

# Women in the Pottery Industry: A Case of Lost Potential

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## ABSTRACT

Until recently, women working in the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent, England have been in the majority as both workers and members of the union yet this dominance in numbers has not been reflected in terms of their power or status in the industry nor in their ability to protect their jobs. This latter aspect became particularly apparent in the recent recession when women's numbers in the industry dropped from 30,000 in 1977 to 17,000 in 1981, a drop of 49% compared to a 29% drop in men's jobs over the same period. Heidi Hartmann's theoretical framework which highlights the role played by male co-workers and co-unionists in maintaining the sexual segregation of labour in the workplace is used to try to understand the situation of the women pottery workers.

As recently as 1977, some 25,000 women were employed in the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent where the main factories of Wedgwood, Royal Doulton, Spode and hundreds of other 'potbanks' are located.<sup>1</sup> These women represented the largest concentration of female workers in one industry in one location in the United Kingdom. Although at that time, women were in the majority in the industry and the union, a long tradition - going back to the early nineteenth century - of lower pay and status than their male counterparts persisted. As one observer put it:

Although two-thirds of the workers in the potbank were women, the supremacy of the male was an established law. Either the men were the centre of things, with women doing ancillary jobs, as with the makers and the printers; or else they were a class apart, secure in the mastery of highly

skilled trades, such as the gilders and a few more on the decorating side.<sup>2</sup>

As well as having lower status and pay, women have been used as a reserve army of labour. They were brought into the industry in large numbers in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and have been let go in equally large numbers in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the mechanization and rationalization of production, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of the recession. In both periods, women were let go in numbers which were greater in both absolute and relative terms than were men.

What I would like to explore in this paper is the difference between the situation of women which one might expect to find, given women's numbers in the pottery industry, and the situation that one does find - namely that women's dominance in numbers is not reflected in terms of their power and status nor in their ability to protect their jobs.



*"SPONGING."*

I spent a year studying the lives of women pottery workers in Stoke-on-Trent. The research was done jointly with a local sociologist.<sup>3</sup> We used an investigative approach - touring factories and interviewing industry representatives, union executives, other researchers and most importantly the female pottery workers themselves, both in the factory setting and in their homes. (See Appendix 2.)

The theoretical framework used in this paper to explain women's "lost potential" in the pottery industry is a socialist feminist one outlined by Heidi Hartmann.<sup>4</sup> Hartmann is critical of both neo-classical and Marxist approaches to explaining women's labour force position. The main basis for her criticism is that these approaches ignore patriarchy. Hartmann defines patriarchy as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchial, establish or create independence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women."<sup>5</sup> The material base to which she refers is men's control over women's labour power. Men are able to maintain such control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources - i.e., jobs that pay living wages.

In Hartmann's analysis, job segregation by sex is the primary mechanism bringing about women's inferiority. Job segregation leads to lower wages for women which in turn force women into positions of dependence on men through marriage. In marriage and under patriarchy, women find themselves involved in a traditional division of labour where they are responsible for all of the domestic labour. While men benefit from this, it creates a vicious circle for women since their domestic responsibilities impinge upon their labour market involvement and thus reinforce their secondary position there. In explaining the segregation of labour, others have emphasized the capitalists' role in its creation and maintenance as well as the impact of the wife's continued responsibility for domes-

tic labour and the effect that this has on her outside job performance. Hartmann, in contrast, stresses an aspect ignored in many other analyses - namely the role played by male co-workers and co-unionists in supporting and maintaining the segregation of labour. For male workers, segregation means continued superiority not only in the work setting but also in the home as it forces women into a position of dependency.

But the analysis does not see patriarchy as existing in a vacuum. Patriarchy interacts with capitalism to determine both women's position in the labour force and "the superiority of men over women in our society."<sup>6</sup> The interaction of capitalism and patriarchy may be seen in the outcome of women's entry into the labour force in the transition to capitalism. Capitalists attempted to replace men with cheaper female labour, a possibility which they inherited from the division of labour already established by the pre-capitalist patriarchal system. The strategy of replacing male and female labour can be explained by the Marxist approach - i.e., women as a reserve army of labour. However, male workers responded through their unions by trying to exclude women from the labour force; i.e., by supporting the extension of protective legislation and calling for the family wage. Both responses, claims Hartmann, can be explained by the patriarchal motives of men "who wanted to ensure that women would continue to perform the appropriate tasks at home."<sup>7</sup>

Hartmann presents evidence from the Cigar-makers and the National Typographic Unions in late nineteenth century America where the union actively sought to prevent the introduction of female workers. They excluded women from their union and used protective legislation to restrict their employment. Whether capitalists' use of patriarchy or male worker's patriarchal response to capitalists' attempts to weaken their position in the labour market prevailed, depended, according to Hartmann, on the period. In transition periods, for example the

early transition to capitalism, capitalists had the upper hand and were successful in replacing the more expensive male workers with female workers. However, as industrialization progresses, "male workers were often able to preserve and extend male arenas."<sup>8</sup>

