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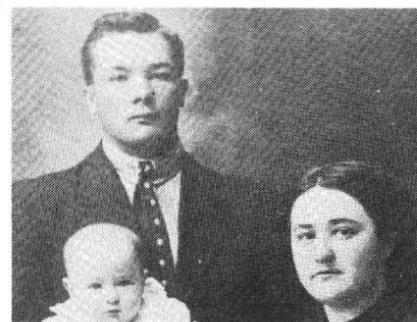


And the flower that was closed unfolds...: How are the relations of dominator-dominated expressed within the family itself? How are they reproduced? How do women, in denying their own sexuality, ultimately deny their own needs? Why are we afraid to question and challenge our conception of sexuality? The women who wrote this article tried to begin answering these and other questions by outlining the story of women's lives from birth through to death. Their aim is to understand the reality of women's lives, their own lives.

A feminist criticism of IN STRUGGLE!'s Programme and Feminist questions about Marxist theory: In these articles, women from IN STRUGGLE!'s National Women's Committee make some serious criticisms of our organization's Programme. They also question some fundamental tenets of Marxist theory in relation to the women's question.



The material basis of women's oppression in capitalist society: Is women's oppression solely a matter of the superexploitation of women on the job? Jean Tepperman, an American Marxist feminist, thinks not and criticizes the communist movement for having promoted an economist vision of women's oppression.



Report on the feminist structure in Movimiento Comunista: A Spanish communist organization sums up more than three years of experience with an autonomous women's structure within their organization. They conclude that such an autonomous structure is necessary and that it is necessary to work to make their organization increasingly feminist.



Editorial

March 8: annual resolutions no longer suffice

March 8, International Women's Day, has often been a kind of 'Mother's Day' for socialist militants...! That is to say, a day once a year where everyone has the chance to reflect on the oppression meted out to women and where good new year's resolutions are made which generally stay at the level of laudable intentions... But why is this so? And why is it always the case that the situation of women always get second star rating on the list of political priorities? For a year, women in IN STRUGGLE! have been asking themselves this question even though the "women's question" is coming to be seen as an issue by most comrades and certainly one which will be a central point at IS!'s 4th Congress.

To aid IN STRUGGLE! militants in their preparation for the congress and to stimulate the thinking of all our readers on March 8, PU is taking up different aspects of the struggle for women's emancipation in this issue. Not all the aspects but certain ones which have been historically neglected, forgotten or downright ridiculed by the communist movement: personal life, housework, biological reproduction, sexuality, homosexuality, the sexual division of labour, the autonomous women's movement, etc. These are questions which are leading us to re-evaluate Marxism-Leninism, to carefully examine the results of revolutions in different countries, and to seek to better understand what has been called "the crisis in socialist thinking" which was broached in our last issue of PU.

For example, a closer look at these questions draws out the fact that there are a whole series of responsibilities carried out by women in the private domain which, moreover, have important repercussions historically and economically: the survival of the species through biological reproduction; the reproduction of social relations, in particular through the education of young children; taking care of the emotional and sexual needs of the work force, etc... This leads as well to questioning the foundation for the relations of domination within the family as within all of society. Marxism has been able to explain in large part why and how capitalists exploit the proletariat but it hasn't been able to give satisfactory answers about men's domination of women and the link which exists between the system of capitalist exploitation and the system of sexual oppression. Yet one can't exist without the other.

The way in which we analyse power relationships necessarily has implications for the way we envision revolutionary struggle developing and for how democracy will be established for all oppressed people. It's in this sense then that we can say that the question of women is a central question.

Some of the questions in this issue have been dealt with much too cursorily, notably that of homosexuality; but a first step had to be taken, somehow.

Some readers may wonder if we are abandoning a class point of view, if we are repudiating the necessity for revolution. But it is precisely because we are working for radical revolution in all areas that we are raising these questions and developing critical stances. The abolition of private property, the collective ownership of the means of production, the integration of women into what it has become convenient to call social production, the socialization of certain domestic work... are these things really going to bring about the complete emancipation of women or even put us on the right path for realizing it? Can we speak of revolution when half the population continues to assume, in addition to responsibilities in social production, the main responsibility for the whole area of private life, beginning with bringing new life into the world? Can we speak of socialism when one sex continues to oppress another?

Lastly, we must point out that this issue lacks an account of the struggles that women are leading in Canada and a description of the organized women's movement. That job remains to be done. It is a formidable task because women are very active in all types of struggles. PU is very happy, however, to be able, for the first time, to publish an article written by two Indian women on the situation of Indian women dealing with the factors of race, class and sex.

We hope this issue of the journal will be widely read even if the theoretical questions it broaches are somewhat new and difficult.

1. IN STRUGGLE! is no exception: For example, PU no. 15 contained an article whose title speaks volumes in this regard: "Feminism, the bourgeoisie's standard-bearer in the women's movement".

A few programmatic thoughts on women's liberation

Many comrades have criticized our programme for its stand on the vanguard party, imperialism, and the path of revolution. I agree with most of the criticisms. But there's been a conspicuous silence on our programmatic stand on the women's question, even though most of us believe women's oppression is now a central issue. We've tended to confine ourselves to organizational questions and the issue of democracy.

The following contribution addresses the debate over what kind of revolutionary organization is needed in Canada today, but from the perspective of the needs of women. It's based on lessons I've drawn from collective discussions in the Toronto women's research collective. It's a condensed sum-up and leaves many questions untouched, but hopefully it will spark discussion.

Some may feel it goes too far — that we are not ready to take a stand on such issues. The position certainly marks a fundamental departure from the orthodox communist programme on women. But I'd prefer to let the process of debate reveal what unity is possible, rather than speculate on the lowest common denominator!

I would like to see a revolutionary Marxist-feminist organization, made up of both men and women, defend the following points in its programme:

1) The struggle for women's liberation is on an equal strategic footing with the struggle for socialism. Women's liberation is dependent on, not subordinate to, the abolition of class society. The abolition of private property is a necessary condition, but in and of itself will not guarantee women's liberation.

2) The sexual division of labour has been the locus of the oppression of women as women, prior to and following the birth of class society, which has entrenched this division of labour as a seemingly eternal phenomenon. It is a 'great' social division, on a par with the class division — the most all-pervasive and enduring social inequality in human history.

3) Our programmatic goal includes the withering away of the sexual division of labour, along with class divisions (a goal never before upheld by the communist movement). An important means to ensure this is the **full socialization and sexual integration of domestic labour**, along with the complete integration of women into social labour. We

have to fight for a society in which men share equally with women the responsibility for child-rearing and the daily maintenance of human life. We must begin that fight today, since the seeds of a new society are born in the womb of the old.

4) In all societies to date, women have been socially penalized for their biological role in the reproduction of human labour. With the abolition of capitalism, the liberation of the productive forces and elimination of social want will create better conditions to collectivize a function previously the private burden of women. This potential can only be realized if women's liberation is consciously made a strategic priority, and women are organized to fight for their own freedom.

5) To achieve lasting equality, women, and women alone, must have the fundamental right to control their own sexuality and reproductive capacity. The freedom to determine one's sexual orientation must be guaranteed for all. (A priority political task is to develop an analysis of the crisis in family and sexual relations today, in order to put forward social and political demands that favor equal and satisfying relations among people, and to take a stand on emerging trends in family relations.)

6) Sexism and petty male privilege are ideological and material blocks to women's liberation which must be progressively uprooted if working class men and women are to unite against their common enemies. Sexism, not bourgeois feminism, is the main obstacle in society at large. Men must be convinced, in a positive way, that their surrender of short-term privilege will bring long-term benefits for themselves, as well as women and children.

7) Women are the motor of their own liberation; their self-activity and self-organization is key.

a) An autonomous women's movement is vital and must be actively supported by revolutionary forces, both now and after the working class and its allies have seized power.

b) Working class and minority women must play a leading role in the 'united front of women'. Concrete alliances must be made with other oppressed and exploited strata, including working class men.

c) Special methods of work are needed to reach and mobilize the united front of women, i.e. separate women's organizations, feminist newspapers and literature, specific campaigns, etc.

8) Women must be fully represented in any revolutionary organization. To en-

sure this:

a) We must reject the Stalinist model of the sole and supreme vanguard party, with a monolithic unity and rigidly organized hierarchical structure. We must reject the outmoded Taylorist conception of organization which puts the accent on efficiency, intellectual prowess, and the 'industrial worker', at the expense of the long-term development and activity of the membership.

b) We must emphasize democracy and collectivity more than centralism at this stage, without negating the reality and need for leadership in an organization. The accent must be on collective leadership and rotation of all leadership posts. Democratic-centralism is not a fixed, universal principle. Unity of action at key moments and the widest possible freedom of thought is the bottom-line today.

9) To ensure that women's interests are defended at all times inside a revolutionary organization, we need:

a) The women to be organized in a way that permits them to play both a watchdog role inside the organization re sexism, and to decide on the political work done among working class women and the feminist movement. The exact organizational form is not a question of principle. According to local conditions, women could opt for a women's caucus, women's committee, an all-women's cell, etc.

b) Regular national/regional conferences of the women where specific policies concerning women could be debated and adopted. The conferences should have **decision-making power**. Policies adopted at such conferences could not be overruled by a Congress of the entire organization, though they should be submitted for debate at every congress in order to educate the men and unite the membership as a whole about the programme on women.

c) The commitment of every man in the organization to support, in practice as well as theory, the specific struggles of women for their liberation. Passive indifference and/or outright chauvinism should not be tolerated.

d) Internal affirmative action programmes designed to ensure proportional representation of women on all standing committees of the organization. A gradual step-by-step programme should be devised to reach this goal.

e) Specific literature for women, i.e. a Marxist-feminist magazine/new-

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- spaper, pamphlets, leaflets, etc., depending on amount of funds available.
- f) To stimulate the development of work among women both within the organization and outside, and to facilitate the exchange of lessons, the organization should constitute a Women's Bureau. The Bureau would be made up of the most active defenders of women's rights, elected by the female membership at large, and reflect the class, racial, national, and regional origins of the female membership.

By T.D.,
member of Ontario
region IN STRUGGLE!

What if she's a lesbian?

"Private life is political" they say. I think nothing could be more true! Mine has its two legs spread over the luminous screens of porno movies. Its edges are eaten away every time I'm asked, "Is it Miss or Mrs.?" My answer makes my respectability commonplace. My private life is also knocked around when I go out with my (woman) lover because then — take care: the lesbians of 42nd Avenue¹, the little Hamilton girls²; they are pretty and they bring in profit, but if you start including **that** in your daily life — it's better to keep that **kind of thing** to yourself!

That's life. Being a woman under capitalism (and from what we know, under socialism too) is quite difficult, this issue gives you some idea of what it's like. Being a homosexual in the same circumstances is like adding a three-ton weight of social disdain to your daily burdens.

Disdain

What is loving? It can be complicated to explain, but basically it's simple. You are married? Living as a couple? There is a man or woman who by his/her very presence gives you pleasant moments? Now imagine that you have to hide this relationship at work, with your friends, in your union and in your political organization in case you are rejected. So, what seemed simple before is getting a little more complicated. You must love and desire in hiding, behind closed doors. Under such circumstances, loving takes on another dimension, it becomes a struggle.

Let's try something. Try to answer this question honestly: What is a

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David Kerr

lesbian? If you managed to answer without resorting to any of the truisms I'm going to describe below, bravo! If you did refer to them, don't worry about it, you live in this society. What is important is to be ready to drop these prejudices.

Truism A³:

Lesbians hate men. I'm sorry, but to be lesbian is not to hate men, it is to be sexually and emotionally attracted to

women. Many women, lesbian or not, hate men. This is a question of political viewpoint or a reaction to chauvinism.

1. On 42nd Street in New York you can see a show of two women having sexual relations for 25c.
2. I'm referring to David Hamilton's photographs.
3. Ruth Simpson developed this analysis in her book *From the closet to the courts*, 1976. I modified the text.

Truism B:

What a pity she's lesbian, she's so pretty! If you have an answer to this one, please write me. I think it's directly linked to the old myth about "old maids".

Truism C:

Women become lesbians because they're afraid of having children. In fact many lesbians are mothers, or would like to be. One of the important struggles waged by lesbians is to be able to keep custody of their children. In addition, many heterosexual women choose never to give birth.

Truism D:

All lesbians are in love with their fathers. Obviously some people can't accept that women can be comfortable or happy without some man somewhere in the picture. The sole fact of loving or rejecting a parent doesn't seem to have any effect on sexual orientation.

Truism E:

A woman becomes a lesbian because of bad experiences with men. Do you know a woman who has never had bad experiences with men? And yet, are all women you know lesbians?

Truism F:

All feminists are lesbians (In other words, all feminists are frustrated). I won't comment on that one!

Truism G:

Lesbian couples correspond to the man/woman stereotype. In fact, very few lesbians take on a "manly" air. This phenomenon does exist, but the malicious insistence on this truism is only exceeded by the disgust people feel towards lesbians. Many working class women because of their living conditions, don't necessarily live up to the model promoted by "Vogue" magazine; many very heterosexual feminists and many militants prefer to adopt a more "androgynous" style because they reject the sexist image of a woman as an "object".

To return to the question I asked at the beginning, what is a lesbian? Well, a lesbian is a woman who loves and desires other women. She is not bigger, fatter, more manly nor more or less anything else. She's a woman who very often, like other women, is struggling to take her rightful place in society but who must, in addition, fight against a whole set of prejudices.

The State has a long reach

The State takes great care to ensure



taht the morality of its citizens is kept in line. Thus, the age of "consent for homosexual practices" is set by Canadian law at 21, even though marriage is permitted at 14 to 18 years of age, depending on one's-sex and the province. And if you decide to take a "wrong turn" at 21 years of age, you'd better do it behind closed doors, in the ghetto, in the apartment with the blinds drawn and the lights turned off.

Every day I am barraged with the degrading sexual stereotypes that society promotes about people like me. I must avoid any "provocative" shows of affection towards the woman I love (holding hands or kissing on the street). Have you ever tried having one of those bums who masturbate in front of you arrested? He is told to zip up and go play elsewhere. Last week, five women were arrested on their way out of a lesbian bar in Toronto. How come the police spend so much time working undercover in the gay and lesbian communities while they let maniacs expose themselves freely in public? Who is it that poses the real danger?

It is difficult to explain our oppression and what our fields of struggle must be in such a short time and space. Even when the right to sexual orientation is written into a labour contract or a law (as in Quebec) too often it is kept quiet so that those directly affected don't know anything about it. There is a need for many changes in the law. Obviously, our demands should be taken up by the population at large. In order

to be heard, we must speak jointly, defending ourselves in public but we also have to take the offensive and educate people on this question.

No, we are not frustrated; no we're neither more or less beautiful. We are everywhere, and we don't look different. We may be your neighbour, your daughter, your sister, your girlfriend, your wife, your mother and even maybe your comrade. Have you ever asked yourself how you would react to such a situation?

Our path in IN STRUGGLE!

IN STRUGGLE! kept quiet for years: the organization could not take a stand; they didn't have all the facts; it wasn't important; it was a touchy question, etc. There were a multitude of excuses, each one as false as the next. In fact, IN STRUGGLE! like all other Marxist-Leninist organizations had a viewpoint on homosexuality: it was reactionary. To say nothing is not to be neutral. Indeed, when there is repression to say nothing is to endorse it.

The feminist tendency within the organization has unleashed new energies to take on the Judeo-Christian morality which has prevailed in our ranks on the question of sexuality and reproduction. Marxism-Leninism has not proven itself adequate to the task of making any kind of valid analysis of the oppression of gays and lesbians. Feminism has.

A group of men and women militants are presently working together to prepare a resolution on the right to sexual orientation and the critique of the patriarchal family. There are two prongs to this work: the writing of the resolution itself and organizing an educational "offensive" to build up support for it. This caucus did not get created due to a proposal by the Central Committee or any leadership body; it comes from the earnest desire of our minority group to have its concerns be seen and heard. We will let you know the results of our work in future publications. I invite all those interested in helping us in any way or in joining us to contact us by telephoning or writing IN STRUGGLE!. For now, I hope this short article has permitted you to become aware of our double oppression as women and lesbians.

— Carole La Grenade

4. Androgyne: Hermaphrodite (combining characteristics of both sexes) Concise Oxford Dictionary.

**Concerning our sexual and reproductive functions:
And the flower that was closed unfolds...**

In the spring of 1981, IN STRUGGLE! called for the establishment of a women's collective on the women's question. In Montreal, thirty or so women got involved. The first thing the collective as a whole did was to demand its autonomy. It is important to emphasize that a number of women in it did not belong, or no longer belonged, to the Organization IN STRUGGLE!. As well, they were anxious to do some reading and come to grips with this issue on the basis of their own experience. Many were sensitive to the problem but few of them had been actively involved in women's organizations. They all came from different backgrounds and social environments. The collective decided to work on five major topics. One of them — Love, Sexuality and Marriage — was taken on by a team of about ten women who then divided into smaller groups to do research on more specific topics. Initially there were four of us who read and talked about the question of our sexuality and reproductive productions.

This article is the result of the work we have begun to do so eagerly and the desire we all share to learn more and transmit what we learn to others. It is what we have created through our own questioning and challenging of what we are and what we used to think. This working document has been possible because of the solidarity of four women in confronting the problems they all share. The research we did provided the basis for an evening of debate in which close to 60 women took part, laying bare their hearts and minds on "so very personal" a subject. All of them agreed that such an experience, which has been all too rare in the past, should be repeated.

Our purpose in this article is to share our discoveries with you. We looked up what has been written and said on the subject recently. Of course there were lots of things we missed. But we have read enough to want to draw together the most important points and indicate what we think are the most obvious links between our sexuality and the question of reproduction. There is also the question of how this serves capitalist society in the institution of the family. Why does the breakdown of the family bother the State? And why does it upset us so much as well? Solutions? We will all have to look for them collectively — no easy task.

We would like to take a look at all these questions together with you. This text is a beginning, not the final word. It is an opportunity to pursue the work collectively, in the light of your own experiences and questioning. We most definitely do not want to become "the" specialists on the question of sexual oppression, churning out reams of printed paper to gather dust on people's bookshelves.

We are very conscious of the limits of our research. It is harder to find studies on certain aspects (like homosexuality, incest, menopause, older women). We were pressed for time. In the future, we hope to develop dynamic, more direct methods of gathering information. The subject is a vast one, but we did not want to wait any longer before sharing our research and discussions with other women. We invite all those who can refer us to books, articles, etc. to do so — especially on some of the more specialized, or less-documented aspects — either by writing to us or by getting in touch with us.

Each and every woman has her own experiences from which we can and

must learn. It is very important to share our history. This is one good way of becoming collectively aware of the problems we share. We have to break out of our isolation and grasp the importance of organizing collectively in order to fight against and overcome our specific oppression.

Women's sexual oppression must be treated as an important aspect of women's oppression. At the same time though, it must remain intimately connected to the other fronts of the liberation struggles of working-class women and of the people in general. In what way? How can this be done? What do we want? This was an important initial consideration for our collective.

The general framework of our research

To start with, it grew out of what we saw happening around us and our own hypotheses.

1. It seemed to us that women no longer want to conform to traditional roles.



Many women still pay with their lives for the lack of safe, accessible abortions.

2. Women no longer want children: at least they want fewer and fewer children.

Why?

1. Objective factors

— The economic crisis: this is especially hard on working-class women. Huge numbers of them are going back to work, or trying to go back to work.

2. Internal factors that result from this

— a new vision of women's role

— a new vision of sexuality: this grew out of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, although the latter was often one-sided and served the interests of male sexuality. It was used to justify the expansion of the pornography industry, a source of growing profits for the men and women who belong to the ruling class of exploiters (see the film "Not a Love Story: About Pornography").

The statistics indicate that although there are perhaps fewer children, children are still being born. We are confronted with a dual role, a double choice. But with little concrete support for the task of having and bringing up children, what are the alternatives? They are practically non-existent.

So we asked ourselves what the daily life of women is really like.

What is the reality of women's lives?

The family is in the process of breaking down. The extended patriarchal

family has almost died out. It is now the "nuclear" family that finds itself in crisis.

1. There is a high rate of separations and divorce.

2. There is a growing number of single-parent families (the majority of them headed by women).

Women are separated, divorced, widowed, single. The immediate family is less and less the centre of social life. People are increasingly isolated and are finding it harder and harder to meet their needs alone.

What does this breakdown of the family mean for women? Does it signal their liberation? It would seem not, certainly not any real liberation. Why?

Because

A. she sees herself primarily as a mother; and

B. at work, she is torn between the two aspects of her dual role, as well as being oppressed by her double day of work (which becomes a triple day when she is also involved in her day-care centre, her union or something else). In short, she finds herself alone with all her responsibilities in the family and in society.

Most women are still **dependent economically** (they account for the greatest proportion of low wage earners; as well they often have to pay for child care — 5% of the children of working mothers attend day-care centres).

Their social situation makes them more isolated than men; they are also still **dependent emotionally**.

