

WORKING AT LESNEYS.

This paper is an attempt to integrate our everyday lives and practise with our theoretical understanding. It's been written hurriedly and only by one of the people in the group because the others were working and didn't have the time. Because of this it's being put out purely as a discussion paper, and not as a statement from the whole group. The other people don't necessarily agree with what's written.

There are four of us in the group working at Lesneys. Two of us are in Big Flame. For the two of us in B.F. I can't say that our reasons for working there are to make an intervention as B.F. The motivation was to understand more about women's struggle as waged workers and to be able to confront the problems of breaking down the separation between women's struggles as waged labourers and as unpaid labourers in the home.

For a long time we agreed with Power of Women and libertarian analysis that the only revolutionary struggle for women is as unpaid workers in the home. This analysis is based on the understanding that our exploitation as women is primarily through our ideological role as housewives and mothers and it is the struggles against this role that hits at the root of our oppression and exploitation.

We'd been organising with local women by squatting, in the Claimants' Union and a community nursery and learnt a lot about how to collectivise the work of housewife and mother and the kind of support that women need from each other to be able to fight back. But we always remained a 'ghetto' group with no power except our aggro and violence which resulted in endless arrests and court cases.

We weren't learning how to relate our struggles to other struggle precisely because we identified so strongly as mothers and housewives rather than as exploited workers.

At the same time we were excited and inspired by the wave of industrial struggles in the early '70's - the occupations at Fakenham and Tillotsons, the Leeds clothing workers' strike, the night cleaners' campaign. Through the Claimants' Union we met hospital workers, dockers and miners wives and local women who were fucked over by going out to work.

These struggles made it clear that women are doubly exploited through going out to work and accepting their position at work because of their ideological role.

The perspectives of the women's movement seemed inadequate and polarised - relating to women either as producers of labour power or as labour power themselves, but not as both. The 6 demands put forward by Power of Women were nearer the mark, and it was good to read 'Scrooge and Stooze' about relating this perspective to women organising in a factory. But it still was going no further in understanding how women experience their oppression and exploitation as workers who are incredibly low paid and overworked because we accept our ideological role, and the ways that women are beginning to hit against this.

I'm attempting here to give a theoretical explanation of the development of women as a productive labour force and how we experience this in the factory and at home, and some indication of how we fight against it.

Development of women as a productive labour force.

"The change from traditional women's work in the home to work in manufacturing and the services has given gainful employment to many women and men and there has been a surplus in national wealth"***

Throughout the 50's and 60's, women were increasingly brought into the labour market, particularly married women. There was a 21% increase of women between 25 and 35 doing full-time and part time work. What is important is to look at the sectors women have gone to work in. According to the O.E.C.D. report, the largest percentage of women work in the clothing, textiles, leather and food industries, also certain engineering industries which require 'womanly skills'.

"Technical progress has been extended to the home, facilitating household tasks. The production side of women's work at home has gradually disappeared, leading to a devaluation of women's role in the home. Industrialisation of the manufacturing process for most products has put an end to women's role as 'producers'. Today women buy what they used to make".

The increase in women's employment is tied to the industrialisation of women's labour in the home. This transition of women's work from the home can be compared to the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Women's work and the tools we use to reproduce ourselves and our families as labour power have become an important profit market. Women have been subjected to the biggest productivity deal of all time. Through putting a large part of our work onto the assembly line, capital has been able to subject women workers to speed ups, rationalisation, bonus schemes etc. The fact that the work women do is related to their role in the home provides the justification for women being low-paid. -handling a sewing machine is classed as 'female unskilled' compared with driving a truck.

But this process of industrialisation hasn't only happened in the factories. It's also taken place at home. The labour saving devices - washing machines, high speed gas - have enabled women to speed up their work at home so they have time to go out to work to pay for these things. Women's production in the home has intensified - we still have to do the same bulk of work, we just do it 10 times faster than before.

