

SCARLET WOMEN IO

Newsletter of the Socialist Feminist Current of the Womens
Liberation Movement
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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Socialist Feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. By the patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed,

an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex, although working men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working women. Sisterhood is our defence against oppression, and as such is part of our revolutionary consciousness.

Socialists sometimes see the struggle as being about a change in the economic structure alone. For us the struggle is about a change in total social relations. We are concerned to develop an understanding of the real relationship between male supremacy and class society. As Socialist Feminists we have to examine looking for is nothing less than a total redefinition of socialist thought and practice. We are working towards a socialism which seeks to abolish patriarchy.

What this means for Scarlet Women

We want to publish papers, letters, articles, ideas that develop the thought and effectiveness of socialist feminism. The debate about the class struggle and relating to left groups can take place in our pages only if contributions are based on the belief that an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement and also on the belief that autonomous movements have the right to define their own oppression and the struggle against it.

F.A.S.T Newsletter produced by women active in Rape Crisis and Women's Aid Groups for women only. Its aims: to generate a national network and to facilitate a dialogue among feminists working to eliminate male violence against women. To support those who have been violated so that together we can fight back. Subscription: £2 for 6 issues (25p+8p.p&p per copy)

Editorial

This issue on violence against women merely scratches the surface of women's experience at the hands of men in patriarchal class society. There are articles on rape and women-beating, but male violence is more subtle and widespread than that, and we've tried to include other articles which reflect our realisation that violence is all around, everywhere you look. Clitoridectomy, for instance is a particularly barbaric crime against female children which is hardly ever mentioned in diatribes chronicling cruelty to children in the International Year of the Child.

It is also important to look at the cultural and legal systems which reflect and support actual physical violence: pornography and what it's about; the law; the way violence is legitimated, surrounding us with the constant threat of it; our day-to-day experiences of the violation of our integrity and autonomy. We would have liked to include something about sexual harassment at work - most women in paid employment have to put up with daily a range of humiliating experiences, from having to look at pin-ups, being assessed as to our sex appeal, etc. to physical assaults on our person. The two sisters in the Brent branch of Nalگو who courageously brought this issue out into the open by making formal complaints against their male bosses in the local authority, and who had to put up with a great amount of vilification because of it, have led the way in this fight. They didn't win their case (so far) - on

the contrary they were told that being treated as a sex object by men was part of the job - but it is up to the rest of us now to take up the issue in our own trade unions. (We could start by collecting a dossier of women's experiences to show how common this is and how many forms it takes.)

We have only briefly touched on the psychological violence used by men in the articles 'A Pig and a Poke'. Like physical violence it takes many forms and really deserves a whole issue to itself. The power of mental cruelty is referred to in the article by the English Collective of Prostitutes' article about mothers and custody, and again here we are trying to piece together the forces that presume to define us and keep us in our place.

Looking at the mass of evidence which shows how pervasive is men's suppression of women, the question of 'who is the main enemy?' is raised in a particularly acute way. Is it men? Or the class/capitalist system? Or both because of the integral relationship between the two? As we have said in previous issues, the combination of the power of men and the power of wealth is a particularly lethal one for women.

However, don't get too depressed by this issue. What we are trying to show is that women who are angry about violence will fight it, and there are many examples of women standing up to violence, often at personal risk. The women's march through Bradford after the latest 'Ripper' murder showed that where women are prepared to show their anger, other women will join in and show their feeling instead of bottling them up.

Finally, to Scarlet Women itself: as you'll see on the next page, there are proposals for changes afoot. While these are being discussed we hope to produce a further three issues - one on Women in Ireland which is being put together by sisters in Ireland; one on Imperialism for the next Socialist Feminist Conference; and before that, one on our sexuality and our right to control our fertility and those related issues being explored by sisters involved in the Campaign against the Corrie Bill. Start thinking and writing now!!

Note: we would like to thank Jane Fitzsimmons for letting us print her article on the sexual abuse of children originally written for the FAST newsletter. The latest issue of the newsletter, including articles on the Press and violence, the Left and Violence, amongst others, can be obtained for 25p plus postage from F.A.S.T the address of which you can find through WIRES.

SCARLET WOMEN wants to go on tour!

At the National Editorial Collective Meeting on 3rd/4th November it was agreed that we should try and make some changes to how Scarlet Women is produced and also its content.

As our limited rights to abortion, employment, equal pay, childcare, health, education, etc. are being attacked, we are being drawn down once again into the kind of activities and campaign many of us were involved with in 1974/75. It was out of the isolation many of us felt as lone or small groups of socialist feminists working in these campaigns that the present socialist feminist current, and Scarlet Women, developed. One of the aims of Scarlet

Women then, in addition to stimulating the development of a socialist feminist network, was to share our experiences of working around issues in different types of groups and campaigns, in order to develop our collective understanding of both the issues we were involved in and how to draw other people into the struggle and put across our ideas.

In the last year or so, while many women have continued to work around the same issues and others have become involved in a new range of feminist activities, there has also been a concentration on developing our ideas - our theory and identity as socialist feminists. Scarlet Women has tried to contribute to that process by concentrating its content on specific topics. We feel that it is now time perhaps to go back to the original aim of Scarlet Women and devote more space to how we are putting these ideas into practice. One of the problems in doing this is that many of us find it very difficult to be active and think about what we are doing at the same time (analytically, that is!). It is much easier to write about a specific event afterwards than to write a mid-stream account of what we are doing or trying to do. In fact, this was one of the reasons that Scarlet Women became less news-oriented over time, it was increasingly difficult to get sisters to write about what they were doing. And yet the mid-stream accounts of the problems, the small successes, the mistakes, the achievements, contain the details of political struggle which others can learn from.

We thought that one possible way to solve this problem would be to circulate the production of Scarlet Women around the regions, so that each issue would contain information about what sisters are doing in any one area at a given time. For example, if we in the North East were to produce an issue along these lines, we would include accounts of what different groups were doing, plus perhaps some articles on particular topics or ideas that we are concerned with. It might be useful to include a more general overview of the relationship between feminists and the left in the area (or different views on the same subject, etc.) The aim would be to give sisters in other areas a better idea of what, how and why we are doing what we do.

At the same time it would be important to have a core of sisters who could plan for future issues, provide continuity in the development of Scarlet Women, act as regional contacts, organise distribution, collect sales money, etc. If it was felt that a whole issue should be devoted to a particular topic, then this group would be primarily responsible for producing it.

To sum up, we are suggesting the following as a future structure for Scarlet Women:

1. That SW be produced on a regional basis, reflecting predominantly but not exclusively regional activities and ideas;
2. That there should be a National Editorial Group which is made up of, say, 2 sisters from each region who would be committed to being involved for at least 12 months to provide continuity; this Group could meet every 3 months in a different place, irrespective of whether there was an issue of SW ready for printing.

If these, or similar suggestions, were adopted it would be necessary to sort out practical problems like subscriptions, distribution, collection of sales money, reprinting, fundraising for travelling expenses for sisters involved who will have to travel for meetings, etc. We

envisage the target date for getting a new organisation working out and ready for start working to be the next socialist feminist conference which is planned for October 1980.

The next National Editorial Collective meeting at which we would like to discuss this proposal will be on February 24/25 at the Resource Centre, Bloom Street, Manchester.



Ban the Jab

A campaign against Depo-Provera has been formed in Britain. Depo-Provera is an injection which lasts 3-6 months. It is given to women to prevent pregnancy. The idea of an injection for birth control may sound very simple and attractive, but this drug has some very nasty side-effects. A doctor who conducted a follow-up survey in Britain on the drug has said:

“Depo-Provera is a very powerful steroid which distributes the body far more than oral contraceptives and has the disadvantage of casting at least three months and sometimes nine months after a single injection.”

The Campaign desperately needs money to print leaflets and run the campaign. Please send all donations [address.]

In Britain Depo is largely being used on black and working class women. It has and is being used on between 3 and 5 million women throughout the world, mainly in third world countries. We believe that women should have the right to choose whether or not to have children.

THE AIMS OF THE CAMPAIGN

1. Withdrawal of Depo-Provera
2. To expose the way in which Depo Provera has been developed, experimented and used on women, often without the prior knowledge and consent of the women involved
3. Free, safe and reliable contraception on demand - contraception that does not endanger people's health.

BUT EVERYBODY is against sexual terrorism against women....

Everybody is against sexual terrorism against women.

The bourgeois liberal society gasps with horror when a young person is assaulted, raped and possibly murdered, and it heaves a sigh of relief when the attacker is safely behind bars. The same society talks about the necessity to detect and isolate the “brutes”, the “animals”, and the “sexual perverts” so that women may walk the streets in peace.

So what is the problem?

The problem is that these attitudes, however well meant, are basically hypocritical, or even dishonest - and therefore have only obscured a social problem which has been an intrinsic part of all women's lives for far too long.

It is essential, therefore, for the WOMen's Liberation Movement to fully develop a comprehensive and comprehensible analysis of sexual violence, to expose the underlying assumptions concerning men's and women's roles in our society, and to place these assumptions in an historical, political and social context.

The first thing we have to do, is to broaden the definition of sexual violence.

We are not just talking about a brutal attack late at night in a dark alley, we are talking about something which goes on every day, in the streets, at work, in the schools, in pubs, cinema and restaurants.

All women in our culture have been subjected to sexual assault - in fact we are assaulted every single day of our lives. We are jostled in crowds and manhandled in trains, buses and tubes. We are leered at, stared at and whistled after - and above all, we are looked at, judged and evaluated as sex symbols wherever we go.

For a long time we have put up with it - as a source of irritation - inevitable - and even to some extent acceptable because we thought it meant we were attractive to men.

It has little to do with being attractive.

It is a tool of control and oppression.

It is a constant reminder of our own vulnerability, the fact that our sexuality does not belong to us, but that it is a commodity, to be valued, judged and ultimately taken, preferably with our passive consent, but if necessary, without it.

And if we should try to forget this, we have men's images of our bodies thrust upon us wherever we go, not only through pornography, but in magazines, on page three in the national gutter press, on advertising-boards, on television and in films.

And when we should try to object this, we are told that we are sour, frigid, supporters of Mary Whitehouse, embittered, jealous - and out to ruin a man's aesthetic pleasure.

But unless we lean to reliase fully that these social norms produce, must produce, the far more serious forms of sexual aggression - rape, flashing and the interference with children - we are not going to solve the problem.

We are not even able to discuss the problem seriously.

It was the Women's Liberation Movement which challenged the myths about sexual aggression towards women and introduced some radical ideas about men's and women's

position in our present society. So far they have - on the whole - neither been welcome nor accepted by the male dominated society.

The feminist ideology is painful - because it leaves no man off the hook.

It is so much easier to blame a few perverts - and a few loose women - and go on as before.

But for the first time we - the women - are not looking to men to improve our conditions.

We are taking the matters into our own hands.

We are fighting back.

For this reason we, the feminists, have been accused of creating conflict between the sexes, and - by socialists - factions in the class struggle.

We reject these accusations.

We believe that the conflicts were always there - created by a patriarchal society which - at least at times - was quite openly misogynist - and always based on principles of power and control.

The conflicts were there - glossed over by an uneasy truce because of women's social and economic position.

We have brought these conflicts into the open, given them names, and tried to analyse them.

We now see sexual aggression towards men as a tool of power in this very special hierarchy which exists between all men and all women in our society. It is a power hierarchy which cuts through the class system - and is not covered by any conventional class analysis.

This tool of power makes it possible for all men to keep all women in a permanent state of fear and intimidation, regardless of class or race.

Do the men know this?

We think they do.

That is why we now reject kind advice from the male dominated bourgeois society to lock our doors, close our curtains and not walk the streets after dark.

We see this kind of advice as part of the oppression - a constant reminder of our powerlessness.

To make us hurry back into the arms of our oppressor.

We object to having to cut down our range of activities - to be told how to behave and how to dress and where to go.

We are tired of having our lives defined and restricted by men because they have the power to terrorise us sexually.

We reject the bourgeois liberal society which sternly cries for revenge and harsh punishment when innocent victims are defled, but which accepts with a nudge and a wink and a grin the numerous accounts of "lusty" seductions.

We no longer believe that sex is fun when it takes place between unequal partners, and we demand the right to say no - whoever we are, wherever we go.

We also object to being called man-haters, humourless dykes or spoil-sports when we refuse to be made fun of through sexist jokes and flippant remarks.

As feminists - and as women - we deplore the fact that we live in a situation which forces us to consider all men potential rapists - but we have not created this situation and will not take the blame for it.

We are becoming more and more aware of the distrust, the fear and even hatred which exist between men and women in our society - but any peace so far has been on male terms, any compromise will be on male premises.

We are angry about this - and we want our anger to be seen.

We want the men - all men - maybe especially socialist men - to help and support us in this struggle.

We think they will benefit greatly from a system based on sexual equality - a system in which men may be regarded as friends and brothers.

But if they refuse to support us - we shall continue on our own.

Astrid Torud



The Castration of females: Clitoridectomy, Excision, and Infibulation

(taken from the proceedings of the International Tribunal on Crimes against women, compiled and edited by Diana E.H.Russell and Nicole Van de Ven, published by LES FEMMES, [address])

The word castration almost always refers to men; but anxious as men appear to be about it, females are much more widely subject to castration. We use the word to refer to clitoridectomy (the removal of the entire clitoris), excision (the removal of the clitoris and the adjacent parts of the labia minora or all the exterior genitalia except the labia majora), the infibulation (excision followed by the sewing of the genitals to obliterate the entrance to the vagina except for a tiny opening). In the testimony on medical crimes, the German women

referred to the removal of a woman's uterus and ovaries as castration; but we feel it preferable to use the word for the destruction of our sexuality.

The following testimony from Guinea was not given personally, but was brought by a group of French women who have been researching this topic for some time.

WITNESS: GUINEA

There was a wall around the place where we lived, from which you could see the big baths where women and men came to wash. It was there that one day I saw myself the savage mutilation called excision that is inflicted on the women of my country between the ages of 10 and 12, that is, a year before their puberty. F. was stretched out on the pebbles on the ground. There were six women surrounding her; the eldest, the woman who was to do the excision (the exciseuse), was of her own family. F. was being firmly held down by the women, who held her legs apart and made every effort to keep her still despite the desperate convulsions of her body.