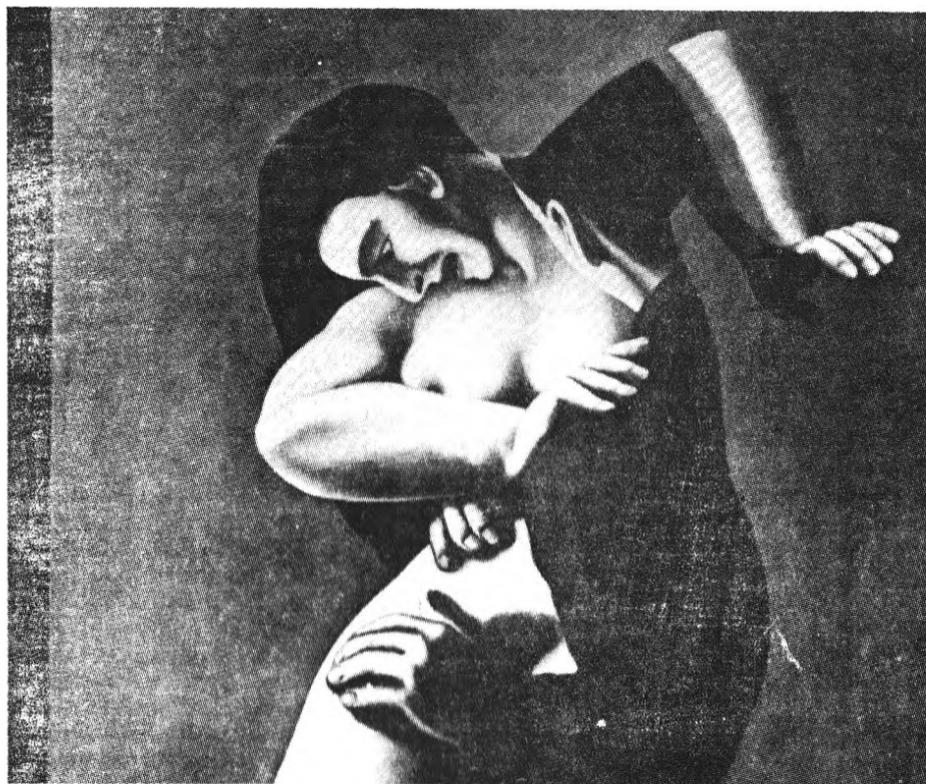
We are torn between wanting children, refusing abortions, the difficulties of having and raising children and a new conception of ourselves.

For traditional roles and values are in fact disintegrating.

Some of these roles and values we want to retain, but others we reject. We no longer want to live within the traditional framework, but the traditional structures still exist. We feel insecure.

What can we turn to?

One thing is certain: women want to **keep their identity** but they do not want to be solely responsible for all the various aspects of private life. The problem is that they live in a society that offers no alternatives or collective solutions — a society that indeed **cannot** offer any, because it is a society of exploitation and profits made at our expense, at the cost of the quality of our lives. We find ourselves at the centre of a major contradiction. It is hardly surprising then that women's mental health suffers greatly and that so many of them have breakdowns.



Society sees women above all as mothers, even if they work. This helps when they are the first laid off: if they are no longer needed on the job but are needed at home to look after the children, they will tend to accept leaving the job market all the more easily.

The woman is supposed to be a "real" mother, and she is supposed to do it all herself. It is her job, her responsibility, because it is her children, her husband, her home (the idea of private property has its effects here too...).

But is this kind of role ordained by God? Or our genes? How is our own notion of sexuality and reproduction developed?

Our upbringing prepares us for a conception of sexuality as something inevitably linked to reproduction in the context of **exclusive relations within the couple**, in order to ensure the reproduction of the traditional family milieu. How? Why?

This vision automatically catalogues all other forms of sexuality (female homosexuality, masturbation, the non-exclusive couple or having a number of relationships) as marginal or even abnormal.

What is the purpose of the sexist upbringing and education we receive in the family and at school, reinforced by all the mass media (books, radio, television)? Who profits from **this free reproduction**, for which we are held solely responsible on the pretext that women have a natural gift for it (the maternal instinct)? Who and what does this reproduction serve? **This reproduc-**

tion of labour-power, of human capital, is not recognized and valued as a social contribution. (We are used as cheap labour to reproduce workers and more daughters who will in turn reproduce...)

Private life is something precious; we are told that it belongs to us and it is up to us to make what we want of it. Yet with the values transmitted and promoted in private life, and the way it is treated here in our society, **the State plays more and more of a role in it:**

1. Quebec's Bill 89 on the family: a renewed, "modern" family, with rights for the wife to make life as part of an exclusive couple more appealing. A gilded prison. We are given a master key to open the doors, but the structures remain the same, just as uncomfortable as ever. What's behind it?

2. **The control of the "medicalization" of women's bodies** in the sphere of sexuality, birth control and reproduction; and in the sphere of mental and physical health. Many doctors, psychiatrists and gynecologists are men. It is often these specialists who tell us about ourselves and what is good for us.

3. **The policies aimed at controlling the birth rate** that are put forward by the population specialists working for the State.

In a society based on profit and the private ownership of the means of production, the family is an instrument by which society maintains and reproduces a value system based on relations between dominator and dominated, owner and owned. **In this society, women are assigned the major**

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role in transmitting a culture of sexist stereotypes to their own children (boys and girls). They are also charged with perpetuating this culture in their relations with men, and in particular their husbands (primarily by not challenging the stereotypes). Thus we learn that it is normal for **some to dominate and others to serve them.** There is no room for relations based on equality and mutual aid. The world runs on competition! The rest follows; **from the inequality between ruling and ruled classes flows inequality between men and women, and between parents and children.**

The violence engendered by the relations between dominator and dominated extends to within the couple and the family:

1. denial of women's own sexuality
2. women's insecurity and their competition with each other to keep their husbands (because of their economic and emotional dependency)

3. incest
4. battered women and children
5. the subtle rape by the husband (the woman is his property within the couple)

How are the repressive relations of

dominator-dominated reproduced and perpetuated in the area of private life?

How, in denying their own sexuality, do women wind up denying their own needs? Why do we fear questioning and challenging ourselves? How is our conception of ourselves a result of our conception of sexuality and reproduction? Why is it like this?

To answer these questions, we decided to describe what women's lives are, from birth until death. We wanted to understand that reality, women's reality.

Portrait of women's life

From childhood... to high school

Before we are ever born, the perception the world will have of us depends on whether we are a boy or a girl. Expectations are different for the two sexes. The laws of patriarchy mean that a boy is much more valuable than a girl in terms of the family's lineage.

So the world that awaits us will greet us differently depending on our sex, regardless of what we want or what we do. The sex of the child is even said to affect the pregnancy. If the unborn baby is carried high up, it will be a boy. In Italy, if the mother is sickly or complaining, it is taken as an indication the baby is a girl; if she is in good shape, she will have a boy. Hurrah for the boys life smiles upon! As for us, our life is already somewhat less happy.

For example, children are breastfed for shorter or longer periods of time depending on their sex: about 20 minutes each time for girls and 45 minutes for boys. So much for our initial welcoming into the world!

Our body is already less valued

What is our life as a baby?

Since our topic is sexuality, let's talk about the body. In the case of the child, we cannot ignore it, for our body is our entire being. It is through our bodies that we perceive, learn, survive and develop. Everything is an agreeable or disagreeable sensation. The entire world around us is sensation, is part of our body. Our life is conditioned by these sensations, the importance we attach to our sensations and their characteristics (hot or cold, short or long, the degree of isolation or contact...)

As we have already mentioned, it is
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considered less important to prolong agreeable sensations for a girl. **There is more concern with satisfying her needs than with giving her pleasure. We touch boys more and talk more to girls.**

As well — and this holds true throughout her life — learning activities are considered less important in the case of a girl. We tend to interrupt what she is doing more often to ask her to do us this or that favour. We have her play girl's games where instead of learning personal satisfaction she learns giving and self-sacrifice. The purpose of her games is not her pleasure or the development of her intelligence, motor skills or knowledge. We even teach her to be fearful and reserved about her body.

The first taboos

Girls are taught sooner not to appear in front of others naked. While still very young, she picks up an attitude of **fear** and even dislike for the reality of **her own body**. We are worried in advance about the harassment she will suffer in the street. She is warned when she is still very small that "she has a bomb between her legs" and than men are dangerous.

For the same reasons, **masturbation** is apparently suppressed more among girls than among boys. Girls always have the word "danger" associated with their sex.

When she begins to ask questions about sexuality, she is told: "You don't have a penis, you have a house to have babies when you are big." **The clitoris does not exist.** Nor does pleasure. Pleasure is not for us. We have children.

Not only do we teach our daughters that sexual pleasure does not exist; we cause them to deny the very reality of their sex. Boys have all sorts of words to

describe their penis, while girls have none; or if they do, it is pejorative or passive. A girl's sex is not a tool, like a boy's.

In *Fille ou Garçon*, Madeleine Laik recounts how an educated, broad-minded woman omitted telling her daughter about the clitoris, on the pretext that she was too young to learn about it.

And yet two-years-old masturbate. Are they too young to hear about something they already experience? Do adults deny children's sexuality because they are afraid of it or in order to preserve their control?

Sexuality versus maternity

A young girl's sexuality is already oriented towards a maternal sexuality.

Frequently (this is confirmed in our own personal experiences), the **only image we have of our mother** as a sexual and/or sensual being is that of her apparent **physical pleasure at contact with her children**. This is surely a factor that reinforces the maternity-pleasure link at a very early age for us.

Sexist education and culture

Many studies have been done on the **sexist contents of children's books and films**. A few statistics and raw facts give an idea of the factors that influence children's behaviour, self-image and image of their bodies — and undoubtedly of their sexual life later on.

Fully **73% of the heroes** in books are boys. Boys dream of being firemen, kings, pirates, astronauts. Girls dream of being beautiful, admired by, engaged to... the king. They are crybabies, afraid, incompetent, or there to admire the hero.

Mothers are always at home (despite the fact that 44% of women in the real



Roger Morin

Young people are taught a view of sexuality that links it to reproduction in the framework of exclusive relations within the couple.

world work) and fathers are always absent. Women are passive and subservient. When they have active roles, it is as witches, wicked stepmothers, etc. More recently, television and the comic strips have added the shapely woman cop.

The positive values for little girls are to be beautiful and loving-loved. They are much more varied for little boys, who are supposed to be active, enterprising, strong, intelligent and educated. What is the first thing so many of us say when we are introduced to a little girl? "What a pretty little girl!" The stereotyping goes further than that. A little girl who acts like a boy is not a real girl. All the games that are active and considered worthwhile are for boys; little girls who want to conform are best to ignore them. (Boys are more adventuresome than girls: from 0 to 24 years of age, they have twice as many accidents, traumatizations and poisonings.) Girls are supposed to have the very characteristics we scorn most: they are supposed to be dependent, weepy, frightened, submissive.

Even people who try to combat sexism tend to raise their girls like boys (with trucks, building toys, games to develop motor skills) but not their boys like girls (they give them dolls but don't attach any importance to playing with them; nor do they stress the fact that boys will have responsibilities as

fathers; they are still discouraged from being emotional or expressing their feelings). In short, the predominant values are still male; girls have to become boys, but not the inverse. A boy is still the best.

The taboos begin

We have seen that very young children are oriented — apparently by sexuality — towards physical pleasures. As they get older, they become more aware and increasingly required to abandon this sensuality for "more cerebral" activities. This is twice as true for girls. In addition, as soon as they are old to understand what they do, they are forbidden to engage in sexual activity. This doesn't mean they stop; they just do it in secret.

We can all remember playing doctor under the porch, in the back shed or the garage. Notice that this game was bisexual — we played it with both little boys and little girls. Nor did social taboos prevent us from playing doctor with our cousins, brothers and sisters.

School-age children

Stereotypes are increasingly reinforced by the ideological content of education, television and also by socialization. The mass media transmit a certain perception of girls and women. Girls play nurse, schoolteacher... They have a very romantic vision of love

(corresponding to what is presented in films).

Girls have a passive vision of sexuality since, like boys, the only one they are offered is the one conveyed by the pictures in the porno magazines at the newsstand or corner store or the outdoor ads for films in which sexuality is presented as a kind of animal state that is an exciting image for the man. On the one hand, this is what a girl is supposed to become. (At the same time, she is clearly warned that if she does become this, men may jump on her. Instead of love, she will be given violence.)

On the other hand, she identifies with an idealized vision of love without sexuality. She is to give herself entirely to the man she loves, marry and have children.

So girls must prepare themselves for an ambiguous role. The fear of pleasing and the fear of not pleasing. Wanting love and afraid of the love they see in the streets.

Incest

With the approach of adolescence comes incest. According to the statistics of the Quebec Ministry of Justice, 20% of children in Quebec are victims of incest. Ninety per cent of the victims are girls, 11 years old on the average. Why incest? But there is a second question: why so few boys?

Needless to say, incest — like rape — is not usually committed by maniacs; the majority of those responsible for it are "normal" men.

One child out of five. And who is to blame? The mother. The legal punishment for incest is 14 years in jail, but this is rarely applied (in part because so few cases of incest are reported to authorities). The method used to solve the problem is family therapy in which the mother is sexually rehabilitated. The mother is accused of working outside the home, of not meeting her husband's sexual expectations or even of having "just given birth". All this is supposed to make it normal for the husband to use his 12-year-old daughter to satisfy himself. So the therapy is aimed at teaching the mother to be attractive, to be a good wife and mother, to reach orgasm... (source: *Luttes et rires de femmes*)

Some psychoanalysts of the traditional Freudian school even imply that in some cases the girl is to blame: having failed to repress her Electra complex, she harassed her father with her love. (A very different interpretation of the Electra complex is given in *Les enfants de Jocaste*, by Christine Olivier.)

Adolescence (high school through to 18 years old)

We go on to high school with the older kids. We have the right to smoke, we begin to develop breasts, we have periods. We begin to look at the boys who not so long ago we thought were stupid. We are big.

Psychological and biological changes

The changes in our bodies bring upheavals. Boys are proud to acquire body hair, but for girls it is something shameful. Menstruation is seen as one more danger: "you can have children now". Hence the need to protect oneself from sexual relations. Our periods are also hidden as something shameful and disgusting. They are a malaise that dirties us, but at the same time something that accords us social recognition.

Menstruation is also something that makes you a bit of a freak. It's not talked about, and boys make fun of it. It must be kept out of sight at all costs. In one high school, 13-year-old girls are considered too young to be taught about it (although they are already having periods). The attitude is the same as the one taken towards masturbation and very young children. **Adolescent girls are treated as children and kept ignorant about things they are experiencing. The result is even greater anxiety.** One-third of all girls between the ages of 10 and 13

have not had any information about menstruation.

Pleasing and not pleasing

Given their social image, girls feel a certain disgust for the sexual parts of their bodies — partly because of their menstruations.

Before the days of sexual activities with a partner, boys go through an intense period of masturbation. This phase of masturbation is accompanied by fantasies, giving rise to an imaginary sex life revolving around a "Playboy" image of women.

Girls leave behind their romantic phase (it lingers on a bit) and become a bit more active. They give themselves seductive airs, wanting to appear as a sexual being (otherwise they will be rejected) without being too sexual (equally cause for rejection).

Pleasing in full awareness of the dangers stalking us. A rapid inquiry among the members of our team indicated that this is an age when all girls experience one form or another of harassment (from the uncle who exclaims at "how we have grown" and whose hands do a lot of wandering, to the exhibitionists in the subways and alleys who show off their "thing", to the gangs of boys who catch you to scare you a bit to the school principals and doctors...). It is an age when we are an easy prey. **It is the age when some begin to prostitute themselves and others begin to work as go-go dancers.**

A research project among students at the CEGEP and university level in Sherbrooke found that 33% of the women students had noticed unwanted sexual attentions on the part of their professors — promises, demands or threats of sometimes subtle reprisals in order to get some sort of sexual favour. Twelve per cent of the students had been victimized. Some 42% of them had not previously been aware of the problem. **Many women students felt that less attention was sometimes paid to their opinions because of their physical disadvantages.** The entire situation was exasperating enough that 68% of women students indicated they would like to see the problems of sexual intimidation in educational institutions discussed openly.

Wanting love, afraid of love

The fear of getting pregnant, the fear of pain during the first sexual relations, the fear of not pleasing, the fear of not experiencing sexual pleasure, the fear of not really wanting to, the fear of being taken forcibly... All this makes pleasure difficult, especially since we do not know our own bodies.

In a survey carried out in a CEGEP

and reported in "L'essai sur la santé des femmes", students gave these answers to a question on their problems with sexual relations:

Women were:

- afraid of being pregnant
- afraid of being raped
- afraid of being seduced and then rejected
- afraid of being rejected if they said no
- afraid of masturbating when they didn't accept it themselves
- afraid of being physically repugnant to a partner
- afraid of losing their self-esteem
- afraid of becoming too attached when the feeling is not shared
- felt guilty about pre-marital relations
- afraid of being pushed into having sexual relations when they didn't want to
- afraid of not satisfying one's partner
- afraid of being frigid

Men mentioned:

- the difficulty of finding a partner open to varied sexual experiences
- having to always be chasing after the woman
- not always being able to have sexual relations when they felt like it
- women who tease but don't want to go any further
- women who refuse to take responsibility for their own sexuality
- women who use their sexual attraction to manipulate men
- women's excessive modesty
- passive women
- aggressive women
- the obligation to tell women you love them when it's not true
- women who assume you know everything about their sexuality
- problems in communicating their feelings and needs during sexual relations

Young women talked about their feelings of fear, insecurity and guilt. Young men tended instead to express their dissatisfaction with the opposite sex.

"Women use sex to get love. Men use love to get sex." (from *Essai sur la santé des femmes*)

In a study of the socialization of sexual roles, Selma Greenberg relates the contrast in the two sexes' emotional needs to their different positions in the social hierarchy. In a situation of inequality, it is always the least powerful who must correctly observe and respond to the indications of pleasure or discontent of those above them in the hierarchy. The need to be close to and in harmony with others is something natural in itself, but it is a greater neces-

sity for women if they want to survive in a society where men have more power. **This is why men and women do not have the same need for special or exclusive relations.** The ways in which children are commonly raised tend to make girls into people who need others too much; but we can also infer that they teach boys to be people who do not need others enough. (Greenberg's conclusions are cited in *Essai sur la santé des femmes*, p. 283)

Sexual reality

Statistics (for 1977) on the sexual life of adolescent girls tell us that they have their first sexual relations around the age of 16 — earlier for working-class girls (they also marry and have children at a younger age). A majority of young people no longer see virginity before marriage as something "normal". Indeed, pre-marital relations (from 16 years on) are accepted by the population in general almost equally well for men and women; this was not the case ten years ago.

The first sexual relations are always accompanied by feelings of guilt. Although we have no statistics dealing specifically with the contraceptive methods used during adolescence, there is no doubt responsibility for birth control is up to the girl. According to the St. Denis Youth Clinic, 80% of adolescent girls visit the doctor alone, without their partner. During their first sexual relation, 80% of them use a very unsatisfactory method of contraception.

In subsequent relations, this proportion drops to 50%.

In Quebec, one adolescent girl out of ten is pregnant each year — 20,000 pregnancies annually. Some 30% of them have abortions (9,000 a year), 30% become single mothers and 40% marry. **This means that adolescents are responsible for 11,000 of the 65,000 births each year in Quebec.**

There is every reason to think that the marriage rate is higher in rural areas. For one thing, it is harder to get abortions; this means a girl must necessarily go to her parents about it in order to have one. In addition, religion has a stronger influence.

Mental health

Adolescence is an emotionally very difficult period for both boys and girls. It is a time when their search for identity may cause all kinds of upheavals in their lives. Many of them eventually come out of these years in good shape, but for others this period has had effects on their mental health.

Information about the mental health of young people is scarce, but what we have seems to indicate that **before 14 years of age, more boys than girls are treated for problems of mental health (58% of the patients at this age are boys). After puberty, the proportions are reversed: 61% of the patients are girls. The statistics indicate that the gentle, calm, nice little girl grows into an in-**

Boys and girls are brought up differently.



secure, dependent and depressed adolescent and woman. (from *Essai sur la santé des femmes*)

The age when suicide is most prevalent during adolescence is 12 to 13 years for girls and 14 to 15 years for boys. The reasons given for suicide are their rejection by parents and friends (the lack of communication, and divorce. There are twice as many suicides among the children of divorced parents. One of the reasons is probably the fact that their family no longer corresponds to society's image of the family and the children can no longer satisfy their need to be "normal" — a need encouraged by this same society.

Adulthood, or the social age of procreation

A young girl's sexuality is oriented towards motherhood. As an adult, she is now old enough to be a mother.

She is often mother at a younger age, but social recognition of motherhood generally comes with adulthood.

What does she think of motherhood? How does she experience it?

Women are having fewer children than ever. Yet they still say they want children, that children are necessary to the happiness of the couple.

Some statistics: Women have an average of 1.75 children (in Quebec in 1981).

In 1975, close to one-third of all

families were childless couples.

In 1966, the average number of children per family in Canada was 2.5; in Quebec, it was 3.5.

The desired number of children per family in Quebec in 1964 was 4.01.

In 1972, the one-third of the women surveyed who thought their place was in the home wanted an average of 3 children. Working women (half of those surveyed) wanted an average of 2.5 children.