In this paper, I will present evidence which I believe suggests the validity of the Hartmann analysis in explaining the position of women in the pottery industry in Stoke-on-Trent. Women's segregation and lower pay over their long history in the industry can be clearly documented. Also, there is ample evidence of women being brought into and pushed out of the industry and union, both in response to pressure from capitalists and in response to union pressure. Finally, the attitudes of male unionists and the limited role played by females in the pottery workers' union complete the picture which Hartmann's analysis would predict.

### Work Histories

We interviewed women from at least three different generations. One woman started work in a potbank in 1934. Her mother had been in domestic service before marriage and expected her daughters to follow in her footsteps. For the mother, work in the potbanks "was looked down upon." However, only her oldest daughter went into the service. The next one, having left school at twelve and waiting for a place in service, walked a short distance down the road and got herself a job in a potbank. This was 1915. She was to be followed by three more sisters, the youngest of which was the woman we interviewed. This woman, a gilder - hand-painting the gold and silver on quality products - started when she was thirteen and worked as an apprentice until she was twenty-one. As she put it "you paid for your learning until you were twenty-one" referring to the fact that she had to give back a portion of her wages to pay for her training. The only interruption in her career was from 1950-52 with the birth of her only child. She returned to work after she was begged to do

so by her foreman, leaving her child in the paid care of her sister-in-law. She worked continuously up until a few years ago with her retirement from the company.

The women we interviewed who entered the industry in the 1950s told slightly different stories. They had left school at fourteen and worked as apprentices for four years before they obtained full pay and status. This usually meant being put on piecework. These women tended to take off longer periods for child-rearing, for example until the youngest was ready for school (age five). Since the 1950s women's career patterns have changed somewhat. The school leaving age is now sixteen. There are still generally apprenticeship periods but these have been greatly shortened. Young women entering the automated factories have barely any training period at all.

Talking to women now, they see their position in the industry in distinct periods. For the older of retired workers, there are the "good old days" - prior to the Second World War - when the work was difficult and pay very low but it meant more. There was a greater family atmosphere in their factory and the possibility of "a laugh" at work.

For the next generation of women, the contrast is between the period of prosperity in the 1960s and early 1970s and that of recession - the late 1970s until the present. In the period of prosperity, women felt relatively free. They expressed this mainly by moving from job to job and in and out of the industry as they pleased. Since the potbanks were always looking for skilled workers, this was possible. Also during this period, a number of women chose to work part-time, mainly on the twilight shift (5-9 p.m.).

A study done in this period on job satisfaction of women workers in the industry found an average 87% job satisfaction for the 494 women surveyed.<sup>9</sup> This was high compared to that found

in studies of women in other industries using the same measurement technique. In contrast to the women's accounts of the 60s, employers saw the 1960s as fraught with problems i.e., a high turnover of married women, high absenteeism rates and an unsatisfactory level of recruitment of school leavers.<sup>10</sup> The firms devised various strategies to cope with the situation. Their implementation however became unnecessary with the onset of the recession.

During the recession, all of the freedoms of the job are gone. There is no more job mobility. No worker dares quit. Absenteeism is considerably reduced and recruitment is no longer a problem for the employer. Rather the problem has shifted to young people who face the reduced number of job openings.

### Women's majority in the industry and the union

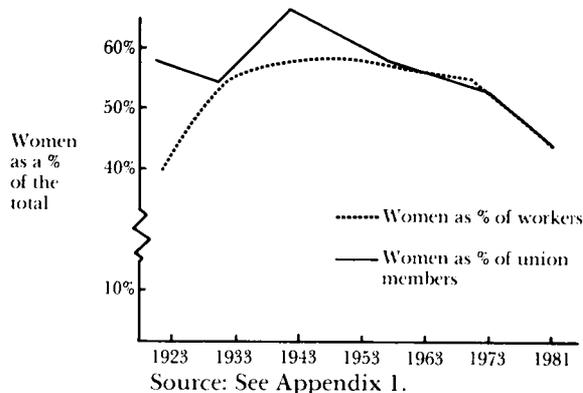
Women constituted a minority in the pottery industry workforce in the nineteenth century. The 1851 census shows 8,998 female workers at that time which was 36% of all of the pottery workers in the county in which Stoke-on-Trent is located.<sup>11</sup>

It was in the period after the First World War until just after the Second World War that women entered the industry in greatest numbers (See Chart 1. More detailed data is offered in Tables 1A and 2A of the Appendix). By 1935 their numbers exceeded those of men. This was also the period when women were recruited into the union. Already by 1923, women comprised 57.3% of union membership and by 1943, this percentage had increased to 67.4%. In 1948, there were 43,500 women working in the pottery industry, 56% of total workers. From 1952 onwards, their numbers decreased. As early as 1943 women's majority in union membership started to decline.

