

# LIVING AS WOMEN



NOTTING HILL WOMEN'S PAPER

- 1 -

# THIS NEWS SHEET is about...

the needs of women in this area, and about what we can do to get these needs met. Women can get organized to get the things they need. Some of us are already doing it, and we can't carry on the way we are.

We feel that our interests as women have been overlooked for too long. Women do a lot of work: we do housework and look after our children; we do most of the shopping and cooking; we fight for decent homes, for decent places for our children to play, and for better amenities and facilities, yet no one recognizes us, or the work we do as important.

We don't get paid for it; we have to struggle and pinch for every penny we can get, from the Social Security, from the council, and all the money is taken off us, in the supermarkets and in the rents we pay for their profit.



If we go out and do a job, sweating it out in a shop, in the typing pool, cleaning their offices and houses, we are used as cheap labour. They pay us as little as they can, while we do all the dirty work, work that men would never do.

We aren't in control of our own bodies. We have to wait for hours in doctors' surgeries, hospitals and clinics, and they never tell us about ourselves, and the the things we really need to know. They won't give any information away.

We are always on the job, never a day off, getting the kids from school, cooking the evening meal, doing the cleaning.

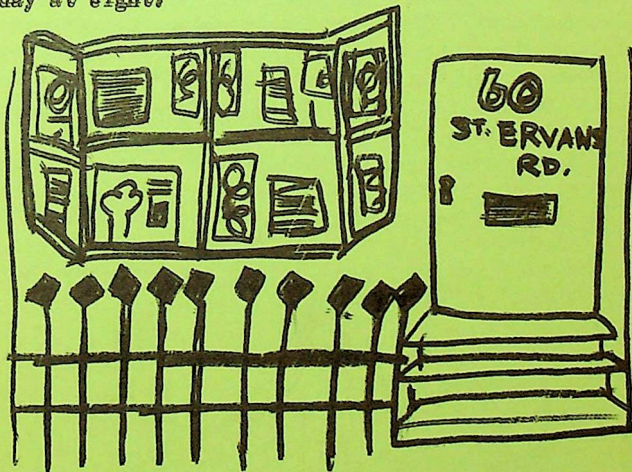
We want time to do the things we want to do,



A women's action group has just been formed. Its aims are to bring together women in the community who are struggling to get what they need, and to fight for the specific needs of women. For instance, by getting a women's health centre, community run nurseries for babies and toddlers, more free play groups, a baby sitting service, and better housing. We also want to improve women's economic condition by conducting campaigns against rising prices, and campaigning for an adequate independent income for ourselves and our children.

Some of us are women claimants on Social Security. Most of us live on very low incomes, whether we support ourselves or not. We would like to set up a food co-op, and already have started a clothes swap for our children. We would like to get together so that we can buy toys, household goods, etc. at cost price, so we don't have to rely on the inflated prices of the supermarkets. We want to teach each other skills usually confined to men - carpentry, mechanics, self defense.

People in this area have been pushed around for too long. Women are particularly isolated by the situations they are forced to live in. If we come together as women we can begin to realize and use the strength we have. All women are welcome - the more of us there are, the more effective our actions can be. Come along to 60 St. Ervans Road, on Wednesday at eight.



# MOTHERS' SOCIAL SECURITY RIGHTS

DID YOU KNOW that if you are an unsupported mother with children under sixteen, it is your legal right to be supported by the Department of Health and Social Security until your youngest child is sixteen?

