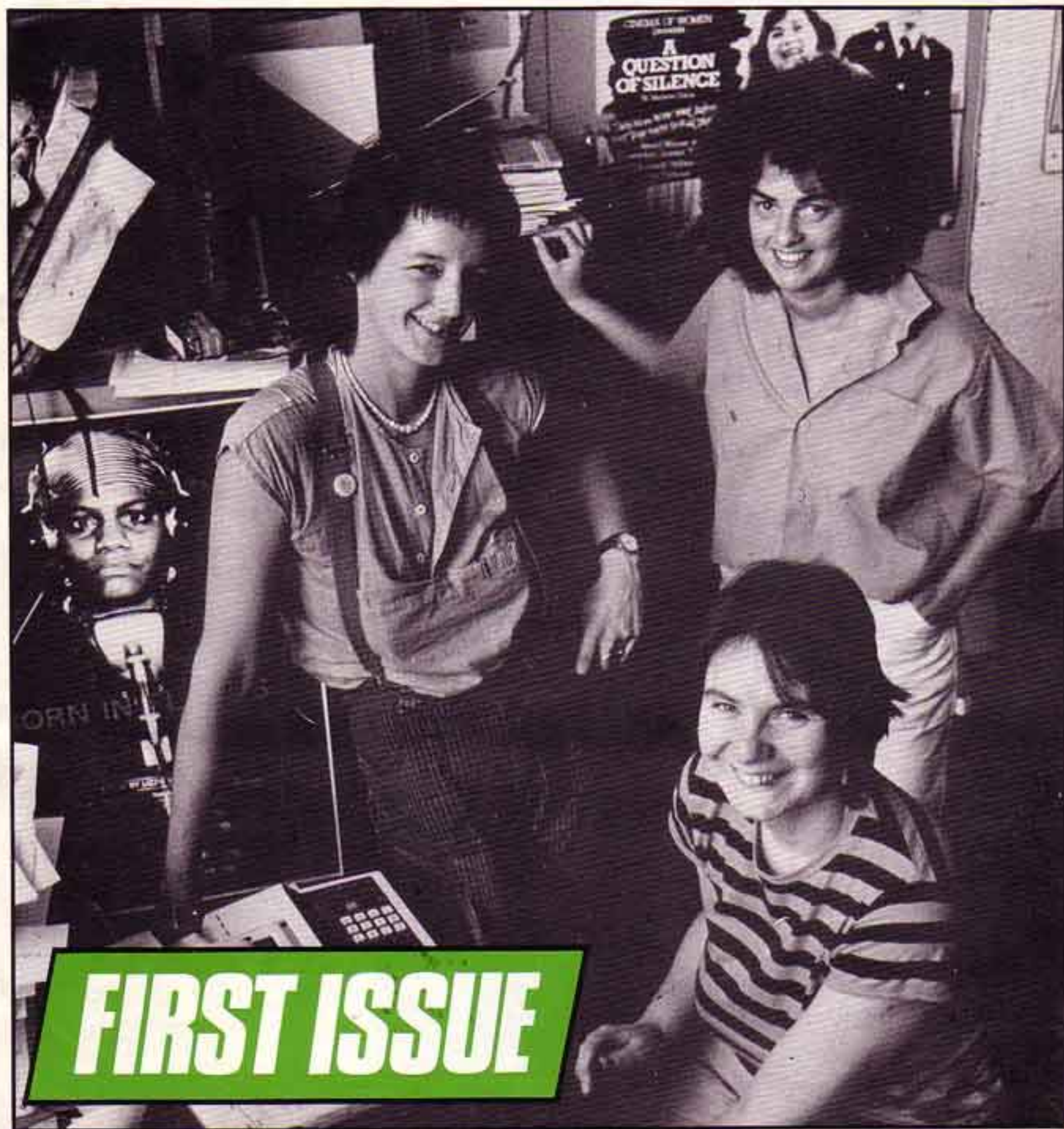


# EQUALITY

MAGAZINE  
OF THE EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITIES  
COMMISSION

NO 1  
AUTUMN  
1983

# NOW!



**FIRST ISSUE**

# EQUALITY NOW!

NO 1 AUTUMN '83

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**COVER PICTURE:** Cinema of Women by Sheila Gray/Format.