Women began to lose their jobs in the late 1950s, a trend which became more pronounced

in the late 1970s. Because the union became a closed shop in 1974 (i.e., a worker had no choice about joining the union), women's union membership declined along with the fall in employment. Women rapidly lost their majority in both. They comprised 49% of each in 1977 but that had dropped to 43% by 1981.

CHART 1  
Women's majority as workers and union members



### Job segregation and low pay

The pottery making process consists of several stages: preparing the clay, making the objects, and then firing, decorating and packing them. While men are normally involved in the preparation of the clay and the firing, women make the smaller objects, act as assistants to the male makers, and are in the majority in the decorating and packing stages. Certain making jobs, such as flowermaking, require considerable skill as do many of the decorating jobs - such as handpainting and transferring prints. One exception to this general male/female split is in the very finest decorating-gilding, the most intricate handpainting in gold - which is performed exclusively by men.

For the nineteenth century, the evidence of male/female job segregation and women's lower pay is mainly descriptive. Burchill and Ross, in a historical account of the industry and union, tell

how in the early days women worked along with their children for their husbands, the potters.<sup>12</sup> Their husbands would receive pay for all of them. At a later point, women took on the role of apprentices:

Throughout the 19th century women were treated basically as apprentices who never left their time of training. Apprentices often worked on "qualified" men's jobs at the appropriate piece rate, with an allowance deducted by the Master. Women were dealt with in the same way. In the Hatherton Arbitration an employer argued that he had to employ women because the men limited the use of apprentices.<sup>13</sup>

There were also considerable job segregation. Burchill and Ross present a table on the distribution of women pottery workers by department in 1892 which shows women concentrated in printing and painting.<sup>14</sup>

Studies conducted during the Second World War show that women's separate jobs in the industry have allowed separate rates of pay. A 1944 Royal Commission on Equal Pay stated from their investigation of pay rates at that time that while eighty-five per cent of the workers were on piecework, that "on average women's piecework prices were about two-thirds that of men's."<sup>15</sup> However, the best evidence available on both job segregation and women's lower pay is presented by a 1970 Report by the National Board for Prices and Incomes.<sup>19</sup> The data they collected shows that as late as 1975, women's job classifications were totally separate from men's. Table 1 shows the classification for two periods, pre-1970 and 1970-75. For example, in the pre-1970 period, women had their job classifications, F1 to F4, and men had theirs, M1 to M16. As well, the highest paid women's job paid less, 2.5 ¾ s.d. per hour, than the lowest paid man's job which paid 3.3 ½ s.d. per hour. This general situation was only modified, not changed, for the 1970 to 1975 period.

TABLE 1  
Previous Occupational Groupings in the  
Pottery Industry and Rates of Pay

F = Female pre-1970		M = MALE 1970-75	
Grouping	Rate s.d.	Grouping	Rate s.d.
F - 1	2.3 1/2	F - 1	2.6
F - 2	2.4 1/4		
F - 3	2.5 1/4	F - 2	2.7
F - 4	2.5 3/4	F - 3	2.7 1/2
M - 1	3.3 1/2		
M - 2	3.3 1/2		
M - 3	3.3 1/2	M - 1	3.6
M - 4	3.3 1/2		
M - 5	3.3 1/2		
M - 6	3.3 3/4		
M - 7	3.5 1/2	M - 2	3.8
M - 8	3.6 3/4		
M - 9	3.7 3/4		
M - 10	3.8 1/2	M - 3	3.10
M - 11	3.9		
M - 12	3.10 3/4	M - 4	4.0
M - 13	4.1 1/2	M - 5	4.3
M - 14	4.7 1/2	M - 6	4.9
M - 15	4.10 1/2	M - 7	5.0
M - 16	5.4 1/2	M - 8	5.6

Source: National Board for Prices and Incomes Report 149, "Pay and other terms and conditions of employment of workers in the Pottery Industry," 1970, p.109.

