

SCARLET WOMEN 6/7

Newsletter of the Socialist Feminist Current. April 1978

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SOCIALIST FEMINIST CONFERENCE JANUARY 1978. MANCHESTER

1. We agreed that the next national Socialist Feminist Conference will be in the Spring 1979. It will be in the spring rather than the winter because the Scottish women had travel problems getting to Manchester – one bus did not get through because of a snow drift.

2. The host region will be decided at a Socialist Feminist Workshop in the national Women's Liberation Conference in Birmingham in early April 1978.
3. The distribution of any surplus money will be decided at the first planning meeting of the next Socialist Feminist Conference.
4. Scarlet Women will be developed as the open journal/newsletter of the Socialist Feminist Current and distributed both as now, by subscription, and in the future through women's alternative and left bookshops.

It is not competing with WIRES (the national Women's Liberation newsletter), and it is stressed that information about meetings and general announcements should be sent to both publications.

[Addresses for Scarlet Women and WIRES both redacted]

5. The Scarlet Women Collective will continue to be responsible for production, but only with help. All articles and contributions should be typed with a carbon ribbon on white A4 paper, ready for laying out.

The above proposals were formally agreed by the Plenary sessions at the conference.

PROPSALS FOR DISCUSSION

There should be a national network of regional correspondents, decided by each region.

They would be responsible for getting reports from their region and sending them to Scarlet Women regularly.

They would all meet with the Scarlet Women Collective (for example) every three months. This meeting would make decisions about general content.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The first national editorial group meeting took place in Newcastle on Saturday March 18th. There were women from London (all parts), Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lancaster and Manchester. (We would have liked to see sisters from Yorkshire and the Midlands, though we realise that Newcastle is a long way away for sisters from Wales and the South West). As a group we thrashed out a statement about the basic concerns of the Socialist Feminist current and what we thought to be the implications of these concerns for the 'newsletter', 'magazine' or 'journal' of the current (we couldn't find a really appropriate description for Scarlet Women in any of the conventional descriptions of publications). This statement is meant to be a guide for the future direction of Scarlet Women, to give a point of reference for all those wishing to contribute to it.

"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 socialist feminist thought and seek to develop it. What we are 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

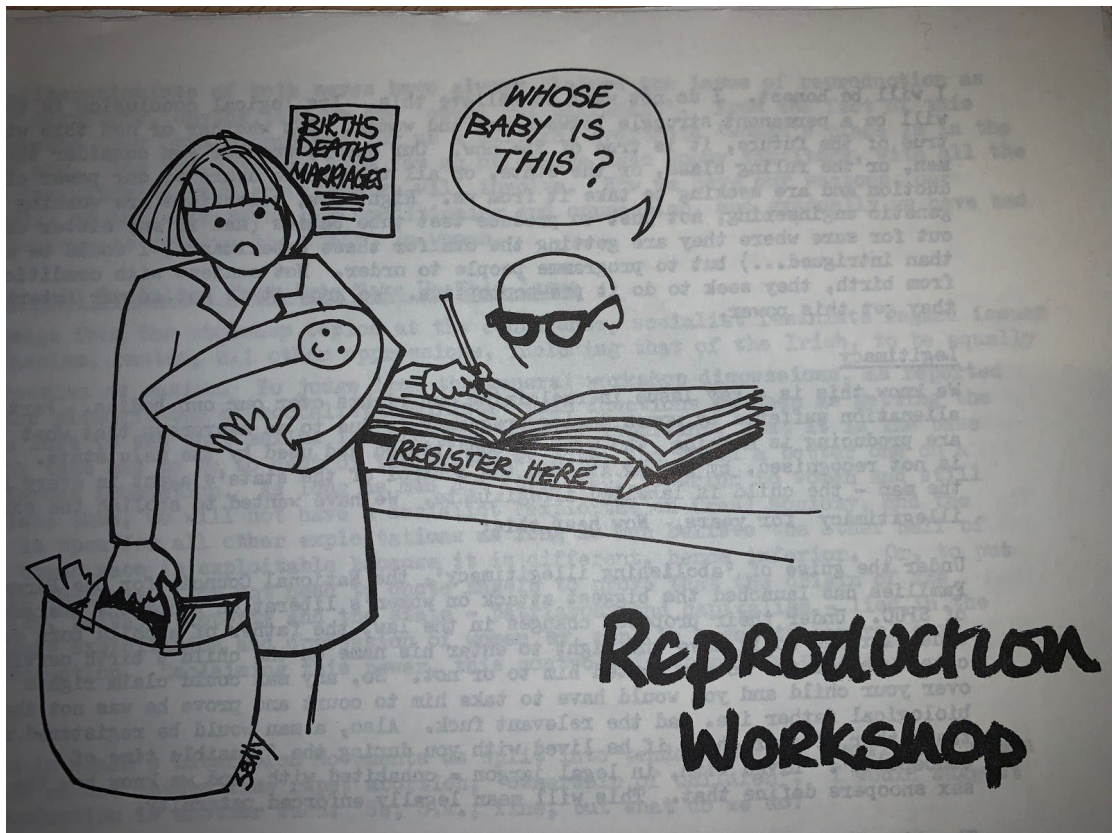
We want to publish papers, letters, articles, ideas that develop the thought and effectiveness of socialist feminism. The debate about the class struggle and relating to left groups can take place in our pages only if contributions are based on the belief in an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement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

The national editorial group is made up of regional correspondents. The next editorial meeting and future meetings will take place about 2 weeks before the issue goes to press. It was decided that regional correspondents will be responsible for encouraging the writing of articles (maximum length 2,500 words except in special circumstances), for the writing of book reviews, and for sending these to the collective on Tyneside. They would also collect news about socialist feminist groups and their activities in their region to be included in Scarlet Women. Quarterly publication will be aimed at and the next issue should be published at the beginning of July. The next national editorial group will meet therefore on June 17th in North Shields, (just outside Newcastle). The meeting will start at 2pm but sisters are invited to come either the night before or early morning, and/or to stay overnight on the Saturday, for informal discussions/ reading of papers/ getting to know you, etc. (Bring sleeping bags). We hope that sisters from regions too far away to travel to Tyneside every time will still appoint a regional correspondent and keep in touch by phone. We would like regions to look at travel costs and find ways of paying for the regional correspondents, or give us suggestions on how this could be managed at the next meeting. It was suggested on Saturday that travel costs should come out of Scarlet Women funds, but we're not sure that that is feasible.

If you are coming to the next meeting, please write and tell Penny at: [redacted], or phone Anna at: [redacted]

This is a double issue (6/7) because we were sent so much material – great! We hope that there will be a similar response to the proposed topics for future issues. The next issue will be on the theme of Independent Income for Women. This will include: the campaign for Financial and Legal Independence, Wages for Housework, the question of unpaid work, social security, pensions, child benefits, etc. We are going to invite articles from women who have been working/campaigning on the question of incomes specifically and hope that other readers who may or may not have been involved in such groups or campaigns will also contribute articles, letters, cartoons, etc. Please, if possible, type articles on white A4 paper with a carbon ribbon or new cloth ribbon. Saves us the housework!

The next issue after that (no. 9) will be on Violence against Women. Time to think ahead!



This paper is a combination of the discussions we had at the workshop on reproduction at the National SOCFEM Conference in Manchester on 29 January 1978, and some thoughts I have on the issue. It omits the discussion of issues raised in Anna Briggs' paper as this is to be included in this edition of Scarlet Woman. The conclusions are those we came to in the workshop.

Why Do Socialist Feminists Refuse To Discuss Reproduction?

When we have tried to raise this issue before, we have suddenly found ourselves 'off the subject' discussing things we did not mean. This is because socialists are deforming the basic meaning of the word. When they talk of 'reproduction', more often than not they talk of the reproduction of the labour force in terms of the upbringing of a child. This is because both of these roles, traditionally, and currently in our society are undertaken by women, but they could equally well, given a revolutionary change in ideology, be undertaken by men. Reproduction, however, can not. The goal of ending all exploitation is assumed to be dependent on the ending of differences. Men and women are different and always will be different in certain respects, one of which is the fact we reproduce, they do not. We actually have babies, they do not. Hence, there will always be a biological difference between the sexes.

The refusal not just to consider the consequences of this, but to refuse to consider it at all, smacks to me of inverted 'biological determinism'. What does 'biological determinism' mean? It is the reactionary belief that your biology must and should determine your social role. So, by pretending men and women are not biologically

different (and that this must have some effects on our consciousness and how we perceive the world) or by avoiding the issue altogether, we are assuming this means that these differences, not just now and in the past, but always, will mean what they do now.

It is not just socialist feminists who have done this. Such radical feminists as Shulamith Firestone have only been able to imagine a future where one sex does not dominate the other, as being one in which women have given up their reproductive power to test tubes. So men no longer fear this power and no longer insist on having all the other powers. Which should come first, they have not said, though I do not think they imagine the correct tactic would be to give up on this one power we have first.

I will be honest. I do not want to believe this. Its logical conclusion is that there will be a permanent struggle between men and women. But whether or not this will be true of the future, it is true of the now. Our enemy, whether you consider them as men, or the ruling class, or the state, or all three, are aware of our power of reproduction and are seeking to take it from us. Right now, scientists are working on genetic engineering, not just to produce test tube babies (and if any sister can find out for sure where they are getting the ova for these experiments, I would be more than intrigued...) but to programme people to order. Not content with conditioning us from birth, they seek to do it pre-conception. We know it is not in our interests that they get this power.

Legitimacy

We know this is a key issue in reclaiming our rights over our own bodies. Part of the alienation suffered by women during pregnancy is due to an awareness that what they are producing is a being who will be conditioned and used by the male state. If this is not recognised, by giving it into control of the state's agent in every home – the man – the child is labelled illegitimate. We have wanted to abolish the concept of illegitimacy for years. Now hear this:

Under the guise of 'abolishing illegitimacy', the National Council for One Parent Families has launched the biggest attack on women's liberation since the emergence of SPUC. Under their proposed changes in the law, the father of the child born outside marriage would have the right to enter his name on the child's birth certificate, whether the mother wanted him to or not. So, any man could claim rights over your child and you would have to take him to court and prove he was not the biological father i.e. had the relevant fuck. Also, a man would be registered as the father of your child if he lived with you during the 'possible time of conception'. Lived with, in legal jargon = cohabited with, and we know how the SS sex snoopers define that. This will mean legally enforced paternity.

The idea that to be legitimate a child must have a legally declared FATHER may seem totally ridiculous to us, but it is totally logical within the system (patriarchy) set up by the enemy (man)(Patriarchy developed from man's need to control (his) children though the control of individual women, by marriage, the family etc.). This is an attempt to shore up the breaches we have been making in that system. This system is that of the family, embodied in the father. He is paid one wage out of which he must keep his dependents, women and children, in exchange, he gets his rights over them embodied in the state. Breaches we have made in this system include going out to work on our own, leaving the men in question, and, best of all, having our children without marriage.

The state has fought this by refusing to build nurseries, by paying men more ('as they have to provide for their families') and by making any man we chose to have a

relationship with responsible for us and our children, via the SS. By refusing, in other words, free 24 hour child care and women's legal and financial independence. Now the way is open for a more direct attack. We must fight this as strongly as the attack on our right to have abortion. Just imagine what a combination of the two sets of proposed changes in the law will mean. What about the woman's right to choose? To choose when and if to have a child and to choose whether or not a father's name is legally registered. In our fight back, let's demand the state abolishes illegitimacy by giving married women the right to choose whether or not the father's name is registered. We want the rights, we will take the responsibilities.

Reproduction – An Issue Whose Time Has Come

To tackle the issue of reproduction means admitting what we all know: women are different from men. We produce, they do not. This power of reproduction has been turned against us by men through the patriarchy. In our first attacks on this male system, we avoided the issue. We stressed the similarities between men and women, valuing the potential man in woman. We pointed out that we do not spend our lives pregnant (and should not) and that the function of the mother is a social role, not necessarily linked to the biological mother. If it were not for our continual conditioning, we would be up there with the best of the boys.

Anti-liberationists of both sexes have always claimed the issue of reproduction as their territory, saying that we are 'equal but different'. From the fact of this difference they have mapped out for us a cultural apartheid 'woman's place is in the home' etc. Now the time has come for an offensive into enemy territory, with all the care for pitfalls such an offensive will involve. Now we have our weapons, our analysis of the effects of our conditioning and oppression, and gradually we have had the courage to revalue the wom(b) in woman.

Why Should Socialist Feminists Take Up This Issue

To judge from the workshop topics at the conference, socialist feminists regard issues of fascism, racism, all the other oppressions, including that of the Irish, to be equally oppressive as sexism. To judge from the general workshop discussions, as reported at the plenary, one of socialist feminists' main functions is seen as getting the male left to see that sexism is more than equally important, that it is the base brick that has to go to destroy the system we hate, and build a better one on a different foundation. As long as men can still feel superior to women and still exploit them, we will not have a socialist (exploitation free) society, and the way is open for all other exploitations as long as men believe the other half of the human race is exploitable because it is different, hence inferior. Or, to put it another way, I do not need to quote Engels to prove that the origin of the family, private property and the state – patriarchy and capitalism – lies in the primary exploitation and oppression of women by men, in order to control our reproduction. Reclaiming this power, this control, is therefore crucial.

How?

Even in Women's Liberation Movements as split into 'tendencies' as the French, women unite around issues like rape, abortion, 'ownership of children'. I would suggest reproduction is another such. So o.k., fine, but what do we do?

In our workshop we envisioned a three-sided offensive:

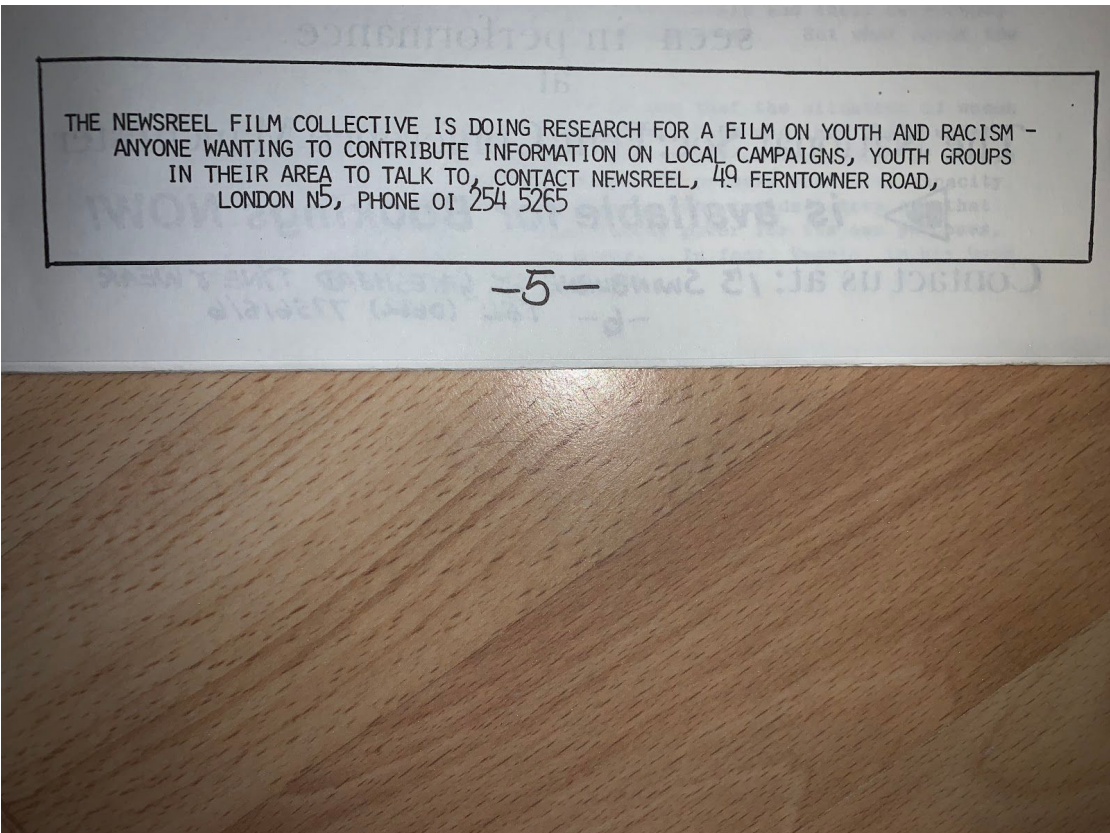
1. We must make all women aware of their reproductive power. Make them aware that what has been told them is their weakness is, in fact their strength. BUT, many (all?) of us seeking to do this ourselves have

ambivalent feelings about it, due to material factors and our continuing conditioning.

2. We, as women, are alienated from our own bodies. Our fear of pregnancy and childbirth is real to us. We are afraid to speak of this, we are afraid to speak of the alienation we dealt when pregnant or of our fears of being pregnant. And are we supposed to be telling women that reproduction is a power of women? Rather say it is a potential power.

So, one thing we must do is consciousness raising – discussion among ourselves about our fears and feelings of alienation, a sharing of this, a base for support in changing our own heads how we feel – a struggle to change.

But this, although essential, is not enough. Even in the brief discussion we had, some common causes appeared. Giving birth is a sexual act, not just because it involves the parts of us connected with sexual activity. Thus, the fact that we do not yet have a self defined sexuality and that our sexual fantasies are conditioned by the sado-masochism of our male culture has an effect on how we view reproduction.



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-5-

3. We must struggle to make practical changes. This will involve campaigning (see Anna Briggs' paper) for the choice about where and how we gave birth. It will involve campaigning (see above) against genetic engineering and the concept of illegitimacy. It will involve campaigning against a male defined view of women's sexuality (e.g. against pornography). It will involve campaigning against the economic deprivation a woman has to suffer now when she gives birth and after.

We must do all three, and here is one of our strengths. We do not have a central committee deciding 'which must come first'. Because we are in the Women's Liberation Movement, we know that we, each individually, will at some time do all

three. We also know that for some women one aspect will become more important to them at any given time, so all three will be being done simultaneously and by women/groups of women who have decided that this is what they are impelled to do now. What a force that is!

The enemy have realised this. They would love nothing more than that our national conferences – votes among some 3000 women – decide what we all do, or not do, in the next year, by majority decision of what most of these women are into at that time, and that a committee supervise this under the guise that this is more 'desirable'.

No way, say I. It may be an old slogan – ten years old? - but let's stick by it: 'Unity in diversity is our strength'.

Sandra McNeill 1.2.78

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Female oppression and the alienation of Reproductive Power

Why are women oppressed – not just us here today, but most women in most societies in recent history? What is the relationship between class exploitation and female oppression? These are the questions we explore in this paper. What follows is an examination of Engel's Origins of the Family, etc. which we think contains a key to the answers to those questions although Engels himself did not understand or develop the significance of his own analysis. Having established the basis of the oppression of women and its relationship to class, the analysis we present here clarifies the relationship between the different ways in which women experience their oppression – violence against women, their super-exploitation at the workplace, their objectification as sex objects – and thus enables us to see the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement within a framework which links them together at a theoretical level. Although we have not spelled out these implications here, because

of a lack of space, we do hope to do so in future articles. We have included, however, some comments on sexuality stemming from this perspective.

1. MARXIST THEORY: OPPRESSION AND SOCIAL POWER

There seem to be two ways of looking at the concept of oppression within traditional Marxist theory. Both of the working class and the female sex are acknowledged to be 'oppressed', yet whereas the working class is considered to be the force for revolutionary change in capitalist society, female oppression is defined in terms of social powerlessness – and even if women were to struggle on their own behalf, they would be unable to effect any serious change in their conditions of existence. Only the working class, acting in its own interest, can bring about change beneficial to other oppressed sections of society. The only form of social power available to the oppressed is class power. This 'double standard' is explainable in terms of Marx and Engels' concentration on the social relations of production.