The operation was done without any anesthetic, with no regard for hygiene or precautions of any sort. With the broken neck of a bottle, the old woman banged down hard, cutting into the upper part of my friend's genitals so as to make as wide a cut as possible, since "an incomplete excision does not constitute a sufficient guarantee against profligacy in girls."

The blunt glass of the bottle did not cut deeply enough into my friend's genitals and the exciseuse had to do it several more times. The blood gushed, my friend cried out, and the prayers being intoned could not drown her screams. When the clitoris had been ripped out, the women howled with joy, and forced my friend to get up despite a streaming hemorrhage, to parade her through the town. Dressed in a white loin cloth, her breasts bare, although prior to excision women never appear naked in public, she walked with difficulty.

Behind her a dozen or so women, young and not so young, were singing to the accompaniment of an instrument made of rings of gourd. They were informing the village that my friend was ready for marriage. In Guinea, in fact, no man marries a woman who has not been excised and who is not a virgin, with rare exception.

The wound takes 2 to 3 weeks to heal, and is horribly painful. My friend screamed every time she urinated. To alleviate the pain she carried a little jug of water with her, which she poured on herself as she urinated. She was lucky enough not to suffer complications; infection and painful side-effects due to the cutting on the urinary tract or the perineum frequently occur.

Among some of my friends a "nevrone" formed at the point where the nerve had been cut. This sets off flashing pains similar to those felt with amputated limbs.

In my country, Guinea, 85% of the women are today excised, and my country is said to be progressive. Clitoridectomy is practised in the Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, the Ivory Coast, among the Dogons of the Niger, the Mendingo's of Mali, the Toucouleu in the North of Senegal, and the Peuls, and among many other African tribes.

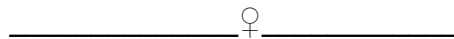
I would like to add that in some other countries this savage mutilation is not enough; it is also necessary to sew the woman up in order to really dispossess her of her body. After having cut, without the benefit of anesthetic, part of the large lips, they are brought together by piercing them with pins. This way they grow together, except for a space for the passage of blood and urine.

The young wife must, before her wedding night, have it reopened with a razor. Her husband can, moreover, always insist on having his wife sewn up again if he is thinking of leaving her for some time.

I appeal to the solidarity of women to make their dignity as human beings recognised, dignity which is denied by the dispossession of the bodies and souls.

I appeal to the solidarity of women to end patriarchal oppression and violence founded on the fear and hatred of our bodies.

I appeal to the solidarity of women to end these barbarous mutilations.



A PIG and a POKE

A woman's best friend is her gynaecologist.

That's what you think. But what do they think about you - especially when you're lying on the couch with your knees apart?

Professor P. Rhodes, who's a senior teacher of gynaecology in Newcastle Teaching Hospitals, presented a paper of 1984 proportions to a congress on Psychosomatic Medicine in 1971 (if you want to read the full paper, see the reference below). The paper starts off well by claiming that the gynaecologist is not dealing with "all the facets of a woman's existence" rather than a surgical problem - and that he (of course) must be "mature in outlook and not censorious of other people's behaviour".

We can tell things are going to get bad when he states that for the purposes of the paper the word 'sex' will "be restricted to those relationships between a man and a woman which are in some measure dependent upon and culminate in sexual intercourse" (no mention of lesbian or celibate women.)

Then the paper starts to get tricky. Rhodes claims that "the majority of patients with sexual difficulties present to the gynaecologist with an apparently physical complaint, It is here that he must display insight and avoid taking the patient at her own valuation. (Are you laughing or crying at this suggestion?)

Now the gynaecologist must decide how to persuade the woman she has nothing wrong physically (which I hadn't noticed doctors having a lot of problems with) and whether to pursue "psychological and psychophysical therapy himself." The following is a full reprint of the next three paragraphs of the paper.

"But if he decides to continue with the management of the patient he is very favourable placed. He has been the first to recognise the problem and by the intimate nature of the physical examination he establishes a rapport with the patient, based on contact, which is denied to other practitioners. He also has a chance to 'listen to nonverbal communication such as the racing pulse, the tender abdomen the tender pelvis and above all the reaction to vaginal examination with its obvious sexual overtones. Women who have difficulty in talking about sexual matters may be much more forthcoming about their problems if careful questions are posed as the vaginal examination is being made. Moreover, as anatomical areas are touched there is no doubt as to what is being referred to, for many women do not fully understand the meaning of the words the doctor may use. Ambiguity can be minimised and errors of communication lessened during the gynaecological examination.

The woman with the very tender abdomen and tender pelvis may have a physical lesion such as alpingtis or endometriosis. Postural backache too, by its effect in causing continued muscle activity, may be a cause of abdominal tenderness and, therefore, tenderness on bimanual examination. But may tender pelvis have a psychosexual basis which should not be ignored. They may at least show something of the patient's attitude to her body, in the direction of narcissism.

During the vaginal examination the response may point to an overt sexual problem. There may be undue anxiety with muscular spasm or such easy relaxation as to suggest sexual anaesthesia, but it must be remembered that physiotherapists and ballet dancers learn such muscle control that interpretation of the psychological state from physical signs needs great care."

Sex and the Gynaecologist
P. Rhodes

After you've picked yourself up off the floor you may realise why I wrote this for the Scarlet Women on Violence. What this man is recommending amounts to assault. Barbara Moyes has shown (New Society, 10th November 1977) what we all know; that women can only cope with internal examinations during pregnancy by believing that the doctor doesn't see them as an individual but as one of hundreds. And the assumptions he makes - about the heterosexuality of all women, about our normal passivity and position in any sexual act, our apparent amorality - we respond to the gynaecologist's poke exactly as we respond to a love (and watch those ballet dancers!) etc.etc.etc. - well, every time you read this you learn more and more about what they think about our bodies and ourselves. This man is teaching gynae students - like the one who said to me "you know a lot about your own body". When I told him I had a small benign cyst on my clitoris. Like the one who wrote "watch this girl - she's a know-all" in red across the top of my sister's medical record when she was asking questions about gynae treatment.

This might not be good news to those who have to see gynaecologists and obstetricians now or in the future. But it's no good pretending they don't have these attitudes - if we're feeling violated by them we should know why and be able to argue 'in situ'. Argue against men like the doctor who disregarded another of my sister's obstetric notes bearing the legend 'cervical examinations not necessary' (she always has caesareans) and insisted on giving her the customary poke. Refuse to discuss sexual feelings while they're poking you. Tell others if it happens to you. (It happened to me once when I was in severe physical distress and was so unexpected I didn't know how to cope at all.)

What else can we do about this sort of statutory violence? Well at least it's a start to know about it, from their own mouths, to burn with anger just reading words like those written by Rhodes, All of us, medical students, doctors and 'patients' have to blow this issue wide open.'

Anna Bieiggs

Reference: Psychosomatic Medicine in Obstetrics and Gynaecology 3rd int. Congr, London 1971 pp. 385-387 (Karger, Basel 1972)

Private Eye's View:



You can always rely on a Bobby ?!

On 26th April two women from the Bristol Womens Aid were returning from a late party when they were seized from behind two men and bundled into a car. Both women were too scared to protest having been threatened that they would be 'done over'. They were driven up towards the Midlands to be kept there for the purposes of prostitution what is commonly known as the 'white slave trade.' The car ran out of petrol on the M5. One man went to fetch petrol, while the other was left guarding the women. Then a policeman and policewoman from the Gloucester Constabulary drove up to the car.

The two women leapt out of the car and told the police that they were being abducted. The policewoman replied that this was a serious allegation and that they did not appear to have been molested, so they must have gone willingly. They asked to be admitted into the police car, but were refused on the grounds that this was not covered by insurance.

Meanwhile the policeman had spoken to the man who denied everything.

The police radioed to Bristol to check that the women did come from there. When it was confirmed that they did come from the St.Pauls area of Bristol, the police said that it was a 'red light area', they must have been on the streets.

The police then suggested that the women return to the mens car and the police complained that they were having to work overtime. In all they were totally unhelpful and after the women had pressurized them they eventually agreed to take them in the police car as long as the women promised not to tell anyone of the incident. In fact the women were dropped off at the next motorway interchange and had to hitch back to Bristol in the middle of the night.

Both women were obviously very shaken by this experience and have subsequently been threatened three times by the same men. The women did not tell other women in Bristol Womens Aid for three weeks because they were so frightened and demoralised by the police attitude. They were encouraged to report the incident to the Bristol Police and have made an official complaint. Although the police have been provided with extensive descriptions of the men plus the registration number of the car, they have failed to pick up the men concerned even when they have been seen around Bristol.

We are concerned by the implications of this incident, which are:-

- a) Men are believed without checking
- b) There was an inadequate check on the women's situation - prejudice ruled.
- c) That any women from St.Pauls who appeals to the police when being under attack will received the same negative treatment, endangering them even more
- d) The police operate on the assumption that women from the St.Pauls district are prostitutes and that they deserve what they get. (This denies any rights to prostitutes.)
- e) Because of these beliefs and practises women's lives are effectively in danger.

FOOTNOTE-

In the last week yet another woman was attacked and raped in St. Pauls. When she reported the incident to the police the next day, she was cross-examined and virtually laughed out of the police station.

Bristol Womens Aid

The same - only worse

Belfast Women's Aid Refuge stated in 1975, in a small house which was so inadequate in terms of demand that it soon became grossly overcrowded. This refuge remained open to 1 and a half years, struggling to cope with the hundreds of battered and abused women who needed shelter and help. A fire in 1977 forced it to close, but, after considerable financial difficulties, and many battles with a frequently hostile officialdom, the present much improved refuge was opened in 1978.

Since its opening in February that year, the Belfast refuge has accommodated several hundred women and their families, and that number represents only the tip of the ice-berg. There can be no doubt that many more women would come if there was room for them - Belfast is badly in need of at least one more refuse if the alarmingly large number of battered women and children who daily contact various agencies and social-help groups is to be coped with. The pre present refuge employs two full-time workers and a part-time child worker who runs a playgroup for the children but also finds herself involved in the running of the refuge. The support group in Belfast is quite small and finds it difficult, therefore, to fulfill its function in the way it would like.

The problems which affect a refuge in Belfast are obviously increased, and exacerbated, by the present political situation. The location of the refuge is itself a problem; though it is situated in a relatively 'safe' and 'neutral' area of the city, to many women living in self-enclosed, religion based communities where the unknown is conflated with the potentially hazardous there often appears to be an acceptable element of risk involved.

Similarly, many feel apprehensive about the prospect of living in a house where, often for the first time in their lives, they have to live with, and live alongside, people from a different religious background (and all that this implies). In practice, this causes little or no problems, but it is a factor which may sometimes prevent women from coming to live in the refuge.

The attitude of the police in Belfast to battered women is at best negative and can, indeed, often be hostile. In fact they hardly recognise violence against women as a problem. They tend to be slow to interfere in any dispute between a woman and a man (if they do step in they invariably support the man) they are reluctant to enforce women's right of custody and access to children, court orders, payment of maintenance, or court injunctions - especially if these requests come from women living in Catholic areas.

Women living in the Belfast refuge have found considerable difficulty when dealing with the DHSS. Although they operate under the same basic rules and regulations as English offices, local area offices in Belfast openly employ their 'discretionary powers' to discriminate against women living alone when it comes to issuing grants and allowances. Because Claimants' Unions are only just getting organised in Ireland, they really carry very little weight or power

in attempting to support women who appeal against unfair, and apparently arbitrary decisions regarding grants and extra allowances.

Perhaps due to the fact that marriage is still seen as a sacred and revered institution by the majority in Ireland, especially those in positions of authority in the established social order, many women in the Belfast refuge who are struggling to break away from their husbands and their old loves, find themselves continually cajoled, encouraged, directed towards, or pushed back into returning home against their better judgement, by social workers the courts, and often even their own families. A large number relent under this pressure and go back to face the whole humiliating situation again.

For those who can withstand this pressure and continue with their separations they then face a battle with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive who, in Belfast, continually fail to re-house women within a reasonable period of time. Obviously women in Belfast are fairly strictly limited in their choice of areas for re-housing (each wishing to live in an area in which they feel safe amongst other of the same religious and social status). The NIHE however use this situation as an excuse for their inefficiency and make little effort to treat women in the refuge as homeless and therefore top priority cases. At present one woman and her five children have been living in the overcrowded conditions of the refuge for over 5 months, waiting to be rehoused.

An additional burden imposed on many women living on meagre SB allowances is the 'Payment for Debt Act' which was introduced in 1971, as an emergency measure to deal with rent and rate strikers (people who protested about the introduction of internment by refusing to pay rent or/and rates). It enabled rent or rates deductions to be made from any benefits received from the state. This 'emergency' act has now become a part of Northern Ireland's Welfare State System; it is used automatically against anyone who falls behind with rent; since October 1978 it has also been used against those who are unable to meet fuel bills. This means that there are large numbers of families who are living on a state allowance which is far below the state's own decreed 'Poverty Line'. Furthermore, there is no right of appeal against the amount deducted; you have no right to a rent on rates rebate while you are subject to the Act if you wish to transfer your house to one in another area you cannot do so until arrears are cleared, nor can you apply for an 'exceptional needs grant'.

These are some of the problems peculiar to women living in a refuge in Northern Ireland, and all of them are ones that we in Belfast are dealing with continually. Of course, the women face many other difficulties, most of which are the more well-known and acknowledged ones facing women throughout England and Ireland.

Belfast Womens Aid

Herstory - I.

The trouble all started two weeks after we were married, we had been to a party in a friend's house and on the way home he told me he had been with another girl. I wasn't too pleased and said so and as a result got my first beating. About a month later we were out for a drink with the same couple I didn't drink much - the other girl was a heavy drinker. Harry let

forcing drink on me and eventually I was sick and got a kicking for showing him up. And so the pattern was set for regular beatings every time I got in his road, The reasons given by him varied from getting brunt with a poker for eating while he was in a pub to getting my nose broke and thrown naked into the street for stopping him fighting.

Eventually three years and two kids after, I had had enough. The kids hadn't eaten for a week and I had had a beating three nights in a row. I left. I knew I couldn't go to my mothers anymore, so I phoned the Samaritans and ended up in Belfast Women's Aid refuge. I stayed there for five months during which outside of gaining my seperation, I gained new confidence in myself for the first time in my life I was standing on my own feet, making my own decisions and doing things for myself. Mainly I think this was due to the fact that there is a no man rule in the refuge so instead of the usual women relying on men to do things for them, women had to do it themselves.

