

SCARLET WOMEN 12



60p

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION UNDER IMPERIALISM

Editorial Statement

"Socialist Feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. By the patriarchy we mean a system in which all women are oppressed, an oppression which is total, affecting all aspects of our lives. Just as class oppression preceded capitalism, so does our oppression. We do not acknowledge that men are oppressed as a sex although working class men, gay men and black men are oppressed as workers, gays and blacks, an oppression shared by gay, black and working class 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."

NATIONAL EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE



2.30a.m.
Bolton.



Possible future issues of Scarlet Women (if we recover from this one)

It has been suggested that we have issues on :
Nuclear power and weapons.
Sexuality and fertility.
Racism.

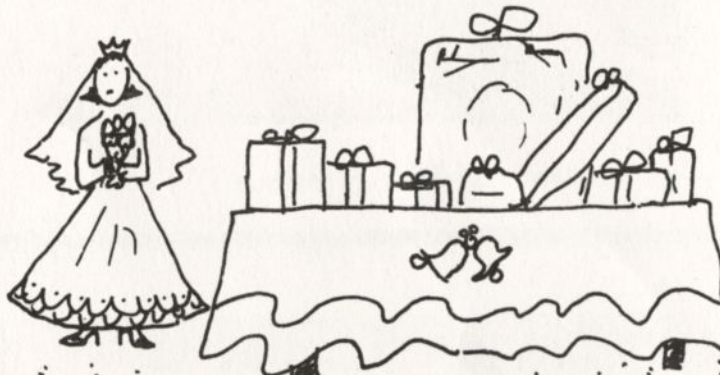
However, as we may still receive articles and responses on the subject of imperialism we may first of all produce a duplicated supplement to this issue on imperialism. But of course all this depends on the our financial situation.....

In exhaustion,
Bolton bit of Scarlet
Women Collective.



'Our patriarchy
is better
than yours'

?
(eds)



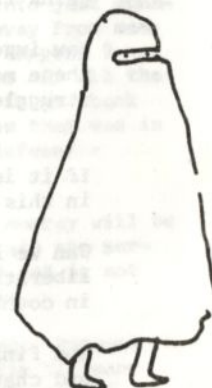
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Original cartoons and graphics by Fanny Tribble - Many thanks.

Thanks to Moss side Press for all the extra help.



Editorial

Imperialism is not new. Other powerful nations in the past have dominated surrounding countries for their purposes (eg. the Romans, the ancient Chinese). The imperialism we are concerned with in this issue is that which developed from 16/17 century European capitalism.

Capitalism has its own momentum - the search for profit - which means it needs to expand constantly, finding new sources of raw materials, cheap labour, areas to export capital to, and markets for its products. This expansion is an attempt to resolve the difficulties inherent in the search for profit, for while capital needs cheap labour to gain maximum profit, low wages don't provide people with enough money to buy its products. Capital has to have consumers to buy as well as workers to produce, otherwise there is a 'crisis of over-production' - consumers can't afford to buy all the goods capital can produce - which is what is happening at the moment. So capital, while maintaining relatively highly paid consumers at home, also exploits cheap labour overseas. Some of this cheap labour it imports to the home territory - and then export again when it no longer has a use for it, migrant labour. Imperialism has developed over time, expressing itself firstly in the plunder of raw materials from the newly 'discovered' lands, then through colonialism - the settlement of these lands - and the slave trade. Finally, after 'independence' and the establishment of national bourgeoisies in these countries, there have developed transnational corporations which have carved up those parts of the world available to them (the West, parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America) in the interests of super-profits.

Capitalism developed within class societies which were already patriarchal; imperialism is therefore inherently patriarchal, a point overlooked by traditional left analysis. In order for the imperialist state to gain the support of their own people, and successfully conquer and colonise other nations, an image of the conquered people as inferior and sub-human has to be fashioned and assimilated by the soldiers and settlers - and by the people in the home territory. The power relation between coloniser and colonised nurtures and reinforces these racist attitudes. Women in colonised nations are subjected not only to racism and economic oppression under imperialism, but also to the sexual exploitation and control of their reproductive capacity which is basic to patriarchy.

Using and controlling people and their lands as a resource denies their humanity and reduces them to objects. In a similar way women both in the colonised and metropolitan countries are controlled and used as a resource for men - our bodies and our lives are shaped to their needs and service. Racism and Sexism then have the same roots in a power relation in which one group treats the other as a disposable resource.

Being part of an imperialist nation ourselves, those of us who are white have inevitably absorbed the racism of our culture, whether we are aware of it or not. We take a lot for granted. Our relative material well-being and political freedom has been purchased with the blood of others. The wealth amassed from other peoples has provided us with a standard of living - including the welfare state - which does protect us against starvation, continual malnutrition and early death. At least our children survive to adulthood - and most of us are likely to live to old age. We also work politically within the framework of a liberal bourgeois democracy which allows us to organise without fear of the overt political repression and torture which political activists in other countries have to face.

The kinds of demands which feminists in this country are fighting for, assume a level of economic and political security which women in Asia, Africa and Latin America do not have. The struggle for economic survival tends to eclipse other struggles if you have nothing. Political repression conditions the forms of struggle. An army of occupation raises questions about priorities, as does the experience of national oppression. We can define our own needs as women and how to go about achieving them (hopefully!), but it would be racist and chauvinistic of us to assume that we can or should provide a blueprint for women in countries which have been ripped off by imperialism.

But we should be asking how we can support women who are fighting against their triple oppression - economic, national and sexual - in these countries. And we should be trying to understand better the ways in which imperialism affects women specifically, both in countries dominated by imperialism and in this country; and how those of us who are white women in an imperialist country, can fight against the oppression perpetrated by 'our' capital in their countries. In this context we think there are a number of questions to be discussed, for example:

How has and does imperialism use women's reproductive capacity and sexuality, both here and overseas, to its own profit?

To what extent are women's specific interests furthered in anti-imperialist struggles, given that these movements are led predominantly by men? And how can women make sure that the gains they make during the struggle are not whittled away after victory?

How important is it for women to fight against male domination and sexist assumptions in these movements? Would this be divisive, or is it crucial to the ultimate success of these struggles?

If it is crucial, do women have to organise autonomously within these movements, as we say women in this country must?

Can we learn anything from the history of women's involvement in anti-imperialist, national liberation and revolutionary struggles in this century, and the subsequent experience of women in countries where these have taken place?

And finally, and probably most importantly for us, how can we combat the deep-rooted racism and chauvinism in Britain - and in white feminists - and begin to build greater solidarity with our black sisters?

Madhu Kishwar - feminism in India.

Madhu Kishwar, who is involved in the Indian feminist magazine 'Manushi' was invited to a women's conference in Copenhagen which was an 'alternative' to the United Nations five year conference on the status of women. Since then she has taken the opportunity of travelling in Europe and America and talking to women. We interviewed her during a visit to Leeds after the 'Beyond the Fragments' conference.

Ali: What do you see as the similarities that women in India and Britain might share and where do you see the differences arise?

Madhu: I don't want to speak specifically of the British feminist movement. One could make some generalisations about Western feminist movements but what I would say would be far more exaggeratedly true of American feminists than the British feminist movement. And yet between these two there are more similarities than differences as compared to the situation in India.

It's quite clear in the context of India, it is really for us a life and death struggle. And when I say us I don't just mean myself, though I see my personal freedom intimately connected with our struggle. Connected with problems of acute, grinding poverty. We just don't have the time or space or energy to go into the whole euphoria of cultural feminism that has come to be in the West. A movement in a relatively opulent set-up throws up quite different forms; you can experience leisure and go in for this whole range of activities, have rock groups, music groups, print badges and T-shirts for every conceivable occasion and any number of these things.

But for us, when we produce Manushi for instance, even something like producing a poster to inform people that Manushi is there - sometimes it may be a choice between bringing out a poster or bringing out a new issue - we can't even afford that kind of minimal publicity... We borrowed money this time and brought out two issues together (Hindi and English) but we had no money for postage.

In a situation like that it's less than hand to mouth living. If it's so for us in Delhi, with relatively greater access to resources, you can imagine what it is like for women in the countryside. One is talking about the struggle of the landless poor, not just against landlordism, but against sexual violence that accompanies very oppressive land relations or situations of bonded labour... Now in a situation like that obviously feminism, or raising the women's question, acquires a life and death urgency which is lacking here.

It's possible to experiment with a hundred different forms of living here - if you don't want to live with a man, you can experiment with communal living - I saw brands and brands of communes all over Europe. It's possible to make these little islands of liberation and to get so involved with the daily functioning of them that you forget that the society outside is slowly likely to eat them up and destroy them. It's a very positive thing, and I'm not saying these experiments are negative but within these communal living experiments fights go on about money or who is to do the garden, and so you move from one commune to another. So much energy goes into creating this illusion of communal living and it is at best an illusion.

That time we just cannot afford - there is very little chance to experiment except perhaps in the very big cities and that for such a very small percentage of people. I think the movement tends to get a little depoliticised as a result. Cultural feminism traps, I think, a lot of energy from the very diehard political fight. In constructing these little alternative structures one is forgetting that we have

to demolish a lot more. That we might, say, as lesbians, banish a few men from our lives but patriarchal institutions stay intact. Therefore, in one sense, as I see it, if lesbian communities become depoliticised, they become not so different from harems. Even in harems, women stay together and it certainly didn't lead to any change of structure - patriarchal structures stayed intact.

So the fight centres not so much on institutions, but in living out your own life and trying to create little islands and refuges. I don't want to belittle their importance, but they have only marginal importance and one has to see them as only a step towards something else. It's a small step and no more - but sometimes that step and trying to sustain it takes a all the energy.

Ali: What form does the women's liberation movement in India take at the moment?

Madhu: To give you one example, wife beating in India is a common problem. Rape is common too, but I will specifically stick to wife beating. Now it's a common problem here as well as in India.

Here the women's movement has managed to highlight the issue in a fairly big way and pressurise the Government into having battered women's refuges and crisis centres. In this country there is a relatively greater facade of democracy - and there is the Welfare State. It gave a little money and said 'O.K., you can keep busy' so you could expect that from the government and you could ask women if they were being oppressed to come out and give them a place, and help them get a job.

Now we in India can't expect anything from the Government, and most of us politically wouldn't even want to touch anything from the Government. We wouldn't touch that filthy money if they tried giving it to us. So when women are battered our struggle has to be - to go outside the house of that family where a woman is being maltreated, and have a demonstration, have a sit in, apply social pressure, demand social ostracism, see to it that the woman survives there in a more human fashion. Try public humiliation and social ostracism as a weapon much more than saying 'step out, and here's a refuge for you'. That's one difference. There is this illusion that

the so called Welfare State can give you what you want. The amount of energy that goes into just running those homes and making women live away from men, is again just one step. And then what happens? A Conservative government comes and cuts off all the money and you spend more energy trying to get back that little bit of a twopenny concession that was in the first place given to you. It's a defensive battle really.

In America and in England so much energy will be going of necessity into trying to maintain the services that were. And the beginning and end is not battered women's refuges, it's much more.

These are differences. The tendency, because you can get money, is to address a little bit more towards the government and expect them to sustain projects, and the movement gets too much involved, I feel, in projects.

There comes a point where these projects start interfering with the politics of the movement and getting too close to the government and its substance. I see it as, at best, short term ways of pressuring, putting to shame, the government but the long term aim, you know, it's an all out battle, not just demanding concessions.

One must somehow keep the two together, short term concessions with the long term struggle against the State itself, rather than this or that government, or this or that party.

Ali: How are things developing in the women's movement in India and what is the attitude of the socialist movement, of the left, to the development of feminism?

Madhu: It's a very tricky question, partly because we are at a very different historical stage as of now, and secondly because of the historical legacy of the movement itself. The women's movement in modern India was born in a colonial context. From the very beginning it was part of the mainstream social reform movement, or the National Movement and all that came with it. And for various historical reasons, not because men were more enlightened, but because it was a do or die question for them, the women's question did become the central question for various reform movements of the 19th century. Indian women didn't have the kind of problem that the suffragists had of being beaten blue for demanding what they were.

We were suffering too much male concern, in fact. And very often the wrong kind of male concern. On the one hand it gave a certain legitimacy to the women's question by making it a social question, a national question, but on the other hand the male led movement was able to define the perimeters of how far the women's question should go, and that tradition did stay with us for a very long time. In one sense it remains even now. We are still at the point where women's groups are beginning to be born rather than a fully fledged all India movement, which is what one can speak of in the West - with all the splinteredness of the movement, all the small groups that exist; yet you can speak of a movement at the all Britain level.

That's not the kind of stage where we are. Small, local, militant struggles, often very militant, radical struggles being born all over the country. The difference now is that they are trying to get linked.

They range from struggles of landless poor women for the right to the land, for minimum wages or against the landlordism and various forms of social oppression that go with landlordism, combined with very oppressive caste systems of near bonded labour, utter destitution and dependence on landlords. To poverty in cities of working class in the slums, unemployment - gross unemployment - two million is a small figure for us, we can talk of hundreds of millions of unemployed and many, many more semi-employed and under employed. The per capita income is 30 rupees a month in the cities and 20 rupees a month for rural areas, and that too is unequally distributed. 70% of the people are living below the poverty line. Even the women's question gets much more linked with the question of poverty.

For instance, when the question of rape is raised in the slums of Delhi, of Bombay, it gets linked with the question of civil amenities. To give you the particular example of a rape of a five-month pregnant woman in a Bombay slum, women did protest against the rape, but they also protested against the fact that there were no public lavatories so that these women had to go out at night or early in the morning to relieve themselves. And there are no street lights. So, if you are going out alone at night and looking for a secluded corner which is what you look for when you want to relieve yourself, you are so much more vulnerable to attack.

The two are linked up - not having drinking water, not having lavatories or a place to bathe - to the question of sexual violence.

These are the forms that struggles are taking. Whenever women, even participating in class organisations, come up to raise these questions, they seldom stop at that - they go on to further questions of oppression at home - wife beating; drunkenness by their own men, rape within the family, and, as I told you, the form of struggle wherever this has happened is public humiliation of whoever has done it. I don't want to say that this is happening in such a big way - these are small, local struggles, but certainly happening.

For instance, price rises. In the early 70's, just before the emergency, this powerful anti-price rise movement swept large parts of West India. It was women who were in the streets who took it upon themselves as their own issue. It's a general issue, but its effects on women's lives are certainly more drastic.

Anti-rape protesters in India

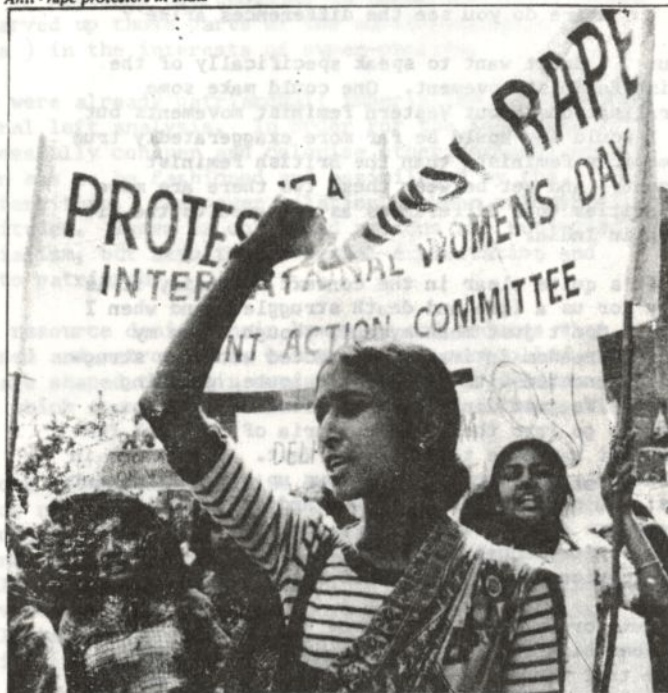


Photo: The Times of India

In the cities, the same issues - from sexual violence, which is becoming a daily feature of our lives, to police rape, which is becoming a big thing, to dowry murders, and anti dowry campaign. These are some of the major issues.

The trade unions, especially the left trade unions, are becoming a little more sensitised, within their own limitations, to questions of working class women - for example maternity leave. But nothing on a very large scale. Despite a very drastic decline in the number of women working in the last few decades, the trade union movement has completely failed to take up this issue of the retrenchment of women on a very massive scale. Its impact of women's lives is really horrendous - greater destitution, and in some ways even this increasing incidence of dowry is linked up to this drastic decline in women's employment, because if women are going to be seen as economic liabilities rather than as assets, then their lives are going to be so much cheaper and more expendable. So, if anyone who has to get rid of a daughter has to literally bribe someone to get her off their hands. This wasn't true even a few decades back, at least for the working class woman, because she worked alongside men. She was an economic asset. It is in that context one has to see the increase of dowry and the literal devaluation of women's lives.

Fiona: Do you think violence against women is increasing?

Madhu: I could turn around and say - do you think it is increasing here? I think it is the women's movement which has brought to focus the fact that we've been violated through centuries. I think violence has always been systematically practised against women in various forms even in times when society chooses to pay great homage to us as goddesses or as presiding deities of home and hearth.

Juliette: So many women were involved in the civil disobedience movement that led to independence and the Indian National Congress included large numbers of women, so it was reasonable to expect equality, at least in theory, would be part of the new National Constitution in 1947. Do you think that equality has really worked in practice, and how are women today learning from the Indian women's struggles in the past?

Madhu: It's only in the 70's that women began to realise that they had been too complacent and had taken this myth of equality rather too seriously, and that our rights are being eroded now partly because of this.

There was the realisation that we, the middle class women, had helped to sustain the myth of equality - that things were going all right because there were 3½ women in the judiciary and 2½ women police officers, 5½ women governors or less or whatever, or women doctors... While a handful of us had sustained this myth because we had these easy won gains, really frightful things were happening to the working class women. All these rights were won at the cost of a decline in the life conditions of working class women.

Employment figures - in 1901, there were 525 women per 1,000 men in the country's workforce, and by 1971 the figure declines to 201 per 1,000 - its impact was on the lives of working class women. And because middle class women were winning entry, and had so much visibility, it seemed all was well. The fact that working class women were being systematically eased out of employment in both rural and urban areas was lost sight of. Nobody knew until the middle of 1975 when the Status of Women committee report came out. Although it was a very lukewarm report appointed by the government, frightful figures came to light.

There has also been an increasing gap in the mortality rate of men and women, pertaining particularly to working class women. With literacy too, the gap between male and female literacy had actually increased in the decades since independence.

These twin realisations are responsible for new kinds of women's groups emerging in India. Realising that on our own we've fought as many battles as we could and we've made the best of it, forgetting everything else, but that if we are to expand the horizons of our own freedom we can't do it alone - we cannot affect structural changes on our own strength. Our struggle has to be linked, not just be linked, but follow the struggle of working class women in India. On our own strength it's a losing battle. I'm not suggesting that this whole politics is being implemented with great success, but it's a growing realisation. And therefore, there are very few new feminist groups, when these emerge among middle class women in cities, which are not sensitive, or alive to, or aware of this need to link the struggle. We might or might not succeed, but the effort is at least certainly being made. We're not any more, satisfied with working among teachers, among students, or among middle class professionals. Those struggles - yes, of course, but the primary struggle has to be also kept in mind.

Fiona: Can you tell us about your ideas about non-violence, and how important that is?

Madhu: More and more, I'm beginning to be converted to the whole idea of non-violence, especially with us living on the verge of a nuclear holocaust. I think women have to take up this issue in a very big way - not just nuclear holocaust, but the whole culture of violence which is patriarchal.

Firstly, it's not just, say, dowry murders in India, or genital mutilation in Africa, but pornography in the West - these are various forms of doing violence to women's bodies, and are deeply interlinked. Mutilating genitals might seem more horrific to Western women, but I think it's no less horrific than the kind of violence that's being done

to the bodies of Western women through the kind of pornographic mass media display of women's bodies to sell everything from razor blades to tyres, all just for voyeuristic pleasure, a sadistic kind of sexuality. I have such a horrific reaction to it - it's one aspect of culture shock that is really difficult to absorb.