For further analysis of the historical pattern of women's lower pay, I have calculated the female/male earnings ratios for the 1938-1981 period. These ratios are presented in Table 2. Although the data for the three periods covered are not strictly comparable (the footnote to the table discusses the three different data sources), they do give the general pattern for the period covered.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the ratio varied between 43.7% and 51.2%. Since these were the war years, the ratios suggest that despite

females taking over more and more male jobs as they did during the war, they did so at substantially lower rates of pay. The situation does seem to have improved marginally as the war progresses. In the fifties and sixties, the ratios moved up into the 50 and low 60 percentiles. However, part of this may be explained by the switch in the data base from weekly to hourly rates of pay and, as mentioned before, women's shorter work week. In a way, the low ratios are a surprise

TABLE 2  
Female/Male Earnings Ratio in the  
Pottery Industry 1938-81

Year	F/M Earnings Ratio (%)*
1938	44.1
1941	43.7
1942	46.0
1943	51.2
1944	47.0
1945	46.6
1946	48.6
1950	61.5
1955	59.9
1960	61.6
1965	59.3
1970	61.6
1975	74.3
1976	78.6
1977	78.4
1978	75.2
1979	75.0
1980	75.3
1981	70.6

\* Average female earnings as a percent of average male earnings  
Sources: 1938-46 Burchill and Ross, p. 200. Includes bricks. Earnings are by the week.  
1950-75 Burchill and Ross, p. 260. Earnings are by the hour which partly accounts for the jump in the ratio.  
1976-81 Calculated from Dept. of Employment, Employment Gazette, 'Earnings and Hours of manual workers,' various years. Earnings are hourly earnings.

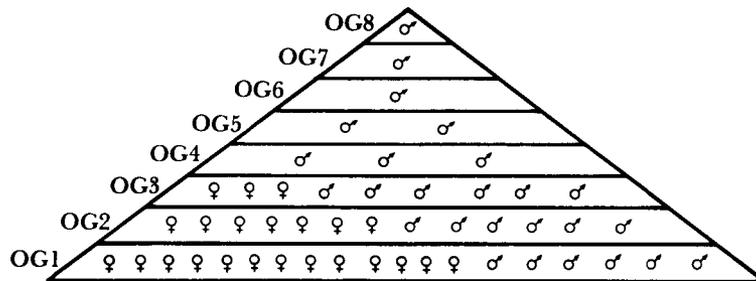
because this was a period of labour shortage when women in the industry felt they were doing well. They had the freedom to move in and out of jobs as they saw fit. However, the data shows that the women's feelings of well-being were not reflected in their relative pay.

In 1975, just before the recession set in, the Equal Pay Act was passed. Immediately after its passage, the earnings ratio reached 78% - an all-time high. But since the recession began, it has started to decline again. By 1981, it was back down to 70.6%. A Sex Discrimination Act came into force in the same year as the Equal Pay Act, 1975. The Sex Discrimination Act was designed to eliminate all forms of discrimination which would prevent women from moving into higher paying jobs. In the pottery industry this resulted in the elimination of sex from the occupational groupings in the Wages Structure so that officially, anyone could apply for any job. However, from our tours around the factories and discussions with people in the industry, we concluded that women have not moved into the higher paying traditionally male jobs.

I asked a long-time pottery worker to go through the new job classifications and identify which jobs are presently done by males and which by females. From the information she gave me, I have drawn Chart 2. As can be seen, women and men still do separate jobs. Also women are in the majority in the two lowest job classifications, in the minority in the third lowest and are not represented at all in the top four. There is now however, some overlap between men's and women's pay. Male general workers are on a lower pay scale than some of the very skilled female jobs such as flowermaking.

In our tours of the factories, we were able to observe the impact of mechanization and rationalization on women's jobs. In two of the most mechanized factories, a medium-priced dinnerware factory and a tile factory, we were struck by the fact that it seemed that it was almost always

CHART 2  
Approximate Job Structure in the  
Pottery Industry  
(from the 1981 Wages Structure)



The Occupational Groups (1981)  
b.h.r. = basic hourly rate

OG1 (b.h.r. 156p) ♀ jobs\* i.e. packers, ♂ jobs\* i.e. labourers

OG2 (b.h.r. 158.40p) ♀ jobs i.e. decorators, makers, ♂ jobs i.e. casters, placers

OG3 (b.h.r. 160.70p) mostly ♂ jobs i.e. kiln firemen, mouldmakers

\* by ♀ jobs and ♂ jobs are meant jobs that are and have been *traditionally* done by the sex in question, although officially all jobs are now open to both sexes.