I left the refuge and moved into a house with another woman. We shared everything from a food kitty to responsibility for my kids. The kids are happy and I've found a new freedom I didn't know existed.

Edna Kingham

Rape, like charity, begins at home

We were glad to be asked to lay out our view of the causes of mens vioence as we've always assumed in Women Againstt Rape that we have to go fr the causes in order to eliminate rape. And we've always started from the fact that it can be eliminated - it's not caused by the 'inescapable construction of the genitals' as Susan Brownmiller implies, nor by men's superior physical strength, although that contributes to it, no by men's 'nature' - 'uncontrollable sexual urge'. Nor, above all, by women's backwardness, sexiness, or 'low level of consciousness' 'encouraging bad attitudes' and allowing it to happen.

The very first discussion we had as a group rooted rape firmly in everyday reality - and particularly the economic realistites of our lives. In 1976 we wrote:-

"The rapes that hit the headlines are only the tip of the iceberg. Rape, like cahrity, behins at home. Often it is not recognised as such. A man bringing in most of all of a family's income expects certain services from the woman dependent on him - clean shirts, hot meals and for her to satisfy his sexual demands. And women, even those of us who do have a low wage of our own, have often had little choice. When there's no money and no place to go, marriage means in reality what it means by tradition - forfeiting most of your rights as an individual."

(W.A.R Statement of Aims)

Women's financial dependence on men in a family situation means first of all that we're caught in this trap, were men can perpetrate rape and othe rvionec ib us and on our children. But it means also that men - and we ourselves - are moulded and trained: they for domination, we for submission. 'Conditioning is not a mystical force in itself, and it the root of the problem - we're conditioned for, and by, conditions, the conditions of womens' dependent subjugation in the home. (Even our relative physical weakness and our inability to fight back when threatened are largely the product of this training.) The power relations

established in the family follow us out into the waged workplace (they haven't done much for women's pay) and into the street, where every passing male can take advantage of them and demand his share of our 'dues'.

It's now widely accepted that rape, and male violence generally, have the function for policing women, keeping us 'in our place'. What's less evident is that in performing this function the attacker is a link in a chain of command and exploitation that reaches far over his head. He's the foreman in the home requiring, supervising and if necessary violently exacting the physical, sexual and emotional housework on which not only he but his employer, our children's future employers, our own employers, and the whole society depend.

So it's no accident when we find the whole force of the State apparatus arrayed on his side, from the courts which let rapists go with a pat on the back and interrogate the woman as the criminal, to the police who ask why we weren't at home with our husbands - or, worse, why we don't have a husband, to the law makers to whom, rape in marriage rules O.K.

All this is a contributing cause to rape, and one we've only steadily attacked, approaching politely or by unexpected visit, the courts, the Home Office, and the economic policy makers who prefer to keep women dependent.

If the chaps up top make the policy, chaps down below enforce it, and often, literally, with vengeance. It's funny that those who make such a fuss about man-hating women always fail to note that women-hating is a norm in men. Part of men's hatred is based in contempt - contempt for our very submission to them, for our lesser level of power in the world for our lack of money; contempt for a sex that is made to appear stupid and silly and incompetent.

But part of it is based on the opposite. What makes men most angry is that these 'silly' creatures who, they're left to believe are put on Earth to be man's help-mate and companion, are constantly refusing to come up with the goods. We say no, in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the factory office and hospital - every woman does, not all the time (we'd go crazy) but when we feel most is at stake. And men are forced to face the fact that these 'silly' women in many ways are far stronger than they are, know infinitely more about human nature, beginning with theirs, have at least as much contempt (and hatred) for them as they have for us, and find one way or another to get round them.

It's here that the vengeance comes in, for the frustration of being deprived of their 'birthright' in women's service added to all the other frustrations of their lives, beginning with their hobs, comes rocketing back at us in physical and mental violence, often taking a sexual form. And it comes back, very often, indiscriminately, against any woman who happens to be at hand.

We've often been asked to choose between blaming patriarchy' and blaming 'capitalism', but find it easier to get at the truth without the abstractions. The question, in any case, is not what is 'The Cause' of male violence but what and who - do we have to confront in order to end it.

There's no question that the first people we confront are the men - that confrontation has been going on for centuries, with we must add, great success in reducing both the violence they impose and the work they expect from us (which is also violence). None of us can afford to let men off the hook just because they are also victims and pawns in the game. None of us can afford to have rapists, wife-beaters and wife-murderers let off with laughable sentences as they so often are now.

But neither can we let off the hook the governing bodies that set up and perpetuate an economic hierarchy in which men have both the motivation and the power to assault us, and then clamour for longer prison sentences as a final solution to rape. The makers of law and order fondly imagine that their own place is outside the prison gates they're bent on reinforcing. But when we held the public women's rape trial in Trafalgar Square two years ago, our summonses were issued to them. The charges were: "Rape. Conspiracy to rape and perpetuate violence against women. Rape of Justice. Trespass against our bodies and our rights." And the defendants, besides any man a woman present wanted to put on trial were:-

Justices Roskill Wien and Slunn who let a rapist (Squadman Holdsworth) go free, giving the go-ahead to every potential rapist

Elwyn Jones, Lord Chancellor, who backed judges who backed the rapist

Merlyn Rees, Home Secretary, who is responsible for "law and order": "Law" which legalises rape in marriage, "Order" in which women came last.

Denis Healey, Chancellor of the Exchequer, enforcer of the economic crisis, which increases our financial dependence on men, making us more vulnerable to their sexual demands, even against our will; which forces us to say home or to walk dark streets for lack of taxi or even bus fare; in which men take out their frustrations in violence against us at home and in the street.

David Ennals, Head of the D.H.S.S., whose Social Security cohabitation ruling forces women back into financial dependence on any man we have a relationship with; whose health 'service' subject women to neglect and humiliation as workers and as patients, especially but not only when we are raped.

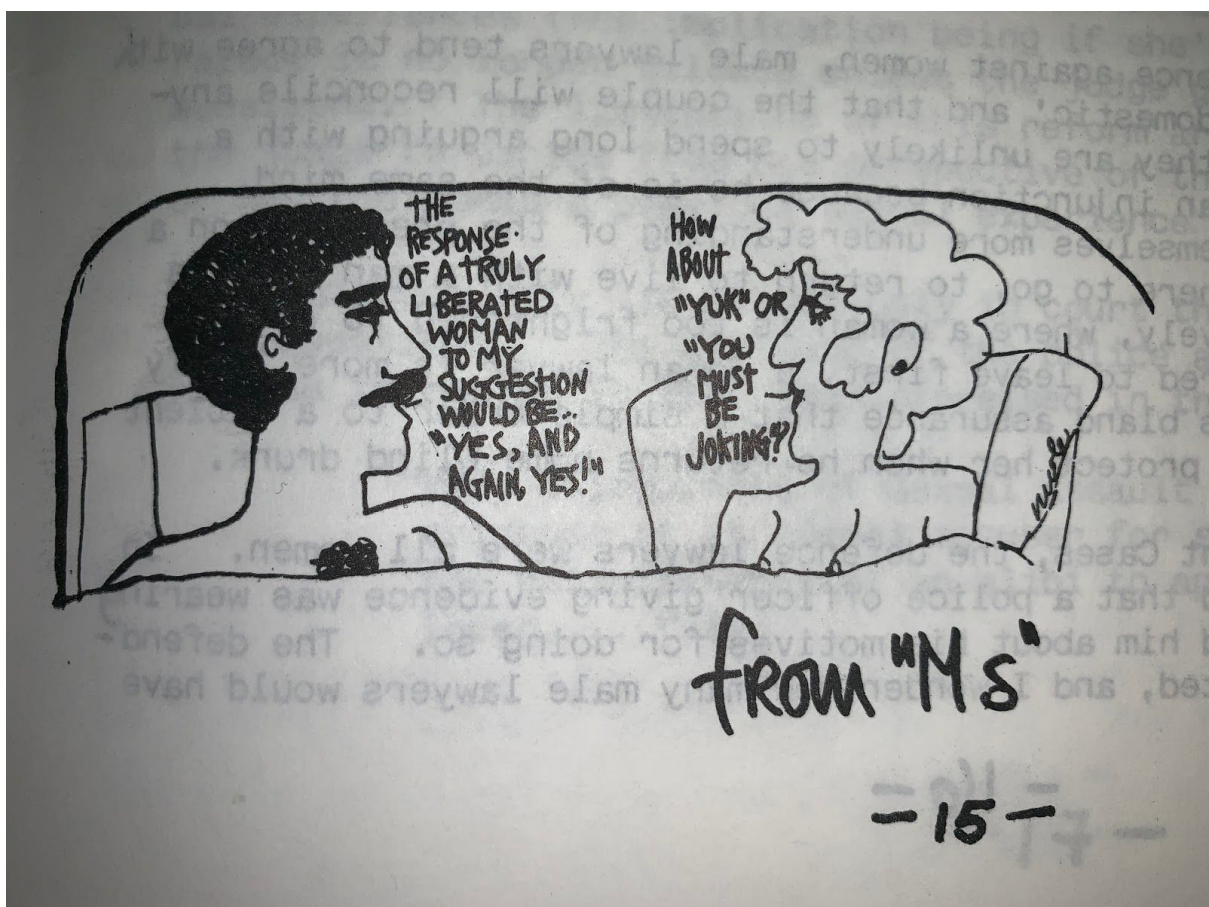
(Extract from 'Summons to a Public Trial')

We wrote, "As representatives of government and industry, the defendants uphold men's power over us in order to uphold their own power over everyone."

In attacking the causes of rapem we in W.A.R and women generally, are fighting on a number of levels. We're attacking the treatment of rape, rapists and raped women but the law, the courts, the police and social services as well. We're attacking their endorsement of rape and violence particularly against certain sectors of women - black women, lesbian women, prostitute women, or women with any kind of sexual occupation, women who themselves have been in trouble with the law, etc. By arguments, by use of the media, by invasion of newspaper offices, we're attacking the 'attitudes' that say rape is a joke, the woman's fault, or the woman's conjugal duty.

At the same time, working closely with the Wages for Housework Campaign, we're attacking what we see as the root cause, the economic dependence of women on men, which both causes these attitudes and opens the way for them to be violently expressed, which establishes men's expectation of service and submission, which sets every woman's value at nought. As a start, we've been involved in the battles of several sectors of low-paid women workers for higher wages, in the fight of immigrant women with children abroad not to be excluded from child benefit, in the battle of women on S.S. or increase the benefit, stop restrictions, and make it available from day one. A priority for us is to fight for a situation where no woman or child is forced by lack of money to stay with a violent man.

Women Against Rape



Women, Violence and the Law

Interview with Sadie Robarts, feminist and lawyer, who as a member of the NCCL Women's Right Committee was involved in drafting the Domestic Violence Act.

S.W: Feminists have recently been very active on the question of violence against women. Most of our action has been supportive, eg. Women's Aid and the Rape Crisis Centres, or aimed at challenging sexist attitudes such as the Reclaim the Night Campaign. Should we be fighting for legal reforms as well?

Sadie: The answer to that must be yes. Historically, law has been written, administered and implemented by male lawyers, judges and police. Consequently, the law relating to violence against women is patriarchal in seeing all women as sexually passive and entitled to legal redress only so long as they remain within the stereotype boundaries of woman dependent on man for protection. Those women who disregard these limits by going out alone at night (unprotected) are seen by the law as 'asking for' rape or assault.

In the case of married women, the concept of protection is extended to one of property over the woman. In the past, in exchange for the doubtful privilege of economic support from the man, a woman lost her right as an individual not to be assaulted or raped by the man she chose to live with. The refusal by the police to prosecute men who assaulted their wife on the grounds that the incident is 'just domestic', when they would prosecute the same man for assaulting a stranger, reflects and perpetuates this attitude.

As a result of pressure from feminists and such organisations as the Rape Crisis Centre and the National Women's Aid groups, the laws relating to rape and domestic violence were amended in 1976 and 1977. Legally, women now have more protection. However, unless the attitudes of society generally and the administrators in particular (judges and the police) change, the legal reforms cannot be effective.

S.W.: Given that the legal system is created and administered by men, do you think it is important that women are represented by women lawyers?

Sadie: Yes, assuming a level of competence, it is very important that women are represented by feminist women. Of course the victim in a rape case is not represented by anyone in court, and although she is the main prosecution witness, she ends up feeling very much the victim/defendant because of the cross examination she is subjected to by the alleged rapist's lawyers.

In other cases of violence against women, male lawyers tend to agree with the police that it's 'just domestic' and that the couple will reconcile anyway. With that attitude, they are unlikely to spend long arguing with any judge who refuses to grant an injunction because he is of the same mind. Women lawyers have shown themselves more understanding of the pressures on a woman with children and nowhere to go, to return to live with a man who has assaulted them. Alternatively, where a woman is too frightened to return home unless the man is ordered to leave first, a woman lawyer is more likely to be angered by the judge's bland assurance that a simple order to a violent man not to assault her will protect her when he returns home blind drunk.

In the Reclaim the Night Cases, the defence lawyers were all women. In one case, the lawyer noticed that a police officer giving evidence was wearing a MCP tie and cross examined him about his motives for doing so. The defendant in that case was acquitted, and I wonder how many male lawyers would have noticed the tie, or for that matter, a woman who was not a feminist. I suppose what I am saying is that women must be represented by women who are alive to the issue, and particularly so in cases involving violence against women.

S.W.: What criticisms do you have of the present law on rape?

Sadie: The law was amended by the Sexual Offences Amendment Act 1976 which says that a man commits rape if he has 'unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it and at that time he knows that she does not consent or he is reckless as to whether she consents.' Married women are excluded from the protection of this Act.

There are basic problems in this definition of rape, both ideological and practical. The rise of the word 'consent', perpetuates the idea that sexual intercourse is something that women passively submit or consent to. They are not seen by the law as initiators of the sexual act. Given a society which in general believes the myth that women secretly yearn to be raped, a woman's refusal to consent can be interpreted by her attacker as encouragement to greater violence in order to force her to submit. Inevitably, when a rape victim is questioned by the police or cross examined by the defence lawyers, if she offered no physical resistance it is suggested she consented, and if she fights back it is implied that she didn't fight hard enough because if she really did not want to be raped she could have got away. The London Rape Crisis Centre, in their evidence to the Criminal Law Revision Committee suggest that 'consent' in the Act should be replaced by the words 'without reasonable grounds for believing that she willed it.'