Even more, the wars being practised and the mindless violence that men practise on each other - mugging, slashing somebody's head, hitting somebody in the head just their way of interacting to each other. Life has been made so ugly. In that sense, the daily day to day sense, non-violence has to be emphasised, disarmament, non-violence, purging violence out of the culture.

Fiona: I was thinking about the fact that in the Independence Movement in India, there was an emphasis on non-violence and also that in this issue of Scarlet Woman we hope to have interviews with women who are involved in national liberation struggles - armed struggles. I wonder what you think about these sorts of struggles where non-violence as a tactic is rarely used.

Madhu: I think that non-violence was not just a tactic but came to be used as a very revolutionary weapon. I think it's a suicidal mistake of the left to have underestimated its importance by calling it pacifism. I think it came to be used as a very powerful revolutionary weapon because the crux for me of revolutionary movements is not whether you can hit and hit back, but more, much more important, whether or not it was a mass movement. And with Gandhi, and the nationalist movement, the emphasis was not just non-violence, the emphasis was the mass movement. It was with thousands of people on the streets that he talked of non-violence. In that sense it was very revolutionary.

I see very little revolution in guerilla groups by themselves, or hi-jackers, by themselves. There's nothing revolutionary about the use of violence itself - it depends on the context and what it is being used for. The Left fetishises violence as a revolutionary way of doing things, and that's, I think, a very dangerous thing.

It's crucially important that it brings a new dimension to women's participation in the movement. Historically, it is our lesser capacity to do violence, our putting much more energy into sustenance activity rather than destructive activity, that has become a liability for us in one sense. But at the same time women have resisted male aggression, within the family, outside the family. I wouldn't say men have been violent and women have just taken it. I think it's inherent, it's been part of our history of resistance this non-violent resistance which is what came to be posed as a powerful political weapon for the mass movement.

This whole emphasis facilitated the coming out of many more women onto the streets. Gandhi was very shrewd - he realised that the very presence of women was one of the most potent ways of keeping the movement from dissipating itself. When women were in the front line of the national movement, the police would think at least twice, before firing. Of course the police have become a little worse since then... Or the presence of women in the front line might prevent men in the movement from indulging in the sudden mindless kind of attack which can be quite counterproductive. Or in picketing, the use of women as picketers represented within the movement a greater moral force.

I'm beginning to believe more and more that not to use violence is much more courageous than to use violence. It's really a weapon of cowards and brutes rather than of human beings.

Parminder: How does that relate to the women's struggle in, say Zimbabwe, where women have taken up arms and fought side by side with their brothers, and fought for the overthrow of regimes?

Ali: To add to that, I heard from a Zimbabwean bloke, that the women didn't in fact take up arms, or it was in very small numbers that they did.

Madhu: I have a feeling that the left does tend to exaggerate women taking up arms when it suits them. I'm sure they did, and yet...on a world historic scale the monopoly of arms is a male monopoly. We can only help make the world a little more violent, and we certainly cannot take away the weapons from them. And so playing the game with their weapons in the long term, is, I think, self-defeating. I'm not making a sweeping judgement on all movements and saying anybody who at any time uses any kind of violence is wrong. There are specific situations where maybe it is necessary, and of course you use it. But it's a question of keeping the two in mind together - disarmament as much a priority issue as having to take up arms to defend your life - one doesn't make a fetish of it.

But I think the short cut to political struggle, for example, blowing up a train - this revolutionary terrorism, is very counterproductive, because I think you alienate more people than you bring together. It's also an impatience, a failure to move with people, to surge forward with the strength of people. I personally believe that mass movements are the only answer.

The kinds of weapons being made now are making human beings smaller and smaller. A nuclear bomb needs 1/2 men to press buttons to destroy millions of people - can you imagine how belittled human life has become and in that sense, using the same logic, strengthens that logic. Now India is making a nuclear bomb, and Pakistan is making the Islamic bomb - its a competition for destruction.

Fiona: How much is this your personal view - or is it general that in India that feminists have been influenced by non-violence after the independence movement?

Madhu: I don't want to talk about feminists - lets say women in India, because a lot of women who are launching very militant powerful struggles don't use this label. Yes, this legacy is very strong national legacy. Undoubtedly, but I think on the whole anywhere in the world women hate violence much more than men do, and want to have much less to do with violence.

But I certainly don't claim to represent the voice of women. It's quite possible that some people, even in Manushi, would not agree with what I am saying wholeheartedly - so I want to emphasise this is my view.

Ali: How would you then view the situation in Northern Ireland, where there is an anti-imperialist struggle, and sections of the nationalist movement are armed. You mention patience, but they might feel that they have been patient too long. Ireland was England's first colony. There is a big debate amongst women in the North of Ireland about what they stand to gain from the nationalist struggle. And in terms of building a mass movement, what about the differences that have been fostered between the people of the North, and also the fears that women of the North have about uniting with Southern Ireland, while at least by the British state they have been granted more rights, say in terms of contraception, than they have in the south. How do you see mass movements and non-violence in this context?

Madhu: I must admit that our information about Ireland is very limited because we don't hear enough about it and that's one reason why I want to go to Ireland and find out about it. It's crucially important that we link up those struggles and offer whatever support we can.

What I say is quite possibly not true for the specific situation of Ireland and I don't want to make a sweeping generalisation. But taking off even from what you say - you say these divisions have been fostered, but do you see taking up arms by one group as an answer to those divisions that have been foster-

ed? Certainly not. How do divisions, for instance in the movement get sorted out, by taking up of arms by one group or another?....

I talked about patience. I'm not trying to teach patience to the Irish people. No, certainly not. They should be much more impatient. I meant it in a different way, which is the tendency even within the feminist movement. Even feminists are becoming impatient, because they see for every woman within the movement there are hundreds who are not - so the impatience is you can't even talk to the others, you just keep talking to each other and you direct all your violence towards each other for not practicing the right kind of politics, and for not being correct feminists. That's what I meant by shortcuts. Now if feminism is what it is, there is no reason why we should underestimate our strength in being able to get other women to see the point. There is nothing special about those of us who have had the light dawn upon us. In that sense there is no substitute for people's participation. The end of oppression is not just an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth answer, but the ability of the oppressed to stand up at whatever risk and say - to hell with it, I'll not take any more.

I'm not saying it happened in such a great militant form in India, but this is what the civil disobedience or passive resistance movement was about. To say - O.K. you think your guns and arms have great strength. Here we are - fire them? I'm not making a virtue of martyrdom, but sometime these sacrifices have to be made, and it's not as if when you use violence you don't sacrifice.

Taking the same example personally, say in my personal relationships with men, there were times when male friends would be very oppressive in their behaviour towards me, and I tell you, the end of personal oppression in an acute form, came not because I learned to hit them hard - I never did - but when I said - even when you hit me hard, even when you blackmail me with this or that sort of violence - suicide or murder - I will not budge an inch, - the sight of a person being able to stand up and say that makes the oppressor disintegrate much more.

I don't want to generalise because I know so little, and every movement has to find its own weapons, its own solutions. As for Ireland, all I can say is we have not only a lot to learn from each other, but also being in the third world our relationship is not quite the same anymore.

Newer forms of imperialism are being practiced. The poor Indian bourgeoisie is not the poor Indian bourgeoisie any more. No tears need to be shed for it even in its struggles against imperialism. Nationalism has a progressive, positive role to play in certain situation, especially of foreign domination but in the context of, say, India, I think the way the bourgeoisie is beginning to use nationalism is very reactionary and that could be said for many other countries too. This whole concept of national boundaries, protected markets and all we are doing in the name of fighting imperialism today in India, is helping maintain a very corrupt, very inefficient national bourgeoisie which leeches us in the name of 'Be Indian, Buy Indian'. It has got this huge protected market, it is benefiting absolutely nobody and in one sense there is not much difference in being exploited by an Indian capitalist, because capitalism is truly international and we are not any more in the era of the national bourgeoisie.

On the one hand whereas in India the bourgeoisie does make a hue and cry about foreign multinationals, and its struggle against them. On the other hand it not only invites them to participate in the various ventures in India, but it does exactly the same itself.

For instance, the Indian bourgeoisie is floating multinationals in the Middle East countries, and various huge building construction projects that it is undertaking. One of the poor bourgeoisie underdeveloped countries, yet still the world's 10th largest industrial power.

With regards to Pakistan, and the whole divide that exists, I think that nationalism has come to acquire a very reactionary character in this situation. But of course in Ireland, yes, nationalism still has a great role to play.

Alli: One last question, you went to the Beyond the Fragments' conference today, which was an attempt to see what the different areas of struggle in Britain have in common. What was your attitude to it?

Madhu: I was very depressed to see that the race question was not anywhere on the agenda even, of the Fragments. It was totally ignored. When you are talking of combining socialism with Feminism, racism is a very central issue. Apart from the fact that the feminist movement has by and large managed not to involve even working class women in Britain, I think another alarming tendency within, at least certain trends of feminist thinking in the West is to disown racism, to disown imperialism. We've nothing to do with it, men created it, so, well, it's their problem, its not on our agenda. That is not just depoliticising feminism - women have to make it their business, even if women didn't participate in creating it. Certainly women in Western countries did benefit from imperialism, so as beneficiaries of imperialism it has to be your concern.

And so is nuclear weaponry a male creation - does that mean we have nothing to do with it, does that mean it's not our problem? Capitalism, even patriarchy itself is a male creation - you can't just disown it, you fight against it. In disowning these various struggles, the movement is alienating very profoundly the Blacks and other groups, and it obviously is not a good thing.

I had profound faith in the fact that feminism, above all, was truly international, but the way it is coming to be, we may not be able to realise it. And the fact that the Asians, the Blacks, the West Indians have been kept so alienated needs to be questioned very profoundly by the feminist movement here. Just as the left uses class as a convenient stick to beat us with - for everything, class struggle is the answer - caste was not there, race was not there - you've seen the result of that.

Now, if feminism is going to beat us with one stick that is patriarchy, then it is going to do exactly the same thing, and I think the mistakes of the left could be repeated. Patriarchy, yes of course, but everything else has to be kept constantly on the agenda - racism just cannot be underemphasised and other forms of class struggle.

Drought - "God sent" or "Man made" Disaster?



Why are you writing about drought? What has that got to do with Manushi, with women? We were repeatedly confronted with this kind of question while some of us were working in different libraries, trying to collect information on drought.

The attitude behind this question is one that pushes women into invisibility. Are not women 50 per cent of the poor, the Harijans, the Adivasis and of every other oppressed group in this country? Are not women in rural India affected even more disastrously by drought - the first to die, the first to be hit by malnutrition and disease, the first driven into destitution and prostitution? And is it not the woman in the cities who is suffering the worst consequences of scarcity and price rise - struggling harder and harder to make both ends meet on an ever-shrinking budget.

It means standing in endless queues to buy kerosene, fetching water from distant and erratic taps, being forced to turn from kerosene stove to cowdung chulha, getting up earlier to grind the wheat herself in order to save a few paise, walking miles just to buy at a slightly cheaper market, cutting down on her own food so that there is enough to go around.

In the rural areas, want takes a much more brutal form. 200 million people, that is one third of the total population have been in the grip of famine for the last ten months or more. In the seriously affected areas, villagers have no food stocks left, no employment and no money with which to buy anything. They are just starving stilling the pangs of hunger by chewing leaves and digging up roots.

WOMEN ARE ALWAYS THE WORST HIT.

As food and water resources have grown scarce, thousands have been driven to migrate to cities in search of work, the consequence being that women are often left behind in the villages to fend for the children and the old.

As people are forced to live in subhuman conditions, as human lives are systematically devalued, degraded, it is women who suffer most, are the first to be sold or exchanged for food, the first to die. It is not surprising then that an overwhelming number of the starvation deaths so far reported have been those of women. The mortality rate among women even in "normal" times is much higher than that among men. (Between 1951 and 1971, the number of females per 1,000 males decreased from 946 to 930.)

Here is a living example of how this comes to be. This is how Ratna Chamar described the death of his wife at Hanna relief work project in Uttar Pradesh. On the day of her death the poor woman had worked on the canal relief project all day and then had collapsed on reaching home. "We get very little grain and we get it very late... It was her habit to feed me first then the children, and not eat enough herself."

Thus the traditions built into male-dominated society, which force women to see their lives as less valuable and to think that virtue lies in self-sacrifice, mean the slow starvation of the woman when the family is living at bare subsistence level.

As all sources of food went more and more out of reach of the rural poor, families have had to sell their last possessions from domestic animals to utensils to even doors and windows. When there is nothing left to sell, the least valued human beings, that is, the girls and women, are sold. Year after year, newspapers report how the sale of women into prostitution shoots up during times of drought.

In Nawapara, Orissa, girls in the age group 10 to 14 are reported to have been sold for anything from Rs 15 to Rs 55. (Patriot, 7.5.80.) Businessmen from Madhya Pradesh purchase these girls and sell them to vice dens in the cities at very high prices. One Raja Nayak of Komma village, sold his eight-year-old daughter Premata to a businessman for Rs 40: "I could not give her food for days together and my entire family starved so I preferred to sell her. She can now survive on the food given by her master and my family can survive for a few days on the money I got by selling her"

In UP it has been reported that tribal women who collect fire-wood and go to sell it in towns, are sexually exploited by ticket checkers because they have no money to pay for the short train ride from the village to the town. Women are being trapped by unscrupulous contractors... who lure them by promising them a daily wage of Rs10 this year; drought has made the task of the contractors even easier... the girls are sent to brothels or dumped in private homes to do domestic work. In most cases they are not paid anything except two meals a day. These cases go to show how poverty acquires doubly brutal dimensions for women. While for a man, poverty means starvation, for a woman, it invariably also involves rape and a myriad forms of sexual exploitation.

These cases are the mere tip of the iceberg because big newspapers either systematically under-report or never report what is really happening to the poor, especially women, in this country. Such facts are given occasional coverage simply to provide titillation by sensationalizing atrocities on women.

RELIEF - THE MYTH AND THE REALITY.

The government has been piously promising relief on a "war-footing." But how have the much vaunted Food for Work programmes been functioning? On the one hand,

government officially admits that there is no absolute scarcity of food in the country, that tons of food are lying in state godowns. It is also known that tons of foodgrains lie hoarded by private traders. On the other hand, the government bureaucrats, in their airconditioned offices, pretend to be as helpless before the calamity as are the starving landless themselves.

The landlords, because of their political connections, can ensure that the Food for Work project be shortlived so that the poor become more dependent and are forced to accept any wage they may decide to fix, or even work in some form of bonded labour.

Reports from all over the country show that those who work on the relief projects are being cruelly cheated of their rights. Almost everywhere, large scale bungling has been reported, involving every power holder from village heads to relief officers and some social workers who are supposed to be running voluntary organizations. The wages which actually reach the labourer's hands are far lower than what is allocated on paper

In many places, the workers are not paid. Who are they to complain to, when the authorities are themselves the exploiters? In Kundra, for instance, the only relief work undertaken was the construction of a 5km. long dirt road. This was completed within three weeks last September and the wages had not yet been paid as of March. Women at most of these sites were being paid much less than men - by the same government which boasts of having passed the Equal Remuneration Act!

And then of course, there is the usual phenomenon of the sexual abuse of women by the contractors and petty officials at the worksites.

WHO SUFFERS MOST? AND WHO BENEFITS?

A new dimension of barbarity to famines and starvation in the present day world is added by the fact that millions are being condemned to starvation in the midst of plenty and opulence, and worse, that such occurrences have become good occasions to speculate, hoard and make super profits. What is scarcity for the poor becomes a blessing for the rich.

Is it any longer true that famines and droughts are unavoidable "natural" calamities? Or is this just another myth, like that of the "natural" inequality between men and women?



Drought, like price rise and inflation, has its own politics and there are powerful vested interests which seek to perpetuate such misery because they gain by it. The government has computed the loss in farm incomes due to the current drought at Rs1,000 crores. But it is the poor peasant and landless labourer who seem to have almost exclusively borne this loss because it is they alone who produce for consumption and not for the market. The rich farmers who can hoard the surplus and later sell it at higher prices have actually benefited from scarcity.

The government, by increasing the procurement support price of foodgrain, makes matters worse. This helps only the rich who have surplus foodgrain to sell and prevents even a little relief to the urban poor, by keeping prices artificially inflated even during times of plenty.

The so-called "national" calamity is the therefore not a calamity for the whole nation. To the frequenters of five star hotels, it makes not difference whether sugar sells at Rs7 or Rs5 a kilo. Thus even while there is so much talk of "shortages", the consumption of the rich has in fact become even more luxurious.

Meanwhile the rural poor are flocking to the cities in the hope of a few crumbs. They are seen eating garbage, begging, and are reduced to committing petty "thefts and robberies". For the government, they represent only a "law and order" problem - the police and anti-begging squads are left to deal with them.

The government is very efficient when it comes to unleashing violence and crushing struggles of the oppressed and the poor. It is very efficient in ordering police firings on unarmed workers demanding their rights, as in Kanpur, Faridabad, Pantnagar. Why is it then, that the government cannot ensure a supply of clean drinking water in villages where Campa Cola can manage to be regularly supplied? Why is it that the government cannot ensure that the food under the Food for Work project reaches those who work for it, instead of ending up in the pockets of the corrupt bureaucracy?

"OUR BATTLE BEGINS HERE"

In spite of the utter destitution and powerlessness to which the mass of people in this country have been reduced, there have been attempts - some spontaneous, some organized - to express their anger and demand their rights. One silent but no less significant way in which people expressed their anger, was by keeping away from the recent state assembly elections. Many villages boycotted the election en masse. Here is one of the many examples: "Residents of drought-hit Khandekama village of Barmer district refused to vote unless drinking water was provided to them immediately". In Chattisgarh region (Madhya Pradesh) too, attempts were made by the people to march to the local Food Corporation godowns where food was lying rotting in the open because of less storage space - with the demand that food be distributed to the hungry. But the protesters could not reach the food godowns because of the heavy police guard.

"A mob of starving Harijans allegedly raided the shop of a grain dealer Baijnath Shivhari, looted 4 quintals of grain at Bira village, Banda district and distributed it equally among themselves. They said: 'We were starving and this greedy profiteer was selling his foodgrains across the district border in Madhya Pradesh.'". And what was the state's response? "A case of armed theft was registered against the Harijans at the Shivrampur police station"!

Is it not "theft" that 80% of the country's resources are controlled by 20% of people? And if one dares call this theft, one is accused of creating a "law and order" problem!

We feel that a lot more is happening by way of people's resistance, protest, and efforts to create change, than ever gets known through the established mass media. So we have to collect and disseminate this information on our own. This is an important way in which we can win back for ourselves the belief in our own power to change things. Only thus can small local struggles get linked and grow into a widespread movement.

Since all these problems - poverty, bondedness, lack of living wage, unemployment, landlessness - affect women much more, since women bear the major brunt of poverty and exploitation, must not these issues also become women's issues? Can women not organize around these issues? What role can women's organizations play in taking up these issues? We invite our women readers to send their views, especially those based on experience of struggle and women's participation in struggle.

Manushi Collective.

This article is taken from an editorial of "Manushi".



Manushi - an Indian Feminist magazine.

The first feminist magazine by an all women group, Manushi has been coming out in English and Hindi since January 1979.

"Manushi" is now being distributed in this country. We have already recieved a number of individual subscriptions, but would like to distribute "Manushi" through feminist alternative bookshops, on a sale-or-return basis. If you could sell "Manushi" through a bookshop/at your women's centre, please get in touch with us. We would sell them to you at 60p. each, but the sale price should not exceed 75. per copy.

If you would like to take out a subscription, please send your name, address and the date to us, the rates: £8.50 for 6 copies, and extra donations are always very welcome.

As you may know, we are also fund-raising for "Manushi" as they face serious financial

problems - they are in great debt and have been unable to produce the Hindi copies of the last two issues. If you wish to take out a standing order payable into the Manushi account, please make it out to Manushi Trust, A/c no. (deposit A/c) 23025152, Midland Bank, St. Martin's Lane, London WC2.

We have some copies of No. 5 left, and hope to receive more copies of No.6 shortly.

We would also like to thank all those women who have sent us donations so far. We have raised £700 approx. which is being sent to Delhi this month, and will help towards paying off only a part of their debt for printing costs of the last 2 issues. Obviously we need to keep the money coming in!

