To mark International Women's Day, 1988, 'Class Struggle' is printing this article, the first in a series. Although the League has for many years paid lip service to the importance of developing and putting into practice a policy on the question of women, it has made little progress so far. This series of articles is intended to help the debate and we welcome comments and criticisms from our readers.

GLIMPSES INTO HERSTORY
WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

CLASS STRUGGLE
REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE
Women's oppression affects half the world's population. Women all over the globe are victims of sexism, violence and male domination. And yet their oppression remains largely invisible.

Women have resisted exploitation in all its various guises through the centuries. And yet this history is largely forgotten, hidden or ridiculed.

Women do two thirds of all labour in the world and also the labour of reproduction. And yet women's work is given little value and everywhere marginalised.

The "new" women's movement which has grown up since the 1960's, both in the West and in Third World countries, has produced a wealth of feminist literature and has been active on many practical issues which affect women in their daily lives. Sections of this movement have explored both the origins of women's subordination and the links between women's oppression and the international division of labour as well as the wider issues of its relation to present day imperialism, the exploitation of the Third world and the working class.

In many liberation movements and in socialist countries, women have come to the fore. But the relationship between socialism and the oppression of women remains theoretically unexplored, with only a few exceptions.

For women in this country - whether they suffer from exploitation in the form of violence and rape, poor pay and prospects, lack of reproductive rights or simply from their undervalued position in a sick society - these questions are of fundamental importance. Yet 'Class Struggle' has, over the years, managed to report on them only occasionally and analyse them even less.

We hope that this series will open the debate on women's oppression, and especially its relation to class and national oppression.
at first not allowed to marry or have children as it was cheaper to import more slaves as replacements. But towards the end of the 18th century, when the slave "trade" stopped the Caribbean women suddenly under pressure to "breed" to replace the workforce. A similar pattern can be seen in plantations in Sumatra.

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

Women have fought back long and hard against all these forms of oppression. The women in the Caribbe and Sumatra, for example, went on a birth strike. This tactic was also used by women in South West Africa in rebelling against German invaders. The Herero women reduced their population from 50,000 to 19,962 between 1892-1909.

Population control is still a favourite strategy of oppression - this time backed today with millions of dollars of "development aid" imposing it on Third countries. Recent campaigns against forced sterilisations and the contraceptive Depo-provera, which the women's movement has taken up on an international scale, are modern examples of resistance to this imperialist strategy.

Women in Africa have also fought back in more violent ways. In Eastern Nigeria, in 1926 the 10,000 women marched and looted in protest at taxation and ill-treatment by the colonial power.

The 19th century women's movement in Europe and the USA was sparked off by the contradiction between the universal principles of bourgeois revolution: freedom, equality and fraternity and the systematic exclusion of women from these basic rights.

In Britain, the second half of the 19th century and early part of the 20th, saw women active in many different fields. The history of the women's movement of this time, which involved women of different class backgrounds fighting for their freedom in many different areas of their lives, has only recently been researched and written up. Later articles in this series will cover this period in more detail. At the same time, a working class women's movement developed, in other countries, notably in Germany, where Marxist theory that only women's full economic participation in social production would lead to emancipation.

WOMEN'S LIBERATION IN THE SIXTIES

The "new" women's movement in the West developed in close relation to the other big movements: the war in Vietnam, the struggle for civil rights, particularly in the USA, leading to the Black

Power movement. The women's movement evolved through women in small groups sharing their personal experiences and discovering that they had common experiences and a common political action: "the personal is political". Such groups tended to concentrate on issues such as violence against women and sex discrimination. However, the movement broadened. A particularly important signpost was the strike of women sewing machinists at Ford's in Dagenham who came out for equal pay.

The First National Liberation Conference in 1970 took Oxford by storm and demanded a total transformation of society whilst at the same time, challenging the orthodoxy and sexism of the left-wing groups. A year later, women marched for four basic demands: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand and free 24 hour nurseries.

The question of housework was raised, particularly by those who later became known as the "Wages For Housework" group, who challenged the theory that housework is non-productive labour and sparked off an on-going debate.

Later, in 1971, the book "The Dialectics of Sex" by Shulamith Firestone was published in the UK and the "radical feminist" current was born. Shulamith Firestone maintained that the primary cause of conflict between man and woman was in the relations of reproduction, and that women's biological make-up had made it possible for men to wield power over women even before the development of class society. Women's main enemy is, in this analysis, men and the main aim for women's liberation is to be to seize control over reproduction.

In response to the challenge of radical feminism, there developed "socialist feminism" which started from a basic Marxist view that men oppress women by virtue of their social and economic power over them. Socialist feminism today encompasses a wide range of views on the exact relationship between sex and class and has made great strides in many countries. The movement here is not limited to women but international, "women of the world, active in the anti-imperialist struggle. Women have organised pickets in support of women Republican prisoners, both in Armagh and in this country as in Derry.

STUGGLIES IN THE THIRD WORLD

In the 20th century, the struggle against imperialist powers has taken the form of national liberation struggles in many countries. Revolutions such as the Chinese revolution could only succeed with the full participation of women. In other countries, we can see today a total transformation in the position of women through national liberation struggles such as that in Eritrea or Tigray.

In other parts of the world, small groups of women were meeting and developing their own feminism. By the Mid-Decade International Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1980, there was a growing militancy and network amongst Third World women and better links with other women around the world. That conference showed how the situation for women around the world was deteriorating. It also marked an escalation in feminist groups world-wide fighting back against such attacks on them such as dowry-killing and rape in India; sex-tourism in Thailand; clitoridectomy in Africa and various forms of machismo in Latin America.

The 1980's have seen the women's movement in the West fragmented while in many Third World countries, it is a growing movement. However, there is a growing realisation of the "inter-relationships between the exploitation of women in different parts of the imperialist system, of the international division of labour and women's need to fight for reproductive rights world-wide.

GLOBAL SISTERSHOOD

Women's oppression is a systematic feature of the world political economy and ideology. Feminism and the different forms of women's fight back is not everywhere, too. Western feminism is derived from our own unique historical experience and cannot therefore be applied universally. Thus the analysis and, strategy developed by the movement here is not to be denigrated but must be placed...
In the labour of women is devalued both at home and in the workplace. In different countries and societies around the world, women have in common that their oppression and exploitation is related to child-bearing. In many societies, women bear the responsibility for bringing up children (at least very young children) and providing food etc. However, in most societies of the world today, women's labour, which plays an essential role in reproducing and maintaining the workforce, and in social production, is not rewarded in economic, political or social terms (money, power or status).

On this dual exploitation of women's labour, the whole complex of political, ideological and social structure of oppression is built. Although this article will concentrate on women's work outside the home, we will constantly find that this aspect of their oppression is closely bound up with others, in particular the work inside the home, and wider aspects such as violence against women, the education of women etc.

**WOMEN WORLD-WIDE**

A single article can only touch on this huge subject. (Whoever sat down and wrote one article on man's work?) This article will concentrate on the differences between women and men's work, and the historical and material basis for this.

Women of all classes and nations are oppressed as women and their labour devalued, but working class women also suffer from class oppression and Third World women from national oppression. This produces a complex relation between women world-wide. Imperialism has exploited women differently in different times and in different places, in order to maximise profits and this has produced both a sexual division of labour and an international division of labour. In the context of the country, we do not mean that international aspects are not important: both women internationally, and national women minority in this country are of extreme importance. But lack of space and resources must make us concentrate here on the history of women's work in this country, whilst learning from, and supporting, women's struggles elsewhere.

**WOMEN IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN**

Historically, there has always been a sexual division of labour. Under capitalism and imperialism, there have been complex and contradictory trends. On the one hand, women have at different stages worked outside the home in large social units of service work, and today they make up a significant section of the workforce. On the other hand, in many ways women's role in social production has been reasserted extensively.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Britain was still an agricultural society, with the vast majority living on the land and producing enough for bare survival. Among the peasantry, women were essential to the family economy. The peasant's wife bore children, which meant more hands to till and she also laboured herself. The rise of trade started a more complex and specialised society and the yeomen's wives withdrew from agricultural tasks. Women kept control of control of foodstuff to make up for the loss of their earnings from agricultural tasks. In the towns, workshops became larger with the main division being between masters and workers, and a lessening role for masters' wives and widows. The trades which women kept control of were those related to women's household tasks: drink and clothing production, such as brewing and spinning.

