



**L**ONDON

**I**RISH

**W**OMENS

**N**EWSPLETTER



SPRING ISSUE

APRIL-MAY 1986

## THE FUTURE

hardly news to anybody at this stage that the GLC is no longer with us. But before all lapse into a communal bout of post-dissolution depression, let's take a look at the right side.

We have a center in Stoke Newington where Irish women are welcome to drop in for a chat, which offers welfare advice, a well-stocked book and record library, a place to hold meetings and seminars, lunches for Irish pensioners, a baby and toddler group, classes in Irish Dancing, Music, Literature and Drama, Irish Womens History, Irish Language for Children, the opportunity to learn P.A., Video and Radio skills, and a kettle that's always on the boil! In short, we have a place of endless possibilities for Irish women in London.

Now you can take off the sun-glasses for a while. Without the GLC it is unlikely that the London Irish Womens Centre would exist as it does today. Without the hard work and dedication of a group of determined Irish women it is certain that it wouldn't. Therein lies the lesson for the future.

As we go to duplicator the funding situation is that the Richmond Scheme will support the centre and three workers financially until June. After that there are no guarentees.

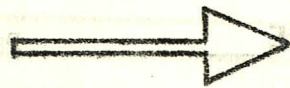
### Planning

With a view to the future a series of meetings have been planned. These are open to all Irish women who support the aims of the centre and are interested in developing its potential. The latest such Open Meeting was held on March 20 and attended by approx. 40 women. Starting with a description of how the centre came about and the facilities it now offers, given by Brid Boland; the chairwoman, Jean Byrne, then invited discussion which ranged from the use and organisation of the childcare facilities, as outlined by Imelda, to who the centre should be available to. A list of proposals were presented by women from both London which highlighted the difficulties for some women who live quite far from the centre and the need to develop an effective communication network. The Newsletter, it was felt, was an obvious means by which to do this. As the meeting progressed the need for much more discussion became clear. There are many important areas which still have to be covered.

However, some progress was made on the question of running the centre in the future. Sub Groups were established to look after the vital areas of the Library, Childcare, Arts and Recreation and the Newsletter. It is extremely important that these areas continue to function and are developed even further in the future and the only way this is going to happen is if women are prepared to give some commitment. Membership of these sub groups is not, of course, confined to those women able to attend the Open Meeting, more members are not only invited for each group, THEY ARE CRUCIAL. An Irish Lesbians group was re-established at the Open Meeting (details elsewhere in this NL).

THE NEXT OPEN MEETING IS ON WED. 14 MAY AT THE L.I.W.C. AT 7.30.p.m.

Details of, and reports from sub-group meetings overleaf.



## SUB GROUPS

After the open meeting at the centre a group of us met together to produce the newsletter. We all got very keen about the possibilities of making the newsletter an exciting read. We want to generate debate, have a letters page, write about our history, keep up to date with events and groups, have news items, reports of what women in Ireland are doing and more. That's the good news. But for all of this we may have to charge a subscription for the newsletter as the financial support for the centre is extremely uncertain. The newsletter is essential to continue the work of the centre and to keep us all in touch with each other so we want you all to subscribe if the worst comes to the worst and we have to pay for its production. We want to bring out the newsletter on a more regular basis, every six weeks, so please send us information, news, comments, opinions and letters. The Newsletter sub-group needs more members.

Jean Cross, Rae Dowds, Mary Jennings, Siobhan McNally, Maureen O'Hara.

The first meeting of the LIBRARY Sub-group will be held on Tuesday 29 April at the L.I.W.C. at 7.30 pm. There are currently over 1,000 books of interest to Irish women and 200 L.P.s of Irish music in the library. It is a collection which is probably unique in London and which will be of tremendous value to Irish women in London for years to come. Most of the books still have to be catalogued and until this is done the library cannot be opened for borrowing. It will be the responsibility of the Library sub-group to ensure that the books and records are catalogued as quickly as possible and then to see that things run smoothly when women are able to borrow them. The Library sub-group will also have to keep the collection up to date and in view of an uncertain future this may involve some imaginative fund-raising. The Library sub-group needs more members.

The ARTS AND RECREATION Sub-group's first meeting will be on . . . . . Now that the centre has P.A. Video and Radio equipment we can be sure that not only do Irish women have a voice but that we know how to use it. It means also that we can record our own progress so that our history cannot be distorted or overlooked as it has been in the past. We hope to be in a position to hire out this equipment to other womens organisations and groups and it is vitally important that the sub group knows whos got what for how long and when its coming back.

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PLEASE FILL IN AND RETURN THIS SLIP TO THE CENTRE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

I would like to join...../know more about..... the LIBRARY...../ ARTS AND RECREATION...../ NEWSLETTER.....CHILDCARE ..... SUB GROUP(S).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE

Day \_\_\_\_\_

Evening \_\_\_\_\_

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

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Because of the heavy work load at this time at the London Irish Womens Centre and the need to concentrate urgently on particular tasks, the service offered by the centre is temporarily being reduced.

The existing classes and courses will continue at the centre and there will be access for groups meeting there already. All other access will be by appointment only.

Also, we will not be dealing with telephone queries directly, but the Ansaphone will be listened to daily and any urgent calls will be dealt with as soon as possible. We hope this situation will not last for more than 6 weeks.

Some of the work we will be concentrating on is:

- 1) Future Funding
- 2) Completing the Arts & Recreation Section, I.E. Buying and installing the remainder of the equipment; Setting up the Sound Studio and Dark Room.
- 3) Preparing the accounts for the auditor.
- 4) Producing the Annual Report.
- 5) Supervising last minute building operations and adequately securing premises for insurance purposes.
- 6) Completing cataloguing of the Library

We are sorry to have to curtail the services of the Centre for a while, but it is necessary in order that it may function well in the future and that its full potential be achieved.

### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers would be very welcome to help with tasks such as cataloguing the Library, or generally lending a hand.

Women who are interested in volunteering should leave their name, contact no, and times they would be available on the Ansaphone.

ANY CHANGE IN THIS SITUATION WILL BE DETAILED IN NEXT NEWSLETTER.

# events:

## LESBIAN AND GAY PRIDE WEEK EVENTS IN HACKNEY.

## LESBIAN AND GAY PRIDE WEEK 20 - 28 JUNE 1986 EVENTS IN HACKNEY.

AS PART OF THE NATIONAL STRENGTH GAY PRIDE CELEBRATIONS, HACKNEY COUNCIL AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR ARE ORGANISING AND SUPPORTING ENTERTAINMENTS AND ACTIVITIES DURING THE WEEK OF FRIDAY 20 JUNE - SAT 28 JUNE '86.

A FULL PROGRAMME OF EVENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE SOON. THE L.I.W.C. HAS HELPED ORGANISE TWO OF THE EVENTS DURING THIS WEEK.

TUES. 24 JUNE THERE WILL BE A CEILI FOR IRISH LESBIANS AND FRIENDS AT THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON PUB ON BALLS POND ROAD (NR. DALSTON JUNCTION) WITH WOMEN MUSICIANS.

FRI. 27 JUNE AT CHAT'S PALACE, BROOKSBY WALK, HOMERTON, E5 SHEELA NA GIG WILL BE PLAYING AND THE HAIRY MARYS SANCING AT A TRADITIONAL COUNTRY & WESTERN EVENING FOR ALL LESBIANS IN HACKNEY.

11 MAY BENEFIT FOR IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL GROUP AT THE WHITE HORSE PUB IN BRIXTON. THE SPIKE ISLAND LASSIES (6 OF THE WOMEN FROM SHEELA NA GIG) WILL BE PLAYING. PLEASE RING CENTRE 249 7518 TO CONFIRM. FULL ADDRESS: OLD WHITE HORSE, 261 BRIXTON RD, SW9. PH. 487 3440.