Women's situations did not seem to have any substantial impact on their attitude towards motherhood.

Women say that children are vital to their happiness (85%) and that not having children is selfish (52%). Very few (22%) think that childless couples are the happiest.

13% of women think being pregnant is definitely difficult.

36% of women think being pregnant is definitely agreeable.

22% of women think giving birth is very hard.

45% of women find giving birth hard but consider this normal, because nothing in life is easy.

70% of those who found giving birth difficult would still have another child.

Women find the attitude of friends and relatives after a child is born agreeable.

They do not believe the arrival of a child lowers a family's standard of living. It is not until the third child that their financial situation changes, in their opinion.

During the period surrounding the birth of a child, they experience their relations with others as positive, agreeable and even fulfilling.

Despite all this, they are having fewer and fewer children.

Birth control

It is estimated that there are 25,000 illegal abortions annually in Quebec, compared to about 10,000 "official" abortions.

Although many women have abortions, they do not think it is a method to use except in the most extreme cases.

In 1977, 50% of the women in Canada who became pregnant outside the framework of marriage kept their children. In Quebec, this proportion rose to 70%.

Women accept abortion, but justify it primarily for therapeutic reasons, as table 1 shows.

The men who answered the same questionnaire were more permissive about abortion. It is true that they do not live either the physical or moral experience of the abortion. They are not the ones saddled with the image of an unnatural woman, a murderer.

Reasons for abortion	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
mother's life in danger	91.3%	7.0%	1.7%
mother's physical health in danger	80.6%	14.8%	4.6%
mother's mental health in danger	80.3%	14.3%	5.4%
risk that the child will be abnormal	76.3%	17.5%	6.2%
pregnancy due to rape unwanted pregnancy	68.5% 29.2%	22.5% 64.5%	9.0% 6.3%
financial restrictions	28.5%	64.9%	6.6%
on demand	16.2%	78.2%	5.6%

(source: *Revue québécoise de sexologie*)

method	rate of use	theoretical failure rate	actual rate of failure
tubal ligation	27.7%		
pill	24.5%	0.34% - 1.5%	4% - 10%
rhythm method	9.1%		0.3% - 21.0%
vasectomy	8.6%		
IUD	7.3%	1.0% - 3.0%	5%
condom	7.0%	0.4% - 1.6%	0.8% - 4.8%
sympto-thermic	4.2%		
withdrawal	3.6%		
chemical foams		0.4% - 7.6%	
others	7.7%		

(source: *Essai sur la santé des femmes*)

Increasing use is being made of irreversible methods of birth control. Close to one-third of women of childbearing age have been sterilized.

The contraceptive methods most often used are the "hard" ones (chemical or surgical methods), as the following table indicates. This trend is related to the exaggerated degree to which women's bodies have been "medicalized". (see Table 2)

Women have lost all power over their bodies, at all stages of their lives.

Technological means are increasingly used during labour and delivery:

- caeserians account for 13.4% of all births
- spinal blocks are used in 28.7% of births
- local anesthetics are used in 59.4% of births
- forceps are used in 17.3% of births
- episiotomies are practised in 82.5% of all births
- a fetal monitor is used 15.1% of the time

(from *Essai sur la santé des femmes*)

By the time they are 75, some 45% of Quebec women have had a hysterectomy. Each year, close to two-thirds of the hysterectomies are done on women between the ages of 25 and 44.

The five stages in women's lives have become five specific medical events. The female cycle, from the beginning of menstruation in adolescence through to the menopause, has become a field for medical intervention.

Women's new material conditions help explain why big families are now a thing of the past. But we should not belittle the role of women's new needs (to work outside the home, their new conception of their social role) both in this trend and in the breakdown of the family.

Divorce

Twenty years ago, the majority of single-parent families were headed up by widows or widowers. Today, the ma-

jority of these families are headed up by unmarried or divorced parents.

There are 15,000 divorces a year in Quebec. One out of three married couples will divorce in the coming years (and this does not include legal or de facto separations). The reasons given for divorces after years of marriage are adultery and breakdown in communications. In early divorces, the reasons are adultery, sexual problems and the absence of expressions of affection. Other important reasons include alcoholism, problems with in-laws and disagreements about bringing up children.

(from *Revue québécoise de sexologie*)

Reasons of a sexual nature seem to be important (although there seems to be more acceptance of extra-marital relations).

The safe harbour is no longer what it used to be. Or was it ever really that?

Mental health

As adults, women consult professionals for psychological problems twice as frequently as men do.

Married women suffer more from the symptoms of depression than married men do. In contrast, when childless people are compared — be they single, divorced or widowed — women and men are affected equally. Mental health care for women has become just as medicalized as all the other aspects of their health care.

Traditional therapists encourage individual treatments for women, while men are encouraged to follow collective therapies.

Boverman's standard for a healthy woman is a **submissive, less independent, less adventuresome, influenceable, less aggressive, passive, more emotional, more concerned with her appearance and less objective woman.** (Boverman is a psychologist quoted in *Va te faire soigner, t'es malade*)

Feminist therapists say that for many women, the result of perfectly taking on and accentuating her feminine features can be depression. Her cultural models are depressing; a woman thus responds to life's stress and the contradictions in her own life with depression. Anger is an offensive, male weapon; depression is a defensive, female weapon.

It is not only for adults that this holds true. Young girls learn that their personal value depends not on them but on their physical beauty and how attractive they are for men.

In other words, girls have no control over their environment. They depend on others. **The situation of women has made it difficult and still makes it difficult for them to assert themselves.** They would like sexuality to be liberating; but is it?



Jean Lauzon

The first sexual relations are always accompanied by feelings of guilt.

Sexuality

The Hite report tells us that penetration is not a source of orgasm for 70% of women, while for 30% it is. 82% of women masturbate, and 95% of them reach orgasm through masturbation.

This tells us that women's sexuality is basically clitoral. The orgasm reached during coitus is in fact a clitoral orgasm caused by indirect stimulation. And yet women's entire image of their own sexuality is of one that is supposed to meet men's expectations.

Some women even prevent themselves from liking masturbation because it does not correspond to the heterosexual relation conditioned by the domination of male sexuality.

Many women wind up saying that seeing their partner experience pleasure contents and is enough to make them happy themselves.

The majority of women report that they have simulated pleasure of orgasm for various reasons: out of fear that their partner would lose interest and look elsewhere; out of fear of not seeming normal or a woman; for some, to get the stage of penetration and coitus over with more quickly, because they do not find it agreeable.

Women's answers indicated that fewer than half the men know when the woman reaches orgasm, and then only when they are used to the partner.

Women do not experience pleasure in the same way as men (the clitoral orgasm is in fact stronger when it is achieved directly and without penetration). Yet it is for the sake of men's sexuality that women sometimes renounce their own, that they submit to birth control, abortion and sterilization and that they ignore what their bodies teach them.

Sexual relations seem to occur three to four times a week when women are 20; once a week or less when women are 50. Women see the desire for another sexual partner as a need to prove to themselves that they are still alive, that they still have some value, that they are attractive.

For women, the desire for extra-marital relations involves sexuality, love and feelings, while for men it is easier to have strictly sexual relations.

Giving birth/ Breastfeeding = Mother ≠ Woman

We were unable to arrive at any definite conclusions about sexuality during pregnancy. For some women, pregnancy is accompanied by more sexual desire than usual, while for others the opposite is true. The same applies to the period after giving birth, during breastfeeding. It is certain, however, that society does not view a pregnant woman as sexually attractive; she is a mother.

After giving birth, women experience a period of isolation that puts them in a somewhat dependent situation. They find it difficult to break out of this after having spent a few months alone in the house. They lose their social life.

Some women experience breastfeeding as a very pleasant relation and a source of sexual satisfaction (although they admit that this is not a socially permitted feeling). Others have no interest in breastfeeding. It is certainly true that pre-natal classes ignore the mother's satisfaction and emphasize only the child's needs, which are supposed to come before everything else.

Women are not prepared for situations in which motherhood is not their full-time "job". Pre-natal classes do not include information about their right to unemployment insurance, day care and the problems of isolation.

Psychologically, the woman as mother confronts the most important reality in her life. And society is always there to remind her of this. She is the one questioned about all the details of the child's life. She is the one guilty or held responsible if the child has problems.

Is a child too spoiled? Not enough? It is always the mother's fault; she is always wrong. She herself believes that being a good mother is the most important thing of all — more important than being a good worker or anything else. A few months after the arrival of a child, a woman feels unattractive, tired; she no longer looks or feels young... The man's reaction to becoming a father (after the initial phase of the new plaything he's so proud of) is often to lose interest in the

child and look elsewhere for some rest and recreation — preferably with a younger woman, someone more attractive, free of responsibilities, less tired.

It's the perpetual pair of wife-mistress/mother-prostitute. Both are downgraded; both serve the interests and purposes of men.

Violence

There is another dimension to women's reality. Besides abandonment, solitude, and the lack of love, they have to live with violence.

It was estimated that in 1978, some 500,000 Canadian women were battered by the men they lived with. One-third of the women in shelters for battered women were assaulted every week or every day.

Eight out of ten women who turn to women's shelters were battered during their pregnancies. Family members are responsible for 58% of the murders of women, compared to only 24% of the murders of men. And then there is rape: A woman is raped every 17 minutes in Canada. One out of every four women is sexually assaulted before she is 18.

In all cases of violence against women, women wind up the guilty parties. Rape is the one crime in which the criminal feels innocent and the victim condemned.

The only ones who escape condemnation are dead women and little girls. Other women wanted to be raped, are basically masochistic and got what they deserved. When violence against women appears in the mass media, it is presented in a sensationalist way to make it more interesting for the male public. The media always make a point of mentioning that the woman is pretty in cases of rape or kidnappings — it makes the story more interesting. **There is something sexual in the violence against women, just as there is something violent in the sexuality imposed on them.**

Pornography

No discussion of violence against women in the mass media can avoid the question of pornography.

We see pornography as a profitable industry that perpetuates dominator-dominated relations and that divides women from each other (the spotless mother on the one hand; on the other, the prostitute whom we so often look down on without seeing the terrible exploitation she suffers).

The people who make money out of pornography see the public depicting of sado-masochist relations between men, women and children as the proof of a new sexual morality, of sexual liberation. There are 16,000 pornographic

theatres — they are four times more numerous than McDonald's restaurants. What influence do they have on society? One study in the United States found that 57% of rapists tried to apply scenes from pornographic films to their victims. "Violent pornography perturbs the consumer dangerously, for the juxtaposition of violence and sexual excitement incites them to seek violent responses to stimuli." (Châtelaine 1979) In 1978, the police in San Francisco and Washington observed that there was a growing rate of serious crime in the areas of cities where pornographic shows were presented.

The deputy minister of justice in Quebec, Mr. Dionne, declared during a visit to Sweden that the absence of legislation on pornography was a heartening sign of the people's maturity! Yet 30 years of sex education in the schools has not reduced the quantity of pornography or the rate of juvenile delinquency in Sweden. This lack of legislation in fact encourages new forms of criminality. (Châtelaine)

Prostitution and pornography are both an expression of power, and in both cases it is mainly women who are oppressed. **This fear, this violence, this ambiguous image of herself is something each woman inevitably feels in her own body, even when she is not a direct victim.** This reality conditions her sex life. Is her sex life a pleasure? Can it be a pleasure in a man-woman, dominator-dominated relationship?



Pornography goes together with violence against women.

Roger Morin

sexuality. We also think it would be important to analyse more thoroughly the sexuality of handicapped people — not that we equate the two, but they are both phenomena that we must stop treating as marginal. A **handicapped woman's body is not merely an obstacle to be overcome; it gives her an image as an asexual person that also has to be overcome.** She is protected but not touched. As an adolescent, she is not informed about puberty or birth control. If homosexuality is something impossible, then the handicapped cannot have a sexuality.

Menopause

Throughout her life, the woman is seen as a sexual object and mother. Her pretty, young body is a source of pleasure for others (men and children). After 50 years, she starts acquiring wrinkles and getting flabby. She can no longer be a mother. We are finally given some "well-deserved rest". **What a gift: we are once again isolated and our own sexuality denied.**

How does society see a 50-year-old woman? She is no longer useful. She is less beautiful to look at and no longer has the sexual value she was once accorded. She no longer produces children and psychologically, she has problems covering her share of the work both at home and on the job.

Her life is ruled by her physical condition. With her reproductive functions at an end she suffers from nerves, tension and heart trouble.

Their new social situation is inevitably hard on women. For them, the experience is similar to the ambiguity of their former situation in which they were both woman and mother, themselves and another. The remedies they are offered involve a whole range of hormonal treatments with more or less positive effects on her physical well-being. Her psychological condition is treated superficially: although women between 45 and 55 have three times as many serious breakdowns as men of the same age, their depressive state is seen as something intimately related to their own individual psychology. So tranquilizers are prescribed for them without any attempt being made to understand the real root of the problem.

To restore some of her former utility, equated with motherhood, she is often assigned the care of the elderly or of other people's children — and paid poorly for it.

What happens to their sexuality in all that?

Although they have sexual desires, for some women a reduced level of hormonal production results in reduced elasticity of the vagina and fewer secre-



tions, making sexual relations with their male partner more difficult.

They thus gradually give up heterosexual sexual activities. Others, however, take up masturbation and self-eroticism, rediscovering their original sexuality, the one they repressed so thoroughly in favour of the sex life linked to reproduction. The situation of women over 65 is no more favourable than any of their previous situations to their fulfilment, sexually or otherwise.

Their economic situation means that they live below the poverty line. In March 1976, the pensions paid to women of 65 or over were 75% less than those paid to men of the same age. Placed alone in nursing homes because they outlive their partners or because in the nursing home where they live the men are separated from the women, they live in isolation, cut off from the family circles that were their life for so long.

Social prejudices do not make it easy for those who would like a relationship with a younger man. It is normal for an older man to go out with a younger woman; but for the older woman, it's a very different story.

The result is that fewer than one-third of elderly women are part of a couple.

The older woman's depression and anxiety are treated with drugs for the nervous system. (Older women are

prescribed an average of 22.4 medications a year, of which 6.2% are for the nervous system; the equivalent figures for older men are 17.6 prescriptions annually, of which 4.0% are for the nervous system.) And then we wonder why we are afraid of aging...

* * *

There you have it! **Our portrait is not a pretty one.** Some will perhaps find it too depressing... **However, that's really the situation of women in this country. The figures haven't been invented.** Perhaps in some cases reality is worse than the statistics tell (for rape, incest, beatings) given they're lived in fear and it's better to hide it? These facts come from all strata and milieux. It doesn't come from our imagination or from what we ourselves hear or see around us. One man told us one time "I refuse to believe that incest exists to such a degree (1 child in 5)." While one woman who herself had been victimized and many others around her considered it wasn't sufficiently high. We hear about it through newspapers which sensationalize the rape of someone or incest between a father and his five-year old or we learn through film ads that pornography exists. But the full force, the importance of all this for our society, for our existence as women, we believe is clearly shown by this portrait.

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You may be surprised perhaps when you look at all the different shitty things we have to put up with at one time; mostly doing so provokes goosebumps and anger.

But what are we to do? It's all very well to go to the bottom of the pit but how do you get out? Unfortunately, we four have been unable to resolve the problems facing millions of women. We seriously think it's essential to get

organized. How? On what basis? If we change isn't it inevitable that the men must follow suit in order to reach us, throwing their own mode of life out of kilter?

Questions? This piece has raised many of them, and valid ones at that! Our second job is to share those with you. Putting our heads together can lead not only to answers, but also to actions to break out of our wall of silence!

Questions and reflections

What does the "sexual liberation" of the past years signify for us? How have we experienced our sexual life as a child and adolescent? What are our expectations? How can we live as: a single person? part of a married couple? a homosexual? wanting or not wanting children? How do pregnancy and motherhood influence our sexual life? Do you make love sometimes without any desire to do so? Why? Contraception, what do we think of it? Do you have fears in your sexual life? Rape? Frigidity? Of growing old? Sexual exclusivity? Non-exclusivity? Is it possible? Desirable? Easy? Is this experienced in the same way when you have children? Why is it different for men and for women? The whole age thing, for example... the social image of beauty... economic difficulties. What are the consequences?

When we find sexist education amongst all women, does it serve the same interests for working women as for bourgeois women?

After all, working women reproduce the work force of the dominated class for the dominant class. Women in the bourgeoisie reproduce the dominant class and obtain privileges from it. Amongst working women, it's necessary to distinguish between the **different conditions** faced by petty bourgeois and working class women, between the housewife who has or doesn't have children or again between the single person and someone who is married. What can unite us? Why?

Must our revolt be directed against men themselves? Ah yes! Men are also exploited but we are doubly so. How do we make them take account of this? Men as well are not all from the same class. When men share the same interests as us, as workers, do they also have the same interests in relation to working women as the bosses do? **Should we be fighting against patriarchy and against male chauvinism, or against male power, without taking into account the class question, as many radical** PROLETARIAN UNITY

feminists say we should? Or should we fight capitalism, without subordinating the struggle against the patriarchy and chauvinism, especially if we look back to revolutionary struggles in history and their consequences for women?

In the present social and political conditions, what can we really demand, and what can we really hope to change? And is it really up to us to start off by setting limits to the scope of our struggle?

And what kind of work methods and research methods do you think we need in order to reach out to as many women as possible? Are there **problems** with looking after the children? Are women **afraid** to go out at night? Are they suspicious of large groups? Are they suspicious of being labelled as a "feminist"? Are they hesitant to talk with others about their personal lives?

And what do you, as women, think of the idea that a woman's life today isn't so difficult or painful as it once was... Is this a distortion of reality? Do you agree with those who don't think it's a priority for us to understand and to control our own sexuality and our role in reproduction, either right now, or in the future...? **Why is it always us that end up with the complete responsibility for the children, for their conditions and for their state of mind? There is also an important place that has to be given to the struggle for tenderness, for sensuality, for caring, for constructive expression of our emotions.**

So there are lots of questions to look at! The debate has really begun! We hope others will join in. You may have your own ideas about the kinds of meetings we should have, or the kinds of actions we should initiate or imitate. If you do, send them along to us through the address for **PROLETARIAN UNITY.**

The working group on sexuality and reproduction in the autonomous women's collective in Montreal

January 1982

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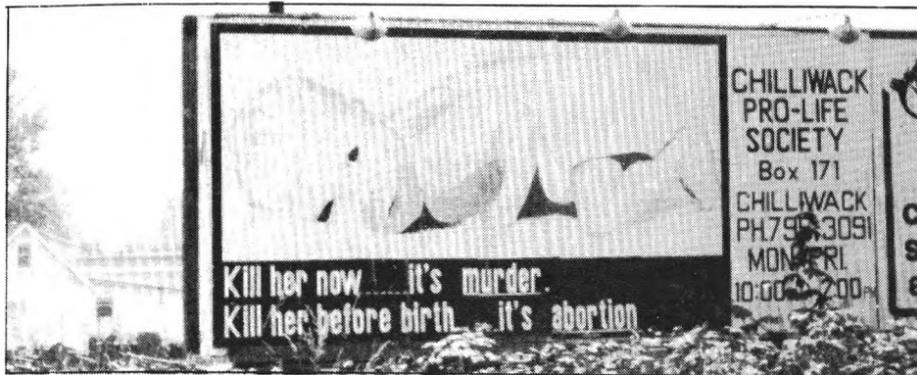
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The results of unwanted births on the lives of women and children is of little concern to the anti-abortionists.

rican women between the ages of 14 to 78. Shere Hite reveals to us things we do not dare admit to ourselves. Our sex life is "sometimes" frustrating, sometimes enriching. We have desires. The responses reported in the book may shock us, but they may also be reassuring for those of us who may have thought we were the only ones to derive pleasure from this or that or who needed this or that form of stimulation. The book deals with all aspects of female sexuality: heterosexuality, homosexuality, self-eroticism, the vaginal vs clitoral orgasm debate and lots more.

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Videos

Va te faire soigner, t'es malade, 74 min, b/w and c/v, colour, 1980. Directed and produced by Roxane Simard and the Centre hospitalier Louis H. Lafontaine.

A video of a lecture by Roxane Simard, a therapist at the Louis H. Lafontaine hospital in Montréal. She discusses women's mental health, denounces the sexist prejudices of many doctors and therapist and stresses in particular the importance for women to use feminist therapies and therapists.

The material basis of women's oppression in capitalist society

by Jean Tepperman

Purpose of the Paper

On the question of women's liberation, the Marxist-Leninist movement currently faces several related challenges: (1) The need to develop a basic theoretical understanding of women's oppression and women's liberation; (2) The need to speak to the large number of women with women's movement experience who see socialism and Marxism as necessary to women. Many of these women are organizationally homeless after political differences split the women's unions in many cities, and many are dissatisfied with the alternatives of Marxist-Leninist and socialist-feminist ideology as they were presented in the debates leading to these splits. (3) The need to meet the challenge presented by the growth of the Right focusing to a great extent on issues of sex, women's liberation and family life (abortion, gay rights, ERA, etc.);

(4) The need to address the changes in family life and sex roles in the working class: to speak to people's concerns about these issues and to understand how these changes affect our work in building a working class movement.

