

The Campaign

Despite the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, women's position has not improved that much. We believe this is largely because these Acts have not tackled the root of the problem, which lies in women's position in marriage.

Change is needed at two levels:

Government

We are campaigning for married women to be given a fair deal now. We demand:

1. The end of all Government discrimination against married women in tax and social security laws. The law must no longer treat married women as their husbands' dependents.
2. The right to go out to work with decent wages for all married women. This means providing proper training for married women and an end to the view that unemployment is worse for men than for women.
3. The provision of adequate child care facilities for the under-fives and after-school and holiday facilities for school-age children.
4. Adequate support for women who are caring for the old and the sick. In particular the invalid care allowance should be paid to married women.

Public Attitudes

We hope this campaign will bring about a radical change in public attitudes towards the role of marriage in our society. This means each individual rethinking what marriage means for her or him. In particular, we hope that girls and young women will look at the alternatives to marrying and that married women will look at how they can make their own marriages more fair to themselves.

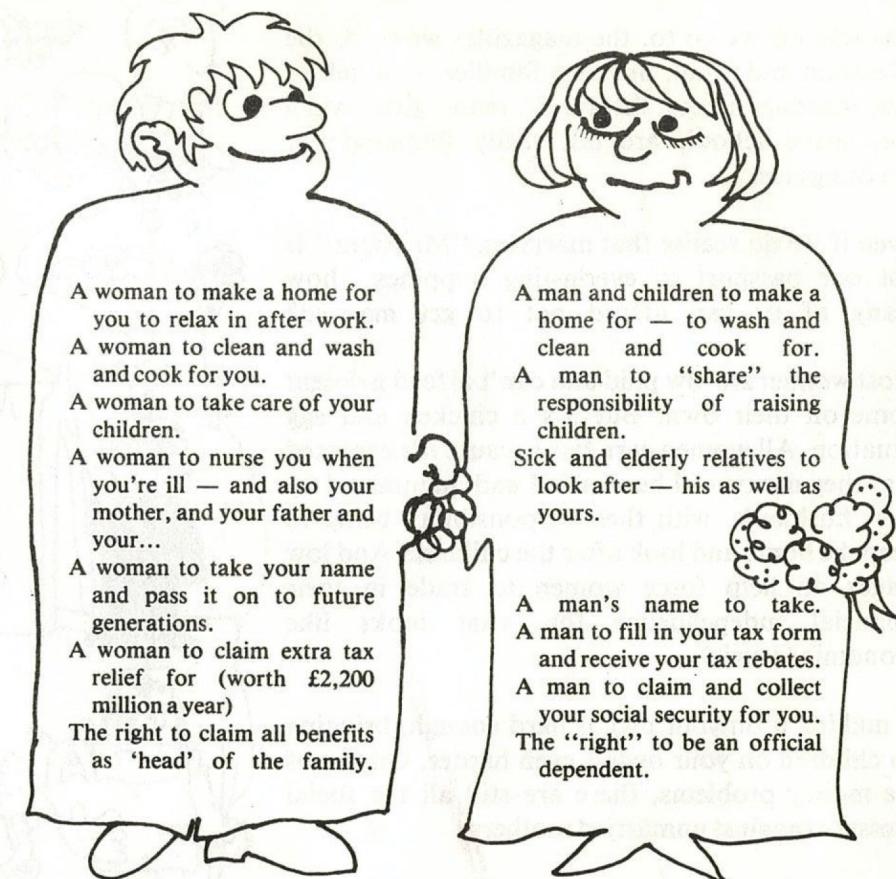
It also means changes in the models presented for both women and men by schoolbooks, comics, magazines, advertising, television, etc. Women's position in marriage is a crucial issue that affects all women's lives and it deserves responsible treatment by the media.

If you are interested in the Why Be A Wife Campaign, contact your local women's group at:

or the Why Be A Wife Campaign, c/o 214 Stapleton Hall Road, London N4.

Why be a Wife?

Marriage - what's in it for you?



Take away the orange blossom and confetti and the marriage vows are not so different from a job contract. The woman takes on the job of unpaid servant, and in exchange the man agrees to 'support' her and any children. But more and more wives are also going out to work — doing a poorly paid job on top of their unpaid job in the home.

Marriage is also a very convenient system for forcing men to go out to work, to 'support' a family, even when they can't get a decent job. It also means society gets housework and child care on the cheap.

So why do we Marry ?

The schools we go to, the magazines we read, the television and radio, our own families — all tell us that marriage is our future. So many girls, when they leave school, are not really prepared for anything else.