# Ruby Murray says

# COME!!!

## TO A WOMEN ONLY DISCO

on

## SATURDAY 24 MAY.

## 9-2

AT

## SOUTH LONDON ♀ CENTRE 55 ACRE LANE, BRIXTON

## £2/£1

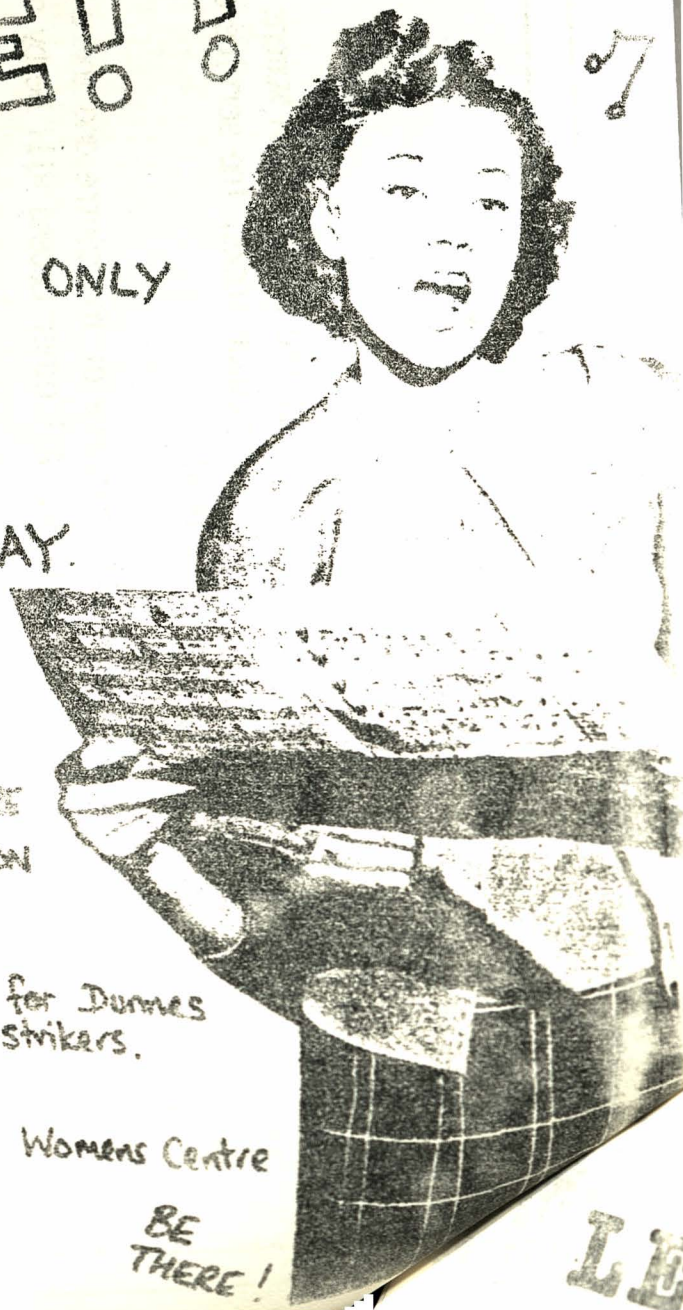
Benefit for Dumes  
Stores strikers.

Organised by London Irish Womens Centre

## BRILL MUSIC!

## BAR + FOOD

## BE THERE!



# LE

# LETTERS PAGE



Write to: Newsletter Sub-Group  
London Irish Womens Centre,  
59 Stoke Newington Church Street,  
London N16.

## Room For Whom ?

I was sitting at the recent Open Meeting of the LIWC listening to the debate about who should use the Centre and its resources. We were told by the current LIWC Management Committee that the suggested policy was for Irish women and second generation Irish women to have use of the Centre and its resources and that non-Irish women were welcome at the Centre as guests of Irish women (1st & 2nd Gen.) and that non-Irish women also be allowed to use the Centre's resources.

As I listened, my mind wandered back to the Grand Opening of the LIWC and the words of Nell Mc Cafferty, when she verbally celebrated the fact that, at last, Irish women had 'a room of our own'. Great cheers accompanied her speech and there was much head nodding and hand clapping.

Now, although it was agreed that Irish women (1st & 2nd Gen.) should have priority over resources available at the Centre, I want to say that I feel IT IS NOT ENOUGH. We have waited a very long time for 'a room of our own' and whilst I agree with Irish women bringing in non-Irish women as guests, I strongly believe that all resources should be for use by Irish women (1st & 2nd Gen) ONLY. The whole philosophy behind the setting up of the LIWC was to provide space and resources for Irish women to meet, socialise, learn, make contact, share ideas on whatever together as Irish women and to be in a "safe" place.

If the LIWC opens its resources as well as its doors to non-Irish women then it can no longer really be an Irish Womens Centre in any meaningful way. It is possible to imagine a situation where Irish women visiting or using the LIWC could find themselves in a minority, where current resources were unavailable to them and where they had to struggle to avail of the facilities which the LIWC was specifically funded and set up to provide for all Irish women living in London.

It seems much more positive for the LIWC to continue to work towards getting more Irish women to know of and use the Centre instead of opening access to all women. There are hundreds of Irish women who have no place to meet as women, who have no access to community resources and who desperately need a "room of their own".

EILIS MHARA

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>> This letter sent to the Irish Post last October, and still hasn't appeared in print, we are happy to be able to rectify that and, in keeping with the policy of this Newsletter we will continue to provide space for letters which other publications have refused to print, as long as you send them to us.

Dear Editor,

We were disappointed that you gave such a brief report on the recent Irish Women's Conference. The cruinníú was attended by over 300 lively and enthusiastic women. Surely the fact that a large number of us came together to share our common experience as Irish women living in England is significant and deserves more attention. Your report didn't mention that there were well attended workshops for lesbians, lesbian mothers, another for ex-catholic women etc. etc. and that sexism was a recurrent theme in many of the discussion groups.

We are well aware that you don't have a permanent female reporter to present the women's perspective. Since your paper purports to speak for the Irish in Britain we ask that you try to represent and reflect the daily lives of us women a bit more realistically. We are old and young, fat and thin, some single, some bringing up children. We work in all sorts of jobs and are involved in trade unions, politics, charities, schools, hospitals etc. You wouldn't think so from looking at "The Irish Post" where we are used merely for decoration, always socialising and ever smiling! Please sir, show us as we warts and all.

Yours sincerely,

THE SOUTH LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S GROUP

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Irishwomen have found a place at last. It's in London, provides a variety of services, and was mobbed on opening night. Nell McCafferty battled her way through the crowds to send this report.

# Where to go in London

NO IRISH woman need ever arrive in London again wondering hopelessly where to go, what to do or who to contact. That nightmare feeling of loss which has assailed countless thousands over the centuries, as they stood in vast railway stations at the heart of the British Empire, ended last Saturday, February 1, when the first ever London Irish Women's Centre was opened.

From now on all a woman has to do is go straight to 59, Stoke Newington, Church St., London N16, where, as long as she comes from Ireland, there'll be a welcome on the mat. The telephone number of the three-storey centre is one that should go straight into the diaries of all intending emigrants — 249-7318.

A full-time staff, all Irish and all female of course, will tell callers and visitors everything they need to know about welfare, health, housing and legal rights in that big city.

They will also provide tea and buns, a washing machine, drier and ironing board, and a creche for any Irishwoman coming in off the street. Hundreds of Irishwomen came in off the street last Saturday as the Centre opened its doors for the first time. Some were drawn from the fifteen groups catering for Irishwomen in London, others were veteran feminists who had worked within British groups, and many were individuals who had seen posters advertising the event and come along because finally there was a building in London that openly catered for

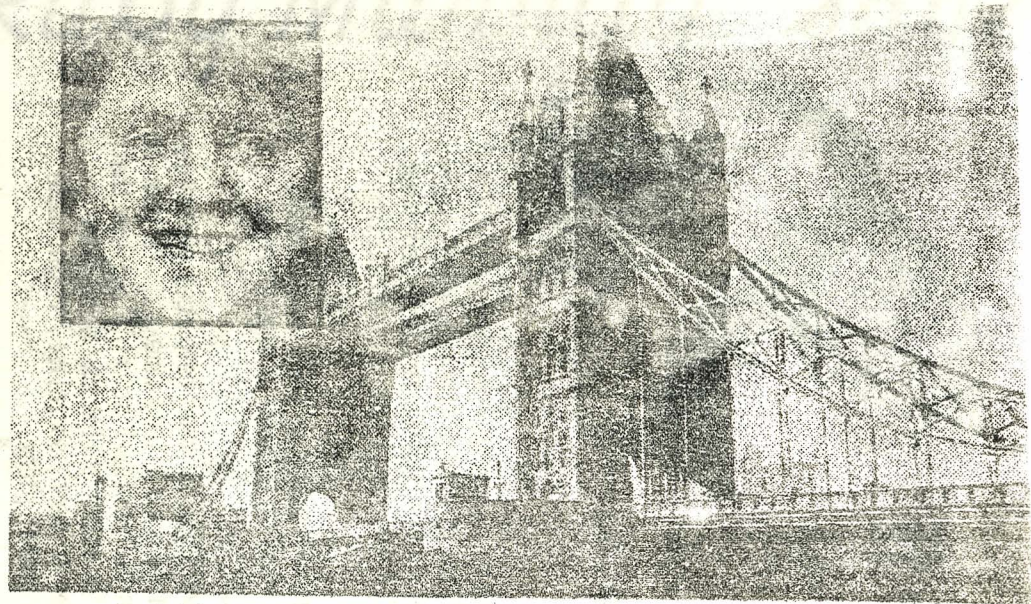
Irishwomen in their own right.