The comparison between the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and women's work from home to the factory, also holds for the lag in ruling ideology behind the changes in the form of production. It served capital to maintain the monarchy and church as mystical authority, until the contradictions became too great and purgeois revolutions paved the way for social democracy. It has also served capital to maintain mystical authority over women through the family with the man as the authority figure, also at work where men are the 'overseers'. But the ideology's cracking up, women don't want to get married any more. "The result is an easy situation where traditions and attitudes are out of step with the new ways of life". Hence, the eagerness of the state in the form of the Labour government and the Trade Union bureaucracy, to give women some concessions towards legal and economic equality, as expressed by the demands of the bourgeois women's movement. They want to ease away the contradictions in women's lives that have produced the explosive women's movement. But it's not working. Young women who aren't married and want to be independent, see that they have the same needs as men and won't accept the terms of the Equal Pay Act where we have to be doing the same job to get the same pay.

We need to look for ways of organising and perspectives that take into account our whole experience as women up against capital. This was one of the reasons for going to work at Tesneys, to understand how women experience wage labour and what the main needs and struggles are in that situation. (other reasons were economic necessity and getting out of the isolation of being housewives and mothers and always talking to people in the same limited political/friendship network).

Women's Wage Labour in East London

What characterises women's employment in East London is that there's no major industry like in many of the northern towns. There's a lot of average sized engineering factories, Lesneys being one of the largest. A lot of food industry - Cross and Blackwell, Brook Bond, Tate and Lyles, Claricoes, Watneys and Charringtons breweries. A mass of small sweatshops, mainly clothing but also food and engineering. Reason for the number of small factories and sweatshops is that there's never been the room for large scale industrialisation at the time when women were being brought into the workforce. At this time, after the 2nd world war, the population of East London was being eased out to the new towns of outer London - Peterborough, Luton, Abbey Wood. Industry moved out to these places rather than concentrating on Inner London.

Because the industry is so varied and workplaces relatively small, there's no contact between different workplaces, except through friends and relations. When we started working at Lesneys we put as a priority finding out about all the women's workplaces in East London, the form of production, wage rates, relationship of workers to union, struggles that have gone on in each place etc. However, we didn't have the time or energy to do this and most of what we've found out has been through women we work with.

Why we're working at lesneys in particular

At first there was some doubt as to whether a factory or a service industry was the best place to work. In some ways it seemed more important to work in the services, as they're breaking down to some extent and a lot of struggle have been going on and also they provide a direct relationship between community and workplace. However, we decided on Lesneys in the end simply because there's a constant level of aggro there and the place is notorious as a lousy sweatshop and might very well be a reference point for women's struggles on the E, End.

Some information about Lesneys

Lesneys produces toy cars. There's a joke about the men working at Fords producing the big cars and the women working at Lesneys producing the little car that's no joke - the Lesneys recruitment ads. put over the work as being more satisfying because women are 'making the toys', that your children love to play with. Making toys is out over as women's work because it identifies with women's role, the big cars is the 'man's job'. Look at the wage differentials: £21 basic in Lesneys, @46(?) basic at Fords.

Lesneys employs in Hackney 2,000 women and 800 men in 2 factories that are 10 minutes walk apart. It's expanded a lot since it went public in '68, with factory branches in Harlow, Chingford, Rochford, Abbey Wood, Peterborough and Brasil plus warehouses for distribution in the states. It has the highest profit rate in relation to capital investment of any British company for year ending '73. For the first half of '74 (including the 3 day week) pre-tax profits increased by 141%. It's now developing new markets in plastic educational toys, a new 'boom' market, particularly with the increase in day care for under fives.

Lesneys has made its money off women's backs - basic rate for women 53p an hour, for semi-skilled men, 85p an hour.