OG4 (b.h.r. 163p) all ♂ jobs i.e. hand turners, big ware (elec. porc)

OG5 (b.h.r. 167.10p) all ♂ jobs i.e. stickers up and jolliers, big ware (elec. pop)

OG6 (b.h.r. 174.60p) all ♂ jobs i.e. mouldmakers when blocking any casing

OG7 (b.h.r. 177.60p) all ♂ jobs i.e. blocking and casing, modellers

OG8 (b.h.r. 184.60p) all ♂ jobs i.e. engravers

men who were operating the new equipment. This was occurring even where the machine was replacing a process formerly done by women. An example is hand decorating. The old processes of transferring and lithographing in the dinnerware factory are being replaced by direct screen printing by machine. Whereas women did the transferring and lithographing, men are running most of the machines that do the printing. Besides, on the few machines on which women are being employed, they are being poorly paid. In the same factory where we saw the men on direct printing machines, there were some women on automatic banding machines (that is putting the line around the edge of plates). This job, which appears to be very similar in skill level to the printing job, pays minimum day wages while the men on the printing machines are paid by piecework, allowing earnings of roughly twice as much. In the tile factory, it was

only the men who were being put on the automated processes. And they were being paid well on a group piece-rate basis, again earning roughly twice what the women were earning.

### Women as a reserve army of labour

There is plenty of evidence of women in the pottery industry being used as a reserve army of labour. From the 1920s to the mid 1940s, women were brought into the industry in vast numbers at low rates of pay. From the 1950s to the present, first with mechanization and rationalization and then with the recession, women have been pushed out of the industry in large numbers, to a significantly greater extent than men. Burchill and Ross describe the 1914 to 1945 period of bringing in female labour thus:

During the First World War women had come in as casters, and by the middle of the

Second World War had excluded men. They were also making 7-inch plates and smaller plates, leaving only 8-inch and 9-inch for men.<sup>17</sup>

As already noted in Chart I and Table 1A, women's numbers increased from 35,000 to 43,000 and from 40% to 56% of industry workers between 1924 and 1948.

Post 1945 was a period of mechanization and rationalization of the industry. Table 3 gives data on the change in the numbers of workers employed in the industry in various sectors over the period 1956 to 1969. Overall, women lost 6705 jobs over the fifteen year period. This amounted to a 24.9% decline in female employment while the decline in male employment was 2775 or 13.5%. As well, there was a considerable increase in the use of part-time female workers. Their numbers rose from 1322 to 2109 - a 66.3% increase. Part-time workers increased from 4.9% to 10.9% of all female workers over this period.

Most of the jobs lost by women, 6317 out of 6705, were in the sector which they dominated - earthenware, bone china and decorating. The sector underwent considerable mechanization. Women took the brunt of the job loss.<sup>18</sup> The decline in female full-time employment was 32.1% whereas men's employment actually increased by 2.5% over the period. In addition, the use of part-time female workers in the sector, almost doubled (from 982 to 1800). The tile sector which also underwent considerable mechanization, shows a similar pattern - a greater job loss for women than men and an increase in the number of part-time women employed. Little mechanization took place in sanitary ware. In this sector, while women's employment decreased, men's employment increased by 7%. Supplies - mills and glazes and kiln furniture - underwent a rationalization of production. Production was taken out of the main factories into specialized ones. The outcome was that 187 women were brought in, but on a part-time basis only. The one real exception to the general pat-

TABLE 3  
The Effects of Mechanization and Rationalization in the Pottery Industry, 1956-69

Sector	f as % of workers 1969	% Δ* in total employ.	% Δ f full-time employ.	% Δ f part-time employ.	Total no. of f involved in increase or decrease	% Δ in male employ.
earthenware	63%	-18%	-32.1%	+83.8%	-6317	+2.5%
bone china	63%					
decorating	78%					
sanitary ware	10%	+5%	-18%	+5%	-27	+7.0%
tiles	40%	-39%	-50%	+55%	-1372	-33.3%
elec. porc.	51%	-419%	+752%	-66%	+824	-72.1%
mills and glazes	4.4%	+90%	+76%	+1540%	+187	+46.3%
and kiln furniture	38%					+493.5%
TOTALS	55%	-20.7%	-29.6%	+66.3%	-6705	-13.5%

\*Δ = change.

Source: Calculated from Table 4 in Smyth and Gregory, *op. cit.*, Appendix.

ern of female employment during the period was in electrical porcelain, a sector which ran into severe demand problems. In this case, 824 full-time women were brought in. Presumably the reason for this was to save money.

The 1969 to 1977 period was a relatively stable one in terms of employment in the pottery industry. However, in 1977 the most severe job losses ever, began. As is shown in Chart 1 and Table 1A, women's numbers in the industry dropped from 30,100 in 1977 to 17,000 in 1981 while this proportion of the labour force dropped from 49% to 43%. This meant a drop of 13,000 jobs or 44% of total female jobs. Over the period, men's employment dropped from 31,300 to 22,100, a 9,200 decline or 29%. Women's reported unemployment in the Stoke-on-Trent area rose from 284 in May 1977 to 2,848 in May 1982, a 943% increase compared to men's 308% increase.<sup>19</sup> Again it was the female dominated sector such as earthenware which was the hardest hit. The male dominated sectors such as tiles and sanitaryware were able to hold their own.<sup>20</sup> Although the main cause for the 1977-81 job loss is the recession, employers also seem to be pursuing further mechanization. With so many workers unemployed and with the rest under the threat of being so, there is little opportunity and energy for opposition to such automation. What it will mean for the pottery workers is that even after the recession ends, there will be a reduced number of jobs to come back to.