The £82,000 house was bought for the women by the Greater London Council which specialised under Ken Livingstone in providing for the needs of ethnic minorities in the capital. Salaries have been guaranteed until the GLC is abolished later this year, and the staff are confident that further funding will be provided by left wing borough councils, charitable institutions and the EEC. With a panache that marked their confidence they provided free champagne to all who visited last Saturday.

The Centre is radically and fundamentally different in outlook from existing Irish community and cultural organisations in London, which, the women point out, are dominated by men and the traditional Catholic ethos of the homeland.

The new home from home last Saturday was a veritable swap-shop of information between women involved in campaigns to stop strip searching in Armagh jail and Wandsworth prison, get the troops out of the North, support the Dunnes' store strikers, defend the Well Woman clinic against closure in Dublin, and expand the London Irish Lesbians group. There were times during the celebrations when it seemed that they were holding an annual general meeting of Irishwomen United, the radical feminist organisation which dominated Dublin in the mid-seventies.

Opinion during the day was evenly divided about how good and bad London



Irishwomen in London have crossed one great bridge.

can be for the Irish female. Women who had not seen each other since leaving Dublin years ago, when they used to meet outside the Labour exchange, compared notes on their jobs. They were working now in computers, law, the social services and middle level management; relative newcomers were assured that soon they'd be off the buses, where many an Irishwoman has got a start as a conductress, and into a career, practically, of her choice — the mood was upbeat and confident. The Irishwomen who congregated in the new building know the ropes and are eager to pass on the information.

The bad news, which ran seamlessly through their talk of jobs and council flats, was that England is racist and held the Irish in low esteem. A teenager from Connemara, just five days in London, was unwilling to give her name because her parents might not approve of the life style to which she has taken like a duck to water, despite the talk of racism. She had yet to see daylight, she said.

After a winter of rain and mud and the dole with cows for company, she was mesmerized by big buildings and neon lights. She had just booked a flight to Paris "Twelve pounds fifty sterling for a single ticker, can you believe it", and she'd think about her future when she flew back mid-week.

Her young eyes widened in dismay when a woman came into the Centre to see if she

could book a female piper for her 21 year old daughter's wedding. Who would want to marry when there was all of Europe to see every weekend, on the cheap plane flights?

A pensioner who had been brought along in a mini-bus belonging to the Centre gazed peacefully upon the astonishing hubbub. It was a grand thing to have a place, finally, where you could go along, be Irish, have a cup of tea with the women, and keep up with the news from home, she said. She liked talking to all the women from the North who were there. They told her all the things that weren't reported in the newspapers.

Later in the evening the celebrants decamped to Islington Town Hall where a fund-raising benefit was held for the Well Woman Centre, whose director Noreen Byrne told the assembled white and black, gay and straight, married and unmarried women the things English newspapers didn't tell them about the condition of Irishwomen.

The story of the Abortion referendum is still guaranteed to silence a crowded gig. Many of the Irishwomen said it was the final straw and the reason they left. "We've had a breath of fresh air, we've come home". The London Irish Women's Centre is determined to bring the message of confidence to the women of London. It is a thing that should be done. **LONDON**

First Generation  
Open to new  
Disc.

IRISH GROUPS IN LONDON \*

LONDON

generation (immigrant ) Irish women only  
to new members

last Monday of every month at 8pm in South London Women,s Centre, 55, Acre Lane, SW9  
discussion group

Battersea and Wandsworth

Sub group of above

Have got funding from council to put on series of events; interested in Irish women,s  
education and art locally

Can be contacted through above address

EAST LONDON

First and second generation

open to new members

discussion group

Meets fortnightly in women,s houses

For information on meetings and venues contact Adrienne on 519 5089 Mon-Fri

CAMDEN

Anybody interested in starting up a Camden First generation Irish women,s group(i.e. for  
immigrant women ) please come to a meeting on Wednesday 30th April at 7.30pm in  
Camden Neighbourhood centre  
12, Greenland Road, NW1

GREENWICH

An Irish womens Group has been formed in- Greenwich. Meetings are held on the first  
and third Thursday of each month in the Clockhouse Community Center, Defiance Walk,  
Woolwich Church Street, Woolwich, at 7.30 pm. All Irish women welcome.

There are anumber of groups that we know exist but we,ve been unable to get any details  
about them. If you want your group to be advertised please send details into the Irish  
Women,s Centre.

- These groups are; Haringey Irish Women,s Group
- Anti-Imperialist Protestant Women,s Group
- Irish Women Writers Group
- Camden Second Generation Irish Women,s Group

If women from these or other Irish womens groups would like to use the centre for  
meetings and/or seminars they are very welcome to do so. Just let us know.

The ground floor is suitable for both and is fully accessable with disbled toilet.

STRIP SEARCHING OF IRISH WOMEN IN BRIXTON PRISON

The trial of Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer, the two Irish women being held in Brixton Prison, starts the week beginning the 5th of May in the Old Bailey. Both being charged with conspiracy to cause explosions in the U.K. between the 2nd and 21st June 1985. They are pleading not guilty. The women are being tried together with other men and another woman in what will be a political trial. They are all being tried on a range of things going back to before 1984 e.g. the "Blackpool conspiracy", the "Seaside Hotel Bombs Plot", the "Brighton Bombing". One man, Pat Magee, is facing a "Brighton" murder charge. The third woman, who was let out on bail, is charged with withholding information. Martina and Ella will be in court every day and will not receive visits for the duration of the trial.

Both women have been systematically strip searched while on remand; on average 50 times a month each. They have had 115 body searches a month each. As if this wasn't bad enough they have been subjected to 'petty' harassment e.g. they are checked every 15 minutes during the night; door handles have been rattled very loudly through the night waking the women up; Ella had no sleep at all on 31st March or 1st April.

Strip searching is claimed to be a security measure by the British Government. It is not. It is used to humiliate and degrade Irish women both in Armagh and Brixton. It is sexual harassment and torture. Since the British created the Northern Irish state in 1921 it has always used emergency legislation and armed force to try to silence any opposition to the state. It has always had a policy of harassment against Irish political prisoners in British jails. Strip searching is part of this policy.

The Irish Prisoners Appeal (IPA) who are campaigning to stop the strip searching of women have now got access to an office. The number is 737 4144. However, letters, donations etc should be sent to 245a, Coldharbour Lane, SW9. They will continue their regular pickets on Brixton Prison, Jebb Avenue, SW2 on Saturdays between 11.30am and 1.30pm until Saturday 3rd May; court pickets will then be organised. (Details of these not finalised yet)

Michael Fisher, the women's solicitor, plans to have the Judicial Review (aimed at restraining the Home Office and the prison authorities from strip searching the women) in the High Court in about two weeks time. **MONEY IS URGENTLY NEEDED TO COVER THE LEGAL COSTS.** PLEASE SEND DONATIONS TO:

Irish Prisoners Appeal,  
c/o Lambeth IBRG,  
45a, Coldharbour Lane,  
SW9 8RR

**BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS**

Irish Prisoners Appeal"  
at West Bank, Brixton SW9  
account number 02478951  
orting Code 60-03-36

PA urge people to

- Fundraise
- Lobby MP's, councillors, religious leaders
- Come to the pickets on Brixton Prison
- Campaign in your organisations, trade unions, community groups and place of worship
- call for an end to the strip searching and to affiliate to the IPA
- Send letters of support to Martina Anderson D25134

Ella O'Dwyer D25135  
H.M. Prison Brixton,  
P.O. Box 369  
Jebb Ave.  
London SW2 5XF

PLEASE SUPPORT THE BENEFITS BEING HELD FOR THE CAMPAIGN

DETAILS IN LISTINGS OR RING  
737 4144

THE SOUTH LONDON IRISH WOMENS GROUP MEET ON THE LAST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH AT 8PM IN THE,

SOUTH LONDON WOMENS CENTRE, 55 ACRE LANE SW 9.

