

We have received four objections from women readers of Parting Company about our insert of WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK material in the last issue. As a result of this insert, we have certainly lost one potential subscriber and possibly more.

All the objections centre on allegations of manipulation, abuse, and obstruction on the part of adherents to Wages for Housework and/or the Kings Cross Women's Centre aimed at women and other groups which do not subscribe to their politics.

Partizans was set up in 1978 as a co-ordinating group of many disparate organisations and individuals who find the activities of RTZ objectionable or repugnant, in whole or in part. While it has always remained such - with its annual presence/demonstration at the company's AGM, the most obvious and visible sign of this "umbrella" role - for the past four years Partizans has run on a day-to-day basis under the aegis of a London-based collective. While the collective meetings are open to anyone who subscribes to Partizans aims and methods, in practise the monthly collective meetings are usually attended by long-standing Partizans' campaigners. For around two years, the "core" collective has comprised Paul Thomas ("green", computer expert, occasional editor of PARTING COMPANY), Angie Aldridge (convenor of Big Mountain Support Group, long-standing worker indigenous peoples), Neil Collins (community worker, and parent trying to persuade his children to avoid 'Macdonalds!'), Patrick Trench (FoE organiser, trucker for recycled paper coop, expert on model cars and antique bikes), Simon Chambers (bricoleur, youth and community worker, sculptor and artist), Roger Moody (community worker, journalist and co-founder of both CIMRA and Partizans). During this period, other valuable and influential members of the collective have included Robyn Holder (Aboriginal Land Rights Support Group - whose current work has kept her away from recent meetings), Alan Dalton of the Labour Research Group, Chris Whitehouse (computer expert and Partizans "think-tank" whose work also keeps him away at present), Carmel Cadden of WNFIP (who left nearly two years ago), Tarin Brokenshire (former worker with CANUC and SWAPO, now with Chile Solidarity) and several others, including Andrew Peel. All the input of these supporters has counted towards formulating Partizans' policy and deciding activities.

During the period 1980-88 Partizans has produced some form of newsletter, and this has often been mailed with inserts from other groups. Such inserts have included: CANUC material, TICL material, Survival International material, Greenham Women's material, City Anti-apartheid group material, and notices about Wages for Housework events.

It is important to point out that ALL the groups, whose publicity material we have carried, have directly supported, or participated in, Partizans-led actions.

The occasion of the publishing and circulation of the last PARTING COMPANY has been the first to draw any criticism from anyone over this practise of sending out inserts.

It is only rarely that PARTING COMPANY has given an editorial "imprimatur" to the activities of another group, and this has almost always been in the context of their performing actions directly relevant to the aims of Partizans: the Campaign against Namibian Uranium Contracts is an obvious example; the actions around the Australian Bicentennial "celebrations" are perhaps the best example of Partizans giving-over considerable editorial space and funding to publicising activities which it implicitly approves and explicitly supports. On occasion Partizans has also joined in round-robin appeals organised by other groups. Its name has been "lent" on these occasions to specific objectives and not to the organising group.

The practise of putting inserts into mailings is, of course, a long-established one among groups of all political hues. While they are rarely the main means of raising support for a campaign, they can be an important one - and gaining access to "movement" mailing-lists can be a highly lucrative affair. Some groups/magazines charge for the service, others don't. Partizans never has done. It has always inserted on the basis that, if there is room, and it doesn't add to mailing costs, and if the specific aims of the campaign do not manifestly conflict with those of Partizans - then, first come, first served.

The controversy now raised by our sending-out Wages for Housework leaflets has caused us to re-examine this practice - we did so at our last collective meeting. We decided not to change the practice for the following reasons:

i) Many groups which have asked (or might ask) us to carry inserts have other aims, or structures, or *modi operandi*, with which collective members - and a lot of other Partizans supporters - might not find favour. For example, SWAPO or AAM workers are in conflict with City AAM, though both organisations oppose apartheid, South Africa's colonisation of Namibia, and RTZ's operations in southern Africa. Similarly, anti-nuclear activists fervently wish that CANUC and SWAPO would officially condemn not just the Rossing mine as presently operated, but any future uranium mining in Namibia, and nuclear power in principle. This potentially very divisive difference of opinion has not prevented anti-nuclear activists and CANUC supporters cooperating successfully for some years (nor, since this is the matter to hand, Partizans from carrying inserts for both CANUC and the Anti-Nuclear Campaign). It is hard to see how any political campaign with a "hard edge" wouldn't have potential dissidents within our membership: and why not?

In our view, trying to evaluate the "hidden programme", or "real motives"

of groups associated with Partizans is neither realistic nor necessary. Even if we did, what would be the result? We would then be discriminating against some groups within our support network, and favouring others. We would be making political alliances which it is not within our brief to make.

ii). The alternative to selecting certain groups and excluding others from such "favoured treatment" is not to make any inserts at all. This would make for a pretty thin, colourless, Parting Company - as we would logically also have to exclude even notices about other groups' events or actions. But more importantly, we would be taking this step for the wrong reasons: simply to play it safe and placate supporters who've criticised us on the sole issue of giving space to WFH material.

iii) Partizans was accused by one supporter of being "liberal" in not taking a stand against WFH. In other words, we should be making investigations of the group's activities and operations, discussing these in our collective and expressing solidarity for the undoubtedly large numbers of women who object to how WFH operates. But it is precisely because this is a highly controversial issue that has riven women's groups for some years that Partizans - as a mixed collective addressing a wide spectrum of concerns (environmental, trade union rights, indigenous land rights, multi-national power, etc) ~~we~~ cannot take sides. Large numbers of women do support WFH - as evidenced by the support mustered for the particular event we helped publicise in our last issue of Parting Company. To our knowledge there has never been any suggestion that WFH is a "front" for organisations with which we would fundamentally disagree (which is why comparisons with the National Front or various Tory "peace campaigns" are quite inaccurate). Were we a women's group, or identified as part of the women's movement, clearly our attitude might be different, and we might be bound to adopt a stand for or against WFH.

iv). Since there clearly are fundamental issues for women at stake here, which are of importance to our membership - and since it is important to us that having carried WFH inserts (and those from campaigns which do not support WFH), other points of view should be heard, we are very willing to carry a statement/leaflet in the next issue of Parting Company, from any woman/group of women which criticises the politics of WFH. If this provoked WFH into claiming that we were being biased, we would answer in the same way that we are now replying to critics of our decision to carry WFH material.

In conclusion, we believe - not as a collective, but as individuals involved in various campaigns - that "creeping censorship" in media channels is an evil to be strenuously opposed. We are a very modest "channel" of communication, but the principle does not change, whether we deplore government restrictions on statements for broadcast by Sinn Fein, or our own refusal, on similar grounds of expediency, to

disseminate material sent to us by groups which are allied to us.

Undoubtedly there are real issues around WFH which need to be recognised and debated. Unilateral censorship of WFH (or any other such group's material) or a strategic withdrawal from the field of controversy, simply reinforces a trend which we believe the vast majority of Partizans' supporters would deplore

[This statement was drafted, discussed and agreed in toto at the London Partizans collective meeting held on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1988, attended by: Angie Aldridge, Kate Robinson, Andrew Peel, Paul Thomas, Neil Collins, Simon Chambers, Roger Moody - and later agreed to by Patrick Trench.]