

# Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

Spring 1978 Vol.6 No.3

## **Socialist Feminist conference**

Reports from:

Women Against Racism  
and Fascism Group

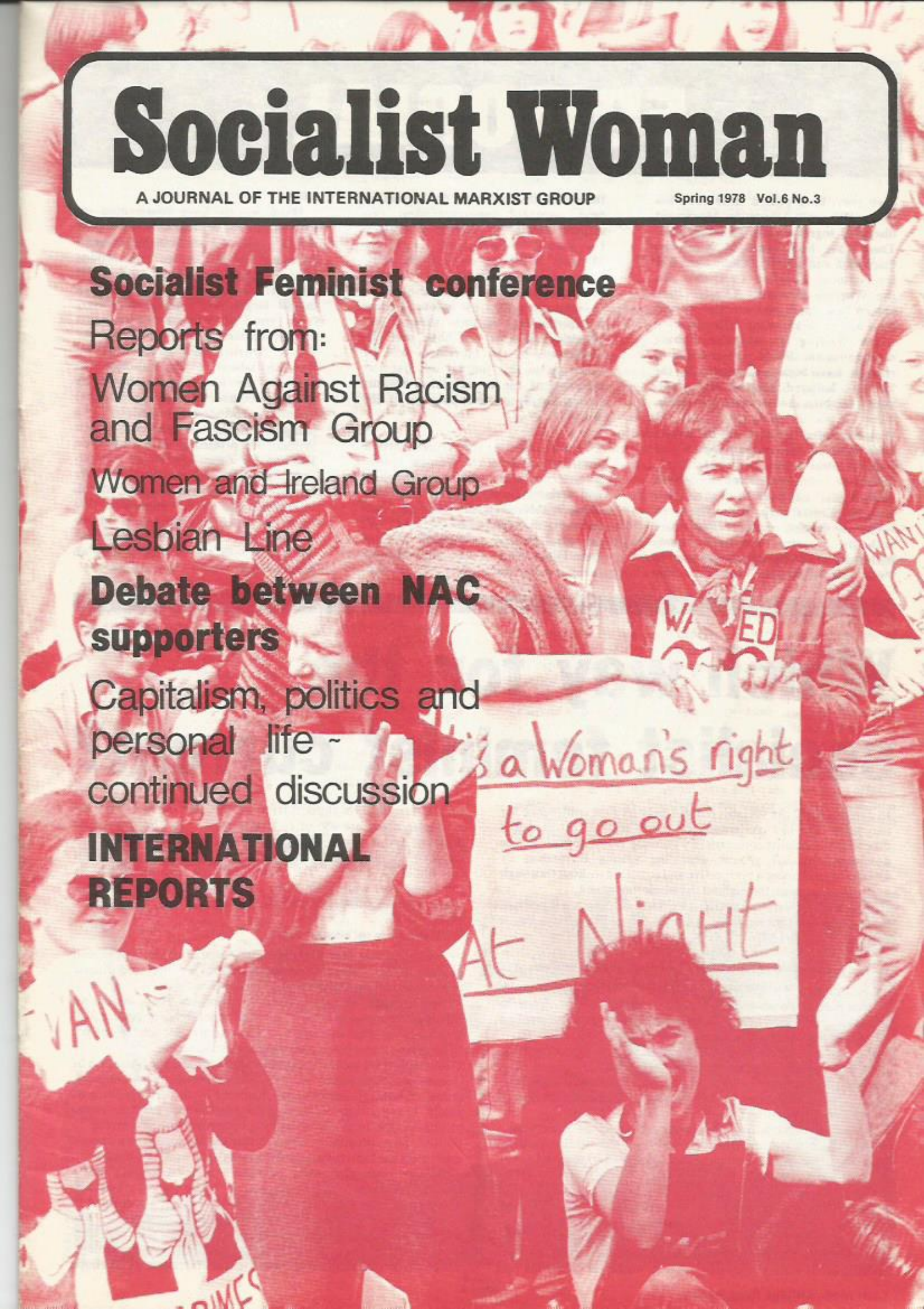
Women and Ireland Group

Lesbian Line

## **Debate between NAC supporters**

Capitalism, politics and  
personal life -  
continued discussion

## **INTERNATIONAL REPORTS**





# EDITORIAL

Two years have passed since socialists in the Women's Liberation Movement discussed together on a national level. These have been years of important discussion and activity. Campaigns like the National Abortion Campaign and the Working Women's Charter have gained in strength and experiences and have had to tackle many difficulties — often leading to intense debate throughout the WLM. Other areas of struggle have been spearheaded by the WLM— battered women, rape, defence of lesbian mothers and gay rights.

Women and other sections of society have received invaluable support and political ideas from the WLM: Trico, Grunwick, anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigns, support for the Irish struggle. Crucial steps have also been taken to develop support and unity with the women's movement internationally at the Spring conferences in Paris and Amsterdam last year. The

theoretical discussions in the movement have generated important ideas. No serious attempt to develop a strategy for women's liberation, enriching Marxism in the process, can afford to ignore these discussions.

We hope that the pages of Socialist Woman can reflect the colour, variety and seriousness of these debates and activities. In time, we hope that the discussions in the movement will be taken up in this journal not only by members of the International Marxist Group but by other supporters of the WLM.

In this issue we therefore welcome contributions from the Women Against Racism and Fascism Group, Women and Ireland Group, and a discussion between IMG members and independent socialist feminists in the NAC. We are also pleased to publish a reply from Hilda Scott to a Socialist Woman review of her book, Women and Soc-

ialism.

Many readers have commented on the inclusion of articles written by men in our pages. We see Socialist Woman reflecting the discussions and actions of the WLM, in particular its socialist current. As such, its contributors should largely be women. However, from time to time we will print articles written by men outside of the WLM. During the discussions on domestic labour it was important to consider the positions developed by Wally Secombe. This is why Socialist Woman produced his article in a pamphlet. In the last issue of Socialist Woman we printed a review by John Ross of Eli Zaretsky's book, Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life. We felt his positions would spark off an interesting and useful discussion. We do not feel that this detracts from our concern to contribute to and extend the discussions of women within an autonomous women's movement.

## Which way for the socialist feminist current?

In January 1977 the socialist current held its first conference for two years. The last conference left many sisters frustrated and dissatisfied. Socialist conferences within the WLM appeared to be dominated by left groups wrangling among themselves or attempting to impose a perspective and structure without thorough and open discussion throughout the whole movement.

The eve of the National Socialist Feminist Conference is perhaps an appropriate time to look again at the position of socialist feminists in the WLM.

### Build a broad based autonomous women's liberation movement

Any attempt by socialists within the WLM to organise conferences, activities and discussions should not detract from the importance of building the broadest autonomous movement of women against their oppression.

The women's movement has brought together women from many different backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints on a common understanding that women are oppressed and a common agreement on six demands that take up fundamental aspects of women's oppression.

The movement has had an enormous impact on society as a whole. We can see this from the way that the media, political groups and the trade union movement have had to respond to the ideas we have generated.

The movement has been a valuable experience for thousands of women. From participation in local groups and other activities of the movement, many of us have developed our understanding and our confidence in expressing our ideas. Through our actions, women whom we have supported have begun to recognise their specific needs within their struggles (e.g. women at Grunwick and

Trico), their need for support from women, and the fact that their particular needs are too often overshadowed by the traditional demands and methods of organising of the working class. This impact of the movement is something we want to build throughout the whole of society. The importance of the movement is something that will continue for many years even after we have achieved the overthrow of capitalist society.

### Why organise a socialist current?

If we accept that a broad movement, united in action, is of crucial importance for women's liberation, why do we meet and discuss together as socialists within the movement?

There are sisters who criticise us for doing so. They say that we will split the movement by organising separately. There are also sisters who say that we should have a separate 'Socialist Women's Movement'. These positions need serious discussion.

As socialists we recognise that we cannot achieve the liberation of women in a class society where all human relations — personal, sexual, cultural, political — are distorted by the driving force of profit. The structures of this class domination have to be destroyed to provide the basis for society to be transformed from top to bottom. That recognition demands that we develop in the women's movement the basis for a socialist strategy for women's liberation.

But the exact relationship between a socialist strategy and a strategy for women's liberation has yet to be fully worked out. That cannot take place within discussion and actions confined to women presently identifying with a socialist perspective. The most fruitful discussion and the best elaborated strategy will only arise from the discussion and action of the whole movement. Through these discussions and experiences of struggle we can hope



to win more and more women to a socialist perspective for women's liberation. Therefore we must recognise that we must be involved in every area of the activity and discussion of the movement and must debate with other currents within the movement. If we do so then our identification and meetings as socialists within the movement will not split the movement but on the contrary strengthen it.

We must also argue that all the different positions within the movement have the right to be heard and to meet together to begin to work out their positions. The women's movement should not exclude anyone who supports the six demands, and should also encourage debate with those women who do not at present see the need for an autonomous women's movement.

Because we recognise that we need to overthrow society as it exists then we support all the oppressed and exploited groups within it — the working class, immigrants, blacks, etc.

Thus socialists in the movement have often been the first to argue for the necessity to support the struggles of the trade unions, blacks, etc., recognising also the particular importance for women of the struggles against the Labour Government's attacks on the working class, the struggle against fascism, etc.; and also the importance of winning support among those also fighting against oppression and exploitation to strengthen our particular struggles. We recognise that unity of all the oppressed will build a stronger movement against the rotten society we live in.

In Leeds, for example, socialist feminists have seen that joint activity with other socialists in elections allows them to participate in drawing up an election programme and participate in an election campaign where there will be an opportunity to take the demands of the women's movement into the streets in a way we do not often have. They have therefore participated in Socialist Unity, an electoral alliance of the far left, taking up the attacks and betrayals of the Labour Government. In the solidarity campaign with the Grunwick strikers, the WLM was involved very clearly in picketing and other support actions. We recognised that the women there did have specific problems as women, which had to be recognised and confronted in the struggle.

We recognise that it is important to force the labour movement to work with us in all aspects of the struggle against capitalism and for liberation. We should also not forget the value of other activities that have played an important part in strengthening the influence of the WLM and illustrating the sexist aspects of capitalist society. The recent 'Reclaiming the Night' demonstrations, for example, illustrated a crucial aspect of our oppression as women — that we are not free to be out at night alone without fear. Yet many socialist feminists did not participate in these demonstrations. These activities, like those on rape and battered women, also pose difficulties for what demands we should have.

We are not in favour of strengthening the state in any aspect. We recognise that the fight is not against men *per se*, and that women alone will not be able to achieve a thoroughgoing change

to society. Starting from that basis, socialist feminists must begin to discuss what demands we can make. We have a responsibility to offer our understanding to the movement as a whole. Through doing that we will be able to demonstrate that a socialist strategy can take forward all the struggles for women's liberation.

Therefore our commitment to the socialist current must be seen as a means of extending and politically strengthening the autonomous WLM as a whole. It is in this framework that we are opposed to any notion of a separate socialist feminist movement or party. In this way we will not split the WLM but enrich its development and impact on the struggle against class exploitation and human liberation.

#### **How should socialists organise in the women's movement to the best effect?**

We do not want to cut ourselves off from the whole movement, for the reasons outlined. But to be in the best position to make a contribution to the movement as socialists, we have to have some common understanding that we develop ourselves.

One of the most important ways is through discussion at conferences and schools, but particularly through a journal. This would not only enable us to develop our debates, but also to have debates with other women and currents in the movement. Whilst the WLM has many journals, there is not at the moment a socialist feminist journal that could be used for that particular purpose.

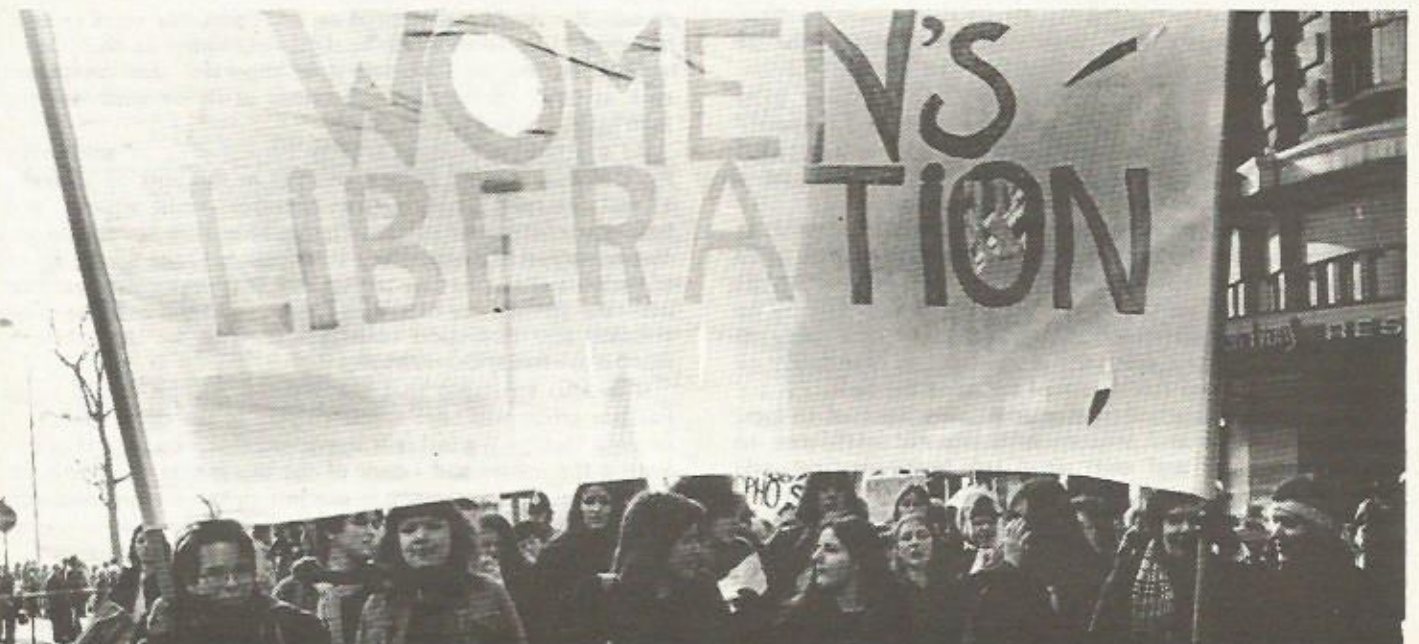
A number of women within the movement are beginning to think of having such a journal. *Socialist Woman* supports that idea and we would like to discuss the proposal with women in the movement. We will seriously consider what relationship *Socialist Woman* would have to that journal. Such a journal would take a lot of resources and we would take a very serious attitude to considering what resources we could offer.

We would see such a journal as covering the struggles of women in Britain and internationally, with articles on the debates in the WLM viewed from a socialist perspective. We do not dismiss any of the discussions within the WLM as irrelevant to us. We have stated above that one of the strengths of the WLM is that it can bring together such a wide experience of the manifestations of women's oppression; therefore any of the debates that grow out of that experience can be important for us in elaborating a socialist strategy.

To carry the debate in the WLM forward at this particular stage we would also suggest that we should organise a further conference on 'a revolutionary strategy for the WLM' where all those sisters who feel that they see the need for a strategy can come together to discuss what such a strategy would be. That conference would not be confined to socialists but should encourage contributions from other sisters in the movement who feel that they can offer a revolutionary strategy. We should take the opportunity to discuss with them and win them to perspectives for liberation based on class struggle actions and demands.

PENNY DUGGAN

Photo: ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)





# FEMINISTS IN ACTION

The editorial board of Socialist Woman has decided to throw open the pages of the journal to women active in the movement. We hope to generate a discussion around the activities in which feminists are involved. For this issue we invited contributions from the Women Against Racism and Fascism Group and the Women and Ireland Group. We are grateful for their positive response. We hope that other activists will follow this up in our next issue, either with contributions around the articles in this issue or with new areas of struggle. We are also pleased to reprint a press release sent to us from Lesbian Line. In future issues we will encourage articles which take up discussions and activities around the sixth demand of the women's movement for a self-defined sexuality.

## Women Against Racism and Fascism Group

The Women Against Racism and Fascism group was formed in response to our experience as women on the 23 April anti-National Front demonstration.

Whilst the demonstration positively illustrated the effectiveness of and necessity for a united front of all groups actively opposing racism and fascism — both in a broad political sense and in their communities — for many women there was only a qualified sense of unity with the other groups present.