Form of production and relationships this produces between workers

Of the 2,000 women, about half work on assembly lines and half on individual machines, both are run on piecework systems. The men are all mechanics, chargehand etc. except for the skilled men in the tool room and the semi-skilled men in the foundry and the tumblers - the latter all work in the Eastway factory. The men and women are completely divided by job categories and rates of pay. The women tend to be pretty antagonistic

towards the men because they don't work as hard and get paid more. The women are more subject to speed-ups and productivity deals because they do the actual productive work (except for the foundry men), For example. all the women work a bonus scheme which ties their wages to productivity whereas none of the men do. When the company went public a time and motion firm was brought in to increase productivity and rationalise the workforce. A lot of women were thrown out and the workforce on the assembly lines halved and the women on the machines had to work with both hands instead of one.

In the section i worked in we worked the collective bonus scheme. There were six belts with 4 women and a quality controller on each. Most of these belts had a regular four women on them, but there was a high rate of absenteeism so there was a change around about twice a week. There was a sort of pool of women who were the bad workers and absent a lot who who'd never managed to stick to one belt who were moved around continuously. I was one of these, partly because i wanted to work on all the belts to meet all the women, but mainly because i could hardly ever manage a five day week so i was always 'moved on'. I quickly found out about the work ethic which operated particularly between the white women who'd been there for 3 to 14 years. The collective bonus scheme meant that all the thirty women were responsible for keeping the numbers up, and if one belt worked badly they'd get stick and nasty looks from all the other women. If there was one woman on a belt who wasn't working as hard as the others, then she'd be ostracised 'til her work came up to standard. This happened to me. At first i tried arguing that the bonus scheme was setting the women against each other and that we shouldn't work so hard, but the women just saw me as lazy so i gave that one up for the time being. In time, i came to suss out the women who felt the same about the work and just talked about it with them. However, the management sussed out that we were stirrers and whenever they got a chance put us on the same belt together. This wasn't very often, but when we were together we only managed about half the target which meant that the other women were really nasty to us. This meant that we ended up working harder. The whole scheme meant that the management had to put very little pressure on the women - they supervised each other.

I can't realise that a lot of the older women actually took some sort of pride in working hard. The target gave them a sort of incentive and talking point for the whole day. At the end of every hour they'd ask the controller how we were doing and adjust their work speed accordingly. It broke the monotony of the endless work and gave them the illusion of some control over the work.

To get on well with the women meant falling in with this work ethic colluding in relationships where we allowed the work to control us. This meant that there was always a rather uneasy distrustful relationship between everybody that came out in prejudices against blacks, immigrants, spinsters etc.

It was interesting to see how the women related to the chargehand, the male authority figure. He was the 'manager' of our section, the son of one of the directors working his way up and he was a right bastard. He used to watch us with an eagle eye, just stranding at the end of the line for about half an hour, looking for an excuse to jump on us. The women used to slag him off all the time and take the piss out of him behind his back, but when it came to a direct confrontation, the women would make a joke out of it, just the way we handle most confrontations with men.

It's interesting and important to see how these relationships changed during the wild cat strikes. (A full account of the whole strike is being written by two other women so i'm only dealing with some aspects that happened in my section)

The wildcat strikes meant that the machinery was off every afternoon and we were given sorting work to do that meant that we were sitting

do n with plenty of opportunity to talk. The bonus schme didn't apply to sorting work so all the watchfulness disappeared. The first d/y, the chargehand almost did himself in, wheeling the trolleys round full of work to us, because the bloke who usually did it was out, and we all split ourselves laughing at him, really pleased that he was having to kill himself working for a change.

the collusion between everybody at this point set the the atmosphere how we felt afetr that. On my li e i was woring with the ' bad workers' and he kept on comig up to us and telling us not to talk so mic and get on with the work. We just shouted back at him and in the toilet (where we have 2 ten minute breaks a day and most of the talking gets done between belts) all the women started talking about ewhat a bastard he is a d we ought to tell him to fuck off. One evning as we were going outm he came up to two fof the womento tell then they should be going out of another door. They just turned round and told him to fuck off and that no body wanted him around anyway. The other women were in fits of laughter and he just backed away without anything to say. This was the first time I'd seen the women win over a confrontation with his authority.

