



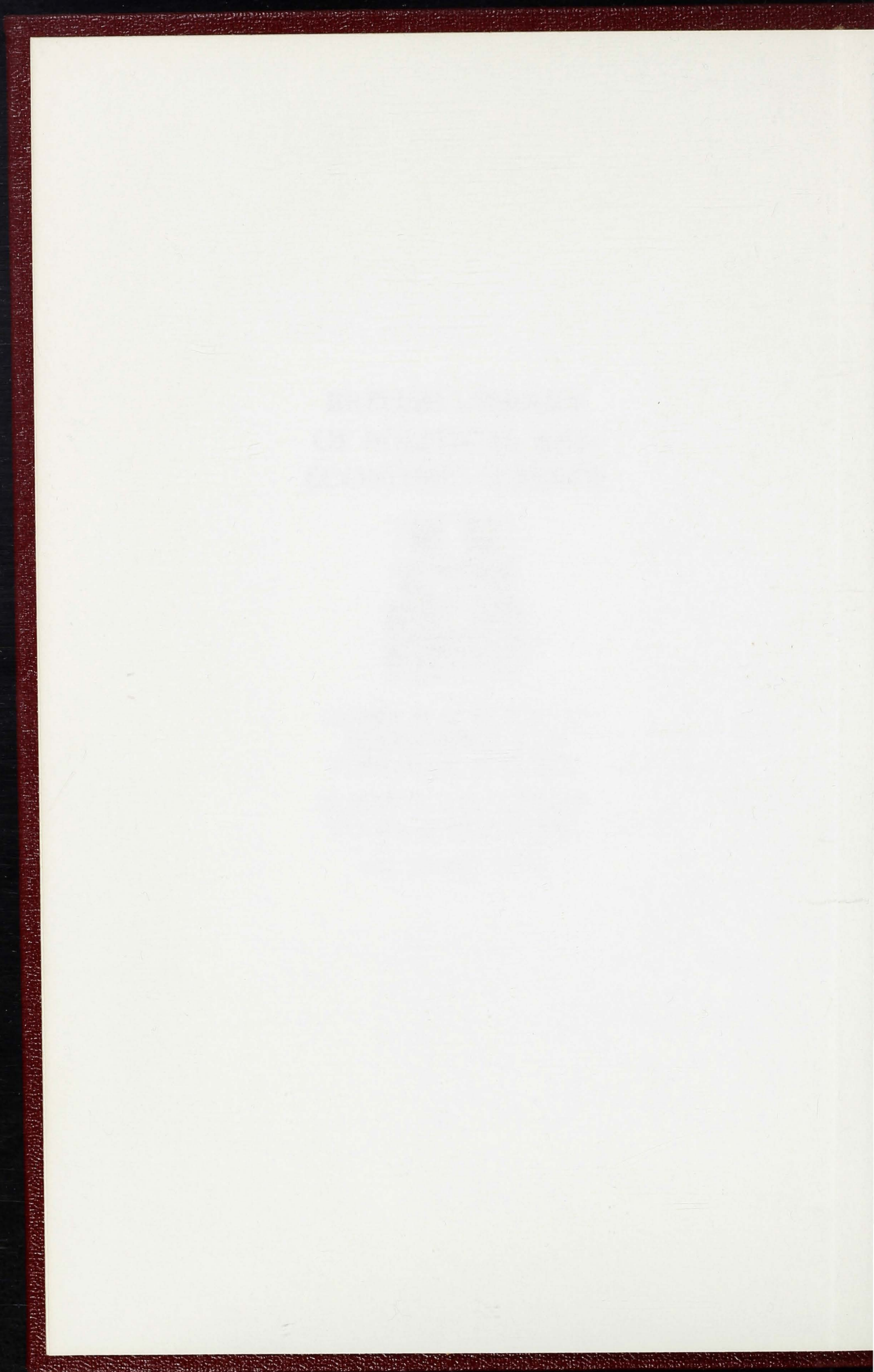
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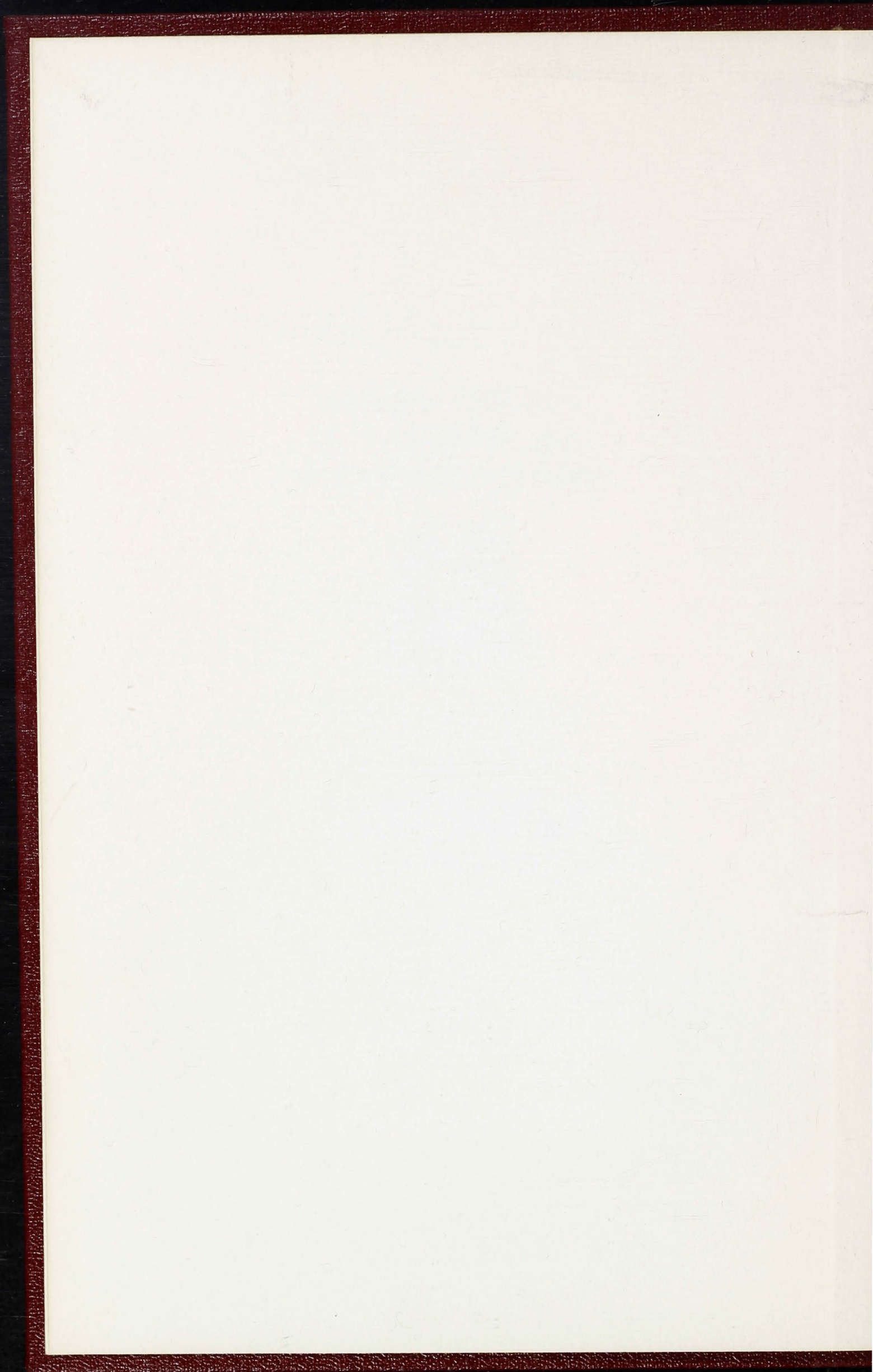
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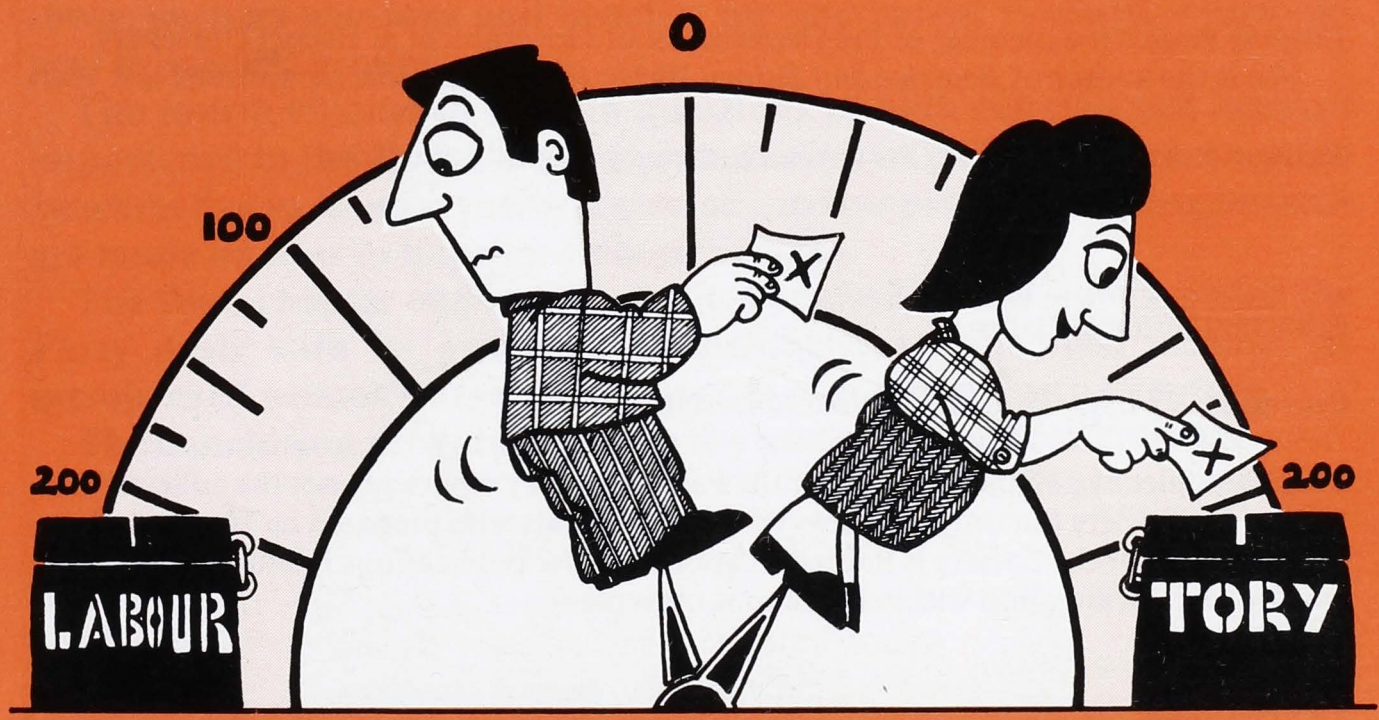