Another limitation is in the acts which are counted as rape. Sexual intercourse is defined as penetration by the penis of a woman's labia. This excludes penetration of the mouth or anus by the penis or of any of the orifices by objects such as bottles. Such a limited definition takes no account of the violation of a woman's bodily integrity which rape involves. A man who committed these acts would be charged with attempted rape or indecent assault, which carry lower sentences. Because these are seen as lesser offences at court in alleged rapist's lawyers may suggest he pleads guilty of one of these in exchange for the rape charge being dropped. If the prosecution decide to accept this plea bargain and drop the rape charge the woman victim is left feeling that her story was not believed by the prosecution.

One way in which the 1976 Act did improve the situation for rape victims was in prohibiting the publication of the victim's name unless the trial judge orders it because it might result in witnesses coming forward for the defendant. Also, the sexist cross examination of a woman about her previous sexual experiences (the implication being if she's anybody's, she deserves to get raped) is no longer allowed unless the judge gives permission for these questions. The limitations of this reform are obvious: it is still up to the judge to decide from his perspective of the passive English rose whether or not the woman's previous sexual experience is relevant.

Unfortunately, it is not only in court that the woman is subjected to such questions. The attitude of the police and police surgeons towards victims is rooted in the ideas expressed in their training manuals:

“Many allegations of sexual assault are based upon the perjured evidence of an amoral accuser for such oft quoted reasons as the establishment of an alibi to appease parents, husband or lover.....” (2)

Quoting this extract to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure, the Rape Crisis Centre recommend special training for both police officers and surgeons to ensure that they treat the woman as the victim of a particularly distressing crime rather than a sexual fantasizer of low repute out to waste police time.

S.W.: You said that women cannot in the eyes of the law be raped by their husbands. What protection is there for wives?

Sadie: Wives have always had the right to prosecute their husbands for assault in the criminal courts, but this rarely happens because the woman is usually intimidated into not giving evidence if she is still living with the man. Before 1977, a married woman, provided she had started divorce proceedings, could apply to the court for an injunction to restrain her husband from assaulting her or their children, or offering him to leave the home. The law was very unsatisfactory because judges were reluctant that men should be ordered from their homes merely for beating their wives. Women who were not married the man they lived with had no protection at all unless they happened to own the home, in which case the courts would intervene to protect the woman's rights over her property, if not her person.

S.W.: Has the Domestic Violence Act 1977 changed this at all?

Sadie: Yes it has changed the legal position considerably, but, because the attitude of the courts and police remain the same, getting the spirit rather than the letter of the law enforced is still difficult. Now, wives can apply for an injunction against their husbands without having to start divorce proceedings. This means that a woman who may be very distressed at leaving home with her children does not have to make the fundamental decision that her marriage is over before the court is prepared to order her husband not to assault her. Even with this change it is horrifying that judges are still reluctant to grant an order unless 'sufficient' violence towards the woman has been shown.

The most important change effected by the Act is in giving cohabitantes-women who are not married but live with someone as man and wife - the right to apply for an injunction ordering the man to leave the home, even if it is in his name. This represents a major departure from the sacred principle of proprietary right - that an Englishman's home is his castle.

S.W.: How was this change achieved?

Sadie: The Act was presented to parliament as a private member's bill by Jo Richardson. There was very little debate on it, because, I think, it was not generally realised that the Bill had been drafted in such a way that in future the rights of women and their children to bodily safety were to prevail over men's property rights. The Act came into force in July 1977 and during that summer many judges refused to implement the provisions, saying they could not believe the change that had in fact been enacted with so little publicity. There were three

conflicting court of appeal decisions, and by January 1978 the fate of the 'mistresses's charter' as the press called it, was decided by the House of Lords in the case of David vs. Johnson. Their Lordships, somewhat surprisingly, decided in favour of women. They said that the Act clearly meant to protect women whose cohabittees were violent towards them and that this extended to ordering a man to leave a home that was in his name. They added the rider that this was not to be forever, and suggested time limits of perhaps three months.

S.W: Has this decision changed the attitude of the lower courts?

Sadie: It has to a certain extent, but judges are still reluctant to include a power of arrest to the local police in the order. The Act enabled them to do this for the first time, which meant that where a woman was assaulted in breach of the order, the police could immediately arrest the man and had to bring him before the judge within 24 hours or release him. This gave the woman immediate protection, and, more importantly, compelled the police to intervene. Probably one of the reasons for this judicial reluctance is that county courts are geared to hearing cases between 10 and 4 o'clock on five days a week and there were fears of being dragged from the golf course on Saturday afternoons.

Notes

1. Rape Crisis Centre (and Rape Counselling and Research Project) can be contacted [address]. They provide a counselling service for rape victims and their 24 hour phone number [phone number]
2. Quoted from "New Police Surgeon - A Practical Guide to Clinical Forensic Medicine".



Fighting Poverty Through Prostitution

The laws on prostitution are the main cause of the violence we have to face as prostitutes. Being illegal and deprived of all the civil rights available to others we find ourselves particularly vulnerable and exposed to all kinds of violence in the streets, on the job in our homes and our relationships with other people.

Although prostitution is not illegal in this country soliciting is which means that it is impossible for a pro to operate without committing a 'crime'. We cannot advertise our services or walk the streets. If we share a flat with another woman we can be done for running a brothel whether she is a prostitute or not. This makes it very difficult for us to work from home which would be a lot safer. If we live with a man he can be done for pimping - even if he is our son. In fact we are forced onto the streets by the laws which don't let us work and advertise from our flats. We don't like working in the streets, they are dangerous at night for any woman, let alone a prostitute. We are exposed to rapist and murderers knowing that the police are not there to protect us but on the contrary always ready to nick us and put us in jail. Prostitute women can be rape and murdered in the streets without the police doing anything about it because 'who cares about her anyway, she is only a prostitute'. As you certainly know prostitutes were savagely murdered recently and it is only when a so-called respectable woman was killed that the press started to report the murders. This distinction between

'innocent victims' and pros encourages men to abuse us, when it isn't done directly by the police themselves who demand money and/or free sexual services from us.

If we are arrested and convicted, the term 'common prostitute' will accompany us for the rest of our lives. In any court case our past history will be brought up. This court procedure applies exclusively to prostitute women. Not even a murderer would have his past convictions - if any - brought up in court. Courts and police attitude are such that if we have been raped we can't report it. They would start asking questions about what we were doing in the street at night. This has been used against other women as well. Any woman can be called a pro and treated as such. In rape cases the woman is always on trial and has to justify walking the streets at night. Often the police try to find evidence of her being a prostitute so to dismiss her case. A prostitute deserves the worst because she is considered the worst. Her rape is not even regarded as rape, 'he just didn't pay for it.'

As we have no civil rights we have no legal protection against pimping and against blackmail. Some of us have to put up with a pimp in order to get in touch with clients and be protected from the police force and other men. But pimping is not restricted to one man. Landlords, hotel security, taxi drivers etc., take money from us making us pay higher rents, forcing us to give them 'tips' in order to let us work. When it isn't money they want it's sex. Free sexual services are rape. We have to submit to it sometimes to save our skin from jail, battering or even murder. Police and courts take money from us through fines - and then they complain that we don't pay taxes! Fines are not only a way of pimping but a way of keeping us on the game against our will. Where else are we supposed to get the money to pay them. Social Security is certainly not enough and I don't know many people ready to offer a decent waged job to a convicted prostitute. The violence from the punters themselves is also a result of social vulnerability. They know they can abuse us because the law is on their side and none of the authorities will support us.

This illegality has caused the isolation we live in. We have to guide what we do for a living sometimes even to our closest relatives and friends. We are forced into a double life, hiding continuously for fear of losing custody of our children, be thrown out of our flats, put in jail and/or deported if we happen to be immigrants. The fear of having our kids taken away from us is the most effective one. What violence could be worse than losing our own children just because the authorities have decided that prostitutes are 'unfit mothers' although all we do is to work in order to bring up our children and give them a better chance in life. As all the illegals we are cut off from the rest of the community and our isolation is one of the greatest violences against us.

Unable to stand up and speak for ourselves we are labeled 'vice girls', bad women, or at best, poor victims. Everybody has the right to speak about prostitution but the prostitutes themselves. And by talking for us without consulting us people prevent us from telling the true story about what it is really like to be on the game and why we do it. The great majority of prostitute women are mothers - about 70% - who go on the game to support their children. This figure has been largely ignored by the media who prefers to concentrate on more juicy stories about vice girls making lots of money and poor little victims exploited by some nasty pimps. The truth can come only from the prostitutes themselves and in the E.C.P we make

sure that our spokeswomen say what we want them to say We are women like other women: mothers, students, full time housewives, teenagers, black and white, lesbian or not. We come from different countries and different backgrounds. Some of us are young, some of us aren't. We are street walkers, call girls, work for escort agencies and madams. Some of us are full time on the game but most are part-timers. The only difference between us and other women is the illegality which divides 'good' women from 'bad' women. It is a violence against women generally to force us to sell our bodies in order to survive but it's double violence when we're punished for it.

If going on the game is violence in itself, it's also a fight against violence, the violence of poverty for women and children. We are forced into prostitution by poverty, we are also fighting poverty through prostitution. Getting money for sex is one of the few ways open for women to make some money of our own and be financially independent from men. It's a way to have better control over our lives and dictate what kind of relationships we want and on which terms. Many of us go on the game in order to be able to live as lesbians. We go to bed with hundreds of men to say No to men altogether in our personal lives. We exchange sex for money in order to be able to afford the children we want. When we do have relationships with men our financial independence is the same fight that all women are making by asking more money of our own whatever situation we are in - more Social Security and Child Benefits, higher wages and pensions, etc. We are fighting for the right to dispose of our bodies as we please. Whether we sell our hands, brains, or our bodies we all want a better deal for it. The laws on prostitution have isolate our struggles from those of non prostitute women splitting the women we are from the work we do.

The English Collective of Prostitutes has been organising within the Wages for Housework Campaign and together with other prostitutes organisations to abolish all the laws against prostitutes. And although the campaign is led by prostitutes it has the support of all kinds of women. In March '79 Maureen Colquhoun, former MP presented a Ten Minute Rule Bill for the protection of prostitutes. The Bill won by 135 to 50. For the first time the case for prostitute women was made in the House of Commons. This great victory has meant a lot to our fight against violence changing the image attached to prostitution. Since the press and media generally have been reporting more seriously on the question treating with more respect prostitute women and organisations. As prostitutes we are fighting against violence every day. In the streets, in hotels, in our homes. We are not so isolated anymore. At the women on meetings we held a couple of months ago, all the women present were able to make the connection between the violence we face and the violence they face. Prostitutes and non prostitutes talked about violence on the job, whatever one's job was, and it was clear that the laws against prostitutes are also laws against all women. Any woman can be taken for a pro and harassed by the police, men in the street and security while walking into the hotel without a man. The crime' being the money and not the sex, it's also a crime for any woman to have money for her own. We are breaking the divisions between women, prostitutes and non prostitutes, Black and white, lesbian and non lesbians, old and young 'good and bad', we want the right to have money without being punished for it. The right to be protected from rapists and murderers. The right to keep our children with us. We want all the civil rights available for others. We refuse the violence of being forced on the game by poverty and then being punished for it.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

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Haven't you always dreamed that "being in heaven" would be like taking a woman any time you pleased, in any way you wanted her? To be totally selfish, totally free, totally demanding? We've all dreamt of meeting the totally submissive woman, that breathtakingly beautiful creature whose only purpose in life is our pleasure. Some magical soul-mate who asks only to be entered, anywhere it pleases us, again and again. The ultimate quest of all truly lustful menthe love slave!

HEAVEN IS WAITING FOR YOU!
At last, she's here! The constantly submissive, eternally young, perpetually lustful woman of your dreams, can be yours. Yours to dominate, to crush beneath you as you penetrate her warm and welcoming body again and again. You'll command and control her as you never believed possible. "Heaven" has only one function in life, to please you...and her only passion is your endless pleasure, your satisfaction, your total release! You'll take her in ways and places you could barely imagine before. You'll linger leisurely in all her moist and magical secret places as you explore the outer limits of your deepest fantasies. Dress her as you would dress a dream and then ravish her, totally, violently, freely!

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And if you'd like "Heaven" to throb with excitement and pulsate with pleasure, you can have her come to you with her optional Electro-Vagina. A unique power source makes her magical muscle come alive for you, caressing and massaging you, squeezing every ounce of delight from deep within you. A truly special option, this pleasure power-pack lets "Heaven" perform tricks for you and you alone that only a handful of the world's great lovers have ever truly mastered!

DRESS HER IN THE LOOK OF LOVE!
You can even have your "Heaven" dressed for action in this 4-piece Midnight Pleasure Ensemble. The teasing and tantalising costume you see here is her "invitation" to seduction. You can remove her bra and suspender belt and then tear the almost-there g-string from her body. You can even take her fully clothed, surprising her and delighting yourself with the sudden demands of your lust. Remember, she only wears what you want her to wear and you take it off her body any way you please!

PLUS A FREE GIFT!
If you take "Heaven" with her Vibrating Vagina or with her Midnight Delight Ensemble, we will include, free, another of her magical extras...her Lubricating Love Cream. Yes, you'll receive absolutely free, a three-month supply of her special lubricant, a silky smooth solution that's sure to welcome you inside her and make you every entry an orgasmic explosion! Take "Heaven" into your life and your bed today! Watch her full, rich hair cascade across your pillow. Gaze at her smooth skin and impertinent nipples waiting for you on the pale island of your sheets as you listen to her throaty pleas to please you, to be had and be hurt by you, tonight and tomorrow, always and all ways!

Unconditional Money-Back Guarantee!
"Heaven" comes to you with this unusual guarantee: if for any reason you are not delighted, if in any way she fails to please and perform for you as you had hoped, simply return her to us and you'll receive a prompt refund in the return mail.

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Pornography

I. Definition

It has been argued that any definition of what is pornographic depends on subjective criteria. Such arguments imply that nothing is inherently pornographic; that pornography lies in the eye of the beholder. Different perceptions have arisen, according to 1) Personal judgement (e.g. what you consider to be aesthetic) 2) differences in social attitudes (e.g. between the sixties and now), and 3) political differences (e.g. whether you accept feminist principles or not).