Women as a group were not informed of the strategy of the demonstration and neither were our interests raised at the planning stage. Several women with children were unable to come as it had never occurred to the planning group that childcare was a relevant issue. Given that all fascist movements and right-wing ideology generally sees as one of its major aims the strengthening of the family, thereby rendering women a consistent target of such movements, a refusal to see women as a political grouping is sexist and fails to confront one of the major ways in which the growth of the right-wing is expressed, e.g. attacks on abortion rights, economic measures which strengthen women's dependency in the family, etc.

The positive aspects of organising as women within broad political struggles has been illustrated by the involvement of women from the women's movement on the mass picket of the Grunwick factory, which has enabled us to see ourselves as a cohesive group and to derive support and solidarity from each other.

The WARF group initiated a mobilisation of women for the Lewisham demonstration on 13 August. The women's contingent was one of the largest, strongest and certainly most impressive at Lewisham. There were 300 really well organised women, with a strong feeling of solidarity. This was the first time that women marched together in such numbers on a demonstration that was not specifically feminist.

The group was extremely critical of the tactics used at Lewisham and a great deal of discussion is still going on as to what are the best strategies and tactics we can use in the struggle against fascism. This was apparent in our position on the ban on demonstrations in the Tameside area early in October. A contingent from the group went to Manchester to support the local anti-fascist groups opposing the ban.

The group is comprised of women already involved in local anti-fascist work and women hitherto not affiliated to any local group, and our aims are both practical and theoretical.

Firstly we aim to initiate and co-ordinate women's involvement in general anti-fascist and anti-racist work. This means that we can act as a discussion and support group for women becoming involved in local anti-fascist campaigns, etc., and means that those of us who do get involved in local work will not have to do so merely as individuals but can use the group

as a basis for discussion with other women.

We have developed channels of communication which facilitate mobilisation when necessary — for example, for Lewisham (August), Manchester and Hackney (October). Clearly many more women have mobilised nationally for anti-fascist activities knowing that there was going to be a strong women's contingent present.

The existence of the group also means that we are able to be more informed of developments and more involved in the planning stages of work. We have been affiliated to the All-London Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Committee since the group was formed in May and have been active on the committee. As a result of our involvement, creches have been organised for both the Lewisham and Hackney demonstrations.

As part of the Women's Liberation Movement, we feel it is crucial that we address ourselves to women to ensure that the issues of racism and fascism are raised within the movement as areas which feminists should actively concern themselves with both inside and outside of the movement. It is important that we publicise and raise the issues of fascism and racism within campaigns such as NAC, for example, since the interpretation of concepts like 'A Woman's Right to Choose' will in part be determined by both the issues of sexism and racism. Whilst for white women this will probably mean the right to decide to have an abortion (although, remembering Keith Joseph's speech, this might well depend on her class), for black women it may and often does mean the right *not* to have an abortion or sterilisation. As such we feel it is important that campaigns such as NAC realise the implications of its demands for the fight against racism and fascism.

As a group of women actively participating in anti-fascist work alongside other groups involved in this sort of struggle, we will also raise the issue of and confront sexist attitudes and behaviour that we are often subjected to in such circumstances. Just as we feel it is imperative that feminists take up the issues of racism and fascism, so we feel that it is imperative that 'the left' take up the issue of sexism (both *inside* and *outside*) in all practical and theoretical undertakings. This we have done a number of times at Grunwick.

It is also envisaged that the Women Against Racism and Fascism group will have a role to play in the development of feminist theory. We feel it is important that women attempt to analyse the nature and extent of the threat that fascism holds for women. For example, it is not just right-wing organisations like the National Front that see women's major role as in the home, nor indeed is it just fascists who think that black people 'breed' too much. In this context we can ask what are the particular threats of fascism for women and how does the existence of racist and sexist attitudes in countries like Britain help to facilitate the growing strength of fascist organisations.



These are some of the areas that we would hope to be able to address ourselves to.

In developing feminist theory of women's oppression it is also important that we realise and discuss the issue of racism and see that contradictions can and do arise when the issue of sexism is complicated by that of race. The classic situation where this type of contradiction arises is in cases of rape involving a black and white person. Rape, like all types of violence against women, is bound up with the perception of women as the property of men. Yet being a woman may not be the only criterion by which you are deemed to be property, race may also be a factor. The thousands of cases of rape suffered by black women on the slave plantations at the hands of white men, and of Jewish women in Europe in the 1930s and '40s, are cases in point. Similarly, rape of white women by

black men also gives rise to many contradictions since it involves more than just the power of men over women.

We would also hope to be able to contribute to developing a feminist position on fascism and racism in a broader context than sexism alone. This means that we hope to be able to contribute to developing an understanding of the nature of racism and fascism, the links between them, their implications, etc. It also means that we feel that feminists should take a position on these issues not just in terms of what they mean for women but as part of the revolutionary movement.

The Women Against Racism and Fascism group meets fortnightly on Wednesdays at Camden Women's Centre, Rosslyn Lodge, Lyndhurst Road, London NW3. The contact address is: c/o LSE Students Union, Houghton Street, Aldwych, London WC2.

# Women and Ireland Group

Our London-based group — the Women and Ireland group — was reformed in the autumn of 1976 to combat the uninformed views expressed at that time as a result of the Peace Movement. We disagreed with feminists who characterised the Peace Movement as a 'women's movement', and who saw it as inherently progressive.

The Peace Movement initially *did* win support both from women in the North and in this country. It gained followers partly because the anti-imperialist struggle had never paid attention to the plight of Irish women and their specific sexual oppression, and was therefore in no position to show feminists that nothing was to be gained in supporting the Peace Movement.

At the beginning of this summer, the Women and Ireland group helped to plan the London workshops on 'What is socialist feminist practice?'. We argued that any socialist practice in Britain today should look at the question of Ireland as a high political priority and we offered to organise one of the workshops on Feminism and Ireland. We aimed to intervene politically through the workshop, as well as to provide information on the situation in Ireland. The response was positive — there were many discussions and articles on

women's oppression in Ireland.

Since then, the group has produced the papers of the workshop as a pamphlet, as well as a poster and a slide-show for women's groups. We are also preparing for the national socialist feminist conference in January and for an educational on imperialism for the socialist feminist current in London.

We plan to investigate Irish women living in England and, in an ongoing way, to support the women's movement in Ireland, including groups like the Relatives' Action Committee.

The women's movement in Britain generally does not take up issues which don't directly concern us. Although it is not the aim of this article to explain and develop a detailed theory on the role of imperialism in Ireland, it is clear that this understanding is necessary for the struggle against our oppression in this country. We have a unique relationship to the struggle in Ireland, insofar as it is the British Army which is occupying that country.

This article aims to provide basic information and material to begin the much-needed ongoing debate in mapping out the responsibilities of the British women's movement.

The specific oppression of women in Ireland has been largely ignored by many — including the women's movement here, and the anti-imperialist struggle and trade union movement both here and in Ireland. This is the case even though the economic and political domination of Britain has reinforced and, it could be argued in certain areas, *created* women's oppression. The English left often ignores the anti-imperialist struggle on this country's own doorstep, and this confusion extends to the women's movement.

The state in Ireland argues that, because of the economic crisis, provision for equal pay, adequate nurseries and the right of women to work are impossible to achieve. The lack of money which the Irish state claims to suffer from is due to an economy — both in the North and South — which has suffered from imperialist domination.

In the North, 35.5 per cent of households live below the poverty line. One third of these households have people in full-time work. The average family income is just under £10 less than that of the UK — although food, fuel and transport cost more. For instance, electricity charges are 33 per cent higher than in Britain.

Irish women are faced with many burdens. They are often forced to manage the family household as well as take a job in paid employment — a situation accentuated by high unemployment and emigration. The high cost of living and bad conditions of housing, health services and nursery provision adds to women's problems. Police and army harassment, and internment — all products of the war in Ireland — provide further burdens.

Women earn on average £33.76 in Northern Ireland, in comparison to the £53.25 of men (1975 figures). In the South, women earn 59 per cent of male earnings. The Equal Pay Act covers the North but it is watered down into an ineffective piece of legislation. The South has the Anti-Discrimination Act of 1975 and the Employment Equality Act. Although there have been some strikes around equal pay, the claims negotiated in several instances gave the employers more time to implement legislation than the Act allows for.

Women comprise 27 per cent of the workforce in the South, and 30 per cent in the North. Married women make up only 3.5 per cent of the workforce in the South, however. Yet earlier this year, the Minister for Labour urged even this low number not to work in view of high unemployment, in order to give more jobs to men!

Although there are more than 300,000 under-fives in the South, only 26 voluntary nurseries exist, providing 814 places. It's not much better in the North, where £129 per 1000 people is spent on nurseries. Compare this to the £441 per 1000 spent in Scotland!

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catholic Church is powerful in Ireland — linked inextricably to the history of British imperialism. The Church has gained its strength from its long involvement with the nationalist movement, the institutionalisation of sectarian divides with the partition of Ireland, the continuing persecution of Catholics in the North, and the economic poverty of the South. The freedom to practise Catholicism was forbidden in the late 17th century and early 18th century. People identified with the clergy in opposition to the religion of the oppressors.

The position of women is directly influenced by the power and ideology of the Church. Until the link between the Church and the state is broken, basic rights like contraception and divorce will not be achieved, not to mention abortion. Its ideological dominance creates physical, material and emotional problems for women. The proof closer to home is evident in cities like Liverpool and Birmingham. Both are high immigrant areas, strongholds of Catholicism and anti-abortionists. Practically all schools, children's homes, hostels and social service organisations in Ireland are run by or dominated by the Church.

## CONTRACEPTION

It has been legal to use contraception in the South since a test case in 1972. However, it remains illegal to sell, advertise or advocate contraceptives. The Family Planning Services are currently challenging this situation by arguing that if a *family* has a constitutional right to use contraceptives, then it must be allowed access to information to exercise that right.

More than 60,000 women in Ireland are prescribed the pill as menstrual cycle regulators. Not surprisingly, Ireland has the highest incidence of irregular cycles in Europe! Today, there are family planning clinics in five towns and cities in Ireland. The clinics ask for donations rather than selling contraceptives.

The Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 is the law these clinics have to get around. It is the same legislation used to ban *Spare Rib*, a Family Planning booklet, and *Gay News*. There have been six unsuccessful attempts since 1971 to change this law. The sentiment against it is evident in the fact that over 69 per cent of Irish women of child-bearing age want the sale of contraceptives to be legalised. Fianna Fail — now in power — intends to introduce a contraceptive Bill in light of changing attitudes, but it will legalise their sale only to married women.

Contraceptives are available in the North, but the Catholic Church's position against birth control has left many women without a choice.





## ABORTION

Abortion is a criminal offence in both the North and the South. Even feminists who support the other demands of the women's liberation movement often don't see abortion as a just demand. In 1976, 2,920 women who had abortions in England gave addresses in Ireland; 1,802 came from the 26 Counties; 1,118 from the Six Counties. Many additional women probably gave addresses in England to qualify for the NHS.

The puritan and reactionary attitudes of the Protestant ascendancy coupled with the attitudes of the Catholic Church in the North has withheld British legislation on divorce, abortion and homosexuality from the North. Unionist MPs consistently oppose any reforms for women, and block their extension to the Six Counties.

In addition to the 1967 Abortion Act, other Acts which have not been extended to the North include: the 1967 Homosexuality Act; the Matrimonial Homes Act (giving women certain rights over the home); the 1973 Matrimonial Causes Act (divorce is prohibited by the 1937 constitution in the South, and in the North a 1939 Act operates); and the 1976 Domestic Violence Act.

A number of factors have combined to develop a new consciousness amongst broad layers of women in Ireland, including the boom period in Irish capitalism in the 1960s, with its increased demand for female labour in production, and the heightened expectations of these younger women in the workforce. This trend emerged in an environment of growing struggle in the North in 1968, coupled with the international influences of anti-imperialist solidarity (the Vietnam war), and the new rise of Irish socialist feminism.

## THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The Women's Liberation Movement itself was founded in the early '70s. It dwindled in the South in 1974. Its main achievement had been to publicise the hypocritical contraceptive situation and to produce *Chains or Change*: the first exposé of the specific oppression of Irish women. Some women still meet under the WLM title, but its membership has largely scattered, or formed other organisations.

The daughter organisations of a reformist character include the Women's Political Association and Women Elect, who aim to get more women into Parliament; Women's Aid, mainly a charitable organisation although it is becoming more feminist; and Action, Information and Motivation, responsible for the introduction of the Family Law Reform Acts and for exposing the extent of brutality within the family, centring exclusively on alcoholism.

## IRISH WOMEN UNITED

On the more radical side, a group called Irish Women United grew out of a lesbian/feminist Dublin group. It also involved women from the Communist Party of Ireland and the Socialist Party of Ireland. The Official Sinn Féin didn't join.

Irish Women United has a charter of wide-ranging demands from the removal of legal and bureaucratic bars to women, through the recognition of parenthood as a social function, to the right of all women to a self-defined sexuality. IWU has campaigned on the issues of equal pay, contraception and health. It received wide publicity around the occupation of the Federated Union Employers' headquarters. The broad left ignored or attacked what it called the 'bourgeois feminists'. Only the far left supported this action.

Pamphlets have been produced by IWU on education of Irish women and a study on anti-discrimination legislation. It has launched an Equal Pay Campaign, and the Irish Contraception Action Programme, as well as exposing the misuse of the 'drip' to induce birth in Irish maternity hospitals.

*Banshee*, the magazine of IWU, has suffered from many of the group's problems. In Ireland, there is an absence of general resources for alternative living and fringe groups. Printing facilities are available only through contacts in the universities, and money is generally difficult to come by. Consequently many groups are forced to concentrate on basic questions like finding meeting rooms and funds. The lack of left bookshops and meeting places mean few outlets for new ideas. Outside Dublin the situation is worse, although small groups of women are trying to raise issues such as contraception.

The IWU has never had a policy on the North, although it publicly opposed the use of capital punishment during the Murray Defence Campaign, the introduction of the Emergency Powers Act and Criminal Law Act, and the Peace Movement.

There has been a historical schism in Ireland between the fight for national liberation and the fight for women's rights. It is time this was challenged. It will prove difficult to do so because many in the Republican movement view Catholicism and Irish nationalism as conflicting with the needs of Irish women. Many feminists don't connect the root cause of backwardness of Irish society with their own oppression. The socialist feminists who struggle against imperialism find themselves 'isolated, intellectually and politically'. In the words of one such sister: 'We have had to sift through the only conceptual tools left to us in our revolutionary traditions — nationalist traditions — which are imbued with Catholicism and reactionary ideology. Many feminists have rejected nationalism and rightly so, but have thereby cut themselves off from a part of our history which is the key to our struggle today.'

In the North, the women's movement emerged later than its counterparts in the South. This stems from the impact of Republican influence in the North, which placed women's liberation after national liberation.

This tardiness was reflected during the Free Derry period of the struggle. Steps to collectivise domestic labour — such as crèches, communal laundries, etc. — were not taken. There is now a Women's Aid group with refuges in Belfast, Derry and Coleraine. The Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement (a university-based women's law group), a Belfast-centred lesbian group, and a socialist women's group called the Andersonstown Women's Group, are the other main groups which exist. The latter is the only one involved in the anti-imperialist struggle. However, the possibilities for integrating this with the struggle for women's liberation are steadily increasing as contact grows between women in the North and South. A very important step in this direction was the All-Ireland Women's Liberation Conference held in October 1977 (reported in *Spare Rib*), in which all the above-mentioned groups took part.

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Women and Ireland Group can be contacted c/o A Woman's Place, 42 Earlham Street, London WC2. Shortly available will be copies of a pamphlet, 'Papers from the Feminist and Ireland Workshop' [price 40p plus 20p p&p], and a poster, 'Women at War, we are in solidarity' [price 90p].*

# Crimes against Irish Women Committee

The CAIW Committee has been formed to collect evidence and build support for the International Tribunal on Britain's Crimes against the Irish People.

CAIW believes that a successful tribunal depends upon the full and open participation of all those concerned about brutality in Northern Ireland.

The CAIW Committee will: Collect and co-ordinate evidence on the mistreatment of Irish women by the British security forces in Northern Ireland; [2] Organise support and sponsorship for the Tribunal amongst women world-wide; [3] Seek to build an International Women's Delegation to investigate the charges and allegations collected through CAIW.

The CAIW Committee is open to all women who are concerned with the treatment of Irish women by the British security forces. Please contact us at: The Committee to Investigate Britain's Crimes Against Irish Women, 37 Middle Lane, London N8.



# Lesbian Line

Lesbian Line is a new phone service for women operated entirely by women and offering help, advice and information.