You can get in touch with us at:
Manushi, c/o 147 Grove Lane,
Camberwell, London SE5.

In sisterhood, Adi, Penny, Shaila.

We will smash this prison - Review.

by Gail Omvedt
Zed Press

Great book! I couldn't put it down! I was there in the dry dusty villages, there in the busy towns. From the depths of my armchair in North Shields I read about Kaminabai from Borl Arab, a small village; Tarabai a militant member of the Pune Street Cleaners Union, and Tanubai, a tribal woman and singer of tribal songs and women's songs - all women struggling for survival and for a life better than survival. The year was 1975. International Women's Year, and the author, immersed in women's movement work in India, talked with many Indian women about their lives and problems. She asked them how they felt about their role and how they saw the future. She talked to rural women who were barely able to feed their families, walking miles to the well, working from dawn to dusk - women who were aware that they carried the greater burden of work. "If housework were paid it would go to the women! Are you men listening? Admit it!" Kaminabai says - but who are also cynical about change coming for them and their families. She talked to landless women who were employed on government projects and who lived on site whilst working, sleeping often enough on the ground, living precariously on whatever project work they could find. For them talk of liberation was a luxury, their lives were reduced to the problem of bare survival and their struggles were against poverty and rising prices. "We have no food, no clothes, no home, we have to sleep on footpaths, what can we do? We have to fight!" They told Gail O. of the tactics organised by the women's anti-price rise committee in Bombay, where they would surround a merchant and not let him go until they got the grain. The 'gherroa' is an often used technique for drawing concessions from the unwilling. On one occasion a Minister was 'gherroaed' until he conceded a better grain ration....

She talked to students who felt the conflict between their educational ambition and the taste of freedom they got in colleges and the arranged marriages awaiting them at the end of their studies. She talked to the highly unionised Street Cleaners of Pune, untouchables who nevertheless had more independence thanks to a relatively good wage than the women who scorned to touch them.

But this book is no ordinary sociological study, it comes out of the experience of that year - the meetings, the organising, experiences leading up to the United Women's Liberation Struggle Conference in the October of 1975. This conference was a speak-out of toiling women who came from all over India to tell other women of their lives and hopes. It had taken a lot of hard work and planning to organise in an atmosphere of political repression - but it came off. A success which posed the question - where next? How to carry the movement forward? Were the women first to go back home? What were they to do?

Gail O.'s book sets the struggle of the women in the context of India's turbulent political life. She talks about the ideas and activities of the various left parties, the tribal movement and the movement of the untouchables, and shows us something of the contradictions facing the people there, the obstacles to unity - urban versus rural, Bahut versus caste Indian. She also shows us the strength of the women - their mass meetings against the dowry system (meetings of up to 8000 women in some towns), their huge anti-price rise marches, (in the autumn of 1973 20,000 women turned up for the rolling march), their leadership and determination in union struggles. It was their tenacity in militant action that forced the left to an understanding that the participation of women was crucial to the success of the Indian revolution, but the left's interest in women as a political force is open to question - are the party organisers really supportive of feminist principles and concerns, or do they rather adopt a manipulative attitude towards women, seeing them as militants in a 'general struggle' that does not include specifically feminist issues? (if a struggle can be said to be 'general' when it ignores feminist principles and issues).

The final chapter written in 1979 goes into these and other questions of perspective and strategy in more detail. I'm aware that I've left out so much, but then a review couldn't possibly do justice to the argument or the context of the book, nor could it capture the flavour and excitement of the Indian revolution and struggle. You'll just have to read the book yourselves!

British Racism Institutionalised

An interview with Nasira Begum, who for over a year has been fighting Home Office attempts to deport her, and Hilary who has been working in the campaign to prevent Nasira's deportation.

R: What did you think about England before you ever thought of coming to live here ?

Nasira: Something wonderful, beautiful, fascinating, attractive, full of charm, People usually live with peacefully having all the facilities of life.

R: What do you think of England now ?

N: I found her (England) beautiful, rich and better than my country. I was quite happy as I came for a visit, it was a good change in my life. Later on, when I had to face practical life, I experienced some problems. For an Asian woman happy married life is something more important and worthwhile. Moreover marriage for us is permanent bond of life. When after a few months of my married life, I had to go through a very tragic and sad breakdown of my husband's relationship with me, I was terribly upset, as I was very much devoted to my husband and wanted a happy married life.

Presently I think life is not an easy thing. I have to prepare myself to face the difficulties of life, and people around me are quite helpful. They encourage and help me a lot emotionally and financially. I am grateful for their help.

R: How do you feel about the way the government has treated you ? Do you think its fair ?

N: I had a feeling and belief that England is famous for its justice and fairness. I have now realised that it is not so. British institutions are just and fair when and where it suits them. If necessary, they change their own decisions. It is quite obvious from the decision made by the Immigration Court at Stockport, in my case, which has now been challenged by the Home Office. I think it is not "cricket". In fact it unjust and cruel, this type of wicked treatment is causing me mental torture and agony.

R: What are the main differences between English Society and Pakistani society for you as a woman ?

N: There seem to be some obvious differences between an English and Asian woman. The areas of differences could be more freedom availed by the English woman. English women are more outward and individualistic, English woman does not bother for the community or social approval. Contrarily an Asian woman is very much concerned what others think about her. We like to live more collective way of life rather than individualistic. We are also more concerned about our religious practices.

R: Do you feel lonely in England ? How was it in Pakistan ?

N: I had a happy and peaceful life in Pakistan. I was also happy and satisfied here after marriage. But when all of a sudden I heard about my marriage break-up, for which I was not mentally prepared, it was a great shock to me. I think marriage is a sacred and permanent union not only between the husband and wife but among the family members on both sides. A "separated" or "divorced" woman in our community is not given respect and grace equivalent to a married woman. Naturally I feel myself insecure. Keeping in view my present life, if I decide to go back to Pakistan, it could be a great shock to my old father. Moreover, in this country I have a circle of friends around me, who are helpful and supportive in each and every walk of my life. How can I feel myself lonely among good, sincere, helpful and supportive friends and relatives. Who are helping during the emotional and economical crisis.

R: Why do you want to stay in England ?

N: England is like my home country now. I got married here. I associated all my future hopes and plans with this country. After marriage, husbands home and Country is something worthy of respect for an Asian woman. Similarly I think of England as my permanent place of residence. Here I can fight for my rights and can regain my status. I can enjoy all the facilities and rights like other English women.

R: Women in England live very differently from women in Pakistan - do you think life is better or worse here ?

N: In the beginning I felt that women in Pakistan and women in England live in a different way, as majority of women have to go to work, whereas few women in Pakistan go to work. Gradually I have got used to this way of life. As England is a welfare state we enjoy more facilities here. Differences seem to be obvious in the beginning, but stay in this country enables to adjust well and one takes life easy after few years stay.

R: What do you think about the way others, like Anwar Ditta, are being treated by the Home Office ?

N: I don't think the Home Office is treating fairly Anwar Ditta's case. It is inhuman to separate the offsprings from the mother. If they put themselves in place of Anwar Ditta then perhaps, they can realise how she is suffering from the separation of her children. Home Office is giving mental torture, suffering and creating undue pressures for the immigrants. We must continue to fight against the decisions and should try our best to regain our rights and not to be treated as third class citizens.

امیگریشن کے قوانین
مہمان

ان قوانین کی تبدیلی میں منتظر اور مساوی برتاؤ کیا جائے!

R: Has the campaign changed you at all ?

N: Campaign launched by my friends is helping me. But there is not change at all. I am grateful to my friends, with their help and perpetual persuance and constant efforts I have got a job.

R: What do you want to do in the future ?

N: I am indefinite about my future, because of the injustice done to me by the Home Office. I simply and honestly believe that I should fight for my rights. As I am on the right side, I am confident and sure I will win my case.



R: To what extent would you say that the present use of Immigration Law by the government system of migrant labour, whereby people can gradually be deprived of their British citizenship, and be encouraged into or sent out of the country as the economy demands ?

Hilary: What seems to be happening now is that the Home Office is curtailing rights which previously existed. Under the Immigration Acts, restrictive though they were, there was the right to bring in family, parents and children. The Home Office is making it more and more difficult for anybody to bring in any dependents. It does this not by saying that people can't bring in their dependents anymore, but by saying that these aren't the children of a particular person, or that these aged parents are not dependent upon someone here, because they can support themselves in Pakistan, or as in Nasira's case, that this was just a marriage of convenience, going out of their way to make the marriage appear invalid. Its a deliberate attempt to prevent people bringing in their dependents and families, which is their right.

R: So they don't want people to come and settle anymore ?

H: This is true, but also they want people to go back. In many cases they are separating families and children in the hope that people who live here and can't get their children over here will go back and live in Pakistan. So its partly repatriation and partly preventing people getting in.

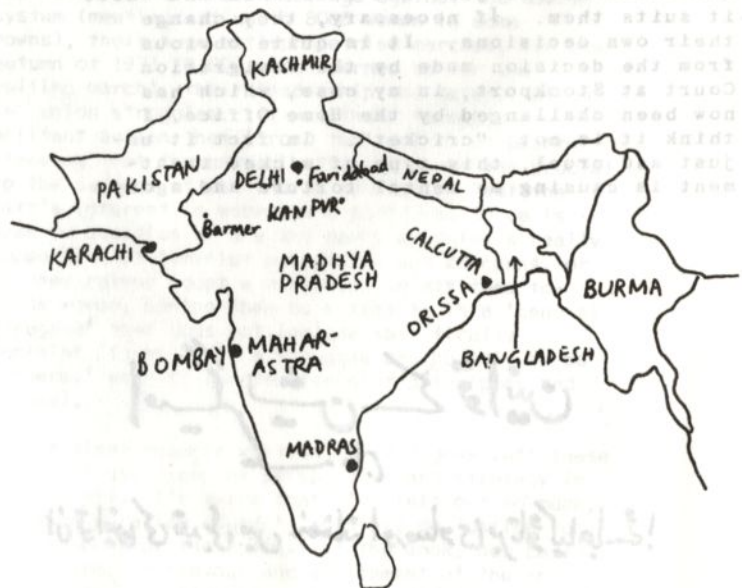
R: How widespread do you think this state campaign is ? How far does it extend beyond the area around Manchester ?

H: I think its probably quite general everywhere. We've come to hear about cases in this area because of Nasira's campaign and the Law Centre's involvement. I think that people don't realise the extent to which the Immigration Acts affect the lives of many Black people. It isn't just people who are trying to get in, or people who are legal or illegal immigrants, its nearly all Black people, even those who were born here, are being affected. The surveillance which they use is incredible. We came across cases where the police are keeping a 24 hour surveillance outside people's houses, looking for illegal immigrants and searching the houses without warrants. This is not only happening in Manchester, but elsewhere.

R: Where has the main support come from during Nasira's campaign and other campaigns around Manchester ?

H: For Nasira's campaign the support has mainly come from people who have already been involved in Anti-Racist work in the past - what you could loosely call the white left. We've had a lot of support from the traditional labour and left organisations. For Nasira's campaign in particular there has been very little vocal support from the Asian community - I think that's partly to do with Nasira being a woman and partly to do with it being in Manchester where the Asian community isn't so well organised as say in Birmingham or London. But it is to do with Nasira being seen as a woman who was deserted by her husband. The attitude of many Asian men is that if she's deserted then she must have done something wrong. I don't think that's the main point but it is important and specific to Nasira's campaign and it hasn't necessarily happened in other cases.

For instance in the case of Abdul Azad in Oldham, there was a lot more holding the Asian community together there but there is much less of a community organisation in Manchester.



R: Has the community been more supportive to Anwar Ditta in Rochdale ?

H. I think it has, but not as supportive as it could have been. People in Rochdale haven't come out on the streets over this, though still more than with Nasira. It's hard to distinguish to what extent it's because Anwar is a woman and because the Asian community is afraid.

I think it's important to point out that white people haven't come out in support, not as much as they have in the past against the National Front for instance. If we're going to be frank about it, it hasn't been as broad based as say the Anti-Nazi league campaign.

R. Do you think that the Women's Liberation movement in this country should get far more involved?

H. Considering the way that the Immigration Laws are treating women particularly, you can see this in Nasira's case where a woman is defined as a dependant upon a man rather than as an individual in her own right, women in the women's movement have not really recognised this. Again it's quite a difficult problem - we had this idea that we'd like to set up a group of women fighting the Immigration Laws because the women who have come to us through the Law centre, yet it's difficult to know where to start when there isn't more guidance from women in the Black community. It's a dilemma - as white women what can we do in an organised way?

The support from the women's movement hasn't been fantastic, although various conferences are taking up the issue more strongly.

R. Can you describe what it was like when Nasira's case first went to the Appeal Court (she has been a second time since)?

H. It was an exhibition of how racist and fascist our Home Office could be. This is the impression which we got from the first part of the Appeal particularly.

They were just trying to discredit Nasira and the witnesses supporting her. They said the witnesses were telling lies: the witnesses were confused and their evidence was said to be 'stories' and fabrications'. My biggest impression was that it was a complete insult to everyone who is Asian - and Asian culture. The fact that Nasira had an arranged marriage was ridiculed, and that she chose her husband through a photograph.

The prosecutor tied up the witnesses in knots, with his language using the kind of colloquial expressions that we very rarely use. He made everyone look as though they were lying or stupid, or that it was a conspiracy to allow this one woman to stay in the country.

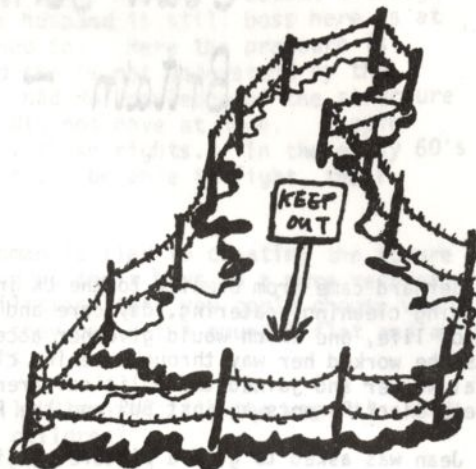
The whole procedure is unfair anyway because there is no jury. There's just an adjudicator and he's appointed by the Home Office. In Anwar Ditta's case for instance she was just dragged through her whole life, everything about her children, by people who were just out to make them look liars.

It's unjust that people should have to go through all that.

R. How do you think the Government's proposals on a new Immigration Law are likely

to affect the situation for Nasira and others in her position?

H. The new Nationality Laws are proposing to simplify the Nationality Act and create 3 different kinds of British citizen. One is a British citizen - someone who was born in this country, the other 2 are basically Black



people who have previously had rights as British citizens because of coming from the ex-colonies, who are going to be called 'British overseas citizens' or 'British citizens of the dependencies'. It really does racially define a British citizen much more strongly. Its going to mean that these 2 categories of (Black) British citizens will be denied all sorts of rights that anybody who is now a British citizen has - Welfare Rights etc. It will legalise what's been going on for a long time and make it a lot more rigorous. Also this thing about children born here, previously anyone who was born here was a British citizen. Now they are saying that children born here of illegal immigrants won't get British citizenship which means there's going to be a hell of a lot more surveillance of Black people - registration of births, for Asian people with children born here there's going to be a whole thing into the history of the parent's immigration. It could be brought up again, say, when the children have grown up - all those kinds of hassles. There will be much more surveillance over the Black community. It facilitates the withdrawing of rights which they have in theory, if not in practice. Its already happening, it'll just make it easier - legalise it.

R. Do you think there is a need for some kind of immigration law or should they be scrapped completely?

H. Ideally people should be free to live wherever they want to, but that's not the issue at the moment. We're not saying to people we want to abolish all Immigration laws, because that preys upon the fears that people already have, their prejudices that the country will be flooded with all sorts of people. I think it's a non-issue, in some ways a red herring - 'cos what is important is to point out that this and any immigration law instituted by this country has been racist, because the ideas and intention behind it has been to keep Black people out of the country. If it's a question of whether there should be immigration controls or not I think that under socialism there would have to be controls, but that's another issue. When, say, in street meetings, people come up to me and say we've got to have control over immigration because of all the millions of people that could come into the country. I usually try to avoid the numbers game by saying that you have to understand it that what we're fighting against isn't just an immigration act but a law which is designed specifically to oppress Black people. Most people don't realise that throughout the world there are millions of Whites who have automatic rights to settle here and if they all exercised that right the country would be flooded. But that's not what it's about - its about oppressing Black people.

Jean Bernard

Britain - a Black woman's view.

Jean Bernard came from Jamaica to the UK in 1961. She has worked in various paid jobs here including cleaning, catering, day-care and laundry work. She came because she wanted a different kind of life, one which would give her access to higher education. Because of her family commitments she worked her way through evening classes. As her children got older she qualified as a social worker and joined the political arena, as an activist in the community. She is in the Lambeth Black Parents against SUS and the Richard Campbell Campaigns.

Jean was asked to give a picture of life for Black women in the UK. Because she did not have time to write it herself, she instructed me to write down exactly what she said. My only contribution was to make sure I did it accurately. JG.



The struggle for Black women in the UK is harder and more difficult to understand; it's different from that of white women because of the combination of racism and sexism. Limited access to higher and political education makes it more difficult for the Black woman to see what prevents her from succeeding as a person rather than as a woman.

Firstly most Black women in the UK are brought up to be the servants of men. They are very domesticated as regards children, chores, obedience and dependence. She feels lost and unable to cope without a man.

Secondly where the white woman can make room for herself, the Black woman cannot, because of racism, the biggest hazard - the way this society has assumptions about her. The majority of Black women wouldn't even wear trousers before they came here. The white woman takes more dominating chances. The Black woman doesn't question enough. She still has to see herself as an equal, and more working class women must join in that struggle for equality.

On my own, facing the responsibility, I feel like a human being, because financial dependence on a man is one of the greatest hazards of a Black woman's life. It's a pretence, she doesn't get the chance to be dependent anyhow. In fact the Black woman is the real head of the household and the man just a figurehead. 95% of people in Jamaica were self-employed, growing crops or making things for sale and the woman taking the stuff to market. The majority of Black men only realised when they came to the UK what is true family responsibility. At home it was all covered by the extended family network, which consisted of women. When the men came over here they had to do their own domestic work so they sent for the women, for the domestic labour. Most Black women arriving in the UK were already married and had children at home. Now both go out to work. The woman is providing for the children at home as well. She goes to the doctor here for contraception and he sends her home for her husband's permission because of sex discrimination. So, not out of choice, women started to have a second family. As facilities became available, the few Black women who knew about them used them.

Racism in the Black woman's life prevents her understanding herself. She came from a background where she was affected by class. Here the colour of your skin holds you back so there's no chance of coming up. Racism destroys the Black woman's life. Men, women and children are all getting the pressure. The man loses his job, the children fail at school, the woman would also be experiencing racism and sexism. You don't understand racism when you first come here and as a result you all feel as a failure. You are all taking it out on each other.

West Indian men are saying it's only in the UK that the women can live without them. They are also questioning the break-up of so-called marriages. The fact is women have gained some earning power, coupled with the help of the welfare state and have come to realise they were and still are the breadwinner. The Black man still is dodging his family responsibilities while it can be seen that in many areas the white man is facing his by doing things with his family.

Although the Black woman has two families to support, the man still has his freedom, although he may have created several other families. She is stuck. The husband is still boss here as at home. He is free to satisfy his ego. The women are not listened to. Here the pressure is tougher since she has lost the support of the extended family and she is not understood by the society around her, eg. when she first came here the Black woman had no knowledge of the structure of the welfare state, of the little rights she has here that she did not have at home. People were stigmatized as living on S.S. when 95% didn't even know about those rights. In the early 60's for example we didn't know about housing rights. Many now will never be able to fight, their strength is gone, things have run out on them.

Here the man can run from one woman to another, while the woman is tied to creating the future through the children. Today Black women here are trying to bring up their boys to a more responsible attitude. Given education, decent wages and childcare facilities, then you could choose who would give you children, but now some women are having babies so they can get a council flat and as a result are falling back into the same trap as their predecessors.