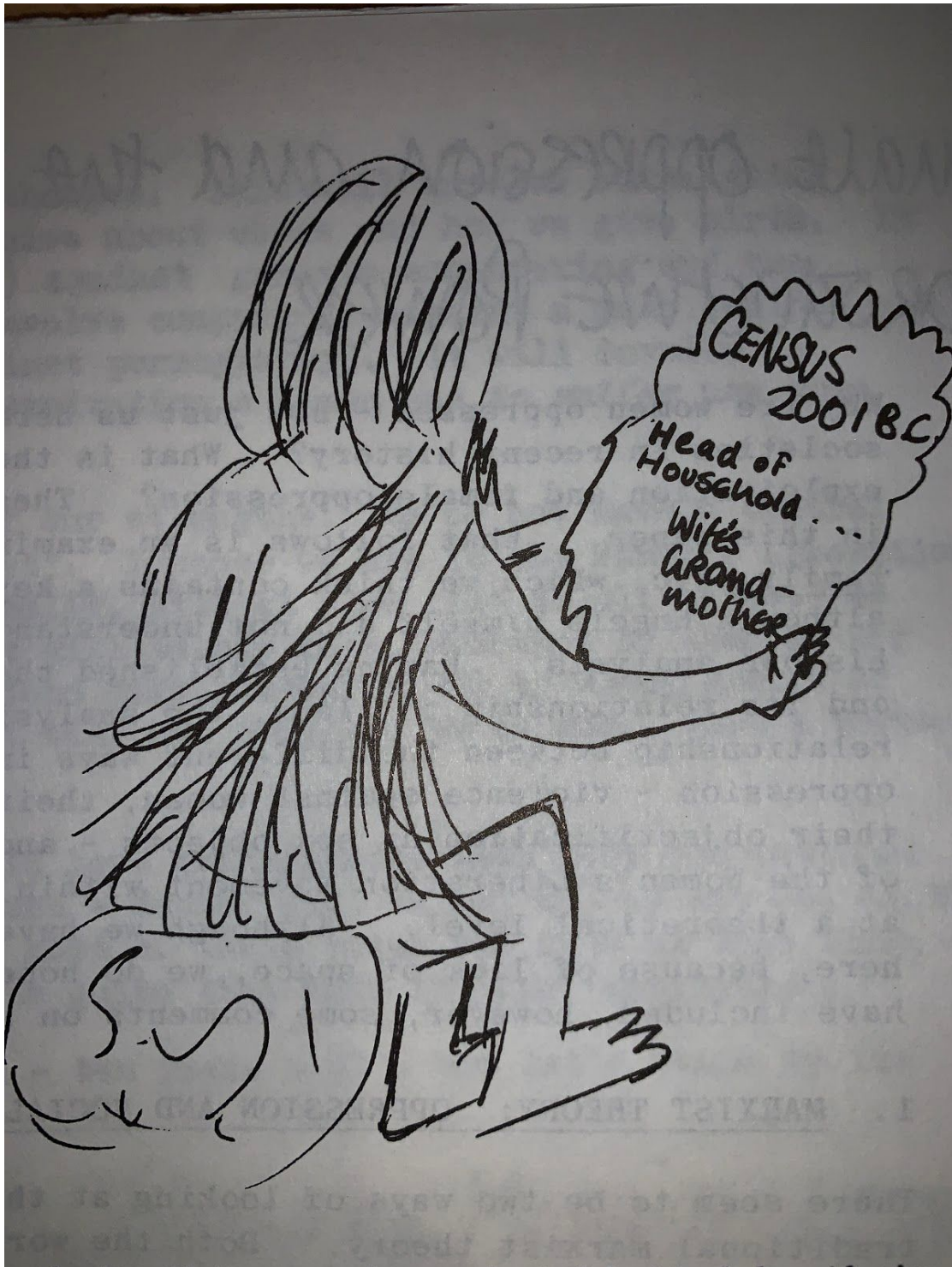
It is clear that the working class is oppressed because workers own the labour power so necessary to the production of profit. Labour power, which is a human capacity of the worker, is also an industrial resource of the employing class. The worker is reduced to object status within the production process, but because the capitalists are totally dependent on the working class for their profits, they are, in the final analysis, vulnerable to the class they are exploiting. Although the employing class needs workers, the workers certainly do not need the employing class – and this is the source of class power. Powerless in appearance only, the working class nevertheless has the real, though as yet unrealised, power in capitalist society. They can refuse to produce; they can seize control of industry and run in for social benefit rather than for profit – they can in fact dispense with the capitalist class. For the first time in the history of class society, there is an oppressed class that can effectively abolish class exploitation forever.

The basis of class oppression in capitalist society is clear then. The oppressors actually derive benefit from the oppressive relationship and their dependency on this relationship gives social power to the oppressed. But what about the women? Why was it that Marx and Engels were unable to see that the situation of women was in many ways analogous to that of the working class and that their understanding of class oppression could equally throw light on the nature of female oppression? Why couldn't they see that women did possess one vital capacity unique to their sex, namely reproductive power. Why couldn't they see that just as capitalist class had alienated labour power for its own purposes, so men had alienated female reproductive power. In fact, Engels, in his book The Origin of the Family showed how and why this was done, but limited by their own perspective, which did not include an analysis of the social relations of reproduction, Marx and Engels were unable to see the significance of their own analysis. The conclusion they drew from the overthrow of mother right was that women were oppressed because the father family confined them to domestic slavery, preventing them from participating henceforth in the development of social productivity.

According to Marx and Engels, insofar as women were not involved in the world of 'real' work, they were socially powerless and were thus irrelevant to the struggle for social change. For them, as Engels says in

The Origins of the Family

The first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry.



Engels' argument runs as follows:

- In the very earliest times humanity lived in matriarchal clans, where descent was reckoned through the female line and where personal property of clan members reverted back to the clan on their death. Women lived with their children and with their maternal blood relatives, not with their sexual partners, the men of the clan being their uncles and brothers. Paternity was irrelevant, children having no reason to be aware of their biological fathers – who lived in another clan. Women in these clans were autonomous. They were not dependent in any way on their sexual partners. Their sexuality was

constrained only by those tribal taboos that regulated the sexual lives of the clans. Motherhood was the source of their social strength and productivity as they worked with each other to provide for the children and the other clan members. Their male relatives performed those duties that fell on men according to the sexual division of labour.

- As time went on, Engels said, the sexual partners of the women came to live with the women of the clans, contributing their labour services to the wellbeing of the women and children. However, the development of the 'pairing family' as he called it, in no way threatened women's predominancy in the matriarchal clan.

Not only did their domestic activities guarantee their status, but because the men were guests in the women's clan, they were vulnerable. Although they were permitted to live with the women, they could be sent packing if they displeased them. The women still had control over their own lives and bodies.

- So women did not find the pairing family oppressive – nor were they oppressed because there was a sexual division of labour. According to Engels the division of labour in those early communities was a 'pure and simple outgrowth of nature', the women performing the 'domestic work' whilst 'gaining a livelihood had always been the responsibility of the men'.
- As he saw it 'the man went to war, hunted, fished, provided the raw material for food and the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the house, and prepared food and clothing – they cooked, weaved and sewed'.
- It was only the development of wealth and that alone that brought about the oppression of women. When men began to herd cattle instead of hunting them, they soon found that they were accumulating property in cattle – they found themselves the owners of a new source of wealth – and with that wealth, their power in the community increased relative to that of the women.

'The women's housework lost its significance compared with the man's work in obtaining a livelihood, the latter was everything – the former an insignificant contribution'.

but the men had a problem. The rules of inheritance prevented them from leaving their new wealth to their sons. According to mother right, property could not be passed out of the clan. The solution was simple enough. Men now had the social strength and the incentive to change the old rules of inheritance. This they did. They replaced mother right with father right – property was in future to go from father to son – a simple solution, but Engels called this transition from mother right to father right

'the world historic defeat of the female sex'.

- Men imposed monogamy on women. On marriage, women were taken to live with their husbands and were compelled to remain faithful to them. In this way men were able to ensure the paternity of the women's children. And so the old matriarchal clan broke up. The new clan structure, based as it was on a brotherhood of father families was inherently unstable, in that the households of some men began to flourish, not only at the expense of their slaves and their wives, but also at the expense of their clan brothers. The old clan customs whereby clan members had obligations to care for each other fell into desuetude and thus clan society developed out of the patriarchal clan.
- For women, the transition from autonomous mother to unfree wife had very serious consequences. Even before the overthrow of mother right, women's domestic activities were beginning to carry less social weight in the clan than the activities of the men – and the imposition of monogamy finally removed

women from the sphere of social production altogether. Although she was performing the same tasks, the conditions in which she was working were very different – isolated in her husband's family, her activity lost its social character, it became instead a private service for her husband.

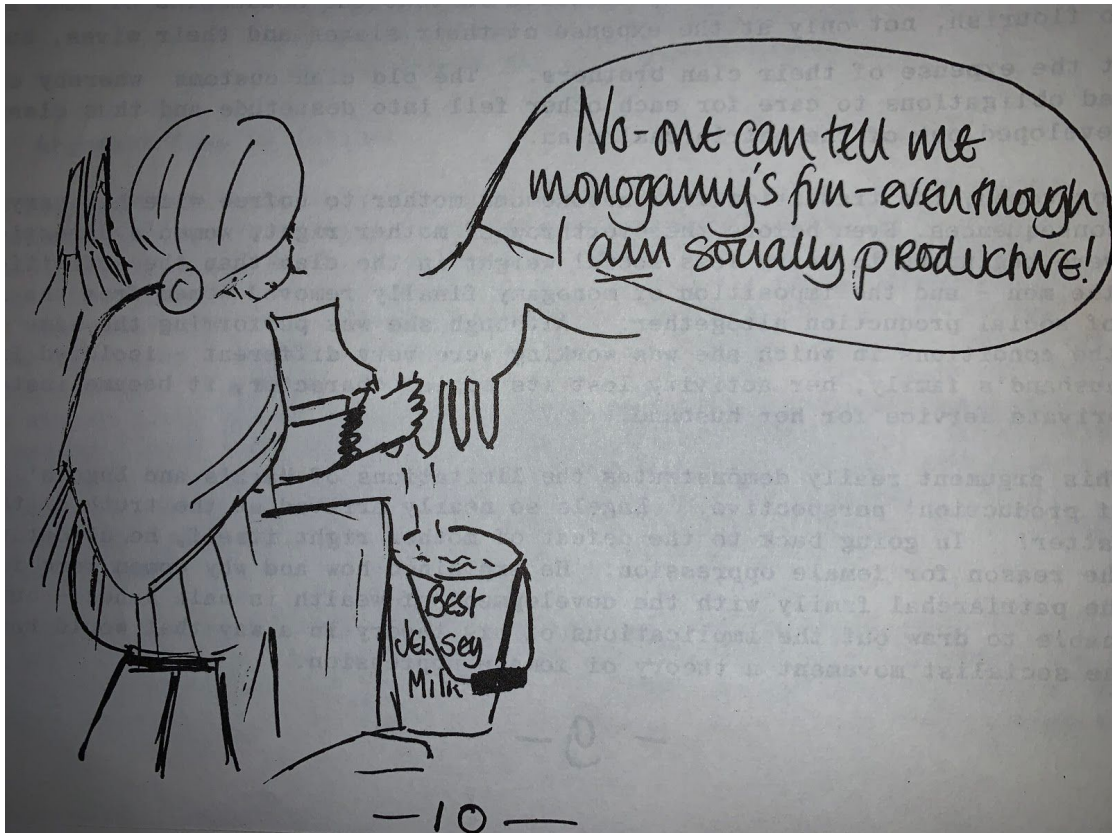
This argument really demonstrates the limitations of Marx's and Engels' 'relations of production' perspective. Engels so nearly arrived at the truth of the matter! In going back to the defeat of mother right itself, he almost uncovered the reason for female oppression. He explained how and why women were forced into the patriarchal family with the development of wealth in male hands – but he was unable to draw out the implications of his theory in a way that would have given the socialist movement a theory of female oppression.

His argument, as he develops it, is not very logical. He took what he considered to be a consequence of monogamy, namely that women were from then on excluded from social production and said that this exclusion alone accounted for female oppression. Women are oppressed because their reproductive power was alienated by men through the institution of the father family – that is the cause of female oppression. Women's exclusion from social production may be a consequence of their oppression, but it certainly isn't the cause of it.

But was it in fact a consequence?

Engels undervalued 'domestic work'. His description of the sexual division of labour in those early communities owes more to his own perceptions than to reality. Men were certainly not responsible for producing food for the family – for hunting was not a very reliable way of getting food – the hunters often came home empty handed. It was the women of the clan who in providing for the material needs of the clan, first developed human social productivity. They not only 'cooked weaved and sewed' they also developed and invented the techniques of cooking, weaving and sewing. They were innovative and creative – they discovered the techniques of building, pottery, agricultural cultivation and they learned about herbal medicines by studying plants and their properties. Because he undervalued 'domestic work', it was not difficult for him to suggest that women could be excluded from social production by monogamy. It is true that as a result of alienating reproductive power, men also acquired the use of women's productivity - but it would be entirely wrong to assume that because women were forced to work in and for their husband's family that they were no longer socially productive. Up until the development of industrial production, the family was the centre of social productivity and the housewife was a skilled producer within that family.

If Engels failed to locate the reason for female oppression, if women were not excluded from participating in social productivity by the imposition of monogamy then it is obvious that Engels' 'solution' was not far reaching enough – but then Engels did not consider that the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry was anything but a 'first premise' for the emancipation of women. However, the belief that Marx and Engels had outlined the 'solution' for women has effected the attitude of the revolutionary left towards feminism and the activities and concerns of the Women's Liberation Movement.



Marx and Engels focussed attention on the social relations of production because they wanted to expose the basic contradictions in capitalist society and because they wanted to isolate the only force within that society with the power to overthrow it*

[*It would appear that they were aware of 'social reproduction' but obviously they didn't think that it was particularly relevant to the class struggle. In the booklet, All Work and No Pay, published by the Power of Women Collective, we came across the following quotation from Theories of Surplus Value, Karl Marx.

Productive labour would therefore be such labour as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labour power itself.

Theories of Surplus Value, Part I, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1969 p.172]

Although they exposed the mechanisms of class exploitation, their approach was limited by their lack of interest in the totality of social relationships which narrowed their understanding of the revolutionary process itself.

Their analytic isolation of the class struggle from the total revolutionary process has bequeathed to the socialist movement the perennial problem of how to relate the class struggle to other areas of struggle – how to relate 'women's issues', 'health issues' or whatever to the general struggle for socialism – which in practice usually means the struggle at the point of production.

The Left, preoccupied with organising on the shop floor, responded to feminism by attempting to fit the struggle of women into a 'class analysis' framework – and the easiest way of trying to relate 'women's issues' to the class struggle was by concentrating on campaigns around the problems of women at work.

The response of the left to the rise of the Autonomous Women's Movement was, in the main, pragmatic. There wasn't an adequate Marxist analysis of female

oppression – and no analysis of the source of women’s power. Engels’ book, showing as it did how class society developed out of the patriarchal family system could have provided the socialist movement with an understanding of the real relationship – the historical and dialectical relationship – between female oppression and class oppression. It could, in fact, have provided some of the answers to many of the questions raised by feminism within the socialist movement. Had Engels been in a position to develop such an analysis it would have enriched the Marxist concept of the revolutionary process.

And it would have provided the WLM with a very useful starting point from which to develop its own theory and practice....

.... As it was, his assertion that women were unproductive and powerless unless they were at work meant that his analysis of female oppression wasn’t just inadequate – it was also anti-feminist and as such it could offer little comfort to women involved in the autonomous women’s movement. The theoretical possibilities in Engels’ book were never particularly followed up by feminists and although his insights could have been developed into an explanation of female oppression which would have uncovered the source of women’s power, in fact, they were effectively ignored.

Engels’ credibility amongst feminists – even feminists who considered themselves to be Marxists – was very low. The socialist feminists did not turn to his analysis of female oppression for guidance when they were trying to develop theory about the relationship of the women’s struggle to the class struggle. Instead, they turned to the Marxist analysis of class oppression for answers to the questions being thrown up by the WLM.

The discussion within the women’s movement about the significance of domestic labour and the role of the working class housewife in the capitalist economy was not really a discussion about the power of women as women – it was really a discussion about whether or not working class housewives – who were not at the point of production – were part of the working class. If they were part of the working class, that is, if they were productive for capitalism then they too had social power – but their power was the power of the class. The discussion, then, was carried out very much within the terms set by traditional Marxist theory. It was based on the assumption that the only source of power available to the oppressed was class power and it did not go beyond that assumption to consider the possibility that women might have power in their own right. In other words, the women involved in the discussion were not talking about the specific oppression of the female sex. What they were talking about was the particular form of exploitation suffered by the ‘unwaged’ part of the working class. Concerned as they were with the practical problems of organising in the community, it seemed to be more relevant to discuss the role of the working class housewife than it did to discuss the historical basis of female oppression.

However, because the discussion was limited in this respect, at times it lapsed until crude functionalism. There was a tendency to consider the family solely in terms of its function as the ‘service station’ of capitalist industry. Although it is a patriarchal institution which, in Europe at least, has been around for about 2000 years, it almost seemed as though some women were arguing that the family was a capitalist plot deliberately inflicted on women in the interests of profit. There was a tendency to discuss the role of women within the family solely in terms of their function as reproducers of labour power – thus although women had been subordinate to men ever since the overthrow of mother right, female subordination was identified with the wife’s role in servicing her husband’s labour power.

The discussion may not have been about the specific oppression of women, but insofar as it identified female oppression with the needs of capitalism, it came close

to suggesting that there was a possible link between the two – that female oppression could be adequately accounted for in terms of capitalist exploitation. It is true that there was a link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of working class housewives, but the link was an historical one. Capitalism could only exploit the domestic labour of the working class housewife because she was already oppressed as a woman living in patriarchal class society. Women worked within the family for their husbands before the development of capitalist relations of production. It was a simple step for capitalism to take advantage of this relationship. Her reproductive power belonged to her husband and so did her children. In the feudal family, fathers had absolute control over their children – the mother's relationship with her children was already subject to patriarchal interference and the intervention of the (Welfare) state and its agencies in the mother-child relationship is only an extension of that interference.

The limitations of this whole approach to the problem of the power of women can be seen clearly in that otherwise brilliant booklet by Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community. Although they say that they are only concerned with analysing the role of the housewife within the capitalist division of labour, they do point out that female oppression actually predates capitalism. However, they do not attempt to analyse the reason for that oppression, nor do they discuss the effects of patriarchy on women: so although their analysis is penetrating in that they can see quite clearly how capitalist society exploits the working class housewife, often their interpretation is thwarted by their lack of historical perspective. For example they say in a section headed "the Capitalist Function of the Uterus":

Never as with the advent of capitalism has the destruction of women as a person meant also the immediate diminution of her physical integrity. Feminine and masculine sexuality had already before capitalism undergone a series of regimes and forms of conditioning. But they had also undergone efficient methods of birth control, which have unaccountably disappeared..... As it (the family) cuts off all her possibilities of creativity and of the development of her working activity, so it cuts off the expression of her sexual, psychological and emotional autonomy.

We repeat: never had such a stunting of the physical integrity of woman taken place, affecting everything from the brain to the uterus.... They are robbed of their sexual life which has been transformed into a function for reproducing labour power. p30-31

Female reproductive power is indeed controlled in the interests of capitalist industry, but it had already been alienated by and through the creation of the patriarchal family. Women had long been robbed of their sexual life as an expression of their own autonomy.

Because Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James confine themselves to a consideration of the role of the working class housewife without setting the development of that role within the historical context of patriarchal class society, they are forced to explain women's lack of autonomy in terms of the reproduction of labour power. The tenor of their argument seems to be that women, and then only working class women, lost control of their powers and capacities, their creativity, sexuality and autonomy with the creation of the female role in the capitalist division of labour. In fact, all women lost control of their lives and their bodies with the creation of the patriarchal family. According to them the alienation of female reproductive power happened with the advent of capitalism. They say:

Either the vagina is primarily the passage to the reproduction of labour power sold as commodity, the capitalist function of the uterus, or it is part of our natural powers, our social equipment.