WE ARE A SUPPORT GROUP FOR IRISH BORN WOMEN IN THIS AREA, SINCE MOST IRISH ACTIVITY IS CENTRED IN NORTH LONDON.

WE DISCUSS EVERYTHING, FROM PROBLEMS OF LIVING IN A MAN-MADE WORLD TO MOVING STATUES AND THE UNAVAILABILITY OF RED LEMONADE IN LONDON!!!!

A SMALLER GROUP OF US FROM WANDSWORTH CAMPAIGN WITHIN ILEA TO COMBAT ANTI-IRISH RACISM IN SCHOOLS AND TO ENCOURAGE AN IRISH DIMENSION IN LOCAL SCHOOLS. WE ALSO LIASE WITH LOCAL BOROUGH ENTERTAINMENT TO HELP PROVIDE LOCAL IRISH EVENTS.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED AND WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT JEANNE ON 228-2327.

Accommodation:

Flat (Wanted)

29 year old Irish Nursery worker seeks house or flat share, preferably mixed if house. Rent about £30 per week. Around Stoke Newington Area. Phone Wendie evenings 326 1277

DEADLINE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER: FRI 22 MAY

DOES YOUR "OLD MAN" GIVE YOU TROUBLE? Any woman who would like to talk to other women, in the same situation, is welcome to come along to an informal group... EVERY TUESDAY at: KINGSWAY PRINCETON COLLEGE, SIDMOUTH ST., GRAYS INNRD. W.C1 Starts Tuesday 22 April 6-8 pm Room 307-308

ARE THERE ANY IRISH LESBIANS WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN JOINING AND HELPING TO SET UP A LESBIAN GROUP (NOT EXCLUSIVELY IRISH LESBIANS) TO EXPLORE ISSUES OF SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHIC DEVELOPMENT. PLEASE PHONE TRICIA DARRAGH ... 748-5688

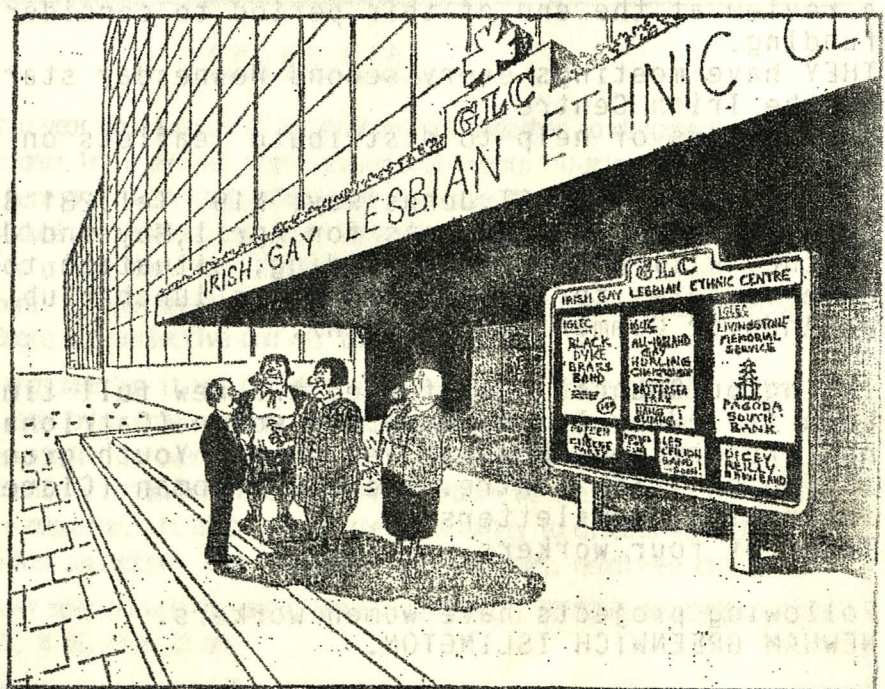
TOYS FOR THE GIRLS (AND BOYS) Does anyone have any toys, jigsaws etc. that are in good condition, but that they no longer need. The Irish Womens Centre would give them a good home. Please ring us at 249 7318.

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY We hope to have an evening of readings on FRIDAY 13 JUNE. This will coincide with the Feminist Book Fair in London. So keep the date free and there'll be more info in the next newsletter or Ring the centre at 249 7318.

NEVER AGAIN TO BE REPEATED OFFER FOR SOCIOLOGY or SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS. Imelda is finished with her books on the subjects and in an effort to spread the knowledge, is giving them away, FREE! phone her at 249 7318.

HA! HA! ?!

\*! \* !! \* ! \* \* \* !! \* \* !!!



"I know you gave us the money Ken—but, honestly, we don't have a single job vacancy!"

COMING SOON... AGONY AUNTIE & GOSSIP!

Funding situation for GLC funded Irish projects in London

Waltham Forest Irish Project

Greater London House, 547 Leytonstone High Road, L.E11. Tel. 5584577

Has not been funded by Local Council or Department of Environment, so no longer has paid workers from 4/4/86. However local people will keep it going on a voluntary basis.

Newham Cairde na nGael

2A1 Windmill Lane, Stratford E15. Tel. 5195089.

Has been given transitional funding by the D.O.E. for the next three years. Two full time workers. They are setting an under fives group. IF interested ring above no.

Lambeth

245A Coldharbour Lane, SW9. Tel. 2747700 ext. 36.

Unable to be contacted.

Battersea and Wandsworth

Has lost funding and no longer exists.

Greenwich

115/123 Powis St, Woolwich, SE10.

Have received a further years funding from London Borough Grant. Two full time workers.

Haringey

C70 Hornsey Library, N8. Tel. 3483354 ext 3.

Council have made commitment to fund them for a further year but group has received no money yet. Have been refused funding by D.O.E. Two full time workers.

Camden

112 Camden High St, NW1. Tel. 4820869/0824

Have received a further six months funding from the D.O.E. Will have a review at the end of this period to consider a further six months funding.

THEY have meetings every second Wednesday starting 15th April. at the Irish Centre.

Need offers of help to distribute leaflets on housing benefits.

Islington

Caxton House, 129 St. Johns Way, N19. Tel. 281 3225.

Salaries and running costs for April, May and June. THEY DO NOT KNOW

if they will get further funding, situation to be reviewed.

Have vacancies for Irish pensioners lunch club on Mondays 12.30-3PM at Andover Community Centre N7.

Islington Council have funded two new full time posts, which have been filled by Irish women. One woman (Catriona) will be developing new projects, eg. Under fives group, Youth group, helping to get Islington Irish Centre. The other woman (Clare) will work on advice, information, newsletters. Total of four workers.

Following projects have women workers.

NEWHAM GREENWICH ISLINGTON.

NOTES

... UNSPOKEN CONFLICT,

babies ... it seems to be fashionable these days for heterosexual women, lesbians, women who have never said they would be doing it. I ask them, what is it about and I don't get many answers that make much sense.

I don't want to have children. For me it is a positive choice which has evolved over the years. I'm excited by the challenge and experience of living my life with few of the traditional relationships to fall back on, that is, children and family (I have very limited involvement with my family now because I don't want to tell them that I'm a lesbian). It's good to have the uninterrupted space to put energy into creating and maintaining lasting and secure relationships with women. And I don't want the responsibility involved with bringing up children (I do enjoy spending time with children).

Nor do I want to be involved in co-parenting or communal children. They are both good ideas, but there is little evidence to suggest that they work even in feminist households. So, I have decided my limits. I am prepared to be a feminist au-pair -- I will continue to look after the children of some of my friends because the woman/mother needs a break. But I don't wish to struggle with the issues raised like sharing responsibility and power.

Having made this decision I live it and with a lot of anger as I feel labelled, silenced and often not taken seriously on issues related to childcare and mothering. The labels which I have been daubed with include child hater and selfish. My arguments against having children are often turned around so as it would appear that my decision is based on a dislike for children. Once established it is difficult to change this. The truth is I like children but find the attitudes of many mothers unpalatable. And, yes I agree that my decision not to have children is a selfish one, I don't think that there is anything necessarily wrong with that. But, equally the decision to have children is also a selfish one, it would be nice if mothers would begin to acknowledge that.