Institutional racism in all fields is the problem. In Family Planning it's the way it's handed to you. "What are you going to do about not having any more children?"

We are demanding better facilities for women in every direction. Better maternity and childcare facilities, education for women, better working conditions. We can't make it without that. Here you have got to fight for better facilities, for everything we want.

I got involved in the SUS campaign because my children and everybody else's were getting picked up and I had to find out whether the complaint against SUS is justified. We founded the Lambeth Black Parents Campaign against the SUS laws. It was only women who came out to fight for the rights of their children. Nobody can understand the effect of SUS on the mothers. They become losers again. Losing days off work to be at court, to be at solicitors, to visit kids remanded.

In the first stage, when less articulate parents' (women's) kids were picked up, everyone was saying it was the parents' fault. Then when everyone's kids were picked up, the anger was turned against the system. The Black minister's kids were picked up coming from Sunday School. That made him join the fight. SUS influenced me and others to get up and ask questions and to become more involved in political things. SUS has brought a lot of women to reality; and education, too because the children were failing in school. Deprivation of higher education within the Black community has made Black people more in need of education. Because of that hunger they want to educate their children, to break the cycle. But because of racism the children are back where we left off, in pre-war council estates, unemployed, walking the streets. Having illegitimate children and no man to support them. We have broken the cycle of material deprivation, some of us, buying houses, cars, furniture and clothing, but not the cycle of racism, sexism and racial class. Even with UK education our kids are still unemployed.

People think that most Black women have settled in to their little council flat with their little family and everything is rosy. But a high proportion are being isolated as single parents. Black women have become immune to conditions here. They are ashamed of the situation, which they didn't expect to find themselves in, with several children and on their own, facing the pressure of a racist and sexist society.

It's important to look at where we are going. Activists move out. But a liberated woman doesn't mean being a sex symbol or necessarily going to live with another woman. You have to face your responsibility and fight for your rights as a human being. Men are not your enemy but have been educated to be as they are. Women have to educate men to play their part in the human race. So long we have been taught that Black men are savages that it's difficult to get rid of these ideas out of your own head. Men should be educated to care for children, and children should not be put into care if women leave. The men should care for them where possible.

In the middle class we are acting as a buffer between the ruling class and working people. We make working people dependent on us. We should be with the working class community helping them to be aware of the system that oppresses them and educating them to fight back against racism and sexism.

Unity between Black and white women will come with the struggle to get into the day nurseries and schools and children's homes and have some control in them.

Unity will come when we as women can identify that the struggle is one struggle and when we can destroy institutional racism of which the white woman is a part.

In the final analysis women must command respect for themselves.



Roads to Repatriation.

At the time when Britain needed our labour, racism was used against us to rationalise and justify our exploitation. Now when Britain no longer has that need, racism is still being used to rationalise and justify our exploitation. There are various means by which this is being done.

We all know that British immigration policy is centred around keeping Black people out of this country (For details of the racist and sexist nature of immigration laws see the last four issues of FOWAAD.) But there is more to it than that - immigration policy is also about the systematic intimidation and harassment of Black people settled here. This aspect is becoming increasingly evident. A clear example is the manner in which the Black community is subjected to random attacks under the pretext of catching 'illegal immigrants'.

On Friday 20th. June, the Main gas cooker factory in Edmonton was surrounded by police and immigration officers with dogs. 28 Black workers, mainly Ghanaians, were taken away; by the following Tuesday only five had been released.

Just over a month before the Edmonton raid, there was another massive passport raid, also in North London. On that occasion 50 immigration and police officers with dogs raided the Bestways Cash and Carry store in Willesden. All the employees were forced into a small room and interrogated. Passports were demanded and about 25 people, including one customer, were pushed into police vans and taken to Kilburn police station. The owners and staff of Bestways are, of course, Black (Asian). They were searched, locked up in cells and interrogated until late evening. Some were taken to their homes to check their passports, and then taken back to the police station where they were held for several hours or more for no reason except that their skins were Black.

At the same time eight Bestways shops all over London were raided and there, according to Bestways director, Mohammed Yunus Sheikh, 'police behaviour was even worse. They were abusive, they rounded up customers, staff and partners'. The Earls Court Road shop was closed down and an employee's flat above it forced open. Even people who happened to have their passports with them and could prove their legal status, were forced into police vans and taken to Kensington police station.

In other words, for Black people in this country the immigration law is being used as a pass law system. We are considered to be guilty of being illegal immigrants until proved innocent (and even then we are not spared any of the harassment !)

As immigration and race policies are changing, so are the functions of the welfare state for Black people. The welfare bureaucracy is now taking on the surveillance of Black people and trying to exclude us from benefits. For example Leonis Pieter Low, a baby whose mother is from Hong Kong, and who was born in St. Mary's Hospital in Paddington, was refused NHS treatment in the same hospital when severely ill with a blood disease a few weeks after birth. According to the hospital administrators the 'decision had been made after consulting the Department of Health and Social Security... there were no grounds on which to treat the baby'. In Perivale Maternity Hospital in Middlesex, Asian women who were born in Britain and have lived here all their lives, are being refused beds on the pretext that their husbands are abroad. In fact a new comprehen-

sive circular regarding the eligibility of various categories of people 'from abroad' to use the NHS is being prepared by the Home Office and DHSS working together. In the meantime a circular has been sent out urging hospital doctors and administrative staff to watch out for patients they 'suspect' may be ineligible for hospital treatment. But how and why should they suspect people ?

Cathy Fagg, Deputy House Governor of St. Stephens Hospital in Fulham, explained that it was 'just a matter of commonsense - whether we go on their being foreign, or their colour or whatever'.

What applies to the NHS is also true of Social Security offices, where the direct link with the Home Office was demonstrated with startling clarity in the case of Nasira Begum. Nasira, a Pakistani woman who is facing deportation simply because her husband has deserted her, explains that "the police have been involved in my case all through. Even the Home Office notice of refusal to stay, which is normally posted, was in my case served by the police. I have lived constantly in fear of being arrested. But at the Supplementary Benefits Tribunal I learned that the police and immigration officers are not the only ones involved. The DHSS too are spying, and acting for the Home Office. They told me they would be prepared to make payment if I was ready to leave the country. If I stayed and contested the case, as is my right, they would refuse benefit".

Thus in every area Black people are being put under pressure. On the one hand laws are on their way, in the form of the new Nationality law, which would deprive a large number of us of the right to work or vote in Britain - sure steps in the path to repatriation. On the other hand, the push to repatriation comes in the form of making life in this country unliveable for Black people. But we are here to stay and we are here to fight. We say, defend our rights !

This article is taken from the July 1980 issue of FOWAAD, the Newsletter of the Organisation of Women of Asian & African Descent (OWAAD).

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Filipino women domestic's in Britain.

Many Filipinos have already been deported and several hundred, mainly women in domestic service in hospitals, hotels and private houses, are due for removal as a result of a court ruling early this year which classifies them as illegal immigrants because they failed to disclose that they have dependent children.

These people were allowed to enter Britain on work permits facilitated by employment agencies (Filipino and British). Under the Department of Employment regulations, such permits are not issued to persons with dependent children under 16. This rule was mainly designed to prevent family separation, not for purposes of immigration control.

Many of these women migrant workers were not aware of this regulation. They applied for work in employment agencies in their own country to come here and left the paperwork to the agencies. Before 1976, the visa application forms signed by these women only asked for information about children if they were accompanying the adult. After 1973 the rule about children was no longer included in work permits. There was then no published guidance explaining the work permit system. In some cases women were told by employment agencies that employers preferred women without children. In cases where the migrant women knew of the regulation about children, they thought it related to their acceptability to employers, not to the British government. They did not believe they were breaching any law.

The Home Office charges these women of deception and has in fact won its test case in the court of Appeals (Nov. '79) which ruled that obtaining a work permit as a resident domestic when one had children is entry by deception "even if the misrepresentation was effected without the person's knowledge."

For almost ten years the Home Office glossed over this regulation about children. As late as September 1979 there were cases of women migrants who were allowed to have their children join them as long as they fulfilled the requirements of work permit regulations. But instead of enforcing the new rule prospectively; the Home Office has been applying it retrospectively. Some women domestics had been specifically told they could bring their children if they got larger accommodations. Yet after these women had worked very hard and succeeded in doing this, they are now being apprised that they have to be deported.

This anomalous state of affairs, especially the retrospective action, is against the correct British sense of justice and fairness.

The Home Office contends that a special concession to these domestics would encourage other migrant groups to follow the example of these women and thereby weaken immigration control. So far, the Home Office concedes that only 234 migrant workers are due for removal. As work permits for this category of workers have been abolished, how can special concessions for resident domestics create a precedent for other migrant workers?

As no more migrant domestics are allowed into the UK, compassionate and favourable consideration of the cases of these women by the Home Office can only humanly benefit these migrant workers who are already here and not give impetus to further immigration problems.

Since they entered the country, these women have been doing unpleasant, demanding work, some of them working for 14 to 16 hours a day, with low wages and poor conditions of work, while paying their taxes properly. It will in fact become more difficult to staff hospitals, hotels and private houses after they are deported, as British workers are not prepared to accept such low-paid, tough jobs.

There are at present 234 migrant domestics, mainly Filipino women, who are being threatened with deportation. Already 46 have been deported, 53 have been allowed to stay, and the rest are waiting for the Home Office's verdict on their cases.

The Filipinos in Britain have organised an association to help the migrant women. They have formed a committee which has been interviewing Filipinos in hospitals and hotels. The Pagkakaisa ng Samahang Filipino (United Filipino Association) has been holding mass meetings, organising protest marches, and publicising the domestics' cases. A women's organisation in the Philippines, the Association of the New Filipina, composed of 18,000 members, has joined the campaign. It had written a letter for the migrant women to Mr. Timothy Raison, Home Office Minister, and is publicising the women's cases in their own bulletin and in the Philippine press.

FROGS IN A WELL

Patricia Jeffery

Review

Patricia Jeffrey's book is the result of a year's fieldwork among the pirzade, the hereditary keepers of a Muslim shrine near Deld Delhi, and deals with the strict form of purdah kept by the women.

While the descriptions of the concrete reality of living in seclusion are of documentary interest, the real value of the book, particularly for non Indian women, lies in its analysis of purdah as an institution for which religious explanations are only partial ones. Seclusion, for Jeffrey, is only understandable if placed in the context of a stratified society which requires that some women should be secluded while others do more than their fair share of work outside the household. Female status derives a great deal from economic factors and Jeffrey stresses how control of what is produced is as important as production itself. This is an important consideration not only in relation to the pirzade, whose total exclusion from productive activities makes them totally dependent on the men, but for all women in less traditional societies, since involvement in paid work has only partly meant improvement in status.

If, as Jeffrey shows, pirzade women resent the discomfort and limitations of their seclusion, how does the institution perpetuate itself? Concrete obstacles (economic dependence, physical isolation) prevent the transformation of the voiced complaints into action against the continuation of purdah; the main barriers are, however, ideological ones. The ideological subordination of the women insures that they internalise the system as good and necessary, particularly because they see themselves as a privileged social group.

P. Jeffrey, in conclusion, manages to analyse the problems of purdah avoiding both the shocked reactions of some observers, and the uncritical acceptance borne out of a supposedly open minded cultural relativism, of others.

Ines Riccardi.



Active campaigning is also being done by the trade unions. The General Secretaries of TGWU, GMWU, NUPE Aand COHSE lobbied Mr. Raison to demand humane and fair treatment for these workers. The TUC Hotel and Catering Committee and the Race and Immigration Committee have passed motions on the subject and sent petition letters to the Home Secretary. Union branches at hotels and hospitals have rallied in defense of the cases of their members threatened with deportation and have written to the Home Secretary. A lunch-time demonstration was organised by NUPE members of the University College Hospital in support of their two fellow members who were due for deportation.

In Parliament the unions have called upon their sponsored MPs to help. An Early Day Motion, signed by 58 MPs, called on the Home Minister to act compassionately on the cases of these women. A petition was signed by members of the Shadow Cabinet, Conservative, Liberal, and Labour MPs and 9 Bishops, asking the Minister for a moratorium on the deportations until the Early Day Motion can be discussed in Parliament.

Some women's organisations have rallied to the campaign. An example is the National Assembly of Women, whose programme is for peace and disarmament and, against racism. It has sent a letter to the Minister and is publicising the women's cases in their journal.

The campaign has received widespread and favourable publicity. The London Programme showed an hour long television documentary, numerous radio programmes have broadcast the cases of the domestics, and countless newspaper articles have appeared in their behalf.

Yet the Home Office remains intransigent to public opinion. They have even refused to heed the petition of the four General Secretaries of the trade unions for moratorium on the deportations until the issue can be discussed by Parliament.

The Migrant Action Group and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants demand a general amnesty for these immigrant women workers, not only a moratorium until the subject can be debated in Parliament. They are calling upon women's associations, working-class organisations, and individuals who believe in a non-racist Britain to rally and support the cause of these migrant workers.

(note: the author of this article is from the Philippines herself, and is a member of the National Assembly of Women.)

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Review: Isis no.13

Tourism and Prostitution

Noi, who is twenty years old looks for clients independently in the evenings in the cafes and works in a battery factory during the day. "I get 25 baht a day but this is not enough to cover my expenses." Noi's eight brothers and sisters live with their parents, peasants, whose only means of subsistence comes from Noi. "I have to find work at night so that I can send money to my parents. I don't live in a brothel so that I can be free to go to work during the day." (taken from an article first published in a German magazine, reprinted in Isis 13).

"It's really unbelievable, all the dames here - they drive you wild and for a few guilders you can pick up the most beautiful of the beauties - and only for a few rotten pennies." (a carpenter from Amsterdam, quoted in Isis 13).

The lands of South East Asia and the South Pacific (Korea, the Phillipines, Thailand) have become a playground, a leisure resort for tourists from the West and Japan - and the bodies of women from those lands have also become a playground, a leisure resource for the tourists, the main attraction offered by poverty stricken countries in an attempt to pull in foreign currency. Mass tourism does bring in the currency, but the countries remain poor with little real development of industry and with falling agricultural productivity. Imperialist exploitation and war have kept these countries poor and dependent and sex tourism is just another form of imperialist exploitation. The tourists divert and use up much needed resources; they create a workforce of bargirls, sauna attendants, prostitutes, hotel and restaurant staff and a myriad of other workers all employed in catering to their whims for next to no money. The airline owners, hotel, club and bar owners, the men who own the women driven to this work through poverty, they take the money. The tourist industry brings violence, a rising crime rate, drug abuse and tawdriness to the cities. It does the country very little good and the workers within the industry little good either; even where they do make money they pay dearly for the privilege.

Of course conquering males have always used women of colonised lands as sexual objects, - invading armies, settlers and business men have exploited their power to the full. Male prerogative backed by arms and/or economic power. This latest wave of conquering males see the prostitutes of South East Asia as women, "without desire for emancipation, but full of warm sensuality and the softness of velvet" (the words of a German journalist quoted in Isis).

Very nice for Europeans threatened by castrating feminists at home! These countries are supplying them with "new and docile servants" to comfort and bolster their sexist racist egos. The men can go to the bars of Bangkok and Manila and find themselves surrounded by eager women vying for their attention and become kings for a few days and nights.

These eager smiling women are poor. Cruelly exploited by the men who control them, they end up poor and disease ridden, on the scrap heap, in old age. Poverty and V.D. are the reality behind the smile - and anxiety for the family back home - for many of the women are supporting families in the country.

The presence of US forces in the area also encourages prostitution. Since 1904 the US navy has had a base at Subic Bay and rest and recreation services have grown up around the base since then. The sailors provide income and work, but what if they were to be withdrawn? The recreation industry is entirely dependent on their continued presence, an irony familiar to the Vietnamese also. The American soldiers in Vietnam were supplied with women to boost their morale. The military, in creating the prostitutes and pimps, created a population dependent upon war for their livelihood whose work probably contributed to its continuation. At the time, as Ilse Lenze says in one of the articles: "the foreign soldier seems to prove the superiority of his country through the form of its arms, its commodities, the currencyThe principal aims of the revolutionary wars of national independence in South East Asia included the liberation of women and the demand for a culture based on human dignity."

Thai women are being imported to Europe to be bought and sold as prostitutes. They are often tricked over here by promises of marriage, or they may be already married and brought over here as wives only to find themselves slaves in a strange land - just another raw material coming into the West.

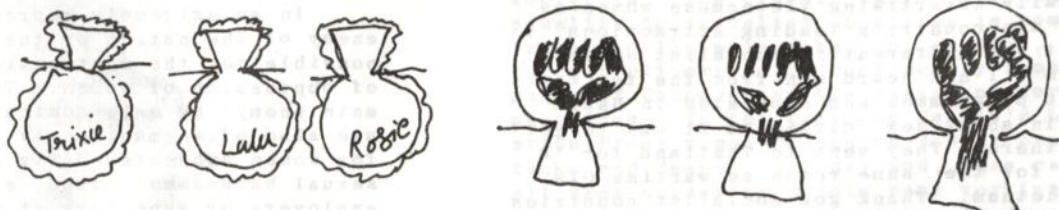
In the face of all this, what can we do to support our sisters who are fighting this imperialist exploitation? The South Korean women are moving against their sex tourism industry, supported by their Japanese sisters. They've called a conference, demanded government action, organised demonstrations at the airports where Japanese men come in plane loads for a night or two with the prostitutes of South Korea, a former colony of Japan.

Being an International Bulletin, Isis presents a global picture. The articles are valuable because they show so clearly how imperialist domination in these lands has spawned the sex tourism industry, and they show clearly too how analogous women's oppression is to the oppression of third world/under developed countries - and how within the colonised situation women suffer specifically as women.

Anne Torode

Isis is obtainable from:

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'Filipina women are naturally warm and loving'
quote from Daily Mirror Friday Oct. 3rd

Some thoughts on women and socialism

Why do third world women become involved in anti-imperialist/national and class issues that apply to men, women have their own reasons, their additional oppression as women. An army of foreign occupation or an indigenous repressive military

En route to Hanoi, Sept. 1st. '79.
Philippines airways flight from Amsterdam to Bangkok:

The Filipina air hostesses wear aprons embroidered with cute American nicknames Trixie, Lulu, Rosie.

In the row behind me, two South Asian businessmen try rather ineffectually to flirt with the pretty stewardesses, then settle down to telling two young Swedish travellers about the female services for sale in Bangkok. The Swedish boys look about 18; this is their first trip to Asia and they drink up the superior knowledge of the wholesalers, wise in the various price differentials of the capitalist world system. 'You can buy several women at once in Bangkok - three or four at a time and very cheap.' 'You can get an all over body massage for \$4.' The eager young pups puff up with delight. '\$4 - that's the price of a meal!' one declares in amazement.

If you go to Hong Kong, advises the older and fatter wholesaler, you should buy a gold Rolex - they cost \$5,000 in Sweden, but only \$2,000 in Hong Kong. 'Oh yes, that's good to know,' say the young Swedes, as if they could peel \$2,000 off a wad just like that. It sounds like Rollexes are actually out of the South Asian businessmen's class as well. 'I carry 140 lines,' he boasts. 'If you'd like a Seiko or a Citizen watch, I can get one for half price; here is my card.' Along with the card, out comes the photos. Here is a house where they have girls lined up in the windows with numbers, you just choose the one you want. 'Like going into a store to buy a piece of meat!' exclaims one of the young Swedes with obvious satisfaction. The older man has photos of some of the lovely ladies: This one is \$130 for the night, this one costs \$70.

Insecure fat businessmen showing off to 18 year olds, off for their first bout of sexual tourism. The young men are expanding with delight to the knowledge of the rights of their sex and money.

