

Speech by HELKE SANDER, representative of the Action Council for the Liberation of Women, to the S.D.S. in Frankfurt.

By the present separation between private life and social life, women are persistently thrown back into individual conflicts requiring solutions in the private sphere. They are still educated for private life, for the family, which, for its part, is dependent on the conditions of production against which we are struggling. The education for a specific role, the inculcated feeling of inferiority, the contradiction between their own expectations and the demands of society all generate a constant feeling of guilt for being unable to do justice to the demands put upon them, for having to choose between alternatives which in each case involve the renunciation of vital needs.

Most women are not political, because politics has hitherto always been defined one-sidedly, and has never included their needs. They are therefore forced to persist in their appeal to the authority of the law, as they have not become aware of the fact that the realisation of their demands will break through the boundaries of the system.

The easiest groups to be politicised are educated women with children. They are the most aggressive and are the least vocal. Those women who today are in a position to study, do not owe this as much to the bourgeois movement of emancipation, as to economic necessity, and when they have children, they find themselves thrown back into old behaviour patterns, which, thanks to their emancipation, they had already overcome. Their studies are discontinued or delayed and their intellectual development comes to a standstill or is considerably reduced, a result of the demands of the family. Added to this is the insecurity arising out of the fact that they have not succeeded in resolving the conflict between being a blue-stocking and becoming a housewife, between building up a career, which has itself to be paid for with a considerable loss of happiness, or becoming a woman in the sphere of consumption. In other words, it is especially these more conscious women who have learned through experience that the bourgeois road to emancipation is the wrong one, and who have learned that they cannot emancipate themselves through the competitive struggle. They have learned that the general principle of productivity has become the decisive factor within existing conditions, and that the road to emancipation is preconditioned by the ends which determine it.

These women learn very quickly when they have children that all their privileges are of no use to them, and they are thus the first to be in a position to throw light on this scrap heap of social life, which is synonymous with carrying the class struggle into married life and into existing conditions. Thus the man finds himself in the objective role of the exploiter or class enemy, which, of course, he does not want subjectively, but which has also been forced on him by a society based on the productivity principle and which maps out for him the role he has to play.

We cannot solve the problem of the oppression of women individually, and we cannot wait for its solution until after the revolution, as a mere political and economic revolution does not abolish the repression of private life, as is demonstrated in the socialist countries.

We struggle for conditions of life which will eliminate competition between man and woman. This is only possible by transformation of the productive relations, and with it of power relations in order to create a truly democratic society.

As women with children display the greatest preparedness for solidarity and are most ready to be politicised, we concentrated our activity on their conflicts. This does not mean that we do not take seriously the conflicts of students without children, nor does it mean that in spite of the common characteristics to all oppressed women, we are not aware of the specific mechanisms of class oppression: it merely means that we want to work as effectively as possible and that we have to create a starting point which will permit us to approach the problem in a systematic and rational way.

As the initial efforts made by us to deal with these conflicts together with the S.D.S. and within the S.D.S. failed, we withdrew and worked on our own.

When we started half a year ago, most comrades made fun of us. Now they reproach us for having withdrawn, they try to prove to us that we have entirely wrong theories, they try to impute to us the opinion that women do not need men for their emancipation and similar idiocies, none of which we have ever maintained. They emphasise that they too are oppressed, which we know in any case. We merely cannot see why we should any longer accept their oppression, with which they in turn oppress us, without defending ourselves against it. It is precisely because we are of the opinion that emancipation is only possible as an overall social emancipation that we are, after all, here. For it must be said at least once that society consists of more women than men, and it is high time that we raised the claims flowing from this and demanded that these will be considered in future planning. Should the SDS not be able to advance rapidly to this insight, then we shall have to embark on a power struggle, something we would much rather avoid - it would be a waste of energy on our part. For we shall win this struggle - historically right is on our side.

Both the helplessness and the arrogance we have been forced to show here does not give us pleasure.

We are helpless because we feel that we ought to be able to expect from progressive men that they understand the explosive character of our conflicts. Our arrogance is the result of our insight that you are such blockheads that you cannot see that without the least help from you, people to whom you have never given a single thought, have suddenly organised themselves, and, moreover, in numbers, which you would take for the beginning of the new dawn if they were workers. Comrades! Our meetings are unbearable! You are riddled with inhibitions which you have to release as aggression against comrades who say something stupid or that you already know..... Why don't you discuss before you plan your campaigns how they can be executed? Why do you all buy Reich? Why do you speak here about class struggle, and at home about orgasm difficulties? Is that not a subject for the SDS? These repressions we will not tolerate any longer.....