Ecery afetrnoon, when the machines were off, we'd settle down for an eniovable afternoon' s caht. We talked about everything - money, family, marriage, sex, health, how hard the work was, where we'd worked before. We probably found out more about each other than in 6 months of working' the there. Ofcen i was working on a belt with a Nigerian woman, an Armenian wo woman and an Indian woman who were all amrried. The were pretty disparagi ng about marriage and warned me not to do it. The indian woman said that going out to work was e real freedom for her. She didn't like her husband much and felt trapped in her family and going out to work was a rebellio as her husband was against it. She kept her wage for herself, as did the o other 2 women. The Armenian woman said she hated work a d they didn't rea lly need the money but it was the only way of getting out of home. The nigerian woman had three kids and said it was e real struggle making end meet. They all agreed that sex was a dead loss after the first year or so and once you had kids you didn't have the timea or inclination anyway. Th They all went home and did the housework and then went to bed about 9 o'clock. We all agreed that it was really good having the extra afternoon off with the wild cat strikes but we felt no power to push for this in the face of the 'work ethicers'

These women were all very aware of the racism against them and bitter about it, saying to me 'what have you got to moan about, you're not black'. They were a lot more outspoken most of the white women. I thin think this was because they felt there wasn't much chance of getting 'in with the other women anyway, so they were more autonomous from the whole set of work relationships.

RACISM

The racism hits you in the face. The black women are usually put to work on seperate belts to the white women to prevent fights. One belt with 2 white and 2 black women, the wh te women used to bring in air-freshener' because of the smell'. There are a lot of stories going around about how the black women provoke fights and bite chunks of flesh out of the white women and each other. And many of the older white women blame the deterioration in relationships on the blacks. They talk about how in the good old days, bero re they brought the time and motion in and the work load doubled, they used to actually enjoy coming in to work and everybody would be singing and laughing. Often when I'd say that was a reason for getting rid of the bonus scheme and not working so hard, the y'd say "oh no, its since they brought the vlacks in it's got worse". Thos obviously isn't pure and simple prejudice. It's to do with their own feeling of powerlessness at being able to change the work situation and sublimating this feeling through blaming the blacks.

The black women are very aware of the resentment but have different ways of coping with it rather than doing anything about it collectively. There's one belt of all black women where they won't have a another black woman to work there cos' the blacks are bad workers'

Like the black kids in white schools, they've internalised the white values and experience themselves as white rather than black. This broke down a bit during the strike when they got into a bit of negroish singing and dancing and the white women quite dug it. Some of the black women are pretty resigned to the prejudice and just keep themselves to themselves. A few of them are into Hallelujah! white man's religion and read religious texts through the lunch break. There's one black woman who can really stand up for herself and takes the piss out of the white women and gets a certain respect from them for this.

Most of the black women were consistently radical in that they challenged the chargehand, tried to get out of the work whenever they could, weren't bothered about the target even though they needed the money as much as the other women. And there was this thing about autonomy from the work/social relationships that I've mentioned before.

When I was first working there, I thought it was a priority for the black women to get together more. I got on better with them because of their attitudes, but I found it impossible to make suggestions about what they could do because I was white and didn't have the same things at stake as them - i.e. I could always get on O.K. with the white women and chat to them which put me in a superior position ultimately to the black women. One time the black women did get it together. There was a bomb scare and the black women were out of the door five minutes before the white women who were waiting for the chargehand's permission. The white women sort of respected them for this and it became a big joke. I reckon this is an indication of the way the racism could break down.

THE UNION.