Most women, whether or not we are lesbians, have been brought up either in total ignorance of lesbianism, or to regard lesbians as anything from disgusting perverts to, at best, unfortunate women with 'problems'. Lesbian characters are rarely portrayed on television, radio or in films, except as sexual deviants in pornography. The hostility towards lesbians prevents us from making our relationships visible in public. Unless we are prepared to wear distinguishing badges, it is automatically assumed that all women are heterosexual. We get constantly asked questions about our boyfriends or husbands. In every aspect of our lives the heterosexual image is thrust upon us.

As a result, heterosexual women are often very wary of relating to us as friends. For us as lesbians it is difficult to meet and recognise each other, while for women experiencing their first attraction to another woman, the prospect of not being 'normal' can be very frightening.

Seldom if ever are we shown the positive aspects of lesbianism; our closeness and strength together, our potential for developing alternative ways of leading our lives as women. We recognise that lesbians can have 'problems' although we believe that these are not caused by our homosexuality but by the pressures put on us by society.

Lesbians are discriminated against not only as lesbians but as women. All women unaccompanied by a man are seen as potential pick-ups and can be rape victims. Generally speaking, too, women are in lower paid jobs than men, and welfare provision reveals that we are eventually expected to be financially dependent upon them. But lesbians are also discriminated against as homosexual people, to the extent that we face losing our children in custody cases, purely because of our sexual orientation. Any lesbian who wishes to have or adopt a child is assumed to be an unfit parent. In particular lesbians working with children, i.e. teachers, nurses, social workers, risk losing their jobs if they reveal their homosexuality, largely due to the myth that homosexual people — unlike heterosexuals — are unable to control their 'sexual urges'. In addition homosexuals often face dismissal even in jobs where they are not in contact with children, as in the armed forces, for example. In our personal lives too as lesbians, we face possible rejection by family, friends or colleagues.

For society the very existence of lesbians challenges the expectation that women are put on this earth in order to find a man and get married. It undermines the traditional view of women's role as being passively dependent, and, for men, the independence of lesbians poses a particular threat to their ego. Society prefers to close its eyes to the existence of lesbians. But this apparent indifference is not to be confused with acceptance. There is a general misconception both inside and outside of the gay movement that because lesbians are not necessarily overtly discriminated against by law (as is male homosexuality) lesbian oppression

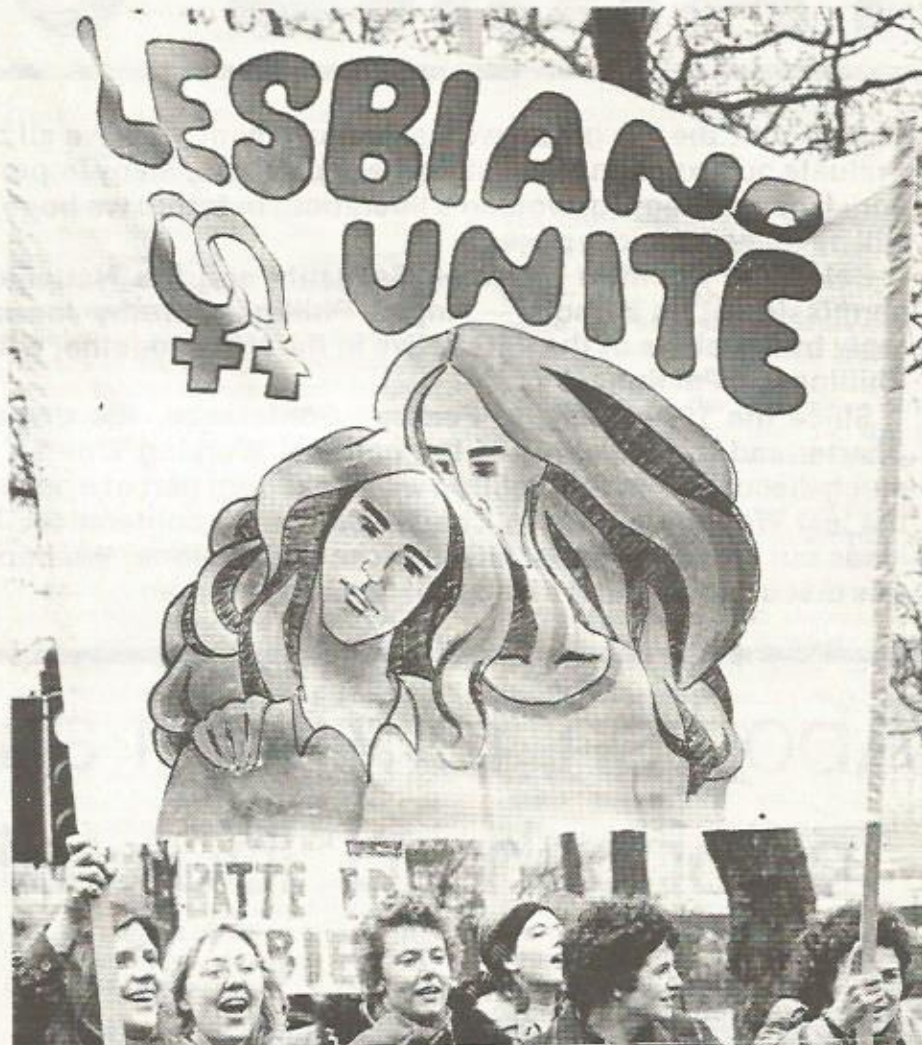


Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

is less severe and our struggle only secondary to that of our gay brothers.

Lesbian Line originated this summer largely as a result of the dissatisfaction felt by some of its members who have previously been active in other gay organisations, some of which exist to help and inform isolated individuals. Both women using these services and the women working for them found that homosexual men can often be no more free from misconceptions about lesbians than the general public. So the first national phone service was set up, run entirely by women for women.

*This is the first time a woman has been able to ring up and be sure of speaking to another woman, whether she just wants information regarding women-only events and places, or the opportunity to talk at length to a woman who will have had experiences similar to her own.*

After three months organisation, supported by the Women's Liberation Movement, our phone service started operating on 19 September 1977. We provide the opportunity for sharing information, making links between different groups already in existence, helping isolated lesbians and bisexual women, and encouraging the formation of a wider network. Those of us at Lesbian Line do not see ourselves as experts, but as a group of women with, between us, a wide range of ages and backgrounds and considerable experience we would like to share with other women. We respect every

woman's need to make her own individual decisions about her life and sexuality. However, as well as the more open forms of prejudice against lesbians, we also recognise the total lack of support available to most women considering a lesbian experience. Invariably they are told to work at their relationships with men and the possibility of relating to women is not really taken seriously. For this reason we are not prepared to hide behind a 'neutrality' towards lesbianism which traditionally masks the fear of 'encouraging lesbianism'. We hope therefore to offer a positive image of lesbianism to all women who contact us and communicate to them a sense of confidence and self-worth.

All of us work voluntarily for Lesbian Line. We are a non-profit making organisation, financially dependent on donations and our own fund raising, so financial help is extremely welcome to cover running costs. The phone service is run collectively. Both administration and phone duties are rotated and shared equally. Decisions are taken at regular meetings. At present we are open for any woman who wants to ring us between 2-10pm on Mondays and Fridays. Letters may be sent to us c/o BM 1514, London WC1V 6XX. We also hold small social gatherings to enable women to talk and to get to know other lesbians.

*Lesbian Line's telephone number is 01-794 2942.*



# TAKING STOCK

---

Throughout the life of the women's movement we have all been involved in discussions to evaluate our experiences of struggle and debate. Many important lessons have been drawn to enrich our strategy for women's liberation. In future we hope that some of these discussions will be reflected in our pages.

Below we reprint a paper on Sexuality and the National Abortion Campaign with the permission of its authors — Angela Phillips, Dorothy Jones and Pat Kahn. We also print a reply by members of the IMG active in the NAC, together with a further comment by Angela Phillips and Pat Kahn.

Since the 1974 Socialist Feminist Conference, the demands of the Working Women's Charter and the activities of the national Working Women's Charter Campaign have been much discussed. In this section we also reprint part of a paper produced by IMG members for the last Working Women's Charter Campaign conference. This outlines some of the main ideas put forward by the IMG in these discussions. We hope that other sisters will take up this discussion in future issues of Socialist Woman.

---

## Abortion, feminism and sexuality ~ a long hard look at NAC

The National Abortion Campaign was built because we needed it. We had no other appropriate organisation to take on the job of fighting a hard defensive campaign. In the beginning, when NAC had only to coordinate a massive groundswell of anger, it worked quite well. Now, two years later, hundreds of women have left the campaign leaving the work to a few women who are fighting desperately to breathe life back into it in time to deal with the latest threat from the Benyon Bill.

What has happened? Why has NAC always been only on the fringes of the women's liberation movement, and why has the WLM taken a back seat and allowed the campaign to fall prey to left sectarian infighting? Where is the spontaneity which characterised earlier women's liberation activities like the Miss World protest?

This problem is not unique to NAC; we seem unable to confront women from organised left groups and counter their influence with our own. And NAC, without a clear feminist perspective, seems to be moving steadily in the wrong direction.

### Why are we Fighting for the Right to Abortion?

Is it simply for our right to have those children we can afford when we want them? The right to economic independence through work outside the home? The right to training for skilled jobs, the right to structure our childbearing

according to our economic and social needs?

This is only part of the story. If we see abortion only in this context, as a primarily economic demand, our opponents can point to other answers — better child care and housing, or sexual abstinence. Neither of these are solutions for us because they ignore our right to express our sexuality freely. The fight for abortion is primarily a fight for sexual freedom. The economic implications of unwanted pregnancy flow from our sexuality. The sixth demand of the women's liberation movement, for the right to a self-defined sexuality, must be in part a reaffirmation of our right to have heterosexual relationships without suffering from the economic and social consequences of our sexuality.

Clearly our access to money affects our sexual freedom. Women who can afford more children, who can pay others to care for them, and who can afford abortions even if they are illegal, are to a large extent freed from the anxiety which so distorts sex for the majority of us. We cannot enjoy our sexuality if we are afraid of getting pregnant. Freely available contraception has not solved this problem: many women suffer from pill side-effects because they fear pregnancy (a major side-effect is loss of libido), and no other form of contraception is safe enough to eliminate that fear. Only the knowledge of abortion back-up, free and on demand, can eliminate the twin evils of inadequate

and dangerous forms of birth-control and constant fear of pregnancy.

### Taking Sex onto the Streets

On both sides of the abortion fight the issue of sexuality is suppressed, yet on both sides it is primary. We know that the anti-abortionists regard abortion as a threat to their concept of morality and yet we have not really confronted them on this major issue.

Is this because we have not sorted out the theory in our own minds, or is it because we are afraid of campaigning around an issue which arouses such powerful feelings? Do we fear that our campaign would be less respectable if we made the sexual aspects of it more explicit? Is it our own inhibitions which hold us back? Or are we unconsciously avoiding the issue because we too fear pregnancy and try to view sex and pregnancy in two separate boxes?

Our opponents might identify sex only with unmarried blondes in fast cars, but we know that sexuality is a part of all our lives; it is as important for the forty-year-old production line worker as it is for the twenty-year-old student. Sexuality doesn't cease after marriage, and its economic and social implications don't disappear. Though it may appear difficult to organise around this issue, the fight for sexual freedom affects all women; so surely all women can identify with a campaign based around that demand.



## The Limitations of NAC

The campaign so far has been doggedly defensive. Concentrating on the economic aspects of fertility control, abortion has been separated from its feminist context and launched into the political arena in haste, without sufficient thought.

1. Our campaigning slogans demonstrate the limitations of our campaign: no return to backstreet abortion/keep it safe and legal .... In both of them we identify women as victims. There is nothing **wrong** with the demands as such, but they do not evoke the power of women; they appeal for help, they don't demand control. They are not a rallying cry for women because they seem to be about others and not about ourselves. The slogan 'free abortion on demand, a woman's right to choose' is far more constructive, but it has been used in the narrowest possible way — choice about abortion rather than about life.

2. NAC has even shied away from positive legislation. Instead of backing the ALRA model Bill we have again postponed the issue. We have again lost the initiative. How can we expect women to fight enthusiastically to defend the '67 Act which we know is a bad law?

3. When our opponents say that liberal abortion policies cause promiscuity we deny it. Why? We don't subscribe to their narrow-minded morality; we surely expect women to make use of technological advances which allow us to make the most of our sexuality.

4. Even when we fight for day care clinics, we stress their economic usefulness to the state. We don't argue that women **prefer** quick simple procedures, that day care clinics are better than the old way.

5. We have never used our ability to perform abortions clandestinely as a threat against the state. We do not suggest that a clandestine network could possibly replace the NHS. While continuing to fight for NHS abortions, our ability to defy the law is a powerful weapon which we haven't explored using.

## The Personal is Political [remember?]

Not one of the current NAC slogans includes the words 'we' or 'our'. Have we forgotten that the strength of the women's liberation movement is that we fight together against **our own** oppression? If people are avoiding NAC because they feel we can manage without them then we have failed to put across one of the most basic theories of the women's movement. We cannot fight to liberate others. We must fight to liberate ourselves. The American slogans make this explicit — 'our bodies, our lives — our right to decide'.

## Building a Feminist Campaign

NAC is not a feminist campaign. It is an uneasy coalition of politically active women and we as feminists have allowed our ideas to be fragmented and pushed aside by the more organised left groups. It is time we organised among ourselves and made our politics explicit within and through the campaign, and worked out more imaginative ways of putting our case across. Demonstrations and public meetings are not the only ways of campaigning, and they are not the ways the women's movement has used in the past. We don't suggest that NAC drop its plans and completely reorganise itself. As

socialist feminists we are just one constituent part of NAC. We must sort ourselves out, and provide positive alternatives and feminist practice instead of moaning about left group domination.

We would like to start that organisation **now** and invite all non-aligned socialist feminists to a lunchtime meeting during this conference where we can decide on a place and time to hold a meeting and start organising for ourselves.

**This paper was written by ANGELA PHILLIPS, DOROTHY JONES and PAT KAHN. Our view is an over-view: we haven't been involved in local NAC groups. One of us has been active on the steering committee, and one of us does a lot of design and printing for NAC.**

Shortly after this conference some groups of feminists met to discuss 'feminist action' in NAC. The result was a chain reaction. First the idea for the NAC caravan was launched and adopted by NAC but organised and designed by feminists. Then during the committee stage of the Benyon Bill, FAB [Feminists Against Benyon] emerged. The name was used to cover three different events organised by different people on each occasion. The first was the stink bomb incident in the committee room, which attracted wide press coverage. The second was the spray painting exercise against chosen targets. The third was the occupation of the Catholic Cathedral in Westminster.

These actions had in common a combination of imagination and self-activity, with the intention of stimulating similar activity elsewhere.

# Supporters of Socialist Woman reply

The basis for the argument for demands being made around the issue of sexuality seems to be that 'the economic implications of unwanted pregnancy flow from our sexuality'. Therefore the demand for the right to freely express our sexuality is behind the demand for abortion and therefore we should include demands about sexuality in the campaign.

We disagree with this. The economic and political needs of capitalism lead to support for the family unit. Many things support the retention of the family — the economic ramifications such as the appalling financial position of single parents, the lack of nursery schools, the lack of part-time jobs, etc, the lack of adequate contraception, no right to abortion; the weight of family ideology. From these flow women's sexuality — monogamous, sex after marriage for

childbearing only ....

Certainly the fight for abortion is part of the fight for sexual freedom, but it is just as much a fight of importance to women who *do* conform to bourgeois standards of morality, who see the need for abortion as primarily a need for efficient means of *family* planning. They also demand the right to control their own fertility. It is not necessary to have broken with a bourgeois conception of morality, as this paper implies, to see the need for the right to abortion. The need to control one's own fertility is one of the preconditions necessary to being able to explore sexual relationships freely, it is not the result of this.

Just as we have encouraged people to be involved in the campaign who do not oppose the Government's cuts, we also encourage people to be involved who have

not begun to think about what 'self-determined sexuality' means. Of course we discuss these issues and hope to persuade all the people involved in the campaign to see the need to fight on all these points, but we should not make this one of the main slogans or demands of the campaign and therefore the basis of participation in it. Our support comes from wider numbers of people than those who support all the demands of the women's movement. It seems rather bizarre to expect so much on these questions and yet to rebuke NAC for not supporting ALRA's Bill with its upper limit of 24 weeks — a decision that was taken on the basis that we were not prepared to compromise on 'a woman's right to choose'.