In fact the vagina has belonged to men ever since the defeat of mother right – it was the passage to the production of their children long before capitalism acquired an interest in it. Although they can see the analogy between the alienation of reproductive power and the alienation of labour power, because they do not have an historical perspective, they cannot see the real, dialectical relationship between both forms of oppression. Capitalism, which relies on the alienation of labour power, is the latest stage of patriarchal class society. It is not enough to suggest that female reproductive power was alienated at the same time as labour power and for the same purpose, which was to maintain capitalist profitability – this effectively reduces female oppression to a simple question of class exploitation and the truth is far more complex than that. Selma James says in her introduction to the articles:

The demands of the women's movement ... take on a new and subversive
significance p11

when they are examined in the light of their analysis, for, as she says

When we say for example, that we want control of our bodies, we are challenging the domination of capital which has transformed our reproductive organs as much as our arms and legs, into instruments of accumulation of surplus labour; transformed our relations with men, with our children and our very creation of them into work productive to this accumulation.

She is not suggesting that the significance of these demands lies in their challenge of patriarchy. She says that they are significant because they are in direct challenge to capitalism – because, in fact they are class demands.

Their analysis reaffirms the traditional Marxist belief that social power lies with the working class and that women as a sex have no power in their own right. Engels said that women exercise social power through participation in the class struggle – which for him, was a point of production struggle. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James would agree that women can only exercise power insofar as they are involved in the class struggle – but they would argue that the class struggle includes the struggles of working class women in their communities – and in their families.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James were talking quite specifically about the role of the working class housewife, they did say in the text of the article Women and the Subversion of the Community that the oppression of women predated capitalism, yet in a footnote to that article they seem to be claiming much more for their analysis.

Talking about the value of the demand for wages for housework, they say that it would give

...a perspective from which to start, whose merit is essentially to link immediately, female oppression, subordination and isolation to their material foundation: female exploitation.

Any attempt to generalise the specific analysis of domestic labour into a theory about the material foundation of female oppression, however, is bound to fail because women were oppressed before the advent of capitalism and because not all women are working class housewives even under capitalism!

*Anne Torode, Penny Remfry
and Gwynne Somerville*

If you have been the victim
of rape or sexual assault
and need help or someone to
talk to, you can ring us
anytime - emergency or not.

RAPE CRISIS
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A play against Rape?

Dear Sisters,

We are a group of four who have been writing a play about rape, to be toured around England, Scotland and Wales. Until January we were part of a theatre group called Counteract but we have since been forced to leave. We are writing to Scarlet Women because we think what happened is of interest to socialist feminists and so that you can contact us if you would like to book the play.

Why we left: We are three non-aligned socialist feminists and one non-aligned male feminist sympathiser. The rape play was one of three plays running in Counteract under a common administration. We were happy to work collectively with people with whom we had political differences as long as the company was democratically run and our politics as such respected. However, during the three months before we left, the administration and the other two plays became dominated by the Socialist Workers' Party, and we expressed our concern that Counteract as a whole should remain a non-aligned theatre group. We were told that since we were not members of a party we could have no real political commitment. So we became a minority socialist feminist wing inside an S.W.P group, but the rest of the company did not acknowledge this as a problem. We were seen as "just feminists", and our work was seen as a side issue. Two of the men were also consistently patronising and dismissive towards us both as women and feminists. The S.W.P never openly said that they wanted us out because we were a political opposition; instead they tried to deny our abilities as writers and performers. Political differences were fought out on an artistic terrain: we were told we were undisciplined, lacked any idea of art etc. This had the effect of undermining our confidence and we found it more and more difficult

to write the play. Then Counteract ran out of money and working relationships, especially with the administration, were so bad that we felt forced to resign.

However we decided that we would definitely go ahead with the play on our own provided we could raise enough money. Then we found out that Counteract are writing and rehearsing another play about rape from scratch in a few weeks, using our title and leaflets. They have refused to give us any of the contact addresses we built up together, including those we personally made last year while touring a play about nurseries. They have made it clear that as far as they are concerned the two plays are in commercial competition.

What has happened reflects wider issues important to socialist feminists. First, the S.W.P were unwilling to take the women's movement seriously or to give political credibility to the socialist feminist grouping within the movement. Secondly, they engaged in sectarianism, whereby recruitment to the party was seen as the main task and put before any attempts to work with revolutionary socialists with political differences.

Obviously it is up to you which play you book if any, but we think it is important that sisters know who and what they are booking. We would prefer you to see our play because we cannot believe that Counteract, having given no credibility to us as socialist feminists, will do justice to the difficult political problems involved in the issue of rape. If you might be interested in booking our play, please contact us at the address or telephone number below.

[redacted]

Dalston, London E.8.

Sexuality

Women are oppressed because their reproductive power has been alienated by men. In those early times they too possessed a power vital to others. It was alienated by means of the bride price, but that original transfer of reproductive power to men was not the end of the story. Rather it was only the beginning.

For women still actually possess the power that patriarchy requires. It rests in their bodies, in their reproductive organs. Patriarchy was not able to seize control in perpetuum. Through the centuries it has had to engage in a constant struggle with women over control. Her reproductivity is part of a woman's total being and unfortunately for patriarchy, it cannot be appropriated without appropriating the woman too – and here the analogy with labour power holds very well, for the capitalist class has the same dilemma. Though they need the worker's labour power, they cannot appropriate it entirely and nor can they buy discrete quantities of it, for it is a capacity that comes attached to people.

The power of the ruling class rests on the continual alienation of the labour power of the working class and of the reproductive power of women. Just as its very existence as a class rests on that original alienation of female reproductive capacity.

Patriarchy means the subordination of women to men, and though men are not united as a class against women, being divided themselves into exploiter and exploited, they all exercise power over women. Because their reproductive capacity is controlled by men, women no longer own their own bodies. A woman's body is male territory to be plundered and entered into as he sees fit. Rape is an obvious example. When women walk out alone at night they are at once declaring their autonomy and self containment and their availability. Rape, so often associated with sexual desire, is in fact an act of violence against a woman who cares to be self contained and impervious: it is an act of outraged ownership, a way of reminding all

women about their role in life. The woman is asking for it in the sense that she is asking to be shown her place... and in the sense that she is asking for sexual attention. For it is assumed that the women will enjoy it... once she gives up her childish pretensions of autonomy.

A woman's body is male territory in less dramatic ways too. Her loss of control over her reproductive power exacts a heavy price. The price of passivity. Because her vagina, womb and her breasts cannot be divorced from her body and because her sexuality and reproductive capacity engage her emotionally, she is often forced absent herself from the scene when they are being used by men; when they are on duty in the service of patriarchy, - and the fact that her deepest feelings are involved makes that disengagement both more difficult and more necessary. The wife who lies in bed thinking of tomorrow's household chores while her husband is having sex is disengaging herself - not from the possibility of sexual pleasure, but rather she is protecting herself from the tension of frustration and the terrible anger that she would otherwise feel at his smug presumptiveness.

When young girls allow their boyfriends to 'go the whole way' in cars or alleyways, they are responding to their lack of control in precisely the same way. They cope with the situation by absenting themselves from it. They tell themselves - 'I'm not really here... it's all got nothing to do with me'... and they are right, but it has got everything to do with female oppression. Though the wife and the young girl are both being forced to disengage from male imposition, patriarchy values the wife's absenteeism, calling it 'wifely duty' and it condemns the girl for irresponsibility.

Women have the same attitudes towards contraception. Many married women rely on their husbands to protect them from pregnancy. They see sex as their husband's business and feel that therefore he should take responsibility to ensure that at least he doesn't impregnate her whilst he's having sex. Adolescent girls also rely on the man to take care of contraception, for how can they pretend that they are not having sexual relations with their boyfriend if they are on the pill? Male contraception, whilst it might protect women from unwanted pregnancy, still leaves control in male hands. The widespread use of the sheath and withdrawal is a clear indicator that patriarchy still rules ok. Where women assume responsibility for contraception, they are assuming responsibility over their own bodies; extending control over their own lives. They are making a statement to patriarchy about ownership and control. Passivity is a natural response to loss of control, and patriarchy relies on passivity to maintain its control.

Sex is something that happens to women. It is done to them by men. By not being there, women can just about survive in a situation where men have taken the initiative in sexual relationships and in the heterosexual act itself. In the matriarchal system when women exercised control of sexuality, they did not destroy men in the process; they did not impose morality or chastity on men; they did not rape or otherwise violate male integrity nor did they force men to pretend that they weren't there. In patriarchy however, women are destroyed psychically and at times physically by male control of sexuality. Men not only take the initiative, they also impose their limited and limiting definition of sexuality and sexual expression under patriarchy has become totally perverted. Because men have power over women, sexual expression often becomes an exercise in domination, and women's passivity, their protection against hurt in relationships and activities where they are being used, can very easily turn them into victims. A man can use a woman for his gratification and then hate her for being at his disposal. His 'sadism' grows with her retreat into 'masochism'. Interpreted by 'sexologists' (sec) as being a case of whatever turns you on, sadism is in fact a patriarchal perversion. Because women are relative to men,

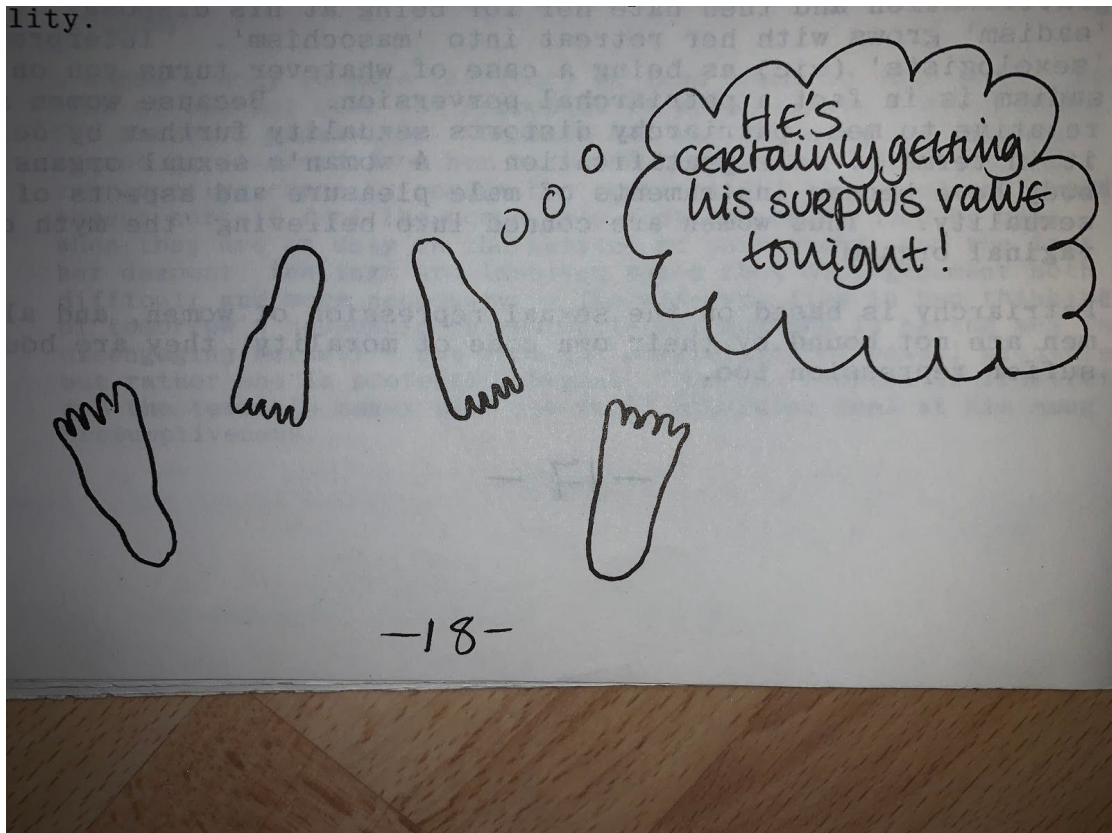
patriarchy is distorts sexuality further by defining it in terms of male gratification. A woman's sexual organs, her body have become instruments of male pleasure and aspects of male sexuality. Thus women are conned into believing 'the myth of the vaginal orgasm'.

Patriarchy is based on the sexual repression of women, and although men are not bound by their own code of morality, they are bound to suffer repression too.

The patriarchal association of sexuality and reproduction would have been entirely alien to the people of matriarchal society. When sexuality became defined in terms of procreative purpose, this again was a reversal of the natural order – after all, animals do not mate because the female desires to be a mother, but because they are seeking gratification..... and in the matriarchy, where women controlled their own fertility, it was also undertaken as an end in itself.

If sex is about having babies, then it follows that it has to be heterosexual. The repression of homosexual feelings further distorts human relationships and sexual possibilities, the belief that homosexuality is perverted and disgusting follows from the patriarchal perversion of the natural order. It is patriarchy itself that has perverted the feelings of men, women and children in imposing purpose on sexual expression. Because it confines sex to the marriage bed, people are denied the opportunity to explore other possibilities. Monogamy is a limiting experience for both men and women, and women especially suffer under a marriage system which prevents them from learning enough about themselves and developing enough confidence to challenge the arrogant assumptions of their husbands who continue undisturbed in the belief that they know what sex is all about...

...and under patriarchy, sex is all about the male orgasm, which is the minimal requirement for fulfilling the purpose of procreation (its procreative purpose). The heterosexual act is geared to the attainment of this limited and limiting goal. The male controls the timing of the heterosexual act. He penetrates when he is ready, and moves till he has an orgasm, then he has a cigarette, and that is that. And the woman, shy of insisting on her own interests and feelings often has no words to say what it is that she wants... to define her sexuality in her own terms rather than in the terms imposed on them by the patriarchy. A Samoan woman commented on hearing about the missionary position that white men must be ignorant about sex because they lie flat on their women. They might be ignorant but their wives, rather than trying to force the issue, are more likely to disengage themselves; it is easier to withdraw from the proceedings and to concentrate effort and energy into faking orgasms than it is to try and change the relationship. Where repression is so pervasive that children are prevented from learning about their sexual potential; where masturbation is frowned upon as being 'unproductive' ('unreproductive' would be a better word!) It is hardly any wonder that women accept the male definition of their sexuality.



It is only recently that textbooks on sexuality (and it would be a sick joke to any Samoan that after 2,000 years of civilisation, people turn to 'experts' to learn how to express themselves with each other) have even discussed the possibility that women could become more actively involved in the heterosexual act. This, of course, is a vast improvement on the old school of experts, whose only concession to the female was that men should engage in 'foreplay' before the real thing (the 'big bang' theory of sexuality). Having been got ready by courtesy of male virtuosity, the female had little else to do but lie back and enjoy it... or at least to lie back until he'd finished. Women are also victims of male virtuosity during pregnancy, labour and childbirth. The medical profession controls the process of childbirth on behalf of the patriarchy. Women having babies are exercising their reproductive power. The birth of a baby can be a very satisfying experience, where a woman's mind, emotions and muscular power are working together; it can be a totally absorbing activity in which the women's body becomes her own once more- which is why the medical profession intervene, for in no way can women be allowed to experience their potential. Childbirth, which could be an expression of female power, is turned into its opposite. Women are rendered completely passive during the birth of their baby, while the consultant orchestrates the whole proceedings. This isn't simply a question of the overzealous use of drugs which makes too many women miss the birth of their baby altogether but in the more subtle sense that women in labour have no control over their hospital environment; no control over the technology of childbirth. She has been forced to cede control of the birth of her baby for fear that she might lose it altogether unless she goes along with the hospital staff. Childbirth can be a powerful experience but it can also make the woman very vulnerable. Just as the timing of the heterosexual act is geared to the requirements (increasingly) of the patriarchal medical profession. This gross interference by man in the natural process of labour and birth; this forced disengagement inflicted on women by the patriarchy has horrific consequences for

the new mother. How many women find themselves disengaged from their babies (new born) after they are handed them? And how many women would dare admit that they felt this way if they did?

Women can absent themselves from breast feeding too. The woman who finds she 'can't' breast feed (as opposed to the woman who takes a positive decision either way) could well be responding to the patriarchal take-over of her body. Perhaps she feels that her body and its functions are nothing to do with her because it belongs elsewhere – to men, to the obstetrician, to the world even – but certainly not to her as part of her own powers and autonomy.

And she is right. A woman's body does not belong to her. The mother with young children and a husband, whose body is constantly accessible to the emotional and physical demands of her husband and the children, knows that her body is not her own. And yet this same woman is confronted by the ideal female form in men's comics, on advertisement hoardings and in her own imagination. Her body seemingly ever available to all and sundry is confronted by, and in competition with its own idealised form.

Women are compelled to compete by distorting their body until it becomes a 'figure'; by using make-up to give her the look of the moment – and then she can't compete.

Anne Torode

WOMEN. REPRODUCTION

+ ALIENATION

It is absolutely strategic for women to regain control over reproduction. If we allow the patriarchy to keep building barriers between us and our reproductive powers, alienating us to the point where we ourselves repudiate reproduction and feel that it is an alien power, only in us, not of us, our main strength as a sex (or sex-class) will be dissipated. We will have reproductive characteristics without reproductive power and our colonisation on the grounds of biology will never be ended.

The patriarchy has been very successful in persuading us that our reproductive powers don't really belong to us but are there by grace and favour of men.

Sociologists, from Levi-Strauss onwards, have assured generations of students and social scientists that 'legitimacy' is a key concept of civilisation. This entirely begs the question of the reproductive power of women. The 'civilisation' in question must be a patriarchy since women can have no interest in promoting or proving the 'legitimacy' of their children unless their only route to security (money, food, housing, social approval etc...) and to power is through men. In other words, the sociologists are saying that patriarchy is an essential prerequisite of civilisation. Such is the threat of women's control over their own reproductive power – it would not only shake the foundations of inheritance, primogeniture and patrilineality – it would threaten 'civilisation' itself.

This emphasis on legitimacy permeates behaviour and attitudes in everyday life - calling all expectant mothers 'Mrs' at the ante-natal clinic, giving children their father's surname, the fact that the Registrar-General doesn't record the half-siblings of subsequent 'illegitimate' children (though he records step-sisters and brothers, who have exactly the same biological relationship). Concessions made in the name of 'permissiveness' haven't undermined the reality – that legitimacy is a pervasive concept. (My third child is the most 'planned' of all – but I still have to wonder if the stigma of illegitimacy will affect her as she grows up).

But these devices are nothing compared with the alienation of women from their own reproductive powers brought about by technological childbirth. The women's

movement has, I think, been lulled into a feeling that fighting for abortion and contraception – i.e. whether we have children or not – is the main front in this battle. While this aspect of reproduction is absolutely vital, the troops of the oppressors have been infiltrating between the lines. The emphasis has been put on a ‘high quality’ baby with a low risk of mortality, and although we accept risk-taking as part of life in driving, drinking, smoking, crossing roads, etc... etc... etc... this has become a unique area where others forbid us to take the human responsibility for our own and our babies’ lives, replacing this with a thoroughly inhuman experience. Though maternal death rates are claimed to have been lowered by the exercise known as the ‘Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths’, other factors such as better nutrition and housing are just as likely, if not more likely, to be responsible for the fall in mother and baby death rates. (Professor Kloostermann of Amsterdam has shown that both these rates have improved equally in two Dutch cities, one in which there has been a large swing towards hospital births, and the other in which there has been an equally large swing to home births). What’s more, the ever-ingenuous doctors are replacing our age-old childbirth sicknesses with new and sophisticated ill-effects of twentieth century obstetrics (just as doctors introduced the wave of puerperal fever into Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). Funnily enough, the fall in British rates is usually attributed by obstetricians to obstetric improvements, whilst the same people ascribe the superior rates in Holland not to more relaxed and less interventionist obstetrics but to environmental and social class factors! Anyone who reads the report of the 1973 Study Group of Obstetricians will realise just what disregard most obstetricians have for the emotional, social and physical (including sexual) needs of mothers. Even the paediatricians are objecting to their excesses!

