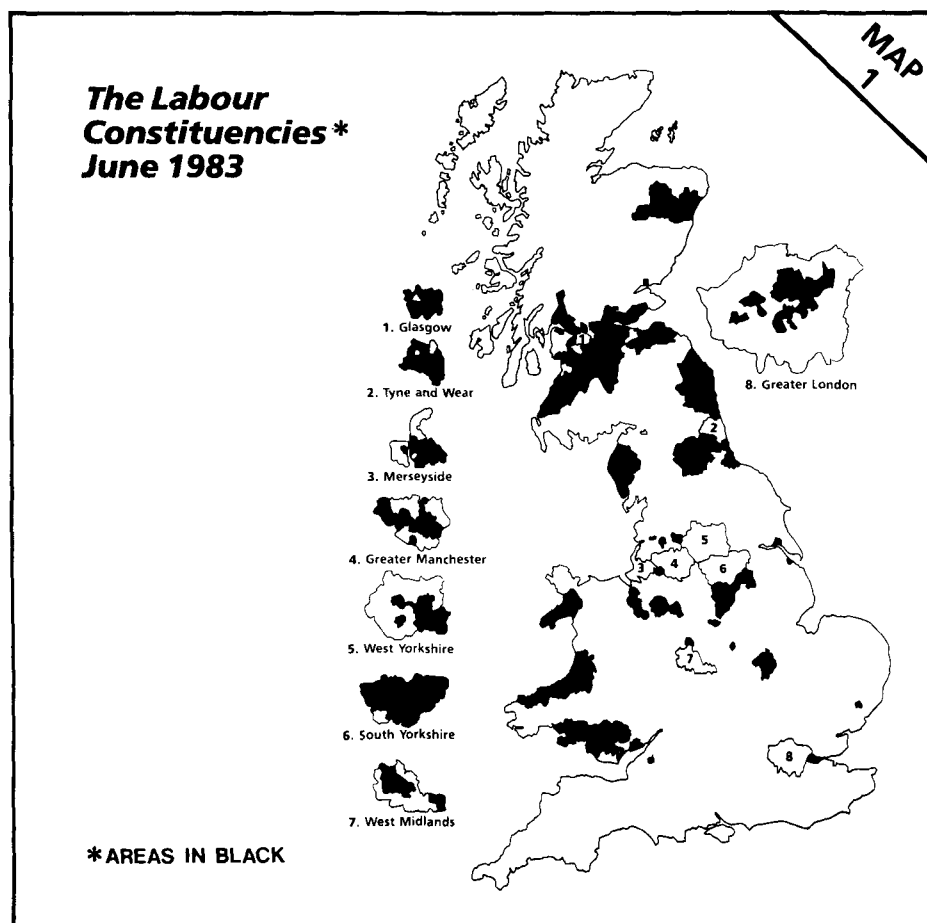


Doreen Massey

## The Contours of Victory.... Dimensions of Defeat



Compared with 1979 the Labour Party lost a fifth of its vote at this election. You have to go back to 1918 to see its electoral base so small. Map 2 is not a map of Tory seats. It is a map of Tory seats in which the second place (ie, the main electoral opposition to Thatcherism) is now held by the Liberals or the SDP. This is the case in *two thirds* of the seats now held by the Tories. In terms of popular vote this election may not have been a landslide for Thatcher but there can be no doubt it was a disaster for Labour.

Moreover what we have seen is not just a collapse in absolute electoral support but also a shift in its composition. It is a curious mixture of trends. On the one hand there is the persistence of some of

the solid old patterns — the regional 'heartlands' are still largely red (or Labour, anyway). On the other hand there have been some striking shifts in the social composition of Labour's vote.

### Unemployment

The evidence on social composition is perhaps the most significant and the most important to get to grips with politically. First there is the fact that has for some time at an aggregate level been all too obvious: unemployment cannot in itself be relied upon to produce radicalism, still less socialist politics. Margaret Thatcher in 1983 became the first prime minister since 1959 to lead a government to re-election after a full term (more or less) in office. No government this century has

achieved an increase in its majority on the scale which hers achieved. And she did this when way over three million people were unemployed, even if you only count those registering. We have known this (though not perhaps known what to do with the information) for some time. Part of the evidence we now have, from opinion polls, analyses of the election results and so forth says something worse. It isn't that people don't care about unemployment. Most polls indicated it was the issue people cared about most. The trouble was that Labour was not widely seen to have a credible alternative to the problem which had any real meaning to people, or which it could communicate. The unemployed themselves were not overwhelmingly convinced. Polls abound to show that less than half of them voted Labour and that, perhaps most indicative of all, nearly half of unemployed people between 18 and 22 years old just didn't bother to turn up at the polls.