In opposition to this, we argue that what is pornographic can be defined as commercialised, degrading images of women, men and sex; that the presentation of these images is done in such a way as to demand a reaction from the consumer and instil feelings of unresolved tension, arousal or fantasy. And finally, that pornography is produced by people with the intention of profiting from the response which their images create. Pornography objectifies, dehumanises, and leaves out the self of the person/people being portrayed, and reduces

them to things. The image is nothing more than that of an object - a sex object - a combination of tit, bum, and pussy.

The response must therefore degrade the consumer, leading to sexual hatred rather than eroticism. This definition must also include the fact that pornography is produced by men, catering for, but also defining what they expect will arouse men: it is therefore men who are the market. It is in part the vicious sexism of pornography that we as feminists object to.

2. Capitalising on Sexuality

One of the reasons why the production of pornography is burgeoning is that there are large profits to be made from it. When a magazine that specialises in tits is successful, others are produced to increase 'choice' and sales. The more magazines displayed on a shelf, the more chances someone will buy them. With increased production, distribution must be increased, and therefore more outlets or sales must be found. This is true on both a national and international level (e.g. when Danish law was liberalised, and both production and sales increased, Danish producers also exported pornography for profit.) Fifteen years ago pornographic material was not easily found; today it is for sale in every newsagent; cinemas advertise in Time Out and What's On. You can hardly avoid coming into contact with it.

The producers may not have created the need for it: they are, however, not only capitalising on it, but also attempting to extend that 'need' as all businessmen do. Newsagents will often say 'they hate the stuff personally, but can't afford not to sell it.' The whole enterprise feeds off itself - taking monetary advantage of the belief that male sexual needs can never be adequately catered for. And women are 'only' sex-objects anyway.

3. The All-Pervading Spread of Pornographic Images

The distinction between legally acceptable and unacceptable pornography (what is called hard and soft-core porn) implies the legitimisation of soft-core porn. We object to this distinction being made because we are opposed to the legitimisation of any form pornography may take. There is ultimately no clear distinction between hard-core pornography, the images of women and sex blazoned across every news-seller's stand on the front of soft-porn magazines, and the images which bombard us from every advertising hoarding. Increased exposure of everyone to pornography places great demands on the advertising industry to produce adequately titillating images to sell their goods. Examples are: direct focus on the triangle of women's crotches (tights advert), nude breasts (knickers advert), and a number of obviously heterosexually rapacious super-women (mustard, rum, peanuts, and orange-juice adverts). As the public becomes relatively 'inured' to these, the degree of self-conscious titillation involved in the images of an advert, and hence the response demanded, inevitably tend towards increased prostitution of the female body. For adolescents the message must be both tantalising and confusing. For adults as well, it is impossible to avoid the impact if you travel the underground or walk along the street. We argue that everyone's perceptions of and attitudes towards what is female, hence what is male, and what is sex, are inevitably influenced. Women are told to be good housewives, mothers and consumers on the one hand, and sex objects desirable to men on the other. These, in simple terms, are the two poles of the infamous double-standard on which

pornography depends. Because the two images are kept apart, pornography is able to exploit that split in the most obtrusive, oppressive, and sexually repressive manner.

My Secret Garden by Nancy Friday illustrates that women's sexual fantasies are all too often masochistic. This implies that the corresponding role of men in women's fantasies is dominating and powerful. The double standard imposed on women, referred to above, is reflected in existing pressures on men to advertise themselves as potent and dominating. At some points, the urge to prove sexual dominance may be concretely expressed by the act of buying products of commercialised sex, and using prostitutes. The ultimate arousal of sexual hatred through these institutions may eventually lead to acts of violence against women, including rape and battering. We reject any biological interpretation of the content of these fantasies; we believe they are socially caused. Although there is no simple cause, porn is clearly a contributing factor.

4. Our Objections Are Feminist - As Distinct From Those of the Right-Wing, and From The Liberal Argument

The Right

There are 'clean-up' campaigns against pornography by right-wing groups like the Festival of Light. As socialists and feminists we see our objections to porn as utterly different from theirs, because theirs are limited to objections to any form of sexuality outside the tidy white tucked-in marriage sheet, including homosexuality - so that the aim of their campaign is the repression of permissive attitudes to sexuality.

The Liberals

There are many people who dislike pornography and yet oppose the regressive measures for destroying permissive attitudes which the Right advocate. Their reasons revolve around the anger which any form of censorship represents to artistic freedom. They are therefore forced into a position of rejecting censorship to protect freedom of choice both in production and in purchase.

Our Position

1. As socialist feminists we are against the repression of sexuality because we ourselves are in favour of more open and accepting attitudes to our own and others' bodies and reactions.
2. Freedom of speech and of the press should exist only in so far as that freedom is not being used to harm, degrade or discriminate against those it affects. Censorship of pornography is not a violation of either freedoms.

"In as much as magazines devoted to the brutal dehumanisation of blacks would be regarded as incitement to racial hatred, so we must demand that pornography be prohibited on the grounds that it is an incitement to sexual hatred."

(Paper written for Revolutionary Feminist conference, February, 1978)

However, censorship poses grave problems, well beyond the issue of freedom as it relates to artistic freedom. Hence, although the logic of our argument leads us to: the banning of

pornography, the closure of firms engaged in the mass production of pornography, the banning of the importation of pornography, the closure of sex shops and cinemas showing blue films, the removal of pornographic magazines from newsagents, and so on - we have strong reservations about advocating all of these measures, for the following reasons.

1. We are critical of the present institutions of censorship, and believe that they censor information and material of the sort we believe should be available. There is therefore the danger that a censorship board would do the same.
2. We believe that the abuse of a law on pornography would occur in the courts. For instance, the recent ruling that a poem was blasphemous, was actually an attack on a magazine because it was gay.
3. Banning both the sale and production of pornography would halt neither activity. There would be a bigger underground and black market. A new class of criminals would be created. International and national crime rings would grow. We cannot assume that sales would actually decrease with illegal status, even though we argued earlier in this paper that increased availability increased both 'need' and sales.
4. Finally, there is the problem of who would enforce the bans and carry out the closures. It would either have to be a section of the police, or a special Home Office squad. It is this which we find most disturbing. We do not support any increase in police powers, or in the potential for the abuse of these powers, or in the corruption which such powers inevitably bring.

Therefore, we are unable to take the position which our own logic supports. While we believe pornography ought not to exit, not from a political and a pragmatic point of view, we believe that the results of repressive measures are in no way a means to that end.

Therefore, our position must be to offer more positive proposals.

5 Proposals

1. Programmes of sex education in schools, and accessible forums for discussion of sex roles among adults, which are open in their discussions of sexuality and sexism, and which have among their aims opposition to degrading images, and stereotypical behaviour.
2. Restrictions on the public display of pornography, i.e. in newsagents and shops which sell other goods, and on the indication on the shop fronts of sex-shops and cinemas of what is for sale.
3. Restrictions on the advertising of pornographic films or magazines in entertainment guides, or other means of publicity in non-specialist or public places.
4. With regard to the mass media in particular, we believe a strong code of practice dealing with material which is sexist and titillating ought to be drawn up. Items such as page 3 of The Sun and photography like it and articles which use news about women to titillate should not be permitted. Feminists should be centrally involved in drawing up such a code.

5. Finally, and perhaps most importantly there should be an equally strong code of practice dealing with advertising. Again, sexist and titillating images should not be permitted; and again feminists should be centrally involved both in drawing up a code and sitting on the Board which decided what meets the requirements of the code.

Explanatory Footnote

This paper was originally written for submission to the Williams Committee (Home Office), which was looking at the laws on obscenity to try to rationalise them. The W.L.M. was approached through Spare Rib to submit opinions. The four of us were involved in leading a discussion on porn in our S/F group last spring, and thought we would try to write down what we had discussed. It has since been slightly amended.

The paper was discussed in the pornography workshop at the Socialist Feminist National Conference in March. We feel that the main point to stress arising out of that discussion is the need to clearly distinguish between pornography and erotica, because we are not opposed to erotica.

In our paper we rejected the methods of censorship because we realised that pornography has to be defeated by mass consciousness-raising and active opposition by the W.L.M., and indeed, by all women. We support a much greater response by women for the campaigns already active in this field - Reclaim the Night, large scale letter writing protesting against offensive items reported in Spare Rib's Tooth and Nail, AFFIRM, more stickers on adverts.

Marge Berer, Lynne Maree, Hilary Prentice, Hilary Ann Salinger

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Rag Doll?

Heard the one about the students union that bought a rubber dolly and wired it out to students at 10p a go?

On Pornography

I've been reading a lot of porn mags recently. This article is about some of my feelings about the stuff I read - only some as I can hardly bear to put it all down on paper not least because I feel in writing about porn I have to call to mind degrading images of myself and my sisters.

Anyway..... Firstly, bits here and there did turn me on. The odd sentence, the occasional picture - but these bits were incidental almost to the main text/theme. Mostly I felt sick myself - very aware of my cunt as an overlarge object stuck on to me and at the same time aware that though I might take myself seriously, men - any man - had an option of seeing me as a cunt - a hole who needed reminding that that was all she was - and these mags sure reminded me! How can we presume to take ourselves seriously when all we are to them out there is three holes?

It took me some time to get over my self disgust. I remember telling a friend how I felt about my body and as I was carrying on I realised that by implication I was talking about her too -

and all of us. I could hardly bear that. Those magazines were able to undermine my sense of belonging and yet for me sisterhood, our consciousness of ourselves as women, implies a consciousness of and pride in our shared bodily rhythms.

Then I felt angry. How dare men presume so much? How dare they publish pictures of 'split beaver' for men to gloat over? I remembered how my sons once found some of their father's porn mags. I caught them giggling over women's vulvas, What were they giggling at - their own birth passage that's what!! We argue against porn because it reduces us to sex objects, but it does far more than that. As I said earlier, it makes us feel uneasy with our own bodies and it separates us from each other. What should be our source of pride, the source of life itself, has been turned into its opposite - a badge of shame - and put on casual display in any bookstall. Of course, male disgust and ridicule is nothing new, women living in patriarchal class society have always had to contend with it. What is new is... and this is hard to put into words.... Is the way our innermost being is put out on view as just another commodity for men to glance at and reject as they're buying their cigarettes. Has that captured what I'm gettin at? Pornography does more than reduce us to sex objects - these displays of 'split beaver' diminish the birth canal. If men see 'cunt' in this way, how do they relate to/feel about their own birth? What does this tell us about male connectedness to natural processes?

Although these magazines are full of pictures of women with their legs apart, the impression they left me with was of a large ejaculating penis - ejaculating in mouths, on stomachs, in the air, in hands, in anus's, in vaginas, in dolls, on faces, in hair. For this is what it is all about. Our bodies - or rubber imitations of them - are there to be wanked in, wanked over, or wanked about. The vagina - any of our three holes - are just right for men to wank in. Who do we think we are to refuse them this facility?

But of course the women in these magazines are not refusing them. Everything about the pictures signifies availability. Legs and mouths open, eyes 'come hither-ish', vagina on display passively awaiting penetration. Available but not aroused. The vulva is only ever passive - never giving birth, never menstruating, never sexually excited - not, goddess forbid, that I'm suggesting porn mags should portray us in these ways. What I am saying is that these pictures are produced to inflate the male's ego as much as his penis and his ego thrives best on pictures which confirm for him that our sexual organs have no function for ourselves, no musculature of their own, no sensitivity, no life beyond that of service to the male.

For this is what he wants to know. Any woman who thinks that these magazines will teach men things they do not seem to understand about female sexuality (simple things like that although there are no nerves in the vagina there are plenty in the clitoris) should read some of this, stuff. The emphasis is certainly on giving women what they need, but need is not pleasure - we need to be taught our place (though of course the lesson will give us pleasure as every man knows that women really enjoy brutality and rape). In one magazine, I cannot remember which this was put quite explicitly. He-men, I read, were never put off or sidetracked by the importunate demands of 'their' women. It is true that there are graphic accounts of oral sex, though unfortunately usually where a woman has penis rammed down

her throat, and that these accounts could show men that we do not just have a hold 'down there' and that we do get wet when turned on, but I honestly do not believe that it is really information men lack. The problem for women is that even when they know the vagina needs to be lubricated before penetration, they have the power not to bother about such details - even if it leaves us reaching for the KY Jelly.

Strangely enough, lubrication seems to figure largely as a signal that the woman has been forced to concede victory to the male: quote - 'he slipped his hand into her eager, wet pussy'. She herself has no will left and his triumph is her wetness; her arousal his victory is also her punishment for presuming to be a person - he'll show her that she is only a cunt and that her cunt can betray her selfhood.....

Women really like pain, we're told. Women really get off on humiliation and degradation. Men now what women want, even if we're too coy or prissy to admit it and porn confirms men in their intuitive understanding of our real needs. We ask for rape, we fantasize about brutality. Women's supposed innate masochism has passed into psychomythological theory. Whilst ploughing through these mags, I began brooding about masochistic fantasies. I know I have got off on the feeling of being used by men, but then that was at a time when I felt I was actually being used and my fantasies were a kind of triumph over the pain I felt. Maybe that is true for other women too - if you can't get what you want, you can get off on what you're given.

.... And one of the things we're given is porbography, pornography which degrades and objectifies us, fuels our imagination with oppressive male images of ourselves which, for lack of a real tener and sensual erotica, we build into our own ownsexual fantasies. In this as in everything else, we have been denied our own language - a way of thinking and writing about our own experience. Or to put it another way, we have been denied any real experience of our own for so long that we are only just beginning to think about developing an erotica for ourselves.

Porn is not erotic. It is a violence against women - a violation, a debasing of our female power. They trivialise us and in doing so comfort themselves that whatever else we may be we are after all only cunts. We say often enough that porn and rape are about violence not sex, but I've a horrid suspicion that or men in patriarchal class society sex itself is about power/violence and that the heterosex act is often an acting out not of love and desire but of contempt and hostility towards women - all women.