Of course it would be good if we could involve more women from the WLM in NAC. If we have failed to do this it is because we, as socialists, have failed to get across to women in the movement the need for us as feminists to struggle against state oppression in order to achieve our liberation. The authors of the paper admit that the right to freely determined sexuality would be a difficult demand to organise around but say, 'surely all women can identify with a campaign based around that demand.'

When the vast majority of women still hope to marry and have a permanent,



monogamous relationship we would query that this is the case. Even when women do identify with this issue it is still difficult to involve them in a campaign on it. If we look at the campaigns around the sixth demand of the women's movement, we see that they have been against particular repressive moves, e.g. the sacking of Louise Boychuk for wearing a 'Lesbians Ignite' badge, or the *Gay News* trial, rather than around the demand generally.

It is claimed that the 'fault' for the issue of sexuality not being emphasised enough lies with the domination of women from left groups who are 'economistic' and do not have a feminist perspective. We have explained why we do not think that demands around sexuality should be made part of the basis of the campaign. This is not because we are not feminists but because we think it will limit the number of women who will become involved. Women from the IMG are feminists in thinking that women's liberation is crucial in changing the various repressive relations under capitalism. We are feminists in being militant on our own behalf in order to combat *our own oppression*. Groups in NAC have increasingly discussed various wider issues relating to the struggle for abortion — discussions which help to arm us politically for the campaign. If this is being done a little belatedly, it is not because we have 'launched [the struggle] into the political arena in haste, without sufficient thought'. It is because we have been too overwhelmed with work. If we have not had time to think, grumble to J. White and B. Benyon. It is scarcely NAC that controls the timing.

When we discussed this paper in our local NAC group, all the women there said that they thought this characterisation of NAC as economistic, not interested in the issue of sexuality, not against the cuts and rife with 'left sectarian in-fighting' was anyway more fantasy than anything else. Of course these things happen occasionally but, for example, there was an overwhelming vote at the last conference against the cuts. Even if some people did put forward these views they would be countered by a socialist perspective, not a feminist one.

The 'feminism' which NAC lacks seems to be characterised by being 'spontaneous' and 'self-activity'. Probably as much planning went into the disruption of the Miss World contest, proportionate to the numbers involved, as went into the NAC demonstrations. It is just as much 'self-activity' to go on a NAC demonstration as to occupy Westminster Cathedral, and because it doesn't depend on secrecy it is possible to encourage many more people to be involved in *struggling for themselves too*. If we aim to build a mass campaign we must have some activities which large numbers of people can be involved in.

Of course we support these other activities but do not see them as better, 'more feminist' than anything else. One of the central themes running through all aspects of the WLM is the importance of collective activity. (It would be a pity if feminist activity was activity which a few women only had to get themselves along to.) We should combine various tactics for struggle and use whichever is most

appropriate for the occasion.

The authors suggest that we should investigate using 'our ability to perform abortions clandestinely as a threat against the state'. We think this would be a move in completely the wrong direction. NAC is a campaign for abortion to be done legally and on the NHS. How could doing *illegal* abortion outside the NHS possibly aid the campaign? We are demanding that the state provides the best facilities for women — not allowing them to avoid this.

In Italy, where CISA has set up centres to do abortions, the Government has turned a blind eye and allowed them to continue, whilst at the same time rejecting a Bill in Parliament to legalise abortion. When the Seveso disaster happened in 1976, the pregnant women affected by the contamination either came to England for abortions or were encouraged by the Government to go to CISA. In this way the

## A further response

'Abortion, Feminism and Sexuality' was written as a discussion paper for the Socialist Feminist conference on sexuality last Spring. Although time has passed and some things have changed, we were interested to hear what Socialist Woman had to contribute to the debate. Unfortunately, Judith and Sarah have totally misunderstood what we had written. This is odd since such misunderstandings did not surface at the conference. To set the record straight, we'd like to make a few points:

1. We'd like to draw attention to the last paragraph of 'Taking Sex onto the Streets' in our paper. We are clearly not suggesting that it is necessary to have 'broken with a bourgeois sense of morality' to fight for abortion rights. On the contrary, it is because sex [whether good, bad or indifferent] necessarily preceded all abortions that we see it as a central issue. If women did not want to have sexual relationships with men they wouldn't get pregnant [except as a result of rape, which is still an aspect of sexuality which cannot be ignored].

Even if some women are 'putting up with sex' in return for security, the question of sexuality cannot be ignored. For most women, abortion and contraception are important because increasingly they consider it their right to enjoy sex without the consequences of pregnancy and child-bearing. Of course economic and social constraints are important: they are important because they limit our sexual freedom. We think therefore that the question of sexuality should be emphasised as part of our campaign.

2. Sectarian in-fighting a fantasy? We congratulate SW London NAC on their good fortune. However, they would have to have been wearing blinkers not to have noticed the effect it has had on the rest of the campaign. Many women have left NAC because of it and some NAC groups have actually collapsed under the strain. Tension has certainly eased since members

Government avoided taking any responsibility at all. It was certainly not threatened by clandestine abortions. Of course there is a problem for women needing immediate treatment, but in England, where medical treatment is supposed to be available on the NHS, it is not for NAC to suggest that the women's movement becomes involved in illegal abortions.

Finally, we think it a very good idea that people with similar views on any particular issue should meet together before NAC conferences, National Planning Meetings, etc. This would aid and clarify discussion so that our limited time on these occasions could be put to the best possible use. We hope that this would be around a positive position, not simply on the basis of being non-aligned.

JUDITH ARKWRIGHT & SARAH HART [both in SW London NAC and the IMG]

of some political organisations have limited their involvement in NAC, but is this a healthy sign?

3. We did not suggest that NAC should abandon demonstrations as a tactic but that other more imaginative activities should be added. These need not involve only a few women, they can be organised locally involving more rather than fewer people in organisation.

4. Clandestine abortion: we did not suggest replacing the NHS but merely using the threat of organising clandestine abortion as an additional form of pressure on the Government and the NHS.

The work of illegal abortion networks in France, America and most definitely in Italy has been a major factor in pushing governments into liberalising the law in all three countries. It is quite simply wrong to suggest otherwise. Mass law-breaking is a threat to the rule of law, and the tendency is to bend the laws rather than allow them to be ignored. The Italian Government, in spite of its Catholic bias, is desperate to pass some kind of liberalising legislation as soon as possible for this reason.

5. The question of the ALRA Bill is the only concrete criticism of our paper, it is a pity that the writers didn't develop it.

6. Does the word 'we' throughout the article imply IMG women? We were in fact addressing our paper to all women at the conference. The failure to think the issue through is therefore as much ours as anyone else's. We do not believe that IMG=NAC, and did not therefore address our criticisms to them or any other section of NAC. We feel it is rather arrogant of the writers to be so personally defensive. And finally, as non-aligned socialist feminists, we are meeting from a positive position.

Having given permission for Socialist Woman to use our paper, we would feel unhappy if it were used without this.

Yours in sisterhood,  
ANGELA PHILLIPS  
PAT KAHN



# Which way for the Working Women's Charter Campaign?

The national Working Women's Charter Campaign is a year old. The campaign has been placed on the map of struggles for women's liberation by many successful activities. Of particular note are the establishment of a national newspaper with a circulation of 2,500; a Rally on Women's Rights of a scope and base of support unprecedented in the life of the WLM; solidarity with struggles developing in the year, e.g. with the Trico strike, where the response of the campaign throughout the country gave it recognition from the strikers (Eileen Ward stated at the Trico victory celebration, 'without the support of the trade unions and the Women's Charter we would not have won').

Not surprisingly, the first year of the national campaign has been plagued with problems. Balance sheets of the year's activities have been produced for the conference. These, and the reports and experiences of the local groups, should play a central part in the discussion at the conference. In this way we can learn from the problems of our first year and go forward in our fight for women's liberation, of which the campaign for the Charter is a part.

In the assessment of the first year, many people in the campaign are beginning to question the importance of the Charter demands in the fight for women's liberation and the need for a nationally organised campaign.

In this paper, members of the International Marxist Group take up some of the questions raised in this discussion.

## Why are the WWC demands important for the battle for women's liberation?

1. Since its beginnings, the WLM adopted a number of demands as a framework for action. This framework stressed the need to take up the inter-related aspects of women's sexual oppression and economic exploitation at home and at work. These developments in the WLM were important in a situation where the labour movement had an inadequate understanding of the need to challenge women's ties to the family.

2. The Charter demands emerged from a labour movement body as a response to the increased struggles of women and the

growth of the women's movement. The London Trades Council Charter has been discussed by most trade (national) unions, has been adopted by 12 national unions and received one third of the TUC votes in 1976. The significance of this is that for the first time important sections of the labour movement were considering the lessons drawn from the women's movement on the necessary basis for a fight for women's liberation. Thus the Charter demands allow an audience for the initiatives and arguments of the WLM far wider than anything previously existing.

This is what we mean when we argue that the Working Women's Charter acts as a bridge between the experiences and lessons of the WLM and the struggles and debates of the labour movement.

## Why an organised campaign?

Many people have argued that a permanently organised campaign with local groups and conference is not necessary. They argue that the Charter can be taken up in many ways in existing organisations — women's groups, trade unions, etc. While we agree that the methods of taking up the Charter demands should be explored, we believe that an organised campaign is also necessary.

1. Without an organised campaign, the pressure for activity and debate around the Charter would be lost. The existence of Charter campaigning groups and the propaganda actions of the campaign have ensured continued debate on the Charter issues in the labour movement. The influence of these debates around the Charter is already seen in a revised TUC Charter, which includes demands for abortion rights and drops demands which bolstered women's home responsibilities. Without such an organised campaign, the Charter demands would have died with the London Trades Council in 1974.

2. The Charter has been taken up inside the trade unions, political organisations and within the struggles of women on specific issues — abortion and nursery campaigns. The campaign has allowed women most active in the fight for the

Charter to exchange their experiences and co-ordinate their activities. Without an organised campaign these activists would be isolated in individual women's groups, labour movement bodies and communities.

3. An organised campaign on the Charter can begin to gain recognition from people who may not be as committed to the struggle for women's liberation as those active in the Working Women's Charter Campaign itself. This is achieved through consistent propaganda and support activity which only an organised campaign can produce.

This recognition from people outside the campaign allows it to organise events (eg. conferences, the Rally) or set the ball rolling on particular issues with broad support (e.g. the London Charter organised the first demonstration against the James White Bill).

Without an organised campaign, these initial steps might never be taken. The broad support and discussion around the Charter demands allows the Campaign to approach people who may be unfamiliar with struggles on the issues in question.

## Why a national campaign?

1. Many of the gains to be made by an organised Charter Campaign relate to the debate within the labour movement on the issues raised by the women's liberation movement. These debates are often organised at a national level through trade union and women's conferences. Without national co-ordination we would be ill-prepared to take advantage of these national discussions.

2. The backwardness of the labour movement on women's oppression often means that women in struggle do so in isolation from the national support of the labour movement. Important examples of this are: EGA, Trico, SEI and other equal pay strikes. In this situation, the women's movement is important in the struggle to gain national labour movement support and recognition for women's actions.

The specific relationship of the Charter Campaign to the labour movement places it in a good position to take action to strengthen and gain wider support for women's struggles (e.g. Trico).

Charter Campaign has given active support to Grunwick strikers, most of whom are women.



Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)



3. Propaganda on the issues raised by the Charter is best organised and co-ordinated on a national level. A national newspaper and pamphlets strengthen the respect and impact of the campaign on a local and national level. Propaganda material produced by the national Campaign or circulated from one group to others throughout the country makes best use of our energies.

### Should all the activity on the WWC demands be organised through the WWCC?

We have argued the importance of building and strengthening an organised national campaign around the Charter. However, for the Charter demands to have the fullest impact within the specific struggles of women, or in the general labour movement, we must explore all possible ways of using the Charter.

When considering this we must be aware that the people committed to the organised Working Women's Charter Campaign are not the only ones active around the Charter demands. Support for the demands spreads far wider than the Working Women's Charter Campaign. This support acts as a basis for actions which unite quite broad sections of the labour and women's movements in struggle — turning often passive paper support for the Charter into action. This 'wider movement' on the Charter demands underlines the importance of looking beyond the boundaries of the Campaign itself, which largely organises women already committed to the Women's Liberation Movement and to socialist politics. This is not to downplay the importance of building a national Charter Campaign but clarifies the role of the Campaign as a radical section of a much broader, less politically committed movement around the Charter demands.

One difficulty faced by the national Campaign and local groups in the last year was the form this 'wider movement' on the Charter should take and the relationship of the organised Campaign to it.

Some of the problems to be resolved are:

1. How the Campaign relates to the individual campaigns on specific issues raised by the Charter, e.g. nurseries and abortion? What steps can the Campaign take to initiate action on these issues? How can we use our support in the labour movement to strengthen these activities? What actions should we take to raise the wider questions embodied in the Charter within these single issue campaigns?

2. What opportunities exist to organise women's groups in the labour movement? These groups would support the Charter but draw in women not yet as politically committed as those in the national Working Women's Charter Campaign. We should consider here the possibilities offered by women's committees and conferences in unions like NATFHE, ASTMS, TASS, and Labour Party women's committees.

3. How best can we relate to women's sub-committees in trade unions and trades councils whilst maintaining the independence of the national Campaign?

4. What possibilities exist for setting up women's caucuses involving large numbers of women as a basis of action?

### Do we only concentrate on activity with women at work?

Many women in the Campaign have raised the very important problem of how

we take up the issues facing women outside the workplace. The debate around this question has thrown up many confusions. Among these are the notion that we should ignore the labour movement or the equally incorrect position that we should concentrate our attentions on the problems facing women at work. The following position should be considered in the debate around the problem:

1. The struggle for socialism, of which women's liberation is an intrinsic part, takes up all questions of oppression and exploitation facing all oppressed sections of society. The struggle for socialism concerns a challenge to a whole social system. It cannot therefore be reduced to the economic problems faced by people at the workplace.

2. Struggles on issues not directly involving the workplace or working people can take on central importance in a challenge to capitalist domination, e.g. Basque national question, political prisoners in Spain, apartheid in South Africa, abortion and divorce in Italy.

3. The best way to unite all sections of oppressed women is to offer solutions to their problems. For example, the struggle to defend abortion rights, women's health needs and nursery facilities can unite together women in the home and at work.

4. It is necessary to recognise that, although the issues on which we struggle are not reduced to those only facing working women, the economic power and strength of collective action by the organised labour movement is crucial for victory on any question. Whatever issue we take up, we must attempt to draw behind it the collective strength of the labour movement. So in the struggles of women around such questions as rents, nurseries, rape we should fight for the aid and support of the labour movement.

This is why we stress the importance of an orientation for the Campaign towards the **labour movement**. This is why we emphasise the importance of the Charter demands as a channel to the labour movement. Thus our emphasis is not necessarily on working women as such but on the organisations of the working class.

### Where do we go from here?

Women are under attack through government policies of the Social Contract, cuts in social expenditure and associated unemployment. In addition we see increased attacks on an ideological level, with a challenge to abortion rights and the right of women to define their own sexuality and reassertion of the family as a woman's 'natural' place.

These attacks must be greeted with the most consistent fightback, which asserts women's right to independence and equality and begins to challenge women's ties to the family.

The present stage of development and resources of the national Charter Campaign limit the amount of national action we can take on in this situation. The weight of activity will rest on actions in localities, workplaces and through women's groups. However, it is important to outline areas of co-ordination on national activity which can unite our efforts and increase the impact of the Campaign in the quest for women's liberation. A serious discussion of realistic forms of national activity, which takes the Campaign further than its local work, is particularly important when the

attacks on women's rights are co-ordinated nationally by a consistent attack from the Government and the national leadership of the labour movement. These attacks can only be blocked by a national response.

1. The abortion issue is at the forefront of the ideological attacks on women. A national campaign is underway spear-headed by organisations like NAC, Labour Abortion Rights Campaign and ALRA. The Charter Campaign can play an important role to spread support for this campaign. The national Charter Campaign has a base of support in the labour movement much broader than these existing abortion campaigns. This support could be drawn behind the abortion struggle through consistent work by the Charter Campaign in the labour movement. The abortion struggle also draws into action many women and men not yet committed to the wider issues raised by the WLM and the Charter. By taking up nationally co-ordinated activity, the Charter Campaign can begin to win some of these people to the wider struggle for women's liberation.

2. At present, the major attacks on women's rights come through Government policies of cuts, unemployment and the Social Contract. The major contribution the Charter Campaign can make to these activities rests largely on the work of local groups, determined by the particular struggles developing in the locality.

However there are some important actions which the Charter Campaign can take on a national level.