Dr. P. Dunn (paediatrician). I am afraid there are too many obstetric reports introducing new drugs into the management of labour where the authors have shown only casual interests in their effects on the foetus and newborn. Maternal sedation is also likely to be a major factor in failure to establish breastfeeding. Pethidine may not infrequently make the mother feel sick and dizzy and give her a feeling of unreality.

Mr. O’Driscoll (Obstetrician) Many unpleasant experiences wrongly attributed to labour are caused by even small doses of pethidine. There are two words which I would like to see used more often. One is stress. The other is an obstetric complication which to me is more important than eclampsia, and which I would regard as one of the acute emergencies to be seen in the delivery unit, namely panic. I am sure that anybody who has spent any time in a delivery unit will have seen from time to time the almost degrading spectacle of a woman who has really ‘blown it’. One gets the impression that this woman might indeed go through the window, and this suddenly explodes.

Compare this with Dr. Dunn, again: And to the obstetrician who believes that every woman requires some form of analgesia during labour, I would ask: How confident are you that you and your staff have succeeded first in preventing the unnecessary pain of labour – that caused by fear of the unknown, by lack of confidence and by loneliness? Dr. Dunn gives two tables (shown at the end) showing the relationship between excessive drugs, nearly always needed where more monitoring and intervention, i.e. ‘active management of labour’ are the norm, and foetal distress and mother-child separation. Yet Mr. Tipton of Watford G.H. says that: Monitoring equipment, epidural analgesia, and augmentation of labour removes much mental and physical distress from the labour ward and allows more time for the observation and care of the mother and foetus. We believe that we should have 100% monitoring but have not yet sufficient equipment (This is a laugh for anybody who spent their

labour watching hospital staff fiddling with wires, tubes and electrical connections that didn't work and gave false readings!) and Prof. Whitfield of Manchester says: I should like to think that in the end the eventual aim must be for every woman to have her baby in an intensive care situation, and that means more monitoring.



The increased pain, suffering, fear, and even danger, brought about by high technology obstetrics, is disregarded by far too many obstetricians in practice. Obstetricians have their own way of putting down women who 'reject' their intervention and drugs in favour of pain they feel they can control:

Dr. Rosen (Obst. Cardiff) We do have a term for those people who like pain in labour – namely masochism!

Women have been brainwashed into thinking that childbirth is something that doctors do to them, not something that they do to themselves – "I would like to have it at home but my doctor won't let me" – and many seem to lapse into a sort of mindless obedience once pregnancy starts. Even worse, women who work in the obstetric service as men's surrogates, now that midwives are no longer independent practitioners, have often 'joined' the men as oppressors of labouring women, feeling that they have more to gain by siding with the consultants in the 'active management' of labour than they have to lose by forsaking the women they once served.

Oppressive and dictatorial post-natal wards, undermining of confidence during labour, disregard of mothers' wishes and fears and an inability to support mothers of stillbirths – many women have testified to unbearable experiences in their 'relationships' with health service staff during pregnancy, labour and afterwards. No wonder many women who have not yet started to have children continue to avoid having them, because of what they have heard from friends, and read about 'modern childbirth'.

Yet apart from the adverse effect of the new techniques on mother-child bonding, breast-feeding etc., already mentioned, others as well as Dr. Dunn have observed physical effects from monitoring, intervention, and the administration of drugs. In a controlled study of 1,046 home births and as many hospital births matched for parity, (number of children), social class, pregnancy complications, etc., Creevy et al found in the United States

- a) Despite a nine-fold greater incidence of episiotomies, hospital delivered women sustained significantly more second, third and fourth degree cervical lacerations.
- b) There were significantly more forceps deliveries in hospital for foetal distress.
- c) The hospital group had many more caesarean sections for 1st stage arrest (The first stage is considered by Professor Kloostermann, the Amsterdam obstetrician who favours home births, to be only a preparation for labour): for cephalopelvic disproportion, and/or non-progressive labour... and did more caesarean sections for primigravidae (first child) breech presentations and for foetal; distress.
- d) The hospital group had significantly more intra-uterine foetal distress, elevated blood pressure during labour, meconium staining and reported shoulder dystocia... and posterior deliveries (where the baby's head has not yet turned to the right position) and significantly more postpartum haemorrhage.
- e) The hospital group experienced significantly more birth injuries, neonatal infections, received significantly more oxygen at 2, 3, 4 and 5 or more minutes, more respiratory distress lasting 12 hours or more among full-term infants, and more total non-congenital neonatal complications... and were given more resuscitation and had lower one minute and five minute Apgar* scores than the home group (*a measurement of various body systems)
- f) Long-term morbidity and mortality in mothers and children in both groups was not significantly different
- g) The significant differences noted in the management of the women indicate that those hospital delivered are more likely to encounter oxytocin augmentation of labour, forceps delivery, analgesia, anaesthesia and caesarean section.

In addition to this evidence, Naaktgeboren in Holland has observed that labouring animals stop their labours (even in the middle of multiple births) when they are moved or photographed and observed. Some members of the British Home Confinement Society believe that as this is the first century when women have been moved on a large scale during labour, it may be that women need 'augmentation' of labour when they go into hospital and their labour stops. The recumbent posture now adopted for labour is also believed by many people, including Dr. Dunn and Mr. Tipton of the study group, to be associated with discomfort and maternal hypotension (low blood-pressure) which can cause a slowed-up labour and foetal distress.

Women opposing these trends also have to beware of careerists seeking to increase their own prestige by jumping onto the bandwagon. Under the guise of 'natural childbirth' a new obstetric 'star' has appeared on the horizon, by the name of Leboyer. In reality this man may be pro-baby (though how one can be pro-baby without being pro-mother is hard to see) but in fact he has a strange view of women.

"The picture he paints is of violence – a violence created in his own mind. It is of nature, 'an intransigent force – wild, out of control' and of a woman's body, a

prison gone berserk, demanding it's prisoner's death" (Judith Luce). He speaks of women as 'the monsters who drive their babies from their wombs'. I will never forget the sight of a 'Leboyer' birth on television, where a very aware mother, sitting up to watch her baby appear, cried 'Baby, baby' as it's head born and was told "Shush" by the birth attendants, in horrified tones. (She was disturbing the baby!) That's the sort of alienation she won't forget.

I want to look at breast-feeding as well from a feminist point of view. Like many women, I wanted to breast-feed all my babies and had varying amounts of success – 1 month each for the first two and 3 months for the third (before I went back to work). Each time my experience has led me to be more curious about the ambivalence behind the bland assumption that breast-feeding is best. There is still a lack of support for women who want to breastfeed but this isn't the crux of the matter. I always felt perplexed by the women who not only didn't breastfeed but held their bottle-fed babies at arms length as if they couldn't bear physical contact with the creature who only hours before had been inside their bodies.

These are often the same women who 'accept' medical direction for their pregnancy and I feel that there are two main reasons for not breastfeeding, or not continuing to do so, in addition to the commonly-cited reasons (the discomfort and pain which some women experience, the sexual objectification of the mammary gland which obscures it's real function, voyeurism and the unacceptability of feeding in public, as well as the fact that breastfeeding seems to hinder weight-loss after pregnancy (hormones?) which can increase post-natal depression in a society with a slimness cult).

- 1) NOT breastfeeding is the only 'strike' which women have, against a system which orders and co-opts their reproductive power, and makes them entirely subservient to the production of a healthy baby with a statistically good future, and gives them little or no control over the future of that child. "I am not going to breast-feed – again make my body a servant of my baby, the product of the medical establishment" is the only withdrawal of labour (!) we have concerned with pregnancy. In other words, medicine and society have alienated us from our babies, set us against them to the extent that we don't want to feed them.
- 2) When we have been poked and prodded, reduced to cattle, invaded with foetal scalp monitors, forceps to break waters, etc., etc., we only want to get our bodies back to ourselves. (For an appalling catalogue of how women rationalise the inhuman cattle market of ante-natal treatment, see "A doctor is a doctor" by Barbara Moyes, in New Society, 10.11.77, p. 289) Apart from the problems this causes in resuming our sexual activities, many of us have had this feeling of wanting to button up our clothes, and wanting not to be subservient to another human being's needs and 'invasions' every 3-4 hours.

Of course, breast-feeding in our culture takes for granted that women will not be returning to work, but I think the two main reasons given above bear much more examination as the real reasons for stopping breastfeeding or not starting to do it.

It is important for us to do this work because women are always being pulled apart by male social scientists. I read in New Society on September 8th 1977 that

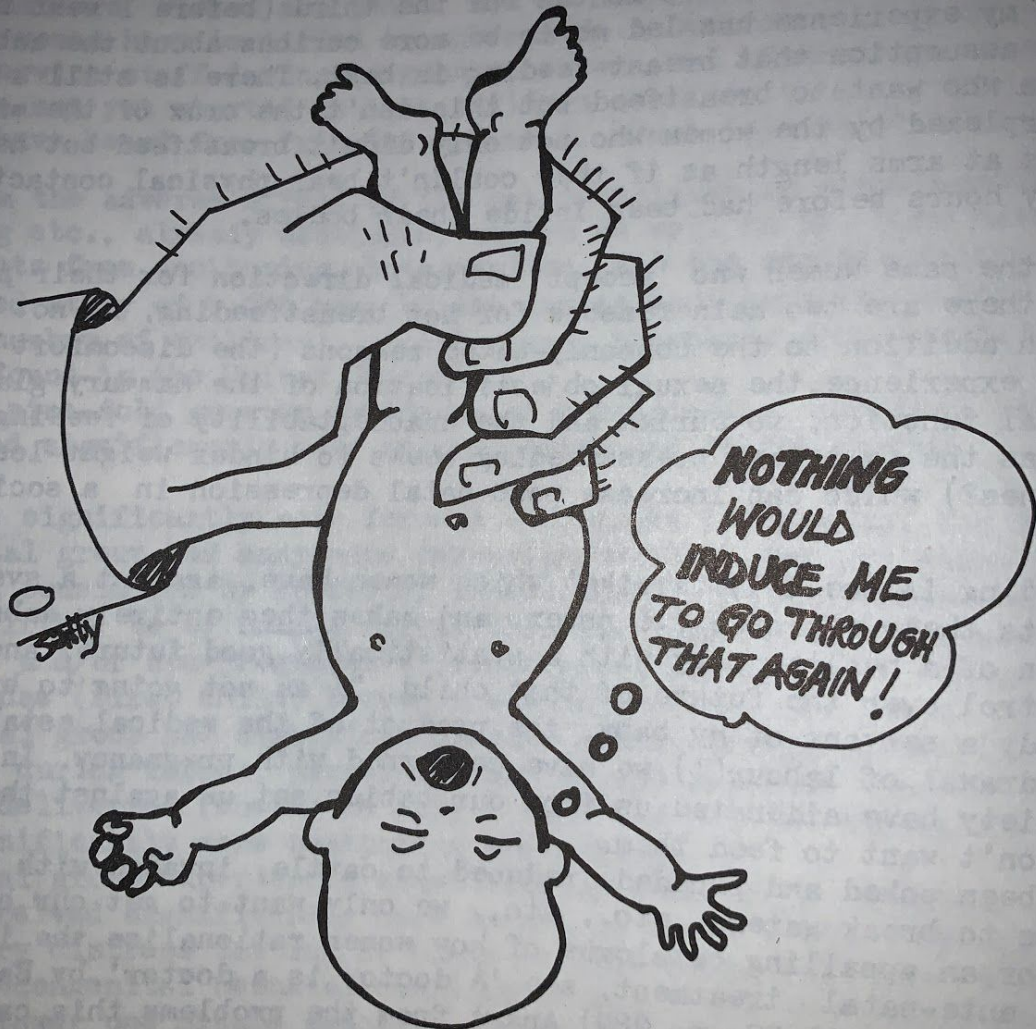
"While it is general medical policy to encourage breastfeeding, relatively little is known about the social and cultural factors which influence the mothers. R.A.K. Jokes and E.M.Belsey (men?) investigated such factors in an inner London borough (Social Science and Medicine, vol.11, No.3., page 175).

'Such factors' included social class, immigrant status, parity, 'dislike', convenience, mothers and friends breastfeeding, and the level of encouragement from the medical profession. The authors come out with the startling finding that "Most women gave it up because they disliked it" and New Society goes on to inform us that "the authors conclude that an irrational distaste for breastfeeding is probably the biggest obstacle to an increase in the practice" !

Poor women again - hampered by irrationality, putting their preferences before their babies!

The only organisation campaigning in any way against conveyor-belt childbirth and not mainly composed of women, is the NSPCC, which is now voicing a belief that mother and child are alienated to such an extent by modern obstetrics that they believe this to be partly responsible for the increase in child-battering (though they are not directly campaigning for the rights of mothers in this). This belief may be borne out by the research findings of Kennell, Voos and Klaus (see bibliography) whose research is quoted by the DHSS in their discussion booklet on maternity services 'Reducing the risk' - in what could be considered as a very mild broadside to the obstetricians.

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This is a long paper, with extensive quotations, but I make no apology for that because the aim is to bring to the attention of women, mothers or not, some of the things that are being said about us, and planned for us. What I am trying to suggest is that we, as feminists, ignore these facts, and possible future developments, at our peril. Some women may be avoiding child-bearing, simply because they cannot face the alienating experience which it often is now - others feel estranged from their own bodies and from their babies by the experience. One or two have been driven to suicide during pregnancy. How many are seeking abortion for fear of childbirth, not of children? Abortion and contraception are not the (only) answer for women who feel

like this - in fact abortion in this instance is playing into the hands of the patriarchy as we are still not fighting to exercise our reproductive power the way we want to. It is left to the individual woman to struggle on her own against the concept of legitimacy and against high-powered obstetrics. (I.e. what does 'A woman's right to choose' mean in the face of childbirth on male terms?)

Others have written extensively on the low status and rewards, and scandalous lack of provision, for childrearing in our society - but confining ourselves to childbearing alone, we can see that a complete takeover and redirection of our reproductive powers is on the cards.

A futurologist is predicting that 'cloning' (test-tube baby farming) is extremely likely to be developed and/or that 'people' who refuse to have children will be punitively taxed, if the birth-rate continues to fall. When talking of cloning, geneticists quoted by Hilary Rose and Jalna Hanmer in "Women's Liberation, Reproduction and the Technological Fix" recommend using the male genes of Einsteins and the female genes of Elizabeth Taylors. All this raises severe problems for those advocating solutions for our biological 'handicap' along the lines recommended by Shulamith Firestone. It is not impossible to prognosticate a fascist state (such states have only encouraged women to breed in the past) which develops cloning, breeds men for work, thinking and social life and women as slaves and sex objects alone.

What about reproduction and socialist-feminists?

The combination of two factors - the assumption that men have the right to decide how, when and where, women have their children, and the need of medical capital to protect and perpetuate itself, is a lethal one for women. Obstetricians have to pretend that they always know what they're doing and put down women's wisdom as 'old wives' tales'. Anyone who saw the put-down of women's feelings on the ITV series 'All about babies' (Spring 1977 and repeat, Winter 1977-78). directed by Dr. Hugh Jolly, a paediatrician who is making an enormous name for himself as an expert on mothers and babies, will bear this out. He has also written a horrible article in Women's Own (week ending 22.10.77) asking 'Have you the right to be a mother?' Women with unhappy childhoods and emotional problems are judged by Dr. Jolly. 'I do believe some people shouldn't have children' he says. Apparently he has the right to be a (highly-paid) paediatrician and judge of women. And listen to Dr. Crawford from the Obstetricians Study Group:

"Sometimes it is very difficult to say something to a woman. If I were to tell the truth, that we want everyone in hospital because we do not know who is at risk that will not increase patients confidence in us. But that is the true statement". and Professor Beard obstetrician, nearly giving away the paternalistic/medical hierarchy game to Ms Jill Tweedie, journalist, who was present at the Study Group "Re consumer (how can a mother 'consume' childbirth?) attitudes to labour - we have found that if we adopt a liberal attitude towards the patients in terms of giving them the impression, and carrying it out (whoops!) that they have a real say in how their labour is managed and how they go through the ante-natal period, it is the sort of attitude that gives the patients confidence, and should reverse what most of us see as a bad trend - i.e. home delivery"

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English give a succinct account of the rise of male medical capital in 'Witches, midwives and Nurses', and Jean Donnison's book. 'Women, midwives and medical men' is a detailed chronicle of a fight about expertise and capital - with medical men being determined to undermine the status of midwife, so that they could corner the market in obstetric expertise - always a highly saleable commodity. With the birth-rate falling they must be even more desperate about preserving this.

This is important for socialist feminists because there is no guarantee that in a 'socialist' male state, there would be any change in this. Medicine concerns women considerably more than men, yet the only socialist country which has deliberately sought to demystify medicine is the Republic of China. (Read the story of 'Lotus', the 40-year-old 'dwarf' who wanted to have a child, in Joshua Horn's 'Away with all pests'. In any other state the 'medical contra-indications' would probably have resulted in great pressure being put on this woman not to have a baby, but here her needs came first).

If socialism means the end of the oppression of one group of people by another, the overthrow of oppression based on class, it must mean fighting for an end to the control of women's reproductive powers by men.

HAVING CHILDREN is the best thing I have ever done. It's something only I, not men, can do. (So many people have had traumatic changes in the behaviour of their husband/lover during pregnancy and just after that we have discussed whether they are in fact, frightened by our reproductive power when it is made so evident and brought so close to them). I have had some very alienating experiences in pregnancy and childbirth, but through fighting for more control through my last pregnancy and labour, feel very differently towards my (youngest) daughter. But we are isolated by the men who control our reproduction, They twist their words and actions to suit their own case. A local obstetrician, arguing for deliveries to take place in a consultant unit, rather than admitting some mothers to a G.P. maternity home, from whence they might have to be moved if problems arose, claimed that there were 'considerable dangers attendant upon moving women in labour'. But all mothers (except those who fight to stay at home) are moved in labour! These men have undermined our traditional helpers, the midwives. We must get together and redefine how we will have our babies, fight for the legitimacy of all children, and make childbirth again, in fact in a way it has never been throughout patriarchal society, our experience and our power.

TACTICS FOR THE FIGHT ABOUT REPRODUCTION

1. Support women who challenge medical direction of their pregnancy and labours e.g. Home Confinement Society, support for mothers who want, or don't want, to breastfeed. Countering patriarchal rubbish about 'irrationality', 'irresponsibility', etc., when it appears in the media and medical circles (One woman in Newcastle was told she was 'irresponsible' for wanting to take responsibility for the home birth of her child.)

2. Campaign on health service facilities - cuts in the domiciliary midwifery service and G.P. units now being made in your area, forcing all women into consultant units and therefore into high technology obstetrics.

3.Campaigning on women's health, nutrition and incomes (including the hidden poverty of women inside marriage) and establishing that it improves nutrition, better housing and standards of living that will enable women to carry healthy babies. not high-powered medical technology.

4.A local pregnancy handbook or part of a local Women and Health booklet, and talking to women in playgroups, offices, factories, and schools, about childbirth.

5.Challenge differential registration of births and compilation of 'illegitimate' births. All babies are legitimate!

References and useful reading

N.B. Some of the more technical-sounding stuff will be in the library at your local university or poly, especially if there is a medical school or department which studies the Health Service.

Report of the Study Group on Obstetrics - The Management of Labour (1973)

Creevy, Mehl, Leavitt & Petersen : Home births versus hospital births: Comparisons of outcomes of matched populations (Universities of Wisconsin & Stamford, mimeo, 1976- copy via Scarlet Women Collective, [address] \$1.00)

Judith Dickson Luce and the Judith collective: Childbirth without mothers: more violence against women; from Sister Courage, USA, April 1976

Mothers Choice, New Society, 8th September 1977, p.495

A doctor is a doctor, Barbara Moyes, New Society, 10th November 1977, p.289)

Women's Liberation, Reproduction and the Technological Fix: Hilary Rose and Jalna Janmer, from Sexual Divisions and Society, ed. Diana L.Barker, Tavistock

Worker control of reproduction - Sheila Jeffreys - in 'Catcall' No.5

The Dialectic of Sex: Shulamith Firestones - Oaladin paperback.