The situations where I feel silenced as a single woman are numerous ... when women become pregnant or have babies the expectation is that everyone should feel happy and congratulatory, well, often I don't and why should I. It is not one of life's events that thrills me, I don't expect support or happiness from friends or acquaintances when I undertake to do something which they're not remotely interested in.

Many women with children expect their single friends to fit our lives around theirs. This may be fine, but only if equal status is given to the demands of my life. Even in feminist workplaces it is not easy to phone in and say 'I'll not be in today as I'm helping my lover through a crisis'.

The IRISH WOMEN & MENTAL HEALTH GROUP meet regularly at the L.I.W.C. It is mainly a discussion group, and they hope to produce a pamphlet on the experiences of Irish women in the area of mental health. New Members are very welcome.

The next meeting is on : THURSDAY MAY 1 at 7.30pm at the L.I.W.C.

whereas no-one bats an eyelid if there is a phone call from a mother saying 'little Rita is sick and I'll not be in today'.

My opinions on childcare and mothering are often not taken seriously. Comments like 'only mothers know what it is really like' are not uncommon. While I would agree that there are many aspects of the day to day experience of mothering that are not within mine, I do have opinions on these issues, for example, children's schooling and discipline. But there is little scope for expressing or exploring them. Why is it so impossible to question the current baby boom in feminist circles without it becoming a defensive battleground? I scarcely dare to open my mouth and when I do the consequences are too often regrettable. Motherhood seems to be some kind of sanctimonious issue. It is not part of current political discussion. Why? It is seen to be personal, a question of the individual woman's choice. Having children may be an individual personal choice, but its implications are far reaching -- it changes friendships, alters our vision of the future and opens up the possibilities for doing things in a different way etc. And yet, all that currently exists is silence. Can we not have some kind of dialogue -- the space to explore why women decide to have children, or not to have children, the contradictions involved in rearing children etc, etc. ...

Siobhán Ní Néaraigh

The Irish Women in Islington Group is a voluntary organisation based in the Borough of Islington. We provide information on Training, Housing, Welfare, Educational and Social facilities as well as organising courses, classes and social events, for Irish women.

For more information please contact:

The Irish Women in Islington Group,  
Cabin Y,  
25 Horsell rd,  
London N.5 or Telephone: 6098916.

SPARE RIB

About a year ago a group of Irish women got together to discuss Spare Rib's anti Irish racism, their coverage of events relating to Irish women both here and in Ireland. There had been some dissatisfaction felt by many individual Irish women and Irish womens groups for some time but this all came to a head when Spare Rib published a particularly offensive cartoon. An open meeting was arranged so that Irish women could meet with the Spare Rib collective and air their complaints.

From that meeting it was decided that Loretta from the collective would meet with Irish womens groups on a regular basis. These meetings have been held periodically over the past year. Their aim is to keep the collective up to date of Irish womens events and to ensure we are properly represented in the magazine. It also gave us the opportunity to discuss with the Spare Rib collective such things as their policies, deadlines etc.

The next meeting will be on 30 APRIL at L.I.W.C., 59 STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET, N 16, at 6.15 pm.

If you require a creche for the meeting, please book in advance.

# CLASSES CHANCES

The following Classes and Groups are now running at the Centre.

BABY AND TODDLER GROUP meet every Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 10 am-12 noon.

RELAXATION & SELF HEALING GROUP meet Thursdays at 2 pm,

IRISH LANGUAGE CLASSES FOR CHILDREN on Saturday Mornings from 10 - 12. We intend them to be very informal so that children will enjoy coming and learning.

New members are welcome for all of the above classes and groups.

P.A. COURSE on Wednesdays 6pm - 9pm.

COMMUNITY RADIO COURSE on Saturday morning 10.30 am - 1.30 pm.

VIDEO CLASSES: VHS Equipment on Tuesdays 7 pm - 9 pm

VHS & U - Matic Video Classes on Saturday 11 am - 2 pm.

The Video classes are now booked up, but don't lose heart, see below:

>> If you want to join a P.A., Video or Radio class, please let us know and we may be able to start another class.

It is important that women who take a place on the courses do turn up. Because these are practical classes and there is only one set of equipment for each number have to be limited.

If women don't turn up not only is the class itself held up but a place is wasted.

If you can't possibly make it, and of course circumstances will dictate that who puts her name down will be able to start the course, but, PLEASE RING, and let us know in time to find another woman to take your place., i.e. at least one week in advance if you can.

It is also important that if you book a creche and can't come that you cancel the creche.

These Classes and Courses are ongoing at other venues.

CEILI CLASSES Every Thursday 7- 9 pm at the Whittington Park Community centre, Verbury rd, N.19. Beginners welcome. (fully accessible). Inelda, 249 7318.

TRADITIONAL IRISH MUSIC CLASSES. Mondays 6.30. - 8.30. Flute and Tin Whistle, beginners welcome.

IRISH LITERATURE AND DRAMA CLASS For details ring Sabina Sharkey, 609 8916.

WOMEN IN IRISH HISTORY CLASS Every Wednesday 7 - 9 pm at Highbury round Hse, Ronalds Rd, N 5 nearest @ Highbury & Islington Or Holloway Rd., (Not accessible).

The ground floor of the Centre is fully accessible and this is where most of the classes are held. Other classes can be held here if disabled women wish to partake of them. Please phone to make sure.

The A.G.M. of the LONDON IRISH WOMENS CENTRE

is on

WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE at 7.30 p.m.

ring for details of venue

The Annual Report and previous year's Accounts will be presented, and a new Management Committee will be elected, (5 - 9 members)

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Women wishing to stand for election have to have at least 3 nominations (see note 6 constitution; "paid-up" members refers to all women on the newsletter mailing list)

NOMINATIONS have to be in writing and sent to:

The Secretary, L.I.W.C. 59 Stoke Newington Church St, N16.  
by WEDNESDAY 11 JUNE at the latest.

The present Management Committee are as follows and can be re-elected:

Dorothy Fergus (Secretary)  
Ann Gilmartin ( Chair )  
Jean Byrne (Treasurer)  
Sabina Shankey  
Ellen Reynolds  
Eilish Dowds

Let's have a good turn out..... **BE THERE!!!!!!**

# CONSTITUTION - L.I.W.C.

1. The name of the Association shall be the Irish Women's Centre Group.
2. The objects of the Group shall be to promote, maintain and advance the education and welfare of Irish women by giving information, advice and support on health and welfare and particularly by promoting and encouraging cultural activities.
3. Membership of the Group shall be open to all women who subscribe to the objects of the Group and who pay such annual subscription (if any) as shall be decided by the Committee as hereinafter defined.
4. The business of the Group shall be managed by a Committee (hereinafter referred as the "Committee").
5. An Annual General Meeting shall be held in each year not more than six weeks before nor more than six weeks after the first anniversary of the last Annual General Meeting of the Group. The business of the Annual General Meeting shall be to receive an Annual Report and Accounts and to elect the members of the Committee, and such other business as the Committee shall decide.
6. The Committee shall consist of not less than 5 and not more than 9 members who shall be elected by ballot at the Annual General Meeting. Nominations for the Committee shall be made and supported in writing by at least 3 paid-up members of the Group and be sent to the Secretary of the Committee at least two weeks before the Annual General Meeting to which they relate.
7. The Secretary shall send a notice to all members inviting nominations for election to the Committee at least four weeks before the date of the Annual General Meeting.
8. The Group Committee shall consist of a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and between 2 and 6 Committee members who shall all serve for one year and retire at the next following Annual General Meeting of the Group. A retiring member shall be eligible for re-election, provided that no member shall serve on the Group Committee for more than three years successively.
9. The Committee shall be entitled to open and maintain bank accounts, raise and invest funds, borrow money, lease or rent property, employ and pay staff and do all such things as they shall decide are necessary for the achievement of the objects of the Group.
10. All monies raised by or on behalf of the Group shall be applied to further the objects of the Group and for no other purpose.
11. After the dissolution of the Group, any assets remaining after the satisfaction of any proper debts and liabilities shall be applied towards charitable purposes for the benefit of any other Group or Association having similar charitable objects to those of the Group.
12. The Treasurer shall keep a record of all monies received and expended by the Group, and produce Accounts for the Annual General Meeting of the Group annually. The Secretary shall keep a record of all decisions of the Committee, and of all correspondence sent and received by the Committee. The Chairperson shall chair all meetings of the Group and the Committee.
13. The Secretary will act as Returning Officer for the annual election of members to the Committee.
14. No alteration may be made to the clauses of this Constitution relating to the objects of the Group or the dissolution of the Group. The Constitution may otherwise be altered by a two-thirds majority vote at a General Meeting of the Group provided that all the members have been sent written notice of the proposed change at least two weeks before the date of the meeting.
15. A General Meeting may be called by the Secretary giving at least two weeks notice to all members of the date and time and place of such meeting, together with details of the business to be laid before the meeting.
16. The accidental omission to give notice to any member shall not invalidate a meeting.
17. The quorum for meetings of the Committee shall be half of its members plus one. The quorum for general meetings of the Group shall be 25% of its paid-up membership.
18. Resolutions of the Committee and ordinary resolutions of general meetings of the Group shall be passed by simple majority on a show of hands of the members present. In the event of a tied vote the Chairperson for the time being shall have a second and casting vote.
19. The Committee may set up such sub-committees as it thinks fit and decide on the purposes and regulations relating to such sub-committees.
20. The Group may be wound up on a three-quarters majority of a General Meeting that has been properly called and constituted.