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**Fabian Society**  
**No.507**

# Winning Women's Votes



Edited by  
**Lisanne Radice**

## Fabian Tract 507

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# WINNING WOMEN'S VOTES

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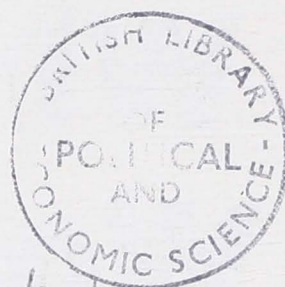
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# INTRODUCTION

**More women vote Conservative than Labour. Recent shifts in support indicated by the opinion polls do not show an increase in the proportion of women supporting Labour. Instead there is a move from the Conservatives to the Alliance. If it is to gain political power, Labour must increase its share of the women's vote.**

**The purpose of this pamphlet is to suggest ways in which the Party can demonstrate its relevance to women. It also sets out to increase awareness within the Party as to the importance of women's issues.**

**The pamphlet is divided into five chapters. The first analyses the impact of six years of Tory government on the everyday life of women. The nature of the Thatcher attack on family life and the question of equality and the quality of life is also discussed.**

**The second chapter uses poll material to illustrate the gender gap, taking into account age, social class and regional female voting patterns. It also examines the way in which women look at issues.**

**A review of Labour Party policies as they affect women follows. This chapter is divided into a discussion of issues which are perceived to be central to most women voters, such as the National Health Service and those, such as pensions and benefits for one-parent families, which appeal to specific groups.**

**The fourth chapter deals with questions of both external and internal importance to the Party. A poor presentation of policies which ought to be attractive to women voters is seen as a major problem and suggestions are made on how to improve Labour's image.**

**The final chapter ends with a critical analysis of the way in which the Party deals with its own women members, at all levels, whether as members of women's organisations or as part of the Party structure.**

**The conclusion provides an overview and proposals for action.**

# 1. TORY POLICIES

**Although Mrs Thatcher is Britain's first woman Prime Minister, her period in office has neither increased opportunities for women nor been beneficial to their basic interests.**

The Tory Government acts as if it has a view of the role of women and the circumstances of family life that has more in common with the images in a 1950's advertising campaign than the realities of the mid 1980s. Its policies assume that the father is at work earning enough money to buy a house and a car, pay for private medical insurance, and put the children through private education. Meanwhile the mother stays at home to look after the needs and comfort of the family. They have, of course, two children and a granny who either lives around the corner or who has moved into the family home. This attitude perpetuates the concept of women depending on men — an integral part of the Thatcherite philosophy of cutting social provision by reducing the quality of service on which families rely.

The picture created is far from the facts of most people's existence. Fewer than one in five male workers conforms to the traditional 'breadwinner' as the sole wage-earner providing for a family; it is women's earnings which keep a large number of families out of poverty. 12 per cent of children come from single parent families (in Inner London this is as high as 33 per cent); a third of marriages end in divorce; a third of elderly people have no living relatives.

The policies of the Conservative Government have made the lives of the poorest more difficult. As a consequence, a considerable number of women have had their horizons narrowed and their opportunities restricted.

## **Women's equality**

In 1982, Mrs Thatcher claimed that "the

battle for women's rights has been largely won". This is far from the case. The Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts represented only the beginning of a movement towards equality. Under the Tories, the advance has been stemmed. Women's pay in 1983 was only 73 per cent of men's (for women manual workers it was 69 per cent of male manual workers' pay). Opportunities for better jobs have also been curtailed. The Government's attitude is well illustrated in Patrick Jenkin's comment: "If the Good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work he wouldn't have created men and women".

## **Education and training**

Since June 1983, female unemployment has risen dramatically — by 22 per cent. In six years of Tory rule, women have been more tied to the home and have had less opportunity to train or continue their education. The very weak statutory requirements on local authorities to provide nursery education has been removed altogether. When Tory-controlled Oxfordshire proposed the closure of all their nursery schools, it was found that there was a statutory duty to provide nursery education. The 1980 Education Act removed that impediment.