Reducing the Risk: Safer pregnancy and childbirth - DHSS_HMSO

Kennell J, Voos D., and Klaus M. 1976 "Parent-infant bonding": Chap.II: Child abuse and neglect: the family and the community. Eds. Helfer. Ray and Kempe, pub, Ballinger.

Away with all pests: Dr. Joshua Horn

Women, Midwives and Medical Men: Jean Donnison, 1977

Witches, Midwives Nurses - A history of women healers - Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English - from Compendium books

C.Naaktgeboren: Human delivery in the light of biological views of parturition: 3rd international congress of Psychosomatic Medicine in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, London, 1971, pp.206-209 (this whole congress report contains some very interesting and revealing papers on medical attitudes to stillbirths, sexuality, etc.)

(The futurologist, whose name I didn't catch, was from Oxford University and was on Radio 4 in September 1977)

Anna Briggs, January 1978

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Womens Liberation, Reproduction and the Technological Fix: Hilary Rose and Jalna Hanover, from Sexual Divisions and Society, ed. Diana L. Barker, Tavistock.

Dr. Dunn's figures

1. Maternal analgesia in labour → Depression of woman's central nervous system → Maternal hypoventilation → Maternal hypoxaemia → Foetal hypoxaemia → Birth asphyxia
2. Maternal analgesia in labour → Phases across placenta → Depression of foetal C.N.S. → Depression of respiration at birth → Neonatal hypoxaemia → Birth asphyxia

Infant sedation during labour → Infant sedation → Failure to establish breastfeeding → Impaired mother-child bonding → Separation from mother → Special care

(A sister who read the first edition of this paper asked for a glossary of obstetric terms. I think it would be quicker if you got a midwifery textbook out of your local library!)

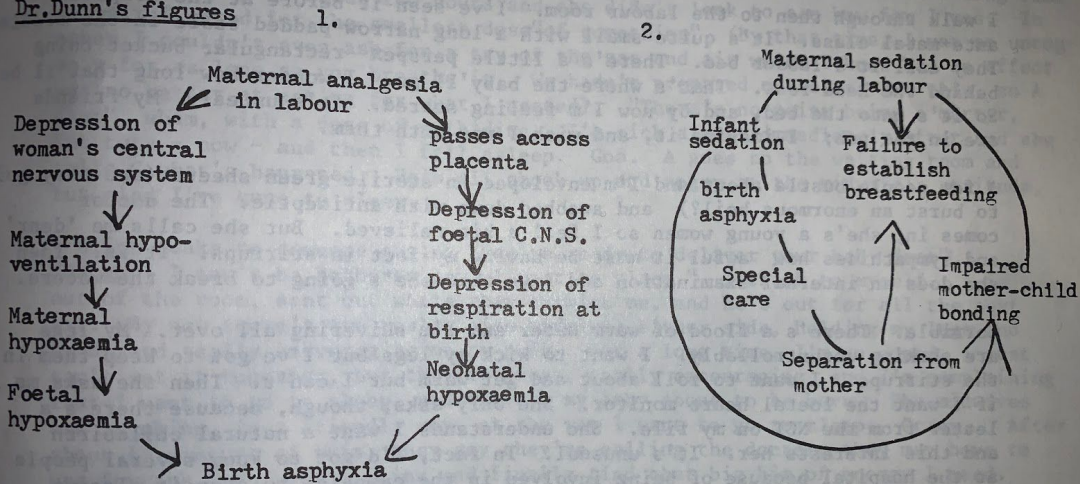
REPRODUCTION HANDICAP

Start here:

1. You go to the Council for housing as you need it but you can't be housed because you have no family	2. You ask doctors about home confinement but are told it's not safe for first-time mothers. For small women, or women under 30 or women over 30, or women with an obese (obstetric) history etc. etc. anyway you can't work around you!	3. Both who hospital wife name clinic and called the nurse were a ewg. she is for the other minus	4. Ask about death - feeling depressed - death - told there isn't any need - nurses will take care of it	5. You lose maternity allowance + pay because you haven't been in one job for two years. Go on to Social Security	6. There's a 7 months gap + the council offers you 3rd floor flat - 7. You ask for woman friend to be with you in labour but you're told "Farkes only, dear"	8.
9. You're told "This sleep will just speed things along a bit, dear"	10. You're told "These drugs but the contractions are too strong relaxer"	10. It's a que!				

anna briggs. January 1978

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to hospital Ask about breast-feeding prep - You lose maternity allowance + pay Hurrah! 7 months gone You ask for woman proud to be with

One Woman's Childbirth

My pregnancy had been very easy and happy. I was healthy, fit and confident. The NCT (*) classes seemed to help and I felt well enough prepared for a straight-forward labour - I hoped. Like it is in the books, if you miss out the chapters on drugs. At the ante-natal clinic they said I was 4cms dilated (full dilation of the cervix, when the baby can be born is 10cms) and would undoubtedly go into labour within 24 hours. I couldn't wait, and kept hoping could feel contractions regularly. Soon they did come, and they didn't hurt. This was great. Eventually I worried a bit that I might just 'drop' it at home, so I phoned the hospital and they said to come in within the next couple of hours. I was getting a bit nervous and by the time we got to the hospital, I was sure the contractions had stopped and wasn't going to have it at all! "We'll go home again" my friends said. No, I had to go on with it. So in we went. I was in their hands....

On to the couch, a bit of friendly chatting and form filling. The pupil nurse feels my tummy and the midwife, who's very nice, laughs because the contractions aren't hurting and I can't feel them coming. She gives me an enema and I get onto the loo just in time. I'm sure the undigested remains of my tea are going out with the shit. I feel exhausted already! Then into a warm bath (for a rest) and back onto the couch for a shave which is a laugh because I had so much pubic hair the pupil midwife had to give up after 2 razors. Though I can't see over the lump, it does feel like a plucked chicken.

I walk through then to the labour room. I've seen it before at the hospital ante-natal class. It's quite small with a long narrow padded table in the middle. They call it a labour bed. There's a little perspex rectangular bucket thing behind the head rest.

that's where the baby'll go. I wonder how long that'll be. So it's onto the bed, and by now I'm feeling scared. It's unreal. My friends are in the pub; I imagine it, and wish I was with them.

A few people bustle about and I'm enveloped in sterile green sheets (are they going to burst an enormous boil?) and swabbed down with antiseptic. The doctor comes in, she's a young woman so I feel a bit relieved. But she calls me 'dear' and sympathises how awful it must be having my feet in stirrups. It is. Then she does an internal examination and says that she's going to break the waters.

Horrible. There's a flood of warm water and I'm shivering all over. My legs are shaking uncontrollably. I want to kick my legs but I've got to keep them in the stirrups. I want to roll about and get warm but I can't. Then she asks me if I want the foetal heart monitor. She only asks, though, because there's a letter from the NCT on my file. She understands I want a natural childbirth and this interests her. It's unusual. In fact, I'd got to know several people at the hospital because of being involved in the campaign to stop it closing (maternity hospitals are the first to go in the cuts) and they all wanted to know about natural childbirth, to see if the exercises and preparation would help.

But there's no point asking me about the foetal heart monitor because "it's for the good of the baby dear". So on it goes, a little wire up my vagina and an electrode is clamped onto the baby's head. Poor baby. But that's not that bad, not like the dreaded CONTRACTION MONITOR - a great rubber band, strapped round my belly and attached to another machine. By now, because the waters had been broken, the contractions were coming fast and lasting too long. I didn't seem to get time to rest in between (like they say in the classes and the books), to gather strength to breathe (to relax through the pains) through the next contraction. This bloody band round my tum meant I couldn't move, I couldn't stroke my tum to ease it, it was sweaty. I was strapped down as my whole body was hurting. I was hot and cold, lying in a pool of warm water (from around the baby. Though they'd changed the sheet under me, the fluid was still coming out.) And to make it all worse the bloody machine didn't work with me lying on my side, and that was the only position I could get remotely comfortable in.

It was about this time, when I saw all strapped and ready to go - wherem into space? that they called in A. Their policy is: the father of the child is encouraged to be present (doesn't have to be hubby any more, what a great leap forward) No one else instead or as well. So my friend who didn't want the father of the baby in with her was denied her woman friend with her. Though at the last minute the midwife, who she knew, called her friend in on the sly. Given that situation there was no chance of me having C. the woman I live with, in as well.

So in came A, and was I glad to see him! It was like a bit of reality walking in the room, and I could hug him and have a little weep and tell him how awful it was. I was not coping at all well with the contractions and I was realising that we hadn't practised the exercises enough. He could give me emotional comfort, but little more. I was getting breathless and panting because I wasn't getting the breathing right. The room was terribly noisy, with five other woman in adjoining rooms, and all the instruments being sterilised, clank clank, next door. I couldn't get comfortable, so aksed a midwife for another pillow to put under my knees (which were still shaking a lot of the time) "In

all that wet oh, no dear. This is labour, you're not supposed to be comfortable." I felt I couldn't stand it, if this was going to go on much longer, I'd have to get some drug. I asked her if she'd examine me to see how much longer I'd be, because if it wouldn't be long, I'd hang on. I didn't want to be doped up when it was time to push the baby out. She just pointed to the dilation chart on the wall and said "you came in at 4-5cms dilated and you've got to get to 10. It'll be a long time yet." I'd been in about two hours and she didn't look to see how far I was. In despair I asked for the smallest dose "of something" (by that time, I was so untogether I couldn't even ask for a try of the gas and air which I knew has an effect only for as long as you breathe it. We hadn't prepared ourselves for this, so A was no better at asking for what I needed). "There's no point being a martyr, dear," wham, with a dose of pethidine. I'm sick almost immediately after and she tut tuts - cow - and then I fall asleep. Goo. A goes to the waiting room and tells C what's happened. He's all shook up and angry at the midwife's attitude, but glad I've gone to sleep.

I blink awake to someone saying "you're ready to deliver your baby dear". "Oh god, I can't be bothered now, I want to sleep." I think to myself. A is out of the room, sent out while they examine me, and he's out for all the next bit. By now there's two really nice midwives either side, holding my legs and hands and really encouraging me to push. For a long time, I'm so doped, I just can't get it together, but they're great, really encouraging and I'm complaining that I want to go to sleep, and there's my baby about to be born. The midwives are laughing, in a friendly way, at the way I want to go to sleep. Crazy.. After about 45 minutes of this, they say they're calling the doctor, they may have to use forceps. Oh God, I think and finally find that big bit of energy I need. The dope seems to wear off just in time and as the doctor arrives I really start pushing.

All this time A is outside and he tells me later that a nurse had come out and told him the baby's heart was failing and they were calling the doctor to use forceps. He was scared shitless. All the time he could hear me shouting and forcing to get the baby out, and when they cut me "Oooo, you're hurting me". And suddenly they shout out "A. A....." and throw him a gown and mask and pull him in. Great..... it's going to be ok.. Like in the film he's seen, he went to the head of the bed, and the doctor pulled him to the foot of the bed.... so he'd see it all better. Then it was terrific.... a final bit push..... "it's out" I yelled, and it echoes round the room, and there's the head and an arm. All I can remember really is a baby flying through the air, great balls dangling "You got your Joe, A." I shout (I just confess) and we're all laughing. What a relief...there's the baby....fine....I can stop working.... thank god.... wonderful. "Can I hold him" and there he is in my arms and I'm thrilled. They call C in then and we're all exclaiming at him. Someone puts him in the little perspex box that I wondered would ever hold the baby that had been in me. it's 4.3 in the morning and everyone's great.

In no time, the place is cleared up and C and A go. It's quiet, all the other ives had delivered long ago. The lovely kind midwife helps me put the baby to the breast for a little suck, and he's put back in his box. Then it's funny, a young medic. stitches me up carefully and he, I and the two young pupil midwives who've been around most of the night, talk about hospitals and work... as though nothing's happened. But now and then I look over my shoulder and there's Joe, all wrinkled and I've just given birth. I can't believe it.

After a long careful sewing up, I'm wheeled off to the ward where the women are waking up to start the day.. The baby's taken off to the nursery... will it be long before I see him again? I'm exhausted.

That first day I hardly slept. I was so tired, and emotional. And I was angry. Angry that I'd had that bloody pethidine which had zoned me out for when I really needed to be able to push. ANgry that I'd had a kind of midwife at the beginning and end, but lost her for an old cow in the middle. Angry that the whole set up in that little room made it so much more difficult to cope with the labour: the "bed" the contraction monitor, the noise, the lack of pillows I was elated too - I couldn't stop looking at the baby at the end of the bed, and I kept having little weeps. I longed to see my friends so I could share my joy and my anger, but I had to wait till the afternoon when A (fathers only visiting) could come in, and the evening for the others.

Looking back on it, I realise a lot more about what was wrong and what it could have been like. I realise how women had lost childbirth to technology and the professionals, to a health service which is mainly controlled by men who take little or no account of the total needs of women. There are some lovely women involved, who despite years spent delivering babies and looking after women, still treat us as individuals. But in the present set-up where the workers and we the patients have no control, where other people's standards, norms and rules prevail, they can rarely do what you and they would like. Why can't women be present at the birth? Why can't women visit in the afternoons? WHY are most women who have babies so terrified, they'll take all the drugs going and vow never to have another baby after that? Why when you talk to a woman about her experiences of childbirth, does she dodge the question and say it's hard, and tell you the weights of her babies instead? And when they've had the baby, over ciggies in the loo, all women talk about how they can't wait to get out. Hospitals don't cater for our needs. In this system they can't.... but that's another chapter."

A final word: I think, looking back on it that my labour was fairly normal, even easy in that I never noticed the early part. The hard bit in the hospital, before the hour of pushing, lasted about four hours which is relatively short. Most women don't have as much trouble actually pushing the baby out; I suppose it was a mixture of bad luck and the effects of the pethidine that made it hard for me.

Mary Red

*Note: the names used are fictitious because the other is claiming a small independent income from the state. If you want to contact her, you can get in touch with Scarlet Women Collective.

*NCT. National Childbirth Trust. They arrange classes for preparation in childbirth, with the emphasis on relaxation exercises so women are better prepared for a painful labour and therefore may not need painkilling drugs. They also give advice about drugs should they be needed.

DEAR SCARLET WOMEN,

I would like to contribute to this issue on reproduction from my personal experience, as I feel that as feminists and socialists our attitudes towards having children are important, and for me at the moment this means 'how to conceive.'

1. Choice and child, feminist attitudes

Most women have not had a clear choice about whether or not to have a child. Conception occurs by chance, or pressures from family or tradition are too great for a woman to deny. The question for most women, although this is changing, is when, not whether. I grew up expecting I would have children, did not want to while I was first married and working, and put off the decision in the last four years, now single, thinking the right moment would occur. It has not, and I am now thirty,

As a feminist I fought against my wish to have children, seeing it as a strong part of my conditioning as a woman. I had to fight for independence and autonomy, and saw having a child as acting directly against these things. The wish to have a child does seem to have been unofficially labelled 'not feminist' for these reasons. In the past I have not talked much about my feelings on this, for two reasons that I can now see. Firstly because having children is considered a relatively unimportant function both by society in general, and also by the left, and in Marxist theory. Secondly, our patriarchal society has made sure that the question of whether or not to have a baby is "privatised" one, made by a woman in conjunction with the special male in her life. The decision divides her off from other women, although of course women have always found ways round this.

2. Who would be the father?

This is a difficult question, as I am single, live in a group of five people, and have a relationship with a woman, though I am bisexual. These are the steps in my thinking about it:

- a. I do not have a relationship with a man at present whom I could, or would want to ask to be the father. My relationships with men in the past four years have only twice approached the possibility of having children. I do not see this changing drastically and I am thirty and want to have a child now.
- b. In any case I am against the idea of setting up a mother/father/child group. This increases the tendencies embedded in all of us towards traditional family patterns. I see very few successful, long-term family groups around me.
- c. Even to have a 'father person' may create these tendencies towards 'nuclear' family patterns, and imply a certain kind of relationship between the mother and father, which could distort their true feelings. It also pushes other adults who might want to be involved as 'parents' to the edge of the 'family'. In my situation of living in a house of five people, it would introduce another person who would have to adjust our way of life - sharing money, buying a house together - even if he did not live in the house. And all this on top of the new decisions we would all be making in regard to the new child.

My attitude seems to me to spring quite logically out of my approach to relationships, but some people do seem to find it rather shocking. I think this is because it challenges the basic concept of patriarchy - that a father is necessary to bringing up a child. I would hold that what is necessary to bringing up children is similar to what we need as adults; support, affection, honesty in relationships, even struggle!

My conclusion so far is that my options have narrowed to promiscuity, without telling the man, adoption, or artificial insemination. I may sound clear-headed, but it makes me sad (angry?) that I have to approach having a baby in such a clinical way. I do see it as part of a struggle to find new ways to live as a socialist/feminist.

Promiscuity does not appeal to me. I don't fancy sleeping with random men; I would like to know that the father is healthy, and not a transmitter of disease; and I don't feel anyone should be cheated out of being a parent, even if he doesn't ask about contraception. Similar problems are attached to advertising for a 'father', and also then, the man knows he's a parent, and could exercise parental rights either legally or in practice.

Adoption: I am investigating this, but the restriction of being single means I could only adopt the more problematic children from already 'less acceptable' groups; older, handicapped, non-white. My unusual living circumstances and/or sexual attitudes could act against me even so, (which is why I will withhold my name!)

Aid: I have not found out about it yet. I would like to know whether Sappho, or any other group have got together to discuss how lesbian parents using AID feel about it. I feel certain group discussion and support would be necessary for me.

3. Why I want a child

I find myself getting increasingly prone to anger when people ask me this question. What is the correct answer? because they seem to think there is one and I haven't given it! (more recently I've begun to think people want to find an answer from me.) Bringing up a child would seem to contain a lot of joys as well as problems. It's an experience of life I don't want to miss. Life should be a balance between work, home, creativity, relationships between old and young, and I am in danger of missing some of these. I want to contribute to the next generation's thought and life, and I believe that people like me who have ideas about different ways of living and relating, should have children, and contribute from practice, not theory. I agree that there are too many children unwanted, but we will only end this by giving people real choice, which will not be increased by me denying what I want. I consider all my thoughts above to be contributions on a political level which could improve life, for children as well as adults.

At the Socialist Feminist conference in Manchester, I went to the special workshop on reproduction. It was interesting, and we discussed the problems that confront us as feminists in relation to childbirth. Perhaps we need to precede this discussion with one on how to deal with all the confusing thoughts about how to conceive, being a single mother, and how to cope with the attitudes of friends and acquaintances who think I'm mad, if not dangerous to my potential child. Because I have to speak and act fairly definitely to combat the social norms I am up against, I find I am unable to talk openly about my feelings. Of course at times I don't want a child at all, at times I am terrified of the implications of what I am saying I want to do. It is difficult to share these feelings - in addition to the reasons I have already gone through, because other feminists are also prone to desires for children which they would prefer weren't reactivated by me!

There is no conclusion to this letter, and there is much that I have left out. Perhaps other women who find themselves in a similar position could also write in? If any London women would like to get together to discuss the issues perhaps you could get in touch with Spare Rib.

REPRODUCTION

By fully utilising and developing what already existed capitalism has increased the oppression of women by deepening the division of labour. As a mother, the isolation of most women has horribly increased, for the first time in history, women can perform domestic futures and more importantly socialise infants, without being personally involved in the outside world, ie. society. Her primary function is so reduced to servicing a male and children, without any expectation other than gaining the 'love' of those she services, and the tacit approval of society for doing her duty.

It is only in this capitalistic society that child bearing and childcare are seen as such a burden that it seriously interferes and restricts a woman's ability to do anything else. There are enough examples of other cultures to refute this assumption, also before the development of capitalism women did take part in productive work, and still reproduced. While it is true that the division of labour is in the males interest, it is capitalism that has separated women from production and this in turn has redefined a woman's role which now oppresses her. When necessary, e.g. in war-time, the reproductive function is not seen as a prohibitive factor. Therefore it is not the fact that a woman can reproduce that is the cause, but the myth of motherhood and more importantly, the continuance of the usefulness of the woman's role in the nuclear family which is the inhibiting factor.