(a) Propaganda produced nationally to highlight the need to integrate demands of women into the unfolding labour movement opposition to government policies.

(b) Nationally co-ordinated solidarity with the struggles of women, e.g. Trico, EGA.

(c) Contacts have been made with the labour movement through national actions like the Rally and the statement issued by the Campaign to the British Leyland conference on women's low pay. This and the continuing debates around the Charter mean that the Campaign is well placed to initiate a call for a national conference on opposition to Labour's attacks on women. Such a conference will be important for women leading struggles against these attacks. The conference would strengthen opposition to government attacks through the exchange of experience and the chances offered to generate further support for women's struggles. This will begin a process of ensuring that their struggles are given national weight and importance. This is essential when we consider the problems and isolation facing the EGA and Grunwick workers because of labour movement refusal to take national action.

(d) One of the main tasks of the national Campaign is to organise propaganda on the general questions raised by the Charter to win support inside specific struggles, labour movement bodies and the women's movement. Nationally organised propaganda, particularly the national newspaper, material for meetings (speakers and speakers' notes), and the organisation of meetings at union and campaign conferences (e.g. NAC, TUC) to win further support, are an important feature of national campaign work over the next year.



# DEBATE DEBATE DEBATE

Many readers may be amused, angry, enthused, or disappointed by articles appearing in *Socialist Woman*. Why not write and let us know your thoughts? Two of our readers have done just that. Indeed, both were so moved as to write from abroad! Hilda Scott, author of *Women and Socialism*, wrote from Austria in reply to a *Socialist Woman* review of her book. And Gary Kinsman, an activist in the gay movement in Canada, put pen to paper to reply to John Ross's article in the last issue on 'Capitalism, Politics and Personal Life'.

## Capitalism, politics and personal life ~ in response to J. Ross

The publication of J. Ross's article on capitalism and personal life in *Socialist Woman* (Vol. 6, No. 2) is an important step in beginning a discussion on this question in the Fourth International and the revolutionary left. Unfortunately while Ross makes a number of important and necessary criticisms of Eli Zaretsky's book *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life*, he misses the main point of Zaretsky's work and therefore does not provide an adequate critique of it. His labelling of Zaretsky's work as 'anti-Marxist' and 'anti-Leninist', while it may have a certain legitimacy, serves to write off Zaretsky's important contribution rather than establishing a basis for discussion of the real issues involved.

Perhaps a quote from Ross can help to clarify what I'm getting at. He states: 'The problem is not, as Zaretsky supposes, the "politicisation of the personal" but the elimination of the political altogether' (p. 13). In other words, he starts off from a point that in the long-term is correct, i.e. that in socialist and communist societies the state and the sphere of politics as a distinct sphere will wither away; but he uses this position to catapult over the real problem we face now which is how capitalism affects 'personal life', and how this relates to revolutionary strategy. Zaretsky is trying to point out how the distinct 'personal sphere' has developed in capitalist society and how this relates to the oppression of women, gays and the working class as a whole. Ross essentially does not deal with this central problematic that Zaretsky develops.

Ross's article makes a number of relevant points. Firstly, he takes up a certain confusion in Zaretsky's work between the private sphere which Marx talked about and the personal sphere which Marx didn't really conceive of, at least in the sense that Zaretsky outlines it. For Marx the distinction between public and private is the distinction, as Ross puts it, between the 'life of the capitalist state and the real nature of capitalist civil society' (p. 14). However this does not automatically mean, as Ross suggests, that Zaretsky's work is 'anti-Marxist' but rather points out the content of the debate in the last century. It is certainly clear that a distinction can be made in a Marxist framework between socialised labour and domestic labour, in a sense between public life and personal life. This does not negate the distinction that Marx made, which is essential to understanding bourgeois democracy, but is looking at another distinction which can be made, and is made, in mass consciousness in bourgeois society.

Ross also makes an important point in emphasising the political dimension of Marxism against Zaretsky, who sometimes seems to over-emphasise its 'economic reductionist' aspects. Ross correctly

points out that the precondition for social liberation is the destruction of the capitalist state and the establishment of workers power. He also correctly points out that Zaretsky does not have an adequate understanding of the development of Stalinism, which leads him to errors in his analysis. However, again Ross misses the main point. Zaretsky is trying to overcome the economist distortions of Marxism (which Ross himself recognises on page 9) by attempting to synthesise socialism with relevant aspects of feminist analysis. He sees Marxism as a total method of analysis and wants to overcome the error which many radical feminists have made of seeing Marxism as only a valid method of analysis for the economic sphere. He sees overcoming this division, which is common to both economist Marxism and sectors of radical feminism, 'through a conception of the family as a historically formed part of the mode of production' (p. 31, *op. cit.*).

Zaretsky explains the main project of his book in the following way:

'The following book examines the division between the private and public, or inner and outer worlds of our society. It explains this division in terms of the impact of capitalism upon the family: on one hand, the decline of the traditional patriarchal family, based upon private productive property; on the other, the rise of a new emphasis on personal life, experienced as something outside work and society' (p.9).

In other words, the distinction he is trying to address (if we use a narrow definition of 'political' like Ross does) is between personal (individual) and social life. Zaretsky is trying to examine the co-optive function of the 'personal' and 'subjective' spheres in bourgeois democracy. One of the major ways people are integrated into bourgeois democracy is through this division between public (seen as political, social and industrial) and personal life (the sphere of sexuality, the family, of something the people involved can control as compared to the impersonal 'outside' world). Marxists have to begin to explore this area so we can point out how social and political oppression are perpetuated in inter-personal relations, and how capitalism uses gender roles and emotional structures to maintain its domination over us all. Zaretsky is not arguing for the destruction of the distinct 'personal sphere' but is pointing out how 'the personal is political', not in the sense that it directly contests the bourgeois state, but in how forms of oppression and social domination are perpetuated in this sphere. In other words, he is trying to take from the analysis produced by feminism and gay liberation to enrich Marxist theory.

Zaretsky examines how the family has been transformed with



the rise of capitalist society. He explains: 'With the rise of industry, capitalism "split" production between its socialised forms (the sphere of commodity production) and the private labour performed predominantly by women within the home' (p.29).

He explains that, 'This "split" between the socialised labour of the capitalist enterprise and the private labour of women in the home is closely related to a second "split" — between our "personal" lives and our place within the social division of labour' (p.29). And he further argues: 'In fact, developed capitalism has mass-produced specific forms of personal life, and of individuality which simultaneously reinforce and threaten capitalist hegemony' (p. 73).

The understanding of this contradictory effect of capitalism on 'personal life', for example of the 'sexual revolution' of the late Sixties, which simultaneously laid some of the basis for the women's and gay movements and integrated aspects of sexual rebellion into capitalist commodity relations, is important for Marxism to understand and integrate into its revolutionary strategy and practice.

Zaretsky is trying to provide the material basis for understanding the ideology of the 'personal sphere'. While he may be somewhat schematic we must give him credit for this pioneering work.

Zaretsky also provides some elements for a critique of Marx and Engels' position on the sexual sphere and the liberation of women. To vulgarise somewhat Marx and Engels' position, they argued that the integration of women into social production and the socialisation of domestic labour would lead to the liberation of women. In other words, economic changes would somewhat spontaneously lead to the liberation of women. Zaretsky correctly points out that while these economic changes are absolutely necessary, they are not in and of themselves sufficient to bring about women's liberation. He points out the need for a conscious social and political struggle if women's liberation is to come about.

Marx and Engels also tended to see the forms of sexuality around them (generally monogamous heterosexuality) as the 'normal' or 'natural' form of sexuality. Because of the underdevelopment of scientific knowledge of the sexual sphere at the time, they were unable to apply a historical dialectical approach to this sphere of 'personal life'. Zaretsky also points out that Lenin didn't adequately understand the need for a conscious struggle around these questions. Zaretsky is trying to explain why we need to accept the basis that Marxism has provided for understanding the relation between the family and economic and social development, but why we must go beyond this to develop an understanding of how 'personal life' can be transformed along with the mode of production. It can also be pointed out that there is an inter-dependence between these two processes, and that without the transformation of 'personal life', further economic transformation will no longer be possible after a certain point.

Ross also raises a number of questions that are not directly related to Zaretsky's work. While he sees the importance of learning from the women's and gay movement, he seems to suggest that the revolutionary party should not take positions on many of the questions raised by Zaretsky. While he makes a number of valid points around the relationship of the revolutionary organisation to questions of culture, art and society, he leaves a lot of unclarity. For example, he suggests that while a revolutionary organisation would oppose all laws against gays, it should not take

a broader position on homosexuality. Again Ross is missing the point. The questions of women's and gay oppression are important political questions and if we are to fight sexism and hetero-sexism in mass consciousness we must take a broader position than simply support for law reform and formal equality. On gay liberation, for example, we must be able to explain why gays are oppressed, be able to combat theories of 'abnormality' and 'sickness', point out that homosexuality is as legitimate a sexual orientation as heterosexuality, and point out how homosexuality and the gay struggle question rigid gender roles and the sexual division of labour.

Ross goes on to point out that many activists in the women's and gay movements have a sceptical attitude to Leninist organisations. He tries to explain this attitude by suggesting they demand too much of a position on 'personal life'. While this has a relevant aspect it again misses the point. If we look at the relation historically between the left and women's and gay liberation we will see many inadequacies and errors on the part of the left. It is for these reasons that many feminists and gay activists are hostile or sceptical in relation to revolutionary organisations. The revolutionary left must go beyond these limitations of the past and develop an understanding of the importance of the fight for women's and gay liberation in the total revolutionary process. When the left corrects its past errors many feminist and gay activists would have reason to take a more positive attitude towards the left.

Ross seems to have a somewhat narrow conception of what a revolutionary party's tasks are. He seems to limit the party to helping to create the conditions for the smashing of the bourgeois state, the establishment of workers' power and to 'political' matters in the workers' state. Again there are relevant aspects to his analysis, but it begins to blur the important role a revolutionary organisation has to play in raising the political consciousness of the working class and oppressed before, after and during the revolution. The revolutionary party must constantly be raising the consciousness of workers and the oppressed around such issues as sexual oppression, not only to unite the working class prior to the insurrection but to be able to establish an adequate understanding of how to build a socialist society. Clearly the autonomous movements of the oppressed have an important role to play in this respect, but the revolutionary organisation still has a central role to play. It is only through a conscious social and political struggle that the family and present 'personal life' will be overcome and replaced by new forms of social organisation. And again these new forms of social organisation replacing the family and sexual division of labour will be necessary if a socialist and communist society is to be built. The function of a revolutionary organisation is a more dialectical process than Ross outlines and requires an understanding of how social and personal affect the political sphere (narrowly defined).

In conclusion, Ross's article, while it opens up the debate, is inadequate in a number of respects which I have tried to point out. It is important for the revolutionary left to be able to learn from the women's and gay struggle and to expand Marxist analysis to include the problems of the 'personal sphere'. While Zaretsky does not provide many answers to this problematic, he does pose the important questions, and whatever its limitations his work on this question is still the best available in English (as far as I am aware).

GARY KINSMAN

**Intercontinental Press**  
combined with **Inprecor**

TV Newscaster  
**CARTER'S  
WORLD  
TOUR**

Head Office: 111, Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 0LP  
Telephone: 01-477 9600  
Fax: 01-477 9601  
A Division of Intercontinental Press

Subscription Rates: 1988  
— Britain & Ireland: introductory (10 issues), £2.50; 6 months (24 issues), £5; 1 year (48 issues), £9.  
— Continental Europe: introductory, £4; 6 months, £8 (air, £11); 1 year, £13 (air, £19).

All new subscribers before 31 March will also receive free the final issue of Inprecor devoted to the world economic situation.

Send all orders with payment to: Intercontinental Press, P.O. Box 50, London N1 2XP. All cheques/POs etc. should be made out to Intercontinental Press. For enquiries outside Europe write to: Intercontinental Press, PO Box 116, Varick St. Station, New York, NY 10014, USA.

#### NEW INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

A single united weekly journal reflecting the views of the Fourth International has just commenced publication, combining **Intercontinental Press** and the English language edition of **Inprecor**. It will specialise in fast, accurate information and interpretation of world events of particular interest to the labour, socialist, colonial independence, black and women's liberation movements.

Single copies are 30p, but subscription rates are much cheaper:

— Britain & Ireland: introductory (10 issues), £2.50; 6 months (24 issues), £5; 1 year (48 issues), £9.

— Continental Europe: introductory, £4; 6 months, £8 (air, £11); 1 year, £13 (air, £19).

All new subscribers before 31 March will also receive free the final issue of **Inprecor** devoted to the world economic situation.

Send all orders with payment to: Intercontinental Press, P.O. Box 50, London N1 2XP. All cheques/POs etc. should be made out to Intercontinental Press. For enquiries outside Europe write to: Intercontinental Press, PO Box 116, Varick St. Station, New York, NY 10014, USA.



# Women and Socialism – an author's comment

by Hilda Scott

I have been invited to comment on the review of my book, *Women and Socialism* (Allison and Busby, London, 1976), by Alix Holt and Barbara Brown (published in the last issue of *Socialist Woman*). For the benefit of American readers, the book originally appeared in the US as *Does Socialism Liberate Women?* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1974). The two editions are identical except for the introduction.

When a person writes a book they usually limit themselves to a narrowly defined set of questions if they want the book to be digestible. If they stray from their declared intentions, they are usually pushed back into line (at least I was) by the publisher. Sometimes the particular set of questions which the author thinks are crying out to be discussed are not those which particular readers want to see aired, and there occurs a sort of non-meeting of the minds between people who may agree on more things than they disagree about. I suspect that this is at least part of the trouble between Barbara Brown and Alix Holt on the one hand, and me on the other.

I undertook to examine, primarily in Czechoslovak conditions, the only existing model we have of a society which proclaimed its intention of emancipating women according to the original Marxist prescription: the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, followed by full legal rights, economic emancipation of women through employment outside the home, and the taking over of housework and the care of children by the state. 'I have examined what did happen in the daily lives of women in post-war East European countries when an attempt was made to put a consistent body of ideas about the liberation of women into practice in a changed social order' (British introduction). Or as I wrote in the American introduction, 'I have tried... to record objectively what happened in a particular part of the world at a particular time when certain ideas were applied under certain conditions, and to attempt to explain why certain things happened as they did...'

I thought I had some special qualifications for this: first-hand experience and material systematically collected over a long period. I did not undertake to examine what should have been, or what might have been if Stalinism had not occurred. Czechoslovakia might have remained a bourgeois republic, and I might not have written a book.

## The Criticism

The main criticism directed against the book by Alix Holt and Barbara Brown is that I do not examine the effort to emancipate women within the context of political and economic developments, and that I confine myself to the 'optimism and idealism' of the early years, that I accept the problems of Czechoslovak society as 'an inevitable result of socialist change'.

I realise that I have a soft-sell way of writing. In general I like to present facts and I believe that many readers like to draw the conclusions rather than have them hammered home. I started the book in Czechoslovakia in 1972 and finished it in Vienna in 1973, after being asked to leave rather quickly by the Czechoslovak authorities (probably not because I thought their kind of socialism inevitable). It may be that under the impact of this experience some things seemed more obvious to me than they are, and I have not been explicit enough for some readers. Nevertheless.

## The Political Situation

I make clear at the beginning that not only the Soviet model of emancipation but the Soviet model of socialism was brought to Eastern Europe by the Red Army, which remained on the soil of these countries, except in the case of Czechoslovakia. I point out (p.74) that this model 'precludes all but officially sanctioned experiments, organisations, debates, and frames of reference'.

I have tried to reproduce the atmosphere in which hopes were followed by disillusionment in the 25 years following the war, by showing how it looked to people living through that time. I reported the level of thinking which I found in the 1950s and 1960s (not the thoughts Western feminists and/or socialists of the 1970s would have had). I wanted to show gradually where this thinking led, rather than stop every second paragraph and point out the errors from our point of view. I explained why the debate on women 'never got down to basic principles' (p.135).

I tried to show how it happened — tried to make it believable — that many people, including today's leading dissenters, thought it possible after Stalin's death in 1953 to make the situation work. While at any given moment there is only one 'correct' view, the view handed down by the party (p.74), there are people in Eastern Europe with various points of view and their points of view change, they push within the bureaucratic framework, changes occur which affect people's lives. We outside are aware of what is going on only when something dramatic happens, but this drama is the end result of a dialectic process. Former high party officials and other influential members of the Communist establishment do not become spokesmen for democratic socialism and leaders of Charter 77 overnight. If they are decent people now, what were they doing up there in the 1950s and early 1960s? How did they change?