The Tory philosophy on day nurseries has been succinctly expressed by Patrick Jenkin: "If they (nurseries) are made available at public expense too readily, they can all too easily be seen as the expression of a philosophy which preaches that parents can do as they like and it is the duty of the state to look after children".<sup>1</sup>

The Government's action in cutting

resources for specific women's courses such as TOPS and in abolishing many industrial training schemes has meant that women have lost opportunities for training and retraining.

The cut-back in the budget of the Open University and other institutions providing second chances and continuing education has also significantly reduced opportunities for women.

## **Employment**

The 1980 Employment Act reduced women's rights to paid maternity leave. An employer can now more easily refuse to hold a woman's job for her, and there is less protection from dismissal because of pregnancy. The 1985 Budget made the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims two years. This means that a third of full-time adult women workers are no longer protected against unfair dismissal.

When women are able to take paid employment it is often on a part-time basis. A direct result of privatisation in the public sector, particularly of school meals, has been to force women to take part-time jobs as a way of reducing employers' costs. While this is convenient for many employers, part-time workers are the most vulnerable and highly exploited. Not only do they miss out on various employment rights, such as holiday and redundancy pay, but their average hourly earnings in April 1981 were only 58 per cent of those of full-time male workers.

The weakening of the Wages Councils will mean that existing protection for many low paid women will also be undermined. Women form over two-thirds of all low paid workers in Britain, and more than 5.5 million adult females are low paid.

## **The quality of life**

As well as attacking the right of women to equal opportunities at work, the policies of the Thatcher Government have under-

mined the services that many women depend on to make their lives tolerable. Tory policies have resulted in more difficult conditions and greater stress in the home, and therefore greater burdens upon women. In the vast majority of cases it is the wives and mothers who take responsibility for the organisation of family life. It is they who try to make do and manage on fixed budgets unable to stretch to the necessities, let alone the luxuries, of life. It is often they who will sacrifice their own diets, comforts and clothing to provide for the rest of the family.

Under Thatcherism 4 million people live in poverty. A MORI poll in 1983 found that 3.25 million could not afford to heat their homes adequately; 4.3 million lived in damp housing conditions; 3.4 million could not afford new clothes; 7 million could not afford to buy enough food and 10 million could not afford to take a week's holiday.

Throughout Thatcher's first Government the value of child benefit fell. In 1984, it was restored to its 1979 value but has dropped back again in this year's uprating. The real value of maternity benefit, already amongst the lowest in Europe, was cut. The Tories' housing benefit scheme, introduced in April 1983, has been a disaster, as over 2 million households were made worse off, 400,000 losing their rights to benefits altogether. Thousands of tenants were left piling up debts, and some were faced with eviction.

Normal Fowler's recent review of the social security system, with its emphasis on public expenditure savings, promises further reductions in benefits of particular importance to women. Under Fowler maternity grants will be abolished, the numbers eligible for maternity allowance cut and widows left worse off. With the abolition of the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) those on middle to low incomes will be worse off; the sick and disabled will find themselves uninsurable and housing benefits will be cut sharply.

Housing has borne the brunt of the Tories' public spending cuts. The building

programme has been slashed, rents forced up, and councils have been prevented from spending revenue from the sale of council houses to benefit those in need.

In 1981 there were over 1 million unfit dwellings in England and Wales; 1 million lacked one or more basic sanitary amenities; there were 800,000 households living in overcrowded conditions and the same amount in shared accommodation. In 1984, the average mortgage advance needed by first-time buyers was more than £20,000. This excludes many millions of people from joining the 'property-owning democracy'.

## **Transport**

Public transport has been a particular target for the Tories. The cheap fares policies adopted by many councils were central to their desire to abolish the GLC and the Metropolitan Counties. Women, much more than men, are dependent on public transport for long-distance and local travel. Bus fares have increased on average by 80 per cent since 1979, and by much more in some areas. Many localities now have little or no service in the evenings or on Sundays, and some communities are in danger of being entirely cut off from the public transport network.

## **National Health Service**

For all of Mrs Thatcher's claims that "the NHS is safe with us", there have been constant rumours about plans to undermine the basic principles of the National Health Service. Whatever plans are in store for the future, there is severe damage being done now. Since the 1983 election, the Tories have cut the cash for services in real terms,

cut staffing levels for the first time in the history of the NHS, and forced Health Authorities to privatise ancillary services.

Prescription charges have increased since May 1979 from 20p to £2.00. Dental charges have risen, and the optical service reorganised so that those with the worst problems have to pay the greatest amount.

Squeezing the NHS has also affected women's pay. Except for top jobs, the Government has kept public sector pay awards at 4 per cent; since the NHS has over 1 million employees out of which 75 per cent are women this means that women have been the section of the community which has been most affected by the Tories' pay restraint.

Despite the Tories' claim to be the Party of law and order, serious crime has increased more than under Labour. Women feel themselves particularly vulnerable. This linked to the cuts in public transport provision ensures that many women feel confined to the house at night.

With one in three marriages ending in divorce, consideration ought to be given to the welfare of divorced partners, particularly those taking primary responsibility for children. Instead the Tories produced legislation which aims to cut the right to maintenance, and reintroduce the idea of "conduct" into the assessment of maintenance.

## **Conclusion**

The Tory Government, led by the first woman Prime Minister, has weakened the rights, status and opportunities of women. It has also substantially reduced the services on which women rely. Mrs Thatcher has proved to be bad news for women.

## 2. THE GENDER GAP

At no election has the Labour Party ever been able to command a majority of women's votes. Even with the growing disaffection with the Tories, Labour is still a long way short of a majority amongst women. In this chapter, we explore the gender gap — the difference between the male and female vote — and examine the way in which women perceive issues.

In February 1974, with more men voting Labour than Tory, the gender gap was 14 points; by October 1974, it was slightly reduced to 12 points. The General Election of May 1979 saw a further reduction to 9 points, but not because more women were voting Labour but because more men were voting Tory.

At the last General Election, June 1983 (when more women voted than men), the Tories led Labour by 16 points overall. However, broken down, this showed that the lead among men was 12 per cent, whilst for women Labour was 20 points behind, giving a gender gap of 8 per cent in favour of the Tories. October 1983 saw a swing to Labour of 6 per cent, but the gender gap of 8 per cent remained.<sup>2</sup>

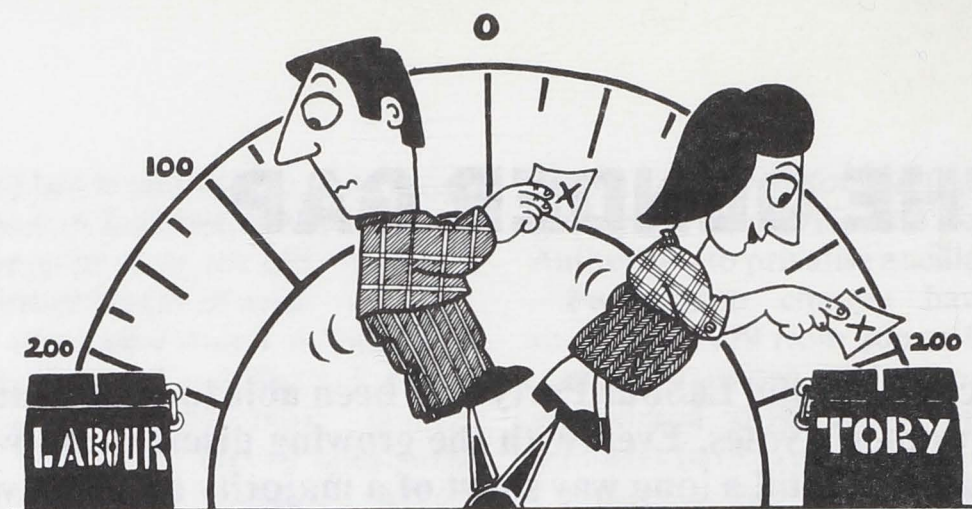
During 1984 the gender gap fluctuated with the Party's fortunes between 10 per cent and 6 per cent.