I am an unsupported mother. In my innocence, when I first claimed I thought that the Social Security office was there to tell me of all the ways in which I could be helped. But how wrong I was. I had recently become a widow, with a 19 month old child, and another one on the way. When I went to the Social Security office, the clerk told me that I was quite capable of going out to work for the next few months, and should do so, and find a stranger to look after this small child who had recently lost her father. This was a deliberate attempt to stop me getting what I now know to be my legal rights. At that time I was so desperate, I just broke down into hysterics, and they were eventually obliged to grant me Social Security. But it was not until some months later, after my second child was born, that I discovered by a chance conversation with a friend, that the cost of HIRE PURCHASE commitments that I had been struggling to maintain, and the cost of EXTRA HEATING needed for the new baby could also be met by the S.S. in the form of EXTRA GRANTS. There are many other benefits I could have claimed, which at the time were unknown to me. My experience with the S.S. is typical. It is in the interest of the S.S. not to pay out, and they will fob you off with lies as to your entitlement, and try and make you feel guilty into the bargain. So go prepared and know your rights!





DID YOU KNOW that the basic Social Security rates are these?

You get the rent plus:

for a COUPLE.....£9.45

SINGLE Householder...£5.80

OTHER over 21.....£4.60

from 18-21.....£4.05

from 16-17.....£3.60

from 13-15.....£3.00

from 11-12.....£2.45

from 5-11.....£2.00

UNDER 5.....£1.70

less family allowances.

DID YOU KNOW that if you are on supplementary benefit, or family income benefit you can get MILK TOKENS and VITAMIN BOOKS for children under 5?

DID YOU KNOW that if you are working, but your take home income is less than the rates above, i.e. rent plus an allowance for you and your dependants, then you can have the difference made up by the Social Security?

DID YOU KNOW that an unsupported mother can earn £2 on top of the above rates?

DID YOU KNOW that once you are claiming you can apply for CLOTHING GRANTS for yourself and your children, payment of FEUL BILLS, a grant for special dietary needs?

DID YOU KNOW that when you are claiming you get FREE MEDICAL PRESCRIPTIONS, and FREE DENTAL TREATMENT; that your kids can have FREE SCHOOL MEALS?

A RECENT EXAMPLE OF HARDSHIP CAUSED BY THE D.H S.S.

A young Indian woman moved into the area covered by the Praed Street S.S. in the second week of March. She had a young baby and had been obliged to leave her previous accomodation in Finsbury Park because there was a serious gas leak. She had great difficulty in finding low rent accomodation for herself and her child, but eventually her sister sub let her room to her, and her sister moved elsewhere. The woman applied to Praed Street to have her book changed. **THREE AND A HALF MONTHS LATER**, despite VISITING PRAED STREET TEN TIMES, and on each time being told that she would recieve a giro the next day, and despite having been visited twice at her home, the first visitor having been very rude, telling her that her husband who is employed in India should be supporting her,

- 5 -  
then telling her that she should go out and work, SHE HAD RECIEVED ONLY ONE GIRO FOR £7 AND NO BOOK! She is entitled to £13.50, minus a small amount for electricity, per week. All this time she had been living off borrowed money from her sister, who is also now in dire need. The women came to the West London Claimants Union, and several claimants accompanied her to Praed Street (her 11th visit). Eventually they got her an over the counter payment of £6.95, plus a promise from the manager that they would look into her arrears (they now owe her £180). This slight concession was only obtained through lengthy verbal fighting by the woman and other claimants, first with the clerk and then with the manager. Both these people tried to blame the delay on the claimant who had not been informed of her rights by them. The prejudiced and racist nature of the harassment became apparent when the manager explained to a white member of Claimants Union that part of the difficulty was understanding the claimant. (She speaks English fluently, and it took only half an hour of conversation for the Claimants Union to understand her case). The manager is now asking proof from the landlord of her accommodation, that she is still living there, despite the fact that she has already shown proof from her sister, before he will consider rent arrears. She was never asked for this proof before, and many sub tenants who claim never have been asked for this proof. The claimant, with the West London Claimants Union continues to fight this case, and eventually she should get her full arrears.