My mind goes back to similar conversations heard some years ago in Saigon before liberation. Young Americans working for USAID, supposedly there to help the country 'develop', teasing each other about ordering girls by number in Saigon brothels. The Saigon government's Ministry of Tourism was officially advertising Vietnamese women as one of the country's leading attractions. I knew it was different in socialist North Vietnam. I had heard men from the few Western aid programmes and embassies in Hanoi complain about how difficult it was to get girls there. They went to Thailand for 'R and R' for the same reason as wartime GIs from Vietnam. Thank god socialist countries stand out against the 'international culture' in which third world women become an exotic consumer commodity. I silently rejoice that since 1975 all of Vietnam is off-limits for Western male sexual tourism.



regime can sexually harass and rape women with impunity until there is a movement of armed resistance. This is one of the main reasons why women are among the most loyal and dependable supporters of people's armies and young women are eager to join the armed struggle. For example, the biography of a heroine of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam makes clear the relationship between her politicisation and the prevalence of sexual harassment and rape by soldiers of the Saigon regime in her village in the 1950s when the US neo-colonial regime was being built up. She insisted on, and carried out, the execution of the son of the military commander of the post in her village who accused any woman who resisted him of being a 'Viet Cong', which would result in her arrest and torture at the village post. The underground (male) party secretary in the village was initially opposed to this execution, since it was a manifestation of 'armed struggle' at a time when the party line was: political struggle only, no armed struggle. (source- Phan Thi Nhu Bang, Ta Thi Kieu: An Heroic Girl of Bentre, Liberation Editions, South Vietnam, 1966) A Western feminist might read this example as a manifestation of male political leaders' 'backwardness' in moving on issues that are of crucial importance for women, whereas to a Vietnamese woman who had been involved in the struggle the main point probably would be that there was absolutely no place for women to turn except the party and the revolutionary struggle which it led, and that the party secretary involved eventually did approve the execution of the rapist.

In an extremely repressive situation the enemy of the nation or the class is also responsible for the most extreme manifestations of oppression of women. Those defined as 'the main enemy' by male-dominated Marxist parties are also often manifestly the 'main enemy' for women subjected daily to the threat of sexual harassment, rape, etc. by soldiers, employers or superiors at work. This fact acts as a barrier to an understanding of some of the issues raised by Western feminists who act in a less repressive environment (eg neither foreign occupation or military rule).



However, this leaves a number of questions unanswered. Yes, women enthusiastically participate in class struggle and wars of national liberation. But outside this context, women have great difficulty getting the questions that are of vital concern to them accepted by male leaders as significant problems that must be dealt with politically. The things that dominate the lives of many women: childbirth, violence against women, the division of labour and resources within the household, all tend to be dismissed as 'private' matters, not political questions. The power relationships that rule women's lives are defined as 'not political' and then, ironically, the complaint is often made that women are not sufficiently interested in politics.

The best known example of this is Lenin's conversation with Clara Zetkin, where he declared himself shocked to hear that at sessions she organised for reading and discussion with working women, "sex and marriage problems come first". With an epic struggle going on between communism and counter-revolution, he said indignantly, "active Communist women are busy discussing sex problems and the forms of marriage, past, present and future!". And yet one of the classic texts of Marxism, Engels' The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State is devoted to just this question, and provides ideological justification for the view that the politics of relations of reproduction -ie. sex and marriage - are as important as the relation of production.



"The determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This again is of a twofold character: on the one side the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other."

(Frederick Engels, Preface to the first edition of The Origin of the Family, etc. 1884.)

And yet, the overwhelming majority of the writings of Marx and Engels are devoted to just one of these two fundamental aspects of human life -ie. the social organisation of the production of things. Since their time, Marxist writers have rarely considered 'the production of human beings, the propagation of the species' and its social organisation in the family to be worthy of sustained and serious attention.

These aspects of human existence became subsumed in the emerging Marxist tradition under the rubric 'The Woman Question', and firmly established as secondary to socialism's prime concern.

With the industrial revolution, for the first time the production of things was fully separated from the sphere of human reproduction, the family. Marxism, child of this social and technological revolution, celebrates its product, the Proletariat. Women's equality could only come about if women joined this vanguard class.

The socialist prescription for women's emancipation became to liberate women, like men, from the confines of the household. Lenin proposed that public canteens, nurseries, creches and laundries be set up to liberate women from most of the burdens of housework and childrearing and enable them to gain equality with men by taking up factory and other 'socially productive' labour in the paid workforce. This programme, which has parallels in many of the demands of the contemporary women's movements of the West, has been adopted as the solution to the 'Woman Question' in socialist countries old and new, whether in European or third world socialism. The classic image of women's equality in socialist countries is women in traditionally male jobs: for example, women tractor drivers smile confidently from the pages of Chinese and Vietnamese pictorial magazines- in the Eritrean People's Liberation Front women mechanics repair captured tanks and jeeps. All day and, more rarely, all week nurseries enable many working mothers in socialist countries to devote more of their energies to paid employment than to childcare.

However, in socialist societies as else where, childrearing is a necessary task. It is taken for granted that 1. this work is first and foremost women's work, as mother or creche attendant and 2. that this work is less important than the work done by men. This is shown most clearly by the fact that socialist parties are led by 'van-guard parties' recruited from the walks of life considered to make the greatest social contribution. Outstanding workers, farmers, soldiers or intellectuals stand a fair chance of being recruited in to the vanguard party. An outstanding mother does not, unless she has other substantial achievements to her name.

Motherhood is considered an important responsibility for women in socialist countries, but it is not a political promotion track. In many - not all - socialist countries, the interests of all women, including mothers, are represented by a Women's organisation. However, this is invariably a "mass organisation" whose role is explicitly ideologically inferior to the 'leading party' the role of the women's organisation is to represent the interests of women to the vanguard part and transmit the decisions and priorities set by that leading party to their constituency.

In Third World anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation, the guerilla and the liberation soldier have all but supplanted the Proletariat as the symbol of revolution. In these movements women achieve equality in the anti-imperialist struggle as well as in some socialist countries which have emerged from armed struggle: in China, Chiang Ching in military fatigues and her revolutionary Peking Opera The Red Detachment of Women; in Vietnam, the photo of a diminutive militia woman with a rifle trained on a hulking American pilot, provided vivid images of women's liberation. There are many examples of women taking up arms with men, proving themselves to be as adept as men in the use of armed force to overthrow a reactionary system.



The image of woman as soldier, and that of woman as proletarian, are the two symbols of women's equality offered by third world socialist liberation movements. But in post-revolutionary socialist societies, motherhood is considered a primary role for women. Woman as Mother will not be a symbol of equality between men and women until there is equal stress given to man as Father. For examples of this we must look to the customs of matriarchal societies. In matriarchal societies the role of women in childbirth and childcare was highly valued and there were rituals for men to symbolically share these esteemed female activities. Contrast in your mind's eye the symbols of equality of our industrialised, or socialist industrialising societies - Rosie the Riveter, or the female tractor driver of the pages of Soviet Weekly, China Reconstructs or Vietnam (pictorial) - with the following description drawn from Vietnamese history:

(According to an ancient history)

"When a (vietnamese) woman has been delivered she leaves her bed and her husband takes her place: like a confined woman, he has to observe certain restrictions in his daily food and take care of the baby".

Over a thousand years have passed since then, but as late as before the "revolution (ie, 1945) it was the practice in a number of villages in northern and central Vietnam when the mother was suffering the pains of childbirth for the father to lie in bed and mime acute pains so as to lessen those of his wife. Another custom obliged him to climb up onto the roof of his house: he had to run as many risks as his wife in childbed.

One can be sure that such customs would be considered by most male socialists as 'backward' and 'un-scientific'. Yet in their way, such customs are productive: productive of a different type of relationship between father and child, between mother and father, than that produced by modern 'scientific' rituals of hospital childbirth. They spring from a concern for equality that is quite foreign to the dominant present conception, whether in socialist or capitalist countries, of equality on the male model.

To realise how divorced most male socialists are from the fundamental insight into the importance of reproduction in the passage from Engels cited above, one has only to suggest to the organisers of a socialist workshop or study group that as much time and attention should be devoted to the 'labour process' and the 'relations of production' involved in the production and rearing of human beings as to the 'labour process' involved in the production of things and factory relations of production. At best, it will be considered a feminist point well taken, but not one to be actually implemented, at worst it will be treated as a dirty joke.

CHRISTINE WHITE.

DAILY MIRROR, Friday, October 3, 1980

RUSH FOR 'SIN

By ROD CHAYTOR

MEN are queuing for a new package holiday—three weeks in a coral island beach hut with a dusky maiden.

Charter pilot Graham Nock, who is organising the £648 trip to the Philippines, said yesterday: "I'm not guaranteeing or selling sex as part of the trip.

"But there are plenty of beautiful girls who would jump at the chance of romance with a personable man.

"Filipino women are naturally warm and loving".

Island

Captain Nock, in Birmingham to promote the tours, plans to fly customers—married or single—to Manila where he lives.

They will have a week to make an acquaintance before flying to a nearby island in the China Sea.

Scores of men have asked about Captain Nock's tour.

The Association of British Travel Agents said last night: "Tour operators should not hold out romance as a part of the deal."

IN

THE SUN TOURS'

Iranian women speak.

An interview with the members of Iranian Women's Group in London.

- Well, what can we say about the Shah, the Shah's period, the oppression? I think the best is to start from 1973, the oil boom and what meant for Iranian women and for Iran in general. The boom brought a lot of economic prosperity to the country and a lot of wealth, so-called wealth and a large part of Western culture through the oil boom, and Western businessmen came to Iran which affected Iranian people's lives, especially women's lives.

- It promoted consumerism quite a lot, household consumerism, like refrigerators, washing machines, television, things that were not known before. In this way the household became a target for consumerism and Western goods. It was all manufactured outside, a few of them were assembled in Iran.

- I think the repression started long before that. The Shah came to power in '53 through a CIA plot and created the SAVAK and then came the white revolution, the distribution of land, and the land reform started the real opposition of the mullahs because they used to get taxes from the land.

- No organisation was allowed to exist outside the government's, including women's organisations. The government had one women's organisation and that was it. Women had the right to vote, but that doesn't mean that they were equal to men, but they were very much more open than now within the society. That caused another reaction from the mullahs in opposition to the Shah's government. They thought that women should stay at home, a woman's place is home, her husband, and the role of motherhood was very much emphasized by the mullahs and the Muslim fundamentalists.

- We can tell you stories about women who got roasted in these torture beds, electric shocks they got in their genitals, and all sorts of horrible tortures they suffered. And any political activist, they didn't have to be leftist, oppositionist religious women were tortured as well.

- The country became under the hold of the United States. All democratic rights were banned. There was no free press and nobody could have free meetings. There were huge social problems, about 90% of the population in Iran lived in bad housing, 70% lived in houses without water or electricity. The medical situation was terrible too, because there was no national health. There still is no national health. And none of the oil money went towards providing either free medical care for poor people, or unemployment benefit, or council housing. So is we want to understand why the Shah's government was opposed

on such a massive scale, that 4 million people took to the streets opposing him in a single demonstration, then we have to know the background.... The only groups that could actually oppose the government were small organised urban guerilla groups and there were two of them at the time, one marxist and one religious. And they were the only active organisation inside Iran challenging the state. And that was the armed struggle they took up....The marxist organisation failed because it was small, an intellectual group with no mass base, and the repression of the state, the SAVAK, was too strong.

- I want to talk about the organisation that M- was talking about. The left is quite weak in contrast to Islamic issues in Iran, because most of its basis had been built up among students and intellectuals and they didn't have a programme for the national minorities, for the working class, for the women.

Their main issue was armed struggle, and in the time when people were facing lots of problems, economic, social and political problems, and political repression,they were active underground, but they weren't giving leaflets or pamphlets out to make the workers conscious of what was going on in the Shah's government.

- There were very many women involved in the struggle against the Shah. I won't say half of the organisation were women, but there were very many women.... Some of us were invited to join, they were not sexist, in fact they would want women in, because it was easier for women to get through in guerilla activity.

SW: You mean in the way that women in Algeria were able to use their immunity from search during the revolution?

-Yes. I think one of the things that it's important to say in relation to women before the overthrow of the Shah, was that the Shah's government had to legislate for women because they needed women as cheap labour in the factories. The Shah's sister and his wife headed the government's women's movement... but the kind of women's liberation they had in mind was very different from the liberation Iranian women wanted. The civil law and all judiciary law and the of the old constitution come from the Koran, so what have you got there for women? You've got nothing there. So they had to change it, to make it a bit progressive and these are the bit of crumbs coming from the government's charity given to women. One is the vote, and the Family Protection Act which came very recently just a few years before the Shah was overthrown. (The Family Protection Act gave women protection from instant divorce and the right to stop their husbands from taking any more wives, but as women were financially dependent, it wasn't that easy to stop them in practice. The court could decide if she wanted to refuse him. Eds.).

- The Shah's regime was so generous to women because they knew these laws were not going to be implemented really. Take the vote, when there is no voting anyway, it is being very generous, yes, but nobody can vote, yes? And the Family Protection Act, again social forces acted as a brake to stop it being very progressive. So he could always claim to be very liberal.

- Under the Shah we had reactionary laws against a women's lives, like if a man sees his wife with another man, he can kill her, it's justified so he wouldn't be in prison. But if a woman kills her husband she has committed a crime. And custody goes to the man unless he has left his wife for three years, is an addict, or he can't afford to pay for them. These laws weren't changed.

- I think we should say more about cultural imperialism in Iran, and what it meant in terms of all these reforms. They were necessary, free contraceptives, banning of polygamy, the right to vote, and some kind of free abortion when necessary, but these reforms did not change women's lives. What turned women against the system, made their opposition stronger was the effect of imperialism... I think the oil boom brought the most banal aspects of imperialist culture to Iran, pornography, the media, businessmen coming to Iran. They came in masses to invest in Iran. It became a garden, the heaven of the capitalist world. All the hotels were booked 6 months in advance. So what happens when you have so many businessmen in a country which is so backward? A tourism boom and the aspect of tourism which affects women directly is prostitution.

These businessmen came for pleasure too. There were masses of clubs opening, women's singers coming, and television programmes became all discos, music, and women were most exploited and that really hit at traditional women. During this period, because of massive industrialisation the population of the cities grew three or four times in a few years, and all these people who came from the villages for work, they all turn on the television and they see women, legs and breasts and all nude. It was a complete cultural clash, and that was why it was so easy for the clergy to take up these issues and get women's support behind them.

- And all the values associated with the West were totally rejected, including free women. Even the left say about women in the decadent west they were prostitutes and feminist - they use feminist as an insult. And so the mood of the opposition was anti-western and anti-women's liberation to some extent. Until everybody had second thought after the revolution. Now things are changing a bit.

- The traditional values were oppressive to women but the population was used to them so they went back to them.

- Masses of women are Islamic, as much as they can fit into their daily lives; the aspects that don't fit they nice and easily push under the carpet. And those women opposed the Shah on imperialistic grounds and they are now disillusioned with Khomeini's government. But yet it hasn't been easy to come up against him as he still holds mass power. But that will happen in the future....

- The government used this anti-imperialism. Many articles were talking to women about the veil issue - you should wear the veil, and you shouldn't wear make up, because if you wear the veil you are fighting against imperialism. Immediately after the revolution, the government saw the power of women, it saw the women could come into the street and fight, while looking after kids, too. That power, if it had continued after the revolution would have been too threatening to the clergy's power. So they had to curb that power first. And we have to realise, that women were the only section of society in Iran who were immediately attacked and pushed back to the home. And in the early days of the revolution they demonstrated against the regime and what happened? Women were attacked first, and then 8 months, 10 months later the left was attacked, then the political organisations were banned, then they keep some socialist students from the university, then the free press is banned. You have to see how important women's liberation, women's political activity, is. A reactionary government has to attack women first, and it is easier then because women are so oppressed that they would go back home.



SW: It must have been difficult for them to see any alternative. What is life like now for women in Iran in terms of education and work and so on?

- Under the Shah, there were schools, colleges and university places for women. But it is not so now. Many centres for education for women are closed.

- With the compulsory veil, a lot of women have lost their jobs. Nurses and women in government offices who refuse to wear the veil are sacked. If this continues there will be fewer and fewer women skilled women in the public sphere. In Tehran you see many women with the scarf, they are only forced to do this because they are government employees. Some of them take the scarf off when they come out of the offices.

SW: Is there any repression of women on the street?

- Yes, recently I was in a well-to-do part of Tehran. I got out of the taxi and felt something hitting my face. It was a shock, it hurt so much. And then I saw this catapult. I was one of the few women not wearing a scarf, and I got harassed very much. It didn't happen last year. The attacks on women's rights have been much more successful in the past year.

- I think there is organised violence both by groups of men and by the state. The state guards, committee people who beat women publicly for talking to men or for drinking beer. Many women were lashed publicly because they put their feet in the water in the men's quarter when they were out swimming.

- The clergy dominated state has shown in the last two years that it is capable of more oppression of women, it has organised more violence against women. The boys who throw stones at you in the street, they are condoned by the state.....More and more violence against women, even women who wear very protective clothing.

SW: What was the reaction to the stoning to death of two prostitutes earlier this year?

- I think even the Islamic faction was appalled.

- Is there a law in Islam to stone to death prostitutes?

- Yes. Any kind of sexual relationship out of marriage is offensive to Islam. Homosexuality, adultery (if you are a woman) you would get stoned to death. But if you're not married they only slash you.

- Male homosexuality has been attacked vigorously by the system. Before you could hide it and get away with it, but this government has no sexual tolerance, exactly how the Koran says, that's how they interpret it. So many homosexuals have been shot, executed and two were stoned. Lesbians are more protected as they wear the veil and needn't be open about it. Women seem to be much closer than here.

- the gay movement here should have protested to the Iranian government.

- We haven't heard them protesting publicly, writing to their MP's, or in their unions. People should protest about these issues through means that can get to the Iranian government.

- Homosexuality is taboo inside all so-called revolutionary organisations in Iran. You can't possibly talk about homosexuality or women's issues, it's a side issue, it's not important. This issue is never raised at meetings.

- Personal politics, sexual politics, haven't attracted the left in Iran yet. They still see the economic struggle as the major struggle. Most of the left is Leninist, operates under a strong Leninist -type party, and of course there is no room for side issues.

SW: Do you think the struggle against imperialism and the Iranian ruling class can be waged along side the struggle for women's liberation?

- Recently when they asked women to wear veils, none of the leftist organisations opposed it. I asked one activist why, when they could rally so many women behind them. He said the women's organisations had not managed to create a movement to bring in working class women, masses of women, oppressed women, so why should we go and do this?
....



- When they women demonstrated against compulsory veiling, veiled women held a counter-demonstration. I think we must make those women aware of what they are doing. They were shouting at the women "You're foreign dolls, you're westernised". I think it's very important for women's organisations to approach working class women to have a base, a basic massive support for their own rights. From what I've seen in Iran last summer, women's organisations have lost support and cadres because of the attitude that you either get the working class or nobody. They emphasized the politics of class and subjects not related to women. They are left by themselves, fighting within themselves. They were so inactive. Now they have learnt their lesson. The thing is you cannot rally working class women behind you unless you take up women's issues and you have enough cadres to do that, women who would go into the poor areas and have clinics, have their classes. They are doing this now actually and it is very good. Now they are taking women's issues more and more and they are taking it into the mass of women and are much more successful. But before that they would only discuss communism.

- Well I think class struggle and women's liberation historically have been two separate issues. But they don't have to be. But because of the structure of politics in the West, the structure of the Leninist party, women could only organise around women's issues effectively when they organise among themselves, in their localities, the community, with themselves discussing women's issues, the issues affecting them as women and directly relevant to their personal lives. This area was never considered political, but it's only now women think it is political. This happened in Iran too, and it happened a lot after the revolution. When the veil became a major issue two months after the revolution, when Khomeini said that women must wear the veil, on television, that was a major issue, a direct attack upon basic human rights. To rally against this issue and to show the opposition to the government which was stabilising itself - but nobody did except women - the 20,000 women who came out against Khomeini's order, they were only women, why didn't the left.....?

- You can't say that because I was on that demonstration and what happened when the women, they wanted to have a demonstration, just one party, the party I belong to, came and helped. So you can't say none of the left.....

- I think none of the left in Iran take women's struggle seriously enough to base their political programme against women's oppression, and to have women's liberation as part of their programme. Your party produced a programme at the time relating to

unemployment and to imperialism and the only thing in a 10-point programme that said we believe in women's rights was the sixth point of the programme. Women's rights in Iran two months after the revolution was right at the top of the agenda, the first point of a political programme in Iran.

- The socialist argument is that women will gain freedom after the revolution, so women don't need to have their own struggle, it's divisive of the movement

- Well, that is changing....