'The effort to reconcile idealistic aims with the harsh measures of socialist rule and centralised decision making provide the major conflict of the post-war period and are the background of this book.' (p.73)

'Khrushchev's famous speech... in which he revealed some of the excesses of Stalinism, was presented to the Czechoslovaks in a very diluted form, but this was enough to spark off a wave of agonising reappraisal in which every individual began to re-evaluate his own experiences and to consider everything he had heard, seen or been told in a new light...' (p.98)

'Accumulated grievances built up into explosions... East Berlin... Poznan... Poland... Hungarian Events... "Prague Spring" of 1968.' (p.76)

## Why Study Eastern Europe?

I refer to the Eastern European countries as socialist because for better or worse they represent socialism in their own official eyes, in the eyes of a certain number of their citizens (varying with conditions), and in the eyes of a large part of the world. If there is or has been **something** socialist about these societies, how much socialism entitles them to be called socialist? If there was and is **nothing** socialist about these societies, and 'any project to liberate women was doomed to failure', then why are we studying the position of women in Eastern Europe? We know in advance that it's a flop. The only lesson is that dictatorship is bad.

Of course the situation is a good deal more complex, and Alix Holt and Barbara Brown do not think it all so simple either. Later in their review they reply to two other reviewers of my book, pointing out that in spite of everything women do have jobs and certain rights and options which they do not have in equal measure everywhere else in the world.

There is ambiguity in all our attitudes, which mirrors the ambiguity of the situation. We want to know how come centralised, autocratic societies voluntarily give women legal rights, jobs, education, nurseries, abortions, and loudly proclaimed women's equality. Were there some socialist principles and humanitarianism behind it, or was it simply in order better to use women as cogs in the production process? Why, having got that far, were these societies unable and unwilling to relieve women's household and child-care burdens?

If in trying to answer these questions I attempt to examine this kind of society on the basis of its own claims, does this mean that I accept their problems 'as the inevitable result of socialist change'? On the contrary, I assume that people view the Soviet model critically and do not want to fall into the same errors:

'Even if we reject the Soviet model, followed since the Second World War in six other East European countries, or at least view it realistically and critically, the experience gained when a comprehensive programme for women's equality was made part of the overall objective of governments for the first time in history does not lose any of its importance for us.

'Certainly we may argue that the disappointments were not inevitable, that they were partly the product of a particular historical situation, that they could have been avoided "if only", and that we in attempting to create a new social order would be less dogmatic, less bureaucratic, more democratic, and so obviously would not make the same mistakes... The experience of others is valuable just because it takes place on a concrete building site and not in a castle of the mind. We don't have to duplicate it, but it helps us to approach our own options more intelligently.' (British introduction)

## The Economic Situation

According to Alix Holt and Barbara Brown, I 'favour an explanation that sees both economic and psychological obstacles to women's social



advancement'. I write that 'the economic patterns are against them', it is implicit in my material that the very forces of production determine the dual role of women, I do 'note some effects of economic policy', and yet I 'accept the logic of this kind of economic rationality without question'. At the same time, the entire description of the effects of economic policy on Czechoslovak women given by Holt and Brown in their review is drawn from my book, except for the last sentences which seem to be from a personal communication from me to Alix Holt.

As I thumb through my book I find not 'some effects of economic policy', but one economic disaster after another, together with the complaints that 'poured forth'. Not even the toughest dogmatist in Prague accepted these as 'inevitable results of socialist change'. They were (and are) always described as mistakes and distortions of socialism (blamed on someone who is no longer around, of course). As I point out, economic failings in 1961 and 1962 'revealed such far-reaching and unexpected weaknesses in the whole system of planning and management that the entire plan was scrapped' (p.109).

I could not really provide an analysis of the centralised and bureaucratic practices which inspired the economic reform of 1966 and ultimately led to the 'Prague Spring' reform movement of 1968. I refer readers to a book by an expert in a note on p.227. The economic reform of 1966 was finally launched in its original form during the short-lived 'Prague Spring' which ended with the Soviet invasion in the summer of 1968. But that is not what is important from our point of view. It was ironically the possibility of a decentralised economy, with more individual responsibility and therefore more efficient, that created the threat to women's employment and inspired suggestions that women be sent home (pp.122-132)! In other words, an understanding of the need for correcting the abuses of a bureaucratically managed economy may go hand in hand with sympathy for women, but not necessarily with an understanding of sex-roles — a major point of my book.

## First Reason

One basic reason the 'Marxist model' could not produce liberation in my opinion — and Alix Holt and Barbara Brown do not mention this although I devote a whole chapter to it and refer to it repeatedly — lies in the original theory.

Engels believed he had demonstrated that an original state of matriarchy which prevailed everywhere in prehistoric times was overthrown by men when the development of private property impelled them to ensure the identity of their heirs by institutionalising the monogamous family. From this he concluded — and the whole communist movement long believed — that once private property was overthrown there would no longer be any real conflict of interest between men and women. I discuss at length why anthropologists no longer accept Engels' theory, and Rosalind Davies discussed the flaws in the argument in issue No. 1 of the Newsletter on 'Women in Eastern Europe' (available from Barbara Holland, CREES, University of Birmingham — please send sac).

As I point out, the Stalinist regime made dogma of the matriarchy theory and it passed into the compulsory corpus of belief of the Eastern European countries, where it remains today (references on request) to throttle all creative discussion on women's problems. If women's inequality is entirely due to private property, just abolish private property. There is no need to examine people's prejudices. (This approach has proved a great convenience to male socialists everywhere.) 'If patriarchal beliefs then continue to lie just below the surface in men and women, these are likely to determine the kind of equality that is set as the goal' (p.42). The admission that women's troubles may have some other root cause would require an examination of some of Marx and Engels' ideas, and 'doubts cast on one part of a doctrine may lead to reassessment of others'. This is impermissible in all existing socialist society to date (p.43).

## Second Reason

This limitation of investigation and discussion is the reason I give that sex-roles were left unchallenged, not just 'the absence of vocational training'. We can speculate that if 'Leninist norms' had prevailed in the Soviet Union, some of the original tenets of Marxism would eventually have been subjected to scrutiny. Perhaps a more complete theory to explain women's oppression would have emerged and it would be unnecessary to examine the second part of my explanation for the gap between professed intentions to achieve women's equality and the performance. But we are not playing the 'if only' game, we are trying to find out what we can learn from existing circumstances.

I write (p.104) that 'none of the early Marxists gave any weight to the fact that socialism — a change from private to social ownership of the plants and the machinery — would not alter the reality that the working world into which women stepped from the kitchen had been arranged and structured by men for their own convenience, and that any inability to adapt to these arrangements would be regarded as a female shortcoming'. As I have shown in my book, Marxists have long believed that resolution of the conflict between labour and capital also resolves the conflict between men and women. 'The idea of a conflict under socialism between men's and women's interests would have seemed absurd.' As this belief has been carefully nurtured and perpetuated, it seems perfectly natural for

men to define equality (or fail to define it). Men establish the 'socialist norms', set the goals and priorities, based on 'a concept of equality according to which men and women are equal but different, and it is women who deviate from the standard' (p.25).

When the theory 'from which nothing could be added and nothing could be taken away' (p.213) clashes with reality, when women turn out to be on the wrong wave-length, when they prove to be 'unreliable workers', when the birthrate drops, men attempt to solve the resulting problems at the expense of women (often with women's connivance, as everywhere). They simply redefine equality to mean making it possible for a woman to combine a job with her role as a wife and mother, while man has only one job — of course the really important one.

## My Conclusion

I do not offer my conclusion as the 'only', or indeed as any, solution to the problems of the women of Eastern Europe, as Alix Holt and Barbara Brown seem to think. This is a misunderstanding. I offer my conclusions for us: 'Theoreticians of women's liberation who need not work within any such rigidly prescribed formulas' as those enforced in Eastern Europe (p.216).

I believe that it is essential to change men's thinking as well as women's, to end sex-role stereotyping and the belief that the relative values men have given to the public and private sphere and to various functions within those spheres are the only possible values. I don't think this is the 'only' thing that stands between us and liberation, but I do believe that 'even if there is a more equitable distribution of wealth, it will not be until this new consciousness dawns that real equality will be possible...' (p.218).

In the introduction to the British edition I have restated this to emphasise it: 'A necessary emphasis on economic and political democracy as a condition for women's full liberation should not be allowed to obscure the fact that while economic power and male power may coincide, they are not the same thing. Thus a change in the economic and political system which is not at the same time predicated upon a redivision of sex roles cannot result in equality.'

## The Family

Yes, I think it is going to take a very long time to change attitudes. I do not know how these new attitudes will change the family (or, of course, what other forces will be operating on the family at the same time), but I do not think a fundamental change in the family can come about without them. Therefore I visualise the family as changing gradually, partly as a result of efforts to liberate women.

I don't rally behind battle cries like 'abolish the family' and 'socialise the family'. They are vague slogans, not programmes. Who is going to abolish it? How? When? On Monday after the Revolution by decree?

If our ultimate vision is a non-atomised society, and it is mine, then I think we have to begin not by demanding that the family abolish itself, but by trying to change attitudes in and communal services for existing atomic families that will make it possible to break down the fragmented roles into which they are frozen and which are perpetuated in their children. Naturally this must include full rights and appropriate living conditions for people who opt for communal living or whose families fail them.

We cannot provide full communal services which will make collective forms of social living possible as long as men regard services as 'the debt we owe our women' — a debt they have no real intention of paying. Once the care of children (for example) is recognised as being as valuable to society as building a new piece of highway, both men and women will take care of children and will not be isolated and written off whether they do it in a family, a commune, or a day-care centre. And more day-care centres will be built.

The family is our slowest changing institution. There is not, as Engels believed, a form of the family to correspond to every economic formation. We know this not only from modern anthropological research on pre-literate societies but from demographic studies of our own societies. The nuclear family in England and America as a prevalent form is not a product of industrialisation or capitalism, but predates the industrialisation process by some time. In Eastern Europe and some other countries the extended family has been common until recently and nuclear families have much closer ties with their other relatives than most of us do. The extended family is still relatively strong in Romania and the authorities are trying to preserve it. Why this diversity? We can guess but we don't know.

The family can be used to control and manipulate people. At the same time, it is also used by its members to preserve their values against oppressive authority — for example, to keep the national language and culture alive for 150 years in Poland and 300 years in the Czech lands. The family serves in Eastern Europe today in many instances to frustrate government pressure on the individual.

What exactly is the relationship between cultural and economic change and changes in the family? We do not really know, although we have theories, and so we do not really know how to bring about the changes we may desire. Slogans simply mask the complexity of the problem.



# INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

## The Spanish Communist Party and women

---

---

### Interview with MANUELA LOPEZ

(formerly responsible for the  
CP's work on women at the  
University of Madrid)

---

---

**Q. You left the Spanish Communist Party [PCE] at the time of the elections. How long were you in the party, what made you leave, and what perspectives do you have?**

A. I am not a typical case among the PCE opposition women. I entered the party with serious disagreements with its political line, but thinking that it was a party with a big implantation and great possibilities for work. I joined in 1972 and left for two reasons. The first was personal. I was personally exhausted, and when you are a militant and have difficulties in discussing what you are doing — lacking any concrete evaluation of your work — it is not very gratifying.

The second reason was the political line of the PCE. This caused problems long before the elections. But particularly at the time of the elections I became conscious of great contradictions. I could only go on being a militant in the party if I could see real possibilities of struggle as a feminist. I didn't see them, so I quit.

I think now that despite the serious contradictions a person might have between their ideas and actions and the party line, it is important to practise entryism — with the object of advancing feminist consciousness within political organisations. So I think it is important to struggle within the Socialist Party (PSOE) — a party backed by five million voters, which allows a certain amount of autonomy on what its members do on women's issues. Today there are few women in the PSOE, and they are not under excessive control.

Although I work in a political party, I think that if the autonomous women's movement does not have sufficient force to impose a determined political line on the parties, they are not going to carry out important changes.

The main reason I left the PCE was because of the party's idea that it would present itself as the 'party of women's liberation'. To do this, it used 'the woman question' as a way to implant itself and gain votes. Women working inside the PCE never thought the party was any more 'the party of women's liberation' than were other parties. After it had maintained an incorrect line — at least during these recent years — we couldn't allow it to characterise itself in this way.

The leadership of the women's organisation of the PCE — the

MDM — consisted of women whose politics made them put the interests of the party as an institution first, before the interests of women. The decisions reached in the MDM were not taken up by the leadership of the party itself. The PCE did not introduce feminism as an important factor for its total political line, regarding it as a separate issue.

**Q. What is the MDM, when was it established, and what are its links with the PCE?**

A. It appeared in 1965 in the wake of the general change in the political line of the PCE. The party at that time abandoned the idea that the Franco dictatorship was an unstable regime which could be finished by a general strike. It began to put forward a strategy of alliances with sectors of the bourgeoisie and with social groups that could have interests opposing the regime. The PCE analysed that women could have objective interests against the Francoist dictatorship, and they thus planned a new women's organisation.

During the first few years the organisation worked in the neighbourhoods, organising solidarity groups. For example, women from these groups took food to political prisoners.

When the PCE had a reasonable influence in the neighbourhoods in big cities, the MDM began to work specifically with housewives. The political line of the MDM was to take up problems specific to each neighbourhood, to improve their conditions and facilities, and to struggle against price rises, as well as participating in the general battles of the workers movement.

Up to about 1970, the MDM had no opponents on the terrain of feminist struggle. The only groups in existence were minority groups with specific objectives or small groups of radicalised women who didn't set out to provide a general political alternative, but began to have discussions in confined groups.

In the heart of the MDM there was one sole nucleus of opposition — the women of Catalonia, of the PSUC (as the CP is known in Catalonia). I don't know if it arose from a feminist consciousness or opposition to the centralism of the PCE, but in 1968-9 they disbanded the MDM in Catalonia.

Until 1975 the MDM was practically the only organisation with any serious influence. That was the year of the first 'Women's Days'. These days of action were held and feminist alternatives began to appear with the perspective of turning themselves into a real alternative to the MDM.

In the first Women's Days, a broad group of women emerged who opposed the project of the MDM, which until very recently was to work with housewives — who were characterised by the PCE as backward and isolated, only prepared to act around problems related to the home and refusing to take up problems of sexuality or even changes in legislation.

When feminist currents appeared outside the PCE — backed by other parties or independent women — women at the heart of the PCE began to question its political line.

The Women's Days were seen as a response to International Women's Year. Some minimal demands were formulated and co-ordinated between groups was established — like the Women's Platform in Madrid. Further days of action were also proposed.





'I am also an adulteress' reads the placard carried by this demonstrator outside a Barcelona court. Inside a woman was being jailed for this 'crime', but the CP refused to extend its amnesty demands to include such 'women's crimes'.

More groups were involved in the Women's Days, but the MDM bore the brunt of organising the event. It marked the beginning of the debate about feminism in Spain. Five hundred women attended. The event was held 16 days after Franco's death, in clandestinity. The MDM was the major force — although women attended from women's collectives and other left organisations like the Labour Party (PTE) and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

The debate was very fruitful. Fundamental problems were raised. For example, why does the women's movement organise and what form of organisation should it adopt. The MDM advanced several political positions which caused nearly half the women in the hall to clash with its members. There were two main points of conflict.

First, the MDM wanted to send a telegram to Juan Carlos asking for amnesty. The radical feminists' proposal was to include amnesty for specifically women's crimes. The MDM refused. It was incapable of understanding the political importance of this approach. The second conflict arose over a demonstration the next day. It was called at Carabanchel prison. Some women proposed that we should march out to the women's prison of Yeserias — where there were both political prisoners and women condemned for 'women's offences'. The MDM once again refused to support this proposal.

After these days of action, some women in the PCE began to think that a political alternative could exist in organising women outside the MDM. The polemic between the opposition in the MDM and the leadership centred on two questions. Women of the opposition felt that the women's movement should be unitary and autonomous, independent of political parties. They thought it was an error for the MDM to act as a transmission belt for the PCE, and argued that Communist women should work in the feminist movement alongside women of other parties and non-aligned women — rather than simply in the MDM itself.

Secondly, the opposition took up the MDM's limited political line in the neighbourhoods. It maintained that specific problems like sexuality, contraception, equality at work and so on should be included in the party's internal concerns. The women who led the MDM disagreed.

Communist women at the University of Madrid participated in a

women's group with a feminist platform. Theoretically, all political parties and independents worked in this group. The CP women tried to carry out a political intervention autonomous from the MDM. After a long fight — supported by the University Committee of the party — the women won the right to prohibit the leadership of the MDM from intervening in the University. They were then able to organise meetings and even to join activities with which the MDM was not in agreement.