The use of psychology has intensified this oppression, one aspect of this is the emphasis on the child's needs, particularly the need for security, and this is seen as being wholly the responsibility of the woman. The need for security should be fully analysed. This society maintains that a child's ability to develop into a functioning adult rests on his/her early experience of MOTHERING. Yet it is difficult to imagine any child being secure in a nuclear family, dependant on a depressed mother on Valium and on a father's earning power threatened with unemployment, and other variants. What should be questioned is the type of adults wanted and needed to maintain the system.

A man's time is rigidly divided between work and leisure, and the increased alienation of work has also increased the pressure on women, for all his emotional needs must be fulfilled out of work usually by the family. On the other hand in this age which recognises psychological needs, society is silent regarding the mother's needs as a social being. Instead vast profits are made on pills of all descriptions to help a woman, not to supply her needs, but to accept her lot and to supply the needs of others. From the 30's an army of welfare workers and other have sprung up, trained in advising and pressurising women to match an ideal of motherhood, i.e. there is now state supervision. Yet a woman's work is regarded as unimportant. She has nowhere to go for her leisure time (if she has any), there is no separation between work and leisure, night and day her existence revolves around her family.

Much emphasis has been made of the quality of home life, and in the boom period with the growth of consumerism, the family is seen as a consumer unit. As the man's

wage is largely used within the family, this has served to increase women's oppression by reinforcing the role of the family and particularly the woman's role in the home, especially by the media. It has also increased women's oppression in another way, before a family was dependant on a woman's skills, preserving, cloth and clothes making, etc now her role has been reduced to continuous instant servicing eg. cooking meals. This reduces the social value of her work and reduces the woman's importance in society. While the ideological emphasis is on reproduction, in actual fact far more time is now spent on servicing the home and male, again reproduction is used to maintain the institution of the nuclear family. Even with the event of the pill, easier divorce and other developments, the institution of marriage and family have not been weakened. Society all the way through uses ideology to reinforce these processes, thus ensuring that one and all plays one role in the maintenance of expanded capitalism. The intensification of the sex roles, the good man is a reliable worker and a good woman is a good servicer, has intensified the oppression of women in a particular way which has given rise to the women's movement as we now know it.

The growth of consumerism has resulted in the most vicious oppression of all, the development of woman as a sex object, that is the depersonalisation of woman to a previously unknown extent. This lays the foundations for women to accept unquestionably the ideology of love, marriage and motherhood. Also the depersonalising of women makes it easier for society to excuse violence such as rape against women. Women are encouraged to inhibit the security of women for the benefit of men. But all serves to inhibit the sexuality of women and serves to ease the acceptance of the "safety" of marriage, because the assumption is that a woman should use her sexual attraction (not sexuality) in establishing a stable relationship with a male.

Marx and Engels wrote in a time when the family was breaking down, with a subsequent large child mortality rate mainly through neglect. Engels could argue for the wholesale reintroduction of women in social production. But what they did not foresee was the ability of capitalism to overcome these problems. But the use of the bourgeois ideology of the family helped by the development of technology, women's roles were redefined thus securing a next generation of healthy workers, and also securing a cheap, amenable, generation of healthy workers, and also securing a cheap, amenable expendable labor force when needed. Because the burden was put on the individual family and not on the state or capitalist, the role of the unpaid worker traditionally fell on the women. But this puts the woman at a disadvantage as a worker in production, most importantly regarding bargaining power. Women can only be PARTIALLY integrated into the workforce because of her reproductive role. But the contradiction between work and home roles, the necessity of the former and the pressure of the latter has served to make some aware that in the existing structure there is no solution. Women may gain reforms, but the pressures of society serve to strengthen the oppression in other spheres.

With the development of the welfare state, while having undeniably benefited society in general, it has not improved the position of women. The material improvements have not seriously changed the basic dependence of women. This is because the state is used to maintain the ideology of the family. Quoted in a paper written by R.O.W., is a bit of the 1942 Beveridge Report which laid the foundation of the Welfare State, "In the next thirty years housewives as mothers have vital work to do

in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British Race and of British Ideals in the world.” The judicial system is also an example, while it is commonly understood that the courts maintain that the best place for a child is with its mother, this is dependant on their conception of mother. If the woman demands divorce because she wants to be independent, follow her carer or to form a lesbian relationship, she is unlikely to keep her children. One contradiction is that more women are now include to have children and to attempt to support them without a male, bit usually below the poverty line and with increased oppression.

The working class is split by sexism which weakens their ability to fight the exploiters, and all aspects of sexism affect women in the workplace and this in turn affects women as a potential revolutionary force. Therefore the struggle of women to overcome these divisions must be part of the class struggle in that sense. The fight must take place outside the unions as well as inside. But as society used the reproductive role to place women outside production, it appears futile to some to argue that it is only in organised labour is there collective power; women have as little power there as anywhere else. Only when unions themselves take up the struggle of women can change come about, this is why the struggle must take place within the unions. But if the whole of society upholds sexism and there is no organised pressure against sexism outside the workplace, there is little hope in combating the ivisions which benefit those whose interests lie in maintaining the status quo.

It is true to say that men benefit from sexism, but they are also oppressed, women are DOUBLY so. This society IS a patriarchal society, but capitalism has reinforced and integrated patriarchy in a particular way, this is why the fight must be against capitalism initially. It is true that a revolution need not bring about the liberation of women but there must be a revolution and the aim to build a socialist society before women can hope to be liberated. The struggle can then continue against patriarchy, for the issues will be clearly separated from the capitalist society; the question of sex power would not be integrated in the continuance of a ruling class based on economics. The arguments of the revolutionary feminists seem to imply that once women have power, we would be alright. Bit the hold of bourgeois ideology controls the majority of women as well as men. There also seems to be some confusion between privilege and power. This is NOT to say in any way that the struggle against patriarchy should not take place now. It must!

The left tends to take an economic view of the women’s question, and there seems to be a great deal of difficulty in integrating the women’s question in the class struggle. The emphasis is in terms of labour against capital, without the recognition that the women’s struggle can and must be also outside the point of production, as her reproductive function which is vital to the maintenance of capitalism is used to place her away from the point of production. As Marxists we recognise that the woman’s position is socially detirmined, and these determinants operate largely through the family of ideologically reinforcing the socially determined sex roles. Because she reproduces, woman is manipulated to accept her social/economic weakness as a result.

Newham Socialist Feminist Group by Gillian Anciano
- with thanks to Margaret Page

The right of every woman to A.I.D. free on the N.H.S?

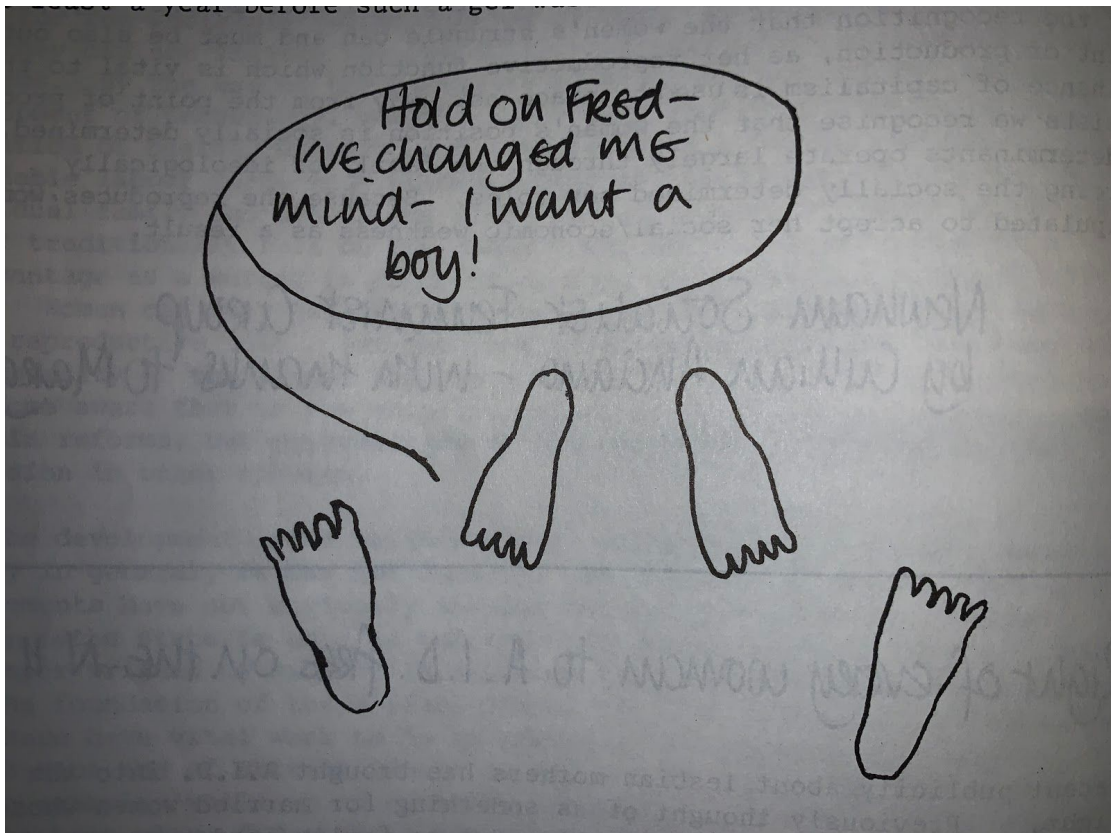
The recent publicity about lesbian mothers has brought A.I.D. into the limelight. Previously thought of as something for married women whose husband was unable to help them conceive due to faulty/inadequate sperm, it has taken on much wider implications. And not only for lesbians. Heterosexual or bisexual women who have no male lover to wish to have a child by could use A.I.D. to get pregnant. So could celibate women. It's certainly a preferable idea to picking up strange men around the time of ovulation, or fucking with friends and just hoping it all works out O.K. - to me anyway. A.I.D should be available free on demand for any woman on the N.H.S. This is unlikely at the moment. Also many women find the way the N.H.S. operates alienating and prying. So how about arranging it in a woman-controlled way? A.I.D. donors are usually medical students (in France they use policemen!). Some women don't care whose sperm they use, who he looks like or believes. Others would rather know the man concerned or choose a friend, whether or not he is to be closely involved in bringing up the child. Have any women's health or other groups done any research on this? Would they see it as a possible role? What do people think? - Al

Reproduction notes

If you want to have a girl, fuck a couple of days BEFORE you expect to ovulate. Male sperm swim faster but die quicker. Sperm live a maximum of 72 hours. Eggs live a maximum of 26 hours. So if the sperm are there about 36 hours and then you release an egg, chances are the male sperm may mainly be dead while the female sperm are all hanging round in the fallopian tube awaiting an egg to pop out and engulf one of them.

Conversely if you want a boy, get the sperm there on the day of ovulation or just after. The male sperm will zoom up the uterus and get to the egg first.

Other ways are to have a vinegar douche if you want a girl - the increased acid kills off male sperms ; or douche with bicarbonate of soda if it's a boy you want, as female sperm don't like alkaline solutions. Don't use too much of either though or you'll kill ALL the sperms. A messy business. A doctor in Oxford is meant to be developing a gel which would have the same effect which women could put up into their vaginas before the sperm got there to determine sex. (Reported in B.P.A.S. newsletter, May 1977: it said it would be at least a year before such a gel was available.)



If you want a Home birth: contact Society to Support Home Confinements [address]
They have groups all over the country and support people wanting home births,
especially people meeting medical opposition.

Health workers for women - association of radical midwives [address]

Book Review

OF WOMAN BORN - Adrienne Rich (Virago £2.50)

MATERNITY - LETTERS FROM WORKING WOMEN Ed: Margaret Llewelyn Davies
(reprinted by Virago £1.75)

Compulsory reading, both these books, for women seeking for the link between women's reproductive power and our lives as a whole. Maternity is a quiet book, with no polemics - the letters speak for themselves of the total hopelessness involved in being the childbearing worker of the second and third generation after the industrial revolution. It doesn't demands 'worker control of reproduction' as we would envisage it, but modest demands are made for birth control and basic antenatal and child health care. Women's gratitude for having a 'good' husband himself the victim of capital. and women's fatalism about having an inescapably terrible husband - both are reflected starkly in these pages. The continual grief of having too many pregancneies, often as not ending in miscarriage, stillbirth, or the early death of a child, is an outrage on the sensitivities of women who intrinsically value childbearing and raising. The letter show that women are very clear about the source of their oppression - not childbirth as such but the institution of mother hood, as Adrienne

Rich would say, at that particular stage in the development of patriarchal class society.

“The child is the asset of the nation, and the mother the backbone.”

“I know of streets of houses where there are large factories built, taking the whole of the daylight away from the kitchen, where the woman spends the best part of their life. On top of this you get the continual grinding of machinery all day. Knowing that it is women and girls working in these factories gives you the feeling that their bodies are going round with the machinery. The mother wonders what she has to live for; if there is another baby coming she hopes it will be dead when it is born.”

Numerous letters tell of mothers torn between feeding their husband and children first, and feeding the latest unborn infant through their own bodies; torn between the growing mountain of domestic chores awaiting them, and the need to rest during pregnancy and after childbirth, to get their own bodies back to health and to breastfeed their babies; torn between looking after their children properly and having to go back to the factory within a month of childbirth to make ends meet in the family. The letters are unbelievable, representing the common experience of women only 60 - 70 years ago in this country - our grandmothers and great-grandmothers; but they are not to be read in order to thank our lucky stars that we have pregnancy and childbirth immeasurably easier. A lot of the changes that have taken place since the letters were written reflect not only the humanitarian aims of the Co-op Women's Guild but the recognition by capital that a greater investment in qualitative rather than quantitative reproduction, ensuring a healthier labour force, lower infant mortality and releasing more women to the casual unskilled level of the labour market, would be less of a drag on its resources. We are still fighting the same enemy, which changes its shape with the times - the alienation of women's reproductive power and their co-option in the cause of the patriarchal state.

It's good to read this book at the same time as 'of Woman Born'. Adrienne Rich's book is what one would describe as a 'tour de force' - it pulls you along from beginning to end, identifying at all levels with Rich's experiences, poetry and polemics. Though there are chapter headings, inside the chapters the structure is indivisible - she darts from her own and other women's experiences, poetry, writings, to political conclusions and assertions without you noticing the change - which is as it should be since for feminists (uniquely amongst political groupings?) personal and political are indivisible. Her references and quotations are extensive and come from widespread sources, and are always to the point.

What Adrienne Rich is talking about is not an end to 'sex roles' or 'sexism' but a complete overthrow of the masculine principle upon which society as we know it is based. She shows that women, through their relationship to reproduction, have a real understanding of what life is about. Not only has the patriarchy expropriated that reproductive power for its own ends, but it has alienated society from female values and priorities, replacing them with values which makes human beings less truly human. She asserts that “women are beginning to ask questions which.... patriarchal method has declared non-questions. The dominant male culture in separating man as knower from both women and from nature as the objects of knowledge, evolved certain intellectual polarities which still have the power to blind our imaginations.”

Her book examines in depth the implications behind the quotation she gives from Elizabeth Oakes-Smith, an early 19th century suffragist, writer and preacher:

“Do we really understand that we aim at nothing less than an entire subversion of the present state of society, a dissolution of the whole existing social compact?”

Rich's only omission, in her long chapters about othering sons and being daughters, is that she does not explore the experience of producing deformed, disabled or stillborn children (which have particular manifestations in a patriarchal society) or the experience of being a mother of daughters, (perhaps because she has borne three healthy sons.)

She shows clearly that she understands very well what it is not to be a mother of sons - nevertheless she gives those of use who do have daughters the tools with which to examine the relationship. It is important for feminists to consider the mother/daughter relationship seriously - it is obviously problematic to be encouraging a child to do things for which the patriarchy might seek to punish her (by stigmatization at least) before she was old enough or politically mature enough to withstand the onslaught. Mothers of feminist daughters also have a problem of identity when their daughters reject things they accepted and also by implication sometimes, reject them. Her picture of a close female world existing at a different level from the male world, is very positive - but it is clear that we want the 'female world' extended far beyond those areas (child-care etc.) in which men allow it to exist.

Rich gives an overwhelming impression of the positive love of women for women and draws a clear distinction between male and female homosexuality by describing vividly the mutual identification in sexual pleasure experiences by women - the joy in each other's sensitivity and the trust at the moments of deeper sensuality from which women have been alienated by patriarchal heterosexuality. She talks powerfully of the alienation caused by patriarchy which brings women to the point of assaulting or even killing their children - of the massive influence of the concept of legitimacy on women - of the takeover of midwifery by men - and of a possible Brave New World where reproduction would be taken away from women, rendering us totally powerless. She makes it quite clear that there can be no reliance on left men to end the subjugation of women:

“For however theoretically men may call for 'women's liberation in any social order they may devise, however much they consciously may wish for an end to sexual caste, they still live in the unacknowledged cave of their own subjectivity, their denied fears and longings, and few men can bear to confront that shadow-world. For patriarchy, however much it has failed them, however much it divides them from themselves, is still their order, confirming them in privilege.”

This is a book to be read at a gulp, but studied slowly. Each chapter could form the basis of a full evening's discussion, in a 'course' of meetings on the history, present and future of patriarchy. Best of all it's optimistic because it reasserts the power of women and that's where we go on from.

Anna Briggs

Anyone interested in the women and mental health group contact [name & number]

News from the regions

Belfast

You might like to know the situation over here at the present time. I was a founding member of the Belfast SWG (you have printed an extract from our manifesto), which dissolved in May 1977. Some of the women believed that a specifically socialist group was 'elitist' in that we were automatically excluding women who felt unable to commit themselves to the position outlined in our manifesto, et who wanted to work on women's issues. Other women argued that we were too remote from the main political issue: the anti-imperialist struggle, and that we should concentrate our energies in giving support to the women active in the Relatives Action Committee working for political status. These two groups, although not united on the way forward, were united in calling for the dissolution of the SWG. Some other women including myself, wanted to ratify the SWG (with some organisational changes). We wished to make clear our position with regards anti-imperialism - that we are anti-imperialists because we are socialists, not because we are Catholics, nationalists etc - which in the particular political context of the six counties can easily become obscured. We also believe it is impossible at present to build a movement of women here; the needs of the military struggle override everything else for many potential women activists. The problems facing women here are even more acute, but women's responses are different due to their hostility to the state. For example, many Catholic women will refuse to campaign for nurseries because that would be to take money from the British Government. Yet in the overcrowded housing conditions of West Belfast, self-help is not the answer: there are no vacant buildings. While we are opposed to self-help as a solution the fact that we can't even occupy a building in protest, leads to feelings of apathy and despair. I'm compressing a complex discussion that lasted for weeks, but our basic political position was that an organisation which is simply made up of working class women has no built-in guarantee of expressing a socialist answer to women's oppression - indeed, given the limited nature of class consciousness here, it is more likely to express reformism.

The dissolution of the SWG led to much confusion, with people having conflicting ideas as to what the next step should be. After a period of six months, agreement was reached to form the Belfast Women's Collective open to all women who want to work on women's issues. Apart from that minimal level of agreement, the collective takes a broadly socialist position, but this remains undefined. Women's Action, after an absence of four months, is to be published again. The first project planned is a nursery campaign - a petition has been circulated and the Belfast Women in Media group are making a video film on nurseries, which it is hoped will be shown to women on the various estates.