- Well, anyway you mustn't forget the situation in some way is better. They try to put pressure more and more but now the left wing people, they can work and they can fight and really they can publish their newspapers. Now when you speak to the people they realise that Khomeini is not that leader who can answer their demands. That's why now women are seeking employment. They come in the street, women they have many groups, but unfortunately the bourgeois press in the West, they never say these things.

- At present the situation for women in Iran is very bad, the little bit of reforms and rights they had under the Shah, they have lost it all. But I think that the gains of the revolution is that the upsurge of mass opposition, the fact that the masses were able to overthrow the Shah, will remain in the memories of the people. It is unfortunate for Khomeini that he started the repressive government so soon, too soon. I think women will be able to learn from the revolution and to use the methods that they evolved to overthrow the Shah. They will use it in the future when the time and opportunity arises. It may be that they have returned to their homes now, we hope not for too long....

- No, no they haven't. A lot of them prefer to come out with the veil rather than stay at home, a lot of the activists are very active. You see in Tehran these days there is so much repression you can't have a free press. But at every crossroads you have women of all organisations, all oppositions, they have posters up there, cursing the government and all that, and it is always women, and they are putting it out and they are just ready to see somebody coming to arrest them, to pack up and run away.... I have watched them, they don't discuss, they just stand there with a few books for you to look at... But the important thing is that they are very active and almost always women who do this. They use the discrimination against them to their own interest. It's good. It's not all gloomy and horrible.



Manny

Nawal el Saadawi - the Arab woman's struggle in Egypt.

The following is an interview with Nawal el Saadawi, which took place on 30th July 1980.

Nawal is an Egyptian feminist and writer. Only one of her many books about women has been translated into English. This, 'The Hidden Face of Eve', was published by Zed Press earlier this year and is well worth reading.

I had never previously interviewed anybody, and was a bit nervous but very excited at meeting her. The interview lasted for at least 1½ hours, so obviously I've had to edit, select and discard. In doing so, I hope that I've retained what I believe to be important information about her life, her feminism, and information regarding feminist and anti-imperialist activity in Egypt.

I realize that I found the interview itself rather inadequate. It is important for those of you reading this to remember/know that it was a situation where two 3rd. World feminists were discussing and arguing together. There was a lot we shared - anger and mistrust of Western feminism. At the same time, the differences were very apparent - in our politics and because of differences in our living situations. Had I been interviewing her in India for an Indian feminist publication, it would have taken quite a different course. I realized that I was asking her questions that would 'suit' a Western feminist publication - I wasn't very happy about this.

Further, there were a lot of statements she made which I would have liked to have challenged more than I did. But again, I would not have liked to have 'exposed' her, and let the argument revolve around the issue of 'men' for example.

I hope that what follows is interesting and provides some sort of introduction to the situation in Egypt - for a more detailed and informative account of the situation of Egyptian women, read her book.

Shaila Shah.

Q. Could you tell me something about how women are organising in Egypt, and what sort of problems and issues are being discussed?

A. We don't have a Feminist Movement in Egypt....We do have some groups and individuals who are coming together to discuss different issues about women, and we have the traditional women's organisations. But we don't have a Movement yet, only the beginnings of one.

Generally, the problems being discussed are economic and political problems - class, Zionist infiltration, imperialism. We do talk about 'women's problems - divorce, marriage, sexual problems - but these are not yet the issue. The issue is still general, related to the country, to all people and their suffering. In many other Arab countries as well, women are aware of political problems and we cannot separate these from 'women's problems - it's all part of the whole system.

Q. Are the issues about women being discussed by people or by women specifically?

A. No, usually it is women, but there are men also who are interested in discussing them and wanting to know about them, because they are fed up with traditional customs, and women's liberation will help them, eg. because of economic necessity men are now believing that women should work, go out, be financially independent. So they are interested in women's liberation.....

Q. In this country, the Women's Liberation Movement has 7 Demands, and there are various active campaigns around them, as well as on other issues. Do you have anything similar?

A. No, I can't say we do, but there are discussion groups and groups coming together to organise seminars. Here, feminism takes on an 'advanced' form. In Egypt it is still groups talking about problems.

But in these 7 Demands I don't see anything against the capitalist system....

Q. No, there isn't anything that is directly against the Government, and I agree that the Demands themselves are bourgeois. But there are feminists who are active in struggles 'outside' of the Demands eg. for trade union rights etc. I would hope that all feminists, by definition, would be against the capitalist system, as well as being anti-imperialist, but there is hardly any anti-imperialist work done here by feminists, and what is, is carried out by Third World women and Irish women mostly.

However, another direction of feminism here is expressed against men. Is this part of the struggle of Egyptian women ?

N. For me, I believe that there is an antagonism between men and women. But in our country, some women fight on an individual basis eg. against their husband, but not against Man. It was the man that was created by the system which we have to fight, not the freethinker, the progressive man. The battle is savage - we are facing imperialism and Zionism - we need progressive men to fight for us, with us. Some men can feel and then fight. You cannot separate the man-woman struggle from the class struggle - this is my difference with some radical feminists here. I think the process of knowing your oppression is a long one, and I believe it is a men mental, emotional and psychological awareness, and we have to fight on all levels - you have to be a revolutionary feminist.

S. I sort of agree with that.... but I do believe that there is a distinctive system that operates in which the group of men has power over women as a group, and this power needs to be eradicated.

N. Well, I've seen peasants being exploited by other men as well as the wife of the man who exploits him. I've seen men being beaten by the mistress of the house, humiliated by rich women.... And of course he will then go home and maybe beat his wife....

In our country we cannot put Man as our first conflict - or religion - it's unrealistic.

I agree this should be discussed, and men must learn how not to oppress women, and we should teach men how to be human beings, how to respect women.

S. How much is Egyptian feminism influenced by Western feminism, if at all ?

N. Not our group - we are rejecting it. We feel they are not aware of our real problems - they concentrate only on sexism and not on other political and economic issues. Also, they feel that they are 'teaching' us - this is not an equal exchange of information, so we reject it.

S. I suppose I find the Women's Liberation Movement in this country very nationalistic - I don't think they have a concept of Internationalism, or awareness of conditions elsewhere. Would you expect support from Western feminists ?

N. I think they should liberate themselves first - they are also oppressed in different ways, by a patriarchal class system and I feel that eg. American women should fight the Carter regime, not 'help' us. I feel it is culturally neo-colonialist. There is a superiority in white women when they feel they are teaching a and helping Third World women.

They have their own battles - they should not come to Lebanon and talk about female circumcision - we all suffer 'circumcision' in different ways. At the conference in Denmark, there was a woman who said she knew all about this practice, but didn't know where Sudan is.....!

They don't read our literature, our language.....how can they know about our oppression ?

We need Western women to fight capitalism and imperialist policies in their own countries, because by doing so they will help us because we are the victims of it. We would reject this International Campaign against Female Circumcision, because it's patronising and also it is isolating the issue and limiting it to us. How can they ? It is universal - they may not be physically castrated, but they are psychologically so. So this is escaping from the main battle into the side battle.

S. I agree, but I also think that Western women have an obligation to support Third World women....

N. Yes, and I think they can use their system which is more free and 'democratic' to fight. For example, my books are censored in my country.



S. Can you tell me what sort of feminist literature is available in Egypt ?

N. My books (16) are available in the countryside, everywhere in Egypt. But hardly any Western feminist literature is read, and there are no translation in Arabic. So they do not influence the Egyptian women.

Generally, people read Arabic, and out of a population of 42million, maybe about 60% are illiterate, but this is decreasing. I think you can reach many women when you write.

S. Would your women's group aim outside of your group eg. towards peasant women ?

N. Yes, I come from a village, I visit my village often, I talk with them. I came from a poor family in the village, was then educated and now am a doctor. I would now call myself lower middle class.

S. What about peasant women organising independently in the villages ?

N. Not yet, they are working day and night, hard, and need rest.

S. I can understand that, but eg. in India, women from slum areas have organised against rape and male violence....

N. This isn't an issue as yet. There are self-help projects - women help each other, but there is no fight against men, not yet.

S. For a WLM. to develop in Egypt, would you say that that means that women necessarily have to reject Islam ?

N. I think all religion is a human phenomenon that serves the patriarchal class system. I started as a Muslim, but when I studied history, and I began to understand the oppression of women and about the class system, then you no longer become religious, you become a feminist. But you can't expect this from all women. In our countries, most people are religious emotionally.

S. Could you say a bit more about feminist anti-imperialist activity in Egypt ?

N. I think women should be part of a progressive left party, but should also organise on their own. I am a writer, not a political activist, so my role is limited. I am not in a left group, but in these groups women are fighting side by side with the men. We are socialists. Women fight in the party and also teach men from the inside. I think the illuminated man has an interest in change and in fighting the patriarchal class system. In the socialist groups, they are campaigning, educating, writing, speaking, organizing. They have different programmes - some fight in the workplace, some fight economic policies, Zionism, etc....

Feminism cannot be separated from the fight against capitalism, Imperialism, Zionism.

Witness Report - Eritrea

Taken from Eritrea Information May 1980, which is published by Research and Information Centre on Eritrea, Via della Dogana Vecchia 5, 00186 ROME.

I have been in Eritrea. There is nothing extraordinary about this, as numerous individuals, delegations and political parties from Europe and other parts of the world have visited the liberated areas of this Red Sea country. Nor is it the first time that people from Spain visit the region to learn more about Africa's longest war. However, it is the first time that a delegation, organised by IEPALA and comprising journalists, representatives of political parties and members of the Eritrean Support Committee, goes into Eritrea. The aims were that of experiencing, in the first person, the characteristics of this revolution, so as to better inform people in Spain as well as in Latin America, as well as to promote solidarity for the Eritrean people.

The striking aspects of the Eritrean revolution are: the organisational capacity of the Popular Front; the absence of private property in the liberated areas; the high level of political consciousness of the fighters, their self-confidence and determination, so evident in their actions and words; the participation of women in the revolution; the attention given by the Front to the social and human problems that are springing up in this new society; the absence of the cult of leadership; the rigorously applied concept of self-reliance; and finally, the brilliant and correct military strategy.

This article intends to expand on one of the aspects of the process of political and social organisation, that which deals with the participation of women in the revolution.

ERITREA, like some other Third World countries, has suffered successive colonialisms, which have given rise to a feudo-capitalist economic and social structure. The women in Eritrea comprise 50% of the population, and are an essential component of the work force, both in the countryside as well as in the urban centre, resulting in a double exploitation: that of class and of sex.



In the rural areas, women did not have the right to own land. In the cities, the working woman received half the salary of men for doing the same job. This economic exploitation had conditioned their participation in the political, social and cultural life of the society.

Women in Eritrea had always participated in the revolution, even though in a non-organised way. In the decade 1950/60, Eritrean women took part in demonstrations, peasant revolts etc., even though this participation never developed into an organised structure. At this initial stage of the armed struggle of the Eritrean people, the contribution of women was mainly to bring food to the fighters, offer them shelter and to bring information. Only a very small number actively participated in the armed struggle.

The active participation of women as a whole was to take place around 1970, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front was created. The Popular Front, in the light of the structure of Eritrean society and the repercussions on it of the women's struggle, consider the women's role equal to that of the Eritrean working class.

Aster, who is 20 years old, and who teaches political education in the training camp, tells me about her personal experience of joining the armed struggle.

"I used to live in Asmara and every day I witnessed how the Ethiopian soldiers were killing and imprisoning my people. The most important thing for me was the desire to liberate my country from Ethiopia. In 1974, I was studying at secondary school when the Derg announced a literacy campaign which aimed at sending all students in to the countryside and closing all schools. This was a pretext, to put an end to the strong opposition to the Derg's policy among Eritrean students and intellectuals. The Eritrean students refused to go to Ethiopia. At that moment, I ran away from Asmara and joined the EPLF."

The women in Eritrea are organised through the mass organisations, both in the cities as well as in the villages. In the cities, the Women's Association works closely with the Workers' Association to give active support to the armed forces of the Front. In the countryside, apart from collaborating with the Peasant's Association, the women work towards concretizing the land reform, both in the highlands and the lowlands, which, for the first time in the history of Eritrea, permits a woman to own land.

The Women's Associations outside Eritrea give vital economic support to the armed struggle; it is not uncommon to find working women, the mothers of the fighters or younger women working outside Eritrea, dedicating a major part of their salary to the Front as an expression of solidarity. Since nearly 95% of Eritrean women are illiterate, one of the main tasks of the Women's Association has been the campaign for literacy and political education of women, resulting in the creation of innumerable military and political cadres amongst the women, who have joined the ranks of the EPLF forces. Following a training of approximately six to nine months, these combatants pass on to their respective work responsibilities. They constantly spoke to me about the enormous significance of "the mothers'" support to the Eritrean revolution. Aster's account bears testimony to this fact:

"In the initial stages, I thought my parents would not understand why I wanted to join the Front, and to take up arms as a fighter. So I left home, without saying anything to them. When Keren was liberated, I met them there. They were happy about my decision and told me that they preferred to see me there, rather than having me living where there was a constant threat from Ethiopian soldiers. My mother told me that whenever she could, she would run to the nearest spot where she heard the fighters were, to bring them food, clothes or ammunition."

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTION AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

At the present moment, 35% of the combatants with the Popular Front are women. I asked 24 year old Fowzia if there were any women members in the Central Committee of the Front.

"No, at the moment there are no women members in the Central Committee, due to the fact that the Front does not believe in creating false situations of token responsibility. Existing relations inside the Front are of equal opportunity for all, men and women. The posts that women occupy, they have earned for themselves. However, it is also true that the past discriminatory education that the women have inherited, has created disparities which are gradually being overcome. The Popular Front, for this reason, gives priority to women in cadre schools."

The division of labour is obviously not an automatic operation. Each person is given a task best suited to his or her abilities; one can see men cooking, sewing, lighting fires, just as one can see women driving cars, working as carpenters or mechanics etc. Both men and women fighters look after the children.

I asked 23 year old Nuria whether the fact that women were now doing the jobs traditionally done by men, had shocked them or created any ideological friction among the fighters.

"Reactions of surprise, or even incredulity, were not so uncommon in the beginning, because it was taken for granted that we were fragile and unsuited for certain kinds of work. However, when they saw how actively we participated in the struggle, they came to realise how wrong they had been. Fighters in the frontline have had to take the guns out of the hands of their dead women comrades before burying them. They realise that women too are making Eritrean history."



Photographs from

Relationships among comrades is based on friendship and solidarity, but they also fall in love and get married. The organizing capacity of the Front never allows it to under value the social aspects of the revolutionary process. In the days prior to the formation of the Front, marriages were based on economic interests and the religious and tribal customs of the families. The wishes of the couple to be married were not taken into account. Often, the bride had never met her future husband before the marriage ceremony. Many girls were married when they were still children. Among the Tigrinians, it was the practice for the bride's parents to pay a dowry to the parents of the bridegroom, but with the other nationalities, it was the other way round. Amongst the Rashaidas, the price paid as a dowry depended on the beauty of the bride. Polygamy existed among the moslems, and wives were often repudiated. In other words, women were very much subordinated to men.

In November 1977, during the second regular meeting of the Central Committee, a new law was passed which abolished compulsory marriage and instituted monogamous marriage based on free consent, and the equality of rights between husband and wife. It also provided for the protection of women and children in the case of divorce. Askalu, aged 27, and responsible for the organisation of the large Solomuna Camp, explained to me how the new system worked:

"When a couple wants to get married, they inform the Front. They have to think about their decision for three months. Then they can get married and take a month's holiday. After that they return to their respective tasks. If they are not far away from each other, they can meet frequently. If not, they are allowed to spend a fortnight together every six months. If they want to have children they can do so. Otherwise they are provided with contraceptives. Already we have 70 babies born in these circumstances and they are looked after in the nursery set up by the Front in the Central Hospital. The mothers themselves decided to spend six months with their babies and then return to their work, leaving their children in the care of doctors and teachers. Since this is still a relatively new development, we are still discussing what is the best frequency for visits by the parents to the children."

On his way to the Central Hospital, a fighter whose wife had recently had a child told me: "I've had a daughter who weighs two and a half kilos. I'd never have thought that it was possible to have children while serving in the battlefields."

Yes, in Eritrea, women are emerging from their feudal heritage, destroying the old order, posing a challenge to the new society. For them, the struggle for their country's liberation in no way distracts from their own.

THE BIBLE AND THE GUN or HOW THE MATRIARCHY WAS L

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How were women affected by the imperialist takeover of their lands? What did they lose as women when missionaries and soldiers invaded and destroyed with the Bible and the gun? As the people and their resources were drawn into the world capitalist system of social relations, their old communities, based as they were on the land (hunting, gathering, agriculture) and on kin, were transformed, broken up. This process has been well documented by historians, socialist or otherwise - what is overlooked by these same historians is that the imperialist nations were also patriarchal and that a great many of the societies taken over in the interests of capital were matriarchal in structure, matriarchal and classless, they were organised along very different lines to the colonising nations. Even where the colonised culture was patriarchal, in many cases, the women had only recently lost their independence and class relations were only just emerging within the social system.

Morgan, Engels and Briffault note the impact that this native matriarchal culture had on the travellers and missionaries. They expressed disbelief and amazement - how could women be so powerful, how could they control these mighty warriors? One traveller says of the Bega of the Upper Nile that the woman "rules the roost in a way which is difficult to reconcile with the defiant and haughty nature of those untamed nomads"

and another says of the natives of Paraguay: "The women are most powerful to reconcile the warring parties and produce peace, those most barbarous people easily granting anything at the request of those that have suckled them."

- and yet although women had such power, they worked very hard! Not what the missionaries were used to at all! Back home the working people were powerless and those with power did little to contribute to the national wealth. As a missionary said of the Zulus:

"Whoever has observed the happy appearance of the women at their work, their gaiety and their chatter, their laughter and song, let him compare them to the bearing of our own working women!"

The women worked together to produce food, clothing, implements and housing for their children and their clan brothers and sisters. They tanned leather, made pots, conserved food and did all that was necessary to provide for the clan. The men of God found their building activities hard to stomach- they tried to teach the men to be men. Some Spanish missionaries got the Pueblo men building A missionary reports on the venture :

"The poor embarrassed wretch was surrounded by a jeering crowd of women and children, who mocked and laughed, and thought it the most ludicrous thing that a man should be engaged in building a house."

Another aspect of their life that freaked out the missionaries and travellers was that the family structure of the peoples they were 'civilising' was quite unnatural and immoral, not at all the Victorian middle class family they knew and loved. The children didn't even know their own fathers and the women rarely lived with their husbands - if they had husbands. No father family? what was going on in these 'primitive' areas? The women and their children lived in clans with their maternal relatives - male and female. Their fathers and the fathers of their children lived in their own maternal clan. The children took their mothers name and inherited what little personal property there was through their mothers line. The men of the clan cared for the children even though they were not their fathers - a cause of surprise to one French missionary who was told by an Iroquois :

'You Frenchmen love only your own children, we love all the children of the tribe.'



but it was the sexual customs that upset the missionaries and the explorers the most, coming as they did from cultures where the women were so sexually oppressed. A traveller in the Phillipines remarked:

"The women are extremely lewd and they even encourage their daughters to live a life of unchastity."

One traveller experienced this lewdness for himself when he visited the Ainu:

'She began by gently biting my fingers she then bit my arm, then my shoulder and when she had worked herself up into a passion, she put her arms around my neck and bit my cheek.'

All this clearly flouted God's law and God's agents on earth did their best to enforce patriarchal morality on the people and although their efforts were often met with incredulity and resistance, they were bound to succeed eventually as the incursion of capital had its effects on the native social structure - the clan lands were stolen for private ownership depriving women of their status and collective property, people were forced to work away from home - in the cities, on the plantations.