The last three challenges depend on theoretical development, which in turn is possible only by speaking to the realities of people's lives and learning from historical and current struggles of the women's movement as well as the Marxist-Leninist movement. But this theoretical development is hindered by incorrect ideas about the nature of women's oppression under capitalism and the connection between women's oppression and capitalism. Since few Marxist-Leninists have devoted much study to this question, there is a tendency to accept casually, certain traditional attitudes and responses as the "Marxist-Leninist" approach to women. This approach tends to narrow the question of women's oppression to issues related

It is certainly true that women are subject to superexploitation at work, but this does not explain all the forms of oppression of women.



to the workplace: equal pay, anti-discrimination fights, affirmative action, etc.

This approach is an effort to analyze women's oppression in a Marxist, as opposed to "bourgeois feminist," framework. That goal is positive and achieving it is crucial to our movement. But such a narrow view of women's oppression will actually *prevent* us from developing an accurate Marxist analysis of women's oppression.

Most Marxist-Leninist would deny that they see women's oppression only in terms of the workplace. They are aware of a Marxist theoretical tradition linking women's oppression to an analysis of the family. But in public statements, many individuals and groups seem to be basing their political line on the assumption that the exploitation of women wage workers on the job is *the* fundamental material basis of women's oppression. An important current example of this problem is Point 13 of the Principles of Unity of the OC IC:

It is impossible to develop a revolutionary vanguard party without a vigorous struggle against all manifestations of sexism in every aspect of social life. The superexploitation of women is a pillar upon which capitalism stands and the struggle against this exploitation is inextricably bound up with the struggle for revolution waged by the working class. The unity of men and women is critical to the struggle against sexism, i.e., men must take up the special demands of women. At present one arena of struggle is the women's movement. Within this movement communist women must take a leading role. Further, within the communist movement a firm struggle must be waged against male chauvinism—that is, the attitude in practice or words of male supremacy.

This point has many good aspects, including insistence on the importance of the struggle against sexism and identifying the women's movement as an important area for communist work. Its weakness lies in the way it draws the connection between sexism and capitalism. Whatever the intentions of the authors, this point implies that "super-exploitation" is the cornerstone of women's oppression under capitalism, and that this superexploitation is also the main connection between women's oppression and capitalism. The logic of this line can be traced from its analysis of the source of women's oppression to its implications for program and strategy.

This line may not be held in its *pure* form by very many people. But its logic influences the movement to varying degrees, mixed together with other views. And many communist organizations operate *practically* on this line even though their actual theoretical analyses and strategies are somewhat more sophisticated.

For these reasons, it is important to expose this line to critical examination so we can see its implications, because it represents a serious theoretical and political error we must struggle against.

Implications of a "Super-Exploitation" Analysis

Before examining the issues, it is necessary to define some terms. Marxists use the term *exploitation* to refer to something very specific—the extraction of surplus value from wage workers by a capitalist. *Superexploitation* is a term generally used to mean the extraction of a higher than usual rate of surplus value. For example, if two hours of the average person's daily work goes to surplus value, for the "superexploited person" it might be three hours. The "super-

exploited" person would have correspondingly lower wages. Groups such as national minorities and women, who have less power in the labor market, are usually seen as subject to this superexploitation. In contrast to these specific terms, *oppression* is a very general one, meaning simply the domination of one person or group by another, and the resulting injustice and suffering experienced by the dominated person or group. Exploitation is only one type of oppression.

Superexploitation of women workers is a real and important aspect of capitalist societies. Women are segregated into particular kinds of occupations, grossly underpaid compared to men, and pushed back and forth between job and home as capitalism's need for labor fluctuates—their ability to leave the workforce and become "housewives" makes them an ideal reserve labor force, and



Marxist political economy has consistently refused to recognize that reproduction, including the reproduction of the species, is an integral part of the material basis of our society.

they are expected to have or find husbands to support them when their labor is not needed on the job market.

There is no doubt that this superexploitation is *an important part* of the material basis of women's oppression under capitalism. But it is not the only, nor even the key aspect of this oppression. What are the implications of seeing superexploitation of the job as key?

One implication is that job discrimination is the key way sexism is maintained in capitalist society. This view deals with "women" basically as a subcategory of "workers" and presents their oppression as different *quantitatively* from men's (they are *more* exploited).

This in turn implies that change in this area is the key to liberating women. It goes along with the view that the family is part of the "superstructure" and will automatically change

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You cannot understand women's living conditions without understanding what goes on in the family.

when the material base—capitalist production—changes. For example, when women earn equal pay, they will have equality in the family. This means that the key struggles for women are those against discrimination and for affirmative action. Another implication of this view is that there is no material basis for sexism in a socialist society, since sexism stems from capitalism's need for superprofits. This means that once capitalism is eliminated, the struggle to end sexism is a purely ideological one, without a continuing material basis.

In relation to men, this view implies that men oppose women's liberation, when they do, because of two factors: (1) their rivalry over jobs, and (2) the influence of bourgeois ideology. The main real contradiction between women and men is their division at work, which can be overcome by greater class consciousness and awareness of the need for working class unity. Men do not benefit from sexism and the struggle against it requires no sacrifices and changes on their part, except an ideological effort to stop looking down on women.

Because ending this discrimination is in men's interest as workers, and because its material basis will disappear under socialism, there is no need for a women's liberation movement as such.

Why Is the "Super-Exploitation Analysis So Common?"

There are good reasons why many communists want to see superexploitation as the basic cause of women's PROLETARIAN UNITY

oppression. It is important to show that sexism has a material basis and isn't just part of the "superstructure." In a capitalist society we must understand how all issues are linked to the basic contradiction between capitalists and workers. So it seems logical to look for this material basis in the worker-capitalist relationship of women to their bosses.

There are also some bad reasons why so much Marxist-Leninist discussion of women seems to be based on this "superexploitation" analysis. These include:

(1) *Misunderstanding of Marxism.* Wage labor is the central, defining relationship in capitalist society. From this fundamental Marxist idea, some people draw the incorrect conclusion that wage labor is the fundamental aspect of the oppression of every person or group—no matter how important or unimportant wage labor actually is in their lives. This is a dogmatic use of Marxism, failing to make a specific analysis of each group's relation to production.

Marxism says that the character of the capitalist economy as a whole is determined by wage labor. But other forms of labor can be very important within a capitalist economy. This point may be clearer if we compare work in the home with peasant production. If peasants work a few days now and then for the local capitalist, this doesn't mean the basis of their oppression is wage work. Their condition as land tenants and petty commodity producers are much more important in shaping their lives. Their relationships to the state, the market system and the landowners are still important ones in their overall relationship to the means of production. Obviously, the participation of women in wage work is more significant than that of the peasants in this example. The point is that it is not a Marxist *principle* that their role as wage workers is the heart of women's oppression.

The superexploitation analysis is also related to another error in interpreting Marxism. Some people are so anxious to prove that "everything is socially caused," "there is no such thing as human nature," etc. that they seem to come close to denying that there are biological differences between men and women and that these have something to do with their different social roles. (For instance, all societies have a social division of labor based on women's role as mother). It is true that these biological differences don't inevitably cause oppression. But it is also important not to pretend that the capitalists invented the idea that there are any differences between men and women that have any significance for society.

(2) *Tailism.* The most important reason people tend to slip into the "superexploitation" analysis is tailism. The discussion of superexploitation keeps things on nice, safe ground when talking to workers, especially male workers. It's relatively easy to win progressive men to seeing the need for unity against the boss and struggle for equality at work. An analysis which included a critique of the family would be harder to talk about: it would raise the issue of women's need to struggle against men sometimes; it would mean probing into intimate and emotional issues that might scare people off. On the one hand we would be facing deeply-felt privatism—on the other we would be haunted by ultra "left" slogans of "radical feminists" and some Marxists, calling for smashing or abolishing families.

These are real problems, which will have to be dealt with sensitively in developing agitation and propaganda about women's oppression. But they are issues that must be confronted. It would be a serious mistake to ignore them in order to make our agitational tasks less complicated in the short run.

(3) *Downplaying "Women's World."* There is also an element of unconscious male chauvinism in the "super-exploitation" analysis. This analysis says material reality is the world outside the home—the world that has traditionally been men's. Women's lives and women's oppression are taken seriously to the extent that women participate in this traditionally male world. The really important role in which women are oppressed is the one they share with men—wage worker. The significance of the traditional "women's world"—the home and family—is ignored or downplayed, even in an analysis of women's oppression.

Elements of a Correct Analysis

If "superexploitation" is not the key to understanding women's oppression, what is? It is important to see women's oppression as a total structure in which economic, historical and psychological factors all re-inforce each other. The economic relationships create a context and set limits in which all the others operate. Traditions have been handed down for thousands of years. Early experiences in infancy and childhood shape the very core of our personalities according to certain conceptions of what it means to be female or male. The kinds of work expected from men and women differ greatly in a sexual division of labor affecting every area of life. Etc. etc.

Some Marxists have recognized the richness and complexity of this structure of sexism. Others have chosen to ignore many of its aspects. But in both the past and the present, most communists have maintained that if women could participate equally in work outside the home, all other aspects of sexism would more or less automatically be eliminated. The "superexploitation" analysis implies that the main barrier to this change is capitalist discrimination in the workplace, due to the capitalists' need for superprofits.

In this paper I will argue that no amount of struggle on the job, and no amount of anti-discrimination and affirmative action efforts, could possibly eliminate women's oppression without simultaneous deliberate measures to radically change the structure of the family. Equal employment efforts, by themselves, can never even bring about equality on the job.

The Marxist method tells us that the basic material reality of what people do to survive ultimately determines the nature of any social structure. But superexploitation on the job is not the only aspect of women's material reality. There are at least three basic material realities in capitalist society that shape women's lives, in a complicated and changing pattern: (1) reproduction and child rearing, (2) work in the home, and (3) work for wages. It is a mistake to pick out one of these as a key in the sense that all the rest of women's situation automatically follows from it. But it is significant that it is women's reproductive role which defines her difference from men. Their other work somehow has to be adapted to their role as mother or potential mothers—systems of reproduction and child rearing have to be taken into account whenever any society makes use of women's labor in other areas. Of course, the social definition of the role of mother and arrangements for reproduction and child rearing vary greatly. These patterns must be compatible with the mode of production and level of economic development. The point is that *women's roles in reproduction and production are dialectically interrelated and it is this dialectic which forms the basic material reality of women's role in society.*



Anne Morin

PROLETARIAN UNITY

A full analysis of the material basis of women's oppression must include, *in addition to women's wage work*, the following elements:

(1) *Reproduction.* Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is the only work of classical Marxism that tries to explain a systematic theory of women's oppression. In the introduction to that book Engels says:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.

It is important to note that in this passage Engels says that *reproduction itself* is part of the material basis of society. Understanding this would take us a long way toward overcoming the *economism*—the narrow focus on wage work—that dominates so much Marxist-Leninist thinking about women.

Engels goes on to say that the social organization for the propagation of the species is the family and that the state of development of the family is, together with the development of labor, the basis of organization of any society. What does he mean by this? What issues or questions does he deal with in discussing the development of the family and the status of women? Some of them are: control of women's sexual behavior, control of children (he meant within the family) and the economic dependence of women on men. Under modern conditions we would have to add the question of who controls women's reproductive powers, since the possibility of separating reproduction from sexuality has been created by effective birth control technology. We would also have to add the question of arrangements for the care of children, inside and outside the family. (In both these issues we can see that the state now plays a bigger role directly in women's lives as reproducers than it used to, although individual men still *also* have power over individual women in these areas). We would also have to ask what is changing and what is remaining the same in the pattern of women's economic dependence on men.

One implication of this is that issues such as birth control,

A detail from a fresco in the St. Joseph Oratory in Montreal. The motto reads: "The one who holds the family together"



Christine Lemoine

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abortion, sterilization abuse, day care, welfare, etc., are not simply "superstructural" or "cultural" issues, but deal with *an important part of society's material base.*

(2) *Housework.* In most pre-capitalist societies, most work was done within the family unit. As capitalism developed, it divided work into public, socialized work and work that remained in the family. The more development takes place, the more work that used to be done in the family is brought into wage labor. Does this mean housework has become unimportant economically? No, for two reasons. One is that a tremendous amount of socially necessary work is still done in the home, mostly by women—the work women have always done, such as cooking, cleaning and sewing. In addition, new kinds of work, such as shopping, have been made necessary by the new ways production and distribution are organized.

Marxist economic theory has generally ignored the importance of the work women do in the home. In a recent article Paddy Quick, a Marxist economist, cites the above quote from Engels and comments:

But while Marx analyzed the reproduction of the means of production (in particular in Volume II of *Capital*), he never completed his analysis of the production of human beings. Instead, in *Capital*, he made the initial simplifying assumption that labor-power is reproduced solely through the consumption of commodities purchased with the wage. In concrete capitalist societies, societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production, the reproduction of labor-power involves not only the direct consumption of commodities purchased with the wage, but also the consumption of use-values produced within the home (primarily by women.)¹

Housework is necessary to the operation of the capitalist economy. Housework keeps workers physically and emotionally able to keep going back to work the next day, and helps the next generation of workers to grow up. With these tasks being done, the capitalist economy could not operate. And yet this work is not considered "real work" or a real part of the total economy, because it doesn't bring a paycheck. In spite of this, housework absorbs a tremendous amount of womanpower—*more woman-hours than work outside the home.* Some statistics given by another economist, Margaret Benston, illustrate this: "In Sweden, 2,340 million hours a year are spent by women in housework, compared with 1,290 million hours spent by women in industry. And the Chase Manhattan Bank estimates a women's overall work week at 99.6 hours."²

Marxist theory has not focused on this work because it is not wage labor, which is the type of labor that defines capitalist society. But understanding this work is important to understanding the situation of women in a capitalist economy, and to understanding the whole picture of how that economy operates.

One Communist Party theorist writing in the '40s, Mary Inman, tried to pinpoint the specific economic contribution of housework. She assumes that these tasks are done by full time housewives because she was writing some time ago. Although this is no longer true in many cases—the economic function she points to still has to be performed, and the family is still the basic institution for doing these things:

¹ Paddy Quick, "The Class Nature of Women's Oppression," p. 43.

² Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, Sept., 1969, p. 17.

What has not been adequately taken into account is that people produce people, not solely by a biological process, but also by a social labor process. In the social labor process, as in the biological process, people do not produce people *in general* (merely by creating the material requirements of life: steel, coal, transportation, tools of production, food, etc.), but *specific persons* produce the human energy of *specific persons*, or perform one of the labor processes, or part of such a process, in such production.

Uncooked and inedible foods, the products of other workers, come into the housewife's kitchen in the form of raw materials and by the consumption . . . of a certain amount of tools of production, appliances, kitchen stove, pots and pans, etc., plus the consumption of a certain amount of the housewife's labor-power, these raw materials are transformed into the finished product: *cooked foods*.

Since the objective of the housewife, however, is not merely the production of cooked foods, but of human energy, the cooked foods become in turn only one of the necessary raw materials for the production of the commodity: labor-power.

If our housewife was concerned only with the cooked food production, when she finished the roast she might well leave it in the pan in the oven, but since that is not her objective, she must perform further productive labor upon it before it is ready to be eaten. . . steaks, chops, vegetables, salads, fruits and coffee . . . arrive safe and sound on the dining table by the expenditure of additional labor-power on the part of our friend the housewife.

Her labor transforms soiled clothing that needs mending into clean clothing, ironed and with buttons sewed on, ready to be worn. Her 'living labor' seizes upon the rooms in disarray, and makes them comfortable and habitable again.³

I have quoted these passages at such length *not* because I agree with Inman's specific formulations, or the ways she characterizes housework in terms of Marxist economics—she is at times crude and incorrect. But the value of her descriptions is that they make housework *visible*. She shows that it is a crucial economic function. If "housewives" don't perform it, someone else has to. The issue of housework has too often been dismissed by Communists as a trivial concern of "bourgeois feminism." "Hassles over who does the housework" are political struggles, however limited, around a very important part of the material basis of women's oppression.

Women's Liberation and Economism

(1) *What is Economism?* As I understand it, economism is an error with two levels. As defined by Lenin in *What is to Be Done?*, economism is the belief that revolutionary consciousness and the revolutionary movement will grow spontaneously and directly out of the relationship between worker and boss on the job. Lenin's point was not merely that revolutionaries had to step in and point out the lessons of this direct economic struggle, but also that revolutionary consciousness and movements grow out of contradictions in many aspects of society:

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is



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the sphere of relationships between *all* the classes and strata and the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between *all* the classes. . . . To bring political knowledge to the *workers* the Social Democrats must *go among all classes of the population*, must dispatch units of their army *in all directions*.⁴

More generally, economism is related to economic determinism, the view that the economy is the only dynamic force in society and all other aspects of society are simply and automatically dictated by its economic base. A more dialectical view sees many forces (the state, the culture, etc.) operating in a society, in complex and dialectical relationships. Among these, economic relationships set the context and the limits within which everything else must operate. These economic relationships also define the classes whose struggle provides the main dynamic moving society forward. But there is tremendous room for variation in different societies with different historical, political and cultural conditions, even with the same general economic system—and these other levels in turn have important effects on the relations of production and the class struggle. Engels wrote late in his life:

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.⁵

(2) *Economism and Women.* The "superexploitation" line above is an example of economism. Sexism in all its levels is seen as simply "caused" by discrimination against wage workers on the basis of sex—liberation is seen as basically assured by eliminating discrimination on the job, and giving all women jobs.

Many Marxists go beyond this simplistic view and recognize that the family is *part* of the economic system and the relations of production, since the production and reproduction that take place in the family are indispensable to the operation of the economy. Even people who recognize

³ Mary Inman, *The Two Forms of Production Under Capitalism*, pp. 23, 25, and 29.

⁴ Lenin, *What is to Be Done?* Chinese edition, p. 98.

⁵ Engels, "Letter to Joseph Bloch," in Lewis Feuer ed. of *Marx and Engels*, pp. 397-8.

this, however, can make economist errors in seeing the family *only* as an economic institution or, as Margaret Benston did, defining women as "that group of people who are responsible for the production of simple use-values in those activities associated with the home and family."⁶ It seems she is missing something!

Analyses like this miss the crucial significance of the political, psychological and cultural aspects of the family, and the way these aspects are fused with economic functions. They fail to deal with the fact that sex roles are part of everyone's basic personality, shaped early in life, mainly by family experiences (to be reinforced later by the rest of society). Economist views ignore the importance of sexuality and sexual identity for women's oppression.

It could seem incompatible with historical materialism to assume that gender-related characteristics of men and women are biologically determined. And yet it is impossible to believe that people's most basic sense of themselves as male and female, and what that means in important and sensitive areas of life, is irrelevant to the system of sexism. We must understand the relationship of these issues to capitalism, and how socialist society might deal with them.

Strategic and Programmatic Implications

A deeper analysis of the nature of women's oppression leads us to more complex theoretical and strategic tasks. These tasks require more resources, since the answers do not come easy. And in this area especially, we can succeed only through the serious application of the mass line—by finding ways to draw on what women themselves think about their complicated situation. We need to develop an analysis of the crisis in family and sexual relations that can guide strategy on these issues, as well as a deeper understanding of the place of wage work in women's lives.

(1) *Program.* In making this analysis we will still give a very important place to women's struggles against sexism on the job. Not because this area is the key to everything, but because it is the area where women's struggles are most clearly and easily related to class struggle. These struggles provide an important connection between the women's movement and the workers movement. They also organize women who are brought together daily by their jobs, and who have the power of all wage workers—to produce or stop production.

But in dealing with the reality of the lives of women, our demands have to go beyond the workplace. Left literature is full of references to the fact that women work a "double shift"—one on the job and one at home. But the left usually confines its demands to improvements in paid jobs. How does this deal with the "double shift"? Sometimes left groups add a demand for day care. This is fine, but it fails to deal with the "double shift" at all, since women's job in the home takes place before and after their paid jobs, when the children *are not* in day care.

Communists correctly oppose Wages for Housework on a number of grounds—but where is *our* analysis and program that speaks to women's oppression as mothers and workers in the home? Communists often dismiss the "bourgeois women's movement" for its petty squabbling about how men should do housework and child care. But the struggle around the division of labor in the home is an attempt, however limited, to deal with a crucial part of the material basis of women's oppression, and should be supported and seen as important by communists.

The usual communist program for women workers includes fighting job discrimination, affirmative action (if we are lucky), maternity leave, and day care. This program fails to speak to the pattern of work life of the vast majority of women who leave the workforce completely or partially for a number of years when their children are small. We should broaden our ideas about demands that deal with the conflict between the roles of worker and mother. In this context we need to see the importance of demands for rights and benefits for part time workers, and for training and placement of women who are re-entering the workplace, as well as a vigorous fight against age discrimination. Family allowances, common in many European countries, are also reform measures that address these real problems.

It may be objected that if maternity leave and day care were really adequate, these other provisions would not be necessary because women would not take much time off full-time work to have children. This may or may not be correct as a vision of how things would be in a fairly developed socialist society. But in the US today, most women—and *especially* most working class women—want to stay home with their small children, at least part of the day. They find raising their children more meaningful than working to produce surplus value, and hold views of child rearing that call for a parent to be around a good deal in the early years. It seems to me very arrogant for communists to dismiss these views as backward—especially given the fact that few have much knowledge of children or have made serious studies of child development and working class family life.