I feel one of the main weaknesses of the new group is its decision not to work with other organisations. The SWG had continually intervened in united fronts, raising the position of women and making some gains (enormous for Irish politics!), such as a commitment to provide creches at all major political meetings. The discussion this issue provoked was extremely valuable, but now, the problems facing women will again be ignored, lost in arguments on political status, repression etc. which of course affect women also, but not in the most obvious ways. One reason for not working with other groups is the difficulty one is immediately faced with - when

various left groups are putting forward resolutions how does a women's group (which contains women who are also members of these same left groups) reach a position? We were continually confronted by this situation as the SWG - generally we decided that as a group we could only put forward and speak on resolutions relating specifically to women. At one time we thought it would be possible to arrive at a consensus, but we were accused by some sisters of wanting to act as a female revolutionary party.

Although our experiences are vastly different from our British sisters, we have many points of contact: do soc/fems organise separately from the main women's movement and from the organised left - how do we work within united fronts (TOM, ant-racist committees etc.). We welcome the interchange of ideas in Scarlet Women and the development of the soc/fem current within the WLM. With luck, our Dublin conference should help us to build a similar current over here.

Margaret Ward

Edinburgh

When the bus from Edinburgh was unable to make it through the blizzard to the Socialist-Feminist conference in Manchester, we spent the weekend together in Edinburgh discussing some of the conference papers.

The discussion was varied, but there was a general feeling of the need to develop a clearer theoretical perspective as Socialist-Feminists, and re-examine some of the traditional socialist ideas in the light of the growing understanding of the nature of women's oppression developed by the Women's Liberation Movement - such as the relevance of "class" to women. We have now planned a series of meetings to discuss such topics in greater depth, the list of topics is attached. Also there are plans to hold a Scottish Socialist-Feminist conference fairly soon.

Topic Headings

1. the Question of a Class Analysis
2. The Revolutionary process
3. Scarlet Women
4. Sexuality

Questions thrown up by the discussion.

1. Class

What is a class analysis of society?

How do women fit into a class analysis?

How is class defined?

How is a woman's class defined?

what is class consciousness?

Does the socialisation of domestic labour end the division of labour?

2. The revolutionary process

How do we think the revolution will come about?

- what forces will determine it?

Are women a vanguard layer?

How do we as socialist feminists organise to bring about the revolution eg separate organisations or not?

Just how much can be achieved under capitalism - how far does/will capitalism accommodate?

What is the strategy to make men confront their sexism?

Patriarchy and Capitalism - what is the relationship? Is there one? Is capitalism an expression of patriarchy or now? (how universal is violence against women?)

What does traditional marxism have to learn from the WLM, from the Gay and Black movements? and vice versa? i.e. what is the relationship of subjective and material factors?

3. Scarlet Women

What is its relationship to the WLM? What should it do? Why are we organising as a current? What is the effect on the rest of the WLM of organising as a current?

What is the relationship to "The Left" and to individual left groups? Is there a conflict between belonging to a left group and being a Socialist Feminist?

What are the problems of relating to broad United Fronts, Socialist Unity?

What about the differing forms of organisation in the Left and in the WLM?

4. Sexuality

What is sexuality? - to what extent are sexual feelings innate even if sexuality is conditioned?

What sorts of behaviours are sexual?

Is there a split between emotional and sexual needs?

'Gay' and 'Straight' both label people by sexuality - is bisexuality a cop out? Is it politically correct to identify as Gay even if "im" is bisexuality?

Is there a specific socialist view point on sexuality? - if so what are the differences with a non socialist on this question?

Mary Brand

London

Notes of a London Socialist Feminist meeting held to discuss the seventh demand, in preparation for the National Women's Liberation Conference.

About 10 women came to the meeting on Sunday, March. We were not necessarily a representative group but basically were women from London who had been to the seventh demand workshop at the Manchester Socialist Feminist Conference and agreed to meet again.

The following is a brief summary of our discussion which we are circulating so other women and groups of women have the opportunity to see and discuss it before the National Conference. We would be pleased to hear from other groups who are discussing or working on this theme.

Discussion

Campaigns on the subject of violence against women (Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Centres, rape action groups, Reclaiming the Night) are already ongoing. The point of a Seventh Demand is not to replace these campaigns. The point is for the Women's Liberation Movement to make a public agreed statement on violence against women, and provide a framework for campaigns to continue and grow.

We agreed at least 3 things are needed

1. a demand
2. a list of campaigning points and activities as aid to organising
3. a framework for theoretical work and analysis, on violence against women, to continue

The Demand

The main difficulty in formulating a demand was that it was either very broad and general (more or less 'We demand Women's Liberation) and not aimed at anyone or anything in particular; or else too specific, limited, short term - even reformist? eg. 'We demand state support for women's refuges and rape crisis centres.'

We agreed that emotional as well as physical violence must be included; and that specific reference should also be made to rape and battering of women. In the end we came up with two alternative formulations:

"We demand an end to rape, battering and emotional and physical violence against women"

or

"We demand the right to live free from (the fear of) rape, battering and emotional and physical violence against women."

We put these forward for discussion, not because we think they are perfect, but because we hope they may encourage others to think of something better.

Campaigning Points

Suggested points and activities included:

1. Rape within marriage should be legally recognised
2. The concept of 'without consent' in rape law should be changed to one 'against our will'
3. Self defence should be taught to girls in schools
4. there should be government funding for Rape Crisis Centres, under the control of the WLM
5. Groups should organise in their own areas against kerb crawlers, the local press, sexist hoardings - and to talk in schools, clubs, etc.
6. Public humiliation of known rapists should be encouraged (eg. at their place of work) partly in order to change the public image of rape as something roovy and macho. Most people felt hesitant about all-out endorsement of violent retaliation and worried about what it could lead to in further counter-attacks

7. The facts about rape should be well publicised and myths exploded (eg. rape is not the result of men suddenly feeling an uncontrollable sexual urge - most rapes are planned).
8. There should be adequate funding by local authorities for all refuges, under the control of the support group.
9. Battered women without children should become a priority group under the Homeless Persons Act.

We also felt links should be made with:

- campaigns on the media against sexist adverts the press, etc.
- the violent and sadistic treatment of women in clinics and hospitals including during childbirth
- the treatment of women in mental hospitals

In terms of campaigns we considered the problem of whether we should work for legislative change or set up alternative structures. We agreed we needed to do both.

Theory and Problems

Need a Socialist Feminist analysis of rape necessarily be different from a radical feminist one? We thought possibly not. But the kind of campaigns groups choose to pursue might differ.

How do we feel about stiffer prison sentences for rape, given our dislike of the prison system and all it represents? We thought that since at the moment we can't provide any alternative protection for women, we can't afford to be liberal about prison.

We noted that some societies punish rape very severely, but for the wrong reasons, i.e. because it infringes another man's "property rights". This is not a socialist feminist perspective on rape!

We have to fight the masochism (internalised sexual conditioning) of women, as well as the sadism and violence of men.

Conclusion

We hope these very limited notes will be useful to other groups.

We agreed to ask for a workshop on the seventh demand at the National Conference.

We agreed to try and contact women who had attended the forthcoming Rome conference on violence against women.

If other groups have been working on the seventh demand (and we are sure some have) we would like to hear from you soon.

Contact [address]

Letters

Dear Scarlet Women,

I think I could do you a better cartoon on housework than the SHIT one. I am also willing to do my best with the proposed cover for Scarle Women, if you let me know what you want done, though my style of drawing may perhaps be too old fashioned. I may not have a clue how to set about it- in which case I would let you know at once.

The Socialist Worker, to which I subscribe, knows something of my views on housework, and has seen my cartoon. But my views have only been given in more detail in my paper to the Amsterdam Conference. I have more to add since then.

It is quite easy to separate nappy-changing from nappy-washing. I used to change nappies, but not wash them. Usually my husband washed them when he came home from work, but once a week we had a cleaner who used to do it. I don't say this was an ideal arrangement. We had to pay the cleaner, and so could afford her only once a week. She (or he) should have been supplied by the state. But this was over forty years ago. It is amazing that socialist women nowadays demand to do their housework for nothing, or else to become private employers paying other women to do it for them. Perhaps this is the example of the USSR.

Vietnam has other ideas, however. The Vietnamese Government has declared that housework is the equivalent of productive work, and it provides a professional houseworker (usually a man) for households in which both husband and wife go out to work. These are two important steps in the right direction, in a country which is struggling to recover from many years of devastation, massacre and a fascist regime, imposed by a callous and hypocritical foreign power which still refuses the reparations due. It gives the lie to the idea that a government "can't afford" the social services which would give women opportunities outside the home. But if socialist women in Britain are interested in the socialisation of housework, they are keeping very quiet about it, and the men seem to regard it as unimportant, like Lenin's government (with the exception of Alexandra Kollantai, its one female member, who was exiled for her persistent feminism). On the contrary, it is all-important, and socialism is impossible without it.

Socialist women appear to be interested only in attacking Wages for Housework in favour of Nothing for Housework, instead of advancing any positive policy on the subject. Many socialists believe that in a socialist system unpopular jobs will be shared. At present we live in a capitalist system, and should demand wages for the work we have to do. Few people are fortunate enough to take up the careers they would have chosen, and most people must work in order to live. The only jobs that some men (not only women) can find available are uncongenial, but they won't refuse payment in case their work should become "institutionalised" if they accepted payment. If the unpaid slavery of the Russian women in teh home is not institutionalised, what is?

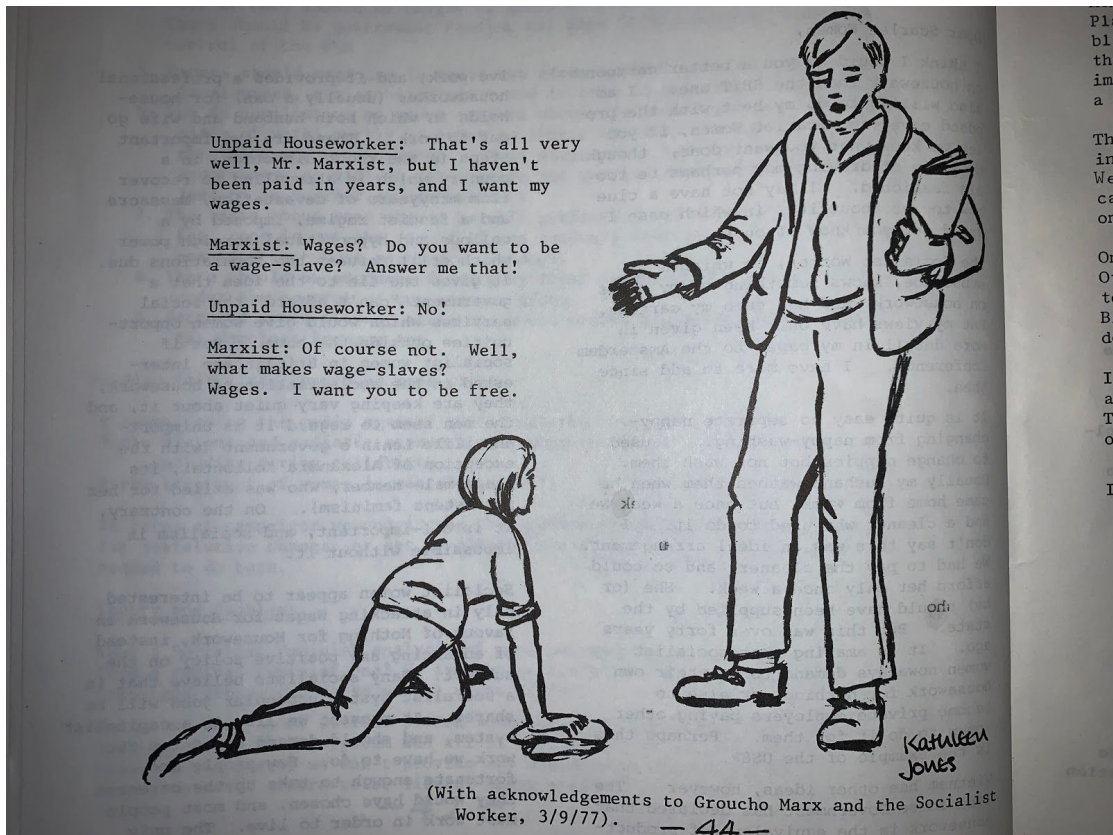
In the last century there was actually a group of socialists who said that workers should not mae wage - claims because the wages system was part of capitalism. Women who want to do housework for nothing belong to this school, and Groucho Marx puts the case beautifully. These willing, unpaid slaves are a nuisance because they tend to set the pattern for other women, so that unpaid housework is regarded

as a women's lot. But it doesn't matter so much if you, personally, would not like to be paid for doing it, as long as you don't put any obstacles in the path of those who would. To have to do it for wages is surely an improvement on having to do it for nothing.

I am opposed to the Wages for Housework Campaign because (1) they regard housework as exclusively women's work, and (2) they include sexual intercourse with "housework" (!) and this certainly should not be paid for.

I hope that socialist women will soon raise the demand for the socialisation of housework. Britain is certainly not more impoverished than Vietnam. Moreover, it was during World War II, when this country was on its beam-ends, that we had municipal restaurants and other social services to release women from much of their work in the home, because they were needed for the "war effort". The government can afford such things when it suits their purpose.

In Sisterhood,
Kathleen Jones.



Dear Sisters

RECLAIM THE NIGHT

At the Socialist-Feminist Conference in Manchester on 28/29 January, some women claimed that one of the RECLAIM THE NIGHT marches went "unthinkingly through a black area" and was therefore racist. We've heard the same criticism from other sources, and know it applies to use in Leeds, since one of our marches went through the multi-racial area of Chapeltown.

As to racism: any man can be a rapist. The colour of the penis facing its way into you is irrelevant, Same with kerb-crawlers, bottom-pinchers, porn-merchants, sexist-commenters, sleazy-propositionalists and Jack the Ripper. "When we are attacked as women, then we must attack a man because he is a man, not a black man" (from a letter by Paula McDiarmid to Spare Rib no.67). Very true, and that's what we were doing.

We chose the Chapeltown route because of several brutal murders of women in the area over the last 2 years, This was understood by all the local people we talked to, informed of the march, gave leaflets to - friends, neighbours, members of West Indian and Asian organisations, women in pubs, the Community Playgroup, the Youth Club, the Citizens' Advice Bureau... there were a few black women on the march. Had more women from Chapeltown been involved in the initial organisation local support might have been much bigger, but the impetus came from the then Revolutionary Refeminist Group most of whom lived in a different part of town.

The RECLAIM THE NIGHT marchers were perfectly well aware of what we were doing in marching through a black area - why should sisters call us "unthinking"? We obviously considered the image an all-white women's march (which it wasn't) carrying torches might present, and took care to make it clear, in advance and on the night, exactly what we were doing. And we feel it WAS understood.

One woman did tell us she disagreed with our leaflet, hence her non-appearance. Other feminists who voted with their feet and stayed away never got it together to tell us WHY. Incidentally there were women from mixed left groups there - Big Flame, I.M.G, S.W.P, C.P., Alternative Socialism and no doubt more - decisions not to come were all individual.

It's a pity that women who muttered (and mutter) "racism" behind our back, and allow rumours of trouble to spread, never confronted the Leeds RECLAIM THE NIGHT group with their criticisms. We weren't, and aren't, invisible or unknown.

In Sisterhood, Leeds RECLAIM THE NIGHT GROUP [address]

ABORTION - WHICH WAY NOW?

NAC ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND POSITIVE LEGISLATION DAY SCHOOL, Sheffield on 29/30 April, Open to all who support NAC's aims. At the Sheffield Students' Union, Graves Building, Western Bank, Sheffield. (Take 60 bus from the station). Food, creche and accommodation available.

Manchester Socialist Feminist Conference - Compositied Workshop Report

Dear sisters,

Hereby enclosed the promised report. On second reading it still seems to have many rough edges, but I thought it preferable to send it as read, rather than to take it on myself to edit and modify. However, do feel free to polish up where you feel necessary. Incidentally, I don't know if it's worth mentioning that this report go written under circumstances reflecting all too accurately the 'tyranny of structurelessness'. (I

didn't mention this because of injunctions against being 'negative'). Of the women delegated to report on their workshops most did in fact turn up to the Reporters' Meeting, but were rapidly driven away by cold, hunger, fatigue and impatience. This left a small nucleus of 6 women, self-selected, not delegated, to discuss the final report, of whom two actually drafted a report, purporting to represent 700 other women! Hopefully it turned out OK and not too skewed by our personal recollections and opinions - but even so the problem of who 'takes responsibility' - and why - remains unsolved, as does that of accountability.

Yours in sisterhood
Ruth Butler

Report on Day 1 Workshops of the National Socialist Feminist Conference

January 28th 1978

With the proviso that summary reports tend to gloss over those very nuances and dynamics of discussion which make or break the experience of participating in a workshop, we hope that the following will convey some idea of the themes raised and the feelings and ideas expressed.

Composition of the workshops

The encouragingly large numbers of women who participated in the workshops - about 1000 - represented a broad spectrum of groups and activities, including the following:

Women from socialist feminist groups, Women's Aid, NAC, WARF, WWC, Women in Ireland and various collectives such as Scarlet Women and Newsreel; women from CR groups, Lesbian Left, Women's Voice, Women's Action Groups; women involved in community politics, trade unions and manual trades; women new to the movement, women who have been out of touch for a couple of years and women who are presently active; women aligned in left group - CP, IMG, SWP, Big Flame, RCG, ICL, Worker's Power, CPB(ML).

There was a sprinkling of international representatives, including groups of Latin American and Iranian women.

And probably lots more besides whom we have unwittingly left out.

Content

We shall try to summarise the discussions held in the workshops according to the general headings suggested by the organisers.

1. common concerns in feminist action

Since there is not yet a coherent and cohesive socialist feminist network, many women who identify themselves as socialist feminist and who came to the conference are active in various campaigns and/or left groups. In discussing our participation in such activities, several common themes and issues seemed to emerge.

Several women raised problems flowing from conflicts between self-definitions as socialist feminist and the need to work within the system, when, for example, applying for grants. Women's Aid was cited in this respect, with women expressing the conflict between making clear statements of principle and intent, or playing these down in order to obtain badly needed women's refuges. In the same context women

discussed the implications of parliamentary lobbying, an issue of especial relevance to NAC women.

Another theme evolved from discussion pertaining to working on campaigns jointly with other groups. There was a feeling that women's groups could contribute to the development of more varied and flexible tactics for political action. For example, in several groups women from WARF talked about the need to develop further alternatives to direct physical confrontation both as a means of reaching more people and as an expression of wariness of what were seen as male tactics of violence as a major form of expression. However, it seems to have been generally accepted that in some situations direct confrontations are necessary, and that greater emphasis on self defence for women would equip us to cope better with such confrontation situations as Grunwick and Lewisham.

During discussions about the need to develop a socialist feminist strategy for action, several groups talked about the need to broaden the age, class and race bases of involved women. Particular emphasis was placed on the potential of working within local community issues such as nurseries, schools, hospitals, tenants' associations and so on.

From their experience of working in various campaigns, several women voiced the need to formulate guidelines for actions compatible with a socialist feminist perspective. One knotty example discussed was the Rape issue, where a common feminist demand for stiffer sentencing is not an easy one for socialist feminists to support unambiguously. A parallel issue within Women's Aid was expressed as the need to develop alternatives to the nuclear family rather than merely providing short term solutions for immediate problems. Another issue to emerge from discussion on Rape was the problem of, for example, having Reclaiming the Night marches through predominantly black areas. During such discussions it was suggested that socialist feminists could make a creative contribution by conceptualising additional levels of linkage between superficially disparate campaigns.

Finally, many women seemed to suffer from chronic over-extension. Socialist feminists have been defined as women who go to twice as many meetings as anyone else. Whether true or not, all groups seemed to touch on the thorny questions of how and where to channel energy so as to be most effective as socialist feminists.

Obviously, such a sparse summary cannot but fail to do justice to the depth and texture of the thoughts, doubts and aims that emerged in discussing these issues. However, two general conclusions did seem to emerge. On the level of practice the vital need for more communication and mutual support among socialist feminists was repeatedly voiced - indeed many women noted this as their main reason for coming to the conference. The lack of such close communication was felt specifically at a geographical level - for example by Scottish women from NAC who felt that their specific needs had been largely ignored by the national campaign, and by Irish women feeling inadequate solidarity with them in their struggles. In general, many women felt the need for more contact between socialist feminist women working in different campaigns. While no resolutions on the matter were suggested, the general desire for a co-ordinating network which, despite our fears of organisations, would function to provide contact and support for socialist feminists was clear. Some

specific suggestions in this direction included the publication of a separate newsletter and/or magazine devoted to the socialist feminist tendency.