Gradually, women were forced out of the more profitable trades, and women's work became associated with low pay. There were wide variations from place to place and from trade to trade. In large and small towns, feudalism lasted much longer. Young printers, for example, were protesting against the unskilled working conditions. In 1620's and had virtually excluded them.

By the mid-17th century, in the woolen trade, women retained quite a strong position although by the 17th century, they were being restricted to carding and spinning at home, while men did the sorting and dyeing. In 1639, Mary Arnold went to jail because she continued to brew, contrary to an order of the Brewers of Westminster and the Brewers of Westminster. Women healers were increasingly persecuted as witches and the expensive education required for medicine as a science excluded women. Midwifery survived for the poor only.

**COLONIAL WIVES**

By the 18th century, the idea that men should be able to support women in their work gained credence, although only amongst a very small minority at first. Of course, the Victorian middle class male required wives who were decorative, accomplished in music etc. to entertain him, but most importantly, in charge of all domestic concerns and able to bear children, so that he could...
put all his energies into his capitalist and colonial ventures.

By the early 19th century, the middle class had a distinct identity as a class in their own right, with a close connection, in England, between business and landed property which changed the feudal relations in the countryside and provided newcomers with "non-working" wives and farm labourers.

Whilst the rich women were being excluded from production, the lives of poor women were ceaselessly worked for. Women agricultural workers had the bearing and succour of large families, work in the fields, especially at harvest, and would work as domestics in the big houses. Poor women played an active, and if necessary violent and organised, part in the struggles for a cheap loaf of bread.

**WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION**

The industrial revolution gradually separated women's work in the family for work for wages. Women and children forced off the land by capitalist farming methods, as well as Irish immigrants starved in the family for work for a cheap loaf of bread. In many cases, Irish immigrants worked in the family for work for a cheap loaf of bread. In the early 19th century, some trade unions, especially in the textile unions, became actively involved in the long and bitter struggle for the vote.

The period of the two world wars, of course, saw dramatic but temporary changes in women's work and union's attitudes. However, women were encouraged to be engineers, drivers, and do heavy work of all kinds. Millions of women today can describe their experiences of this period. Basic unions made agreements that women would leave their jobs at the end of the war, and equated the removal of women workers with the occupation of the British race and of British ideals in the world.

**FAMILY WAGE**

Many working class men resisted the entry of women into factories, both because they wished to remain master in their own home, and because of competition for jobs. In reality, then as now, families depended on wives' earnings. But the idea of a family wage gained credence. Protective legislation for women workers was a two-edged sword: men and women desperatly needed short hours and better conditions. But women were excluded without alternative employment. The reasoning behind such legislation was often more to do with maintaining patriarchal within the family and imposing middle-class values than recognising women's any relief.

Despite the growth of factory production, there were large areas of work where it was still cheaper to use low-paid female labour as outworkers, for example, finishing off, lace-working, and in domestic service. Absorbed many women, seasonal agricultural work, and shop work.

**WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONS**

The growth of workers' organisations in the 19th century, which culminated in the legalising of trade unions in 1824 and later the Chartist movement in the 1840s, included some women as well. Female spinner's strike in 1818 saw women and men drawing equal strike pay. In 1832, there was a strike by women card-setters. But most of the early unions of strength were in male-dominated industry. The Chartist movement included some women united in the class struggle, but it did not take up women's problems as such and campaigned for a family wage and a place for women in the home.

The expansion of trade unionism in the 1830s and 40s brought some women-only unions which were split under the Women's Protective and Provident League by Emma Pardoe and Miss Black. In 1869 such unions were welcomed into the TUC. However, conflict soon broke out. Not surprising with prominent trade union leaders such as R.A. Bagnall, who said it was "very natural for ladies to be impatient of restraint at any time...to stay in their proper place at home." Despite this, women workers took increasingly militant action at work. The matchgirls' strike is the best known example. But in the same year of 1869, there was action by blanket weavers in Herefordshire. Women's work.

**DOUBLE OPPRESSION**

Thus women continued to labour for capitalism in two ways. Although capitalism broke the complete control of the working class by the man and children, in that they ceased to be directly a means of production for him, the women's low wage was still complementary to his. Women could not enter commodity production on the same terms as men. Like the man, they sold their power as a commodity. But they still worked to maintain the labour force at home.

In the early years of the industrial revolution, the work of women in reproducing the man and children's capacity to labour was drastically reduced. With protective legislation and fewer hours in the factory, women workers spent more time in production in the family. The need for women's labour in the family, in reproducing and maintaining labour power, imposed certain constraints on the direct exploitation of women's labour power in industry. But women's social usefulness was never recognised by capitalism. Capitalism and imperialism have used women's labour in different ways at different times. But this basic contradiction remains as a legacy and reflected today in women's place in the wage labour market, their role in trade unions and attitudes to women within the unions.

The rise of women's trade unions in the early 19th century, which culminated in the legalising of trade unions in 1824 and later the Chartist movement in the 1840s, included some women as well. Female spinner's strike in 1818 saw women and men drawing equal strike pay. In 1832, there was a strike by women card-setters. But most of the early unions of strength were in male-dominated industry. The Chartist movement included some women united in the class struggle, but it did not take up women's problems as such and campaigned for a family wage and a place for women in the home. The expansion of trade unionism in the 1830s and 40s brought some women-only unions which were split under the Women's Protective and Provident League by Emma Pardoe and Miss Black. In 1869 such unions were welcomed into the TUC. However, conflict soon broke out. Not surprising with prominent trade union leaders such as R.A. Bagnall, who said it was "very natural for ladies to be impatient of restraint at any time...to stay in their proper place at home." Despite this, women workers took increasingly militant action at work. The matchgirls' strike is the best known example. But in the same year of 1869, there was action by blanket weavers in Herefordshire.

Women workers were helped by some male trade unionists, radicals and socialists such as Henry Hyndman, in 1891, a big demonstration of laundresses in Hyde Park was supported by the railway workers amongst others. There is however, not much written about the ideas and aspirations of working women at this time. In the early 1900s, women trade unionists, especially in the textile unions, became actively involved in the long and bitter struggle for the vote.

The Girls Back Home

The period of the two world wars, of course, saw dramatic but temporary changes in women's work and unions' attitudes. However, women were encouraged to be engineers, drivers, and do heavy work of all kinds. Millions of women today can describe their experiences of this period. Basic unions made agreements that women would leave their jobs at the end of the war, and equated the removal of women workers with the occupation of the British race and of British ideals in the world.

Consequently, women were sent back to their homes and the labour shortage solved by importing workers, firstly from Europe, as in the case of Italian workers who worked in the cotton mills, and later from the Third World.

Immigration to Britain in the post-war years was carefully planned. Initially, Caribbean immigration to Britain in the post-war years was carefully planned. Caribbean people, many of them women, came in search of jobs and money that they could send back home to the Caribbean. Many of them were also recruited from the Indian sub-continent. Most did not plan a long stay and their presence caused huge problems, mainly because they were not in sufficient numbers to maintain the economy. Women black women were employed by the State, in the National Health Service, and to continue to be employed there today, and suffer oppression as the lowest paid workers, as women, as black people and as thirdly as women.

National minority women brought with them their long history of hundreds of years of struggle and resistance and the tradition has continued in new forms in this country.
SUBURBS have involved black women, for example, Grunwick. Many black women in this country are employed in jobs which make union organisation extremely difficult (without taking into account the racism of the unions), like homeworking and small workshops. In 1981, homeworkers in Leicester were earning an average wage of 80p an hour with no expenses paid, no benefits or legal rights.

MODERN UNIONS

Women in trade unions these days face many of the same problems that they always have. The egalitarian unions that passed through generations of progress have been replaced by women's unions. For example, the Transport and General Workers Union has recently set up a Women's Advisory Committee, but women are still not fully active in the unions. For example, the only 1% out of the 40 strong Executive Committee is a woman, and only 14 of the union's full-time officials are female. On the shop floor, women's involvement in union affairs is held back by both practical and ideological difficulties. Half of women workers are part-time, often with two or more jobs, and then have all their work with children and leisure time divided between the two. Attending bureaucratic union meetings, out of working hours, is just not possible for most women.

Several recent local studies by women have emphasised again the degree of segregation and discrimination for women at work:

WOMEN'S WORK

Nicola Charles interviewed and studied 160 women and union representatives in different industries in Sheffield in 1980. Most of the women did "women's work" which was separate and lower-paid than the men's. This was not seen as a problem by the unions. Union officials upheld the idea of a family wage and considered women's pay as a separate issue. They had strong views on women's shifts so that their work at home was not interfered with; and some saw women as a cause of male unemployment. All these views were echoed by women themselves and equal pay was not supported by the majority. They were keen on the union as such, but very critical of local unions, and many said they would be union reps if they were asked to.