### **Patriarchy and the union**

In the Hartmann analysis, male workers are able to maintain their superiority in the factory as long as women receive lower pay and status and are let go first. In addition, there is the indirect benefit for men that women's lower rewards and security on the job reinforce their dependence on men and thus preserve the traditional division of labour in the home. I will argue that in the pottery case, the patriarchal attitudes and actions of male pottery workers as

they manifest themselves through the union have contributed significantly to the situation of female pottery workers. The union negotiates not only wages and job classifications but also lay-off provisions. In a union where power and decision-making is dominated by men, women have fared badly.

### **Men's actions and attitudes**

Charles Shaw, in one of the earliest published accounts of life in the Potteries, describes how in the 1840s his father went on strike and drove his family into the workhouse over the issue of "female labour (being introduced) into a department which had hitherto belonged almost exclusively to the men."<sup>21</sup> It was resisted "partly as innovation" and "partly because of the serious reduction in wages it involved." The way others put their objections was in terms of preserving the sanctity of the home. Harold Owen, writing around the turn of the century, claimed that "the mere fact of a wife working at all is an incentive to domestic disorder and squalor."<sup>22</sup> He quotes a Father O'Rourke as saying:

I don't see how it is possible for a woman to properly attend to her household duties and go out to work all day. I know cases where more is lost by want of attention in the home than is actually earned by the woman herself on the potbank - that is, more is lost in cash, apart from any consideration of comfort which the hand of a woman can impart to all domestic arrangements.<sup>23</sup>

According to Burchill and Ross, male trade unionists resented the employers' use of women to undercut men. On the other hand, they showed little regard for the fate of women. The authors explain that the men found several excuses for this. One was that, working as family units under the maker, it was felt that the distributions of pay between family members did not greatly matter. Second, men deluded themselves

about the extent of women's participation in the industry. They thought of women as basically housewives, and of working women as aberrations.<sup>24</sup>

It was in the twentieth century that female competition became a serious problem for men. By the 1920s, there were more women than men in the industry. The men's strategy changed from trying to send women back into the home to getting them into the union where presumably their competition would be controlled. Burchill and Ross described how between World Wars I and II, women took over a number of men's jobs by accepting pay which was only a proportion of what men had been paid. The reaction from men was to recruit women into the union, educate them in trade union ideas and persuade them to demand equal pay. Circa 1946, Burchill and Ross report that, "Among the sanitary workers there were demands for equal pay, as much from the men, to prevent undercutting, as from the women."<sup>25</sup>

Since the mid-sixties, there is a stated interest on the part of the union in more female participation. However, the interest appears to be more nominal than real. We noted this in our interview with the present General Secretary of the union. It is even more blatant in the 1976 interview done for a BBC Open University broadcast in which several active union women and the then General Secretary of the union are interviewed.<sup>26</sup> The General Secretary tried to justify, in some kind of half-hearted way, female job losses in terms of the price for "equal pay." In the same interview, the women talked of the men being resentful of equal pay, of women "only recently being allowed to go to conferences," of "men only voting for men at the lodge (union) meetings" and of "nothing being done for women with the onset of recession."

### **Women's participation**

Until very recently, women scarcely participated in union affairs. Even now, only a small

number are active. In the late 1960s, with the encouragement of the union, a few women started trading union courses and day schools and putting their names forward for positions in the union. At the present time, there is one woman on the union executive. As well, approximately one-fifth of the representatives (i.e., shop stewards) are female, forty-two out of a total of a little over two hundred. However, more than half of the female representatives are inactive in the union. They do not attend union meetings. They only deal with matters which come up in the factory.

A Women's Advisory Committee was established in the union in the early 1970s. There was participation only by the few active representatives. We met nine of these. Although the Committee was fairly active in its early days with regard to certain issues such as cervical smears, provision of nurseries, school milk and school holidays, recently it has done little. It has never taken up substantive work issues such as women's status and pay in the industry vis-a-vis men or the relatively greater impact that the recession has had on their jobs. One major problem is that the Women's Advisory Committee has no power. It reports through the District Council to the National Executive Committee of the union. In practise, the women told us, the Committee's minutes are read at the District Council level and the matter ends there.