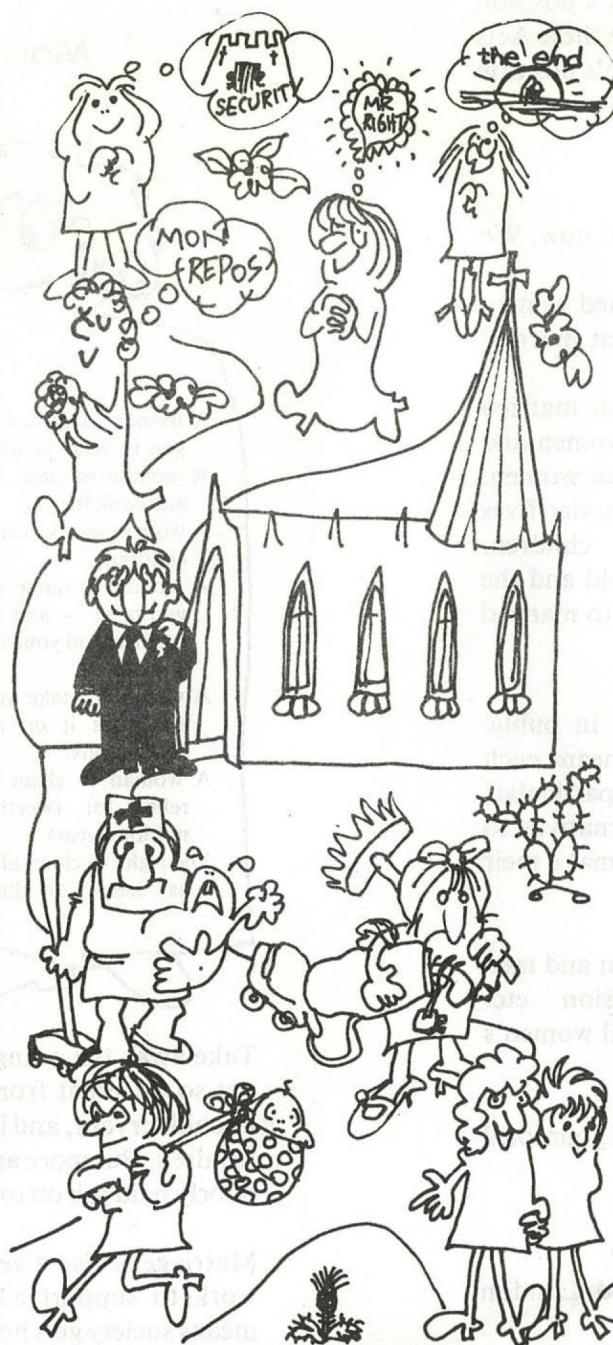
Even if we do realise that marrying "Mr Right" is not our passport to everlasting happiness, how many of us can afford not to get married?

Most women are low paid and can't afford a decent home on their own. But it's a chicken and egg situation. All women earn less because it's expected that they are or will be married and maintained by their husbands, with their responsibility being to keep the home and look after the children. And low wages do help force women to trade in their financial independence for what looks like economic security.

If making it on your own is hard enough, bringing up children on your own is even harder. On top of the money problems, there are still all the social pressures against unmarried mothers.

If everyone else is marrying, what sort of life is it for you on your own? For many women, marriage holds out the promise of love, sexual fulfillment and companionship for the rest of their life. This is still their hope despite the rising divorce rate. But a lonely middle and old age is not a happy prospect.

In short, whatever angle you look at it from, there doesn't seem to be any alternative. But is this really true?



The Alternatives

We believe that there are alternatives to marriage and also that there are alternative ways of being married.

*Firstly, marriage should not mean that a woman loses all her rights to be treated as an independent person. It is monstrous that the Inland Revenue and Social Security should discriminate against married women and treat them as their husbands' dependents.

*Decent nurseries and facilities for children of all ages are essential if one parent and the children are not to be trapped and isolated in the home.

*We must start overcoming the fear that if we don't get married we'll be left on our own. In fact, for many women marriage means isolation. Often they are stuck in the home all day and vulnerable to depression and mental distress.

On top of that, many women who get married cut themselves off from their friends and then find themselves even more alone if the marriage breaks up or their husband dies. Can we really expect just one person to provide all the companionship, friendship and sexual fulfillment we need for the rest of our lives?

There are alternatives to marriage. Groups of friends can set up home together — either as single people, or couples, or a combination of both. Responsibility for child care, housework, cooking, etc., can be spread among a wider group, reducing the burden on any one person.

Of course, this is difficult now because planners build houses and flats for the 'average' two parent family with 2.5 children. This not only makes it hard for groups of people to find places to live together, but it also means that the needs of single people and those with elderly relatives are ignored.

We realise that those who do decide not to get married may face many practical difficulties plus society's prejudices. But we do believe that it's essential for women to start questioning whether marriage is their only future, and for women who are married to question the kinds of marriage they are in. The question 'why be a wife?' needs to be asked by us all.