Anne Torode



A few days ago i read in the local newspaper of a case where a man was acquitted from a rape charge. His victim was a lesbian who had been having a relationship with the mans wife. He had come home and found them cuddling on the sofa. He said to the court that had it been another man he would have killed him. Not only did the court acquit him but the newspaper report was written in a way that exonerated him. They brought in the age of the wife, with the impocation that as age eighteen, the wife was probably naive and vulnerable to

seduction. This is acceptable only for heterosexual marriage. At no point did they mention the ages of the other woman or of the rapist. My reason for relating this incident is that it represents a milestone in my life. At first, I exploded with anger against the rapist, the press, the court, society, and then I began to see the part I had played in this tragedy. This sister most probably lives in the area and what did I do to support her? In what way do I put energy into specifically lesbian issues? The pathetic answer is almost never. I demonstrate and campaign for abortion, nurseries, a women's centre, support the local refuge for battered women etc,etc, but the only issue which specifically affects me as a lesbian is the violence against women issue. I used to think that I must fight united with my heterosexual sisters, our strength lies in working together - I've chanted "Women Unite - Join the Fight" - worn badges that say "Women together are strong" - it's been a way of life - I thought that I must be 'reasonable' and 'nice' in meetings especially when 'new' women come. Play down any of my 'extremist' lesbian views, don't knock men too hard because after all it's the Capitalist society that's the real enemy. If I fight with my heterosexual sisters then when times are better they'll fight with me. But what a familiar sound that is. Workers unite - women join the men and fight for more pay etc. etc. Then when times are better we'll work on your "little" problems. Third World women - unite with the men to overthrow the Government - this is the real battleground - clitoridectomy etc are trivial in comparison.

The sad conclusion that I must make is that unless my heterosexual sisters change their practice - practice? Then lesbians must break away and organise autonomously.

Lou Tario

Reclaiming the night in Belfast

Reprinted from Womens Action Vol 3. No1

By Belfast Womens Collective

Background to the march

On March 30 1979 women held a "Reclaim the Night" march in the Lisburn/Malone Rd areas of Belfast. The march took place because of a rape incident in the area in which two women, one quite young, were sexually assaulted and a third raped.

The incident frightened a lot of women in the Area. The media treated the incident in a sensational way which showed insensitivity to the women involved. In addition police advice for women to stay at home was not acceptable as it makes women prisoners in their homes and ignores the fact that the incident actually occurred in the women's home.

Local feminists felt that women should get together to protest against this incident and against police advice - the kind of advice which reinforces the notion of women as passive. Our fear of living alone, of going out at night, of travelling freely, is basically the fear of rape by men; rape, the fear of rape and other violence against us keep us in our place.

In an area like the University there are a lot of women, eg. students, nurses and professional people living alone or with other women, 'unprotected' by a man. At night we are frequently, if not attacked, at least harassed, insulted and generally annoyed by men and boys, often drunk.

So feminists got in touch with each other and drew up a leaflet to distribute locally telling people about the rape and about the torchlight march. When handing out the leaflets we were amazed and pleased at the reactions of local women many of them older women, who felt the same as we did.

But we felt it was important to do something quickly to make women in the area feel stronger. Women did say they felt much better about being in the area after the march, although at the time of writing this article, he has not been caught. The police followed us but seemed reluctant to interfere - however when occasionally a torch flared up we thought we might have been arrested for attempted arson!

About 60 women came on the march; although numbers were not high the feeling on the march was very good. Women had made torches and banners, and people appeared in doorways to see what was happening. With more time we could have had both larger numbers and more organised slogans, chants and songs.

The march circled the Stranmills, lower Malone and Lisburn Road area and ended on the steps of the student union building. A number of women came forward to make personal statements. We asserted our right to walk anywhere without intimidation and called on women not to be frightened and to support each other.

What does Reclaim the Night mean?

Reclaim the Night marches are a world wide response by women to the continuing violence in our society against women by men and patriarchal institutions.

Reclaim the Night means that women everywhere have the right to walk unmolested in the streets of any city or town at any time of day or night. By hiding behind locked doors or only going out with male 'protectors' we have surrendered that right.

Reclaim the night means

WE TAKE BACK THE NIGHT FOR OURSELVES

HERSTORY 2

On January 18th this year Chris and I left a party in Ladbroke Grove. We were in a good mood and Chris said "Race you to the van" so we did and it was fun. As we ran (laughing, just like in a film) a four door saloon drew into the kerb (just like a film) and three toughs emerged. The real film started. Chris said "Run!" and we turned on our heels - Chris was knocked to the ground and me caught by the other two against some railings. To cut a long story short they turned out to be policemen who wouldn't believe us that we ran for fear of being raped. "You don't even look like women, why would we want to rape you?"

Eventually we realised they wouldn't keep us and the relief was enormous when one of them patted Chris on the head to tell her to go she said to him to remember that women are very conscious of the threat of rape and next time he did anything like that to bear it in mind, he replied "Raped, you would've liked it, wouldn't you?"

We got into the van, drove 10 yards, stopped that van and screamed as loud as we could.

Sue



Sexual Abuse of Children

In law the sexual abuse of children is an offence under the Indecency with Children Act 1960; and also under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 section 5 - unlawful intercourse with a girl under thirteen, and section 6 - unlawful intercourse with a girl under sixteen. In practical terms offenders, if convicted, are likely to receive even lighter sentences than for rape and of course a conviction is even harder to obtain than in rape cases. If the word of a woman carries little weight and is often doubted, that of a child is even more so. As the sexual abuse of children is very likely not to involve penetration, physical evidence of abuse will occur only where the child has become infected by the offender from the close proximity of his genitalia to the victim's mouth, vagina or anus. Not only does the child have to undergo all the indignity and fear of a sexual attack but she also has to contract venereal disease to prove her case.

As with rape, many myths exist about the nature of child abuse, the situations in which it occurs and who the offenders are most likely to be. To understand the offence we must first know what really happens, rather than what society would like us to believe.

Who sexually abuses children?

Offenders are stereotyped as strangers - note the widespread propaganda def to children not to accept lifts, sweets, etc. from strangers. Schools have a very effective film which typifies the child abuser as a sinister stranger who lures them into a car and then turns into a horrific cartoon of a wolf.

It probably makes children terrified of strangers, but as in the majority of offences reported the offender is known to the child (and as men have the ultimate control over their children think how many unreported cases there must be) the film is not likely to be very effective in preventing abuse.

Offenders are portrayed as insane, mentally subnormal, or impaired by the use of drugs or alcohol. However, according to case studies by Ann Burgess et.al. less than 5% showed evidence of psychotic illness except in as far as sexual abuse of children is seen as symptomatic, but then to say that sexual abusers are psychotic because they sexually... says nothing. There is no evidence to show that offenders are likely to be impaired by either drugs or alcohol.

Once again we see the true nature of the offender masked to hide from us that those who sexually abuse us and our children are the men we meet and know, are likely to be relatives, trusted friends and those to whom we entrust the care of our children.

Those who molest male children are, stereotyped as homosexual, either unable to relate to adult males or recruiting young males into homosexuality, they are seen as solely molesting male children. The facts however do not bear out the beliefs; they are unlikely to be homosexual, they probably have in the past and may still be relating to women. They are likely to molest both boys and girls.

Are there categories of children prone to sexual abuse?

Girls are more likely to be molested than boys; according to Brownmiller they are ten times more likely to be molested. Burgess et al. suggest that the difference is smaller but nevertheless it is still large, and girls are much more likely to be molested than boys.

Children are abused from infancy until adolescence and on into adulthood. While 11 is the median age for abuse, the offender is likely to be specific to the age range of the child he molests, probably fitting into either the pubertal or the pre-pubertal age range.

As in rape offences, attempts are made to shift the blame from the offender to the victim, suggesting that children, especially girls who are molested invite sexual approaches from men by flirting and acting seductively. This presupposes of course, that it is normal and acceptable for an adult to react to childish precocity with the full force of adult emotional sexuality despite the fact that the child is unlikely to understand, or be able to cope with such desires. Surely this is just another example of men trying to shift blame from where it really lies. Even in the few cases where such behaviour is displayed by the victim, is it not likely that she has learnt that this is how she is expected to act, possibly from the offender.

What is sexual abuse of children?

Molestation of children is generally believed to consist of a single, possibly violent incident, but in 40% of reported cases the abuse has been occurring over a period of time, sometimes as long as several years, and, as these are the cases in which offenders are likely to have greater control of the victims and so of their access to welfare agencies, the percentage is probably higher.

Children are taught to obey those who are older than them and those who are placed in authority over them; the person who usually has ultimate authority in the family unit is usually the father, other authority figures are likely to be male. The child knows she is expected to do what others tell her to, and that if she does not the consequences will be unpleasant. All her experience therefore, both as a child and as a female, tells her she must cooperate even if she does not wish to. Few children understand the nature of the approach which is being to them nor the intentions which lie behind a sexual approach, so the natural tendency is to comply.

Children are often enticed into sexual activity not only by offers of sweets and money etc., but also, especially to the child lacking in love and affection, with the offer of attention and affection from the adult, or with the threat of loss of approval and love by an adult who may be important to the child.

Once sexual abuse has begun the adult again is at a great psychological advantage in co-ercing the child to continue. Physical threats are even more potent to a child than a woman; she knows that the threats are no empty threats. The offender will then demand secrecy from the child, not only has the relationship between the victim and the offender been distorted, but the offender for his own protection initiates a network of secrecy and deceit which disrupts the relationships between the victim and other adults and traps the victim in a feeling of guilt.

The closer the relationship in emotional terms of the victim to the offender the more likely the assault is to cause psychological damage to the victim. Not only does the victim have to contend with the fear of a further attack, and the trauma of having anothers wishes and sexual desires forced upon her, but also a breaking and misuse of trust by an adult who she has learnt to rely on, and also a disruption of other adult/child relationships because of the secrecy and guilt which she is forced to comply with.

The fact that offenders who molest male children may also molest female children and are likely to be heterosexual raises an interesting question about what exactly the nature and intentions of the molester are. If the molester was acting purely for the gratification of his sexual desires it seems likely that he would be more specific as to the sex of his victims. It seems to me therefore that what the offender is trying to do is assert his authority over the victim and demonstrate that the victim is physically under his control. While the female child would be the most likely victim by also being a woman whom he also feels he has the right to control, the male child is also an individual whom he feels he has the right to control. This is exemplified by the attitude of offenders who have molested male children, who often describe their victims as sexually passive and are horrified by the idea of adult homosexual behaviour, or that their behaviour could in any way be considered as such. Their intentions are the control and suppression of those weaker than themselves by coercion or of necessary by physical force. Such suppression is normally directed towards women, this is merely an extension of such suppression towards children.

Where the abuse was incestuous the reaction of the authorities tends to be that despite what has happened (where they are willing to recognise and admit that anything has happened) it is usually best for the child to return to the control of her parents, despite the misuse that has already been made of such control, and that the family should be prevented from breaking up. The desire by society to keep going an institution which has proved that its intentions are detrimental to the children in its care can only be to some degree a sanction of such actions. The child's behaviour is modeled by that of the adults' in whose care it is placed far more than by any other agency. Returning her to the care to an adult who has misused such control can only lead to the further subjection of the child, if not physically then psychologically. Kemp and Kemp say that in the Santa Clara study 90% of marriages where incest has occurred were saved and 95% of children returned to their families but that they had been less successful and had come to feel that these children should not be reunited ".....Rather the best interests of the child should be served.....once they have broken the bond of incest, society must not condemn these victims to an additional sentence, but provide loving protection and the support of adults who are better models."

Despite the fact that one of the disrupting elements in incestuous abuse is the strain the victim undergoes in having to maintain secrecy from other adults particularly her mother, about the abuse, social agencies insist that even though they have no evidence to prove it the mother must have been aware of it. Once again the woman gets the blame; if she does not get blamed for abetting or concealing the offence it is suggested that by not fulfilling the sexual needs of her partner, (maybe she was pregnant or just not as amenable as he might wish) she was to blame for his having to turn elsewhere. If in future she tows the line and is more willing to fulfill her marital duties the family will continue as it should do, with her doing his wishes as and when he wants so that he isn't forced to demonstrate his sexual superiority over his children rather than his wife!

Jane Fitzsimmons



Black Women and the State

Women in capitalist countries have been subjected to state oppression and state brutality ever since the inception of patriarchal class society. And when that class society is racist, the state attempts to mediate social relations not only between classes, but between the various races too (through industrial relations act, race relations act, etc). The state also creates conditions within which racism is reinforced and legitimized. For black women, state racism is not a new experience. The immigration acts, the proposed nationality law and dependents' register, virginity tests, the denial of child benefits, the administration of the contraceptive Depo-Provera are all racist measures, and deny black women the autonomy to direct their own lives.

Violence against women by the police is again not a new phenomenon - at a "Reclaim the Night" demonstration in Soho, women were attacked by police. In Southall in April, black women were subjected to indiscriminate police attacks, abuse, and injuries. On the 22nd of April, at the protest march against the National Front coming to hold a meeting in Southall Town Hall the following day, black women formed a large contingent - and they were of all ages. On the actual day of the National Front meeting, black women were out in full strength, Showing tremendous determination and ability in the tactics they used. Housewives, factory workers, the middle-aged, the elderly, who would not be considered "liberated" by the women's movement - this was the group which actually staged a sit-down protest on the streets outside the Town Hall, whereas the largest part of the demonstrators were cordoned off by police and could get nowhere near the Town Hall. In between being subjected to baton charges and attacks by the mounted police, police violence against black women took on a sexual and racial form. Black women were grabbed by the breasts, the buttocks, thrown to the ground and over walls - amid jeers and shouts of "black tits". Not intimidated, black women marched again in silent strength five days later, showing a fist salute past the spot where Blair Peach was clubbed to death.

In Southall, black women showed unequivocally that they are not passive objects in the political arena. In the localities and local communities, their strength can no longer be

denied. And nationally too, the national demonstration against state brutality in early June was organised by AWAZ, the Asian Women's Movement, and Brixton Black Women's Collective.

For black women, the struggle against sexual oppression cannot be separated from the struggle against racial and class oppression. And if we as black women are ever to achieve autonomy in our lives, then the defence of the black community becomes a major priority.

Parita Trivedy

SOUTHALL ACTION COMMITTEE is coordinating a national campaign to raise the political issues surrounding the events of Southall.