### The skilled working class

But at least more unemployed people voted Labour than voted any other way. This wasn't true of another supposed bedrock of its support — skilled working-class voters. Definitions vary and are often hard to pin down in the opinion polls, but a series of different enquiries indicated a clear majority of skilled workers opting for the Tories. ITN's Harris Research poll showed 38% voting Tory as against 32% voting Labour, and ITN's analysis of constituency results showed a similar pattern. The BBC/Gallup survey analysed by Ivor Crewe in the *Guardian* showed Labour with 35% of skilled manual voters, as against the Conservatives 39%. What's more Labour allegiance had dropped 12 points since 1979.

Skilled workers are not the only element of the organised working class, but they are an important one. Much debate in recent years has centred on its decline as an element of national social structure and alarm bells have been sounded about the erosion through occupational and social change of parts of Labour's natural base. (It is usually the male and manual bits which are the focus of those analyses). What seems evident as the dust begins to clear after June 9 is that it is not just the declining importance of this group as an element of society which should be worrying, but the assumption that it is part of Labour's natural base. The numbers indicate

(though this *has* to be provisional) that it is deserting Labour as much as it is declining in numbers. The Labour Party — on this showing — is losing its skilled working class base as much through an inability to appeal to it politically as through the long erosion of social change.

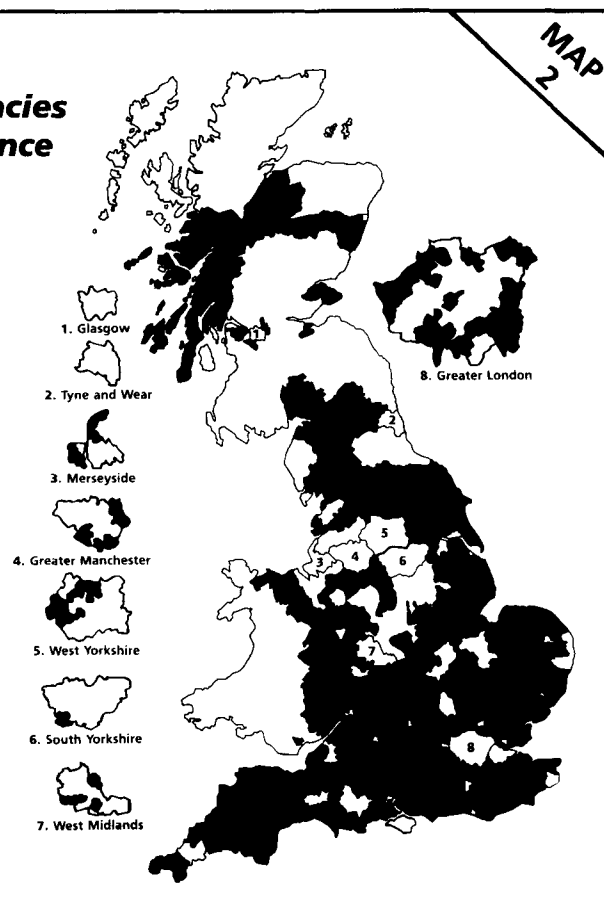
#### The professional and managerial vote

Nor — save for some exceptions which we'll mention later — does Labour seem to have captured the professional and managerial vote. The technocrats and modern managers who voted for Wilson in 1964 and in large numbers for Thatcher in 1979 seem this time either to have stayed Tory or voted SDP. The politics of these groups deserve attention. They are groups which are actually increasing in size. They are important elements of ideology-construction — their image (which changes) is always a significant building block — whether it be through technology and planning, entrepreneurship and individualism, or simply the good life to which everyone is supposed to aspire. Labour failed to appeal to them. But again the response to that failure needs thought. Adapting to social change does not mean seeing what's growing, asking it what it wants and putting something appropriate in the manifesto — yachts for everyone. It was the ideological and political dominance of this group (as opposed to its conversion to socialist politics) which, particularly in the period 1964 to 1970, laid the basis for Thatcherism. It was the dominance of that form of centralist (in both senses) state intervention, concepts of neutral technology, of sensible rationality organised by the liberal elite for the benefit of all, that made it so easy for Margaret Thatcher to point to state intervention in industry, and to unresponsive social services, and lumbering and undemocratic nationalised industries, and say with such success we want none of it.