There are very few areas in the world where you'll find 'mother right' inheritance through the female line, very few areas where women still control their own sexuality, their reproductive powers and their lives. All this was destroyed. Their imperial masters imposed patriarchal customs on the people they controlled (and they're still doing this - see ISIS Bullitin on 'women land and food reproduction, no.2 for an article on 'women and land rights by Barbara Rogers which tells how development agencies are expropriating women's rights to the land just as the colonial administrators did in the past, The agencies tend to treat men as the owners of the land, disregarding women's claims in their attempt to develop agriculture.) The people had little choice and the little women little protection - exposed as they were to the imperial will of their foreign rulers who used their bodies for pleasure and their wombs to provide them with slaves and/or cheap labour: (again this is still going on - a particularly horrific example of this r exploitation of women's reproductive power is the way that women in South East Asia are forced to sell their babies to childless couples in the west their poverty ensuring a supply

of children to provide 'real', white people with families.)

It seems to me that if we are considering the effects of imperialism on women we really can't ignore the way imperial expansion effectively destroyed the social basis of women's power in so many of the cultures they colonised and in so doing it also destroyed a large slice of female herstory, robbing all women of any knowledge of our past power, our heritage, leaving us with the lie that patriarchy is inevitable and natural.

Algeria - after Independence.

The position of women in Algeria today expresses the profound contradiction between the ideals expressed in the Tripoli Programme of 1962 (at independence) and adopted in the Charte d' Alger in 1964, and the economic and traditional/religious pressures which act to maintain the vast majority of Algerian women in traditional roles. The outward sign of this subservience, in the eyes of western women, is the wearing of the veil, a loose sheet which covers the woman from head to toe when she ventures outside her home. In Algeria the veil is deeply rooted in the national consciousness as an important symbol, more so than in neighbouring Morocco and Tunisia, expressing as it does, even now, eighteen years after independence, a rejection of the values of the European coloniser. The disgust and anger with which we approach this forceful expression of our sisters' oppression must be tempered by an understanding of the complex factors which have allowed the continuation of this practice - for it in itself is only a symbol of the subservience of women in Algerian society.

Before and during colonisation the association between women and certain ideals and concepts has been reinforced - primarily as a defence against external change. At the same time, Islam has become a defence in the same way - neither the image of women or the religious beliefs were allowed to change and evolve. The image of women is clearly expressed in the oral tradition of stories and myths passed down by mother or grandmother from generation to generation, and also in the intensely romantic songs and poetry of the period.

But a certain number of young Algerians received an education under colonialism and, especially after the second world war, began to write novels overtly committed to the struggle for independence. The image of women in these works in general is characterised by her association with maternity, the uncomplicated and "real" past, the ancestors, fertility of the land, honour and Algeria. The wholesome, maternal world is contrasted with the stranger's bright city, the fertile female world with the impotence of the male in the coloniser's city. In the work of Kateb Yacine, NEDJMA the woman Nedjma does not stand for the struggle of Algerian women for independence but for Algeria itself - she is a transient shadowy figure whose ancestry is cloaked in mystery. She exerts a strong charm. Yacine expresses his hopes for the future through the reestablishment of links with the past, and the conception of Nedjma herself is a story of: "nights of drunkenness and fornication; nights of rape". (1).

"I am a woman, I have never been to school, the war is the business of men" (2) So speaks Faroudja, one of the characters of L'Opium et Le Baton, one of the most lucid accounts of the war in the hills and countryside. This much respected novelist, Mammeri, now resident in France, was recently invited by the University of Tizi Ouzou to address a conference on Kabyl poetry and language, for he is a strong supporter of language rights for the people of his native province.

His account of the war does not however do justice to the role played by women. For some, participation meant remaining in the villages, covering up for the absence of the men, risking imprisonment, torture and death to feed the visiting maquis at night. For others, the struggle involved taking to the hills with the maquis, fighting side by side with the men. In the towns, and especially in Algiers, during the period of bombing raids on French buildings and cafes, women played an extremely important role fearlessly, planting bombs in the French districts. This work involved going among French soldiers in cafes, and required the abandonment of the veil and the adoption of Western dress, as did service with the FLN in the hills. During

the siege of the Kasbah when movement in and out of it was strictly controlled by French troops looking for bombs, weapons and wanted men, many women again donned the veil as a weapon, for it brought them immunity from the searching hands of the French soldiers, and allowed them to undertake the transportation of bombs, guns and messages.

For this heroic work women were duly praised when independence was won, but once the unnatural conditions of war had ended, they were pressurized into taking up again their traditional role, and with it the veil. The authority of father, brother and husband was once again established.

During the struggles the Front de Liberation Nationale undertook some political education among the maquis, under difficult conditions. The fighters were always on the move, and the only permanent contact which they had with the population in general which would allow the necessary education to take place was in the few isolated areas where the French troops could not penetrate. In fact, one of the main theorists of the struggle, Frantz Fanon, who himself lived and worked in Algeria with the FLN, did not foresee the need to raise the question of the emancipation of women during the struggle: "The doctrine of the Revolution, the strategy of combat, never postulated the necessity for a revision of forms of behaviour with respect to the veil. We are able to affirm, even now, that when Algeria has gained her independence such questions will not be raised, for in the practise of revolution the people have understood that problems are resolved in the very movement that raises them" (3). The fact that women had joined the maquis, had lived side by side with their male comrades, challenging the traditional familial authority of the father, indicated to Fanon that permanent change had taken place. In fact the old structures were resilient, they had been shaken but not transformed.

The victory over the French brought to power Ben Bella, until his overthrow by the more conservative and puritanical Boumediene (1965-1978). Ben Bella seemed to appreciate the need for rapid consolidation of the gains made by women, promised emancipation and inaugurated a vigorous campaign in the press in favour of the participation of women in all walks of life. In 1964 the FLN Congress asserted the equality of the sexes and Ben Bella actually voiced his opposition to the most traditional and conservative leaders of the faith:

"We oppose those who, in the name of religion, wish to leave our women outside of this (national) construction. We respect Moslem traditions but we want a revolutionary Islam and not the Islam left to us by colonial domination... Women should be mobilised like men to build a happy future for the country. It is not the wearing of the veil that makes us respect the women, but the pure sentiments that we have in our hearts" (4) Attacking the religious leaders was both difficult and dangerous, for they had been among the first to join the early movement in favour of independence from France, and their organisation, the Ulemas, had considerable support still among the FLN and the people. Independence also brought many problems, a ravaged land, the mass exodus of skilled workers and professionals back to Europe, and massive unemployment. Women were soon forced out of the labour market as more and more jobs were reserved for men. Algeria had lost many dead, and women were encouraged to concentrate on the home and raising children.



The following is drawn from my own experience of living in a medium sized town in Algeria for a considerable period, and from travelling to other parts of the country.

Although some attempts have been made by women and by the party, attitudes towards women seem to have changed little in the 18 years since independence. "The woman is still considered more or less an object there, she is practically out of circulation, out of the life of the country, even in the law she has never had the status of an adult, she remains throughout her life under the domination of the man, father, brother or husband." (5) In Algiers and Oran it is certainly possible to see unveiled women going to work, and young couples out with their children; but the vast majority of Algeria's population lives in the reasonably fertile littoral, and here, in the towns, the women clearly feel the weight of oppression. Schooling in Algeria is free, although pupils in the secondary schools are required to provide their own books and materials. The country has made an enormous effort to stamp out illiteracy at least among the young, and this has been very successful. In the towns at least, girls seem to be afforded the same chances as boys to receive at least the first cycle of education. In secondary schools however, there is a clear preponderance of boys, and the imbalance is much more acute in the universities and training colleges. Young women in Algeria today know that education presents them with the possibility of change, but all too often the parents support a girl in her secondary education because then she will fetch a higher price in marriage, the educated daughter will tempt an educated husband.

In practice work prospects are restricted, women may be teachers, nurses, cleaners, office workers, where industry exists, they may fill some factory jobs. But there are many prejudices and practical difficulties which serve to limit the choice. She may study in a university or training college away from home if she can persuade her family to allow this, but to work she is forced to return to her home or that of relatives. Government employees, for example, are allocated flats, but these are not allocated to single women or to women sharing. One official I met regarded this as unsafe, immoral and unthinkable, as well as a gross provocation. If she does work, family pressures may force her to wear the veil on her journey to work.

Even those girls who do find work often know that this will stop when they marry. Although strenuous efforts are being made to mix schools, the chances are that girls will still leave school to marry a man chosen by the parents, and who is considerably older. It is difficult to assess the extent to which traditional marriage is the norm - certainly in the town where I lived this was the practice for those who could afford it. The bride's parents must provide an adequate dowry, and the bridegroom's family buys expensive gifts - in this town, gold bracelets and necklaces, sumptuous cloths and blankets and carpets. On the night of the marriage, the bride is decked out in all her finery and that of her family, symbolising this crude form of barter. She is often young and frightened, and must sit on a cushion to be admired by all the guests. The men take part in the revelry outside while the women stay with the bride in the house. The bridegroom then mounts a white horse (this is specific to the region) and rides around the town dressed in his best, accompanied by the men and a band playing Andalusian music. The climax comes when he enters the house to the firing of guns, to consummate the marriage.



The ruling party, the FLN, does have a women's organisation, the UNFA, which holds national congresses, to which men are admitted. The national council of this body met in February, 1980, in the presence of the minister of Justice, who in his speech stressed the important role of women in the education of children and the struggle against waste! He also tackled the problem of divorce in Algeria, where the husband may repudiate the woman and remarry immediately, while the woman must spend a long time going through the legal process in order to obtain a divorce. This speech demonstrated most clearly the ambiguous attitude of the FLN to women's liberation - for while effectively limiting women to a role in the house and family, the party is taking steps to improve her situation - he called for a new family code of law, and stressed commitment to the provision of preschool facilities such as creches, but declared: "such a reform does not imply to any degree an attack on the family which remains the living cell of the national community...the object of the reform is to create the means to relieve parents who are mobilised by their daily tasks, giving the children everything which can complete the family's efforts" (6)

The FLN opposes those who wish to preserve certain outmoded Islamic traditions which are no longer relevant - and includes in this the proscription of contraception. But contraceptive advice for women remains woefully inadequate - the pill, for example, is available to married women only, and low dose pills are not available. Little information is available to girls about birth control methods. Health care in hospitals and Polycliniques is free, and strict segregation of the sexes among outpatients does encourage women to attend. Many of the doctors in these hospitals and clinics are Russian or East European, speaking little French and usually no Arabic. They are overworked and often insensitive to the fact that it may take enormous courage for a woman to go to a foreign doctor let alone to submit to an internal examination. Family pressures will often force women to leave hospital for too soon after a difficult birth or a miscarriage, for they have many other children to look after. In many cases, a woman's health is destroyed by too many pregnancies and by lack of medical care, for frightened away by the rumours which abound about the hospitals she may prefer to be delivered by a local midwife using traditional methods even when there are complications. Virginity tests are still carried out before marriage in some cases.

The biggest obstacle to women's emancipation remains the attitude towards her which is so entrenched. Independence has not brought a far-reaching re-evaluation of women's position in society. Attitudes are changing, most rapidly in the cities, but not quickly enough. Algeria at the present time faces a number of economic and social problems: underemployment, housing crisis, rural exodus, desertification of once fertile lands, a demographic explosion and most recently, unrest among the Berber people of Kabylia. Part of the response of the FLN to these problems has been to stress the importance of the stable family in social organisation, and the role of the mother in education and health. At the same time, external pressures in the Islamic world are having an effect in Algeria - for the first time in the recent troubles at Tizi Ouzou University a group of fundamentalist students were involved. Everywhere the clergy is gaining respect and prestige. The attitude of the government towards the revolution in Iran plays down the oppression of women in the new Iran. All this endangers the changes which are already taking place far too slowly.

Notes:

1. KATEB, Y: Nedjma. pg. 98.
2. MAMMARI, M: L'Opium et Le Baton. pg. 299
3. FANON, F: A Dying colonialism. pg. 33.
4. BEN BELLA. quoted in GORDON, D.C.: Women of Algeria: An Essay on Change. Harvard, 1968.
5. COLLIN, C: in Les Temps Modernes. 280. Nov. 1969.
6. REVOLUTION AFRICAINE, pg. 835, Feb. 1980.

Books worth reading:

- TILLION, G.: Le Harem et Les Cousins. Paris Seuil, 1966.
M'RABET, Fadela.: Les Algeriennes. Paris, Maspero, 1967.
YOUNG, I.: The Private Life of Islam, Penguin, 1973.

Women in the Struggle for Liberation - El Salvador.



This article is based on an interview with a refugee woman teacher from El Salvador.

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, surrounded by Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica, yet it is the most densely populated and also the most industrialised country in that area. The economy is based on the "cash crops" coffee, cotton and sugar produced mainly for export to the west which create grand profits for the plantation owners who constitute a tiny oligarchy commonly termed "the 14 families". This group of families also play a key role in the industrial sector as agents of the western multi-national corporations and banks who control the economy of El Salvador, including the international market value of its cash crops. While the ruling class and the imperialists export the food and goods produced by the working people, the majority of people live in deepest poverty. Nevertheless the Salvadorian people are presently fighting a war for their national liberation against the oligarchy and its repressive machinery; the military-civilian junta, the army and the paramilitary forces. The Capitalist media however have created the myth that it is a battle between the "extreme left and extreme right" with the "moderate" military junta trying to carry out land reforms. It is important to dispell this myth and draw attention to the constant threat of a direct intervention by the United States who are ready to move in troops with the collaboration of the Guatemalan and Honduran armies at any time. They are desperate not to let another "Nicaragua" occur. The US is constantly supplying the junta with military and economic aid. - But the people, determined to win the struggle against imperialism are united in the FDR (Revolutionary Democratic Front) which consists of all popular mass organisations, the Social Democratic (MNR) and the Popular Social Christian Movement (PSC) which has split from the Christian Democrat Party. In such a system of dependent capitalism all the working people are exploited. In order to overcome the daily struggle for survival and to build up a just society the people are fighting in a civil war for their liberation.

60% of the population work in the country side on the coffee, cotton and sugar plantations. This involves seasonal labour during harvest time from November to February when the schools are also on holiday. The women and children are employed to pick the crops and clean out the insects. They work and live in very harsh conditions. Even when they are pregnant they must walk for miles, work long hours, sleep on bare grounds and get no medical attention. They have to do very hard, dirty, boring and risky jobs such as fumigating the crops (spraying with insecticide) which has already led to some children being poisoned. Also the lack of hygiene and spreading of diseases inevitably shortens their lives. This work could easily be mechanised, but it is cheaper for the landowners to employ the women and children who both earn 30% less than men for the job. The replacement of people by machines would also cause more unemployment and greater discontent and so strengthen the popular mass organisations. However the coffee plantation workers are organised in the unions FECCAS (Salvadorean Peasants' Federation) and UTC (Union of Countryside Peasants) who have fought for an 8-hour day and 5-day week. The wages still depend on the weight of coffee picked a day and because the rates are so low, a large number of men have to go to the town to look for work while the women work on the fields, do their housework and look after the children.

Some young girls manage to get jobs as maids in the houses of the rich but even they get harrassed and sexually abused by the men in the houses. Some get involved in prostitution to get a little more money to support their families.

In the towns the women work mainly in the factories that produce goods for export for example: stationary, clothes and shoes which they could never afford to buy themselves. Those who work in the factories "Maiden Form" (producing garments), "Egal Internacional" (gloves for women), "INSINCA" (a Japanese textile factory) and "Hilasal" (famous for its high quality towels, purely for export); have organised strong unions which are very militant. One of the demands that these factories have fought for is maternity leave, paid for by the National Social Security. Elsewhere working class women are not allowed to work when they are pregnant and are given the sack.

There are many women involved in manual work producing food and clothes for the local market. Some work in their houses, sewing clothes and taking them to the market place to sell. Others knit wool and jute, or prepare food to sell and they are all self sufficient.

The Salvadorean people are very well organised to ensure their victory of the struggle for liberation. So it is no surprise that even in the market the stall holders and street sellers are organised in a syndicate to fight for their common interests such as the lowering of taxes on the stalls and cheaper gas for the open kitchens. The street vendors who do not hold stalls can sell their food a little cheaper which is mostly consumed by the poorest people. However the quality of the food is very bad and the conditions in which it is sold very unhealthy which inevitably leads to ill health and disease. The syndicate of market and street sellers cannot overcome this problem in the near future because they realise it is a long term matter of health education. These market women must suffer abuse and harrassment from policemen. Many of them make only a few pence for their goods and must therefore find another job in the evening, like washing or ironing for some one else in order to get enough money to feed their own family.

Education:

In the professional jobs the majority of primary school teachers are women mainly because the wages are too low for men who have to support a family, which forces them to take up a second job or leave the profession for a job in the town. This is because the state considers education as unprofitable and unnecessary. The teachers have founded the very strong union ANDES (National Association of Salvadorean Teachers), which also fights for the rights of the pupils, for example the right to sit a free exam at the end of each academic year which in the past pupils had to pay for and could not afford.

They also managed to win a wage increase which was introduced by a university lecturer Salvador Samayea when he became the Minister of Education in October 1979. In January 1980 he resigned his post because he could not work alongside the military junta, and instead he joined the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL Farabunde Marti) which are currently engaged in the armed struggle against the junta.

The teachers also gained a 3-month pregnancy leave based on the National Social Security. In their political struggle against the state by means of strikes, they have found a way of winning power. But they are careful that the pupils do not lose too much of their education so they plan their strikes to take place in different areas at different times. In this way they get the support of the parents who see their children's interests also being cared for. In fact at times where the political activities of ANDES are carried out during school hours, the school directors themselves take over the lessons for that time. From this it is obvious that the whole staff is united in the political work.

The teachers have even organised special evening classes for workers to give them general and political education which are run purely on their initiative. The workers contribute a little money towards expenses. Of course the classes must be carried out clandestinely because the junta who fears the result of this political education, and persecutes and murders anyone known to be involved.

200 teachers and university lecturers have been killed by the junta and paramilitary forces this year.) In the universities the students (20% of whom are women) are very militant and have fought for many basic rights, such as in 1975 the increasing availability of courses, which have helped women, particularly in secretarial or office jobs, to take up psychology and administration in order to find more interesting jobs.

A woman from Cuscatlan tells: "Two truckloads of guards arrived, and they had some people from ORDEN with them, as though they were tied up, but that was only to make us think that they were under arrest and I saw what happened when they met the man who rings the bells at the church. He was with his mother and his girlfriend and they killed him right there and they all grabbed the women ... My God, what terrible things we have seen."

"We're not prepared to have them come and kill us without defending ourselves. Some have just got knives, or small pistols, or hunting guns. So that we can die defending ourselves and not like animals. This is the right of every human, and the world must understand us." The women will not give up their fight against this repression which is a direct result of the dependent capitalist system in which the oligarchy is trying its utmost with the help of the United States to hold on to its power and rule.

In 1976/77 the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BFR) and the Popular Unified Action Front (FAPU) have organised two associations of the "Mothers of the Disappeared" who have staged many hunger strikes, demonstrations and occupations of churches to know the whereabouts of their sons. Just after the assassination of Archbishop Romero, as a result of this political pressure and as a weak tactic to try and gain some credibility from the people the junta opened up the prisons, and allowed the women to come and look for their sons. But they had moved the prisoners to clandestine prisons before hand, so that they would not be held responsible for their disappearance. However the people are not fooled so easily. They have realised who their enemies and oppressors are, and they know now that the only way to liberate all the children, women and men is to unite in this civil war for national liberation. The Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) and its military wing the Unified Revolutionary leadership (DRU) are the recognised belligerent force. The USA is desperate in its attempts to continue to prop up the oligarchy and impose its bourgeois ideology in the country. This bourgeois ideology tries to make women appear as "individualists" only concerned with their children and homes; as "pacifists" that wish to conform and not condemn the injustice, and who refer to men as the only people responsible for the situation of women.

Finally it tries to make them submerge themselves in egoism and an individualist spirit that is opposed to solidarity; so that they want to deceive themselves, covering up the fundamental problem (the dependent capitalist system of exploitation and domination), as if it were only an individual problem

and a question of men's machismo attitude towards women.

The popular organisations dedicated to the interests of the people have, of necessity, the historical and unavoidable task of educating women in political class consciousness:

The women who remain in the villages and towns must face the brutal repression of the civilian population and any opponents of the regime. Not only do they take advantage of the women by sexually offending and raping them but also they do not hesitate to murder the mothers in front of their children and even slaughtering the children and old folk just for the sake of terrorising the population. They also have a policy of systematical killing of any young men and women because they are potential guerillas.