Praed Street is known as the worst S.S. office in West London. It is difficult to fight them alone. The West London Claimants Union, which fights hand in hand with the Womens Action Group, is a body of claimants who organize collectively to help and support each other in the fight against the S.S. They operate from 60 St. Ervans Road, W. 11, and there is always someone there in the afternoon. They have for sale the UNSUPPORTED MOTHERS HANDBOOK, which was written by mothers experienced in S.S. hassles, and it is an informative aid in getting your rights. It costs 10P.

#### CO-HABITATION

The Social Security send out their spies to watch women on their own if they are claiming benefit. They are known to particularly harrass unsupported mothers. They will try and cut your benefit if they suspect you are sleeping with a man



HOWEVER, THEY HAVE TO PROVE SHARED HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES BEFORE THEY CAN PROVE CO-HABITATION. If they prove co-habitation, you are taken to be man and wife, and the man is supposed to support you. This ruling is an insult to women. It considers them to be the property of men. Claimants Unions, of which there are 98 in the country, are working together with women's groups against the S.S. ruling. The campaign is just beginning, and anyone who is interested should come to Claimants Union for more details.

IF YOU: ARE CLAIMING  
HAVE CLAIMED  
WANT TO CLAIM

IF YOU are having the usual hassles with the S.S., and even if you're not, but you want to join others to change the repressive welfare state as it operates in our area, please come over to the Claimants Union, at 60 St Ervans Road, W. 11, in the afternoon, Monday to Friday.



# NURSERIES

There are lots of play groups in this area, but most of them won't accept children under three, and also we usually have to pay for our kids to go to them. The only other provisions for child care are the council day nurseries which are always full up, and the baby minders who we have to pay for.

We are five mothers who have started up a small community nursery for our children which involves no expense and which allows us some free time to work, get our housework done, to be involved in other activities and to have a good rest whilst our children are away.

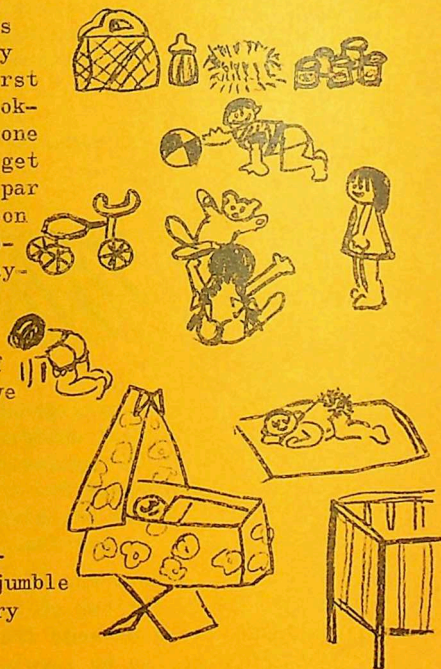


This is how it works. There are five mothers, and each day during the week one of the mothers takes a turn looking after all the children. In this particular case the children go to the same flat every day, but other arrangements can work where the children are taken to the house of the mother who is looking after them on that day.

We take the children along to the flat about ten o'clock and they stay until five in the afternoon. They each have their own bag with a change of clothes, towel, nappies, labelled bottles and food.

When you suddenly find yourself looking after five or six babies and toddlers on your own, it may come as a bit of a strain at first. But really, it's just as easy looking after five babies as it is one once you get organized and you get to know the children and their particular needs. The children soon get to know each other, and provide their own amusement by playing with each other.

We pooled some of the toys, so that there are always plenty of things to play with, and we have picked up other toys at jumble sales. Two rooms are usually needed to run the nursery, a small room where the children can sleep and a larger one for play. Extra cots are also necessary. We picked ours up at jumble sales, and we also use old carry cots for the young babies.