The union's only been at Lesneys for a year. It was brought in after a pay demand when the people got half what they wanted and demanded a ballot for bringing in a union. The demand was started by the men in the foundry in the Eastway factory, the only large group of semi-skilled men working together. The main union is the A.U.E.W. but there's a different branch in each factory which is defined by the men working there. There's the engineering branch in the Lee Conservancy road where the men are mostly mechanics, and there's the foundry branch in the Eastway factory. This means the women are split between the two branches which actually sets the women against each other as we discovered as we discovered during the strike.

The union in the Eastway factory has the most support and is the best organised. This is mainly because the foundry men are the driving force. Because of this the women tend to see that the union is the men's business, although there are three women shop stewards who are very strong and see that the union is the only means of fighting back. It's difficult to get a general understanding of how the women relate to the union because attitudes are so varied and contradictory. The function of the union, how far it's useful, how far it's reactionary, has to be understood as part of the history of workers' struggles at Lesneys and as part of the existing form of production and the work relationships. Any autonomous organisation can only come out of the changes in these relationships. At the moment, the union is an improvement on what there was before - the Lesneys councils which were the tools of the management. The union means that we can have shop floor meetings when we (or rather the shop stewards) want, without any management present.

The women aren't satisfied with the union but don't see any alternative. Any organisation that limits itself to the workplace is inadequate for women. One woman said about the union 'They're always going on about politics - what we want is a bit of enjoyment'. None of the women were particularly interested in talking about the union - they saw union business as 'workers' rights' and were quite happy to leave all this boring business up to the shop stewards.

The shop stewards were elitist and hierarchical, making decisions with and informing only their friendship network of older white women

But this reflected the power relations on the shop floor rather than being produced by the union structure. The women completely accepted the need for leaders and representatives because they hadn't experienced anything that should make them think otherwise.

There were signs of this changing slightly during the strike. For a start, we were challenging the chargehand without the steward to step in and smooth things over (she was usually off at a meeting). In the shop floor meetings we spoke out about what we wanted, demanding that the shop steward explained everything clearly and discussing it between ourselves. In one mass meeting the women got angry with the union official for telling us to keep within the social contract and told him to fuck off when he suggested that any wage rise had to go with higher productivity. After a leaflet we put out criticising the shop stewards, a few women and men tore up their union cards through no confidence in the union, but we don't know whether this was because they thought the union was making too much trouble or not enough. After this leaflet, the women in our section demanded a shop floor meeting and told their steward they wanted an all out strike. A couple of people said they wanted to start a strike action committee but there was no support for this from anyone else.

Some men in the foundry have been refusing to join the union. The men thought they should be 'sent to Coventry' until they joined, but the women wanted to know why they didn't want to join & the women obviously have more sympathy with disillusion with the union.

The shop stewards - can we work with them as shop stewards?

In the Eastway factory there are five women shop stewards, three of whom are pretty militant, two of whom are on the management's side, as the women say. These three women are very aware of women's rights as workers and are prepared to argue out the issues of equal pay, work speed etc. They've a traditional union consciousness - they're the representatives of Lesneys workers and that's as far as it goes. But again, their consciousness is determined by the struggle that's going on. The question is whether they'll be a radical force in the struggle going beyond workers' rights or whether they'll hold it back. One of the stewards has given out a leaflet for us in the factory and given us information for others. She knows we're revolutionaries but doesn't agree with us but is prepared to help us because she's frustrated by the lack of political consciousness amongst the women (she's a miner's daughter). Another steward is a real radical force in the factory. During the strike she's found herself supported by the immigrants and younger women against the older white women who are her mates, but she's kept arguing her ideas with them. She says she supports whoever's giving the leaflets out but isn't interested in doing anything outside of the union. The third steward and most influential, doesn't want anything to do with us and says we're stirring up trouble against the union. It's important to keep up contact with the other two because they're sympathetic and want to go beyond the present level of things, not because they're shop stewards.

Equal Pay - what the women think about it.