Marplan polls for March 1985 continue to show that the Conservatives are consistently more popular among women. The aggregate of MORI polls for the first quarter of 1985 also bears this out. They indicate a gender gap of 6 per cent — even though there has been an improvement in the level of support for the Party.

But merely relating voting attitudes to women collectively is not sufficient; we have to look into other criteria, such as social class, age and region.

### The Gender Gap

		General Elections					
		Feb 74	Oct 74	May 79	Jun 83		
Labour Lead (+)		%	%	%	%		
Men		+ 7	+11	- 3	-12		
Women		- 7	- 1	-12	-20		
Gender Gap		-14	-12	- 9	- 8		
		1983	1983	1984	1984	1984	1984
		3rd Qtrr	4th Qtrr	1st Qtrr	2nd Qtrr	3rd Qtrr	4th Qtrr
Labour Lead (+)		%	%	%	%	%	%
Men		-11	0	+ 2	+ 1	+ 1	- 2
Women		-21	- 8	- 6	- 5	- 6	- 8
Gender Gap		-10	- 8	- 8	- 6	- 7	- 6



## Social class

As we have seen, there was a Conservative lead over Labour among all women voters in the June 1983 election. However, in the unskilled class (DE), there was a Labour lead of 26 per cent. This disappeared in the skilled manual class (C2) and instead it was the Conservatives who had a lead of 30 per cent over Labour. The Conservatives had a similar lead amongst what are known as the C1 and AB groups — the white-collar workers and the professional and managerial classes. Here the figures rise steeply. A Conservative lead of 45 per cent for the C1 group, and 44 per cent Conservative lead for the AB or professional groups.

Put another way, of all women voting, 52 per cent of unskilled working women voted Labour; 15 per cent of skilled manual; 16 per cent of white-collar; and 20 per cent of the AB group. Given that the C1 and C2 classes make up 55 per cent of

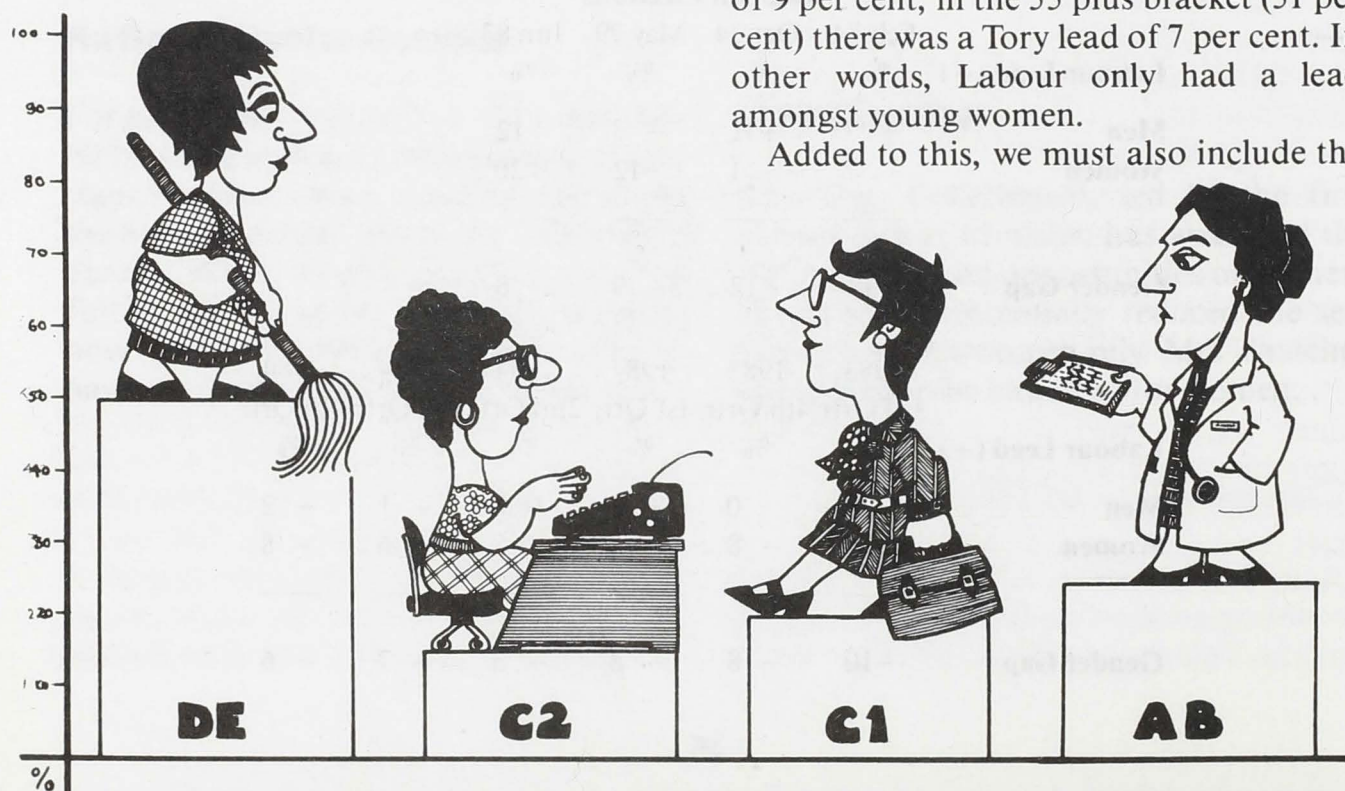
all women voters these figures graphically demonstrate the need to capture that particular section of the electorate.

By the second quarter of 1984 the situation had changed for the better, but not dramatically so. In the skilled manual class there was a Labour lead over the Tories of 4 per cent; however, in the C1 or white-collar group the Tory lead was 20 per cent.

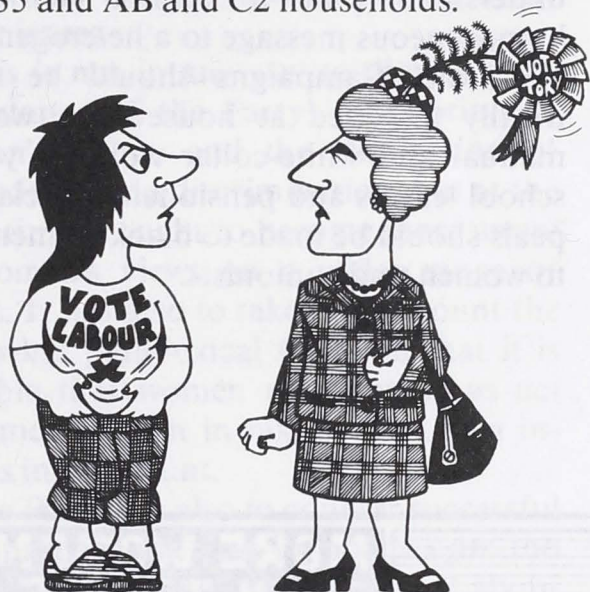
## Age

There is one final set of figures which needs to be considered, and that is a breakdown of female voting by age. If we look at the second quarter of 1984 — ie. when Labour support overall had risen from its all-time low of June 1983, we find the following. In the 18-24 age range (15 per cent of the total female vote), Labour had a lead of 8 per cent; in the 25-34 bracket (21 per cent) there was a Conservative lead of 2 per cent; in the 35-54 bracket (33 per cent) there was a Tory lead of 9 per cent; in the 55 plus bracket (51 per cent) there was a Tory lead of 7 per cent. In other words, Labour only had a lead amongst young women.