There were other groups, too, for whom Labour really ought to have been the obvious choice, but where it failed even to win the largest share of votes. Table 1 gives the details. Only 33% of voters over 65 voted Labour (though the swing away was very small). 21% of the growing numbers of office and clerical staff voted Labour (though again the trend on 1979 is at least not negative — this share held steady). And for youth (18 — 22 year-olds) Labour ranked third, after the Tories and the Alliance, with 29%.

### Tory Constituencies Where the Alliance Came Second \* June 1983

\* AREAS IN BLACK



So for which sections of society was Labour the first choice on June 9? Apart from the unemployed, Labour was the party most voted for by council tenants, public sector workers and blacks. It was also still the main party among trade unionists as a whole, with 39% of the vote. One contrast which is notable is that Labour did considerably better among semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers than among skilled. Its percentage (44%) was higher, it was the largest party, and the fall below the 1979 figure (11 points) was marginally less than for skilled manual workers.

So what do you get when you put all that together? First, that most Labour voters are still from those groups that have long been Labour's base. That was reinforced in 1983 because it was the less 'typical' who showed some of the biggest swings away — middle class, non-union and owner-occupier. But as we have seen, the 'traditional' vote too was eroded and eroded differentially. Labour could become increasingly the party of more marginal, less skilled and more oppressed groups. It is less the party of skilled manual workers and office and clerical staff. In the Tory victory of 1959, 62% of manual workers voted Labour; in 1983 it

was 38%. Perhaps most clearly of all Labour has not established itself as the party of any of the sectors of society which are based in the growth parts of the economy.

#### Regional variations

One reason the picture is not as simple as that, though, is geography. As usual, there were big variations between different parts of the country. Table 2 gives some elements of the broad picture, and it makes interesting reading.

First of all an element of relative stability. The heartlands are still the heartlands. The fall in Labour's share of the vote in Wales, Scotland and the North of England was less than in the South, and the Tory fall was larger. One of the clearest dichotomies in the electoral pattern was between mining and non-mining areas, with a very much stronger shift away from Labour in the latter. But the regions of the industrial periphery did not all behave in the same way. While in Scotland Labour did relatively well, in the North East the two-party swing was around the national average and in Wales the long process of erosion of the Labour vote continued. From holding 60% of the vote and all but 4 seats in 1966

TABLE  
1**Which way did people vote?**

| Group                             | % Voting for: |              |          |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
|                                   | Labour        | Conservative | Alliance |
| Council tenants                   | 57*           | 19           | 24       |
| Public-sector workers             | 46*           | 29           | 25       |
| Unemployed people                 | 45*           | 30           | 26       |
| Semi-skilled and unskilled manual | 44*           | 29           | 28       |
| Trades unionists                  | 39*           | 32           | 28       |
| Private-sector workers            | 37*           | 36           | 27       |
| Skilled manual workers            | 35            | 39*          | 27       |
| People over 65                    | 33            | 48*          | 19       |
| People between 18 and 22          | 29            | 41*          | 30       |
| Owner-occupiers                   | 25            | 47*          | 28       |
| Office & clerical workers         | 21            | 55*          | 24       |
| Professional & managerial         | 12            | 62*          | 27       |

\* Denotes largest share

SOURCE: figures drawn from the analysis by Ivor Crewe of the BBC/Gallup Survey, reported in The Guardian, 13 June 1983.