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Again, what the women think about equal pay has to be understood in terms of the form of production including the family and social relationships that come out of this. At Lesneys, the women are the productive workers, the men, literally, stand on the sidelines. Because of this, the women haven't got any illusions about going by the Equal Pay Act. We do more work than the men, so it's nonsense to demand equal pay for the same work as men. A lot of the women say we ought to get equal pay with the foundry workers, who get £45 basic because we do the same bulk of work as them.

A suprising amount of the women aren't married, as far as i can tell, almost half of them. This means they've got a very keen idea of their needs being the same as the men and that they need the same amount of money. But they're very doubtful about getting what they want. They say the union's not strong enough and the men won't support us. They know too that the management can hold the threat over our heads that they'll close the factories down and move somewhere where there's cheaper labour. It's not at clear what the necessary strategies are going to be in this situation except building co-ordination with the other Lesneys' factories and making sure they don't use us against each other.

As a demand, we'd say that equal pay's useless, particularly Lensys which would go bust or go to Brasil if we got equal pay. However, it seems certain that the women are going to fight for it. What we can do here is emphasize what the women are saying already, which is that we work too hard with the work at home as well, and more money isn't going to make any difference to the misery of our everyday lives. Hopefully we'll be able to use the issue of equal pay for a discussion of our whole experience as women workers and the need to take action in every area of our lives. In East London this could have a real meaning if we could get women from the food co-op, the Sumner House squat, from the hospitals and playgroups to come and talk.

How we've worked as a group at Lesneys

Four of us in the women's work group have been working there, 2 in each factory in a different section. For the first few months we were at a loss as to what we could do there and just built up our understanding of the situation and got to know the women. For a long time we thought it would be a mistake to put out leaflets, that the women wouldn't relate to them. When the strike reached a crucial point (it seemed the action was going to be called off) we put out a leaflet without thinking twice about it, it was so important. We put out another leaflet after this which created uproar. A couple of people who weren't in the group were accused with putting the leaflet out and threatened with expulsion from the union. They knew it was us and confronted us, but after talking it out they agreed with us and said they wanted support from us in discussing what was happening and perhaps putting leaflets out. We've decided to disown the leaflets if asked by anyone until we're completely sure of them. Otherwise it would mean the sack sooner or later.

Two possibilities have come up so far about how we can work as a group around Lesneys. Some of the shop stewards want a day school on equal pay and we're organising it with them through the W.E.A. It means we could get women organising in other factories and situations to come and have a wider talk about women's struggle and work out how to take the discussion onto the shop floor. The other thing is doing a regular bulletin that goes beyond what's happening in the factory to wider women's issues and general political issues.

How far it's been useful being in Big Flame

The most useful thing has been the meetings with the Fords group and hospital workers group in West London, both to find out the struggles going on in other workplaces and to clarify our political ideas from a practical basis. Also important has been the general support and encouragement and help with leafletting. However, we found the number of meetings impossible to cope with and that we have very little social life with the other comrades in Big Flame. (some of the younger women want to know about our social life, and as it's been mainly meetings, there doesn't seem very much to offer) We haven't said that we're in Big Flame to many of the women we know at Lesneys. The whole idea of a political group is so alien to their lives. Also, we haven't put out leaflets in the name of Big Flame, partly because

there's only two of us in it, partly because the name is too 'explosive' when people suspect the 'reds' of the bomb scares and arson that's been going on, but also because we're not sure about putting ourselves over as an interventionist group.

What we need at the moment from Big Flame is more political education and clarification of ideas. The two women not in B.F. have said that this is what they want, also the meetings with other base groups. Working full time has made us critical of the amount of national activity and decision making going on. As we're so small at the moment it means that it's usually those who aren't working who have the national contact. This makes the usual separation between workers and intellectuals - and as more working people join B.F. this split will become more of a problem unless we work it out now. B.F. should be regarded as less of a national organisation and more of a tendency i.e. less decision making on national policy and more dialectical discussion from the situations we're fighting in. -

A subjective account of working at L.