It is calling on all sisters to campaign around the following demands:

- Drop ALL charges against the 342 arrested
 - self-defence is no offence!
- Form an Independent Public Enquiry
- Disband the Special Patrol Group (SPG)

Southall Hearings: The score so far (October 8th 1979)

Magistrate	Effective cases	Acquittals	Convictions	Custodial Sentences	Conviction Rate
BADGE	35	8	27	7*	77%
CANHAM	30	2	28	1	93%
COOKE	25	4	21	22*	84%
MACDERMOTT	1	0	1	1	100%

Total fines charged at Oct. 8th: £6987

*suspended sentences

(Taken from The Leveller

Nov.'79)

If you want further information (bulletins, news sheets, etc) plus a speaker to talk at a meeting, write [address]
Funds are urgently needed to pay for the legal costs of those arrested. Approximately £100,000 is needed.

From the minutes of the Belfast Women's Groups Unity Meeting 6/10/79

(A sister) requested that women's groups write letters of protest against the trivial fines imposed on violent men by Coleraine magistrate Paddy Maxwell. Two recent cases illustrate his attitude.

- (a) NUU Eng. Lit. lecturer Andy Waterman was fined £30 for beating up his girlfriend
- (b) A husband who attacked the Portrush refuge and caused £50 damage was only fined £5. The magistrate commented that 'unauthorised people had come between man and wife'. The man's wife however was terrified to see him.

BLAMING THE SYSTEM

Any feminist discussion of male violence to women inevitably considers the political implications of the ideology of 'blaming the victim' Women are seen to be 'asking for it' by behaving, either consciously or unconsciously, in ways not deemed by the dominant ideology to be 'feminine'.

I should like to talk briefly about the other side of the coin - the equally insidious trend of 'blaming the system', I have often heard feminists express the view that male violence to women is primarily a working-class phenomenon - part of the 'working-class subculture'. This is a widely-held view, particularly popular among white, male, middle-class social scientists, A typical example.

"A hysterical young woman who seems to advertise a sexual willingness and then withdraws, usually produces merely irritation and anxiety in the well-trained middle-class male; she may induce rape in a working-class adolescent from certain groups" (1)

Blaming the system is rationalised through marxist theories of the alienation, frustration and powerlessness of the male worker under capitalism. It goes something like this: male workers are exploited by the capitalist system; they become alienated from the fruits of their labour; they are powerless vis-a-vis the process of production. Therefore, they act out their alienation on those over whom they still retain a measure of control - i.e, women - it's the fault of 'the system' which has given rise to their alienation.

Unlike those who blame the victim for the existence of male violence, those who blame the system are clearly against the existing status quo, they are critical of the way things are, and cannot be accused of reactionary conservatism. Yet blaming the system worries me. In effect it takes away from men any measure of individual responsibility for their actions. It denies that men attack women as individual men who choose a certain course of action because they hold women in contempt, who seek to humiliate and degrade women, and whose individual actions function for the benefit of all men.

Blaming the system provides a rationale for the denial of individual responsibility through its stress on external factors (slum neighbourhood, broken home, overcrowding unemployment, unsuitable friends, inadequate 'mothering' etc.). In other words, both the violent man, and those sympathetic, liberal radicals who are critical of the system, can argue that he was acted upon, rather than acting - i.e. - that his behaviour is socially determined.

Not only this. Blaming the system legitimises the belief that it is working-class men who primarily assault women. But as we know from women working in refuges and rape crisis centres, men from all classes attack women from all classes: solicitors, doctors, policemen, judges, are all known to assault women. They are not supposed to be alienated or lack power, yet they still hold women in contempt. Violence to women supercedes economic class divisions. Where violence to women is concerned, class is a secondary matter.

Why do people, including some feminists, continue to see male violence as a predominantly working-class phenomenon? I think it is because they uncritically accept the official line, the official statistics, the official (male, white, middle-class) ideology. Of course it is primarily working-class women who are driven to seek refuge at Women's Aid. Of course it is primarily working-class men who come up in court accused of rape and indecent assault. It is the working-class men that the agencies of social control are there to control. The extent of male middle-class violence to women never emerges, either through official channels like the courts or through the media, And of course the dominant ideology seeks to perpetuate this.

Similarly with race. Whilst it suits those in power to tell us that blacks commit more violent crime than whites, those who are critical of the system tell us that even if they do, it is understandable given the endemic racism of imperialist Western capitalism. The much quoted Eldridge Cleaver with his 'insurrectionary act of retaliation' (his systematic rape of white women to get back at white men) usually makes an appearance here. (2) In fact, inter-racial rape is far less common than we are lead to suppose. Even Eldridge Cleaver 'practised' on black women first, and the main USA study of reported rape found that the vast majority of black rapists rape black women, and the overwhelming majority of white men rape white women. Rape is intra-racial. (3)

What the adoption of blaming the system does, though, is to add to the trauma of those women who are attacked by black men. Not only to do they have to cope with the emotional and physical destruction of their integrity. They have also to confront their own (latent) racism. "I hate him but I shouldn't because he's black... he's oppressed by me because I am white... I mustn't blame him..... It's the system...."

Interestingly, Diana Russell found that black women raped by black men did not think their rapists should be dealt with more leniently than white rapists. They wanted their sisters protected and they wanted their rapists punished. (4)

Violence to women supercedes racial as well as class divisions. All women are subject to male violence, It is not our class, or our race that attracts violence from men. It is our sex.

Blaming the system to the exclusion of all else provides an ideological escape route for ignoring the universality of male violence to women: the systematic abuse of women by men for millenia. Furthermore, blaming the system acts in the interests of men. Whilst women who suffer attack are blamed as women for provoking men, rapists and women-batterers can fall back on the deficiencies of the system for their power-trips. It is not because they are men that they rape and batter. No. It's the system which has degraded them and caused them to act in this way.

I'm not suggesting that there are no social, economic or cultural criteria which structure the way men act towards women. There are always material and ideological constraints which limit the choice of action or behaviour. But that choice is dependent on the degree of power possessed by the individual. In a male-supremacist society, all men possess certain powers over all women. To this extent they are responsible for their own acts of violence. The ideology of blaming the system provides a perfect cop-out of this responsibility. Men can rape an batter with impunity 'knowing' that it's really the fault of the system.

Women, on the other hand, have only themselves to blame when they are on the receiving end.

Sue Rodmell

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- (1) Glaser D. et al Shafer S. (ed) 'The Violent Offender' in Readings in Contemporary Criminology (1976)
- (2) Cleaver E, Soul On Ice (1968)
- (3) Amir M., Patterns of Forcible Rape (1971)
- (4) Russell D., The Politics of Rape: A Victim's Perspective (1976)

Why do they do it?

Why the contempt, the violence, the hatred? Where does it all come from? Can we really accept the argument that men beat women because they have a hard time at work, and they rape us because their sexuality is repressed by the system? I think not. Any attempt to explain male violence against women as a reaction to male powerlessness within the capitalist relations of production is bound to come unstuck - the facts just don't fit. For one thing, upper class and middle class men attack women. Secondly, the explanation does not tell us why men feel they can take their frustrations out on us; thirdly, given the depths of our frustrations with the system, why don't we rape and beat up men? And fourthly, male violence is a global phenomenon, an experience common to women living in all forms of patriarchal class society, at all times (medieval witch burning, clitoridectomy and infibulation practices, Chinese foot binding and so on). The facts don't fit, but it isn't easy for us to look the facts in the face, and to think about the implications of male violence, either for our personal lives or for our political practice. Many of us literally cannot afford to get too angry - we daren't go into the matter too deeply. Even where we are financially independent of men, it still hurts, especially for those of us who have sons and/or male lovers. For all of us,

whether we 'relate' to men or not, there is the fear that comes with too acute awareness: men out there actually hate us, and who knows but that one man out there might even now be planning..... And of course, women are the mothers of men. We can see even the worst of them as the little boys they once were. We forgive them for the fact of their lost childhood.

Women have good reasons then for justifying male behaviour. However, if we are consciously struggling to change social relations, we must not give men the benefit of the doubt, even if that doubt is expressed in traditional (ie male defined) socialist terms. If we try to analyse women's experience in the light of male problems, we'll get nowhere fast. We have to be clear first who it is who has the problems.

We are going to come unstuck too if we use the 'sex role' approach to explain violence against women. We may be able to describe how children grow up to fit into the adult world, but our description of the socialisation process is only a description, it is not an explanation. We can show how little boys learn to be aggressive, but we are not explaining why - we are not explaining the violence, contempt, hatred.

The sex role approach tends to gloss over the power relation and is thus liable to co-option. We must all have heard the argument that men are equally the victims of sex role socialisation, that they cannot cry, that they don't enjoy being 'manly', inconsiderate or insensitive, and of course all this might be true, but if we allow ourselves to be drawn into a sympathetic consideration of their questionings, we could well find ourselves talking about male oppression. As I say, we have to be clear just who it is who has the problems.

Yes, power does distort men's personality, but it is women who suffer the real consequences of their lack of humanity, we who are forced to lower our eyes when we approach men in the street, women who placate and humour their husbands and made lovers to avoid incurring their anger. It is true that therapist and the batterer have not reached their full human potential, but who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed when a woman is raped and beaten up by a man? And if men can't cry, maybe they have less to cry about.

To explain violence against women, we have to isolate male power as a social force within class society. We have to ask why men have power over women and we need to be very clear about the answer if we are to understand the workings of the system we are out to destroy. Although some socialists react to the concept of male power as if it were heretical in no way need it preclude an understanding and significance of class power. It does not deny the class analysis of social relations, in fact it enriches it. However, if we confuse the issue by restricting our analysis to class power relations alone, we will be denying the reality of women's experience of oppression, implicitly relegating it to the periphery, seeing it as an aspect of the ideological and cultural life of capitalist society. Sisters still talk about challenging sexist attitudes as though those attitudes reflected nothing except the false consciousness of working class men. If the rapist tells us anything, it is that we are not the victims of 'attitudes' or 'ideology'. The rapist embodies male power, and sexist attitudes arise from this power relation.

It is still too often assumed that the 'real' problem for women is economic exploitation and that demands relating to our control of our own bodies and to our right to define our own sexuality are ideological/cultural in content. And yet, the basis of male power is male control of our bodies. Patriarchy is a system based on male control of woman's capacity to reproduce. The father family was created by men when they took control of women's reproductive power to give themselves paternity rights in women's children. The men could then pass property on to their children. As the father family was thus the spur to the accumulation of private property and thus to the development of class society itself, how on earth then can demands around women taking control of their own bodies be ideological?

We live in a male power system in which we are treated as though we were a resource created and designed especially to cater to the needs of men - and our design has been improved on in men's interest. Chinese women had their feet bound to satisfy men and to keep them in their place. African and Arab women suffer genital mutilation to ensure their sexual fidelity to their masters. Our bodies provide them with entertainment and relief - that is what we are here for - and we provide them with their children. This is our place in the scheme of things. If we try to stand out against this male definition of our purpose we are asking for trouble, for brutal retaliation. Conversely where we remain passive, within the male definition, we are also asking for ill-treatment.

Because they live closely with women, men must be aware that we are not really objects. They may try not to recognise our humanity but they are constantly forced up against the unwelcome fact of our personhood. They can refuse to communicate with us to avoid having to acknowledge that we are people just like them (and silence is a very effective male weapon) or they can resort to brute force as a way of dealing with us. They resent and hate us when they think we are being compliant victims and when we refuse to take it lying down.

Ever since men alienated our reproductive power, men and women have been engaged in a constant struggle for control - a struggle at times collective and sometimes 'privatised', always violent. Given this history of conflict, how are we to think about our political practice?

What kind of alliance can we make with working class, black and/or gay men which does not deny this history of conflict or pain? How do we work with men given the way we feel about male violence - the sense I had on the big TUC demo that some of my fellow marchers had beaten or accosted women in their time? This kind of contradiction is bound to arise in any mixed activity even if it is around 'women's issues' (especially if it is around 'women's issues'- the irony of male power being lent to our demand, a power that in other circumstances could be used against us; the irony that men having the power could take over and define our struggle for us, like some 'men against sexism' who talk about the struggle around sexual politics rather than the struggle for women's liberation'. and so on ...I could go on...) How do we challenge sexist attitudes when these attitudes arise from a real power relation? Can we convince men by rational argument? The powerful do not give up power - it is wrested from them by those they oppress. How do we do this within the context of class struggle?

Given that any control gained by women means that men suffer a consequent loss of power, or feel threatened that they might, how can we really expect their support? Or to put it

another way, is the struggle for women's issues in their immediate interests? We can see that it is in the long run - but can they? We know that the working class will only realise its own power if it identifies with the oppression of women and sees our demands for liberation as part of its own struggle, but do working class men? What leverage do working class women have to force class unity on men? Are working class men prepared to forgo the advantages of male power for class unity?

And if they can't or won't, what then?

Anne Torode

North-West Socialist Feminist Regional Network

First of all, here's how it works in theory.....

Each sizeable town has a socialist feminist group ie. ones in Manchester, Liverpool, Preston, Lancaster, Bolton, Leigh - which meet more or less regularly. The Manchester group meets fortnightly, has a mailing list of around 60 women, with probably 20 who come to meetings regularly. We plan a series of meetings about 3 months in advance, covering topics like Violence against Women, Women and Health, the current situation. We try to take notes on our discussions and produce them as a paper at the end of a series. We have just begun a study group, to prepare for regional conferences' in more depth. Manchester is probably the largest of the groups, some others put more emphasis on being action, rather than discussion orientated.