The demand for adequate welfare is another essential element in any program that deals with the economic basis of women's oppression. Women must be able to raise children on their own, if they are to have any hope of gaining equality in marriage (if he knows you're trapped, what power do you have?) or of freely choosing whether or not to be married.

Finally, as mentioned before, the movements for reproductive rights—birth control, abortion, and the power to refuse sterilization—should be seen as struggles around the material basis of women's oppression, and not as "secondary," "cultural" or whatever. Whether you're having a baby or not is a pretty important reality—and the question of who makes that decision is a crucial part of the "social relations of reproduction."

(2) *The Women's Movement.* Another strategic issue, aside from what demands are important, is what the women's movement should be. It seems that a "super-exploitation" analysis would lead to the conclusion that any women's movement that communists support would be a minor sub-group within the workers' movement. Since women's oppression is basically seen as only quantitatively different from men's, no special movement would be needed. The impression is given that the only way to make sure a women's movement is really on the side of the working class is to confine the worker's movement to organizing workers around job issues.

But women's oppression involves some qualitatively *different* material realities from men's oppression, as well as many of the same ones. So women need a special movement through which they can fight against their own oppression, *as well as* participation in the workers' movement, national liberation movements, and others where they share common

⁶ Benston, p. 16.



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oppression with men. The women's movement is an important base for revolution *in itself* and not only insofar as it is *part* of the workers movement. Its class stand will be determined by political struggle. It will be an ally of the working class if we successfully develop and present a convincing Marxist analysis and strategy for the whole range of issues in the women's movement.

(3) *The Relationship of Men to Women's Liberation.* The relationship of men to women's liberation is pretty simple, if you go by the "superexploitation" analysis. Since men are equally powerless as workers, and in no way benefit from sexism, we can appeal to their class interest to show them they should resist the superexploitation of women. It is a good idea—as far as it goes. But on some level we all *know* this does not speak to many of the main problems between men and women!

A dialectical materialist analysis of the family does *not* lead to the strategy of fighting against men as men. It would be idealist or biological determinist to think that men are oppressive just because they are male. Basic class analysis tells us that individual men acting wrong does not determine the structures of sexism. These structures have evolved historically, through the interaction of family and work, the mode of production and the mode of reproduction.

However, the nature of these structures at present is male supremacy. Males have *power* over females in many ways but resting ultimately on their economic power as the main breadwinners in the family. This role is in turn oppressive to men in many ways. But *in relation to women* it still gives men real power. They use this power to get many benefits at the expense of women: they often exploit women sexually and emotionally; they are fed, clothed, cleaned up after, soothed and presented with children whom they can care for only as much as they feel like it, and hand over when they are a pain in the neck. The fact that capitalists benefit from this

work does not eliminate the fact that men also benefit from it.

If women are to be free, men have to do more than support their struggle against the boss for equal pay. Men have to change. They have to do work they have always felt was beneath them. They have to learn skills and sensitivities that have been seen as exclusively female (she will not leave housework and child care to him unless he does it well and takes it seriously; she will not feel her burden of responsibility for personal relationships lighten until others take on that responsibility). We can see that these changes give men an opportunity to grow in new and rewarding ways. They also strengthen the working class movement, by helping men develop stronger class consciousness in giving up the false image of themselves as individualistic lord and master in the home. But sacrifices are also part of these changes.

Change in family structure requires several simultaneous approaches: changes in women's jobs, to give them a base of independence; change in the policies of the state, to create laws and social services necessary for women's equality; and direct struggle on the level of family structure itself: to change power relations within the family, and to free people to choose whether to live in conventional families or create other forms for personal life. If this direct struggle at the level of family structure does not take place, changes in employment and state policies will not be enough.

(4) *Women's Liberation and Socialist Revolution.* It is important to make clear that without socialist revolution the changes necessary to liberate women are impossible. However, it is also important to remember that the most consistent and leading force for socialist revolution is the working class, and that the core of working class strength lies in organization at work. This paper has been talking about what it would take to liberate women, *not* about what

it would take to make a socialist revolution—in practice these processes are inseparable, but we have to distinguish them in theory in order to be precise about either.

Women as women must organize to fight for their own liberation before, during and after a socialist revolution. But women as a group can't be the leading force in that socialist revolution—although women can and must play leading roles. This is because the category "women" includes many people whose class interest is unclear or contradictory. These people have many tendencies to try to deal with sexism through individual efforts, such as careerism, self-help and struggles that remain purely on the psychological level. These efforts are doomed to failure, since sexism is rooted in the structure of capitalist society itself. But many of these women are torn between their class interest and their desire to make the changes necessary to overcome their oppression as women. Many petty bourgeois women can be won to socialist revolution because they can see it is the only way for women to be liberated.

But working class women will have to be the leading force in a socialist women's movement—and under capitalism the women's movement will always contain some sections dominated by the petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. It is important to unite with as many of these groups as possible in particular reform struggles, while politically pushing for an alliance with the working class and clarity about the working class as the leading force in the struggle for socialism.

(5) *Women's Liberation in Socialist Societies.* Differences in analysis also lead to different views on the struggle for women's liberation in socialist societies. Some people may feel it is pointless to speculate on how things will work out after the revolution, beyond a statement of good intentions ("the liberation of women is a basic principle of communism," etc.). But people we are trying to win to socialism will—and should—demand more than that. If we say "socialism will liberate women" they will ask "How?"

If you believe the "superexploitation" analysis, the answer is easy: by giving women equality at work and bringing them into social production. One recent example of this simple faith that jobs will mean liberation was the *Guardian* summary of "victories" for women in 1978. They included the fact that more women hold jobs as simply a "victory." They ignored the fact that in the context of current family structures and job requirements, many of these women are miserably overworked and their family lives disrupted. Many of those women who got jobs in 1978 certainly saw it as a victory—and this process of women moving out of exclusive involvement with the home is certainly progressive. But under the concrete conditions of this society, for many women that move was a hardship, not a victory. Women's own experience, plus the example of socialist countries, both show that jobs do not necessarily bring equality.

(In discussing socialist countries, I am not going to deal with the question of whether all these countries are really socialist. It is important to consider that question in relation to women's liberation—if we think the USSR, etc., are not really socialist countries, but China, say, is, what is the relationship between failures to develop socialism and failures to liberate women? For now I will use the term "socialist" in quotes and leave out this question.)

The various "socialist" countries have a great variety of programs and ideas relating to women. They all have two things in common: (1) Women have made tremendous

progress under socialism, and (2) women are still second class citizens *everywhere*—paid less, working at lower level jobs, grossly underrepresented in leadership, especially top leadership, doing most of the housework and child care. These realities must also be reflected in personal relationships between men and women.

Why are women in this inferior position when they have job equality and participate in social production? Well, they left work for a while to have children, so they have less seniority; they were having children at the age when men were receiving advanced training and so missed out on that; but *mainly* it is that they have too much to do—taking care of the house, shopping, cooking and spending time with their children.⁷ Attacking women's oppression only (or mainly) through changes on the job is self-defeating, since job equality is impossible without major changes in women's family roles and in the expectations and resources for full time workers outside the home.

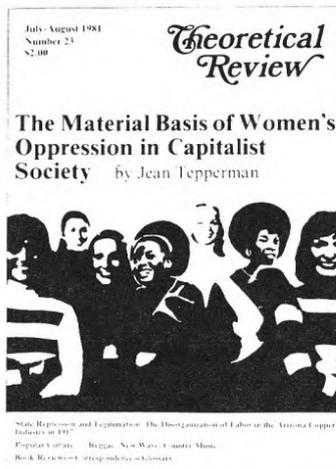
The structure of families is not "natural" or biologically determined. It also cannot be mechanically derived from the relations of production. It is not obvious that "relations of reproduction" are best or most compatible with socialism. The great variety of "socialist" countries shows that socialism doesn't automatically produce a certain type of family structure. A few examples of the range of ideas and practices:

(1) In Cuba and the USSR, much effort is made to remove the stigma of illegitimacy, supporting unmarried mothers, and distributing birth control regardless of marital status. In China pre-marital sex is considered scandalous and an illegitimate child a disaster.

(2) In the Soviet Union there have been efforts (mostly in the twenties, but also in the sixties) to deliberately break, or at least drastically weaken, family ties. Soviet reformers reasoned that people would be more collective-minded without families. They have sometimes, like in the sixties, pushed plans for getting all children over a certain age (such as seven) out of their parents' homes and into boarding schools, where "experts" would do a "better job" raising them. Parentless children are cared for in group homes because that is seen as a more advanced living situation than families anyway. At the other extreme, some Eastern European countries are considering paid *three-year* maternity leaves, arguing that ties between parents and children in the early years are psychologically important and can be best built if the mother stays home. (Also the ratio of caretakers to children needed for high quality care of very young children makes it doubtful whether there are any economies of scale in institutional child care.) In the middle, Cuba and China value family ties but encourage women to return to full time work very soon after children are born—six weeks to a year. China promotes a policy of getting all parentless children adopted, because it is felt it is better for children to live in families.

(3) In the USSR and Eastern Europe, men do virtually no housework. The state argues that with the development of communism, housework will be "socialized," so sharing it

⁷ The description of women's status in socialist countries is drawn from many scattered sources. Especially useful to me were: Delia Davin, *Woman-Work, Women and the Party in Revolutionary China*. Oxford University Press, 1976; Claudia Broyelle, *Women's Liberation in China*. The Harvester Press, 1977; Hilda Scott, *Does Socialism Liberate Women?* (mostly about Czechoslovakia), Beacon Press, 1974; William Mandel, *Soviet Women*. Anchor Books, 1975.



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with men is a reformist and bourgeois demand. In Cuba and China, the state pushes for men to do housework—in Cuba, with the force of law.

The traditional Marxist slogans of “abolishing the family” and “industrialization housework” are crude and vague. They raise images of impersonal, barracks-type living, children separated from parents, etc. Some Marxists have interpreted them this way and argued that this is a positive vision of the future (like some Soviet reformers). Most communists in the US choose to ignore this inadequate tradition of family theory and fall back on an economism which deals the current family structure will remain the same, or that changes in jobs will result spontaneously in “equality” (which is pretty vague).

If we just waver between these two inadequate poles, we will never convince women that socialism will liberate them. We will be caught in a bind like this:

Communist: “Socialism will give women job equality and day care centers and this will make them equal.”

Women: “What about all the housework and child care we do after ‘work’? What about the years we spend at home when children are little? (etc. etc.—in other words, what about the family?)”

Communist: “Don’t worry, we’re going to abolish the family and socialize housework and child care.”

Women: “Take our kids away and raise them in big institutions? Live in barracks? Forget it!”

If we say that is not what we mean—what *do* we mean? That vision of the future is not acceptable to most people. But if the present family structure—and the requirements and hours of jobs—remain the same, women will continue to be caught in this contradiction. In resolving the contradiction between women’s roles inside and outside the family, the goal is not necessarily to reduce family life and the parent-child relationship to such a minimum that it no longer conflicts with the full time work week as it has evolved under capitalism—nor to reproduce labor power with the most large-scale, efficient methods possible.

All children over the age of six weeks *could* spend 45 hours a week in day care so both parents could work full

time. On the other hand it would also be possible to allow parents—women and men—of very young children to work fewer hours with no economic loss, in recognition of their job as parents—or for one parent to take an extended leave.

Socialism opens up new possibilities for society to *choose* how to organize the activities that have taken place in families. How can families or other living groups meet the important needs families now meet, without continuing to be traps for women (and for men and children too)? How can we re-integrate personal or family life with social production in a way that meets people’s needs, individual and collective? How can we combine the roles of worker and parent in a way that is best for children, parents and society? How can we make sure that women—even mothers!—are economically independent of men: so their relationships with men will be equal, and so they can freely choose whether or not to be in relationships with men?

The question of women’s liberation forces us to deal with these issues, or our ideas about women’s liberation will be superficial, unconvincing, and ultimately wrong. It is our responsibility to study the structure of women’s oppression and the experiences of other countries and come up with ideas about what women’s liberation would mean in socialist society. Otherwise how can we hope to persuade women that women’s liberation is really possible, and that socialism is necessary to that liberation?

Conclusion

This paper is not an analysis of women’s oppression in the US, but it does offer some ideas about what framework we should use when we begin to make such an analysis. Its purpose is to stimulate discussion so we can work together on moving forward in that analysis.

I have argued that the material basis of women’s oppression under capitalism lies in the contradiction between their responsibilities for reproduction and housework in the home and participation in socialized labor outside the home. This contradiction leads to the dependence of women on men, which is the material basis for sexism in the working class family.⁸ This contradiction is in turn seized upon and manipulated by capitalists in order to squeeze superprofits out of the labor of women in wage work.

This pattern cannot be eliminated unless capitalism itself is eliminated. Class struggle is the only force capable of moving society forward from one mode of production to another: of making a revolution. But the struggles of women for their own liberation must be an important part of that revolutionary process: providing the working class with an important ally—the women’s movement—and strengthening the class struggle by encouraging the full and equal participation of working class women. A socialist revolution will not automatically liberate women, but it will create, for the first time, conditions which make it possible for the struggle for women’s liberation to succeed.

⁸ This is very similar to the main point made in the Paddy Quick article cited above. There are some differences—I think she doesn’t think housework is a significant factor and focuses much more exclusively on women’s dependence during the time their children are small. But in trying to argue that sexism in the working class family has a material basis and is not just the result of copying the ruling class family, she is going beyond the *Origin of the Family* in a very important way.

A feminist criticism of IN STRUGGLE!’s Programme

The following article is based on a presentation made by IN STRUGGLE!’s National Women Committee to a Central Committee meeting in January 1982. It represents an initial critique of the Programme. Schematic as it may be, it should still give you an idea of what is meant by seeing things from a Marxist feminist perspective.

What are the fundamental criticisms to be made of the Programme?

1. Throughout the Programme there is no mention of the **question of reproduction:**

- the reproduction of social relationships, the transmission of culture (particularly in education)
- reproduction of labour power; a worker has nothing but his or her

labour power— but who deals with maintaining that labour power at the necessary level?

- reproduction of men and women
- It is women who ensure reproduction for the most part if not entirely.

An important part of reality is not even mentioned in the Programme. We have not gone beyond Engels.

The role of the family as a material basis of women’s oppression is ignored.

As a result, the Programme is unable to point out “the way” to go to achieve the liberation of women.

2. Throughout the Programme, women are considered as just **one among many other social strata**. Yet women are to be found in all social classes and social strata and women are always the most oppressed of the oppressed.

3. The contradiction which pits men against women is not even cited as **one of the major contradictions** which divide society, let alone the most profound.

4. Hence not only is the question of women’s liberation posed incorrectly but so is the **whole revolutionary strategy**. The points dealing with women’s liberation have repercussions on not only the women’s struggle but on all aspects of the revolutionary struggle: on class analysis, on our conception of the vanguard, on our understanding of the revolutionary process and of the development of political consciousness, on our evaluation of the necessary preconditions for achieving communism...

Let us look a little more closely at the Programme.

Barely two sentences into the Programme we appeal to “the vanguard workers” (no mention of men and women workers) and “progressive ele-



ments who, in growing numbers over the past years, have understood." Women must fall only into this second category of progressive elements who have understood. (Translators note: this is particularly evident in French where the term "ouvriers" is used instead of "ouvriers et ouvrières" and "éléments progressistes" could be either masculine or feminine.) This idea of the proletariat runs through the entire Programme.

Introduction

We live in a world rife with misery and oppression in various forms.

This description of the world situation ignores fundamental facts about our epoch and leaves out a lot of qualifications and distinctions.

The oppression of women is included in a list of other forms of misery in the phrase "racial and sexual discrimination", in between "illiteracy" and "many forms of repression".

No mention of rape or violence against women. Nothing on forced sterilization or, in other periods, the obligation to bear children.

Misery is more viewed in economic and social terms. No talk about psychological misery, for example.

On the other hand, without any evidence, the Programme asserts that "ever since the first class societies, the exploited have aspired to a better life" as if the exploited were happy or did not aspire to anything or as if there were not exploited before the appearance of class society. The Programme states that the proletarian revolution can put an end to "the capitalist relations of production that are now the fundamental obstacle to further progress for mankind."

Article 1

Most of humanity now lives under the yoke of imperialism, the final stage of capitalism.

In this article, the whole economic system is reduced to the production of surplus value.

Hence it is said that "Workers are forced to exchange their labour power for a wage that allows them to survive but that represents less value than that produced by their labour; this is the source of capital accumulation."

Magically the worker is able to survive with nothing more than his wage.

Thus in the analysis of the economy, there is no assessment made at all of the family as a material structure where reproduction of labour power takes place. This is not done in terms of its economic role; still less is there discussion of the family's cultural, psy-



The woman must become a man and take part in productive work.

chological and sexual role. Nor is there any mention of the biological reproduction of the species.

The other 'tour de force' in this article concerns the division of labour. There is no mention of the sexual division of labour or of the devaluation of the status of tasks performed by women which results in increased profits for the capitalists.

No reference either to the international division of labour, nor the division of labour based on race.

When we say that feminism should influence all of our political understandings, this is the kind of thing we are talking about.

Article 2

The era of imperialism is also the era of proletarian revolution. First, it is not true to say, as the Programme does, that the proletariat has nothing to lose but it chains. A large part of the proletariat, men workers, have privileges to lose.

The Programme ignores sexism and does not include it in its listing of the four main contradictions governing the contemporary world.

Nor can we maintain, as the Programme does, that "only proletarian leadership can lead the revolution on the path towards socialism", given the definition of the proletariat in the Programme and given the analysis that there have been as many defeats as victories to date in the struggle for socialism. For example, nowhere has any society really undertaken to socialize domestic labour.

It leaves one feeling more than a little

bit skeptical when the Programme talks of the firm application of Marxism-Leninism and the dictatorship of the proletariat—and says nothing about all other things.

Article 3

Canada is an independent capitalist country that has reached the stage of imperialism. Socialist revolution is now on the agenda.

First, the description of Canadian society falls into a "misery fixation" and says nothing about things like consumer debt which can be just as alienating.

When the question of productivity is raised there is no mention of the part-time work which is increasingly widespread and mostly involves women and youth.

Here again all the Programme has to say is: "Socialist revolution is the only way that the working people of Canada can ensure both the full respect of the democratic rights of the oppressed strata (women's liberation is here reduced to a democratic right —ed note) and the abolition of all exploitation."

Socialist revolution has yet to prove that it is "the only way". And socialist revolution is not on the agenda for the foreseeable near future for Canadian working people anyway.

Article 4

The working class of Canada has proven that it is the leading force of the socialist revolution in the country.

The "leading role" or "vanguard role" of the "working class" (in some places the term worker is used instead — Transl. note: "ouvrier" is masculine but more important it connotes someone who does wage labour only) in the fight for women's rights? Get serious. It is not true. The women's movement has played this role.

The Programme does not talk at all about the specific contribution of women to the overall struggle of the proletariat. Thus problems are posed in more general social terms and there is a particular way of looking at the struggle in all aspects of life that is consistent with this omission.

Furthermore, this article communicates a very sectarian vision of the mass movement. Everything which is not Marxist-Leninist is categorized as one or another form of petty-bourgeois radicalism. That is what the "orthodox" conception of vanguard leads to. We can testify to this from our experience in working with the feminist movement in Canada.



In East Germany, it has become a tradition for men to congratulate the women they work with and offer them flowers and a gift for March 8... As for the revolutionization of social relations...

Article 5

The historic mission of the working class is to lead the world to communism.

Here again the Programme states that the abolition of all classes will "put an end to all the social divisions and inequalities".

Communist society presupposes the extensive development of the productive forces. Now there is a truly economist way of looking at things! You cannot talk about a genuine communist society unless there is control over biological reproduction and complete socialization of domestic labour.¹

The Programme talks about eliminating the great opposition between mental and manual labour and between city and countryside. It adds that the abolition of classes "will also mean the elimination of the roots of women's oppression". Just where does the oppression of women really come in?

Article 6

The emancipation of the workers will be the act of the workers themselves.

Communism, says the Programme, will only be possible "in a world totally rid of imperialist domination, capitalist exploitation, and bourgeois ideology".

No question here of getting rid of the system of relationships which exist between the sexes, in particularly of patriarchy.

PROLETARIAN UNITY

Another point: the process of revolution is reduced to the seizure of State power. Where that power lies exactly is not said.

Is this seizure of power something that only happens during insurrections, or is it possible that worker and people's control are part of an apprenticeship in seizing and exercising power that begins under capitalism?

How are the dictatorship of the proletariat and "the broadest possible democracy for all working people" reconciled? How are workers' control and (and more generally people's control) reconciled with control by the State and the party?

What are women to expect from a programme which does not deal with their need to be equal in relation to their role in biological reproduction, their sexuality or their private life?

Why is it that even under socialism there is to be no revolutionization in social relations, no struggle to transform persons and the relationships which exist between them?

Article 7

The task of the working class is to build the camp of the socialist revolution under the leadership of its vanguard party.