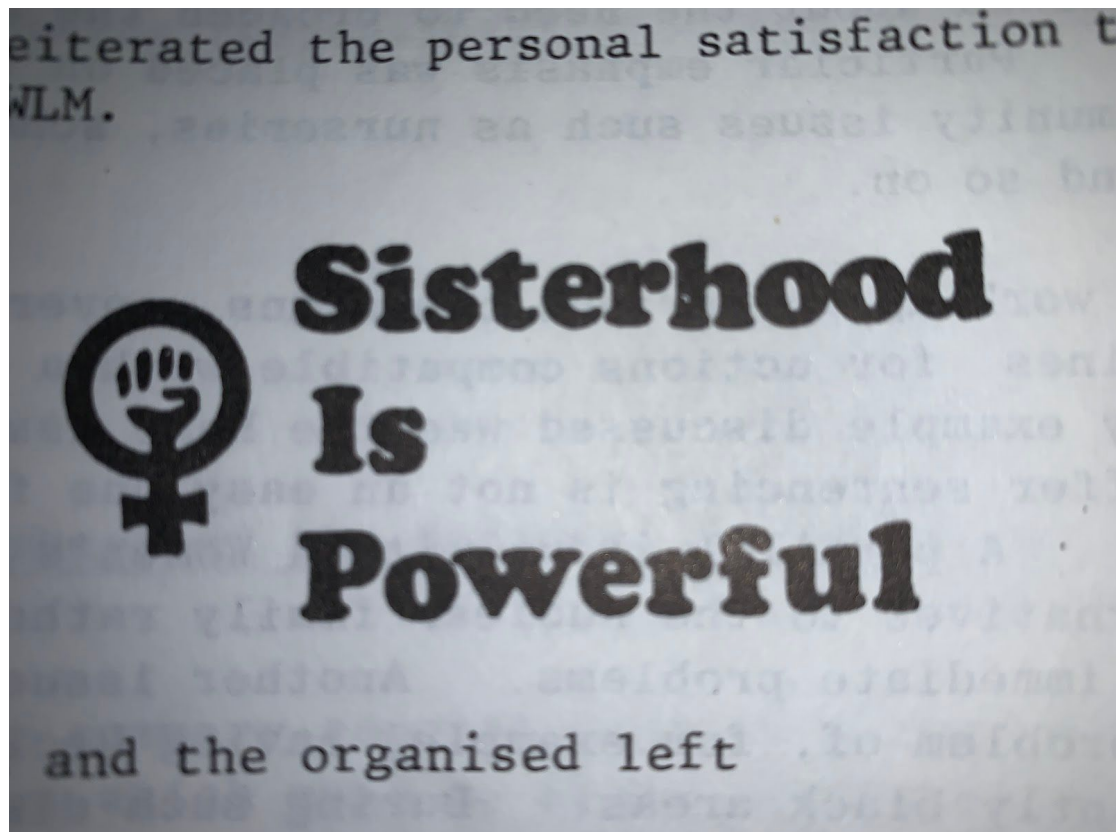
Secondly, there were repeated calls for a long-term socialist feminist strategy and theory which would provide us with an overall perspective; and a framework within which to organise, initiate and co-ordinated socialist feminist activities.

This could help us not only clarify our ideas and stands, but also to address ourselves in a more forceful and effective way to immediate issues ranging from Northern Ireland to the Cuts.

2. Socialist feminists and the Women's Liberation Movement

The second main topic on the agenda was the relationship of socialist feminists to the WLM. Interestingly enough, this question seemed to have received scant attention in most groups. We discussed the growing need to define ourselves as an independent tendency within the women's movement without encouraging sectarianism or splits. While there was some discussion around this issues, the general feeling seemed to be that splits in the movement should be avoided if possible, though not at the expense of glossing over theoretical and tactical differences. It was suggested that maybe the women's movement as a whole needs to work further on the dilemma of combining different tendencies while still presenting some kind of united outward front. It was felt to be particularly important for socialist feminists to work on coming over clear and intelligible to other feminists. Thus we should work to bring an awareness of socialism into the WLM without fostering distrust. At the same time we should not fall into the trap of denying the solid contributions to be made by other groups within the WLM. The problems of overcoming what was felt to be the essentially elitist nature of the WLM was also raised in this context.

Finally, many women reiterated the personal satisfaction they derived from participating in the WLM.



3. Socialist feminists and the organised left

In contrast, most women reported a high level of interest and involvement in the discussions on our relationship to the Left. Our difficulties in relating to the Left seems to be three-fold. Most women criticized Left groups for their failure to integrate an adequate understanding of the implications of an analysis of patriarchy for developing a revolutionary perspective. Much resentment was expressed at being point 5, or sometimes 6, in most revolutionary programmes. Such an attitude seemed to many women to relegate the theoretical importance of subjects raised by the Women's Movement - such as the role of the family in perpetuating patriarchal and capitalist structures - to a mere question of 'women's issues.'

In addition, many women voiced anger at having so often to encounter sexist attitudes and behaviour among men who consider themselves socialists. The analogy was drawn with racism - it is hard to imagine a man with overtly racist attitudes being tolerated in any Left group, whereas sexist men are. Thus much of our work within Left groups on the levels of both theory and practice is reduced to a harrowing struggle with fellow members. It was mentioned that men on the Left are at least 'no worse' than other men; but the expectation that they should rather be considerably better seems most valid. Linked with this problem is our awareness that the power structures against which we struggle as women tend to be replicated within many Left groups.

Finally, women expressed much anger at the often opportunistic attitude of Left groups to feminist issues and campaigns.

There we definite differences in the strength with which different women voiced criticisms of this nature, and in the conclusions drawn from them. Some women,

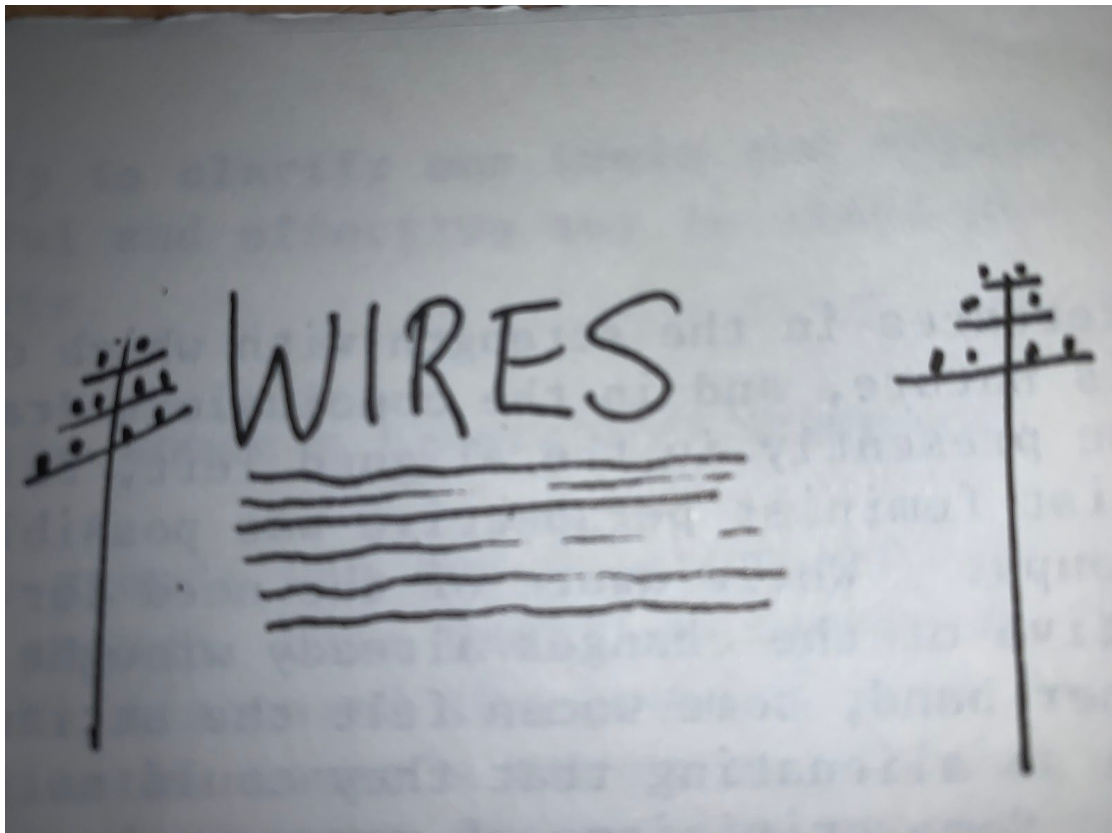
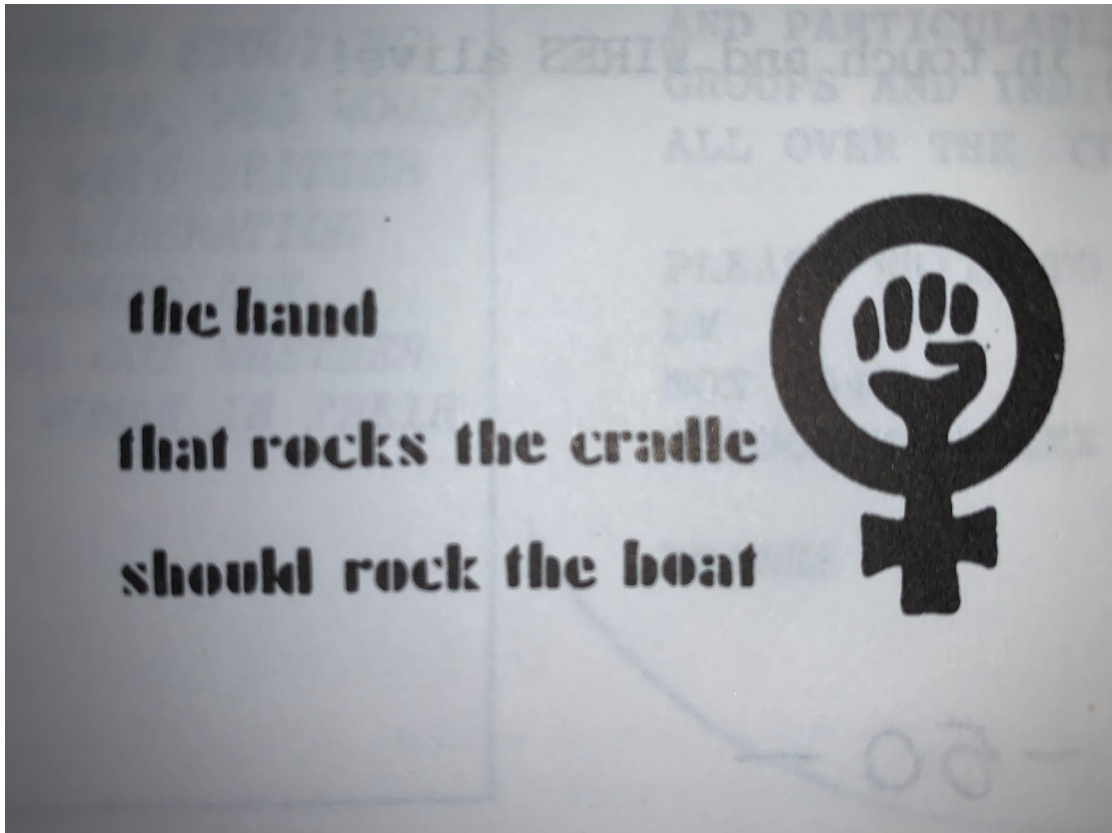
mainly those presently in the aligned left, felt that activity meaningful from a socialist feminist perspective was possible, and indeed occurring, within left groups. While aware of the need for further development, they were appreciative of the changes already wrought by feminists within the left. On the other hand, some women felt the attitudes of many members of the aligned left to be so alienating that they could not work productively within these frameworks. Some criticisms of women members of the aligned left were also voiced. Some women felt that many of these women tended to internalise what they say as the false dichotomy of the organised left between feminism and socialism. Such a dichotomy was seen to differentiate between the 'real, gut' problems of socialism and the 'secondary' ones of feminism. In addition, some women felt that the presence of aligned women with clearly articulated programmes may sometimes stifle attempts to formulate an independent socialist feminist perspective.

While such differences exist and need to be analysed further, most groups reported a strong tendency to reaffirm the need for socialist feminists to work on developing a theoretical perspective which will reflect our own particular position with relation to socialism and feminism. The feeling was that such a perspective must primarily provide common ground where it is not necessary and legitimate to discuss all issues as relevant to socialist feminists. In other words, we socialist feminists must articulate our own identity through the lessons learnt both from the organised left and from the WLM in the form of a growing and flexible set of ideas rather than a dogmatic 'line'. Women seemed to feel that such an analysis should concentrate on the relations between patriarchy and capitalism, together with the relevance of each separately and both together for revolutionary theory and practice.

Secondly, the feminist realisation that the personal is political should be integrated into socialist discussion of the nature and role of revolutionary consciousness and the forms of political practice.

Finally, the issue of structure was widely discussed. We felt that left groupshare often organised on an over-rigid hierarchical basis which could be identified with patterns of male dominance. The WLM has always maintained a certain structurelessness as an essential part of its identity. Some women felt that this is detrimental to effective work and in its own way can become tyrannical. Must we equate structure with hierarchy? Is it possible to develop the kind of structure which will facilitate organisation without falling into those power and leadership patterns which we as feminists reject in left groups?

To summarise, out of all this discussion emerged a definite need to develop a strategy and theory which will create and serve a socialist feminist identity in theory and action.



Want to know where your nearest women's group is? Need help with the project you're writing on women's legal rights? Like to know about women's theatre, film or

music groups? Want to contact other lesbians? Want to know more about Women's Aid or feminist publications? If you do you can write to WIRES, the national information and co-ordination service of the Women's Liberation Movement.

WIRES has been running successfully for nearly three years now. It was set up after the 1975 National Women's Liberation Conference as a central point of contact in the Movement, so that all groups could report their activities and keep in touch with what other groups were doing, as well as enabling more isolated women to find out about the various campaigns, projects and research going on all over the country. Such a co-ordination network is vital in a movement as diverse as ours which is made up of local groups, and where much of the activity and information would otherwise remain unknown except to those most closely involved. Our files are fairly wide now, with contact addresses relevant to almost every subject you'd be likely to need. But they also rely on you to write regular reports and keep them fully up to date.

The fortnightly newsletter is a vital part of our work, with information, articles, reviews, debates, events, letters, and news from groups and campaigns. We'd like more women to write for the newsletter so that it can become a more lively reflection of the discussions going on in the movement. At present we take many of our articles from local newsletters but we'd appreciate a wider indication of what other people see as important.

WIRES is run by a collective of five women and by six monthly meetings where any woman can come along with new ideas, criticisms, and suggestions. We have only just taken over in York and are only beginning to grapple with the problems involved so we welcome as much feedback as possible from all sisters. We are financed almost entirely by subscriptions, and we hope groups will be able to raise money for donations so we don't have to spend too much of our energy on fundraising - it's your paper too! Above all we need subscriptions - £6.00 p.a. for individuals (£4.00 if poor) and £12.00 for groups (which get sent two copies). We make a charge for adverts for groups not in the Women's Liberation Movement.

SUBSCRIBE and keep yourself in touch with WIRES alive!

WIRES [address]

GANNIN'S ON....

7th Demand (Rape, Violence, Women's Aid)

Contacts [addresses and names of contacts]

East Anglia, South West, Yorkshire, Scotland, Manchester/Liverpool, London

THE WOMEN'S PRESS - a new feminist publisher - have just published their first 5 books. They aim to support working women writers and to bring back into print neglected works by women writers of the past. They are supported by an editorial advisory group representing a broad range of feminist opinion. They intend to publish works of fiction and non-fiction in paperback. They would welcome submissions, enquiries, suggestions and feedback, but please enclose return postage. [address]

SWAPO WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN

There are Namibian women studying in many areas in Britain, who would like to make contact with British women in the Women's Liberation Movement. If any groups are interested in finding out whether there is a Namibian woman in their area please contact [address]

Lesbian Line is a new service for women run by women. Our number is [number]. We are open on Mondays and Fridays 2pm to 10pm. We work in London, but welcome all calls, and particularly information from groups and individuals about activities all over the country. Please write to [address]. Thanks

Nurses for a Woman's Right to Choose

For years women have been fighting to win back control over our own lives and to choose whether we want to have a child. Now, with the prospect of General Elections and a possible Conservative Government, we can expect a fresh onslaught on abortion rights.

We must organise now to be prepared for the attack, to campaign for a woman's choice on abortion and for the facilities we need. Nurses can play a vital part in the campaigns for decent day care abortion facilities. We can fight the cutbacks in our hospitals, and expose anti abortionist doctors and gynaecologists.

If you're interested in joining a NURSES FOR A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE GROUP or would like more information contact [address] from NATIONAL ABORTION CAMPAIGN.

ISIS

Dear Friends - For over two years, ISIS has provided an international feminist information service and produced the ISIS international Bulletin. This is thanks to your subscriptions and donations and the moral support from your letters.

Now we are in temporary financial difficulties: decisions on our grant applications to various organisations and individuals will be taken only in March or April. In the meantime there is the immediate need to continue: two more bulletins are due out before April 1978 which we cannot publish without additional funds. So we are sending out this urgent request to all our friends who may want to help.

Please help us carry on during these next crucial months by filling in the form below and sending it with whatever you think you can afford. Any new or renewed subscriptions will also be most welcome. Thank you.

January, 1978

FIGHTBACK is a new bulletin against cuts in the Health Service

It has been co-ordinated by members of Hounslow Hospital Occupation Committee and is an attempt to co-ordinate and build up experience and communication between all those fighting health cuts. And it has a lot of space to develop a women's perspective.

We are looking for people in every area who are prepared to make local contacts among health workers, shop stewards committees, cuts campaigns, women's groups to sell FIGHTBACK and co-ordinate any articles.

Please contact [address]

B.P.A.S Appeal

BPAS spent over £25,000 in taking the authors of Babies for Burning to court for malicious libel. At the last moment the author withdrew the allegations BOAS were suing them for, so the case never came to court. But the costs were incurred anyway in preparing their case. BPAS is launching a fund-raising campaign to help cover the costs. In this way the financial burden will not be carried by women already unfortunate in having to pay to have their pregnancies terminated.

BPAS hopes that all who have reason to be grateful for the existence of BPAS - whether because they have, or may want to, use its information or other services, or because they recognise the role it has played in pioneering a compassionate and safe abortion and fertility control service - will contribute. It also hopes those who have had no direct dealing with BPAS but who wish the 1967 Abortion Act to remain unrestricted, will help with these costs. For, without doubt, with the credibility of Babies For Burning completely undermined, the credibility of much of the anti-abortion lobby's argument has also been destroyed.

Donations, however small, to: [address]

Scottish Socialist Feminist Conference

13th - 14th May 1978, Rosevale Centre, Glasgow

Open to all women who support the Six Demands and the need for an autonomous Women's Liberation Movement and want to discuss the integration of socialist ideas into the struggle against women's oppression.

Block workshop: reports from existing socialist feminist groups and development of the socialist feminist current in Scotland. Workshops: socialist feminist theory. Specialist workshops on Fascism, Ireland, Women and the Trade Unions, Unemployment, Reproduction, and Reformism. Final Plenary.

Cost: about £3.00 including food, papers, and 'conference supply of cheap coffee'!
Registration forms from: [address]

If you are going to write papers, please let the organisers know as soon as possible - and send papers typed on A4 stencil before end of April to allow time for printing and circulating.

Published by Scarlet Women Collective, printed by Tyneside Free Press Workshop