The representatives do not get much support from the women they represent. The women workers in general remain uninterested in the whole process. One reason for women's lack of participation is structural. The union is organized by lodges; that is, in places where workers reside and not where they work. At lodge meetings, only some of the workers would be working at the same potbank. On the other hand, most of the people working together at a factory would be attending different lodge meetings. The result is that the attendance at lodge meetings is very poor—both for women and men—but especially for women. Another problem that

women face is the holding of meetings in the evenings. As one woman put it, "For men, it is a chance to get out but for women, it clashes directly with their domestic duties."<sup>27</sup>

In the midst of this general state of apathy, there was at least one case of militancy by the women at the shop floor level. But the union gave no backing to these actions. The female workers' representative, at one of the strictest factories, told us that she had the support of all of the women and most of the men that she represented. The women walked out several times under her direction and in one particular case, all workers at the factory went on strike for half a day when the company tried to fire her. The story made front page news in the local paper. Unfortunately, during a period of personal crisis, she took voluntary redundancy—a decision which she later regretted. Of course the company refuses to have her back. Not only that, but just around that time, a motion was passed that a redundant worker could no longer hold a position in the union. This women then had to leave her position both as a workers' representative and as a member of the Women's Advisory Council. Because of this timing, it seems unlikely that this was an accident on the part of the union.<sup>28</sup> Once again the union had effectively stifled any meaningful participation by women in determining the course of events in the industry.

### Conclusion

Hartmann's theoretical framework, which explicitly includes the role of patriarchy in the workplace, helps to explain the "lost potential" of the women pottery workers in Stoke-on-Trent. The union which has been, and still is, dominated by men, sought at first to keep women out of the industry, then when that battle was lost, sought to get women into the union to control their participation. The interaction between capitalism and patriarchy which Hartmann analyzed is also evident in the pottery

case. From the 1920s to the 1950s, capitalist forces seem to have dominated, bringing women into the industry. Patriarchal forces could only respond by trying to control the impact of women's entry. However, since the 1950's, in the periods of automation and later recession, patriarchy, working through the union, seems to have had the upper hand. Men have been able to protect themselves against job losses.

One difference from Hartmann's findings was that the pottery industry, in the twentieth century at least, tried to get women into the union, not exclude them from it. However, the purpose of this was to control the situation. Certainly, the men did not seem to try to involve women in union affairs in any meaningful way. Nor do they appear to have done much to improve women's pay or status.

Another difference from Hartmann is that she suggested that capitalists' attempts to replace men with women would be more prevalent in transition periods while men's attempts to improve their position vis-a-vis women would most often occur in boom or prosperous times. The pottery case shows a different pattern. The replacement of men by women was most prominent in the expansion phase of the industry—after the First World War—while the improvement of men's position vis-a-vis women is most striking during the recent recession. Irene Bruegal, in a paper examining performance in a number of industries during an earlier (1974-78) period in Britain also found the substitution of female for male labour occurring in prosperous times.<sup>29</sup> Bruegal explains such substitution in the context of capital restructuring i.e., "of bringing in new machinery which transforms a skilled job into a semi-skilled one, or of moving jobs around the country" - which is more likely to take place in prosperous than in stagnant times.<sup>30</sup> This is true to a certain extent in the pottery industry - most restructuring did take place during boom times - although there has also been some attempt by the industry to auto-

mate during the recession. As for the explanation for patriarchal forces being stronger during the recession, part of it must be in terms of the greater level of competition among workers in a recession for a declining number of jobs.

I believe that women's position in the pottery industry can best be understood, as Hartmann suggested, as a see-sawing phenomenon between capitalist and patriarchal forces. At certain points, the consequences of capitalist strategies have predominated while at others those of the male unionists' have prevailed. In the pottery case, the capitalists have had their way during periods of prosperity while during the recession and the mechanization and rationalization of production, the male unionists' actions have had the greater impact. Unfortunately, neither of these forces has led to the promotion of women's best interests. Rather women have been their double-victims. In fact, without quite drastic structural change, their situation may in the future get even worse.

## Notes

1. See Appendix Table 1A.
2. Mervyn Jones, *Potbank* (London: Martin Seeker and Warburg, 1961), p. 128-9.
3. The research for this paper was done jointly by myself and Ursula Dobrasczyk of the Dept. of Sociology, North Staffordshire Polytechnic, Stoke-on-Trent. The interpretation and the write-up of the material, however, are my own. I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance that I received during the research phase of the project from the Nuffield Foundation.

