

WOMEN'S HUNGER MARCHES



Burnley to London, Hunger March—1932

Maud Brown was the organiser of the Women's Hunger Marches in 1932, 1934 and 1936, and of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement in Wal Hannington's absence from about 1929 onwards. She writes:

'When I look back on old days and struggles, I realise that the conditions of life for working women have improved but little in my time. I was a member of the Edmonton Board of Guardians at a time when unemployment often meant separation of husband and wife in the workhouse, and the Relieving Officer would insist on the sale of any article of furniture before he gave an unemployed man a food voucher.

'In the twenties and thirties, hunger marches were aided by contingents of women from many parts led by such women as Emmie Lawther from Durham, Mrs Chater from Newcastle, Laura Johnson from Nottinghamshire and Fanny Deakin from Staffordshire. Harried by police and workhouse staff, these demonstrations had some hard-won success. They encouraged the fight against the means test and resisted Margaret Bondfield's efforts to force single women into domestic service.

'The means test still exists, however. Housing, it seems, is now in a worse condition than it was then. The fight for school meals still goes on. The children's milk has been taken away. Those women who are young now must not fail to remember that what has been won has to be kept. During this International Women's Year our old struggles should be kept constantly before all militant women.'



Marchers arrive at Co-op Hall, Holloway, London, 1932



Marchers near St Albans on way to London, 1936



Halt for a meal—1934



Emmie Lawther, two Scottish marchers and Maud Brown, 1936



Women marchers being given a civic welcome by the mayor of Islington, London, 1936



Unemployed marchers take a rest, 1934

The pictures on pages 119-122 are from Maud Brown's collection of photographs

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

W. H. Evans*

RECENT renewed interest in the 'environment' in general, and in the 'built environment' in particular, raises afresh numerous issues: agricultural policy, population growth, housing, transport, pollution, and the whole destructive wastefulness of the capitalist economy. As capitalism slips further and further into decline, there is much here which demands of the working class movement that it formulate with ever greater clarity both its alternative socialist strategy, and its immediate campaigning demands.

It would be well, though, to remind ourselves that these are not by any means new problems for the labour movement: the reactionary theme of 'population pollution' has been one which socialism has contended with at least since the time of Malthus; nineteenth-century radical thought from Victor Hugo to Kropotkin was much concerned with restoring a proper balance between town and country; and the Utopian socialists, Owen and Fourier, regarded their new forms of human settlement as the mould in which the new society could be cast. The most potent ingredient in British town and regional planning is still (in spite of recent backsliding) that which stems from these Utopian beginnings, and develops via 'arts and crafts', 'municipal socialism' and the 'garden city movement'.

We should remind ourselves also that the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels has been no less involved. It was Marx himself who led the rout of Malthus, and Engels who, while warning against the pitfalls of Utopianism, drew approving attention to the Utopians' aim of limiting the size of the town and reuniting town and country. In Book One of *Capital* will be found several footnotes quoting approvingly from Liebig on the 'natural laws of agriculture', and a discussion of that most 'modern' of topics—ecology. In a footnote to the chapter on capitalist accumulation, Marx comments that 'for a century and a half England has been indirectly exporting the soil of Ireland, without giving its cultivators any means for returning to the land the constituents of which it has been deprived.' And in the

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This article is the first of two dealing with the 'environmental question', and is concerned primarily with town planning. In our next issue, Pauline Robinson will be writing on 'An Ecological Look at Environmental Planning'.