# Letter to our readers

WELCOME to Equality Now! the new magazine of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

This 20-page, quarterly, free magazine, is a new venture. It replaces the Commission's tabloid newspaper, EOC News, which ran for four years.

Equality of opportunity for everyone, regardless of sex, colour, creed, race or religion, is a vital issue. Discrimination pervades all aspects of our social and working life, whether it be subtle or overt, hidden or unintentional.

The EOC exists to eliminate sex discrimination and to tell you what your rights are — and Equality Now! aims to highlight the continuing efforts to achieve those rights.

The EOC was set up to ensure effective enforcement of our two major equality laws — the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act — and to help eliminate discrimination in a variety of areas: your pay packet, promotion prospects, training, education, getting a job, buying a house, buying on credit.

We can help you take a case to court or industrial tribunal; give you guidance and back-up and arrange for legal assistance.

As well as investigating areas of inequality we have a duty to make recommendations to the Government about the operation of existing law. We are also continually suggesting improvements in laws not covered by the Sex Discrimination Act — social security, pensions and taxation laws.

The EOC has the power to hold formal investigations

and if satisfied that practices are unlawful can issue non-discrimination notices requiring that they cease.

The EOC also carries out research and studies issues that affect the progress of equality. Many of the findings have been published, pointing out how improvements can be made and policy changed.

We can award grants to voluntary organisations and individuals for educational and research projects as well as conferences.

A society that provides for equal opportunities in its national legislation must also work towards a change in values and attitudes. In this issue we look at the unique project at the all-boys school at Hackney Downs, London, initiated by women at the school as a means of trying to change the traditional attitudes towards women.

We also look at equal pay for work of equal value and changes to the Equal Pay Act. And there are articles on changes in the social security system, the EOC's WISE project for next year, court cases we've backed and research projects we've funded.

We welcome comments and criticisms from our readers. In the next issue we hope to have a letters page. So let us know what your views are.



Catherine Cairncross

## Sexual harassment victory for Ellie

Recruitment officer Ellie Walsh was sacked when she poured lager over her firm's accountant who she said was sexually harassing her.

Backed by the EOC, she took her case to the industrial tribunal and won.

Her case was heard in Manchester in September and was the first case of sexual harassment to be brought to a tribunal under the Sex Discrimination Act, although others have been settled out of court.

Twenty-one year old Ellie worked in Stockport for William Rutter Management Holdings Ltd, an employment agency. She was at an office party in a local nightclub when the incident happened last October.

She told the tribunal that Jim Devine, an accountant working for the firm kept interrupting the conversation she was having with some women employees. He tried lifting her up over the bar and he put his hands around her neck.

Ellie claimed that he kept prodding and touching her. He then grabbed hold of her arm and she slapped him. He tried pushing a glass of lager into her hands. "Then I took the glass off him and poured it over him," said Ellie.

Ellie then added that he came back later and said "as from an hour ago you are sacked!"

Her dismissal was later confirmed by the managing director, Bill Rutter. When she had asked him why, he said he didn't wish to discuss it, but said it had nothing to do with the incident at the club.

Her solicitor Ms Elizabeth Steele, told the tribunal: "What happened that night was sexual harassment. It could not have happened but for the fact that she was a woman."

The company had never complained of her work. They had given her a loan to buy a car, had paid for a personnel management course and had given her money for a deposit on a flat. "There is only one incident that gave rise to her dismissal that was what happened on Thursday night," added Ms Steele.

Tribunal chairman Hugh Pearson said: "We have found that the dismissal which took place was due to the incident on that Thursday night. We find the applicant's complaint is justified."

Ellie Walsh was awarded £2,255 which included £350 injury to feelings.

EOC solicitor Ann Saxon said afterwards: "It is a significant victory. For the first time an industrial tribunal has considered the issue of sexual harassment in relation to sex discrimination and the decision means that women have some hope of protection under sex discrimination law from sexual harassment."

## Write on

IF you're after lively practical advice and insights on how the EEC system can be used for the benefit of women, then a new book published by Rights of Women Europe is a must.

They're a sub group of ROW — Rights of Women, a collective of feminist legal workers — who have brought out *Women's Rights and EEC: A Guide for Women in the UK*.

The book gives clear explanations of how EEC laws and policies can be a powerful aid for women's campaigns in the UK. Cartoons by Fanny Tribble add to the overall impressive package.