Added to this, we must also include the



support being given to the Alliance parties. Polling by MORI shows that there was a marginal loss of women's votes during 1984 to the Alliance from the major parties, but more from Labour than the Tories. This loss came mainly from women over 35 and AB and C2 households.



## Regions

A regional analysis of women's voting intentions at the end of 1984 gives Labour a lead over the Tories of 11 points in the North (including Scotland), but in the Midlands, the Party lagged 6 points behind — whilst in the South, Labour was 17 points behind the Tories.

Crucial to the Party is the importance of building support among women trade unionists — it was from middle class trade union women that the Alliance gained its highest level of support at the last General Election. Since the election this support has fallen, but at the end of 1984 Labour still commanded the support of less than a third (32 per cent) of middle class trade union women compared to 58 per cent of working class male trade unionists. The significance of these figures is that at the same time as there has been a decline in trade union membership since 1979, from 30 per cent to 24 per cent of the population, the number of white-collar trade unionists is increasing, and 44 per cent of membership of white-collar trade unions are women. Women's membership of trade unions increased by 49 per cent between 1970 and 1980, and is similarly expected to increase by 1990.

## Identification of social groupings

In all official statistics women are classified, if considered at all, as a collective group. Little account is taken of the changing role of women in society and of the changing pattern of family life — a clear example is the projection of the effects of tax changes in the Budget — still based on the concept of husband, wife and 2.2 children.

The Party also sees women as one homogeneous group: women are women, irrespective of age, class, colour, regional differences, whether they are employed, housewives, married, single parents or pensioners. We must therefore identify a number of key groups within the total category, groups of women who are distinguishable by their own experience of life.

An examination of the census shows that by self-definition over 7 million women see themselves as housewives with 10 million women relating to their job. There are an estimated 6.5 million women of pensionable age, while at the same time school leavers form another clearly identifiable group of which many will be first-time voters.

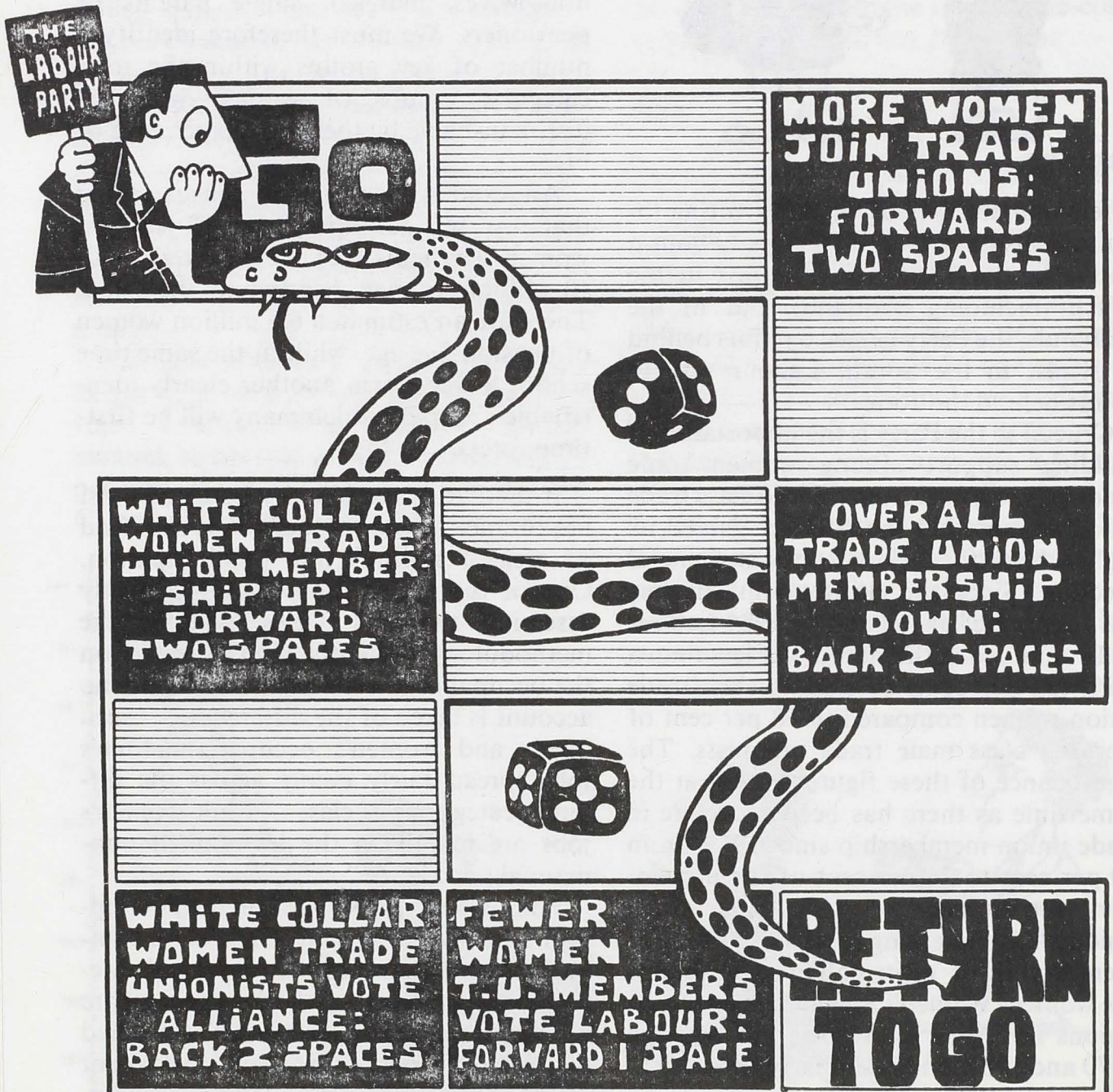
If the Party is to identify issues of most importance to women then it has to extend its area of research into public opinion. One of the major problems of correctly assessing women's views is that the methodology currently used is based on the occupational class of the husband; no account is taken of the difference between men's and women's occupation. Men's jobs spread fairly evenly across the different categories of class — while women's jobs are mainly in the less skilled non-manual sectors.

Polling analysis is based on the assumption that women perceive their class composition in relation to their husband's occupation, irrespective of whether they are working or not. Women must be classified by their own jobs, or by their most recent previous job if they are no longer working.

Only by treating women as individuals can the Party be sure that policies are directed at the women who will respond to them.

The Party must take into account the changes in family structures. In some 400,000 families, the woman is the sole wage-earner due to her husband's unemployment. More than one in ten families in Britain is a single-parent family headed by a woman. In one quarter of all households in Britain today the main or sole breadwinner is a woman. Yet the state still treats the married woman as her husband's financial dependent, and in attitude, if not in statistics, assumes that all women are married.

Unfortunately the Party's attitude is not dissimilar. Whilst in theory there is an understanding that society has changed, in practice this does not apply in terms of attitudinal research, policy making or projection of propaganda. The Party has to understand that it cannot deliver a homogeneous message to a heterogeneous electorate. Campaigns should be specifically targetted at housewives, women manual and white-collar workers, young school leavers and pensioners. Special appeals should be made to black women and to women trade unionists.