Progress: we discover that there are women in the working class. On the other hand, women are not included in the list of oppressed social strata described as the potential allies of the

proletariat.

The proletarian party is described in terms that betray an elitist and militaristic vision of what a party should be: a detachment, the best fighters, the headquarters...

The party makes people conscious, the masses do the legwork.

The exploited strata are united "on the basis of the line defined by the party" and not by giving up the privileges which divide these various strata.

The preparation of the masses for revolution is described in military terms "arming the masses". The ideological preparation for revolution is seen only in relation to dealing with the bourgeoisie. There does not seem to be any thought of any activity of self-organization of the masses being part of this preparation (the women's movement has developed this theme of self-organization a great deal).

Article 8

The proletarian party builds up the revolutionary camp by supporting the immediate struggles of working people.

As the head quoted above says, the party links up with struggles rather than being fully involved as an active participant and part of those struggles.

We support immediate struggles in order to protect the material and moral well-being of the masses. Everything is seen from a bit above the fray and indeed somewhat paternalistically. It reminds you of the sermons you used to hear in your youth in church.

One of the immediate demands made on the bourgeois State cited in this article is the demand for complete independence for various democratic mass organizations. The same autonomy is not, however, guaranteed under socialism.

The autonomy of nations is guaranteed, but not the autonomy of women.

The demand is raised for the equality of women in all areas of political, economic and social life, but there is no mention of private life.

There are other important "oversights", like the right of women to control their bodies, the right to choose one's own sexual orientation, the rights of youth — all of these are fundamental rights because they attack the family as an economic and cultural institution.

National Women's Committee
January 1982

1. This in no way implies that such a society would be programmed and robot-like. See the article by Jean Tepperman in this issue on the same point.

Feminist questions about Marxist theory

For the National Women's Committee (NWC) of IS!, there are two major theoretical questions concerning women's oppression which have to be addressed by our Organization:

- 1) What is the nature and the role of the contradictions between men and women? Should the contradiction between the sexes be placed on an equal footing with the class contradiction?
- 2) What is a genuine revolutionary strategy for women's liberation?

In examining the classical Marxist literature, we have been struck by the quasi-absence of an analysis of the situation of women in our society, as in previous societies. In fact, we can clearly state that if the Programme of IS! contains serious weaknesses, omissions and errors on the question of women, this is because our Programme is a faithful carbon copy of the classical Marxist line on the question, and that Marxist theory contains the same weaknesses, omissions and errors.

The NWC and, more generally, the women's movement within IS! do not have, as yet, definitive positions on all the questions which will be raised in this article. We are indebted to the many feminists — both radical and socialist — whose works have helped us identify the problems in Marxism. We endorse their criticisms in general, without yet being able to indicate if we feel that the nature and depth of the criticisms put into question the possibility that the Marxist method of analysis be used to resolve the problems and errors of Marxist theory on the question of women. In other words, although you might say that we have a favourable bias to the possibility of reconciling Marxism and feminism, we have not yet pushed our research far enough to fully substantiate this claim.

The role of domestic labour

Many feminists have accused Marxism of being both sex-blind and sexist. We would like to give a few examples to back up this charge.

Batya Weinbaum¹ examines Marx's *Capital* in light of its omissions concerning the division of labour by sex and age. She feels that this is the patriarchal component of Marxism.

First, in discussing how to determine the value of labour power, Marx continually refers to the average laborer, a concept which is interchangeable with that of the average male adult, and although he admits that "The employment of these different sorts of labour power (that of men and women, children and adults — Ed. note)... makes a great difference in the cost of maintaining the family of the laborer, and in the value of the labour power of the adult male". He continues by saying, "(This) factor, however, is excluded from the following investigation".²

If men, women and children are paid unequal wages, then there is no average laborer. What have we gained by saying

that the average laborer earns \$5 an hour, when the man earns \$9, the woman earns \$4 and an adolescent earns \$2? We have only obscured the differences, so that we cannot see how the capitalist system benefits from them.

Later in the same volume, Marx explains how the individual worker exchanges his wages against the means of subsistence and that "he supplies himself with the necessaries in order to maintain his labour power..."³

What Marx doesn't indicate is that one of the things which the male worker needs to maintain his labour power is a wife. In fact the whole question of domestic labour and its relationship to the economy is absent from Marx's analysis.

But women's unpaid, individual domestic labour is obviously essential in the reproduction of male labour power. What is perhaps not as obvious is how it is also important for capitalist profits. Many feminists have been examining the economics of women's domestic labour and one particularly interesting analysis tries to demonstrate how "the existence of domestic labour lowers the value of labour-power by lowering the costs of reproduction to the capitalist..."

Thus, although domestic labour is not part of the value of labour-power its existence means an increase in the ratio of surplus to necessary labour."⁴ So, free housework means capitalists can pay lower wages and in difficult economic conditions wages can even fall below the amount necessary to reproduce workers' labour-power since housewives can use more of their own labour power and less money to feed, clothe and clean their family. For example, they can repair and transform old clothes rather than buy new ones, and make all their meals from scratch rather than buying prepared foods or ordering Kentucky Fried Chicken.

The reproduction of the species and male domination

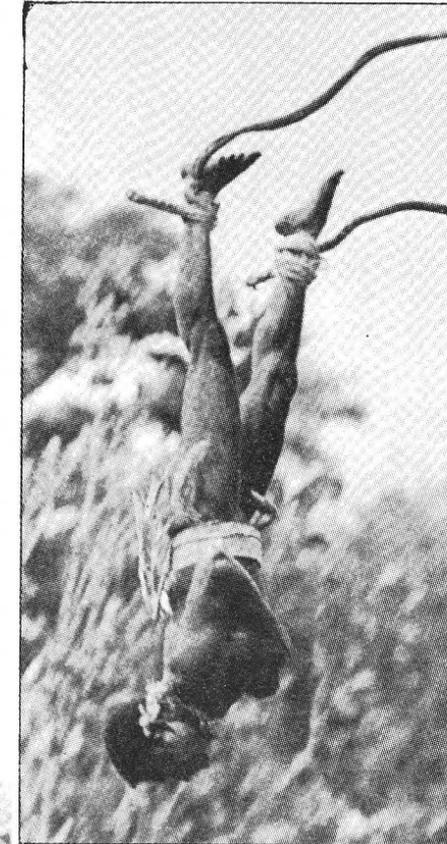
A second major area of omission in Marxist theory is the absence of an analysis of the reproduction of the species — the physical, psychological and emotional caring for children, their socialization and education, and the reproduction of the social relations within which capitalism operates.

Since Engels stated one hundred years ago that "According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life... The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch live is determined by both kinds of production..."⁵ Marxists have stopped examining how the family, the site of the reproduction of the species, determines social organization. On the contrary, for them, the reproduction of the species and its organization in the family does not structure society, but is relegated to the superstructure and the sphere of ideology, and the relations of reproduction have now to be understood by examining the relations of production.

A final example of omission in Marxist theory which we would like to underline is the total absence of an analysis of the system of the domination

of men over women. This system, which is often referred to as the patriarchal or sex-gender system, is seen by feminists as something separate and distinct from the exploitation and oppression of the capitalist system and the other modes of production. Some indications that male domination and capitalist oppression are not one in the same, include: - the fact that male domination has existed through all modes of production and crosses all other divisions, be they class, race or nation - how else can we explain that it is always women who are relegated to the private sphere and to the bottom of the ladder in the public sphere, that all social institutions are controlled by men? It is clear that men benefit from women's labour. All men, relative to the women of their class, race or nation, have a higher quality of life in terms of the amount of free time available to them and the personalized services they receive at home. Men thus have a material interest in women's oppression. All men, no matter what their place in the system, can control at least some women. How can we explain that after an economic change, with the destruction of the private ownership of the means of production, private domestic labour is not socialized and the family still exists as an economic unit and is even reinforced, thus maintaining women's oppression?

Women attend initiation rites for young men in an island of the New Hebrides. The role of men in defence and hunting undoubtedly explains why they occupy a choice place in the band councils and leadership, as well as in the fields of medicine, magic and public rituals.



Is private property the source of women's oppression?

Here we have then a few examples of the errors and omissions to be found in Marxist theory concerning the oppression of women.

But Marxism is not completely silent about women's oppression. Marxists recognize the sexual division of the working class and see it as an obstacle to the unity of workers. Unfortunately, their solution is still the same one as was put forward by Engels one hundred years ago — the massive introduction of women into social production and the socialization of domestic tasks. This has led to a belief that women will be "returned" to a position of equality by the destruction of the private property system, as if this were a natural process of history.

To see how Engels arrived at his conclusion, let us look at his understanding of the origin of women's oppression. Engels believed that in primitive societies, there was no inequality between the sexes. Rather, there was a natural division of labour but it did not lead to any form of exploitation or oppression.

With the development of productive

1 Batya Weinbaum, *The Curious Courtship of Women's Liberation and Socialism*, South End Press, 1978, pp. 34-46

2 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 351, International Publishers, New York, 1970

3 Ibid, p. 571-573

4 Nancy Holmstrom, "Women's work and Capitalism" in *Science and Society*, No. 45, Summer 1981, p. 194

5 Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Preface to the First Edition, International Publishers, 1972, pp 71-72

forces (the domestication of wild animals and the possibility of raising crops) leading to the possibility of accumulating a surplus, came the development of the private ownership of the means of production and the division of society into antagonistic classes. This then led to the development of the patriarchal family and the State.

The development of the productive forces gave rise to a new division of labour where women's production had only private and domestic use value while men's activities had exchange value. The new property which men acquired through their control of the means of production had to be transmitted to men's own descendants. For this, the monogamy of women was essential. This led to a reversal of maternal right (children belong to the mother) and the establishment of conjugal marriage, monogamy and the domination of men over women and children.

Since Engels developed his theory, many anthropologists and feminists have contested many of his basic premises. Is it true that the work women did in primitive societies had only use value? Why was it women's labour which couldn't produce exchange value?

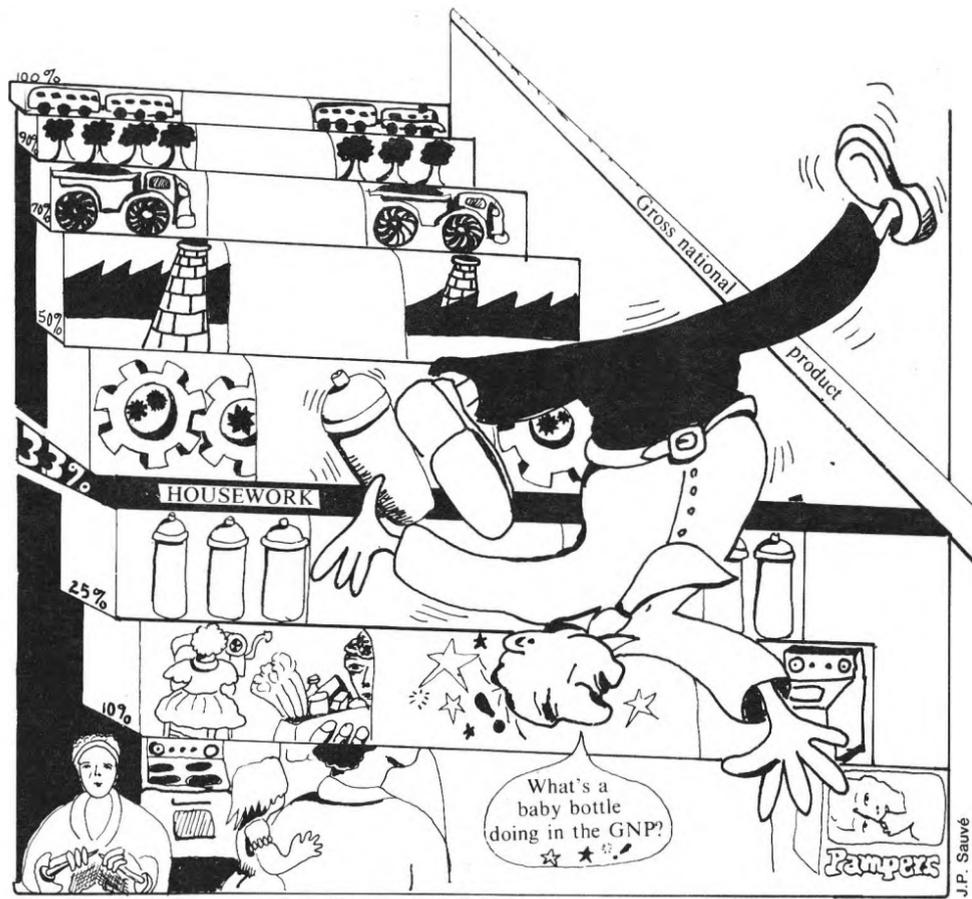
Here, briefly, are a few elements of reply.

Karen Sacks indicates that Engels made a number of specific ethnographic errors. "Engels believed that men were always the collectors or producers of subsistence. It has since become clear that for gathering-hunting societies the reverse is closer to the norm (Lee and De Vone, 1968); and for horticultural societies, it is often the women's horticultural activities which are the basis of subsistence (see Judith Brown in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*). Engels also believed that the domestication of animals preceded the cultivation of the soil. Today, as a result of more recent research, a more commonly accepted theory is that cultivation and pastoralism developed at the same time..."⁶

Antoine Artous, in his article on the family,⁷ explains how before the development of a market economy, it was women who produced pottery and handicrafts since these products were related to their tasks of cooking and working around the home. But when these products acquired exchange value, this work was taken over by men.

How was it, then, that men were able to take over the production of surplus wealth and control the means of production?

To answer this question, we have to take a closer look at the so-called "natural division of labour" between the sexes. With this division, women are



Should priority be given to heavy industry or to socializing domestic labour? This is one of the choices to be made in a socialist economy.

exclusively responsible for the care of young children. This prevents them from participating in hunting which would take them too far away from the home.

Kathleen Gough feels that male power over women in hunting societies "springs from the male monopoly of heavy weapons, from the particular division of labour between the sexes, or from both. Although men seldom use weapons against women, they possess them (or possess superior weapons) in addition to their physical strength... Probably because of male co-operation in defence and hunting, men are more prominent in band councils and leadership, in medicine and magic, and in public rituals..."⁸

Other anthropologists feel there is no proof that a genuine matriarchal society ever existed nor is there evidence that a matrilineal system always preceded a patrilineal one — a sequence which is essential to Engels' arguments, which state that the patrilineal system developed when men needed to transmit their property to their sons.

Still other anthropologists feel that men began to dominate women in primitive societies because they wanted to control women's reproduction and

kin relations because of the low development of productive forces which made human labour power, and thus children, the first social wealth and the main means of production.

With so many questions being raised about the basic foundations of Engels' theory on the origin of women's oppression, it is obvious that we are going to have to take a second look at the solutions he proposed as a result of his theory.

The solutions...

The first solution put forward is the massive entry of women into social production. On this point, what is often forgotten is that socialism does not

6 Karen Sacks, "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property" in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna Reiter, Monthly Review Press, 1975

7 Antoine Artous, *Système capitaliste et oppression des femmes*, in *Critique Communiste*, numéro spécial, 1er trimestre, 1978

8 Kathleen Gough, "The Origin of the Family", in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna Reiter, Monthly Review Press, 1975

change the fact that the work world into which women enter has been organized and structured for and by men. It is a male world and a world in which there is a clear sexual division in which women are relegated to jobs in feminine ghettos, where they do work which is nothing but an extension of their domestic tasks at home. It is a world where women are on the bottom rung, be it in terms of wages, work conditions or possibilities of promotion.

Can women be integrated into social production on an equal basis? First of all, we have to ask ourselves the question, what equality are we talking about? Does women's equality simply mean the right to work? Does it mean the possibility of becoming like a man, where men and male characteristics are taken as the norm which women must attain and all incapacities on the part of women to do so are seen as being personal character deficiencies?

But perhaps the most important problem remains that women will never have any kind of equality in social production and society in general as long as the sexual division of labour within the family is not attacked.

It is true that the classical Marxist programme calls for the socialization of domestic tasks to liberate women from this burden. But the abolition of private ownership does not automatically lead to the transformation of private domestic labour into a social industry. Domestic labour will not leave the private home on its own accord. It will take a specific struggle to socialize it.

Even so, the socialization of these tasks requires a strong, well organized economic base, for the monetary costs are enormous. It is estimated that domestic production accounts for 33% of the gross national product. A study in Sweden showed that 2340 million hours per year are devoted to domestic labour, compared to 1290 million to industrial production. And we have just to think of how governments in advanced capitalist countries are so hard-pressed to set up even a few day-care centres, because of the tremendous financial investment.

To date, in countries which have undergone "socialist" revolutions, technology has first been used to increase productivity and reduce human labour in the most important masculine fields. Socializing domestic labour through the use of technology has not been an economic priority.⁹

Another area which will have to be investigated is the biological reproduction function of women. This function has never been seen by Marxists as a factor contributing to women's ine-

quality. It has been thought that socialism would create ideal conditions for producing children who would be taken in hand by the society.

But Marxists have underestimated the complexity of the parent-child relationship, especially concerning the mother. What does it mean that children will be taken in hand by society? Will we promote the idea of test-tube babies who enter a nursery from the day they are born and never have a special relationship with particular adults? If not, what responsibilities will be left with the biological parents and their entourage?

How are we going to assure women's control over their bodies and their reproduction? In practice, in every "socialist" country in the world, there has been a tug-of-war between women's rights and population requirements. Either mothers are strongly encouraged to produce children for the socialist

motherland, or, as is the case in China, they are punished for doing so. Depending on the population needs of the country, abortion and contraception are widely accessible or almost illegal. Women's rights have a tendency to come second behind the needs of "socialism".

Finally, if we admit that we can not totally socialize all aspects of domestic labour and child care, how are we going to wage the struggle so that men give up some of their free time to share this work? For if women are going to be equal, men will have to renounce their privileges. And this is a struggle which must be begun today. We do not believe that men will suddenly see the light of day after the revolution.

9 Hilda Scott, *Women and Socialism. Experiences from Eastern Europe*, Alison and Busby Ltd., 1976

Bibliography

Rayna Reiter, *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 1975

This book is a collection of articles dealing with human evolution, the origin of the family, the origin of women's oppression and the role of women in a variety of cultural settings. Many articles bring to light the various sexual biases of modern traditional anthropology, as well as those to be found in traditional Marxist theory on the origin of women's oppression and as the editor explains, "This collection aims to provide information and theory on the bases for sexual equality or inequality, and to contribute to the analysis which must always accompany action for fundamental social change."

Hilda Scott, *Women and Socialism, Experiences from Eastern Europe*, Alison and Busby Ltd., London, 1976

This book gives a detailed and dynamic account of the successes and failures in attempts to liberate women in Eastern European countries, by applying the socialist programme proposed by Engels. In Scott's own words, "Even if we reject the Soviet model, followed since the Second World War in six other East European countries... 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." Through a detailed account of the daily lives of women in postwar Eastern European countries, the author tries to explain why the Marxist model for women's liberation has fallen short of expectations and does not lead to equality.

Batya Weinbaum, *The Curious Countship of Women's Liberation and Socialism*, South End Press, 1978

This book begins with an indictment of Marxism for its errors and omissions concerning an analysis of women under capitalism, both in the labour force and in the home. In trying to answer her own questions about why Marx's and Engels' analyses have served as dogma in the Marxist tradition, stifling all attempts to develop and advance the theory in a critical and creative way, Weinbaum turns to psychoanalysis to look at the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious. She offers a psycho-historical analysis of history to provide us with some new ideas to explain the failure of socialists, and socialist countries, to maintain, in theory and in practice, their own notion of consistent progress towards women's liberation. In a final section, the author develops a new way of analysing our economy in terms of 'kin categories' which she feels explain better than Marx's social class categories do the role of each of us in the economic system, by taking into account how age and sex differences affect these roles.

Native women on their fight against oppression



The following contribution comes from two Native women activists from northern B.C., Val Napoleon, a Cree Indian presently director of the Smithers Indian Friendship Centre, and Theresa Tait, a Carrier Indian, secretary-treasurer of the same centre. We first heard this presentation at the Northern Women's Festival, July 1981, and its impact was startling. In the midst of many "back to the land" type workshops, these two people were tackling the important and serious relationship between sexism and racism. They were also explaining the strong contradictions they faced in the Native movement, and the reasons why they couldn't, at present, work in the white women's movement. Their notes are, in fact, the outline of a workshop which they have given to Native women in their area. As they said in their introduction, the issues of Native women are "very complex and need to be understood." This is all the more true for those interested in the struggle for socialism. We feel we can learn a lot from such contributions. (The notes have been edited for continuity and brevity).

We think that Native women face double oppression... by a combination of both racism and sexism.

a) **Racism:** We mean a set of ideas formed on the basis of race about a group of people. As Indian people, we have all probably been discriminated against at one time or another. We have felt racism. It is usually a negative set of ideas.

b) **Sexism:** is pretty much the same as racism in that it is a set of ideas formed about people on the basis of sex.

... Not who people are as human beings but what they are on the basis of their sex. Opinions or ideas are formed because someone happens to be male or female. eg: all women are temperamental/emotional.

c) **Oppression:** We are oppressed when our rights are not respected or are taken away. Male or female, we all have a right to dignity and equality. When

these rights are denied or taken away, no matter how it is done — we are then oppressed as human beings.