Ruth Cavendish worked and studied on a car assembly line in Longbridge. She also found strict divisions between men and women, and black and white workers, in the way they were employed. The women saw themselves primarily as housewives, the reality of life at home and the low wages and boring, alienating work they were offered in the factories.

Anna Pollitt, studying in a tobacco factory in Bristol, in 1972, found the same occupational segregation and low pay. Young women there could only treat their unskilled manual labour as an affirmation of their own worthlessness and often sought refuge in romance.

The gradual "de-skilling" of women's paid work is partly due to a restriction in the sort of work women are allowed to do, and partly due to the category "skilled work" being applied to men's jobs. The many demanding, fiddly and exhausting jobs that women do like machining or electronic assembly, are classified as unskilled. The class historically has not only involved capitalism maximising profits but also the conundrums of the male-dominated labour movement. The Equal Pay Act has done little to change this because of the de-skilling of women's work and struggles to regrade work have proved difficult to win in the present system.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Official facts and figures on women's employment are extremely misleading because of the huge sector of women's work (around 75% of it) below the National Insurance threshold, working as casual labour, homeworking, or working in small workshops or family concerns. Nearly half of these women form part of the official statistics. Many women do two or more "little jobs" such as cleaning. Many do not register as unemployed but would like to work if it was available and possible. Statistics also take no account of women working to care for elderly relatives, handicapped family members etc, all of which is hidden labour.

However, for what they are worth, statistics show that in the UK, the percentage of women in paid employment has increased from 24% in 1960 to 57% in 1980 (a period when male employment was falling). Part-time work has increased: in 1971 only one job in seven was part-time, by 1980, the proportion had become one in five. The majority of part-timers are women. Between 1984 and 1985, 60% of women officially "working" and about half of these were full-time and half part-time. The service industries employ 81% of all working women.

LOW PAY

The gap between men and women's pay on official statistics has narrowed over the last 15 years but is still great. Average gross hourly earnings in 1970 were 67p for men and 42p for women, and in 1977 were 1.77p for men and 1.33p for women. This was not seen as a problem by the unions, who were more concerned by the degree of segregation and discrimination.

The gradual "de-skilling" of women's paid jobs is partly due to a restriction in the sort of work women are allowed to do, and partly due to the category "skilled work" being applied to men's jobs. The many demanding, fiddly and exhausting jobs that women do like machining or electronic assembly, are classified as unskilled. Thus, historically, has not only involved capitalism maximising profits, but also the conundrums of the male-dominated labour movement. The Equal Pay Act has done little to change this because of the de-skilling of women's work and struggles to regrade work have proved difficult to win in the present system.

DOMESTIC SLAVERY

While women work for low pay out of the home, they labour for no pay at all within the home. The vital task of reproducing and maintaining the workforce is carried out by women's labour in the home. Domestic slavery is the type of slavery which exists in the Third World for better wages and conditions, at the same time as the recession was causing severe unemployment back home. With the unions and working people on the defensive, employers have been able to widen the division in the workforce between the traditional, male-dominated and unionised, full-time workers and the part-time, or casual, female workers who are being cruelly exploited. National minority women in this country suffer especially from such exploitation.
WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

In trying to understand the relationship between the family and women's oppression, we need to study the family in a historical and dialectical way. This is very difficult. Our experience of the nuclear family in imperialist Britain is particular in time and place and should not be generalized. On the other hand, it is significant to us because it is the concrete reality of the position that we are in.

BOURGEOIS FAMILY

Our present concept of the family - the monogamous nuclear family - is a bourgeois one. Even the concept of 'family' became popular only towards the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, and to begin with, was only promoted among the propertied classes. It was only these classes who were supposed to have a family: that is, a family as a combination of co-residence and blood relationship based on the patriarchal principle, with the man as the 'head' of the household and 'breadwinner' for wife and children.

Until the middle of the 19th century, there were a number of marriage restrictions for people without property. Agricultural labourers, workers etc. were expected to work ceaselessly, both men and women. Indeed, many of these women worked as domestics and were allowed no family life of their own.

In the second half of the 19th century, these restrictions were abolished in most European countries and the family was promoted and put under the protection of the state.

The reason why the bourgeoisie encouraged the establishment of the modern family within Europe was many and complex. At the same time, they were systematically destroying kinships and societies in the colonies: the other side of the same coin.

PUSHED INTO THE FAMILY HOME

Women and children constituted a large part of the early industrial proletariat. But their extreme exploitation quickly led to such high infant mortality and disease that the next generation of workers was under serious threat. This was undoubtedly one reason for the reforms and for the strong promotion of marriage and patriarchal family. Unlike the peasants, the propertyless proletariat had no material interest in the production of children. Many were unmarried or deserted and lived a mobile existence with no children.

A combination of legislation, police measures and Church ideology forced this class towards the bourgeois family. Legislation was passed criminalising infanticide, sexual intercourse outside marriage and abortion. What the state called a crime, the church called a sin. Thus women were forced into the home to take on the role of housewife. Labour costs were reduced for the bourgeoisie and a new consumer market eventually created.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE FAMILY WAGE

This process, whereby women's place was to be in the home, was pushed forward by the bourgeoisie and the state. However, the working class movement in the 19th and 20th century also made its contribution. The organised working class (mainly made up of skilled men) used the argument that a man's wage should be sufficient to maintain a family so that his wife could stay at home and look after the household. The principle of equal pay for women was consistently rejected by most unions up to quite late in the 20th century, for this reason.

The question of women's work in factories was discussed at the 1866 Congress of the First International in Geneva where Karl Marx stated that the tendency of modern industry to draw women into production had to be seen as a progressive tendency. The French section and also some of the Germans, however, were strongly opposed to women's work outside the house. The German memorandum contained such sentiments as:

"To wives and mothers belongs the work in the family and the household. While the man is the representative of the serious public and family duties, the wife and mother should represent the comfort and the poetry of domestic life, she should bring grace and beauty to social manners and raise human enjoyment to a nobler and higher plane." (Thonnessen, 1969, trans. Maria Miers).

Other revolutionaries such as Bebel and Clara Zetkin had similar views on women as primarily wives and mothers and upheld the creation of the bourgeois nuclear family within the proletariat. This has led to a basis of contradiction for socialists, that on the one hand, the entry of women into social production is seen as a pre-condition for women's emancipation, but on the other hand, man is upheld as breadwinner and head of the family and woman as dependent housewife and mother, and the nuclear family as "progressive".

The material basis for this contradiction lies in the advantage which working class men gain from women's role in the family: both his ability to dominate paid work, his control over all money income to the family and the benefit of unpaid labour for him at home.

Coming home to food bought and cooked, clothes washed, children cared for, 100 paper on the roll etc. etc. is, let's face it, one hell of an advantage.

Thus women's role within the modern Western family means to the capitalist that all the labour required to serve and reproduce his workforce is provided free, and to the working man, the everyday burden of existence is invisibly lightened.

DOMESTIC LABOUR

The way in which women's domestic labour fits into the wage labour system must be dealt with at length another time. As domestic labour produces use values, not commodities, it is not directly paid for by the capitalist. But it does affect the profit made by them. The contribution which domestic labour makes to surplus value (profit) is one of keeping down "necessary labour" to a level that is lower than the actual subsistence level of the working class.

For example, it could be argued that it is cheaper for capital to pay a male worker a wage sufficient to, at least partially, maintain his wife...
so that she prepares his meals for him, rather than pay him a wage on which he could afford to eat regularly at restaurants. If housework is socialised, and those workers paid a proper wage, the scale of labour power (and therefore wages) would rise dramatically. However, as we saw in World War 2, if capital is desperate enough for women to enter the labour market, then housework will, to a certain extent, be socialised.

As stated earlier, the state promotion of the bourgeois family in Europe was bound up with the destruction of kinship systems in the colonies. Without the vicious exploitation of the Third World, the capitalist states would not have been able to promote the ideal of white women being wives and mothers. This is bound together not only in purely economic terms, but also socially in eugenic terms - that white women should breed pure and healthy white children to continue the colonial system.

FAMILIES WORLD-WIDE

In order to have a more all-round view of the family, we need to do more investigation into family structures in non-European countries. National minority women in this country bring with them experiences of quite different family life from, for example, the Caribbean, from India and from Pakistan. Many of these families will have suffered from interference from colonial rule and have also been disrupted by emigration to an alien racist culture.