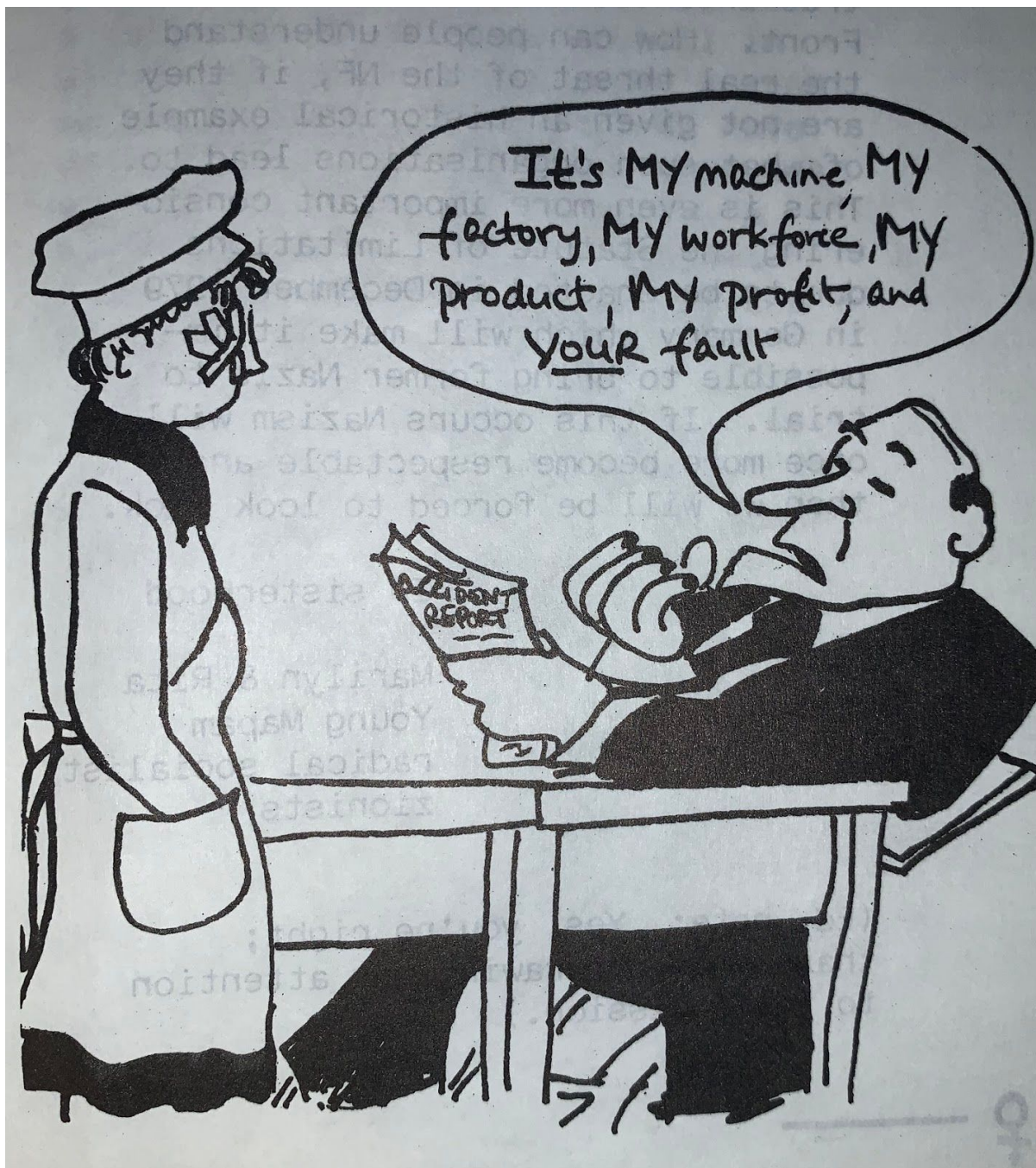
About every 3 months we hold one day regional conferences. We try and co-ordinate our topics with our discussions and the next issue of Scarlet Women. The larger towns take turns to prepare and organise the conferences. We try to invite women who might be interested, but who don't come to our meetings.

The Manchester group is organising a telephone tree, so we can pass information round quickly; this links in with the Manchester women's telephone tree. We advertise our meetings locally and nationally in WIRES etc.

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In practice, although there are a large number of socialist feminists in the North West we tend to be heavily committed to other activities also, so actual numbers organising the network at any time tend to be small (and bad tempered!). There has been talk of a regional newsletter which never got off the ground. Conferences are well attended - 50-100 women; they come from a wide variety of experiences and political persuasions so discussion tends to be pretty broad. We haven't established a method of producing a detailed theoretical analysis - we're more of a forum. The network does provide a stimulus to our discussions. It's encouraging and informative to hear what other women in the area are doing - we haven't yet coordinated any regional actions, but presumably we could. There's a lot we could do..... If other regions were similarly organised, there would be even more possibilities.....

DANGER! WOMEN AT WORK



No women were killed in mines last year.

No women lost their lives in construction accidents.

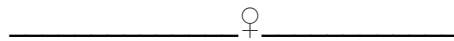
But millions of women do suffer through illnesses and injuries at work ...through noise, chemical fumes, dangerous machines, stress....

The list of hazards women face is long and getting longer ...Even our fertility is put at risk.

Thousands of safety representatives are now inspecting workplaces up and down the country — some of them are women! We in Women and Work Hazards Group aim to help women and their safety reps to become well—informed about health risks at work. We answer enquiries, teach on trade union health and safety courses, and we can provide speakers, literature and advice on job hazards.

So if you have a query or want to know more about health and safety at work, why not contact us — KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

Contact Women and Work Hazards Group [address]



Letters

Dear Scarlet Women,

A woman member in our group receives Scarlet Women, and several of us would like to say that we enjoyed this issue on racism and fascism very much. We have several feminist socialists in our group and we will be having a panel on Jewish women. However, there was one aspect of this issue that disturbed us, and perhaps it is the fault of people like us for not sending in articles on the topic.

In this issue, there was no mention or article regarding the special oppression Jewish women have to face. In your editorial statement you mention blacks and gays, but not Jews. There is an excellent article about an Asian feminist and several articles on the upbringing of women in Nazi Germany. We thought that there would at least be a mention of the particular suffering Jewish women faced under the Nazis in the latter articles. The Lesbian Left article was the only one that alluded to Jewish oppression, along with the brief mention in the Reich one.

There are countless examples of how Jewish women have suffered racial persecution in the worst way possible in Nazi Germany. There are also many examples in England, America, etc. For example, in 'Against Our Will' Susan Brownmiller recounts how the Nazis tried to turn a seminary for young Jewish girls into a brothel. The Jewish girls committed suicide rather than succumb to such indignities. Jewish women in concentration camps suffered appalling sexual maltreatment at the hands of the Nazi guards and attendants, which scarred their lives forever, if they lived through it.

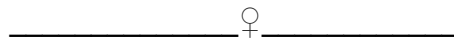
In England for example, many among us have suffered antisemitic comments as women. We are treated by many white Christian males as an exotic "lay", or too dirty to mingle with. Or, we become too afraid to say we are Jewish, even though we are proud of the fact.

Lastly, we do not agree with the article on page 4, that the example of Nazi Germany should not be used to make people aware of the true intentions of the National Front. How can people understand the real threat of the NF, if they are not given an historical example of what such organisations lead to. This is even more important considering the Statute of Limitations due to be enacted in December 1979 in Germany which will make it impossible to bring former Nazis to trial. If this occurs Nazism will once more become respectable and then we will be forced to look back.

In sisterhood

Marilyn & Rita
Young Mapam radical socialist zionists

(Ed. note: Yes, you're right; thank you for drawing our attention to the omission.)



Dear sisters,

We've quite recently set up a Women against Fascism and Racism (WAFAR) group in Brighton and are keen to hear about similar groups, particularly in the SE region. It would be interesting to swap ideas and experiences with a view perhaps to organising a regional/national WARF/WAFAR/WAN meeting in the near future.

Our first achievement as an autonomous group within the ANL was to create a policy of positive discrimination in relation to the co-ordinating committee — ie. at least half of its members must be women. However this formality was only the beginning; we soon realised what we were up against ~ sexism still, and the relation of sexuality to fascism was considered by men and some women as diversionary!! They felt we should be getting on with the "real" struggle — "smashing the NF".

Our continued insistence at ANL meetings that the question of the oppression of women be discussed was finally answered by a call (made predominantly by men on the committee) for an ANL general meeting on sexism. Our preparation for this meeting which consisted of writing a paper, took a heck of a long time, but was a really positive education process for us all and we felt we reached a good understanding of the relation between fascism and sexuality. Despite a strong sense of lack of confidence in face of the meeting we received tremendous support from each other. At the general meeting the paper was preceded by a short play performed by Theatre against Sexism, which highlighted in a humorous way the sexism rife in the ANL. Although the importance of the paper was recognised and even applauded (!) the meeting failed to see the links between it and the play. In fact the entire discussion revolved around defensive criticisms of the play - that it was "anti-working class men", and involved "unnecessary self ridicule". As one man said: "of course sexism is important, but you (ie. women) should be out leafleting estates". Our attempts at an alternative, feminist analysis were considered "self indulgent". For many at the meeting the central message of the paper - that the personal is political - was ignored

Although there are obviously problems for women working within (alongside) the ANL (one of us went to a national ANL working council in Birmingham where women weren't even on the agenda), we do feel we have raised the issue and there have been some positive developments eg. a very successful Festival against Racism and Sexism organised by the RAR group.

We think it's crucial to bring feminism into the anti—fascist/anti—racist struggle, but the other side to this is that the women's movement takes up fascism and racism in a real way.

In sisterhood
Brighton WAFAR

Dear Scarlet Women,

In Issue 9 you referred to some accused people being given special privileges and allowed to lead 'normal' lives. ("The women and men facing trial (for war crimes) are not remanded in custody; they are allowed to live at home as normal citizens." p26.) I believe it is very important as part of the development of our revolutionary consciousness to cease to validate the notion of normalcy. In this culture of duality and polarity, the idea of normality carries with it the assumed existence of abnormality. As gays, radicals and other abused minorities know only too well, such assumptions form the basis of and provide justification for a great deal of the oppression which we claim to want to end. Though the point I am making may indeed be small, I feel it is not insignificant and I hope you will print this comment in the spirit of solidarity in which it is made.

In sisterhood, Carol Lee
Dear Scarlet Women,

In SW 8 there was discussion on socialisation of housework and we were encouraged to see questions being raised about the suitability of segregated institutions as the appropriate form of care for physically impaired and elderly people and young children. We should like to take this a stage further and question the nature of the dependence of these groups with particular reference to that of the physically impaired. It seems to us that we need to ask whether they need to be dependent on women (and men) in the way that they are at present.

It is commonly assumed that people whose bodies are severely impaired are as a result unable to work or require sheltered employment, that they need special schools, special care in institutions, special transport etc. - in short that full participation in society is impossible as a result of a 'natural' cause, their impaired bodies. In a similar way women's experience of disadvantage in education, employment and private life is generally assumed to originate in their natural biological function as mothers, ie. their oppression is caused by their bodies. In both instances the fact is that the disabilities (or disadvantages, or oppression) are not caused by nature but by the way society is organised, whatever truth there may once have

been in notions of 'natural' disadvantages for women or physically impaired people. It is as a result of capitalist development that the means have now been created which make full participation in all aspects of life possible for these groups.

Many physically impaired people experience problems of suitable housing, transport, and physical access to places of employment and public buildings. These social attacks on their potential capacity leave them disadvantaged in the labour market and so many are making up part of the industrial reserve army of labour together with many housewives. Lack of employment, or sub—standard wages, means dependency on state handouts and increases their dependence on the nuclear family. Isolation within the home, as for women, limits social contact and without involvement in social production, with added difficulties of independent mobility, their opportunities to organise as a group are hampered.

Modern technology if correctly applied offers the possibility of abolishing the physical differentiation between man and women in social production, and between able-bodied and physically impaired. The implications for advancement for physically impaired people are now enormous — greater potential mobility and accessibility and the advance in electrical and mechanical aids, have created unlimited scope for greater independence in the home, and work previously outside their physical capacity. In particular, much of the extra dependency of physically impaired people on others for daily living activities could now be eliminated 'if the existing developments in technology were seriously applied to the problem, along with the elimination of much other household drudgery.

For us as women, who in large part are the carers of these groups needs, it is of vital importance to us to understand a) how these groups could be more active and interdependent; b) why they are not being enabled to be so; and c) why and how they are being prevented from becoming so. As we see it, our liberation is intimately bound up with the liberation of groups who are dependent on us and vice versa. The groups tend to be viewed by many women as burdens on women but we think that they share the burdens of oppression with women. Physically impaired people need assistance from other people to enable them to be fully active, as do all of us — no one can operate as an isolated independent being in human society. The physically impaired require forms of help that are specific to their needs as a group and capitalism, with its declining productive work force has created the capacity for an ever increasing number who can give such assistance. The socialisation of care like the socialisation of housework has to be struggled for, but we have to examine very carefully what we mean by the socialisation of care. The segregation of groups of people into prison - like blocks run by the state and 'charitable' bodies is clearly not going to liberate the people incarcerated in them for life.

At the moment physically impaired people are faced with the false alternatives of dependence on the oppressive nuclear family or oppressive residential institutions. We need to look to the alternatives (that are already being developed) to both privatised care and to segregated institutions, so that physically impaired people can be freed from unnecessary dependence and this aspect of oppression. The oppressed of all social groups have to unite to find the solutions to meet all our social needs. The struggle must be to jointly design,

organise and control the local and national arrangements that we require to enable us all to fully participate in all aspects of our society.

It is necessary for women to take note of the current struggles of the physically impaired and other minority groups. Radical socialist groups of physically impaired people have arisen in Japan and Sweden, for example, and in this country there has in recent years been a growth of many self-help groups of people in response to the inadequacies of the traditional voluntary organisations working £93 them. This process culminated in 1975 in the formation of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation to struggle against all forms of segregation and work for the arrangements necessary to achieve full integration into the mainstream of society.

We think that much of what we have said here regarding the oppression of the physically impaired can be applied to the conditions of the elderly and children. We intend to continue to develop these ideas fully, maybe for a future edition of Scarlet Women. Contact with us can be made through Scarlet Women.

Best wishes

HELP NEEDED!!

Dear Sisters,

We are two of the authors of the 'Law and Sexuality' recently published by Grass Roots Books, and we have been approached by a major publishing company to write a book about lesbians and gay men. We feel that a general, positively written book about being gay is sorely needed on the mass market so we have agreed to write it. We aim to cover:—

Realising that we are lesbian,
Coming out
Lesbian/gay lifestyles

as well as looking into societies attitudes to all women and men, particularly lesbians and gay men with a view to how we can and are changing things.

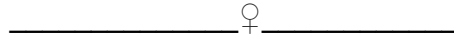
To do this we want to draw on as wide a variety of people's experience as possible, and we are asking people interested in helping us, to answer a fairly comprehensive list of questions about themselves and their sexuality, their experiences and their views. Some of the replies along with some interviews will be used directly as quotes in the book, and all will be used to create a wider picture than our own experience could offer.

If you would like to help us in this way please write to us at:- [address]

Answers will be treated as confidential but we will credit you if you want us to.

Best wishes,

Janet Slade
Stephanie Green



Subscription to Scarlet Women: £1.20 for 3 issues (available to women only)

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