The project has been funded by the EOC.

*Where do we go from here?* is the title of a new book produced by Gatehouse — the North Manchester adult literacy project.

It tells how 11 people survived as adult non-readers in a modern society that doesn't tolerate not being able to read and write.

You can find everything you want to know about sex equality in EOC's Information Centre!

Open weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the Centre is a freely available unique source of material, situated on the 4th floor of the EOC's headquarters at Overseas House, Quay Street, Manchester. Telephone 061-833 9244 for details.

# Infront

## Women find a new voice in the cinema world

Mainstream cinema hasn't very much to offer women in terms of their personal experiences and what they feel they can relate to.

It is about exaggerated adventure and colour, drama and violence, romance and escapism.

This in itself isn't bad. But it isn't good either; mainly because when it comes to reflecting what women really feel and want to say, it falls a long way short.

Our money-spinning film industry is male dominated and consequently we don't get to see the women's perspective on celluloid. And if we do, the film has invariably been made by a man. Women do not have a strong voice in influencing what films are made and how they are made.

But thanks to feminist film distribution groups like Cinema of Women, films made by women, for women, about women, are being brought to a much wider audience.

COW is committed to distributing feminist films. It aims to provide women film-makers with a means of getting their work shown to a wider audience and made more easily available to women.

COW see films as being used primarily as starting points for discussions which question women's role in society. The films and videos they have available for distribution are suitable for schools, higher educational institutions, women's groups, trade unions, community centres, youth clubs and independent cinemas.

Working from one crowded room in Clerkenwell Close, London, COW has a catalogue of over 40 films and videos for

hire, covering a wide variety of women's issues — health, work, images of women, sexuality and violence.

These include: *The Long Shadows of the Plantation*; a black working woman's account of her lifelong fight against racial and sexual oppression; *Here Comes the Bride*; a look at romance and marriage, through the eyes of teenage girls, married women and single mothers; and one of their latest videos *Judy Punches Back*, made by English Women's Aid, about domestic violence.

One of the most notable and controversial films on their list is *A Question of Silence* made by the Dutch feminist Marleen Gorris.

Three women, who have never met before, kill a shopkeeper after he catches one of them shoplifting. The woman psychiatrist assigned to them becomes personally involved in finding out why they killed him.

This is the first contemporary feature film that COW has distributed and the first of their films to have a commercial London opening.

Penny Ashbrook, one of the COW collective of six said: "We were pleased with the response from *A Question of Silence*. There has been a lot of demand for the film and it has been shown at most of the regional film theatres."

She added: "Our films do go to a wide variety of mixed audiences. We want them to get to as many women as possible. There are some films that we would prefer to be seen by women-only audiences, but we're conscious of the fact that many women only have access to films in a mixed situation."



Office scene: *Three of the COW collective*.

COW was born out of Cinesisters, a discussion group which met in the late 70s and early 80s to talk about how important it was to be making films about women, but then having to let them go to a non-feminist distribution network.

Eileen McNulty explained. "We have to be careful that films don't get misappropriated. A film about body image for example could get into the porn market, which isn't the market it was intended for."

In a busy week, COW has around 30 film and video bookings. Eileen said: "There is such a need for women's films. We have a different set of contacts rather than a mainstream distribution. The cinema outlet for independent film is very limited and we have to be very active in our publicity and in the promotion of our films."

"If we feel that a particular film will be of interest to certain groups, for example, trade unions, or teachers we will contact them and let them know about it. There are only a handful of cinemas that use independent film at all, so there obviously isn't the exposure that there is in mainstream cinema."

Naturally, distribution means a lot of paper work publicising films, responding to contact from film makers, following up films they've heard about, taking bookings, cleaning and repairing damaged film and advising groups that need help with showing films.

Eileen said: "We all go along and view films that we have an interest in. We go to film festivals, Edinburgh, for example, to see the different films. We also identify areas that we feel are not been given the exposure they should be given, like films about black and third world women."

COW believes that part of the feminist film making process is to de-mystify areas of film production, and place much more emphasis on sharing skills.

Penny explained. "Once women get involved in film making it will introduce more women into filming. Many people are totally mystified by the distribution process and generally there isn't much interest in it. But we feel that you can't approach film in separate categories; it's a complete process, production, distribution and viewing."

Catherine Cairncross



A scene from *A Question of Silence*.