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

The evolution of today's small nuclear family from the more extended family continued until well after the industrial revolution and the state promotion of the family has continued in varying intensity up to today's strident calls of Mrs Thatcher.

In the more extended form of family, women toiled physically with no mechanisation. Descriptions of this never-ending drudgery of their lives also illustrate, however, the support women gave each other in child-rearing and coping with extreme poverty.

The transition to the small nuclear family began with the industrial revolution and the move from land to towns, the mobility, lack of provision of housing, and the individualism, competitiveness and consumerism of capitalist society.

Within this family, women are virtually owned by their husbands, marriage, many of their legal rights disappear, economically, they require his signature for HP, rent, mortgage, tax, and once tied down children are completely dependent on him for money. Physically, there is little protection from assault. Rape by a husband is still not illegal. Morally, women are responsible for family harmony and burdened with guilt if it fails. Old people and children are excluded from useful social work and varied communal living. The small nuclear family makes roles and sexist stereotypes difficult to change; it provides an intense social situation, isolation from friends and all else, and most isolation especially of women from other women, and an ideal opportunity for media influence.

The present attack and rundown of the welfare state is happening alongside a volte face promotion of the family, like Mr Jenkin (1980):

"If the good Lord had intended us all having equal rights to go out and work and to behave equally, you know, I really wouldn't have created man and woman."

But the Labour Party do no better, like Prime Minister Callaghan, (1978): "We have to pay much more attention than we have done in the past as to how industry organises itself at work, so that her influence at the centre of the family... is not weakened."

Despite this, there is growing evidence that the family is breaking up especially under the strains put on it by the economic recession. Over one in four marriages now ends in divorce. And, in Harlesey, for example, half the households are now single parent families headed by women.

CHILD CARE

Many of the basic demands taken up by the women's movement of the 1970's, relate to coparenting in the family: especially the demand for free 24-hour nurseries. For many women, it is the first baby and they often suddenly loads onto them their oppression as women. They are immediately unable to compete in the labour market; unable to have any time to themselves, doing and exhausting routine round the clock; and often because they are now 'at home' all day their husbands expects his meals all cooked, his shirts ironed, his shopping done, etc. etc.

Society at one and the same time puts women on a pedestal of ultimate achievement and offers them no help whatsoever. In the 1970's, many women's groups campaigned for nurseries or set them up themselves. But they were too expensive to run privately, and employers were not interested. By the end of the decade, the importance of comprehensive childcare for all under-fives was recognised on paper, by the TUC.
it would have been unheard of to see a nomad woman talking to a man in public. Now, there are even nomad women fighters sharing the frontline of battle with men. Women are now active in village assemblies. (In the past, if women had dared to stand up and speak, they were publicly humiliated and beaten by their husbands.) Land distribution has given many women land for the first time.

Within a socialist system which follows such a struggle, there will be, for a long time, conflicts between old family structures and the new social organisations which will grow to replace them. In China, for example, a leap was made from a feudal society to a socialist one only one generation in many cases and many contradictions still remain between women's traditional family roles and those required and demanded by today's women. This is complicated by other changes, for example, the population policy of one-child families. Despite these difficulties, most women in new China lead a totally different and liberated life compared to only 50 years ago. It is certain that women will have to struggle and redefine their struggle for a fair and equal family relationship. A successful outcome will, in many respects, liberate men as well as women.

NO HAVEN IN THE FAMILY

The specific form taken by the family at any time or place is linked to the mode of production. It is a creation of that social system and will reflect its culture. In most of the world today, and certainly in Britain, the family is essentially oppressive to women. Although women seek shelter and warmth within the family from the uncaring, racist and sexist society outside, the bourgeois nuclear family cannot provide this. The bourgeois family is part of the capitalist system and is built upon exploitation, isolation, suppression and violence towards women.

THIRD WORLD WOMEN: SWEATSHOPS IN THE SUN

WOMEN IN THE THIRD WORLD

The impact of capitalism and imperialism on women in Third World countries was necessarily very different and very varied. It depended on the social organisation which had developed before imperialism, on the nationality and stage of the colonial power and on many other factors. It is also a continually changing pattern depending on maximising profits for imperialism, at any one time. This article can only touch on one or two examples. A but knowledge and understanding in this area is vital to our better understanding of women's oppression and the struggle against it.

Broadly speaking, the colonial period involved the extraction of raw materials from the colonies, manufacture “back home” and then forcing these products onto the markets in the colonies. This involved women as slaves; women working directly on plantations; women being left behind with family and poor subsistence land while men were forced to work the rich cash crops; and women losing both land rights and their own handicraft industries as was the case with the Indian textile industry, destroyed by English factory-made cloth. Women were raped, used as prostitutes and the whole social and family structure destroyed.

Thus at the same time as capitalists were withdrawing their own women from the labour force and instituting the family at home, they were destroying it in the Third World. (This is something we will explore in greater detail in future articles.)

SWEATSHOPS IN THE SUN

In the 1970's, Third World women were to a certain extent re-discovered by international capital in their search for higher profits and many labour-intensive industries were relocated in the Free Trade Zones. For example, between 1971 and 1983, 1.5 million workers, mostly women, lost jobs in the clothing and textile industries in Europe and the USA, and over 2 million new jobs were created in the Third World. The computer revolution was made possible by the super-exploitation of Asian women in Free Trade Zones, who make up 80% of the workforce. The factory conditions these women work in are appalling and also continue the ideology that women are women and housewives before workers.

Besides this exploitation of women by low wage labour, there has also been a growth of the sex and sex-tourism industries. Sex tours provide the second or third most important source of foreign exchange in Thailand and the Philippines. Women continue to do the majority of agricultural work: a recent study in Southern India found that women were doing all the housework and 80% of the agricultural work, and that modernisation and ‘aid’ programmes made this worse.

RESOURCES

The following books have been used to compile much of the information in this article:

Hidden From History, Sheila Rowbotham.

Waged Work, A Reader, edited by Feminist Review.

Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale, Maria Mies.

Common Fate, Common Bond, Swasti Mitter.
SOCIAL PRODUCTION & THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

GLIMPSES INTO HERSTORY

A Contribution

Thinking about the very useful articles on Herstory in March and April 'Class Struggles', there are one or two points worth raising even though this contribution is not well worked out.

Starting from the premise that class society excluded women from social production, the question 'why did only men become the social producers, and not women and men?'

There seem to be two main reasons. One: women had, and still have, the essential responsibility for child-bearing and rearing. And two: the greater physical strength of men, which was essential for the heavy labouring work necessary for the development of settled agriculture.

However, with the development of classes, ruling class women ceased to be oppressed as a class but still became oppressed as women. Why? In those far-off days, were men already aware that they were onto a good thing by being the only earners and women the home-makers and a stable element in the society? Or were women who could afford the so-called 'value' of being the home-makers only too pleased to be free of the enormous toil of working on the land?

Even in Diop's analysis (see March 'Class Struggle') although patriarchy still held sway in many African countries as far as inheritance was concerned, women generally speaking, in fact passed on hereditary rights to sons or brothers not to daughters: that is, hereditary rights were transmitted 'through the woman' not to her. Also, from my very limited reading of early societies, Diop's theories for Africa do not hold up for some early South American societies such as the Maya, the Aztec and the Incas. Women here did have some political and social rights but they were oppressed as sexual objects and never, as far as I could tell, were equal with men.

OPPRESSION BEFORE COLONIALISM

As for the Aboriginal people in Australia, whom I read about in Robert Hughes' excellent book 'The Fatal Shore', they lived, at the time of the imperialist invasion 200 years ago, in a state of near primitive communism. With no private property, land rights and no surplus beyond their needs, the women were cruelly oppressed by their menfolk just the same.

Their marriage was usually arranged at birth and they then became the property of their husbands. They had absolutely no rights within the clan and were physically assaulted by their menfolk if they tried to stand up for themselves in any way.

The ideology of men's superiority over women gained credence and acceptability over the generations because nearly always the men were physically the strongest. Strongest for hard physical labour, for going out to war and always with the dominance of physical force over women. She, on the other hand, was always responsible for the essential child-bearing and rearing which took place during the most productive years of her life.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Exceptional women have historically stood out against this oppression. But for the mass of women, the laws made over the ages discriminating against them have always pushed women's efforts at freedom back into the home and at the service of men. And, of course, physical violence against women in the home has played a large part in the act.