Generally, we think that the stronger Indian women are within the Indian community, the stronger the entire Indian nation will be. Indian women must be on equal footing in so far as decisions, work and the entire community.

We cannot speak of human rights unless we accord or apply them to every one around us — and we mean women within the Indian community.

The most important aspect of our approach is that we do not see men as the enemy or the problem. We do not believe that men are "bad or evil" — all of us know or have known men who are good, so men are not the problem. The problem is a set of sexist values and when these values are condoned/perpetuated and when they affect or hurt women.

Why we have to fight for women's rights

First, we'll run through the common arguments against Native women doing anything. Then we will explain our rationale or argument against these attitudes.

The AGAINST Arguments:

a) **The argument of assimilation or that we are losing our identity and becoming part of white society:** We are told that women's issues and the women's movement are white. ... And that by discussing women's issues we are assimilating Indian people; ... that we have no business talking about women's issues.

b) **The traditionalist argument:** Another argument is that women's issues are against and contrary to Indian traditions about the family, the home, the roles, etc.

c) **The "women's issues are not real" argument:** We've been told that women's issues are not important and we should be concentrating our energy on other issues instead; that Native women have no issues basically.

d) **The population argument:** We are told that there are not very many Indians in Canada and that as Indian women we can help out by having as many babies as possible — Indian babies of course, to increase our population. We have even been told this by young Native women — some women are trying to fulfill this population demand — (example: Kahn — Tineta Miller, S.O.S. Book).

e) **The "women's lib is going too far" argument:** The term "Women's Lib" has been used negatively for so long that people have begun to associate the term with something crazy. "Women's Lib" is used as a put down against many women for many different things, usually speaking her mind.

f) **The "you must support the man" argument:** We're told that Indian women have had it easier because she got to stay at home while the Indian man went out and worked ... that because we have it easier, we must provide the support and nurturing for the man.

g) **The "apathy" argument:** The final argument we're given is that we can't change anything anyway, so why try. Nothing we do will make any difference. "I'm comfortable so I don't have to do anything 'cause I made it."

The FOR Arguments: The important thing to note is that the previous "AGAINST" arguments are a reflection of a set of values and attitudes. Through this next step, we will try and explain how this works or has worked and how it affects us.

a) **The assimilation line:** With our analysis, sexism is not limited to race. It is a set of ideas and they are not white or brown. We think this is proven by the similarity between the problems of women all over the world — no matter what colour they are. As women, Indian women are affected by sexism and its resulting problems.

b) **The traditionalist line:** We are told that the women's issues/movement is against our Indian traditions. Whether or not this is the case; rape, wife abuse or pornography are not traditional and we cannot ignore these issues. We must establish our own principles according to the best of both worlds — this does not mean we want to ignore or throw away our culture but we are 20th Century Indians with 20th Century problems.

c) **The "Indian women have no issues" line:** The Indian nations and our movement will be twice as strong with the women involved — generally Native women's strength is untapped and unrecognized, so we do the support work behind the men not beside him. To recognize Indian women as people means to recognize our problems too so they can be dealt with.

d) **The population line:** We do not face the problems we do today because of our population size or lack of population size. To think so is a fantasy which severely restricts the potential role of Indian women in working for self-determination. Motherhood is highly respectable should a woman choose to have children, but it will not solve our problems. Numbers won't make the problems go away or help us achieve self-determination. There are lots of examples of this all over the world where the indigenous people are in the majority over the white people — but still they are oppressed. El Salvador, South

India women demonstrated in front of the Vancouver court house in July 1981 to demand the liberation of 53 of their sisters, arrested for occupying an Indian Affairs office. The stronger Indian women are within the Indian community, the stronger the entire Indian nation will be.



Africa, Bolivia, Guatemala.

e) **Those "women's libbers" line:** To use labels is to perhaps miss the point of what is being said because the person who is saying it is judged. We must establish our own principles and live/work by these. The issues or the "what", is more important than names or labels — and sometimes labels are used as a cop out from hearing what is being said.

f) **The "role of women as support" line:** We all have to support each other... But to imply that Indian women have had it easier because they were staying at home raising children — is seriously mistaken. Indian women are doubly oppressed — racially and sexually. Many Indian women work; many are single parents,... and raising kids is no easy job.

g) **The "old apathy" line:** It's obvious that if Indian people had not done anything to date, we would not be here today.

These were some of the most common types of for and against arguments about Indian women.

But, on a larger scale we should also look at what else affects Native women organizing.

Section 12 1. (b) not the only issue

Some of the other factors to look at are: Much of the work to date on Indian women is single issue and not comprehensive. For example, when the subject of Native women's issues come up, many people automatically assume that it is about section 12 1.(b) of the Indian Act. Section 12 1.(b) is a problem, but it is not the issue.

In so far as the Indian Act, the issue is control. The federal government as-

sumed control over the membership of Indian communities and defined the who's and how's of their definition. Section 12 1.(b) is a membership control mechanism which indirectly affects all Indian people but Indian women are directly affected. Section 12 1.(b) is a part of an overall picture and it is one example of both racism and sexism. This is not to suggest that no work be done to change the Indian Act but simply to stress the importance of an overall perspective or framework. We are speaking from a political point of view, not a legal one.

Finally before we begin part three, another thing we must deal with is the blatant sexism from some of our men. In addition to facing everything else, Indian women must deal with some sexist men. We are sure that many of you have had the opportunity to hear some of our Indian leaders harangue and berate the terrible of Section 12 1.(b), then turn around and outrightly put women down. There are many jokes about women where we are the butt of the humour. And we are treated with disrespectful attitudes. Perhaps the best indicator is the very few number of women who are leaders or spokespeople — there are a few women who have done very well such as Dora Kenni (vice-president of Gitskan-Carrier Tribal Council), but they are still in a minority when we look around us.

How colonialism affected Indian women

Before European arrival, North America was made up of distinct groups of Indian people. Each group possessed all attributes of nationhood. We all had: boundaries, language, religions, social, political, and economic systems, legal systems. We developed these according to our environment and we would not have survived unless we developed these cultures. A common mistake made by non-Indian people and many Indian people is to think that before European arrival, that Indian people were static or unchanging. The fundamental or basic characteristic which ensured Native peoples' survival for tens of thousands of years, was our flexibility or ability to change. We were therefore a dynamic people or we would have perished.

Within all of these different cultures, the women held different positions within the social strata according to the particular culture. Examples: Carrier, Gitskan, Chipewyan, Cree, Iroquois, etc. The people (Spanish, Portuguese, European), began to travel over the world to countries not their own. They sought land, riches, resources and

sometimes the labour of other people. When they travelled they did not leave their culture, values or belief systems at home... Instead they imposed these systems on to other people of North America or other indigenous people.

European people could not have justified the taking of our land or the exploiting of our Nations if they believed we were human. So, they dehumanized us believing we were animals. They said our cultures were inferior and that we as people were inferior to them. They brought and imposed their systems which included: their religion, their education, their legal system, their economic systems, and their political systems. And within these European systems were their values. The ones we are most concerned with are their values about women. They had what were called Victorian values about women.

Some examples of these values are the nuclear family vs. the extended family. There have been several workshops so far about the Gitskan and Carrier families as compared to the European nuclear family. Within the nuclear family, the women played a very restricted role and she was defined by that role. Another example is the "rule of thumb", when European people came, they could beat their women as long as they didn't use objects larger than their thumb — this kind of rule is a reflection of their values about women. Their religion is also a prime example of how they thought of women. In their Bible it says that women shall subjugate themselves to their husbands as they would to their God. Some of the early reports of priests and missionaries show how shocked they were at the freedom and strength of Indian women — some of these reports called us hussies and brazen wenches. The Indian Act is a classic example or again reflection of their values because it is a patriarchal and patrilineal (descent determined through the father — ed. note) document.

So what was the effect of all these impositions on the people of North America? Generally, Indian people accepted these European values, at least to varying degrees, about Indian women. Many things happened. For many years, a lot of Indian men thought that white women were better than Indian women. That white women would raise their own social standing. We've heard this even in the last couple of years — the men internalized racism, that is they believed it and in turn identified with it — so the white wife was the power symbol. We suppose Indian women did this to a certain degree but they had less power and mobility than the Indian man. A book entitled Prison



We as Indian women must define how we are going to work. Because of several reasons we cannot do this with the white women's movement.

of Grass, by Howard Adams — a Metis man, is the only book we know of which outlines this process. Adams explains how he learned to hate everything that was Indian — he did not want to associate with Indian women, not even his own mother. He explains how he internalized racism and sexism. With this he began to see white women as a way to forget about Indianess, so he pursued and spent time with only white women. It wasn't until after he learned to be proud of his ancestry, and proud of his being Indian did he learn that Indian women were okay. Then he began to realize what had happened to him and what he was doing.

Throughout this process of adopting many European values, Native women then became the lowest of the low; not among everyone of course, but in so far as jobs, education, social standing went, the Indian women were on the bottom. Many contradictions arose, where Indian women adopted values and roles, but still were strong in other ways — there were all kinds of contradictions caused in our lives — but in different ways because of the horrendous pressure we began to believe some of this stuff about women. That is we internalized it. We had to survive and try to ensure the survival of our people. This process happened all across Canada no matter what culture we were in and no matter where we lived.

We have to begin to make changes

Today we have the resulting

problems — problems which we face as women in addition to the problems we face as Indian people: rape, wife abuse, lack of child care, lack of resources, sexual discrimination. We face these because we are women. We have the jobs as: chambermaids, tree planters, waitresses, no high paying jobs... if we are lucky enough to get jobs at all. The other problems we face because we are Indian are: alcoholism, unemployment, racial discrimination, high suicidal and violent death rates, low educational levels.

In order to begin changing and working on these issues we have to learn to understand them and where they come from. We must understand how and what effect our history has had on us as Indian people as Human people. It is us who have to begin making changes because men won't. We have to learn to help and support each other because men have a superficial vested interest in maintaining the status-quo — in maintaining sexism. We as Indian women must define how we are going to work — because of several reasons we cannot do this with the white women's movement. (We are working with Nations of people, not women against men, many white women are racist).

A closer example of the path we can learn from is the non-white women all over the world where women are fighting beside their men. Not against them, although they have to stand up to the men sometimes too. We can consider this discussion a "first step" towards the work which must be carried out and which will in the end strengthen all Indian people.

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Report on the feminist structure in Movimiento Comunista

The following article was published originally in Spanish in the Spanish organization Movimiento Comunista's Bulletin 38 in May 1981.

1. Sum-up of three years experience with the structure in operation

Before going into a more detailed analysis let us say that overall our evaluation is basically a positive one. The autonomous feminist structure has proven — as we expected it would when we established it — to be a very useful instrument in enabling our party to become progressively more consistent and effective in its feminism. The achievements of the structure are not the same in each organization (a point we will return to). Achievements are proportional to the stability of the working of the structure and the degree to which the structure is incorporated into the regular functioning of the party

at all organizational levels and from all angles.

The report on the structure we are making public here is the result of an investigation carried out last spring. All regional and national collectives participated in it.

Before going on, we would like to draw attention to one important feature of the report: the boldness that the creation of the structure required at that time. It was something new and unprecedented in our party or any other communist party.

What did we accomplish by creating the structure?

* the forceful promotion of feminism in the party: the existence of the struc-

A wall painting in Madrid: "March 8, working women's day. Autonomous women struggle."



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ture was something so striking, something which went so much outside the "norms" of the party, that its establishment helped us understand how important the question of the oppression of women was for the party. From the beginning, the structure has been a constant vehicle of feminist agitation inside the party.

* feminism was incorporated into party work in a real way and not just on paper. This is confirmed by the practice of the party organizations. The existence and activity of the structure has been useful in preventing the party from blithely forgetting to take up feminist positions in the congress Resolution. Obviously it has not been easy to incorporate into our communist ideology something which has not been other than in a very rudimentary way part of that ideology in the past. It has not been easy to learn to see the world as made up of both women and men. It has been difficult to practice a politics dealing with human beings in a way that learns to avoid treating people as uniform but is sensitive to their differences depending on their sex. The existence of the structure has been and is a constant reminder to the whole party to pay attention to the cultural and political sexual distinctions in the reality. Even if we still have a long way to go, feminism has become so much a part of our party that it is one of the distinguishing features of Movimiento Comunista in

the public eye.

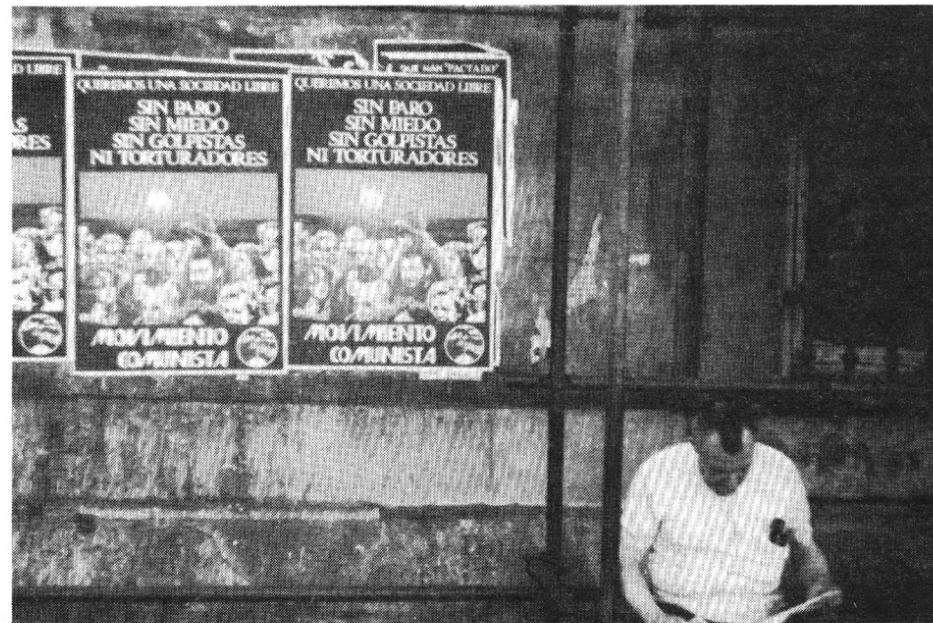
* inseparable from the previous point, the party has become conscious that **Movimiento Comunista (MC)** is also a reality composed of both women and men. It has realized that the fight for equality must go on within the party too.

* women have realized that their oppression is a collective one and that they will only win their liberation together with other women. We have learned not to fall into the trap — into which many of us had fallen before — of acting in practice as if we believed that our oppression could be overcome individually. This trap led to a situation where, because of our special conditions as advanced women, we were not able to feel solidarity with the many women who do not manage to escape at least minimally their roles as mothers and wives.

* the structure has enabled us to employ our solidarity as women within the party. We have collectively waged a struggle for personal autonomy. We have fought to realize our capacities as individual communist activists, to overcome our position of inferiority and progress politically. We have stood against any division of labour in the party based on sex.

* **Women have gained greater self-confidence:** it is noticeable that women are taking more initiative and participating more actively in party life. The structure has also obliged women to express their views and has helped them develop their political understanding. Progress of this nature has been uneven in different organizations and at different times. Generally speaking, the results were fairly good at first. There then followed a period of stagnation, although even here this is not the same everywhere nor to the same degree.

* it has countered any trend towards a division within the party between feminist and non-feminist women. Acceptance of feminist ideas poses a serious threat of divisions being produced not only between men and women but also among women, as the experience of other parties on the revolutionary left in Europe has shown. This has happened when the ideas made a vigorous, spontaneous entry into the party, in a very unbureaucratic manner, "from the bottom up". Another factor: it is virtually inevitable that the initial positions taken will not be totally correct, no matter how revolutionary feminist the commitment behind their introduction. As we said, other parties have gone through this with serious consequences. To an extent, we ourselves could see this danger from the beginning, even when the structure was



Movimiento Comunista, a Spanish communist organization that has been experimenting for more than three years with an autonomous women's structure in their organization. Above, a Movimiento Comunista poster on a wall in Madrid: "We want a free society, without unemployment, fear, coups d'état and torturers."

not yet in operation throughout the party and there were very few women concerning themselves with feminism.

In terms of ideas, the acceptance of the real scope of the oppression of women — realizing that the oppressors were not just the "usual" oppressors but that it is also a contradiction among the people — constituted a complete turnabout of position. It was a complete turnabout in the sense that feminist ideas were not present in the party. Backward ideas existed among us — in some cases, we had regressed from what the classic Marxist authors had written. On top of all that, the new feminist ideas implied a questioning of certain classic Marxist conceptions. The taking in of these new ideas which revolutionized our ideology greatly was accomplished with a minimum of contradictions among the women. The structure gave us the opportunity to debate and reach unity much more quickly and deeply than would have been possible within the regular structures.

* women have become conscious of the vanguard role they have to play among the people and within the party as feminists. We deal with this point in part 4, where we look at what was valid in this idea of women as vanguard and also at some one-sided ideas about the role of women and men in the promotion of feminism in the party.

* the structure, and this is very important, encouraged feminist work in the different sectors of intervention: in the factories, communities, universities... There were considerable weaknesses at this level and contradictory results, as

we will see in the next part. But despite this we must not lose sight of the fact that we would have made a lot less progress if we had not had the feminist structure. We'd be much further behind if we had not developed a feminist leadership for all women comrades and not just for those women working in feminist organizations or who are doing feminist work as their main task in the party.

In this section, we have confined ourselves to pointing out the results that are the most closely related to the existence of the structure. However, we know that it is hard to evaluate to what extent these results have been attained due to the structure and to what degree we could have done the same thing by other means. Despite this, we feel there is a fairly clear relationship between the progress made and the existence of the structure.

As for method, we feel compelled to point out the very decisive role played by the leading bodies of the party in the history of feminism in the MC. We feel that this is an important point to take note of.

Some negative aspects

The negative points all revolve around one area: the promotion of feminist ideas and positions in the party. The greatest weakness here: there was somewhat of a gulf between feminist work and the rest of our party's political work. This gulf, this divorce, was expressed in the following ways:

* a low degree of taking up of feminist positions and priorities in the policy

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guiding our daily political work, especially in particular sectors. The idea that feminist policy is solely the task of the structure and its collectives has been very strong. Committees have usually felt inhibited from taking up feminist tasks in their sector. The feminist component of policies for the different sectors has amounted in most instances to "bandage solutions". Often, women cadres were the ones who had to put the feminist icing on the cake of the policy in a given sector. The feminist trend never used to — and to some extent still hasn't managed to — be incorporated into our politics. It was and is something introduced from "outside".

* there has been a tendency for men to be detached from feminist work, and to be fairly unaggressive in dealing with chauvinist ideas and attitudes among the masses.

We think that these negative points are linked to the existence of the structure and the specific way it works. Unless corrective measures are taken, the structure tends, precisely because it involves all women comrades, to take an important proportion of the debate and political leadership out of the regular party structures. This is somewhat inevitable. For the collectives, this is sharpened by the fact that the structures there go right down to the base unit level, i.e. the structure is one that can function without recourse to or reliance on the regular party structure if we fail to be vigilant about the negative consequences that this could have. We have seen these negative effects in practice quite clearly: this is how we fail to move ahead as quickly as we need to in incorporating feminism into our politics. To put it in another way, any theme which has any connection to feminism is viewed as being the property of women, and the party as a whole becomes uninvolved with it to a great extent.

Leafing through various texts of the federal collective, it is evident that the question of incorporation has been a constant concern. It was already an issue in the **Letter on the tasks reorganizing women in the party of May 1977** to the whole party, which explained why the structure was needed. There has been progress in incorporating feminism, but not enough.

There are many reasons for this: first, it is not an easy task. We have been doing political work for many years now; that politics was blind to the fact that the world is made up of women as well as men. The existence of the structure had contradictory effects on this. The structure had a positive effect insofar as it was and is a stimulus to feminism in the party, as we saw above. On the other hand — and we did not click on to

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this until very recently — the existence of the structure reinforced the idea that anything which touched on feminist activity was the responsibility of the structure alone. This was expressed within the committees by a tendency for the feminist aspect of policy (or more accurately, in many cases, the feminist touching-up of policy) to fall to the women on those committees rather than to the committees as a whole.

This practice of giving the whole responsibility for feminist work and the feminist orientation of our politics to the structure cannot be explained just by the fact the structure existed or by the traditional hesitations of male comrades. It is also due to some one-sided ideas about how to promote feminism in the party that we will get to in part 4.

It is difficult to analyse those ideas without first putting them into context and talking about where they came from and when they developed. That is what we will try to do in part 3.

2. The tie between individual change and political struggle

One theme which was common to many of the collectives and the structure in general as a cause for concern throughout the past few years was the promotion of feminism in the party. Needless to say, it was — and remains

— a vital and justified concern.

In what follows we are going to go over what objectives we set for ourselves, how we thought feminism should be promoted and what criteria we were to use to evaluate our progress.

When it came time to evaluate how well feminism was being incorporated and the steps forward that had been made in the party, we concentrated on two of our objectives:

* **The party must be feminist in its political practice.** This means it must be sensitive to the specific demands of women and must treat them as an integral part of the political struggle. We must learn to apply feminist politics in all areas of party political activity....

