ops in terms of commercial viability, and avoid discussion of the politics of co-ops.

Only 23 co-ops are registered, are entitled to get Government support. And ex-combatants who tried to use their de-mobilisation grants to start co-ops had the grants withdrawn. They were intended for individual use, explained the government. The third model of resettlement is the state farm surrounded by individual land

holdings. The danger here is that because the workers have some land, wages on the state farm can be kept to a minimum, just as the migrant labour system.

And the minimum wage is very low indeed — currently Zim.\$56 per month. (1 Zim.\$ = 70p). The prices women have to pay for domestic goods include \$10 for a child's jumper, \$20 for a blanket, \$1 for a bottle of cooking oil.

### Wages

Besides agricultural and domestic service, women work as teachers and nurses. But here, the Government has taken a hard line of a different sort. In the same week that MP's received a 25% pay rise, striking teachers and health workers were being labelled as "criminals" for demanding a pay rise, and the government threatened to use troops...

Of course, Zimbabwean women live in a context of many factors: the legacy of war and years of a distorted settler economy, the threat of South African invasion, the ZANU-ZAPU split and antagonism between different tribes, the constraints of the Lancaster House settlement...

But they are also facing a government which does not prioritise their needs. The economic policy statement "Growth with Equity" (Feb '81) runs to 139 paragraphs, of which 2 deal specifically with women and are in a section headed "Manpower"(!). One states:

*"In developing the total human resources potential of the country, in particular those which have hitherto remained disadvantaged, equality of opportunity and conditions of service must prevail, untrammelled by consideration of sex. Legislation must conduce to this end, as is already the case with the minimum wage legislation. Likewise, urgent consideration must be given to the provision of special services, such as day-care facilities, for children of working mothers and the way must be cleared for women to enter or rise to high administrative and policy-making decisions."*

The only really hopeful sign for rural women is their own anger and awareness, which comes across powerfully in "We Carry a Heavy Load" — rural women speak out, a survey by the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau:

*"Why is it that only the names of men who have taken courses and have qualifications are being taken for resettlement? We women have also taken some courses, but they (the resettlement officers) are not taking our names. So it means that we women are not counted in any development activities being undertaken in Zimbabwe. We struggled much to win this Zimbabwe, but it seems that our Government has forgotten that and is not interested in women's development and needs."*



Photo Zimbabwe Women's Bureau