4. Heidi I. Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex," *Signs: Journal of women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Part 2 (Spring 1976) and "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union," *Capital and Class*, No. 8 (Summer 1978).
5. "Unhappy Marriage," p. 11.
6. "Capitalism, Patriarchy...", p.139.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 155
8. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
9. Christine Lillekar and R.L. Smyth, *Job Satisfaction and Women in the Pottery Industry* (Keele: University of Keele, 1972).
10. D.L. Gregory and R.L. Smyth, *The Worker and the Pottery Industry* (Keele, Dept. of Economics, University of Keele, 1971).
11. F. Burchill and R. Ross, *A History of the Potter's Union* (Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent: Ceramic and Allied Trades Union, 1977), p. 30.
12. Burchill and Ross, p. 145.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
16. "Pay and other terms and conditions of Employment of Workers in the Pottery Industry," Report 149.
17. Burchill and Ross, p. 224.
18. Information on the changes taking place in each sector is from Smyth and Gregory, p. 89-90.
19. Information from data for Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area sent by Birmingham Manpower Intelligence Unit.
20. Information from Ceramics, Glass and Mineral Products, Industry and Training Board, "Manpower and Training 1981: Pottery Industry."
21. *When I Was a Child* (Seaford, Sussex: Caliban Books, 1977) p. 90.
22. Harold Owen, *The Staffordshire Potter* (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints, 1970), p. 345.
23. Owen, p. 340.
24. Burchill and Ross, p. 154.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
26. Broadcast on BBC, Oct 10 and 15, 1976. We obtained a copy of the tape from one of the workers.
27. From an interview.
28. From an interview with the woman involved.
29. Irene Bruegal, "Women as a reserve army of labour: a note on recent British experience," *Feminist Review*, No. 3 (1979).
30. *Ibid.*, fn. 9.

Appendix 1  
Table 1A  
Male/female distribution of workers in the Pottery Industry 1851-1981

Year	Total	Males	Females	% Males	% Females
1851	25,012	16,014	8,998	64%	36%
1924	n.a.	n.a.	35,000	60%	40%
1935	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	45%	55%
1948	79,000	35,500	43,500	44%	56%
1951	85,300	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1968	62,000	27,900	34,100	45%	55%
1977	61,400	31,300	30,100	51%	49%
1978	60,900	31,300	29,600	51%	49%
1979	55,300	29,000	26,300	52%	48%
1980	45,900	25,000	20,900	55%	45%
1981	39,100	22,100	17,000	57%	43%

Sources: 1851 Burchill and Ross, *op cit*, p. 30.

1924, 1935 Lillekar, *op cit*, p. 12.

1948 Gregory and Smyth, *op cit*, p. 4.

1951, 1968 P.W. Gay and R.L. Smyth, *The British Pottery Industry*, (London: Butterworths, 1974), p. 205.

1977-81 Dept. of Employment, *Employment Gazette*, various years.

Table 2A  
Male/Female Trade Union Membership in  
the Pottery Industry 1923-81

Year	% Males	% Females
1923	42.7	57.3
1933	45.8	54.2
1943	32.6	67.4
1953	41.3	58.7
1963	44.8	55.2
1973	47.2	52.8
1979	52.0	48.0
1981	56.5	43.5

Sources: 1943-73 Burchill & Ross, *op cit*, p. 177, 261.

1979, 1981 since 1974 with the closed shop, all workers are union members. Hence the members correspond to workers in the industry. See Table 1A.

Appendix 2  
Interview Schedule  
Women pottery workers interviewed

Woman	Age	Year of entry into industry	Where Interviewed	Husband's Occupation	No. of Children
A	62	1934	factory	miner	1
B	58	1938	home (several times)	accountant	1
C	47	1950	home	salesman	3
D	40	1957	home	services	1+
E	40	1957	home	miner	2
F	48	1960	home	potter	5
G	16	1980	factory	not married	-
H	21	1974	factory	separated	1
I	25	1972	factory	was potter, now garage worker	0
J	late 40s	1950s	factory	miner	n.a.
K	40s	1967	factory	miner	5
L	25	1979	factory	potter	2
M	late 40s	1949	factory	policeman	3
N	late 40s	1953	factory	potter	1
O	n.a.	1950s or 60s	factory	floors	2
P	40	1957	factory	was potter, now council worker	2

Factories Visited			
Factory	Type	Product	No. of employees** (as of June 1981)
A*	traditional	China	1566
B	traditional	China	352
C	modernized	tiles	811
D*	modernized	tableware	842
E	traditioanl	China	482
F*	traditional	China	1201
G	traditional (went out of business 1982)	figurines	88

\* personnel manager interviewed

\*\* Source of information: CATU (the Union)

Others interviewed:

Union:

Executive Secretary, Mr. Alf Cloves, a fired male representative, nine members of the Women's Advisory Council(as a group)

Other Researchers:

Frank Burchill, co-author of *A History of the Potter's Union*

Christine (Lillekar) Edwards, co-author of *Job Satisfaction and Women in the Pottery Industry*

Other workers:

six retired workers from factory A (as a group), a male sanitaryware worker, member of the Trades Council and Labour party young male caster from Factory F.