## **The issues**

There has been a great deal of research among women to identify their views on women's rights, equality and sex discrimination, but very little in-depth research to identify their views on other major issues.

This is not in any way to diminish the importance of the Party's promotion of women's rights, and the elimination of dependency and discrimination, but at the same time it ought to become more aware of women's views on a wider range of issues. It has also to take into account the somewhat paradoxical situation that it is possible that women may not be as accustomed to men in taking their own interests into account.

The Party has also to counter successful Tory propaganda that its policies are too expensive and that therefore a Labour government would not be able to deliver.

## **Unemployment**

By a large majority, unemployment is identified as the most important issue facing Britain today.

A MORI poll taken in January 1985 showed that 64 per cent of women and 70 per cent of men support that view. However, these figures by themselves help very little in assisting the Party to launch a campaigning programme directed at women electors.

They do not give any indication of how unemployment is seen by women. It is fairly certain that to men it is the loss of men's jobs. Women's perceptions are more complex.

In most families women still have the responsibility for maintaining the family routine, caring for the children, and carrying out domestic commitments. "I help my wife", is the response given by 48 per cent of men in a survey carried out by the Council of Europe — but only 32 per cent of women stated that "my husband helps me".<sup>3</sup> The concept of women's labour in the home remains unchanged. In the main

men still have a choice of whether or not to help in the home. Women have no such choice. Their work not only requires domestic skills but caring for children and dependents, an often emotionally demanding task.

This different experience of life must govern and colour women's definition of unemployment. It is further determined by their own experience of paid work and their lack of access to it.

In 1985, 52 per cent of all full-time women workers, and 79 per cent of part-time workers, were classified as low paid, representing 5.5 million adult female workers — over a quarter of the entire adult work force. 62 per cent of women give family responsibilities as the reason why they cannot work. A poll conducted by Harris showed that 68 per cent (33 per cent of men) would give up their jobs to look after an elderly relative.

## **Strikes and trade unions**

Strikes and trade unions are given as the second most important issue by 6 per cent more women than men. They may have been influenced by the miners' strike or by their perception of trade unions.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst a majority of women believe that the unions should be there to protect women's rights, women trade unionists are concerned that the unions have too much power. There is a greater gap of 21 points on this issue. The reason might be that women cannot identify with the male dominance of the trade union leadership. It might also be that unions fail to live up to the expectations of 70 per cent of women, who believe that they should be working for equal opportunities for women in employment.

## **Welfare state**

The reason why now more women than men in the 35-44 age bracket feel strongly that both the health service and education are at risk (the gender gap is 11 per cent

and 17 per cent respectively) is clearly understandable. Again the figures reflect the direct experience of women. The 1984 report on British Social Attitudes<sup>5</sup> reinforces the findings of various polls that women are more opposed than men to the siting of American Cruise missiles in Britain. It states that women are generally more hostile towards nuclear weapons on British soil than men. Whereas men in all age groups are more or less evenly divided on the US nuclear presence in Britain, young and middle-aged women are divided almost two to one against.

There are many other examples which could be used to illustrate the difference of emphasis placed on issues by women and men, particularly in relation to social policy. The Party cannot afford to ignore them. It must be prepared to undertake in-depth studies into women's attitudes and aspirations, to discuss and listen to women's views and expectations from a Labour government, and even to examine why women support the Tories. The Party's campaigning strategy must include

campaigns specifically aimed at women, both at election time and between elections. Only by these actions will we be sure that the Party has policies that are relevant, that the emphasis is right, and that leaflets, speeches and statements have the maximum impact.

The alternative is that the Labour Party will continue to fail to attract women's votes.

## **Conclusion**

There is a significant gender gap which Labour must reverse. However, women are not homogeneous. Campaigns have to be directed at specific groups — housewives, women manual and white-collar workers, young school leavers and pensioners, black women and women trade unionists. The Party needs to explore in depth the way women perceive major issues such as jobs, welfare, education, trade unions and defence.

# 3. LABOUR'S POLICIES

**In this chapter, we examine Labour's policies from the point of view of women and suggest how to increase support for the Party amongst women voters.**

First, the Party has to promote those policies which are most relevant and most strongly supported by women. Secondly, it has to identify those policies which need to be further developed. Thirdly, it has to target those policies which are relevant to particular groups. Fourthly, it has to be able to deliver those policies.

## **Policies to be promoted**

Which policies can be seen to be both relevant to women and which affect them most? Apart from the question of employment, the policies that matter most to women are those dealing with the National Health Service and the social services, education and housing. These are all issues on which the Labour Party can gain strong support.

The Party must continually point out that the Tories have undermined the welfare state, that the NHS and personal social services are both poorly resourced and badly at risk, and that it is only the Labour Party which will ensure their survival. The Party needs to stress more urgently how much private medical insurance would cost for people with long-term disease, or for those over 50 — a large percentage of them women.

## **Health and social services**

So what are Labour's plans for the health service? And how will they affect women?

The Party intends to increase health ser-

vice expenditure by 3 per cent per annum in real terms; give greater emphasis to preventative medicine; give priority to improving primary health care services and put an end to the development of a two-tier health service where the rich can jump the queue. These policies need to be particularly presented to women.

Tory cuts in the social services have hit women hardest. They have meant lost jobs for women, and a loss of support for the elderly and disabled, thus forcing women to stay at home as unpaid carers — instead of cutting, the Labour Party will improve and expand personal social services. At the same time, married and cohabiting women will be allowed to claim Invalid Care Allowance as well as being provided with domiciliary and day care services to take account of careers, employment and other commitments.

## **Education**

Education affects everyone — because our future depends on having an educated next generation. We need young people who can not only cope with new technology, but can also handle the changing social structures and cultural implications of a high technology society.

The Labour Party understands that if individuals are to achieve their full creative potential and our society is to advance, educational provision must be substantially improved. These aims are particularly relevant to women, who are most involved in the bringing up and education of their children.

The Party intends to introduce a statutory duty on local authorities to provide nursery education for all 3 and 4 year olds whose parents wish it; to improve the quality of primary and secondary education by reducing class sizes, by ensuring an adequate supply of books and equipment, and by meeting the special needs of individual children. Positive encouragement is to be given to girls and pupils from ethnic and working class communities, to ensure that they are given improved learning opportunities.

As important, it will provide a two-year training for 16 and 18 year olds; provide education maintenance grants for those who stay on at school and for those adults who return to education in later life (which will particularly help women) and give statutory backing to paid educational leave for workers.

The Party rightly condemns the impact that the Tory cuts are having on education: the inadequate supply of books and equipment, fewer specialist teachers, buildings allowed to fall into disrepair. Women understand very well that failure to invest in the improvement of education is a major attack on the future of our nation.

### **Housing and physical planning**

The third most important issue is that of housing. The Tory policy of selling council houses at huge discounts proved very attractive, while many voters wrongly believed that Labour was against all council house sales. The Party is strongly committed to the provision of suitable housing whether for rent or purchase. It must make it clear to women that it is not against house ownership, but that it is in favour of choice. It intends to provide help for first-time buyers, help in moving house, and general financial help by providing cheap estate agency and mortgage facilities through local councils.

The Party has to take up the problems of the environment and transport more strongly. As we have mentioned before, it is

women who suffer if there is a lack of viable transport, especially in rural areas. It is women who suffer most from a lack of amenities.