AMENDMENT: 'AT A MEETING HELD ON WED. 14th MARCH 1984 GROUP DECIDED TO CHANGE OUR NAME FROM "IRISH CENTRE GROUP" TO LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S CENTRE AS FROM THAT DATE.

\*\* SEE OVER PAGE...

# DIARY

APRIL

MON 21/04 7.30pm

STOP STRIP SEARCHES CAMPAIGN (ARMAGH/MAGHERY)  
MEETS EVERY FOURTH NIGHT ON MONDAYS  
CROMER STREET WOMEN'S CENTRE WC1  
KINGS CROSS TUBE, BR

WED 23/04 2.00PM

CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRAVEL BETWEEN BRITAIN & IRELAND  
MEETING  
CAIRDE NA GAEL  
2A WINDMILL LANE  
STRAFORD E15  
STRAFORD TUBE, BR

SAT 26/04 \*\*

PICKET BRIXTON JESS AVENUE SW2 BRIXTON TUBE

SAT 26/04 7.30PM

HARINGEY IRISH CENTRE SOCIAL  
IRISH MUSIC/SONG  
TO BE HELD EVERY LAST SAT OF EACH MONTH  
ST. CATHERINES SCHOOL  
PRETORIA ROAD N17  
WHITE HART LANE BR  
£2, £1 CONCESSIONS, KIDS FREE

SAT 26/04 2-5PM

WOMEN IN IRISH HISTORY SEMINAR  
ANN ROSSITER

SEE ARTICLE IN THIS NEWSLETTER  
LONDON IRISH WOMENS CENTRE  
59 STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET

MON 28/04 7.30PM

ISLINGTON TRAVELLERS SUPPORT GROUP MEETING  
BUS COMPANY  
PALMERS PLACE N7  
HOLLOWAY ROAD TUBE

TUE 29/04 7.30PM

HARINGEY IRISH MEETING  
TCP  
628 HIGH ROAD N17  
SEVEN SISTERS TUBE, THEN BUS  
TO BE CONFIRMED

WED 30/04 8PM

ISLINGTON IRISH PENSIONERS LUNCH CLUB  
FUNDRAISING BENEFIT  
IRISH TRAD MUSIC  
VICTORIA PUB  
JUNCTION OF HOLLOWAY RD & LIVERPOOL RD N7  
HOLLOWAY RD TUBE, HIGHBURY/ISLINGTON TUBE  
£1

MAY

THU 01/05 8PM

BENEFIT DISCO FOR IRISH WOMEN BEING STRIP SEARCHED IN BRIXTON  
PROCEEDS TO IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL  
LIVINGSTONE HOUSE  
NORTH EAST LONDON POLYTECHNIC  
LIVINGSTONE RD, STRATFORD HIGH ST, E15  
STRAFORD TUBE/BR THEN WALK OR BUS TOWARDS BOW  
????

FRI 02/05 6.30PM

INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION OF MAY DAY  
ENTERTAINMENT, SPEAKERS FROM IRISH, IRANIAN, KURDS AND  
OTHER NATIONALITIES  
CONWAY HALL  
RED LION SQUARE WC1  
HOLBORN TUBE

SAT 03/05 \*\*

PICKET BRIXTON PRISON SEE EARLIER

MON 05/05 \*\*

STOP STRIP SEARCH CAMPAIGN SEE EARLIER

TUE 06/05 8PM

ISLINGTON IRISH MEETING  
PHONE 281 3225 FOR VENUE

WED 07/05 ??

S.E. MIND MEETING ON IRISH PEOPLE AND MENTAL HEALTH  
241 STEPHENSONS WAY NW1  
BUSION SQUARE TUBE

THU 08/05 8-12PM

NEWHAM CAIRDE NA MIAEL IRISH PRISONERS GROUP  
FUNDRAISING SOCIAL  
TO BE HELD REGULARLY FIRST THURS OF EVERY MONTH  
IRISH TRAD MUSIC  
PRINCESS ALICE PUB  
ROMFORD ROAD, FOREST GATE, E7  
FOREST GATE BR

RELATE  
CALL 011 437 1011  
MARCH 1987  
CENTRE  
FROM THE  
S. M. J. O'K.

JUNE

MAY

SAT 10/05 2.30PM

WOLFE TONE SOCIETY: BOBBY SANDS, JAMES CONNOLLY COMMEMORATION  
SPEAKERS: JIM MCALLISTER-SINN FEIN, BOB DOYLE-INT. BRIGADE, TROOPS OUT  
IBRG, LONDON IRISH WOMENS CENTRE, LABOUR PARTY, TRADE UNION REP, BLACK  
COMMUNITY REP, IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL, JOINT CHAIR-MIRIAM JONES OTHER  
UNKNOWN  
CONWAY HALL  
RED LION SQUARE  
HOLDORN TUBE  
50P

SAT 10/05 8.30-12.30PM

WOLFE TONE SOCIETY FUNDRAISING SOCIAL  
IRISH TRAD MUSIC  
SIR GEORGE ROBEY PUB  
SEVEN SISTERS ROAD  
OFF FINSBURY PARK TUBE  
??

SUN 11/05 ??

BENEFIT FOR IRISH PRISONERS APPEAL  
MAYBE WOMEN ONLY??  
RING IPA 737 4144 FOR DETAILS  
OLD WHITE HORSE PUB  
BRIXTON ROAD  
??

TUE 13/05 7.30PM

HARINGEY IBSRG MEETING SEE EARLIER

WED 14/05 7.30PM

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\*\*\*\*\* OPEN MEETING \*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* LONDON IRISH WOMENS CENTRE \*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
59 STOKE NEWINGTON CHURCH STREET N16

MON 19/05 \*\*

STOP STRIP SEARCHES CAMPAIGN SEE EARLIER

SAT 24 MAY

BENEFIT DISCO AT  
SOUTH LONDON WOMENS CENTRE

TUE 27/05 \*\*

HARINGEY IBSRG MEETING (SEE EARLIER)

MON 05/06 \*\*

STOP STRIP SEARCHES CAMPAIGN (SEE EARLIER)

YIPPEE!

IRISH LESBIANS GROUP

We recognise that many lesbians leave Ireland because of the repressive attitude towards gay people that permeates every aspect of Irish society. Many Irish lesbians come to London to seek support, to sort themselves out or simply to get away. Often they find that the situation here is not much better.

Irish lesbians already living here face discrimination too, for being women, for being lesbians and for being Irish.

An Irish Lesbians Group has been set up and can be contacted by phoning Jean, 523 1749 or Eilish, 881 0983.

The aim of the group is to put an end to the isolation often felt by Irish lesbians in London and to offer support and friendship.

CARERS SUPPORT GROUP

Is anyone interested in becoming involved in setting up a support group for Irish women who are carers of either mentally or physically handicapped dependants? We would like to such a group started at the womens centre. Please ring 249 7318.

DON'T FORGET !!!  
A.G.M. of London Irish Womens Centre  
WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE  
Venue to be confirmed: Ring 249 7318  
Nominations for Management Committee in by 11 June

JUNE  
SEE ALSO  
EVENTS  
PAGE

Childcare  
12th April  
Future Activi  
FUTURE ACT

childcare sub group that was formed at the Open Meeting met for the first time  
12th April '86. Two main areas were discussed:

1) Future Activities. 2) The use of the creche at present.