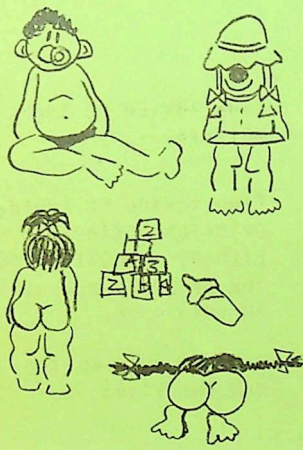


Mothers usually bring tinned food and fruit for the children at lunch time so that the mother who is looking after them doesn't have to worry about cooking. Feeding time



can be difficult when there are five babies all crying at once, but usually what happens is that two or three of the babies will stay asleep while the older ones have their lunch, and then afterwards the younger ones are fed. Most of the children sleep in the afternoon and then wake up and play until their mothers come and fetch them.

At first the children won't like being parted from their mothers and may cry a lot. Our youngest baby was four months when he came to the nursery, and he cried continually for the first two weeks, but then he started playing happily with the other kids, and now he is the most happy and independant baby there.



Other babies came at five months, eight months, one year and two years. The first week is usually the most difficult to cope with, but the only thing to do is to stick it out. It will get better as time goes on. It is often very hard for the mother to leave her baby when she feels it is going to cry and be miserable without her. One way to handle this is for the mothers to stay with their children during the first week so that the kids have a chance to get to know each other and the new adults. After a week or so the children usually start playing very happily with each other and will forget that mum has left them.

The children get used to being with other kids besides thier brothers and sisters, and being with grown ups as well. For the mothers it's easier and more enjoyable to look after kids if it's only done once a week, and you have four days completely free, Also when it is your turn to look after the children you can give it all your attention because you don't have to worry about all the housework at the same time.

If you don't know anyone to start a nursery with, you can come to 60 St. Ervans Rd. or call 960-0977 and we will put you in touch with others who contact us.

# INFORMATION

The following groups provide free information.

## GENERAL:

Claimants Union  
Womens Action Group  
60 St. Ervans Road 960-0977

Law Centre  
74 Goldborne Road 969-7473

Housing Action Group  
60 St Ervans Road 969-6536

BIT information Centre  
141 Westborne Park Rd.  
229-8219

free advice on legal matters.

free advice on rents, eviction notices, tenants rights, squatting, fighting property speculation in this area.

general information  
ask for Vicki

## PREGNANCY, ABORTION, CONTRACEPTION:

Release  
1 Elgin Ave. W.9. 603-8654

Pregnancy Advisory Service  
40 Margaret St. W.1. 629-9575

Family Planning Association  
12 Telford Road 969-2532

Præd Street Clinic  
Præd Street, Paddington

advice on pregnancy and abortion

contraceptives and supplies

V.D. treatment, any vaginal infection

## CHEAP PLAYGROUPS:

The Metro 9:30-12:30 Mon-Fri

5p a day.



# NEWS

## THE AMENITY TRUST PUBLIC MEETING

If you were at the North Kensington Amenity Trust public meeting on Tuesday, 6th July, you will already know that the Trust has refused to provide any space under the motorway for a woman's health centre, or community run nurseries. Some women challenged Anthony Perry, the director of the Trust, on his attitude to previous women's demands, but he avoided answering the challenge. A number of us made constructive suggestions about how we could use space, and we criticised the professional attitude taken by the Trust which avoids the real needs of the community. The local press put us down, although there was a lot of sympathy for our demands at the meeting. The trust will not consider the needs of women at present, so we must take action if we intend to make use of that free space under the motorway.

## EXCHANGE AND SWAPS

One new push chair for toddler's tricycle.

Lynne at 60 St. Ervans Road.

(If you have any items you would like included here, let us know).

## STOP PRESS

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* We have been given a shop front in the Goldborne \*  
\* end of Portobello Road, at 353 Portobello Road. \*  
\* It will be open to start on Tuesdays and Fridays, \*  
\* from 10:30 in the morning until 6 P.M. We will \*  
\* have an exchange, free clothes, toys, books and \*  
\* information. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

We would like to continue to put out this paper at regular intervals. If you have any ideas or information you'd like to read about, please let us know, and if you can, come and work on it.