### **Policies to be developed**

As the Party responsible for the pioneering efforts leading to the first equality legislation, Labour has continued to develop policies on equal treatment for women and men. The Party must stress its determination to strengthen equal opportunities and to promote financial independence by ensuring equality of treatment in tax and social security.

### **Law and order**

The question of law and order is one of major interest to women. The Tory Party has waged a particularly destructive campaign on this issue — and so far won the argument. Labour is thought to be weak on policing policy — especially by women — although in fact the crime rate has increased steadily throughout the six years of Tory Government. The Party must emphasise its commitment to law enforcement while at the same time demonstrating its attachment to civil rights. Hence the Party's insistence on community policing, and its determination to repeal all the recent Tory legislation which has infringed the rights and freedoms of the individual.

### **Defence**

An issue critical in the June 1983 election was that of defence. Whereas it is women who are most opposed to Cruise and Trident, in 1983 many were confused by the policies the Party was putting forward and believed that the country would be left defenceless — without even conventional weapons. Moreover, there is concern over American control over nuclear weapons on British soil.

The Party's approach to international

relations is based on negotiation — a policy for peace not war. The Party must not cease to point out the horrors of arms escalation and the inevitable consequences which will arise if nations refuse to disarm. The effects of the Reagan administration's dangerous increase in arms expenditure have to be stressed and women reminded of the horrors of a nuclear war.

## **Special interest groups**

These issues are of interest to all women, whatever their age or social group. They need to be presented in such a way that women feel that it is to them that the Party addresses itself. There are, however, Labour policies which are also likely to attract particular groups of women, including white-collar workers and skilled workers, and women between the ages of 35 and 65 — those groups which gave little support to the Party.

Further, Labour has excellent policies towards one-parent families. The Party will increase the level of financial support to families with children and disabled dependents by increasing child and other benefits, making them index-linked. Also in the longer term, raising child benefit to the level of child support given to those on long-term benefits. The Party intends to produce a fairer system of family law and to introduce family courts.

In employment, it was a Labour Government which introduced the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act. The Party promised in 1983 to strengthen both, expand positive action programmes, as well as to introduce wide-ranging new schemes in order to encourage women to train and apply for new job opportunities, particularly in new technology.

The Party is also pledged to restore and extend women's employment rights to part-time and home-workers. It needs to encourage more strongly workplace as well

as local authority community nurseries, creches, and more flexible hours.

Labour has always been committed to the safeguarding of pensioners' rights. Not only did the 1983 manifesto state that pensions would be increased with average earnings when they rose faster than prices (and it was hoped to achieve a common pension age of 60), but it also stated the Party's intention to give women the additional tax allowance for the elderly (the age allowance) at 60 instead of 65. The death grant, which the Tories propose to abolish, would be increased to £200. TV licences for pensioners would be phased out.

## **The 'realism' factor**

Women are realists. They are not easily impressed by a list of promises. They want to see a competent and efficient government, able to deliver. It is clear from all the polls that the Labour Party in 1983 was perceived to lack credibility. Things have changed. There is now a new and vigorous young leadership, a competent and able Front Bench, a new approach to the promotion of policy and a general feeling of greater co-operation within the Party. It is therefore essential that the Labour Party in the coming months concentrates on unity and does not revert to the internecine public bickering which can only damage the Party's reputation.

## **Conclusion**

We have shown that, in a number of areas of critical importance to women, such as health, education and housing, Labour has attractive and relevant policies, but the Party needs to present these policies and those on defence and on law and order more effectively. Good policies are not enough — they must be well communicated.

## 4. PRESENTATION

**The Party cannot project itself as the party for women in society unless it is seen to project women on an equal basis with men.**

Whilst attitudes are changing the Party has a long way to go before it no longer only pays lip-service to women's issues and campaigning amongst women.

If we are to break the pattern of women's voting — essential if we are to win the next General Election — there must be a dramatic change of attitude and approach.

There has been a bland assumption that if we can persuade men to support the Party, women will follow like sheep. The voting figures over the years should have clearly illustrated the contradiction of those beliefs. Women vote as individuals, not as adjuncts of their husbands, and they should be treated as individuals.

### Strategy

If the Party is to take up this challenge, if it is going to convince women that only the Labour Party can solve the kinds of problems which they face, it must have a clear political and presentational strategy. As we have shown above, this cannot be done without an analysis, first of the characteristics and social breakdown that make up the collective known as women, and secondly of the interests and issues that are of major concern to women.

Following this analysis, the Party must produce a more coherent programme of action based around those interests. A programme which will not only project Party policies, but which will offer a forum for public debate.

### Programme for action

An important feature of this new approach ought to be an examination of women's

voting patterns in other countries. We have to find the answer to why women in the United States support progressive policies; why in Sweden is the largest area of support for the Social Democrats from married women, and yet why in Britain the majority of women have historically supported the Party of the right?

Might it be that the Labour Party is seen as male-dominated, projecting policies based around paid work, the unions and the state, with not enough emphasis on social policies which are of more importance to women.

In an article in the *New Statesman* on the influence of sex on politics, Peter Kellner concluded that "there is nothing inevitable or permanent about Labour's particular inability to attract women's votes, rather it is the perception of its 'male' concept of socialism and the roles of unions that puts many off ... instead, the Party needs to project a wider progressive vision, in which the rhetoric of union-based class struggle is employed less, and in which concerns for liberty, choice, fairness, tolerance, partnership and peace are stressed more."<sup>6</sup>

It is not the policies which are at fault. The problem is that presentation has been so bad, from women voters' point of view, that the policies are largely unknown and the Party has little credibility as having a real concern for women. The message is reinforced constantly, through Party presentations and the nature of its public image, that we are a Party of men working for men.

It is largely presentation which is letting the Party down so badly. Labour urgently needs to become more 'user-friendly' for women. Women throughout the Party and the trade unions need to become more visi-

ble. We need more women seen to be active at all levels, from the conference floor to the front row of the platform. More importantly, the men in the leadership need to wake up to the need to speak to women as much as to men — to seek out the women's angle on all policies.

## Consultation

At the same time links must be forged and opportunities provided for consultation and debate with women inside the movement on various aspects of Party policy, on campaigning and on organisational skills. The emphasis must be on involvement and participation, and the sharing of both skills and experience.

Debate must be taken to the workplace by Party workplace branches and women trade unionists, by leading Party and trade union women visiting women's workplaces and training centres; onto the streets, with the distribution of leaflets and broadsheets, by setting up stalls in markets and shopping centres, by providing advice services.

To reach women in the home is perhaps more difficult. Firstly, we should organise neighbourhood meetings for women in different areas, with provision made for children; and secondly, we should identify places where women of all ages congregate — nurseries, playcentres, schools, community groups etc., for specialist campaigning. Third, we should encourage women to canvass women voters.

*The Women and Work Charter* prepared for the Party's Jobs and Industry Campaign, provides an ideal focus for these activities. The Charter is to be promoted in women's magazines, broadcasting and other women's media outlets. All local activity should similarly be geared to getting the widest possible media coverage, using local radio and newspapers. That way the campaign will reach the mass of women.

## Three major principles

- All issues are women's issues and must be presented with this in mind. The Party should look for the 'women's angle' on all policies, rather than setting aside a few, low-priority 'women's issues' as if these are a separate and lesser debate.
- It is the policies that count and not the personalities. All Labour politicians should be involved in presenting issues properly to women. Special training sessions would help.
- We urgently need more women to be involved as representatives of the Party, at all levels, dealing with all the issues. The Labour Party needs properly to represent the whole population.

## Visibility

Last but not least, we have the question of the visual image presented by the Party which, perhaps unintentionally, sometimes gives the impression that women have no place in it.