### FUTURE ACTIVITIES

1) - It was suggested that the group would look into the possibility of running a week long festival for Irish Children during the summer. This would include such things as workshops in Irish language, dancing, music, singing, cooking, art, outings etc. We decided to approach Hackney Council to try and get funding but if anyone could offer any help with the organising and running of the scheme it would be much appreciated. We need help with general organising, publicity, general help throughout the week, drivers, someone to prepare snacks, new ideas, and women who will be able to run the workshops.

2) We also thought that if possible we would like to organise a sort of educational day for all children where they could participate in the above workshops,

3) We discussed how we could ensure that all the facilities at the centre for children would be open to children with disabilities and that we should always encourage these children to participate in the activities. It was decided that in future all publicity would also go to groups who work around this area and that we would make ourselves known to these groups.

### THE USE OF THE CRECHE AT PRESENT

It was decided that the Baby and Toddlers Group should continue to meet every Tuesday and Thursday morning. It was reported that the group is picking up in numbers and going very well.

The Self Help Play Group will now run in the mornings on Wednesday and Friday and in the afternoons on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This group is looking for new members, so if you are interested either ring the womens centre or call in at the above times.

We had some debate about who should use the creche facilities. At present the creche uses the policy of the Centre i.e. non-Irish women are welcome as guests of Irish women. Some women felt quite strongly that they wanted their children to mix with Irish women and children whilst at the womens centre and so non-Irish women should not use the drop-in childcare provisions especially. However these points warranted more discussion than there was time for and it was decided that when putting the minutes into the Newsletter we would ask women to think about the policy, discuss it in their local groups and send in their ideas so that we could have a wider debate around such an important issue.

The Childcare sub group is open to all first and second generation Irish women who have children, work with children or are interested in ensuring that there are and will continue to be good quality childcare provisions for Irish children at the centre. We would also like the group to become a point of campaigning or pressure group that looks into the needs of Irish children in schools and play provisions and puts pressure on those responsible to ensure that these needs are recognised and met.

The next meeting of the group will be on 7 May at 12 noon at the South London Womens Center, 55 Acre Lane SW 2.

There will be a minibus leaving the Irish Womens Centre at 11 am. Please ring Imelda at the centre on 249 7318 if you wish to become involved in the group or if you would like to make any contributions.

### GIRLS GROUP

We are in the process of setting up a girls group at the centre. We intend the group to run probably one evening a week and to be for girls between 11 - 16. We have had an initial meeting with Hackney Youth Office and they have suggested that we go ahead and set up the group. So if you have experience of youth work or are interested in becoming involved in it we need volunteers to get the group started.

Ring Imelda on 249 7318 for more details and offers.

## IRISH WOMEN + HISTORY SEMINAR :

On Saturday 15 March 1986 a seminar on Irish Women and History took place at the LIWC. Between 25 to 30 women attended. The speakers were:

Jean Cross - who spoke on the position of Irish women in the 26 counties, talking about cases such as Ann Lovett and Joanne Hayes.

Mary Lennon - who spoke on the history of Irish women's emigration.

Siobhan McNally - who spoke on the war in the 6 counties and working class catholic women's involvement in campaigns directly related to the war and also gave a history of feminist and anti-imperialist women's groups since 1969.

Ann Rossiter - who talked about her experiences as an Irish woman involved in Irish solidarity work in Britain; the campaigns she was in and the political arguments that took place around Ireland.

Brid Boland - who spoke on the history of the LIWC, the campaigns it has been and is involved in and the services it offers.

A discussion took place afterwards in which we agreed that it is essential to record Irish women's history and build up archives. We have to record and document whatever are doing now as it will one day be history. We can do this in various ways eg. through written papers, photographs, video. The Irish Women's Media Group actually videoed the seminar while another woman took photographs.

It was decided that as there was so much information given by the speakers and that, due to lack of time, we hadn't been able to discuss their papers, that each should give an individual seminar on her paper. The papers will be printed in the newsletter not only as a source of information but also to spark off debate and discussion among Irish women about the many issues which have and do affect us. It was felt that it was very important to discuss our personal experiences in both Ireland and Britain and how these have affected our political development and attitudes. Ann Rossiter agreed to give the first seminar which will take place on Sat 26 April between 2-5pm at LIWC. She will talk about her experiences as an Irish woman doing Irish solidarity work in Britain - the various campaigns she has been involved in and the political arguments that went on around Ireland. Below we print part of her paper. Please come along to the seminar and contribute or if you are unable to come please write to the newsletter with your opinions. Ann would like any comments you have on her paper as it is a draft for a chapter in a forthcoming book on Ireland and British feminism. You can write to her c/o the LIWC.

To recount the history as well as the political debates women and the national question as experienced by us in Ireland groups in the 70's would require a book at least. What follows is a sketchy outline going up to 1976 only. What I attempted to do is to recreate the political atmosphere of the debates and merely hint at one or two of the debates. I've made no attempt to charter the development of the British Women's Movement, no more than the Irish Women's Movement, North and South. Even though all the debates surrounding contraception, abortion, divorce, discrimination against women in various aspects of life, the role of religion in Ireland etc., all came up in relation to the National Question and we were involved in those debates. I have not even attempted to outline them here. The problem is space. But more meetings and more papers are to follow - hopefully! There are several feminists out there who were involved in the 70's and perhaps they will speak/write even if to disagree with what I have to say.

Unlike Black and Third World women living in Britain who did not at first see the British Women's Liberation Movement as a constituency that could be fruitfully addressed, Irish feminists have been active on the question of Ireland within the broad confines of that movement since its early beginnings. They were joined by British, Australian, American, Spanish and feminists of other nationalities in a variety of Women and Ireland groups - and later the Armagh group - starting from about 1972. From that time a network of groups developed throughout Britain until there were twelve in the early 80's, in Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Dundee, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Norwich, Nottingham, and Sheffield.

During those fourteen years we have been through a wide range of experiences. We held a hunger strike, support activities for women in Northern Ireland on issues such as the Rent and Rates Strike, campaigns around prisoners, conferences, talks, educational, seminars. We wrote pamphlets, leaflets, a journal, made slide shows, an exhibition, had marches, pickets, lobbied MPs and what have you. We have been through the many twists and turns of the war in Ireland in as much as it can be experienced here in Britain. We have supported and at times been part of the developments taking place within the Irish community in Britain, of which specifically Irish women's groups and the Irish Women's Centre are a part. Also, we have in one way or another supported or been involved with developments in the Irish Women's Movement in Ireland, North and South.

Before going into any details about our activities I have decided that I should first describe who we were and from where we were coming politically. I think this is very important and will shed light on our thinking and choice of political direction over the years.

Both Irish and non-Irish, we were not all middle class university lefties, although the odd few were. Some of us had come from very humble origins, some were socialists but in the main unaligned to any

some came from rural as well as urban Ireland, impossible to generalise too much, I think I would be saying that among us there was a high level of commitment to imperialist struggle - not just in Ireland but world-wide - there was a strong commitment to women's liberation, of course. I saw the oppression of women in Ireland, North and South, being in many ways tied up with imperialism, similar to all colonial situations. Although we might not always be conscious of it, the general political climate of the late 60s and early 70s had a profound effect on all of us. We were part of a particular political culture, in as much as we are part of a different one today.

The 1960s in Western Europe and North America was a period of internal crisis and searching among progressive people. Everything was being questioned, everything challenged. All forms of authority were under attack. The essential nature of democracy, freedom and liberty, was everywhere being debated. Indeed, not only was the ideology of the bourgeoisie under attack, but also the theory and practice of the communists, the workers movements and the left generally. On the culture front, highbrow and lowbrow, dynamic changes were being experienced. Much of this ferment began in the universities. Everywhere there were demonstrations, sit-ins, classes disrupted as protests against the overbearing authoritarianism and elitism of the educational system.

It might all have stayed in the universities except in May 1968 ten million French workers transformed a student protest into a revolutionary movement by joining it in the streets to protest against decades of repression they too had suffered since World War Two. The state shook to its very foundations. In Italy and many other countries of Western Europe there were similar developments. A kind of cultural revolution, similar to the Cultural Revolution going on in China, at the time was generated throughout society. Even in the countries held in the iron grip of fascism there was widespread movement among students and workers. The women's movement was born in these conditions in Europe.