Of course this caused problems for the party. In the Women's Platform of Madrid, Communist women from the MDM were often present at the same time as Communist women from the University with different positions. An extremely anomalous situation existed because democratic centralism was lamentably lacking. This situation created plenty of confrontations, though all very much below the surface. Just as happens with all oppositions in the Communist Parties, these confrontations never broke the surface of the party. And this situation lasted until the 'First Conference on The Woman' which the PCE called in 1976.

Women from the whole country were supposed to attend the conference. We women from the University asked for the right to speak and vote, and to present a paper to conference. Through a series of manoeuvres, the leadership of the MDM tried to stop the University women from presenting their positions to the conference because the party leadership would be present (a thing that could be very dangerous so far as their control of the party was concerned). But the Madrid opposition succeeded in getting five representatives, and in presenting their paper. At that conference there were women from the Workers Commissions, who had a neutral position at the beginning.

The debate was very fierce, and very badly run. It was impossible to bring a single vote to a conclusion. The MDM leadership tried to get through a resolution explicitly stating PCE support for the MDM. The opposition women refused and threatened to put out a public paper explaining the lack of unanimity on the resolution if a vote was taken. The conference ended at loggerheads, so they agreed to publish an external pamphlet presenting all the conference papers. But the opposition paper 'got lost', and so the book appeared with only the positions of the MDM leadership.

As every opposition within the party is very marginalised and isolated, it is difficult to contact other sectors to be able to discuss and gather forces. Our objective was to reach the women in the workers movement, because we thought that if the leadership of the MDM managed to influence them, the political battle would be lost. Clearly everything had to be done clandestinely. They didn't know who we were, where we came from, or anything. We managed to contact women in the legal sector and women from Telefonica, for example.

After the conference we asked for a meeting with the PCE's Provincial Committee of Madrid to explain our positions. In that meeting the Provincial Committee supported the autonomy not only of the women in the University, but also of other women who were not militants within the MDM.

The leadership of the MDM accepted the decision of the provincial leadership and set up a body which, in theory, would be the political leadership on the woman question in Madrid, and where the University would be represented. But while they had representatives on it from all 30 housewives' associations (one per neighbourhood), they only had one representative from the University. There was another from the professional sector, but we were still a tiny minority — the delegates from the workers movement were either neutral or supported the MDM.

The last skirmish took place at the time of the election campaign over the MDM's proposed slogan: 'The PCE is "The Party of Women's Liberation"'. Once again it was the women of the University who opposed this, proposing a completely different type of campaign. But this time the PCE's Provincial Committee and the University Committee vetoed the autonomy of the women from the University. The arguments were that, faced with elections, the party had to be one, united and strong, and therefore there was no possibility of autonomy. The women from the University refused to participate in the election campaign and I left the party.

After the elections, and the failure of the campaign, the party leadership saw that the MDM was incapable of playing the role mapped out for it in relation to the mass of women. It could not become hegemonic within the women's movement, and so they were forced to come up with an alternative solution. Carrillo understood that it might be more advantageous to allow Communist women to enter the women's groups which had political possibilities, such as the FLM (Women's Liberation Front), rather than persevering with a body that had lost its reputation and was stagnating without any real influence. The resolution that seems to have been passed will maintain the MDM but with a leadership which has a more flexible idea of how to intervene.



**Q. The PCE programme of October 1975 (written before Franco's death) defines the autonomous women's movement as a flexible movement, open to all currents, whose organisational independence vis-a-vis political parties is a guarantee of its action and effectiveness. Of course, there is a gulf between these declarations and the practice of the MDM, which elsewhere proclaims itself to be the autonomous women's movement. But weren't you able to make use of that programme in your work inside the party?**

**A.** Yes, this was one of the fundamental weapons which the opposition used, demanding that the adjective 'autonomous' take on an actual substance. But this discussion was ruled out right from the start. The official position was to say: we accept autonomy, so that more political parties can participate in the MDM. But of course the PCE had most influence, and were not prepared to work for a unitary platform with other organisations which could mean a different relationship of forces.

**Q. How has the political practice of the MDM and the PCE prevented women from understanding the real roots of their oppression?**

**A.** Well, I wouldn't say the PCE's work has been absolutely negative. It began work in this sector when nobody was working there, under very difficult objective conditions. In 1965 the word 'feminism' was something that repelled people in this country. Nobody understood it. So the PCE's initial work fulfilled a certain important function.

But this first phase is over. Today there is sizable support for the movement in Spanish society. But the PCE has taken a step backward so far as women's consciousness goes. Its fear of allowing women to think and organise for themselves has kept them from advancing and discussing other topics. By limiting them to issues such as the cost of living and a role of simple solidarity, women have been hindered from questioning their own role within the family and their role within society.

For a long time the MDM maintained that sexuality was not something which concerned women from the neighbourhoods, that debates about sexuality, abortion and contraception were counter-productive in this sphere as they were the problems of radicalised women who belonged to a cultural vanguard. It was only when the women from the neighbourhoods began to support the campaign for contraception, signed letters demanding contraception, and attended talks held by various women's groups, that the MDM took up these problems. And so there was an important section in the propaganda pamphlets of the election campaign talking about contraceptives and abortion.

The political leadership of the party is now beginning to discuss sexuality and is starting to realise the importance of feminism as a specific struggle. So the struggle which women wage inside the party can be very important. But it also means questioning other things, like how the party should function internally, and the hierarchy within the party. The fact is that you can't isolate the problem of women from the general political line of the PCE. The PCE simply cannot risk taking steps that could cause it to clash in some way with sectors which it reckons it can draw along.

It's the same as with the 'historic compromise' in Italy. The PCI cannot come out in favour of abortion, however much the women in the party ask for it, because that would mean confronting the Church while trying to make an alliance with the Christian Democrats. So in this sense there will always be a clash between a feminist strategy and the strategy of the PCE.

Nevertheless, even by allowing women Communists a limited amount of autonomy, Carrillo has taken a very dangerous step. Given the political line of the PCE, an opposition is inevitable in the short term. If the PCE women enter autonomous women's organisations, they are going to be raising a series of problems in their demands which the PCE's line cannot tolerate, because the latter is one of a pact with the bourgeoisie. So clashes are going to take place that could be irreversible.

# The struggle of Palestinian women

## RUTH CHALLIS reports

The wave of reaction spreading across the Arab world — spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, now the most powerful Arab state in the area — has had a profound effect on the struggle of women in these countries for their liberation. The reintroduction of archaic laws based on Islamic practices threatens to reverse completely those tottering steps which have been taken in the direction of freeing Arab women from the prison of the veil and 'Al-ard' — the concept of family honour.

However, quite contrary trends were apparent among Palestinian women whom we met on a recent visit to Lebanon. The traumatic situation resulting from their expulsion from their homeland and an almost continuous state of war has presented men and women in the Palestinian diaspora with problems that could only be tackled by partially relaxing the traditional restrictions on female participation in public life. The necessity of mobilising the whole of Palestinian society in the struggle against Zionism has resulted in a degree of women's self-organisation and female involvement in political and military affairs

unprecedented in the Arab world. But at the same time life in the refugee camps remains in general deeply conservative. The following remarks are an attempt to outline the contradictory processes affecting the position of women in that section of the Arab world known as the Palestinian diaspora.

\* \* \* \* \*

In our discussions with Palestinian women we raised many of the issues which occupy the European women's movement, as well as the specific problems faced by Arab women. However, it soon became clear that questions which appear straightforward in Britain take on a very different significance in the context of the Palestinian diaspora. An interesting case in point is the prevailing attitude towards contraception and abortion. We were told that both are available, but their use is discouraged because stress is placed on the need for large families. In fact, contraception is viewed as part of a general health education programme; a way of producing healthy children at planned intervals, rather than as part of a woman's right to control her own fertility.

The average Palestinian family is large — seven to ten children is common — and of course many of the social and religious

factors which operate here are common to other colonial peoples, as is the distrust of contraceptive programmes as a method of imperialist control. However, a high birth-rate has also become a crucial political weapon for the Palestinians — perhaps the most powerful weapon they presently possess in their struggle against Zionism. This is recognised not only by the Palestinians but by the Israelis. The Zionist establishment, when not denying the existence of the Palestinian people, has constantly asserted that they can easily be absorbed into the surrounding Arab countries. However, Israel's real concerns, as distinct from its public attitudes, were dramatically revealed not so long ago with the publication of the 'Koenig Memorandum'. This confidential report to the Israeli Ministry of the Interior outlined in eloquent and unashamedly racist terms the fear with which the Israeli state views the growth-rate of the Palestinian population.

Thus it is the struggle against Zionist expansionism and resistance to national destruction in the diaspora which provide the context for examining attitudes to contraception. The reactionary dangers inherent in this situation are obvious, and are recognised by leaders of the General Union of Palestinian Women. Nevertheless, practical as well as political reasons make it difficult to see any alternative to





International Women's Day poster stuck up in a Beirut street..

the course being followed at the moment: the right to choose in principle, but discouragement in practice. After the genocidal attack unleashed by the Jordanian regime in 'Black September' 1970, and the massacres of the Lebanese civil war, the importance of demography for the Palestinian Resistance cannot be stressed too strongly.

So the structure and role of the family is of no mean importance for Palestinian women, most of whom will devote their lives to child-bearing and rearing. Again the family has acquired a unique significance in the Palestinian case, being one of the few social institutions to survive intact the dispersal of the population after 1948 and 1967. It was largely the family which served to reproduce the Palestinian identity and preserve national consciousness among the refugees wherever they settled. Family ties and obligations were further strengthened by the tendency for whole villages to settle together in the camps along with their traditional leaders, thus perpetuating traditional, patriarchal relationships. However, these relationships began to be eroded — particularly after the 1967 war and again after the start of the Lebanese civil war — by the rapid mass politicisation and the beginning of armed struggle. One example of this process of erosion can be seen in the transference of authority in the refugee camps from the old village elders to the military commanders. The onset of the civil war in Lebanon greatly accelerated this process. Familial influence in general, and parental authority in particular, collapsed as young girls volunteered for military, paramilitary and medical service, while the older women began the social mobilisation in the camps necessary to resist the attacks of the fascist forces.

We were naturally anxious to discuss the extent to which women were able to play a full military role, both in the civil war and in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. As a representative from the General

Union of Palestinian Women pointed out, the woman *fidayi* guerilla fighter has become a symbol for revolutionaries all over the world. In fact women comprise only about 5 per cent of the *fedayeen* (literally, 'those who sacrifice themselves'). But this low figure disguises the extent to which many thousands of women are trained and ready to fight. Indeed, during the civil war they took part side by side with men in the militias, and a women's brigade was even formed.

However, as usual this mass participation of women was not achieved without a struggle. We were told that many husbands and fathers (a Palestinian woman remains a man's daughter until she becomes a man's wife) were derisory or fearful of this new phenomenon. One woman described one of the ways in which resistance from the men was overcome. When a woman volunteered, she would at first go out on patrol as a first-aid nurse; then she would gradually move into the areas where the fighting was taking place, with a first-aid kit over one shoulder and a rifle over the other; and finally she would be accepted as part of the militia. Significant for the future in this respect is the training given to Palestinian youth in the refugee camps. Girls and boys are given exactly the same instruction in, for example, unarmed combat or the expert use of a machine-gun. The children train together, with instructors of both sexes.

We were also warned, by the same woman who spoke of the symbolic significance of the woman *fidayi*, not to underestimate the importance of the back-up services provided by those who do not carry a gun. Conservative pressures remain heavy, and participation in direct political or military activity usually ends when a woman becomes engaged or married. For this reason the more mundane work carried out by the GUPW in the fields of education, political propaganda, child-care and so on, during periods both of relative peace and full-

scale war, deserve some attention.

The Lebanese civil war provoked a flowering of self-organisation in the refugee camps, and it was in the traditional domain of home and neighbourhood that the politicisation of thousands of women developed and proved crucial. In almost every street a small clinic was set up, hundreds of women were trained in first-aid, and para-medical teams were organised. A committee was formed by the women in each camp to take responsibility for the bomb-shelters, keeping them structurally sound, ensuring that everyone got under cover when the enemy attacked, and taking shelter themselves only when these tasks were complete. Women were organised to manufacture thousands of sheets for the Red Crescent hospitals and to make military uniforms. They also made themselves responsible for preparing food for the militias, since there were no adequate provisions. Women who could not leave their homes for some reason would cook food in their own houses which would then be taken to the soldiers, maybe only a few yards away. Children were cared for collectively, and the allocation of the pitifully small rations was also organised by committees of women in the camps.

Of course, the tasks outlined above are certainly an extension of women's traditional role, and do not indicate any breakdown of the sexual division of labour; but two factors must be taken into account. Firstly, the experience of active participation in a revolutionary struggle provided an unprecedented self-confidence and sense of worth and usefulness for many Palestinian women. The exigencies of war broke down the hitherto rigid social barriers between the sexes and brought women into public life in a way which had been forbidden by Islamic custom. The second factor is the existence within the Palestinian Resistance of women, organised in the General Union of



Palestinian Women, who are determined to analyse and fight the causes of their oppression and to secure the gains which have been made at so much cost.

The women we met were in no doubt as to the root cause of their sexual, class and national oppression. Recognition of an enemy as strong as imperialism, coupled with Arab reaction, had led, however, not to despair but to a realistic assessment of the length of the road still to be travelled and of the kinds of tasks appropriate to the present level of development of the struggle. Great importance is attached to education at all levels. The GUPW has carried out extensive literacy campaigns and has attempted to combat the prevailing notion that a boy's education must come before a girl's. Workshops have been organised to provide employment for women, creche facilities exist on a very limited scale, and campaigns have been launched against the super-exploitation of Palestinian women at work.

The launching of armed struggle was the crucible within which the Palestinian nation reconstituted itself, but centuries of the most complete oppression were reflected in the attitudes towards women which prevailed in the Resistance which emerged after June 1967. Without attempting a theorisation of the present position of women within the Palestinian diaspora, this article has tried to convey one person's impressions of life in the refugee camps, to outline some of the problems and some of the victories, and most of all to pay tribute to the heroism of the Palestinian women currently engaged in activities as diverse as guerilla warfare and teaching other women to read and write.



Palestinian girl takes a break from training.

Photo: RUTH CHALLIS

# Building International Women's Day actions

Over 100 women met in Paris in December to discuss common actions on 8 March, International Women's Day. Women came from Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Holland, and France — and the National Abortion Campaign in Britain sent a representative. The meeting was the second since the international socialist feminist conference held at Vincennes University in Paris last May, when 5,000 women crowded into the campus ground to discuss and debate the lessons of the struggle for women's liberation.

The December meeting agreed that the following steps would help to make this 8 March truly international. First, women proposed that all marches occur simultaneously — at 3pm, and that a common poster for the march be designed. Because the women's movement in many countries

had met to prepare the Paris meeting — in some cases, a national meeting of the movement had taken place — the French sisters came with a poster already designed.

In addition, a common international leaflet was proposed to reflect the experiences of the movement from those who have participated in it. The text of the leaflet has now been translated into English, and will be proposed at a future IWD co-ordinating meeting in London. The themes which sisters felt were important on an international scale were abortion, unemployment, and daily and political repression [especially in Latin America and Africa].

Proposals for future international actions were also considered by the meeting. Plans for a tribunal on repression are going ahead, and the first planning

meeting took place in Paris on 14 January. Rome is the venue for an international congress on abortion — scheduled for 4/5 February to coincide with the vote in the Italian parliament on abortion. The congress will plan further international action on abortion.