* **The attitudes and understandings of all men and women comrades must be revolutionized.** Before feminism was introduced into the party, ideas contemptuous of women (in a fairly subtle form) and a lack of concern with women's preoccupations and needs existed side by side with the idea of man-woman equality (including in political work) which was accepted to a fair degree by most people. Deep down, people figured that women were not as capable as men. Those ideas existed among many women too.

In personal life, men and women party members practised a traditional division of male and female roles. Even in the best cases these roles were only very partially put into question.

We have already spoken enough

In Barcelona, Spain, women joined together in 1976 to found an autonomous publishing house and print shop.



Des femmes en mouvement

about the first point (the party being feminist in its political practice). What we will look at next then relates to the second: personal transformation and the link between it and a feminist party practice.

We begin with one assumption: it is absolutely necessary for women and men in the party to struggle to change their ideas and attitudes from a feminist perspective.

In Chapter 8 of the discussion of women's liberation, it says:

"Recognizing that (that the contradiction between men and women exists in the party too) leads to the conclusion that men comrades must show they are capable of adopting an attitude of modesty and unpretentiousness. Men have got to get the idea out of their heads that they are somehow immune to chauvinism simply because they are revolutionaries. Men must adopt a materialist approach to the fact that they are members of an oppressor group who are brought up with ideas of domination over the female sex. Chauvinist ideas and behaviour, even among the most advanced men, cannot be corrected individually and alone even if you come to a theoretical understanding of the women's question. It will require a prolonged and patient effort of ideological revolutionization.

Understanding this contradiction means that women comrades must get rid of the ideas they still internalize about being inferior and subordinating themselves to men. They must develop confidence in their own strengths and work to develop their abilities...."

We feel this demand that all comrades, men and women, individually change was — and still is — absolutely necessary for two reasons. First, because it is unacceptable for communists who are fighting to put an end to this exploitative and oppressive society to go along with the maintaining of such a discriminatory and oppressive set of relationships. Secondly, because it is impossible to have a feminist political practice if you have not first questioned the role that society has conferred upon each of us for simply being born male or female and the ideology which flows from that. It is going to be awfully hard to fight unsparingly and effectively against chauvinism and the oppression of women if men have not fought against their own idea that they are superior to women and that they constitute models of accomplishment women should be emulating. The same is true if women have not fought against all those ideas that they have adopted as their own about the inferiority of women and their dependence on men.

Do we really want our party to be in the vanguard of the active defence of the

interests of women? Are we serious about fighting for a society where women — and also at another level men — will not have their human qualities and skills limited by the accident of belonging to one sex or the other? Then we must revolutionize our worldview from a feminist perspective.

Feminism has taught us to see that many things are not "natural" but the products of history: the idea that women are responsible for domestic work; that men are less responsible than women for bringing up the children; that women must give up their careers



Adapted from "An anthology of Feminist cartoons" FF 81

to look after the kids while men do not; that boys and girls need to be educated differently....

Feminism has taught us to challenge a lot of our ideas about sexuality. We have learned, for example, that coitus is not the only "natural" way to have sex; that one sex oppresses another in sexual activity; that lesbian and gay sexual relationships are just as "natural" as heterosexual relationships... And above all we have learned that these questions are also political questions. Before we treated them as private. They are political issues and must be taken up as such.

Our position and our intransigence were necessary when we felt it was indispensable to carry out a transformation in our ideology and our attitudes. At the time we felt it was urgently necessary to rid ourselves of at least the crudest and most open expressions of the effects of the patriarchal ideology which persisted.

This demand for change, which was put forward by the federal collective and supported by the leading organs of the party, was seen in the context of working to make it possible for our party to correctly take up the cause of women's liberation and therefore be more thoroughly and consistently revolutionary. It is only in the context of pushing for these objectives that the revolutionization of each of our ideologies can be fully understood. It is the only way that we can develop criteria to politically orient the process of revolutionization.

These positions were clearly illustrated in the attitudes that we adopted in the feminist movement from the very beginning. We always stressed that the movement must be collective struggle and an organized one. We fought ardently against any tendency within the women's movement to contemplating one's "self" or turning in on the movement. We opposed any move to become a closed circle of "liberated" women.

Although all the foregoing is certainly very true, we still made a number of fairly clearcut and evident errors that have persisted over the years. We have begun to understand and rectify these in the past year. The errors can be summed up as follows:

* There was a tendency, stronger in the early days, to see progress in feminism as mainly measured by individual progress, individual change, and to separate this progress from progress in the political work. At some points that even led to a greater preoccupation with leading a "liberated" life than concern with making the party a vehicle for feminist struggle.

This separating of individual change from political struggle was expressed in the fact that we stressed the degree of individual change in our evaluation of the degree which the party had become feminist. The objectives set out for this change were often not explained in terms of making our feminist practice more effective and militant. Instead change was seen as an end in itself separate from the political struggle and the concrete political situation, as something apart from the tasks we had to realize in our feminist work. In the same way, criticisms of chauvinist behaviour were in some cases not linked to the political consequences of that behaviour.

We believe this one-sidedness has had two consequences: on the one hand, it made it more difficult to understand feminism as a political practice; on the other hand, it in some cases may have been a source of disarray, especially for men, because criticisms were made of individual errors or faults without ex-

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plaining the political repercussions of them.

* We put the major stress on the men changing. The need for women to break out of the framework they were caught in, to work to cast off all the habits that being the "second sex" has instilled in women, was downplayed. In practice, we acted as if we thought that when it came to consciousness and attitudes, only those of the oppressor (and not the oppressed) had negative effects. It is certainly true that it is more important to take a firm attitude towards those who have privileges than towards those who are oppressed. However, if the struggle is to progress and the oppressed are to become conscious of their own value and dignity, then the oppressed — in this case the women — must fight bravely against their own limits.

The tendency to not take the changing of women seriously enough sometimes went along with attitudes which tended to justify the limits of what women could do or be. This led to a not very combative attitude and reinforced a stance of commiseration about women's woes and their weaknesses.

3. A little history about feminism in the party

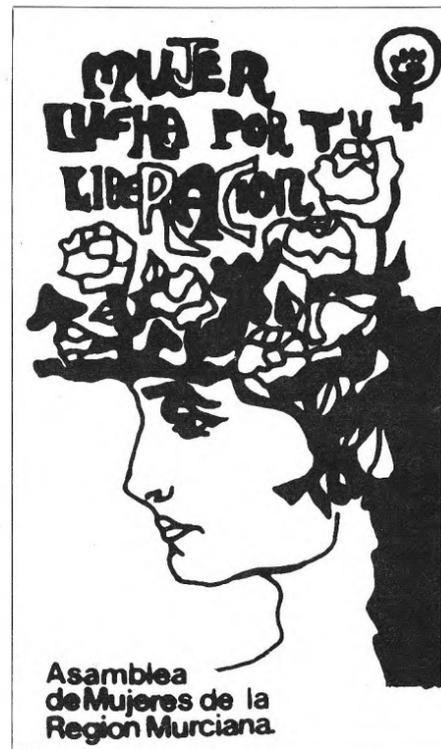
When the first organized units of the feminist movement appeared in 1975, the party was very much off to the side and removed from it all. Far away as well from anything to do with the issue of women's oppression. We won't elaborate on that here. We will just remind people of the pamphlet, **For national independence and people's democracy on the road to socialism and communism**, the basic political document of March 1972: there isn't a single reference to women in any of its 60 pages. The September 1975 document adopted at MC's first congress, **Ideological and political line**, doesn't mention that women exist either except for a few scattered references (in exile during the Franco period, in the fight of housewives against higher prices, as being among the leaders in the masses...). Women didn't figure in the explanation of the future socialist society we were fighting for nor in the present-day slogans. There was one exception: when we worked out the tasks that the new State would have to accomplish after the revolution, we called for "complete equality between men and women". Don't forget that this took place in late 1975. At the end of 1975, the first feminist activities ever in Spain were held in clandestinity in Madrid in opposition to the UN's International Women's Year activities.

The first seeds of an organized

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Spanish women's movement were planted outside our party. It was the resurgence of feminism which pushed us to address the oppression of women for the first time. This brings us to the early months of 1976.

Feminism came to the party from the outside and provoked a questioning at all levels on the part of men and women (it is not exaggerated to say that this questioning extended to the querying of our very worldview). We were faced with a new and complex concept which raised a thousand problems. Today those questions and solutions may seem



simple; they were not at the time. Questions like: Who is the enemy of women? Are men the oppressors? Are mixed parties of men and women usually led by men capable of providing a solution to women's oppression? Etc.

Radical feminism gained a lot of ground (ideologically) in the feminist movement in Spain during these years. It was precisely the women in this trend — or to be more exact, in these trends — who forced us to question fundamental elements of our revolutionary ideology and theory.

We would draw attention to two points raised by this period:

— the women — and to an extent the party as a whole — showed a lot of enthusiasm for all aspects of the fight against the oppression of women. We did not take a dogmatic or closed-minded approach and we were genuinely willing to learn from other women;

— we had serious difficulty analysing the question of the oppression of women

in relation to our revolutionary ideological and political positions. We did not try to demarcate in a proper manner from radical feminism. We were influenced by it with respect to some of our ideas and we were unable to come up with some of our own answers to a number of theoretical questions. We did not succeed in working out a Marxist feminism or, to put it another way, to develop Marxism in the area of the liberation of women.

It isn't hard to understand this period, even if one did not live through it. It was one of enthusiasm, openness to new ideas, of broadening our horizons. It was also a period of anguish and doubt, of difficulty in analysing all the many new ideas in a rigorous manner and sorting out correct ideas from erroneous ones. To understand this properly, things must be placed in the context of what was going on politically then. In 1976-7, the party weakened in its revolutionary perspectives. There was a lack of vigilance and revolutionary fighting spirit in dealing with anti-Marxist conceptions...

The second congress which was being prepared for at that time tried to overcome this situation of disorientation and ideological weakness. The second congress was an undeniable step forward in terms of adoption of feminist positions. First, it affirmed that feminism was an extremely important and integral part of our ideology and politics. But even more important, we made advances in theory and political line. That was when we were able to properly incorporate the women's question into our political line and to situate it in relation to other forms of oppression. That was when we started to develop Marxism in the area of women's liberation. This is also when the political objective influence of radical feminist trends on us started to decline. Although they have made positive contributions to the development of feminist theory, the radical feminist trends are light years away from what we consider a consistently revolutionary feminist position to be.

There is a long way to go yet: the resolution on women's liberation adopted at the second congress barely laid the foundations of a feminist position. The second congress marked the end of the feminist period we have just described. The women's liberation resolution and the adoption of the new articles in the constitution dealing with the feminist structure (see appendix — ed. note) eliminated many of the doubts and feelings of disorientation that had characterized the previous period.

However, with hindsight, it is clear that certain ideas, certain formulations that were partly mistaken or at least

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ambiguous were not analysed, and despite the orientation of our feminist stance, continued to influence the positions we took and our practice to a greater or lesser extent. Our practice and the development of our positions was indirectly to question those formulations and to push them into the background.

The following section is a detailed analysis of those ideas.

4. Analysis of certain ideas: on the contradiction between men and women in the party and the role of women in the feminist struggle

We have never really sat down and looked concretely at how the contradictions between women and men were expressed in the party. We went into this a bit in the initial investigations when feminism first was taken up. However, the assessment was not very deep or rigorous and we never took it up again systematically. We generally confined ourselves to abstract and general formulations about how the man-woman

contradiction also existed within the party. The failure to push this further and to analyse the specific forms this took in the party led to a mechanical transposition of our assessment of what the relations between men and women were in society generally.

Behind the assertion we have repeated so often — as others have also — that the man-woman contradiction exists in the party as well lie a host of questions. The type of answers given to those questions will determine whether the contradiction is handled correctly and a correct understanding is obtained of the role of communist women and men in the women's liberation struggle. The formulation that MC women should be in the vanguard in advancing feminist ideas and positions in and by our party can be interpreted in different ways and be based on reasonings that differ widely. It was stressed, for example, that it is very difficult to make a revolutionary party into a firm defender of women's liberation. This is certainly true but the reasoning may hide, and did hide, some less valid arguments.

Let's look at some of them:

When we alluded to the difficulties that existed in making our party move ahead in upholding feminism, what were we talking about exactly? We meant several things which we continue



to feel are valid which indeed have been confirmed by the past few years of feminist practice:

We felt that it would be difficult because feminism was at that time something foreign to our party; it was not part of our ideology and our politics.

* we said that men because they were men and oppressors, because they were part of a male social group which dominated women, were in a less favourable position to be feminists. Men, being brought up culturally as men and having ideas of male superiority, domination and contempt for women drummed into them, have to go through a tough process of ideological transformation to become sensitive to the thousand and one forms of female oppression. They have to go through this in order to become aware of how they too have been "mutilated" by their male social role and to overcome a very strong trend to passivity in dealing with this.

However, at the beginning, another idea made its appearance with the foregoing which we today consider to be wrong:

* There was the idea that men, including communist men, don't want to stop being oppressors but will cling to their privileges and as a result will always promote ideas which serve to maintain their position of domination.

We are quite certain today that we have moved beyond this idea. We have frequently made statements that disagreed with that idea. Still we think it is worthwhile to spend some time on this point because of the effects ideas like this have had.

We feel that this idea is wrong for many reasons:

* it tends to create the impression that revolutionary men are going to place the privileges that they enjoy due to their situation of domination over women ahead of the interests of the revolution they are fighting for.

* it reflects a tremendous lack of confidence in the possibilities of ideological transformation.

* this assertion can be seen through when you look at another related one: that the contradiction among men and women in society is such that it leads men to adopt counter-revolutionary stands just to maintain their male interests; in short, that what divides working men and women is greater than what unites them against the common enemy.

We feel that this attitude of lack of confidence in male comrades is connected to our insistence in those early years of feminism in the party on slogans like "the liberation of women is the task of the women". It is worth ex-

plaining this because of what it meant for us for a long time. We don't think that these expressions are wrong as such, but we used them to refer as much to the role of women in the revolutionary process as to their role in the party. It is the second aspect that concerns us here, but we have to explain the first as well to avoid a one-sided view of what it means.

Let us explain further:



In relation to the role of working-class women in the revolution

At first, before the second congress, positions of this nature were put forward in the most narrow and erroneous sense: we women should develop our own strategy and tactics for our revolution, period.

In the resolution on women's liberation we clarified and properly defined how the tasks of winning women's liberation were part of the socialist revolution.

On the other hand, expressions like "the liberation of women is the task of the women" contains an indisputable element of truth: either women become aware that they are oppressed and organize and become active agents in their struggle, or the minimal basis for that liberation struggle does not exist. We need only look back and see what role women have played. It was women

who exposed their own oppression and initiated the struggle. The expression is also valid for all forces for revolution in a sense. But it is especially so for women because the task of overcoming their oppression can potentially encounter more opposition among the people than any other precisely because it is a contradiction among the people.

The expression is also valid insofar as it points to the capital necessity that

were talking above about the idea that men should be excluded in principle from feminist activities, which is quite a different thing.

In relation to the role of women in the party

Here as well there is a positive meaning to the use of the expression in this context: to call upon women in the party to be active in the struggle, to become independent and break all forms of dependence on men, to get them to recognize that precisely because they suffer from a form of oppression they are in the most favourable position to be in the front ranks of the fight for feminism. But that's all. Taken further, this could be interpreted to mean:

* that it is only women and not the party as a whole that can put forward views on feminist tasks;

* that it is impossible for men to contribute anything on this (an idea which accompanies the belief that revolutionary men will necessarily defend their privileges at all costs).

We are looking at ideas that have long since been cast aside because they still have a certain influence on our practice and because they are linked to some of the negative effects of the way the structure has functioned.

When we raised certain weak points concerning the way the structure has worked, we pointed to:

— a low degree of coming together of feminist politics with the rest of our politics;

— a certain disinterest on the part of men comrades;

— a non-fighting spirit among men comrades in dealing with chauvinist ideas and attitudes among the people.

We think that there is a tie-in here with a certain distrust of men comrades and their capacity for feminist change in the party right through to making it a feminist party. Such attitudes are often-times linked in with the idea that when you get right down to it, men comrades are going to defend their privileges.

Today it is clear to us that ideas of this type are not the best way to get men comrades to remain actively involved in fighting women's oppression.

It would be equally incorrect to consider that current attitudes of inhibition on the part of male comrades (we do not think this is the only kind of attitude to be found among the male comrades) are uniquely due to these ideas being promoted. First, they are after all very old ideas that have left little trace in the attitudes of women comrades in practice more recently. And secondly, we have focussed on these erroneous ideas for several months now in all the collec-

Des femmes en mouvement

Des femmes en mouvement

From now on...

There is little left to say. With the evaluation we have made of the positive and negative points about the way the structure has worked, we have got across the idea that we feel it must continue. When we analysed certain ambiguous and partly incorrect ideas about the contradiction between women and men in the party and the role of each in promoting feminism, we did not restrict ourselves to what was mistaken; we have also indicated how we should reformulate our ideas...

Thus we will confine ourselves in concluding to saying that our evaluation of the structure is that it has been useful in the past and continues to be so today. To summarize, the structure serves:

— to help promote feminism throughout the party;

— to enable women to understand that their taking a feminist position is decisive in achieving the incorporation of feminism into the overall politics of the party;

— to stimulate and direct the feminist work in various bodies: in feminist

organizations but also in neighbourhood associations, workers' commissions, etc.;

— to share this work with all the party committees;

— to enable women, even those not doing specifically feminist work, to play the active role they should be playing among the masses;

— to help women gain self-confidence as well as autonomy and security; to help them increase their commitment and political development. We use the word "help" advisedly because it is evident, and experiences have confirmed, that the role of the party and its regular structure is, despite all the above, the decisive factor here for women as for men.

We have undertaken over the past few months a campaign of rectification to overcome some of the negative effects we mentioned in the sum-up: to break with the idea that feminism is "women's business"; to overcome the political hesitation of many men comrades; to promote the incorporation of feminist politics into the overall politics of the party.

The policies we adopted several months ago in the federal collective to help rectify the negative effects are the following:

— to make efforts to ensure that people will not just get information about feminist activity but that it will be discussed in the cells and committees. We realize that this is difficult because everyone is overloaded with work and we do not want to increase the number of meetings.

— to try to lead the feminist work in various sectors from within the cells and committees responsible for the work in the sectors. We are not talking here mainly about leading the work done in feminist organizations but rather of feminist work done on the various other fronts of struggle.

— to do our best to ensure that the feminist work of women is controlled on the level of the cells and committees.

The implementation of these orientations led us to modify the way the structure worked in consequence: the topics of meetings, the frequency of meetings, etc. We are trying in various ways to create a situation where the structure will not be something formal and routine but will adapt to what its concrete tasks may be at any given time.

The federal collective
April 23, 1981

PROLETARIAN UNITY

MC constitution: articles re AUTONOMOUS WOMEN'S STRUCTURE

Article 28: The autonomous women's structure will be made up of all women in MC, subject only to the qualification that in the final analysis participation in the structure is voluntary. Responsible bodies will be elected democratically at all levels.

Article 29: The autonomous women's structure can organize its own conferences and meetings. It has the responsibility of developing feminist positions and lines. Its job is to contribute to advancing MC forward to a greater grasp of the women's question and to propose to the MC for discussion and approval contributions which will have an effect in feminizing the ideological and political understandings and political policy in each case. It will also ensure that information gets out and discussion is had about its activity in the regular MC committees. It will thus have the ability to lead feminist work in all sorts of areas and set up structures in conformity with the general organizational principles of MC. In its own jurisdiction, sphere of competence, the women's structure is decisional.

Article 30: In the case of conflict between the women's structure and the regular organs of the MC (a conflict over jurisdiction), the women's collective at an immediately higher level (concretely the State women's collective) will intervene every time its presence is called for. It is up to the federal committee (of MC — ed. note) in the final instance to decide after having consulted with the State women's collective. When there is need for a quick response, the national or regional committees will decide, which is not to say that the State collective cannot intervene.

Article 31: The elected representatives of the women's structures will be ensured a place at congresses, the federal committee and in the national and regional committees. We must also make the necessary efforts to ensure that the proportion of women at congresses and in organs of leadership at all levels corresponds to their proportion at each level. The links between the leading organs of the MC at all levels and the corresponding collectives of women must be forged whenever it is deemed appropriate.

* * *

Ed. note: We were unable to figure out from the rest of the MC constitution what the "State women's collective" is. Perhaps this refers to all the collectives at all levels together, in short to a sort of "women's congress"...

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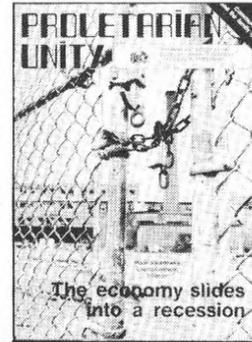
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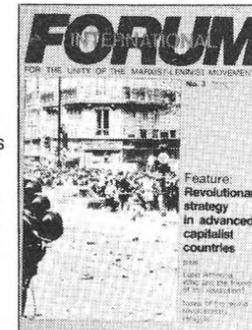
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