The student and worker revolts of the late 60s and early 70s were directed against regimes which were nervous of dissent of any kind. Earlier, the defeat of fascism in Germany, Italy and France involved, not only standing armies, but a huge and powerful underground Resistance movement that was radical in part and which expected the anti-fascist struggle to escalate into an insurrection after the war was over, which in turn might lead to socialism. But the British and American occupying forces at the end of the war were determined this would not happen and so the most right-wing and often fascist elements in each of these societies were sought out to keep socialism at bay. The Americans and the British sustained fascist regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece until quite recently and of course right wing governments prevailed also in France and Italy. It was against these right wing governments and regimes that student and worker revolts were directed. And socialism as the only way out was very much in the air at the time. There was an endless proliferation of left-wing groupings, Trotskyist, Maoist, Marxist-Leninist, Communist, Euro-Communist, and I don't know what. Marxist theory was hotly debated

and the various aspects of class struggle became so finely tuned that, indeed, it seemed as if the revolution was upon us at any moment. So all progressive circles were invaded in one way or the other with a socialist discourse. And we in the Women and Ireland Groups were operating against that background.

We were also operating against the background of the Vietnam War which raged from 1964-1975. The whole world was roused over the spectacle of mass slaughter of the Vietnamese people by the Americans. It's difficult to recreate the atmosphere of those times. There were enormous student demonstrations, the American Embassy attacked in nearly every city of Europe, even in London students battled to tear the eagle off its perch in Grosvenor Square. Debates about imperialism were everywhere. The Vietnam War turned our attention to the Third World, the defeat of imperialism and the possibility of socialism in these countries.

Taking its cue from the Black civil rights movement in the US in the 60s and very much in line with the revolts going on in Europe, Queens University students in N.I. took to the streets to demand civil rights for Catholics in the late 60s. The debate and the nature of the struggle, although very much rooted in the reality of N.I. had something of the flavour of the debates in Paris, Milan, Rome and London, but I hasten to add that unlike their student counterparts in these cities, Queens students had shown themselves profoundly indifferent to anything going on elsewhere in the world. For example, the largest anti-Vietnam demonstration attracted only 50 participants.

Those of us who would later come together in Women and Ireland Groups joined in with the activities of the various support groups over here - the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, or the Irish Solidarity Campaign (led by Bernadette Devlin) or the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, and later the Anti-Internment League. There was a flurry of activity in response to what was going on in N.I. :

- the violent attacks on the civil rights marchers
- the Battle of the Bogside
- the storming of the Falls in August 69
- house burnings and the refugess
- the house-to-house searches by the British Army in 1970
- the introduction of rubber bullets
- Internment, over a 4 year period 2158 men were interned
- the torture of internees

Internment spearheaded a Rent and Rates Strike which was led by women. At its peak in December 1971, 23190 households were involved - a quarter of all Catholic households in the 6 counties. And women were at the forefront. This fact we seized on over here and eagerly publicized women's activity, especially among the feminist groupings to which we belonged - at that time many of us would have been in consciousness raising groups or study groups - the kind of groups that proliferated at the beginning of the British women's movement.

The N.I. situation seemed to us to fit into the frame-work of political thinking of the women's movement at the time. It had many

EAST LONDON IRISH WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

East London Irish Women's Conference was held in East Ham on Saturday 8th February. It was organised jointly by members of the East London Irish Women's Group, Cairdre nGael (Newham and district friends of Ireland), and the Waltham Forest Irish Project. (The latter two groups are local Irish community groups).

The groups felt that as Irish women often suffer the double oppression of being Irish in London and being women it was necessary to have a day where we could meet and discuss issues that affect us.

The conference opened with two speakers; Jean Cross spoke about the way women have been written out of Irish history or not acknowledged and how important it was for Irish women to reclaim our own history. Imelda from the Irish Women's Centre told us about the courses and facilities available there and invited women to visit the centre.

The rest of the afternoon centred around two sets of workshops with a report back and discussion afterwards. In the first session the workshops were:

1. Sexism and Nationality
2. Prevention of Terrorism Act
3. Bringing up children in London

The second set of workshops were:

1. Irish women young and old
2. Strip Searches
3. First and second generation Irish women
4. Irish women and the Church

At the report back session a number of motions were passed and were voted for unanimously. These were:

1. Conference to send a message of congratulations to Dr. Maire O'Shea on her acquittal
2. Solidarity greetings to be sent to Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer who are being strip searched while on remand in Brixton Prison
3. A letter to be sent to the Labour party NEC asking for a three line whip against the PTA.
4. That conference write to all local labour MP's urging them to vote against the PTA when it comes up for renewal.

After the report and discussion food was provided <sup>and</sup> women sat around and talked about the day or watched videos e.g. on strip searching in Armagh Gaol. Bookstalls were provided by the Four Provinces Bookshop and the London Armagh Women's Group. The Armagh Women's Group exhibition on Women and Ireland was also on display.

Afterwards there was a social in the Swan, Stratford. An all women ceili band provided the music and the Maguire O'Shea School of dancing provided Irish dancers. We also had individual women singers. The proceeds went to the Irish Prisoners Appeal who are campaigning against the strip searching of two Irish women in Brixton Prison.

By the end of the evening everyone was very happy about the outcome of the conference. It had been enjoyable both from the point of sharing experiences with other Irish women and because of the warm and friendly atmosphere that was generated. Over fifty women turned up on a bitterly cold snowy day and overall the organisers felt it was a great success.

We hope to have a full report of the conference published soon.

**IRISH women**  
in Greenwich

113-126 Powis Street, Woolwich, London SE18  
Ph. 01-855 7191 Ext. 30

AT LAST!

AN  
IRISH WOMENS' GROUP  
IN  
SOUTH EAST LONDON

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN MEETING OTHER IRISH WOMEN?

WE HAVE FORMED A NEW GROUP FOR IRISH WOMEN  
AND AT THE MOMENT WE MEET ON THE FIRST AND  
THIRD THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH IN THE  
CLOCKHOUSE COMMUNITY CENTRE, DEFIANCE WALK,  
WOOLWICH CHURCH STREET, WOOLWICH,  
AT 7.30pm.

BRING ALONG YOUR IDEAS!

ALL  
IRISH WOMEN  
WELCOME !!!!



# THE OBSERVATION TOWER & THE BALLYBUM PAPERS

PRESS RELEASE.....PRESS RELEASE.....PRESS RELEASE.

Venue: OVAL HOUSE, 52-54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 5SW.

Dates: APRIL Wednesday 23rd - Sunday 27th at 7.30pm  
APRIL Wednesday 30th - May Sunday 4th at 7.30pm

Maureen O'Farrell best known for her T.V. lead as 'Linda' in ITV's 'WIDOWS'  
and Suzy Gilmour co-founder of Blood Group and founder member of Chisenhale  
Dance Space bring you THE OBSERVATION TOWER AND THE BALLYBUM PAPERS.

Powerful writing and windswept hymns, squeaking harmoniums and potatoes in  
arabesque combine to explore the myths of Protestant Ulster in action.

'I IS FOR IRISHMAN' No one in the world so witty and warmhearted as Pat.  
Sure he's rare fighter and loves potatoes.

Often poor little Pat must have them for dinner and supper as well!

Ach well, though! the two little girls from Ballybum, in that case isn't it just  
as well he likes them so much? Just as well that 'I IS FOR BRITON' was not  
only ..'strong and hardy and dogged and brave' but 'just and generous as well'...

Two little Irish girls growing up in Ballybum, the only village in Ireland with  
seven churches and only two pubs.

Two women with a choice, Fight or Flight?

The two parts of the evening give a shrewd and passionate account of childhood  
in a surge culture, of colonisation and exile.

Written by : Suzy Gilmour

Directed by : Philip Oarodot, member of Gay Sweatshop.

Music by : Siared Jones (musical collaborations with IQG, Ra Ra Zoo, Blood Group)

Performed by : Maureen O'Farrell and Suzy Gilmour.

'exhilarating to watch these two women tackle a complex political subject...and  
refine our perceptions of the issues involved'... PERFORMANCE MAGAZINE.

Contact: Alka Prabhakar day: 562 0089 . evening: 04024 55865.

Press Release ends

April 1986.

Written by Suzy Gilmour. Music by Siared Jones  
Directed by Philip Oarodot. With Maureen O'Farrell &c