But now the superior physical strength of men is not a necessity in our daily lives, with machines, science and technology taking the place of strength in nearly all fields of work. Women are not handicapped from that point of view any more, and can be equally capable in an all-round way.

The only exception is still in the home, where violent men can still overcome women physically, again generally speaking.

COPING IN A MAN'S WORLD

So now women have to undo all the discrimination and violence perpetrated against them over the centuries and win their equal partnership with men in the world. Most importantly, they have to realise deeply their equal ability and stand up to this task ideologically as well as practically.

I think we underestimate the enormous burden of generation after generation of women being made to feel inferior to men and how they can overcome this inbuilt subjugation.

But they still have the double task of fighting for equality and being the necessary bearers of children, and at present the rearers, too. How to cope with that dilemma in this man's world, is a problem that even socialist countries such as China, are finding very hard to solve.

Class Struggle would welcome readers' responses and contributions to this series and other items in the paper.

Please send them to:
Class Struggle,
c/o 203 Seven Sisters Road,
London N4 3NG
Of all the aspects of being a woman in society, sex and reproduction must be the most ignored by "politics", whilst being at the core of womanhood. The unique contribution of women to the world economy is the reproduction of the people themselves, although the possibility of giving birth does not alone define womanhood.

WOMEN'S WORK WITH BREAST AND WOMB

The whole process of pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing - a process that determines twenty years of their life for many women - is placed in a separate category of "nature" or "biology". It is not viewed as productive work, not included in political economy and not mentioned in political manifestos.

In rejecting this view that such labour is purely a function of "nature", we need to recognise that men and women have different bodies which interact with nature in different ways. They use their bodies to interact with nature and to change it (sometimes called the appropriation of nature). It is a conscious human and social activity.

Marx defined work in its broadest sense as acting on the external world and changing it. In this way, the labourers' hands are his "means of production". But we do not hear of women's breasts, or womb, being her means of production. Indeed, the actual process of childbirth is called labour, but not really thought of as "work", although any mother can testify to the fact that it is!

WOMEN'S TRADITIONS

Throughout history as we know it, women have acquired knowledge which helps them to choose and control their reproductive activity. Breeding is not just a natural activity but is a form of human work which reproduces the human race in a socialised way.

There is evidence that the ancient civilisations of Africa and Asia had much knowledge about conception and childbirth, such as herbal remedies, an understanding of body products and diet, which enabled them to control to an extent their reproductive forces. We certainly know that many societies under threat can and do decrease their population and women have wielded this as a power in fighting colonial battles.

Much of this knowledge was systematically destroyed or hidden from women in the last few centuries in capitalist and imperialist societies.

Independent free-thinking women were seen as a threat to the rising bourgeoisie in Europe and, more recently, fat profits have been made by making knowledge into commodities, for example through drugs, contraception or food.

All this has weakened women and marginalised their labour. Their bodies have been turned into commodities. Women have lost sight of their identity: the fact that female productivity is a pre-condition for male productivity. It is no accident that the history of early societies is hidden: societies where women were the producers of children, the gatherers of food and the early agriculturalists, whilst men went hunting for the luxury of meat and slaves. That is the history of women using their bodies as means of production in a different way to men, but a way which must be publicly reinstated as productive labour.

DEBATE IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Although much of this has been ignored by political movements, it has been the core of much of the women's movement both here and world-wide. The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, in this country and America, was fired by demands for abortion on demand, control over their bodies and sexual freedom, among other demands.

FREE CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION ON DEMAND

"Free contraception and abortion on demand" was one of the original demands of the women's movement in the West in the 1970s. At an early stage, the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign included an end to forced sterilisation in its campaign.

In 1975, however, the National Abortion Campaign was launched with the sole purpose of defending the 1967 Abortion Act. This campaign was successful in defeating a series of Private Members' Bills and also in spurring the trade unions and TUC into taking action.

When some 80,000 women and men marched in October 1979, it was the largest trade union demonstration for many years for a cause which was beyond the traditional scope of collective bargaining and was also the biggest ever pro-abortion march. For the feminists who had done the planning, however, it was a bitter pill - the TUC insisted on heading the march with Len Murray and General Council members - almost all men.

Reproductive Rights

Effective though the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) had been in defending the 1967 Act, it had completely missed out on the wider implications of "a right to choose". Its white, middle-class background had blinkered it from seeing the importance for black and working class women, of the issues of forced sterilisation, the use of injectable long-acting contraceptives such as Depo-provera, the and the ideology of the need for birth control in order to carry on and strengthen the white race. This racist basis has been carried on to the present with working class and black women being forced into sterilisation and experimented on, with new and long-acting contraceptives.

Campaigns such as those around Depo-provera have united women from many third world countries. Organisations such as Gabriela in the Philippines have played a leading role. Population control and "aid" to third world countries from the West are of enormous repressive significance for black and women. Any campaigns for reproductive rights in this country must clearly acknowledge this, and further links between women world-wide on this issue.

Reproductive Technology

The 1980s have also seen the rapid growth of "reproductive technology". Science, unfortunately in the hands of imperialism and patriarchy, is completely changing...
reproduction. Like other scientific and technological knowledge, it is not right or wrong in itself, but dependent on to whose advantage it is used.

The new reproductive technology has the potential to bring immense pleasure to infertile couples, and to prevent the birth of babies with severe congenital handicaps and diseases such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis. However, the potential is also there, and at present being used, to determine the sex of the embryo and hence to bring about the abortion of female foetuses. In India alone, it is estimated that between 1978 and 1983, around 78,000 female foetuses were aborted after a sex determination test.

The benefits of the new technology can be closely controlled by the state and offered to the "perfect" couple in order to have the "perfect" baby. In these hands, in many ways it increases the powerlessness of women and brings alienation even to conception and childbirth.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Women's sexual needs and pleasures are not only ignored and suppressed by the whole state and religious machinery, but women world-wide are exploited and violated sexually. Within marriage in this, and most countries, rape is not an offence. Pornography and sexual violence against women are promoted in advertising, films and videos, so that women's bodies become commodities themselves.

The total degradation of third world women by western men on sex tours is growing big business. Sex tours provide the second or third most important source of foreign exchange in Thailand and the Philippines, where Americans, British and Australians go. Women are "bought" in advance from brochures. Every Sunday, a planeload of men leave Amsterdam for a sex tour in Bangkok. The women used in this way get a tiny fraction of the fee and are in great danger from violence and drugs.

Also complicating the issue of sexual violence against women, is the racist ideology that it is black men who are violent to white women. This lie has been used historically and in the present, to attack black men, often through lynching.

Historically, there are many examples of how white women's vulnerability to physical violence from men has been used to bring in oppressive legislation. For instance, in 1926 a White Woman's Protection Ordinance was passed in Papua (New Guinea), then under British rule, which introduced the death penalty for the crime of rape of any European female.

In a similar way, class has interacted with sexual exploitation. In that working class and peasant women have been considered "fair game" for seduction or rape by upper class men. Such men can use their social and monetary power to force women to comply and suffer no reproach from society afterwards. Similarly many, many women suffer sexual harassment at work, from bosses and supervisors: ranging from verbal remarks, through touching and mauling to outright blackmail or intimidation.

Female sexuality does not belong to a private sphere which floats free from economic and political affairs. Nor is it simply an expression of economic relations; it does hold a fundamental challenge to patriarchy.

Feminists have challenged powerful myths in our society: such as that sex is purely a natural phenomenon and therefore apolitical; that the natural expression of sexuality is what we know as heterosexuality; and that a woman's sense of her own sexuality is natural rather than constructed by social and economic factors.

In 1975, came the women's movement's sixth demand: 'An end to discrimination against lesbians, and for a woman's right to determine her sexuality'. This was the beginnings of a positive commitment to female eroticism, as something powerful and autonomous, which is shared by heterosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals, and breaks down barriers between them. Femininity could then be celebrated rather than shunned. It could be positive and strong as well as sensual, desiring as well as desirable. It would not necessarily deny men, and it certainly would not rely on them. It would be what women wanted to be, not what men decreed.