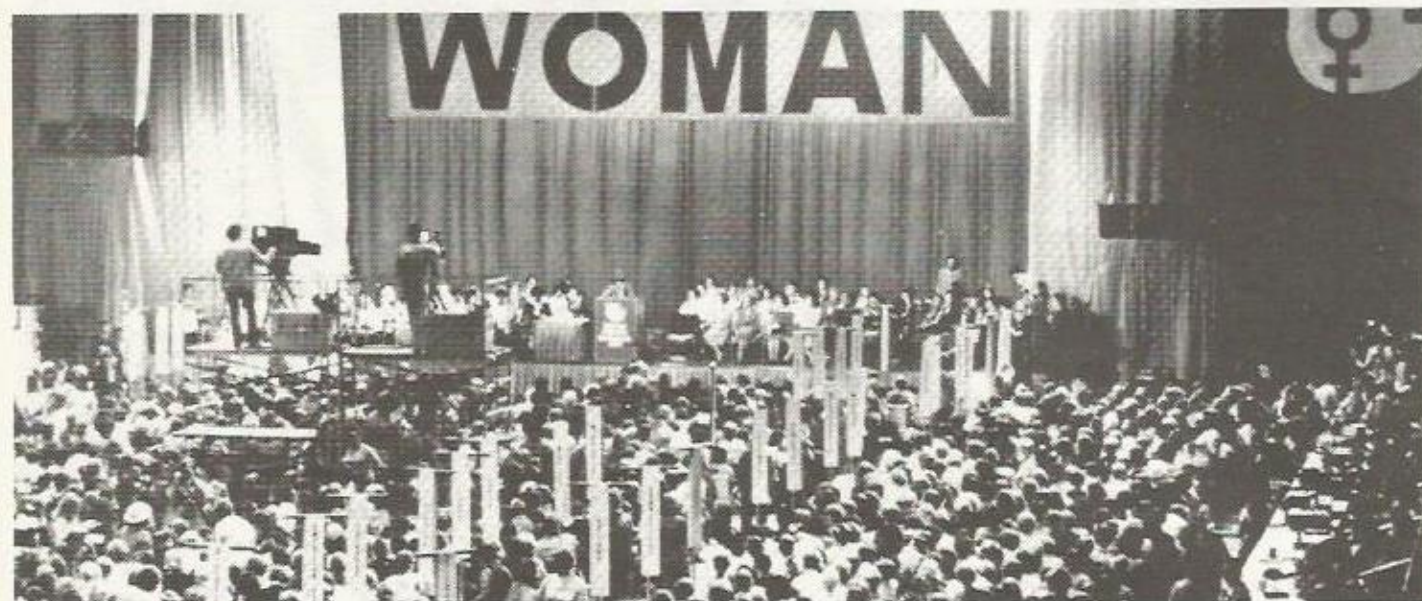
Finally, the meeting discussed the publication of an international feminist bulletin. Italian women agreed to produce the first issue in time for 8 March, and have asked for articles to be submitted.

The December meeting in Paris marked an important step in building an international women's movement. To date, the British women's movement hasn't had the advantage of the experiences shared at such meetings, although we are fighting similar battles on many issues. Let's change it now, and ensure that the lessons we have learned are not lost to women in other countries!



# U.S. National Women's Conference

by KATHLEEN DENNY



The National Women's Conference, held in Houston from 18-21 November, gave the American women's movement a badly-needed lift.

Under the Carter administration, women's rights have received serious blows. The Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution (ERA) is sitting in state legislatures. The affirmative action programmes that opened education and jobs to women and minorities hang on a decision of the Supreme Court, and federally-funded abortions for poor women have been cut. Recently, attacks on civil rights for homosexuals have received wide media coverage.

Over 15,000 women came to the conference from all over the country to say what they want. And national television audiences watched a resounding majority of delegates align themselves behind childcare provisions, abortion, the ERA and oppressed national minorities.

A major victory was for lesbian rights, long a stickler for liberals in the women's movement such as Betty Friedan. The motion concerning 'sexual preference' called for an end to discrimination against gays, including custody arrangements, and for reform of state penal codes regarding behaviour between consenting adults. When the resolution came to a vote and passed, euphoria swelled over. Women throughout the auditorium rose and shouted in unison, 'Thank you sisters!'

State delegates also passed a strong resolution concerning the double oppression of minority women. It called for full employment, bilingual-cultural education, affirmative action programmes, an end to the deportations of Mexican and Asian workers and to forced sterilisations.

Of course the Carter Government did not spend \$5 million so that women could organise an effective struggle against its own policies. A commission appointed by the President and headed by Bella Abzug, former Democratic representative, planned the conference as a delegates' spectacle, with avenues provided to channel women's energies into reformist politics.

Organised workshops dealt with lobbying

techniques, working within the Democratic and Republican parties, and how to reach high administrative positions. Electoral campaigns were discussed. But there were no opportunities for non-delegates to discuss and to organise around the Equal Rights Amendment, affirmative action and abortion.

The liberal leadership of the organised women's movement, primarily in the National Organisation for Women (NOW), shies away from militant action. On the opening night of the conference, NOW members bubbling for action were doused with pleas to write letters to their representatives asking for an extension of the ERA ratification period. There was no planning for mass rallies, or any visible action.

This reluctance to attack issues head-on was evident within the proceedings of the conference itself. A small group of appointed commissioners drew up resolutions, the Plan of Action, and insisted that 'Pro-Plan' delegates must approve the resolutions as they stood. Discussion or substitution of stronger resolutions would undermine the feminist spirit of the package, they claimed, and open the door to disruption from the right.

The Pro-Plan argument rested on the presence of several state delegations. The Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan boasted that they controlled the Mississippi delegation, which was all white and included five men. The hierarchy of the Mormon Church directed its followers to swamp the Utah convention and to oppose childcare provisions, abortion, gay rights and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Unfortunately, the tactic of bureaucratically blasting the resolutions through meant that an opportunity for political argument with the anti-woman forces was impossible. The chair ruled any such attempts out of order.

But this defeatism was contradicted by the development of the minority women's resolution. Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-Pacific women's caucuses met individually and together drew up a substitute resolution much stronger than that in the Plan of Action. That resolution passed resoundingly.

However, at the end of the conference all resolutions were handed to government departments — recommendations from

American women. Margaret Costanza, a Carter aide, assured the conference that the President would have a 'substantive' response to the resolutions. 'To use his phrase, "You can depend on that".'

The Carter Government has thus far demonstrated its willingness to deport migrant workers and slash back education and welfare programmes. The same Jimmy Carter whom Costanza would have women depend on approved federal measures that refuse abortion funds to poor women with, 'There are some things in life that are not fair. That wealthy people can afford and poor people can't.'

That same weekend, right-wing forces were organising. Across Houston, they held an 'Alternative Convention' that drew 15,000 people, including anti-gay stalwarts and the John Birch Society. Speakers denounced the women's conference as an anti-religious, anti-family, anti-American gathering that endorsed sexual perversion and the murder of unborn babies.

Much more sophisticated tactics, aligning themselves with liberal issues such as equal pay, are also being planned by the right. The following weekend, 25-27 November, a national anti-abortion youth conference was held in Milwaukee. The national chair of the Socialist Party USA participated. Workshops linked issues such as disarmament, problems of the Third World, and struggle against 'corporate injustice' to the fight against abortion.

Careful and firm action is required under these conditions. A major obstacle to be overcome is reliance on Democratic politicians. Bureaucratic tactics such as Pro-Plan, which stifle debate, will not help clarify issues or build the visible mass movement necessary for the fight for women's liberation and to overcome the right.

Shelley Kramer of the Socialist Workers Party (US) stressed that, 'What can change the minds of those who mistakenly support the right wing is exposing their leaders, answering their questions, impressing them with the strength and power of our ideas. This will be possible only if we mobilise the majority that supports women's rights behind a programme that defends women's needs.'



# REVIEWS

## Love of worker bees

*Love of Worker Bees*, three stories by Alexandra Kollontai (Virago, £2.50)

When the communist mother of Zhenya in 'Three Generations' discovers that her daughter has been having sexual relations with men she 'likes' but does not 'love', she feels puzzled and hurt by this new, modern behaviour. 'There's nothing — no love, no suffering, no remorse, nothing. Only a sort of icy self-confidence and an insistence on their right to seize happiness however and wherever they may find it.' The irony is that she in her youth had two lovers, and had fought against her mother's belief that she must choose between them and follow the one she 'really' loved.

The challenge to such romantic ideas of love that was thrown up during the revolutionary ferment in Russia is the underlying theme of these three stories. Kollontai's conception of love itself may still be on the romantic side — it is an overwhelming passion, two people obsessed with one another — but she puts forward what are, for her time, some startlingly new suggestions about the place of love in human relationships. These include the suggestion that people can love more than one person, that people can have sex, or companionship in marriage, without love, and also that people should not live together when love and understanding has died. The impulse to sweep away hypocritical bourgeois standards was vital to the new morality of the early '20s.

In her handling of this theme, Kollontai reveals herself as more of a political activist than a literary talent. The characters may seem wooden and the situations contrived, but they are firmly rooted in history, in the changing and confusing situation of women and in the pressing social and economic problems. For example, work is tremendously important to all the women, though this is frequently resented by the men, who wish to be 'providers' and also 'consumers' — of a comfortable, clean home and an attentive wife. Traditional views of women are used by the men as a weapon in arguments: 'Look here, I'm absolutely fed up with these hysterical female outbursts of yours!' he said, finally losing his temper. "Females! All the same! Every single damned one of you!"

The new, independent women, on the other hand, are able to refrain from using their traditional weapon against men — pregnancy. Zhenya, who is too busy to raise a child, arranges an abortion, while Vasilisa Malygina can look forward to bringing up her baby alone, with the help of a crèche and her fellow workers. The mother in 'Sisters' is, however, less lucky; the New Economic Policy (NEP) forces her crèche to close and she eventually loses her job. When poor relations with her husband then force her to leave home, she has little choice other than prostitution. This last story is an anguished reminder of the vulnerability of women, particularly during economic troubles, and ends with a fighting response typical of

Kollontai: 'It demanded an answer from us, action, work, struggle...'

The consequences of the NEP are also shown in the characters of the men, when previously sound militants are undermined by the requirements of business, and the attractions of a bourgeois life-style. It is perhaps a little idealistic that none of the women are affected in the same way. However, one important change in women's attitudes is brought out — the development of sisterhood. The woman in 'Sisters' is able to sympathise with and help the prostitute her husband has brought home, while Vasilisa Malygina resolves her personal crisis by writing a letter to her husband's mistress: 'as one sister to another, I want you to be happy ... We're not enemies, you and I. We never intended to cause each other so much pain.'

Kollontai has no easy answers; nor are the problems new to socialist-feminists today. What the stories do offer us is an idea of what it felt like for women, living through the excitements and disappointments of those revolutionary years, and facing for the first time some of the dilemmas still with us today. One reviewer of Kollontai's stories in 1923 wondered 'why has Gosizdat brought out this pathetic rubbish.... it would be in place on a ladies fashion counter; it should not be allowed in any libraries'. Let's hope present-day socialists will have a different reaction!

BARBARA BROWN

## Femininity as alienation

*Femininity As Alienation*, by Ann Foreman (Pluto Press, £2.40)

This would have been an easier book to read if its central argument had been clearly stated from the start. As it is, the reader is taken on a rambling tour of liberal thought, Marxist thought, existentialist thought, Freud and his followers through the domestic labour debate to the current women's movement. Like most package tours, you are dependent on the limited information your guide gives you. The range of *Femininity As Alienation* is too broad to give a satisfactory account of most of these topics; they are used mainly to illustrate the author's own position.

Ann Foreman's central argument is that because Marx's early theory of alienation was not developed and used by Marxists, their practice has been economic determinist and their theory of women's oppression inadequate. The First International was split even on the question of votes for women and the right of women to work, and since then the Marxist left has seen the 'woman question' in terms of drawing women into the organised labour movement — they have not considered the question of the family or women's roles as a 'political issue'.

All this has already been said by Zaretsky. What Foreman does, unlike Zaretsky, is to

suggest that early Marxist theory contains the seeds of an analysis of women's oppression. In her view, the alienation of productive labour under capitalism depends on the oppression of women in the home. Alienation at work is made tolerable by the existence of 'family life', and by the specific role of women as people who recognise the subjectivity of men.

These generalisations are not particularly original or contentious. But Ann Foreman's weakness is that her eclecticism prevents her from providing a deeper analysis of such important questions as alienation and the family. The history of the family and its *specific* function under capitalism is subsumed under general observations on the split between 'personal' and 'public'.

In an interesting section on existentialism, Foreman shows how Sartre and De Beauvoir took up some of these themes, yet at the same time pointed to the *failure* of men's self-confirmation in the family, because to receive confirmation from someone who is herself an *object*, not an equal subject, is unsatisfactory. Yet unfortunately the existentialists' insights were limited in their usefulness because they saw this as the human condition, not as something susceptible to human intervention.

The same criticisms are made of Freud — his observations of human sexuality were posed as timeless, universal laws of behaviour, and as

such are incompatible with Marxism as a theory of social change. Foreman goes on to develop this critique in relation to her views on alienation. She says that the Freudian concept of 'the unconscious' is a useful term if it is seen as the product of a specific social formation, i.e. capitalism. To her, the unconscious is synonymous with ideology, because ideology does not exist at the level of conscious thought — it is not a set of ideas or even a set of wrong ideas, but it is a representation of real experience under capitalism which is only partially understood. People do not understand that the reification and alienation they experience under capitalism is a historical phenomenon, so they repress parts of their experience into the unconscious.

I think these ideas are among the most interesting parts of the book, but it seems to me that this whole theory needs expanding if we are to thoroughly understand what Foreman is saying. We need concrete examples. For instance, because women have been economically dependent on men, they have had to live as sexual objects for men. What exactly is repressed into the unconscious in this example? Secondly, this whole question of ideology is too important to be treated as sketchily as Ann Foreman does in this book. Her ideas need to be situated in the context of other thinkers such as Althusser, structuralist theory and so on.

Foreman also attempts to apply her theory to



# Femininity as alienation contd.

the domestic labour debate. There is a useful chapter which summarises very clearly the debate so far. However, she concludes the chapter by saying that the shortcomings of the debate so far lie in a failure to go beyond economic determinism, and that 'once labour power is understood as a term expressing the alienation of productive activity, the mechanistic divide between "the ideological superstructure" and "the economic base" begins to disappear'. The way this is put seems to me a bit glib; again, Foreman doesn't really examine the connections between ideology and economic base in any concrete way.

Also, Foreman says that the women's movement can play a crucial role in bringing out the connections between the family and the process of alienation. She discusses the practical implications of her theory in terms of taking political issues into the arena of the family, onto

the housing estates; getting the labour movement to take up issues like nurseries, etc., which affect women, and where possible developing this into the area of sexuality and the family; and lastly setting up women's caucuses in all areas of political life, including the traditional labour movement organisations, to ensure the full participation of women.

All these ideas I think are excellent — but the problems of putting them into practice are notorious. Firstly, the experience of the Working Women's Charter and of the socialist feminist groups has been that even socialist women are reluctant to involve themselves in the sphere of 'traditional' politics. Secondly, Foreman seems to see the women's movement as something more homogeneous than it in fact is. The women's movement is not a Marxist movement: how then can the liberals,

reformists, anarchists and others within it be at the forefront of the struggle to make the whole process of alienation under capitalism visible to the masses? There needs to be a struggle *within* the women's movement itself on these questions.

Despite these criticisms of the book — and, in particular, that it would have been more useful if Ann Foreman had spent more time in developing her central ideas in greater depth — *Femininity As Alienation* begins to piece together, in a vast assemblage of ideas, the history of women's oppression in relation to Marxist theory and practice. This is a vital task, and the book provides a good starting point for the urgent work of clarifying and deepening the analysis she has begun.

SUE ASPINALL

## Socialist Woman

A JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

### ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTION

Please send me the next four issues of *Socialist Woman*. I enclose cheque/PO for £ . . .

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Individuals [Britain]: £1.50

Individuals [overseas]: £1.50/\$3 [surface]  
£3/\$6 [airmail]

Libraries & Institutions: £3/\$6

**BACK COPIES:** Special offer — Summer 1974 to Summer 1977 complete (7 issues) for only £1 post free. Limited numbers only.

Send to Socialist Woman, c/o Relgocrest Ltd., 328/9 Upper Street, London N.1. Please make all cheques/POs payable to Relgocrest Ltd.

## Socialist Challenge

BUILD A SOCIALIST OPPOSITION FOR A UNIFIED REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

### Subscribe now!

#### RATES

Domestic: 6 months, £5; 12 months, £10.

Abroad: 6 months, £5 (airmail, £8.25); 12 months, £10 (airmail £16.50).

Name.....

Address.....

I enclose a donation for the Fighting Fund of.....

Cheques, POs and Money Orders should be made payable to 'Socialist Challenge'.

Complete and return to:  
Socialist Challenge, 328/9 Upper Street, London N1.

### ABORTION RIGHTS- A SOCIALIST PERSPECTIVE



25p

### A Handbook



### FIGHTING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS



20p

Have you read these Socialist woman pamphlets: *Abortion Rights — A Socialist Perspective*, 25p plus 10p p&p; *Fight-*

*ing for Women's Rights*, 20p plus 10p p&p; *Women Workers in Britain*, 25p plus 10p p&p. Or all three for 70p post

free. All orders with money to: Relgocrest Ltd., 328/9 Upper Street, London N1 2XQ.