TABLE  
2**Regional Variations****Percentage Changes from 1979**

| Region                | % Voting for: |              |          |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
|                       | Labour        | Conservative | Alliance |
| 1. Scotland           | -6.6%         | -3.0%        | +11.9%   |
| 2. North              | -9.7%         | -1.9%        | +12.0%   |
| 3. Yorks & Humberside | -9.2%         | -1.0%        | +10.8%   |
| 4. North West         | -6.7%         | -3.7%        | +10.7%   |
| 5. East Midlands      | -8.7%         | -2.3%        | +11.5%   |
| 6. Wales              | -9.8%         | -1.7%        | +10.6%   |
| 7. East Anglia        | -12.0%        | -0.2%        | +12.2%   |
| 8. West Midlands      | -8.7%         | -2.3%        | +11.5%   |
| 9. Greater London     | -10.1%        | -2.0%        | +13.2%   |
| 10. South West        | -9.9%         | -0.5%        | +10.9%   |
| 11. South East        | -10.9%        | -0.2%        | +11.4%   |



Source: David Lipsey, Sunday Times, 12 June 1983

Labour now has 37% (still 9% above the UK average), and 12 out of 38 seats. Even in the valleys, majorities were substantially cut.

More generally the broad North-South divide was reinforced. Many of the things I have already mentioned — proportion of council house tenants, for instance, and proportion working in the public sector — themselves reveal a contrast between North and South. There is also, in addition to this, an independent regional effect. But the pattern is more complicated than a simple 'Two Britains, North and South'.

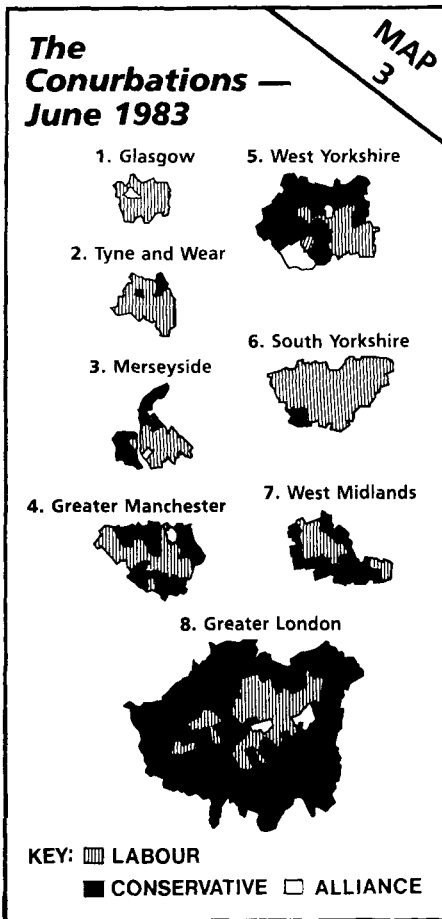
**The sunbelt**

It is that new region which crosses all the old boundaries — the sunbelt — which most epitomises the South. It includes the South East outside of London, the northern chunk of the South West (Bristol, Bath etc.) and East Anglia. Labour has here been virtually annihilated. It has now lost all the new towns, with their relatively high proportions of skilled manual workers, and also of professional/managerial, and non-manual workers. But it has also lost Swindon and Slough, both towns with above-average percentages of manual workers (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled) and with employment structures still more than nationally built around manufacturing.

Such places Labour ought not to lose. And were they in the North maybe it wouldn't have lost them. But they are on the M4 corridor. Swindon has recently been dubbed the fastest growing economy in Europe, and the growth is around new technology. (Not that that helps everyone — both male and female unemployment rates are above the national average). Higher proportions than nationally own their own houses in both towns and the council housing is largely of the new expanded-town variety. The population is on or above the national average of car-ownership. In this context both towns on June 9 were lost by Labour to the Tories. Nor in this case can the Alliance be blamed. In both towns the SDP came a rather poor third.

**Tory stronghold**

But this crescent of high-tech land between Bristol and Cambridge is on the whole *not* like Swindon and Slough. This is the land of the professional and managerial groups. Just taking the South East outside London, of 107 constituencies all but 33 have a higher-than-national



proportion of people with degrees and/or professional and vocational qualifications, and all but 17 have a higher-than-national proportion of professional and managerial groups. In this relatively prosperous stretch of country it is not just that the Tories now hold almost all the seats but that in the vast majority of them Labour is not even second (Map 2).

This raises issues, again, about how to fight back. This part of the country was seen before the election as the vital battleground between the Conservatives and the Alliance. It is a battle which the Tories clearly won. Whatever the Alliance may say about its proportion of the popular vote, the fact is that it failed to take seats from the Tories in places where it might reasonably have been expected to do so. One reason for this was quite simply that, certainly on its SDP side, it wasn't the Tories that the Alliance was fighting. On paper the best Alliance prospects were in this southern region in seats where the Liberals had already done well. But it was precisely in these seats that their vote rose least. Why? — because there was no more Labour vote to squeeze. Did it never cross its mind to squeeze the Tory vote? As in so many

other places — a number of Conservative marginal London boroughs, for instance — the SDP in this election was quite simply not anti-Thatcher.