Margaret Thatcher
Oppressor and an oppressed sister?
Dear Editor,

I've been following with interest the 'Glimpses into Herstory' articles and had intended to give a more considered reply to many of the points it gives rise to. For instance, the idea of childbirth as part of the Marxian concept of 'Reproduction' that I felt needed some points to be made. It is highly inappropriate to write of a "positive commitment to female eroticism" when the articulate sections of the women's movement in Britain are racked by a debate on the nature and expression of female eroticism. To many women, schooled in activity against pornography and the debasement of women, the advocacy of women-orientated eroticism/pornography and sado-masochist practices, which reproduce a mirror image of the power relations condemned when committed by men on women, is far from given recognition as an acceptable expression of femininity. Is it femininity expressed through decorative fashion? Do not female soldiers react as their equally trained male counterparts? Is macho behaviour restricted only to sections of the male population? Are there no men who are gentle, considerate and caring? Is it only women who are peace activists? These are some of the characteristics or qualities banded about in definition of femininity, and the subjectiveness of what is erotic and what is pornography makes for a chasm in arguments.

What could have been developed, and hopefully will be in future articles, is that femininity would be what women wanted to be, and not what men decreed". The obvious challenge to heterosexuality means that there should be a clarification on opposition to the anti-gay legislation.

It has been a universal feature of the human species that a sizeable minority of people are attracted sexually towards their own sex. And for this they have been subject to various social sanctions. That there should be defence of consenting adults against attacks from the state and popular prejudices should be part of a political platform.

There is an unfortunate tendency within the gay movement which identifies one's own sexual orientation as the over-riding criteria to judge others by. Thus, gay fascist skinheads are accepted as a legitimate part of the movement despite their politics, and self-indulgence regardless of the cost to others in emotional or physical terms is all part of the scene. Whilst challenging that situation by supporting the more progressive elements, the limitations and political inadequacies of the organised gay movement should not be allowed to obscure defence of an individual's sexuality. That point is not clearly spelt out but taken as read in the article.

BELIEVE ME, KATE, AS A FEMINIST MYSELF, I'M ONLY TRYING TO POINT OUT AREAS WHERE LACK OF THEORY PERHAPS PREVENTS YOU FROM PERCEIVING THE TRUE NATURE OF YOUR OPPRESSION.
Teaching girls to be wives and mothers

This aspect of their oppression, more than any other, has been discovered by women coming together in small groups and has led to much feminist research into education and culture over the last thirty years.

From the first days of life, boys and girls are treated differently, with boys being praised and encouraged in active, boisterous, exploratory and self-willed behaviour and girls being talked to, cuddled and encouraged to be quiet and conforming. Pre-school children learn much from copying and modelling themselves on others and get the same message from home, television and books.

Once at school, not only does this continue, but the historical legacy of teaching girls to be wives and mothers has in no way been overcome.

Less surprising perhaps when we remember that although about 60% of teachers are women, 97% of the people involved in the "government of education" are male. In 1977, for every boy who passed O level cookery there were 61 girls. For every girl who passed O level woodwork, there were 166 boys.

The deep and hidden nature of discrimination in schools was revealed in the work done by Delia Spender into the way teachers behave. She discovered that teachers mete out preferential treatment to boys on an astonishing scale without realising they are doing it.

By taping lessons, she found that teachers spend about two thirds of their classroom time with boys. Girls had to wait longer for the teachers' attention. Teachers knew more personal details about their boy pupils, preferred teaching them and expected them to do better. They also commended some behaviour in boys whilst demeaning it in girls - for example, elaborate or careful presentation of work.

When these things are pointed out to the teachers, they find it difficult to give more than 40% of their time to girls, although once the students are told about it, girls are quite capable of asserting themselves and challenging the boys.

In addition to the methods used in teaching, all subjects tend to start from the male experience, from reading schemes through history (Egyptian queens?, suffragettes?), geography (Third World farmers mainly women?) and science.

Careers guidance still channel students into traditional sex-typed occupations. This is reinforced by what children see in the school hierarchy, where male teachers predominate in senior posts and the sciences and in headships, whilst low paid jobs of dinner ladies and cleaners are all done by women.

Changing Education

Having made their second demand "equal education opportunity" the women's movement in the west has put much energy into trying to change the educational system. Except for the theor-
In many Third World countries, women are denied any education at all except in the upper classes. Nawal El-Saadawi has written passionately of her own struggle for education in Egypt. One of the first tasks and one of the most popular, of any liberation movement, is to combat illiteracy, especially among women. Visitors returning from such places as Guinea Bissau, Nicaragua, Eritrea and Palestine always describe the enthusiasm for schools - usually held alongside work or military action. One of the big changes for women in socialist China has been the opening up of educational opportunities for all women.

In the Third World

Images in Culture

Women's psychological subordination is not, of course, confined to formal education. Indeed, even as children, the images of women portrayed in the culture of society - the media, writing, music, art - have a tremendous and largely hidden effect. In a country such as Britain, people's culture has been largely taken over by imperialism and promotes imperialist ideology in a variety of ways.

In complete contrast to this, there are cultures of peoples resisting imperialism and cultures of socialist societies; so in examining our own culture, we must be clear about its nature and its particularity to British imperialism.

As well as promoting imperialism, and bound up with that very closely, our culture promotes men, and largely ignores women, especially in the creative fields. Men control the means of expression - from the press and broadcasting, to advertising, film, publishing and even criticism - by occupying dominant positions within them.

It is also true to say, of course, that those controllers are also white, and ruling class, thereby promoting racism and anti-working class propaganda. Thus for most women in this country, culture is alienated on two scores. Black women are almost totally alienated although many turn to their own communities and culture which forms part of their resistance.

Even 'factual' aspects of the media, such as the news, are extremely sexist. A spot check on two national newspapers revealed that on 28th January, 1981, the news pages of 'The Guardian' included reports of 237 named individuals, of whom 19 were female. 'The Sunday Times' that week, featured 14 women among 181 individuals.

Racism and sexism

For black women and girls, in imperialist countries such as ours, the role sexism plays in education and culture is often overshadowed by racism. In the book 'The Heart of the Race', the authors, and the women speaking through the book, are in no doubt as to priorities:

"For Black schoolgirls sexism has, it is true, played an insidious role in our lives. It has influenced our already limited career choices and has scarred our already tarnished self-image. But it is racism which has determined the schools we can attend and the quality of education we receive in them.

"So it is our consciousness as Black people, rather than as feminists, which has led us to take collective action against the education authorities. For us to campaign for non-sexist text books or career guidance, when the racism in those areas has already determined what our daughters do, or to demand their right to do motor mechanics or play football, when our sons could aspire to nothing else, would be a denial of reality. Nevertheless, the campaigns we have taken up as mothers, teachers and schoolgirls, have been given added strength and direction by the experience we have brought to them as women."

Black women in this country have in some areas tackled the racist and sexist education system head on. Such campaigns as Saturday schools, where children are taught their own history and importance, and rejection of labelling black children as ESN and dumping them in special units, have won victories in the 1970's. At the same time, black women are taking up any adult education openings and struggling against all odds to catch up on what they were denied at school.

Images in Culture

Women's psychological subordination is not, of course, confined to formal education. Indeed, even as children, the images of women portrayed in the culture of society - the media, writing, music, art - have a tremendous and largely hidden effect. In a country such as Britain, people's culture has been largely taken over by imperialism and promotes imperialist ideology in a variety of ways.

In complete contrast to this, there are cultures of peoples resisting imperialism and cultures of socialist societies; so in examining our own culture, we must be clear about its nature and its particularity to British imperialism.

As well as promoting imperialism, and bound up with that very closely, our culture promotes men, and largely ignores women, especially in the creative fields. Men control the means of expression - from the press and broadcasting, to advertising, film, publishing and even criticism - by occupying dominant positions within them.

It is also true to say, of course, that those controllers are also white, and ruling class, thereby promoting racism and anti-working class propaganda. Thus for most women in this country, culture is alienated on two scores. Black women are almost totally alienated although many turn to their own communities and culture which forms part of their resistance.

Even 'factual' aspects of the media, such as the news, are extremely sexist. A spot check on two national newspapers revealed that on 28th January, 1981, the news pages of 'The Guardian' included reports of 237 named individuals, of whom 19 were female. 'The Sunday Times' that week, featured 14 women among 181 individuals.

In the Third World

Images in Culture

Women's psychological subordination is not, of course, confined to formal education. Indeed, even as children, the images of women portrayed in the culture of society - the media, writing, music, art - have a tremendous and largely hidden effect. In a country such as Britain, people's culture has been largely taken over by imperialism and promotes imperialist ideology in a variety of ways.

In complete contrast to this, there are cultures of peoples resisting imperialism and cultures of socialist societies; so in examining our own culture, we must be clear about its nature and its particularity to British imperialism.

As well as promoting imperialism, and bound up with that very closely, our culture promotes men, and largely ignores women, especially in the creative fields. Men control the means of expression - from the press and broadcasting, to advertising, film, publishing and even criticism - by occupying dominant positions within them.