For a start, there were difficulties in my identification. I'd gone in as twenty years old and never been a student, to explain my non-work record. I didn't tell the women that I'd been a student - partly because I didn't want it to get back to management, partly because I didn't want the women to know. I'd gone to work in a factory because I didn't see any other option - I couldn't take a middle class job, I wanted to get out of looking after kids and doing housework and seeing people from the same friendship/political network all the time and I wanted to be in a situation where I could fight and organise. But I never felt I could explain why I was working there in these terms - I did when women told me I should get a job as a secretary or something, but they couldn't understand why I didn't think this was any better. This set a limit to most of my relationships - I always felt a difference that I didn't have the prospect of an endless daily grind before me, although in fact the other younger women had dreams like getting a job on a boat or going to college.

The first weeks were quite exciting, in a vicarious sort of way. I talked a lot with the women, but after a while began to find it a strain, not having the same concepts and not being upfront when I totally disagreed because they'd think me strange. I couldn't come out with what I thought and felt without thinking twice about it and often not saying it. In fact, this wasn't just my problem - other women obviously experienced the same thing - black women who couldn't talk about the racism against them, a young white girl who couldn't mention her black boyfriend, women who didn't like their husbands and had no sex lives but it just came out in jokes and cliches. The prevailing atmosphere was get on with the work, get the money, get on with your workmates and keep a happy smile on your face.

After a while, I found it difficult to reconcile home and work. Home living with three women and kids, was a much more slow paced sensitive atmosphere. I'd come home from work all tensed up from 8 hours on the assembly line and find it hard to readjust. I found it hard to relate to the kids how I wanted. At work I had relationships that were tough and speedy and joky and it was difficult to get into being relaxed and playing with the kids after that. One day a week when I did the housework I experienced what most women do every day of their lives - come home, do the shopping, cook the dinner, bath the kids, read them a story and put them to bed. I quite enjoyed this, but doing it 7 days a week I would have gone round the bend. The younger married women had this routine and they went to bed about nine o'clock every night. They'd have to get up at 6 the next morning to get the kids ready for school or childminder.

When i asked the other women if they found it difficult being how they wanted with their kids, they often said they never had time to play with them because they were either doing housework or tired out. Many of the older women were really living out their aspirations through their kids - some of them had children who'd done well, gone to college or something, they felt their lifetime of hard work was worthwhile because they'd paid for the extra bits that ensured that their kids got out of factory work. They were always telling me i should train for a better job. I thought the jobs their children had were just as dead-end and boring as factory work but couldn't put down their lifetime of hard work like that.

The longer i worked there, the more i felt deadened by the work. After a few months i began to dread the 8 hours stretching before me. At first I'd been able to cut off, having the energy and detachment to be able to think and analyse about what i was experiencing. After a while i began fantasising and was in a daze by the end of the day. I began feeling that my whole life was fucked up by the work. I didn't have much time for being with friends. When i did have time for socialising i usually felt too tensed up to get into it. I never got it on sexually - the work made me feel tensed up all over, the pace was anti-physical, forcing you to subject your body to the work and repress all natural instincts and i gradually stopped feeling spontaneous physical warmth with people. I had to be in bed at 10.30 every night to get up at 6.30 the next morning, and didn't have a steady sexual relationship so there was nobody i could automatically fall into bed with. Some of the younger girls talked about this in an indirect way - they'd say they didn't think much of sex, didn't like being mauled around by blokes, and they'd complain about having nothing to do at week-ends or in the evenings.

The Big Flame meetings often seemed distant from the reality of Lesneys. I'd often feel disorientated after a meeting, knowing i was going to work the next day and trying to reconcile talking about politics and revolution with how i felt at work - young, inexperienced and ground down a lot of the time. All this made me think that we as revolutionaries do need to pay more attention to our personal needs and desires as part of the perspective and organisation we're developing. For instance, I'd like to see a women's centre, or social centre in the East End where people can come and discuss their fucked up health, sexuality, family and work, find out what other people are doing about how to understand and change it.