### West Midlands

But if the sunbelt was the battleground which Thatcher had to defend against the Alliance, the West Midlands was the trophy to be won from Labour. Throughout the campaign it was billed as the region that Labour was going to lose, and lose in spite of the catastrophic rise in unemployment. Some of it indeed had already been lost. Skilled male trade unionists from the West Midlands voting Tory were one of the symbols of Thatcher's triumph in 1979. And yet in 1983 Thatcherism in the end could not complete the job. Labour's share of the total vote fell in the West Midlands by less than in any other region of Great Britain apart from Scotland and the North West (Table 2). Indeed it is very interesting that the shift from Labour in both the West Midlands and the North West was lower than it was in two of its supposed classic heartlands — the North and Wales. The economies of the West Midlands and the North West are far more based on manufacturing, especially the engineering groups of manufacturing industries, than on the old basics of coal, steel, shipbuilding etc. Their decline in employment is more recent, their labour movements are different, and their propensity to vote Labour has never been as solid. Their Labour-voter starting point was lower, therefore, but it is still true that this time the vote in these regions slipped less. Not much consolation, but something.

### Inner cities

There is another very clear geographical contrast which overlays that between North and South. Labour did far better in the inner areas of big cities than it did elsewhere (Maps 3). Liverpool was the clearest case. Labour took five out of six seats in the city itself, gaining Broadgreen and West Derby. In the West Midlands it was in the conurbation that Labour did best, losing only Northfield, gaining Erdington and chalking up increased majorities in five seats. Manchester, Glasgow and Newcastle stayed primarily Labour. And London reversed its history of swinging more to the Tories; this time its swing against Labour was noticeably lower than elsewhere.

Moreover apart from in the outer

suburbs, where the Conservatives won, in the cities it was Labour which came second (as in the North) and not the Alliance. Indeed in Sheffield the Liberals were not only second to the Conservatives in Hallam, but second to Labour in Brightside and Hillsborough and the SDP second to Labour in Central. All this may be indicative of the changing balance of big city politics. But it is not a gradual progression from urban to rural. It is very much the electoral patterns of the inner cities which stand out from the rest, especially as you come South. In part this must be a reflection of demographic change, and possibly too the first fruits of the attempts to build new alliances in some inner urban areas.

In London, Labour certainly did relatively well in those constituencies (Islington North, Hampstead, Hornsey, Peckham, Tooting, Southall . . .) with high proportions of Irish, blacks and progressive middle classes. Over the country as a whole, Labour's vote fell by nearly 10% where less than 10% of households were black, and by less than 7% where the black population was a higher proportion. The pattern also fits the *Sunday Times* survey finding that those most concerned about social services and the NHS were much more likely to vote Labour. ITN's poll captured the character of some of these constituencies perfectly: it found a high correlation of Labour voting with high proportions of unemployed people, high proportions of blacks, and what it called a strong polytechnic and university presence. Such areas also have, in increasing numbers of cases, active and left-wing local parties.

### What's Left?

The Labour Party is left with two clear geographical bases — the regional heartlands and the inner areas of the big cities (see map 1). Both are in economic decline. But they are very different politically: the old Labourism dominates the regions, the new alliances are growing in some cities. Weaving these two together is a real challenge. They are different strengths, and Thatcher has already declared her intention of attacking both. But necessary concern with these bases must not deflect us from Labour's other task: how to win support for progressive politics amongst the new and growing sections of society. □

Northern Ireland, which is not discussed in this article, will be considered in the August issue — ed.