It is also true to say, of course, that those controllers are also white, and ruling class, thereby promoting racism and anti-working class propaganda. Thus for most women in this country, culture is alienated on two scores. Black women are almost totally alienated although many turn to their own communities and culture which forms part of their resistance.

Even 'factual' aspects of the media, such as the news, are extremely sexist. A spot check on two national newspapers revealed that on 28th January, 1981, the news pages of 'The Guardian' included reports of 237 named individuals, of whom 19 were female. 'The Sunday Times' that week, featured 14 women among 181 individuals.
We don't need another hero

This illustrates that not only are women depicted in sexist ways—by advertisers, pin-ups etc., but also women are in all other respects just ignored. Women writers and artists have great difficulty promoting their work both now and historically—as in many other fields, our history has been taken away. The last decade has seen some progress in some aspects, especially publishing, with the Women’s Press and Virago promoting women’s work.

Bread and Roses

The exploitation of women both within art, literature and other cultural expressions, and by their exclusion from it, is a large and complex area. There have been many clashes between the women’s movement and the liberal left over such matters, as the latter often find it difficult to accept that any work of art can be sexist. But as Marxist-Leninists we need to be clear in our understanding of English culture as an expression of the ideology of the ruling class, and to be sharp in picking up the sexism within that.

In promoting socialism, do not let us forget the tremendous creative energy which can be set free in such a society. This side of life, denied to the working class and especially to women, for so long, is one very important reason for pursuing the struggle.... Women want bread, but they also want roses.

Celebrate

Women do two thirds of the world’s work, earn less than five percent of the world’s income, and own one percent of the world’s assets.

Women

“The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the pre-condition for its victory”.

WOMENS STRUGGLE ARE EVERYWHERE...
This, the last article in the series on women, will look to the future. Women, a society where women are free from oppression and exploitation, both, and of all its forms, the history of oppression of women, and their struggle against it, and of the many different forms of oppression in society. For women to break free from these chains, it is necessary to understand the relationships between these different forms of oppression, and how they are interlinked. Often, one form of oppression will suffer national oppression. In order to end these three forms of oppression and their inter-relationship in most practical struggles.

For example, a black, working class woman in Britain, is beaten up by her husband. She is faced not only with the violent expression of her oppression as a woman, but also by the racial state which makes her class oppression dangerous for her family, and her class oppression which makes her struggle against her parent almost impossible. The struggle in which they are involved shows a similar pattern of the complex nature of their exploitation and oppression.

The struggle for women's liberation in the world today is between imperialism and the struggle against imperialism. This is the case for both women's oppression, as for class and national oppression. These three oppressions cannot win their freedom without overthrowing imperialism. To win the struggle, it is vital to know who are our enemies and who are our friends. It is often necessary to unite to defeat the main enemy and part of the others. Often, one side is an anti-imperialist, often, one side is a colonialist. In the world today, it is necessary to defeat imperialism and its general system, often changing from one to another. It is the case for both women's oppression, as for class and national oppression. These three oppressions cannot win their freedom without overthrowing imperialism.

In the new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

The main contradiction in the world today is between imperialism and the struggle against imperialism. This is the case for both women's oppression, as for class and national oppression. These three oppressions cannot win their freedom without overthrowing imperialism.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.

In new China, since liberation, the Constitution has stipulated equality in all aspects of life. There is no special treatment of any group of women. Women are not paid less than men, and are not paid equal pay, but special protection is required. For women, children, to divorce proceedings, against discrimination etc.

So, it is clear that women are not the only ones fighting against oppression - in whatever sphere that there is a part of the anti-imperialist struggle. This is something for women to celebrate. It is not a question of how many women there are in a country, or how many women there are fighting. It is a question of how many women are fighting for their rights, their children, their health, their freedom. It is a question of whether women are fighting for their rights, for their children, for their health, for their freedom.
Thinking About Women

Barbara Flaherty

In International Women's Day, on this day, we think of women in the world who are suffering oppression, both because of legal and social status, as well as by the hands of men.

In every society on earth, to a greater or lesser extent, women are considered inferior to men. Women's oppression takes many forms: economic, political, social, cultural, and sexual. Women are oppressed both directly and indirectly by means of ideology. Ideological oppression is particularly effective because even men who believe in a natural belief in their own superiority and take away their will to fight back.

Although it is true that men as a sex oppress women as a sex, men cannot be blamed for being oppressors. It is true that they were brought into the individually oppressed sex. On the other hand, there is no one to help them.

In history by class oppression, they do all they can to exploit their situation. They are not satisfied with being members of the dominant sex in this society, which dominates the state, the family, the church, the legal profession, the medical profession, etc. In fact, every institution which makes important decisions regarding the lives of women in this country - they are inferior to men in all of these institutions - there is a woman's voice in the institution. There are some individuals who are aware of this oppression. They fight the imposed terms that are imposed on them and criticize it in every institution, in those women. The voice of the society, the men and the support they give is important.

There are also many women, because they are victims of ideological oppression, who have no contact with men in the definition of women as inferior beings, and behave accordingly.

RELIGION AND WOMEN

One of the most important tools of ideological oppression in the world, throughout the centuries, has been religion - the "opiate of the people" as Marx rightly called it.

The dominant religion of this country is Christianity, and it has played a major role in the oppression of women by men. Christianity, of course, is a male-dominated religion: the central figure is Jesus Christ, God, the Devil, the twelve disciples, all the main characters in the Bible were male. Also the popes, the hierarchy, all the different denominations, and until very recently, even church ministers, priests, vicars, etc. Women were not allowed to look at the Bible. It is true that it is considered very important for a woman to know how to read the Bible. However, the role played by the only two female characters in the Bible is of great significance: Eve and the Virgin Mary.

The second part of this article is from the first chapter of Genesis. Adam was the man in God's image. Eve was his "helpmate." Part of Eve's punishment for her sin of disobedience to God was "Ishalt serve thy husband" because her sin was regarded as greater than Adam's. What exactly was her sin? She ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she gave some of it to her husband, so that he could make her own decisions, rather than accept the version of reality given by God and Adam. But a lot has changed in this respect, especially for Catholic women, who are still denied the right to make decisions regarding child-bearing.

According to the Christian doctrine, we are all sinners because we are descendants of Adam and Eve. So unfortunate was Eve's hunger for knowledge, that every human being is by nature condemed to hell because of it. This is where Jesus came in, he offers the way to salvation.

Now, in order to be worthy of the honour of giving birth to him, had to be pure, therefore had to be a virgin. The Virgin Mary, who is the mother of Christ, was chosen and is the only one to give birth to Jesus. The message of the Christian gospel is that women have the right to give birth to Jesus. However, the reality is that the oppression has changed because some women's struggles have been successful. In particular, the Suffragists' struggle for women to own property, for faster divorces, for legal and safe contraceptive methods, for equal rights to children, to property and to divorce for legal pay in some occupations. For these benefits, single parent mothers and other important women have struggled and achieved success through the struggle for women's liberation. Similarly, the struggle for legal reforms has been to open up the way for many numbers of women to fight for liberation and equality in this country.

As women, we all live in a country. We live under men's laws, in a male economy, where power is defined in male terms. If we were a man, we would have some dominance against men by now, but we're not. We need men, we give birth to them. John Lennon said this.

But there is still a long way to go.

As women gain strength, the oppression becomes more subtle. Women's issues are not forced on them, but they are subtly encouraged. Women's rights and duties are not discussed as much as they should be. Feminism is a struggle for women's rights and duties.

For women, the message is clear: it is the old Christian message again. If you love somebody, you put their needs first, and deny your own needs.

For men, the concept of love tends to get confused with sexual desire. The phrase "to make love" means to have sex, not to show respect, and she'll do anything you want.

POPULAR IMAGES

A whole range of popular cultural phenomena, products of twenty-first century imperialism, often reflect a relationship between the sexes, as we have seen. They are also a major cause of sexual feelings for each other, and their genuine affection for each other. These include fashions, whose purpose, besides persuading people to spend a lot of money, is to stimulate the most passionate sexual attractiveness, to the detriment of any understanding between individuals. Also pop music, which appeals to young women by promising "love songs" by means of a modern media image. In addition, there is a lot of popular literature aimed at young women's magazines, teenage magazines, romantic novels, and comic type, all instilling in women the idea that they should catch a man, and the myth that when you are married, you live happily ever after. Imperialism seeks to use women, the beauty of the woman and men see to it that they do not live happily ever after. In a short article such as this, it is possible to make only a few points. It is much more difficult to resolve the marriage and family, and how it is oppressive to women. Hopefully, this article will provoke some discussion.
Dear Editor,

In September's 'Class Struggle' article on women, it was argued that if imperialism granted equal pay to women, provided childcare, ended domestic (i.e. women's) labour, etc., then imperialism could not function.