The labour movement is a movement of women and men. It is therefore a misrepresentation for well-meaning media and advertising people to portray the Party, or the issues, as predominantly male. The mistake is made by accepting the almost all-male leadership as if it were characteristic of the membership (or Labour supporters), which it most certainly is not.

Publicity, campaigning and advertising people need to be given a strong brief if the false male image of the Party is to be corrected. The bias is unconscious, and therefore specific targets need to be set which will make the image-makers think about their methods of presentation.

The targets relate primarily, though not exclusively, to the visual image. TV time for Party broadcasts is one example. Another is poster and newspaper advertising, especially at election time. A third is the photos and drawings used on Party literature delivered direct to the voter.

All of these use pictures of ordinary people to illustrate points about specific issues. Those mentioned above as being of particular interest to women should always include women in the illustrations and captions.

Women need to be represented at all Party events, conferences and press conferences.

When there are more women in the leadership, both in the Party and in elected positions, it will be much easier to ensure that the exclusive nature of the current leadership does not distort — as it does now — the presentation of the Party's ex-

cellent policies to the electorate, particularly the 52 per cent who are women.

## Conclusion

Presentation is crucial. The Labour Party has to lose its image of a male-dominated Party. More constructive use must be made of the media — including women's radio and television programmes, women's magazines and women's pages in both local and national newspapers. The image that the labour movement presents must reflect the concerns of the 52 per cent of the population who are women.



# 5. WOMEN IN THE LABOUR PARTY

**We need more women in senior and visible positions within the Party, both as representatives presenting Labour policies to the public, and as influential individuals in the shaping of those policies. At the same time, we must beware of any attempt to use this as an excuse to install 'token' women, who are not in touch with, and do not represent, women within the movement.**

Currently the National Women's Conference and the annual Party Conference are in disagreement over ways of establishing positive action within the Party. This should not however be allowed to block or distort the need for a greater accountability of the Party to women, which is one of the basic principles behind the proposals from the Women's Conference.

If this issue is not handled seriously, and with genuine commitment to women's participation, then the experienced and politically important women will feel frustrated.

There is now a growing sense of anger among many women activists who have for long been arguing the case for a greater say in policy-making and for a fairer system of representation within the Party. It is for the leadership of the Party, and the National Executive Committee (NEC) in particular, to find a way out of the dilemma. Proper discussions must take place rather than the sterile dialogue of past years.

## **The Party and women's organisations**

Whilst the Labour Party is already committed to the principle of positive action, there are some important measures which need to be taken in order to make the women's organisations function more effectively. Ways should be found to improve accountability of those women who speak for the women's organisations, as well as to increase women's participation in

decision-making in the Party.

The demands from the Women's Conference are: at least one woman on every parliamentary and local government shortlist; five women's places on the NEC to be elected by the National Conference of Labour Women; five resolutions from the Women's Conference to be debated as of right by Party Conference, and to be moved by delegates elected at the Women's Conference.

The women's organisation represents a vital resource for the Party in the crucial effort to get women voting Labour. Women's sections all over the country can, and do, campaign vigorously to get our policies across. With more encouragement and support at both local and national level, and a higher priority given to the women's point of view, we could see some extremely effective campaigning among community organisations, tenants' groups and women's organisations, as well as within trade unions. This could help close the gender gap, and swing the vital balance of votes to the Labour Party.

## **Women as candidates for election**

We urgently need more Labour women as councillors and MPs, and on public bodies of all kinds.

Local government is vitally important in its own right; it impinges on the life of ordinary voters in a much more immediate way than Parliament. The Labour Party in

a given area can stand or fall on its record on the local or county council. At the same time, it provides a stepping-stone to national politics, and experience as a councillor can be an important indication of suitability for selection as a parliamentary candidate.

The Party needs to give strong encouragement to women to consider standing for election — encouragement should come from the local Party and from the leadership. There are many thousands of women in the Party who would be excellent candidates, and who simply need some encouragement. They must be made to feel that the Party will help them overcome any domestic problems (such as babysitting or care for the elderly), in order to enable them to participate more fully in political life.

Since so many women have not been used to thinking they could stand for election, training can be extremely helpful, not only so that they can meet other women with similar interests, but also so as to assure themselves that they are not simply 'careerists'. Training sessions, covering all aspects of political life from getting selected to dealing with difficult questions from the platform, need to be organised at both local and national level. Women have to be given confidence in their own worth.

As to parliamentary selections, although there has been some encouragement of women to go on the B-list, it is the A-list of union-sponsored candidates

which is the most important. However, it has so far remained an almost all-white, all-male preserve. Trade unions need to be asked to reconsider their attitude to women candidates.

It will greatly help to lessen the strain for women seeking selection if a way could be found to pay fares, extra expenses such as photocopying, babysitting or care expenses. It is a small price to pay for a fairer system.

In the end, the crucial change will have to take place among the local membership of each Constituency Labour Party (CLP). We need numbers of women to be involved in each CLP to make it possible for the final selection to be a woman — tokenism, is liable to backfire. However, if a woman has the nominations to justify inclusion in the final shortlist, but is excluded unfairly, there might be grounds for appeal on the basis of discrimination.

A review of the whole selection procedure is essential if women are to get a fairer hearing.

## Conclusion

The women's organisation in the Party is a major asset but needs changes to ensure greater accountability. Women must be enabled to play a more important role both within the Party and as Labour's public representatives at all levels.

## 6. SUMMARY

**The purpose of this pamphlet has been to demonstrate that despite Tory policies the Labour Party has not managed to attract a majority of the women's vote.**

We have also shown that the Labour Party has policies which are particularly relevant to women. At the same time we have pointed out that the Party has so far failed to grasp the fact that these policies need to be specifically directed towards women voters.

But it is not enough for the Party to produce good policies. It must also address itself to the problem of presentation and the question of equality within its own internal structure.

Our conclusions are:

- The Tory Government, led by the first woman Prime Minister, has weakened the rights, status and opportunities of women. It has also substantially reduced the services and weakened the institutions on which many women rely. Mrs Thatcher has proved to be bad news for women.
- There is a significant gender gap which Labour must reverse. However, women are not homogeneous. Campaigns have to be directed towards specific groups — housewives, women manual and white-collar groups, young school leavers and pensioners, black women and women trade unionists. The Party needs to explore in depth the way women perceive major issues such as jobs, welfare, education, trade unions and defence.
- We have shown that, in a number of areas of critical importance to women such as the health service, education and housing, Labour has attractive and relevant policies. But the Party needs to present these policies and those on defence and on law and order more effectively. There are also policies which are of special interest to particular groups.
- Presentation is crucial. The Labour Party has to lose its image as a male-dominated Party. More constructive use must be made of the media, including women's radio and television programmes, women's magazines and women's pages in both local and national newspapers. The image that the labour movement presents must reflect the concerns of the 52 per cent of the population who are women.
- The women's organisation in the Party is a major asset but needs changes to ensure greater accountability. Women must be enabled to play a more important role both within the Party and as Labour's public representatives at all levels.

Labour needs the support of more women voters. This pamphlet has examined ways of gaining that support.

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- direct campaigns towards specific groups — housewives, women manual and white-collar groups, young school leavers and pensioners, black women and women trade unionists;
- present its policies of critical importance to women, such as those on the health service, education and housing, more effectively;
- lose its male-dominated image and reflect the concerns of the 52 per cent of the population who are women;
- enable women to play a more important role both within the Party and as its public representatives at all levels.

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