**Sexual harassment at work is becoming an issue for collective concern. But will trade unions be able to come to terms with this new area of struggle.**

Vicky Seddon

# Keeping Women in their Place

At first sight, sexual harassment seems like a bit of a joke. Especially to men. 'After all, it is only a bit of fun. It helps pass the day. And anyway, women like it.' Little research has been done in the area of sexual harassment at work,<sup>1</sup> but what there is shows clearly that men do not take it seriously. Few of the men who replied to *Cosmopolitan's* recent questionnaire<sup>2</sup> on the issue thought that women disliked sexual advances at work, and half of them admitted to making advances there. As for whether or not women like it, 11% of women workers (full time and part time) reported that they had been the subject of persistent, unwanted advances in their work situation, so a large number of women don't like it! 61% of the women in the same survey believed that men sometimes behave badly towards women simply because they are women. Even the women of the Liverpool NALGO<sup>3</sup> branch who initiated a survey amongst their members were astonished at the scale of the evidence they found: 25% of the women replying to their survey had experienced harassment in their current workplace, and 50% had experienced it at some time in their working lives. Apparently, harassment of this kind is a common occurrence for working women, but has been experienced personally and privately by the individual woman, not shared and discussed or seen as a collective issue.

Sexual harassment is used specifically to describe behaviour which relates to the woman as a sexual being. For the women in the workplace is not simply an employee: she is unable to leave her gender at home, much as she might like to. Classical Marxist thought has assumed that the capitalist system makes no major distinction between a male and female worker; that as long as surplus value was being squeezed out of you, your gender was immaterial (unless the employer could pit woman against man to get the job done more cheaply: he would employ whoever would work for less wages). Although the extraction of surplus value is a constant factor, other considera-

tions about the situation of women do mean that female employees and male employees occupy different positions in the social system. The workplace is not exempt from the effects of the primary social and cultural classification of people into 'female' and 'male'. We must, therefore, concern ourselves with how a Marxist analysis overlaps a feminist analysis, so that we can distinguish how women as women, at work, have a different experience, and different struggles, from men at work. One such struggle is against sexual harassment.

## Defining Harassment

What then, do we mean by sexual harassment? The Liverpool survey mentioned above defined sexual harassment as 'any repeated and unwanted sexual comments, looks, suggestions, or physical contact you find objectionable or offensive, and causes you discomfort in the job', and this is similar to other definitions in current use. Initial problems often raised about the

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## the office Romeo has a captive audience

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definition are that not all women find the same things offensive. Also, looks and remarks can be misinterpreted or misjudged. But these objections miss the point, for what clearly distinguishes behaviour as harassment is that it is unwanted, and repeated or persistent. It starts to look very different from the 'compliment' that some people insist it is.

Apart from the general climate in workplaces which supposes that women are unimportant and inferior, women are subject to three kinds of aggravation. The first is the one which is usually considered to be sexual harassment: pestering for sexual contact. The second is where a woman is the butt of remarks or jokes, or even physical contact, relating to her as a sexual person, either positively or negatively, but where sexual relations are not intended.

The third is abuse or degrading comments which are to do with her being a woman but where a specifically sexual content is absent: the 'old bag' line. The implication here is of a woman who is not sexually attractive or whom the man sees to be past the age at which it is seemly to be sexually active. In all these cases, the man is using his own definition of the woman he is harassing as being of sexual interest or not, a prerogative men abrogate to themselves, to make judgements about women, and to be explicit about these judgements.

All three of these aggravations I would include as sexual harassment: harassment because we are women. The NCCL, in its excellent booklet on sexual harassment at work<sup>4</sup> says that sexism and sexual harassment 'are part of the same phenomenon, but sexual harassment is more direct and personal'. The authors, Sedley and Benn, argue that 'an arbitrary line may have to be drawn when we are thinking about effective remedies', meaning that somewhere, a distinction may have to be made between what is sexual harassment, which can be challenged through union agitation and work discipline and industrial tribunals if necessary, and sexism or a general anti-women climate which needs tackling differently. Certainly the idea of doing something about persistent pestering is easier to sell than doing something about sexism, because most people would accept that constant propositioning is inappropriate at work, and that a woman should not have to put up with it; but that jokes which embody anti-woman ideas are irritating

<sup>1</sup> The Leeds Trade Union and Community Resource Information Centre are currently involved in research on sexual harassment amongst blue and white collar workers. A recent discussion led by the women involved, at a NATFHE day school, helped me shape up my thinking for this piece.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sexual Harassment: you tell us it's not a joke' *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Oct 82.

<sup>3</sup> 'Equal Opportunities Working Party: Report on Sexual Harassment' Liverpool NALGO.

<sup>4</sup> 'Sexual Harassment at work' Ann Sedley and Melissa Benn, NCCL 1982.