I am not sure this is true.

Equal pay for work of equal value is a progressive demand but it does not necessarily challenge the capitalist basis of economic exploitation, as so clearly exposed by Marx.

Many aspects of women's unpaid labour could be privatised and be a source of profit.

What working class men do in their homes is not an issue which challenges the fundamental nature of capitalist economic exploitation.

Obviously, struggles to increase equality between men and women are progressive. But we should not underestimate the ability of the bosses (usually men) to grant reforms, in the face of strong opposition, to adapt to save their despicable (and male-dominated) system.

Obviously, imperialism benefits from the oppression and extra-exploitation of women. Opposition to this is one thing; to argue that to end these things would destroy the basis of imperialism, is another issue.

A mere male, Birmingham.

Class Struggle
WOMEN'S PAID EMPLOYMENT

If we look at the official figures for women's earnings, we can see the gap between men's and women's earnings. The average weekly earnings for the top 10% of women were £303.02 a week in 1989, compared with £319.07 for men. For the bottom 10%, the figures were £113.08 for women, compared to £147 for men. Averaging out the levels across the earnings scale, the figures are £182.03 for women and £269.05 for men.

It should also be remembered that official earnings figures in Britain overestimate women's average earnings. Official statistics are based on the New Earnings Survey which only covers those who pay tax. Many part-time women workers, often the lowest-paid, such as cleaners, care assistants, homeworkers etc., do not count officially because they do not earn enough to be paying tax. The averages, therefore, are exaggerated.

In spite of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, inequality at work persists and is in some ways increasing. This can be seen in two ways. Firstly, the figures show that women are a minority in many of the "top jobs". Even where there are a majority of women in a particular area of work, the principal jobs are held by men. Secondly, women are more likely to be concentrated in low-paid and undervalued occupations.

TOP JOBS

6.5% of MPs and 13% of life peers are women. In the judiciary, only one woman sits in the Court of Appeal and a handful are judges. Stipendiary magistrates are often women. Women make up 0.6% of executive directors and 3.9% of non-executive directors. At universities, women are in a tiny minority in the top jobs.

LOW-PAID SECTORS

1987 figures show the concentration of women in low-paid sectors of work: Almost 80% of those employed in medical and other health services are women. In footwear and clothing, 73.5% are women. In personal services (hairdressing, cleaning) 71%; in hotel and catering 66.6%; in education 68.5%; in retail and distribution 63%; in sanitary services 60.4%. It is worth noting that many of these jobs reflect the jobs that women are traditionally supposed to do at home, domestic work servicing the family.

PART-TIME WORK

The low pay associated with such sectors is reinforced by the growing importance of part-time work. Half the women employed in Britain work part-time and a growing number of part-time women workers are being made part-time. Although women are always underpaid, this is to suit women's needs, the spread of part-time work now means that many women who want to work full-time are forced into taking two or three part-time jobs. Part-time workers have been shown to be consistently lower-paid than full-time workers, with fewer benefits such as sick pay or pension rights and fewer employment rights.

HOMESTORE

The most extreme examples of low pay in Britain today are those doing paid work at home. In a recent survey of 21 women doing paid work at home in West Yorkshire, over half (11 women) were earning less than 50 pence an hour. They were working in a variety of industries ranging from knitting and clothing to electronics to printing. In all but three cases, the women gave the lack of childcare as the main reason for taking on work at home, however badly paid.

Enough research has now been done to show that homeworking, at these extreme low rates of pay, is common in many black communities in Britain. On top of the difficulties all women face in combining their work at home and outside, black women face racism both in the wider community and at work outside. For many black women, homework is the most important source of income.

DOMESTIC WORK

In Britain, today women still do most of the work in the home, particularly caring for dependants, both children and elderly or disabled relatives. This work has always been undervalued. Unusually, in 1987, an insurance company, the Legal and General, actually put a figure on this unpaid work:

The estimated that: ...the British housewife had a commercial value of £370 a week, which was twice the average weekly wage. In working out these figures, our research revealed that a housewife is on call all seven days of a 92-hour week. Her jobs include shopper, waitress, window cleaner, nurse, driver, cleaner, cook and child-minder. She is also the financial expert. In nine out of ten households, the wife does the finances.

Only 1% of children under five have places in local authority day nurseries. Only 28% of women with children under five go out to work and the majority can only work part-time. Most women have to make their own arrangements with child-minders and nurseries. They have found that even with the low hourly rate of many child-minders, they cannot afford to pay child-minders out of the low-paid, part-time wages they can earn.

The current campaign from the government and others to promote the 1990's as the decade of the working woman...
NEVER DONE

has had little impact outside some firms which are beginning to provide better opportunities for some of their top women and expensive nurseries for some top-paid women. The current cost of childcare in central London, for example, is over £400 a month.

Other campaigns have got off the ground to provide cheaper childcare to more women, with various schemes such as childcare vouchers, to be paid for by employers or workplace nurseries. These are, of course, to be welcomed. But they are mainly concentrated in the Southeast.

It is widely known that Britain has the worst record on childcare in Europe. However, recent figures show that as important as childcare is the responsibility for elderly dependants or disabled relatives. As the state cuts back on care and promotes 'care in the community', this means more work for women in the home.

FLEXIBILITY FOR WHOM?

Women in Britain and other countries of Western Europe will play an increasing role in the workforce but we are being told that we have to be flexible. Although women welcome any flexibility that fits in with their needs, present trends to make work more flexible seem to be more about reducing costs for employers and finding ways round employment law.

In Britain, by 1985 one third of all workers, and half of working women, could already be classified as "flexible" in that they did not have full-time permanent jobs. European employers look with envy at Britain, where temporary working is so widespread.

Present restrictions on temporary working are under attack in much of Europe. Holland has a ban on running one temporary contract end to end (a common trick in Britain).

It is feared that 1992 will be used as a reason to lower standards of employment law to the British level. A newer form of casual labour, work has been widely used in the Netherlands where women have zero hour contracts. Women are not guaranteed any work or pay but break their contract if they take other work or stray from the phone and thus make themselves unavailable. 120,000 women in the Netherlands are on such contracts and supermarkets in Britain are beginning to use them.

In France, temporary employment crept in under a 1979 law which permitted fixed term (i.e. temporary) contracts for the first time. Since then, there have been a series of measures culminating in a 1986 order which gives the employer a free hand provided the contract refers to a task not a job. The West German government brought in temporary contracts in 1985, arguing that it would reduce overtime. Now a substantial number of new workers are only given temporary contracts.

Many more examples could be given to illustrate these trends. Most European countries also have stronger employment protection than in Britain, for example, minimum wages. However there are many ways that employers find to get round such laws. For example, they make homeworkers self-employed to avoid minimum wage laws. In some countries, minimum wage legislation excludes part-timers.

SOLIDARITY

1992 will be used to try and reduce gains that have already been won. But we can learn from women's position in different countries of Europe that capitalism has compromised in different ways in different countries. We should use the opportunity to build unity with women elsewhere and learn from the examples of struggle and solidarity.

In Norway, for example, the Women's Front promotes the fight for a 6 hour day for all workers. As long as "normal" work is seen as being the eight hour day, part-time workers will always be treated as second-class workers. The demand for a six hour day for all workers enables this gap to be closed.

In the Netherlands, the tradition of linking community and union organisation, has been revived through the Women's Union whose membership includes women in paid employment and those not in paid work. The Norwegian Women's Front also campaigns on issues other than women's struggles, for example, against pornography and sex tours in Third World countries.

We know also from our own experience in Britain the importance of building solidarity across countries. We have already begun to make links with some campaigns in Europe and at the same time, increasing exploitation of the people of the Third World, are already under way.

Homeworkers campaigns in Britain have already begun to organise on an international basis, particularly of men, with organisations such as SEWA, the Self Employed Women's Association, in India who have internationally given the lead in organising women working at home and in the "casual" economy.

Imperialism operates on a world scale and it is also gives us many opportunities to build solidarity with women around the world, as the following example from the Philippines shows.

Women do two thirds of the world's work, earn less than five percent of the world's income, and own one percent of the world's assets.