Some women who come from the area where the repression is being carried out gave the following testimonies:

Maria is eight years old. She has her arms around her brothers, three very young children.

"They (the National Guard) came and started shooting at my daddy's sister's house...yes, I was watching with them (her little brothers) and my aunt's children who were crying a lot. Then they came to our house, looking for my daddy, but he wasn't there, and they hit my mother and we all cried and there was a lot of shooting... and there was my mother on the floor, she had been stabbed, they had cut her hands into little pieces, and her face too, and we all cried a lot. When they had gone a lady came and took us all up there (into the mountains) and we lived up there."

Another little girl, from Cuscatlan province, begins to tell her story; she sees far away:

"The guard came to my house. My mother was there. They had already killed my daddy outside in the road. They pulled my mother's clothes off, my little brother and sisters cried a lot and they got angry with me. The guards were on top of my mother and she had no clothes on...then they dragged her outside, my mother couldn't walk anymore and there was a lot of blood coming out from between her legs, and the guards told us not to follow them, because they would kill us. I went out afterwards, I hid my little brothers and sisters and went down to the river where I had heard shots, and there was my mother who wasn't moving anymore...her head was cut up, and her breast and hands. I washed her a little with water, but I couldn't carry her. There were a lot of other people and we walked for many nights hiding during the day."



In the face of repression

With the whole country now in a state of civil war , with increasing unemployment, poverty, murders and "disappearances"; the majority of women have to find employment to supplement their husbands wages, which are barely enough to live on. With the growing number of households that are broken up, the women are left to bring up the children on their own. Therefore it is not so easy for women to join the guerilla armies and fight on the military level. Overall their strong catholic beliefs make it difficult for them to decide to join the struggle for national liberation but since Archbishop Romere himself declared support for the armed struggle at a Sunday mass, this has given them more encouragement.

So now 40% of the members of the various political-military organisations are women who are actively involved in political and military training.

They must raise the consciousness of women about the true reality of life; raise their collective spirit and feeling of solidarity; raise their spirit of struggle and the organisation to motivate them in the strife for the political struggle, so that they will advance the revolutionary process towards total victory.

Women must know that they are a living, strong force in the process of the struggle for freedom, since it is they that influence in a decisive way the education of their children, and can be the transmitter either of the ruling ideology or of the liberating ideology of the proletariat.

Women are a vital part of the people's struggle: Gradually the Salvadorean woman has come to assume her historical duty to the revolution; little by little she has come to express her heroic attitude, her keen aptitude for struggle... her temper of revolutionary steel.

Women are a vital part of the struggle because their immediate and fundamental interests are the same as the men's. Their class enemies are the same; namely, Imperialism, the oligarchy, the puppet government and the armed forces. It is a struggle for better pay, the lowering of the cost of living, a just working-day, better social taxes, better food and a better condition of life and against the closure of factories and the intransigence of the bosses.

It is a struggle against enemy repression, for the liberty of the press and the release of the political activists that have disappeared.

Because women are a vital part of the struggle, not only as women, but as the exploited, the oppressed and because their conviction and inclination for struggle arises from their concrete living situation, their part in the struggle comes from their hope for freedom, justice and social progress ! "

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"This conclusion is translated from a communique by the Popular Revolutionary Bloc. (BPR)."



Chile.

PERLUSA is a political refugee and an active member of MIR. What follows is the transcript of a tape recorded interview with her.

SW: What was the situation for women in Chile like before the military took power?

P: The situation of women from the working class, from the shanty towns, peasant women in my country, and Indian women, was very hard in terms of the poverty that they were living under, the lack of possibility for getting a job, or when they could get a job it was always as a servant in another woman's house. So, from cleaning another women's house till nine or ten o'clock in the evening, afterwards they have to go back to their house to look after their own house. So it was really hard for them and because we used to have so many children. It was difficult because of the wage of the head of the family, in this case the man, was very small and the women have to contribute to that by going out to work, as a very low paid worker. Children were left alone most of the day, and we always have problems with houses being burned with children inside because the father has to go out to work and the mother has to go out to work too. So the situation difficult.

and to the countryside. And they were treating women like, "Oh, my dear, you have problems and we have come to try to help you to solve them, so we are going to teach you how to cook, how to look after the house," and so on, and just telling them they should protect their family, that everything they were doing was just in order to improve the condition of life of the whole family.

So in a way they were trying to use women to be a more strong support for the government. The ideology, the dominant ideology in my country, with the strong influence of the church and all those values which were imposed upon us, women were supposed to be fulfilling only that role as a woman, as a wife and as a mother, and just to keep within that limit.

But what happened because the economic and social situation was deteriorating very much in the last two years of Frei's government, women within those Mothers' Centres, they started to get more politicised. Because the women who were more active in those Mothers' Centres were women from the left wing parties, so they had tried to change the character of the Mothers' Centres, and at the end we ended up discussing the political situation of our country, how we were going to organise our shanty town in order to have drinking water, or to have electricity, or how we were going to have a demonstration against one of the official organisations, asking for those things. So we became more and more militant, and we even occupied buildings, official buildings, from the government, asking for the resolution of our problems. So because it happened in that sector which was very explosive, because of the situation they were living through, because of the poverty, because of the lack of facilities, lack of health care, or school, or things like that, women started to realise that they could and were able to fight against that. So, families who were without any place to live, they started to organise themselves in committees of homeless people, and they started to take pieces of land. And who were the people most involved in that? It was always women. I was part of that scene so I can talk about it.

When we had a meeting I remember that sometimes men were really more cautious to do it, and they said, "But look, the police are going to come and evict us" and the women used to say "OK, if you don't want to go you can stay and sleep tonight here, but we are going to take this piece of land because we need a place where to live, we need a roof for our children so we are going to do it," and it was women always and just a few men who did these things. And that created a new consciousness amongst them that they could organise themselves and when they fight they could achieve what they were fighting for. And that made it possible to create not only just those Committees of Homeless people, to take land up throughout Chile, but also, people in the countryside, and people in the Indian areas, they had to organise themselves also and they started to ask for the possession of land, land reforms.



Middle class women and the politics of non-politics.

But even before Allend's government, the Frei government, which was the Democratic Christian government, they saw the importance of having women as allies of their government and at that time they created the Mothers' Centres, and they created a complete body of women, middle class women, who went in a very paternalistic way to the shanty towns to organise Mothers' Centres

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Well, because of all that uprising in the class consciousness of the people, Allende's government came to power - well, to government, it didn't have power! And during that time, because of that first experience of women, they start to get more and more and more involved. Now they were no longer the people who went to attend a meeting just to listen, but rather they were the people who were organising things in the shanty towns, and they were organising things also in the trade unions. Although not many women were members of trade union committees, they were there and they were participating. That was something very important. And they started to organise themselves in defence committees and they started to create child care centres.

Building a campamento.



I remember one of them because there was a campamento - a campamento is when you take a piece of land and you start to build a community there, and you start to go to the official government offices asking for reallocating of the land and to build houses and things like that - so we went to the leaders of that campamento and we ask them to give us 5 or 6 rooms so we could have our nursery there. And they gave them to us. So we built up a nursery, we built up a school, and we also built up a surgery which was run by the same people in that shanty town, by the women and all people who weren't at work, and they were the ones who carried out everything. They were the ones who made it possible also for other women to go out to work, so there children could be safe when they were left alone because there was a place where they could leave them.

So women were more and more able to participate at least in their local decisions. When it came to the black market - the Allende government tried to stop the black market, because there wasn't enough food and all that - it was again in the shanty towns that people, most of them women, we were able to create the distribution of food by ourselves. So we went into the warehouses to pick up our amount of food for so many families, twelve hundred families, and they gave us food for twelve hundred families. And we distributed it. So in a way you see it developed a sense of responsibility and a sense of, not only responsibility but just to see we were able to do things and that we were not stupid like most people used to think, the ruling class used to think that women, working class people, are so stupid they cannot manage. But we did demonstrate, we proved it to them, that we were able to do it.....

Well, more and more, it was clear for all of us who our enemy was, it was the national bourgeoisie, the multinationals - the ITT, the multinationals who controlled the exploitation of our minerals, and the presence of the CIA who were trying to create a chaotic situation in our country. So our enemy was very clear for us, and we were organising ourselves in the shanty towns, in the countryside, in the mines, and everywhere, in the industries, in order to fight against that principal enemy, against imperialist policies as a whole not just the one enemy in the USA.

But at that time we didn't think in terms of our own problems as women. We were working and doing things in terms of the class struggle, in terms of trying to beat our enemies.

But in the shanty towns, apart from having our Mothers' Centres and changing completely the character of those, we started to train women to give them some skill, and try and make them able to do something to earn a living while we were at home, and to be part of the production system in our country. But our social and economic situation was changing. Allende's government did make some changes, he nationalised some industries. So some were more aware that it was our responsibility now to make, to keep them going, so it was workers weren't just staying at home pretending that they were sick for instance, because we knew how important it was to keep our country going because we had the boycott from the bourgeois class, who were the owners of the industries, and the big landlords..... And so it was important for us to make sure that we had an eye on everything within the area in which we were living, and if a particular problem was in this part, we had to denounce it and fight against it.

So our participation was really big, but as I said, it wasn't in terms of us as women, it was in terms of the class struggle as a whole.

SW: What happened then when the military came in, and the repression, in what way did women mobilise against the repression?

P: That is very important because we all knew that a military coup was going to happen. We were preparing ourselves for that. But unfortunately we didn't have weapons to fight against that, and with ideology only you cannot fight against tanks or machine guns. But nevertheless.....I have a personal experience of that because as I am a militant of the MIR some of the women in the shanty town where I used to live, they came to me and said "Well, such and such a person is going to look after the children and we have come to you because we want you to give us weapons because we want to go out to fight." And I tried to convince them that because of the characteristics of the military coup, since the first moment we have to start to organise ourselves in terms of a small group within the shanty town, trying to organise things in terms of resistance, how we were going to resist, and which things we could carry out.

And also the way that women have participated after the military coup, how they have resisted all this time, this has been shown not only in terms of how many women have been subjected to repression, how many women have been tortured, things like that, but also because women have organised their own organisations to fight against the repression that has been launched against their relatives and against our people. They have organised committees of relatives of political prisoners, campaigning for their release; they have created the organisation of the disappeared people, the relatives of disappeared people, who have been abroad hundreds of times trying to denounce that situation and gain some support for their struggle.

They start to organise themselves in the shanty town again, in the neighbourhood council, and they had to do it because every single one was completely destroyed, most of their leaders were taken in prison, some of them have been killed, or disappeared, and so on. So they start again to build up those organisations which have a semi-legal face in our country. So now they have been able to build up the neighbourhood councils, to use the Mothers' Centres, in order to discuss the problem they have in the shanty town, and how they are going to solve that. And they are participating in the national council of trade unions, the co-ordinating committee of trade unions. In so many ways they have been participating.

But not only in the semi-legal organisations, because they have been very active members of the resistance. Most of the women who have been taken in prison, they are subjected to a kind of repression and torture not in terms because they are members of the resistance but because they are women and they are not supposed to be doing that. So if a man is going to be tortured in such a way or other, women are going to be subjected to more humiliations, which are going to really create a psychological problem for them. Because when they are torturing them they are using even tape recordings with the cry of their children calling them, or the voices of their children and they tell you they are going to torture one of your children in front of you if you don't talk and so on. They rape you. And they use very sophisticated ways now to torture women, for instance, using trained dogs, or introducing a rat into the body of the woman, or spiders, or things like that. There is a well known case of a woman who was subjected to all those things when she was taken in jail. And lately most of the people who are being wanted and labelled as terrorists - all those who are militant in the resistance are labelled terrorists - we have seen in the last issues of the newspapers from Chile, they carry pictures of 5 or 6 women who are the most wanted terrorists in our country. That shows that women are really a very active part of the resistance. And only last month 6 people were detained, 5 of them women, one was a man.

We have so many cases to show to the world and to show our sisters that it is not just a male propaganda stuff that we say women are participating in the resistance committees and in the resistance against the dictatorship government. But just concrete cases where women are resisting, women are participating, not only women from the working class but also women from a middle class background who have joined the struggle. Because now more than ever we know that the only way to overthrow the military dictatorship is by the use of force. We have to fight them on the same terms as they are fighting against us.

SW: To what extent now, then, are the specific interests of women being taken up by the resistance?

P: Well, I can say that at least in the organisation that I come from, the MIR, we have been able, because we have been abroad and because we have met the women's liberation movement and we have discovered that there is importance in the woman question, that it is something that affects us not in terms of the use of women but in terms of that we have discovered that it was also part of the class struggle, the woman question, - so we have been able to discuss within our organisation with our comrades and to put forward that our demands have and should be met by our party also, and been discussed not only by the women within our party but also with our men comrades. We have had two conferences within the party discussing this problem, not only women, but men and women together trying to put our problems also as part of the class struggle and to see the way, to find the way we are going to link it together. Because we are not going to wait for the time when the revolution is going to succeed to start to discuss these issues. We think it is important to discuss them now and that is what we have been doing.

SW: Which issues in particular have you been discussing?

P: Particularly in terms of the division of the sexes that is very much imposed within this Western society and also in our society because it is a very westernised ideology which was imposed. That sexism should be wiped out, and that there is no difference between a man and a woman, so we are all equal, so we should think in terms of that if we are trying to build up a new society. That women have their own demands and they have to be met. For instance, education, the same possibility for training in jobs as for a man, in terms of health, that women should be allowed to control their health and to decide by themselves. So in that sense, most of the things that are discussed here in Europe we are discussing in our party.

And we think it is important that that struggle should be introduced in our country now, not after the revolution, but now, because then women will be more prepared to put forward their own demands rather than to be waiting for somebody else on the top of the revolutionary committee just to be thinking which concessions they are going to give. But rather than that, women, and the party itself, should put those demands forward together with the nationalisation of the industries and the land reform and things like that. Because all of it is part of the same struggle. It is not separate. For us, it is no longer to see women as probably they will be part of the revolution, in terms of how they are going to cook for the men, or how they are going to be loading the machine gun for them when they are fighting, and things like that, but rather than that as part of the struggle, who have their own demands and that those demands should be met.

And in that sense I think they have taken a very big step forward because if we think that before, when we first came into this country, we used to discuss sometime who we are going to introduce women to the class struggle, but we never used to discuss the woman question in terms of the class struggle. We weren't aware of that. That is something we have been able to discuss abroad here, because our own point of view has been widened about that issue.

In our direction, in the central committee of our party there are three women who are members of the central committee, and others who are members of the political commission, which is the body which elaborates the policies of our party and which has the control of them and which has to see they are carried out and discussed within the party and to develop them within Chile. We are taking part in the decisions that the party is taking today. And we are also part of the decisions that we want to go back and join the struggle in our country and we are able to do that because we decided for ourselves, and because we carry out the policies of our party because we are part of it.

SW: So what is happening now in Chile, how are women organising?

P: Actually, now there are about 25 women's groups in Chile. That is something we never dreamed that it was going to be possible to do. There are about 25 women's groups in shanty towns, women from middle class backgrounds who have been discussing the woman question in a very embryonic way, and there have been three conferences so far of women. The first one was called under the umbrella of a religious body, and they started to discuss the interviews they made with women from the shanty towns, in the countryside and women who were working in factories, and they began to discuss how they were oppressed in terms of labour, in terms of opportunity for work, how they are oppressed in terms of education, in terms of opportunity and equality with our men. The three conferences that they have held there, and the women's groups that have been created, they are relating the woman question to the class struggle and to the struggle against the dictatorship government and they are part of the resistance against the government. And that is important because they are able to talk to other women and make them also start to discuss and think about and begin to realise that our problems and our demands are no longer something separate from the class struggle.

Apart from that, in the last conference they had, it was tried to be stopped by the military because the day before they were going to have the conference the place where they were keeping all the papers for the conference was raided by the police and all the materials were taken away. The next day the whole building was surrounded by the police. Nevertheless about 600 women participated. Amongst them representatives from the Indian areas - our Indians are the Mapuche Indians and they live in the south of our country - even some of their women came to the conference and they had to have someone to translate because they speak Mapuche, they don't speak Spanish.



Mapuche woman and child

And they put forward their own problems as women, in terms of their life in their areas and how they have to organise themselves, and how they need the support also of that whole body which has been created in terms of the resistance, because with the new law which has been passed in order to take away their lands which belong to them in order to give it to the big landowners, even their land is being taken. So they came to discuss those problems. And women from the countryside, which used to be part of the land reform programme of Allende's government, they also came to put forward their demands because also their land has been given back to the former owners of the land who again start to exploit those women, and they are without health facilities, education, and without even being paid for the jobs they are carrying out in the countryside; because just because their husbands are working there women are supposed to carry out the milking of cows and things like that. So they came out also to give testimony and to put forward their own problems as women there.

And the women from the factories and the women from the shanty towns, women from the middle class backgrounds who are studying at university or are professionals, they all discuss those women's issues and one of those things was the new labour law that was passed by the military which really discriminates against women and puts them back about 100 years of our history.

Because this new labour law allows the owners of the factory where a woman is working to dismiss her if he finds out that she is pregnant, just like that without giving her any compensation for the time she has been working there. And apart from that, the new law says that women from 16 to 25 years old are minors of age. That means that if you are a minor of age in terms of getting a job, you have to ask the consent of your father if you are single to get a job, or if you are married your husband has to sign the consent allowing you to take a job. And as a minor you are going to be paid even less wage than is paid to a woman who is over 25. And if you consider the wages that women get paid for the job they carry out, it is not even a third of the wage a man is being paid, just think what those women are getting paid.

For example, women who sweep the streets, and work in those conditions, they are paid less than £12 a month. To women whose husband is unemployed, that is why they get that kind of job, who have three, four or six or eight children, who have to pay the electricity, the water, the rent, just imagine the condition of exploitation they are going through. But I can say now when the electricity bill is not being paid, and the company sends somebody to cut the electricity, the people from the shanty town, they just throw the people out, the people from the company who are sometimes accompanied by the police

force to carry out their job, they throw stones at them, and clash with police, and so they have been able to stop the electricity supplies being cut. Even the drinking water, too, because in my country you have to pay the electricity and the water every month, and if you don't pay the supply is cut. And because they have been organising themselves, they have been able to stop that.

Also, as you see, if they are pregnant they lose their job; but because there was an organisation which was financed by the USA which says that our population is going to be diminished in ten years time and that there won't be enough people in our country and so on, so now even the birth control programme which was introduced in our country in the late 60's, is being withdrawn. So now women when they go to the hospital to have a check-up, the contraceptive coil is being taken out without even telling the woman that she is no longer protected against another pregnancy. So just imagine on the one hand they need more population, but if the woman gets pregnant she gets kicked out of the place where she is working.

And because of that situation, prostitution is growing day by day. Now it is not only women from 18 or 20 years who begin as prostitutes, but you can see in the streets of Chile, not only in Santiago, but from testimony of so many people who come from Chile, that girls from 11 to 12 years old, they are trying to sell themselves out in the streets, in the restaurants, where they see somebody they just approach them, offering them that they can go to bed if they give them some money to bring bread to their house. And it is not only girls who are suffering that kind of prostitution because it also happens to young boys, who have been going through the same thing. So we have to denounce it, not in terms of values and morals, but how this oppressive regime is really deteriorating the whole life of the children and women.

The children are no longer able to study because of the fees that they have to pay, because now they have to pay fees for everything, and they have even to wear uniform. When they don't have money to eat bread, how their parents can have money to buy uniform for the child to be educated. So it is impossible for the children to get education now. And that is the only thing that we can give to our children, but because of the poverty and because of the lack of food, and because of the lack of economic possibilities for their parents to help them, the children go out into the streets to try to sell themselves in order to bring something to eat for their younger brothers and sisters.

So you see, all this new law, the labour law which has been passed really puts women's place back 100 years, because before we didn't need to ask our father or our husband consent if we wanted to get a job, that wasn't the case for anybody. And also it forbids the right to strike. Now if you want to pass a new amendment asking for your wages to be increased, the owner of the factory can decide if he wants to give it to you or if he doesn't; and if the workers want to discuss it, then there is a (arbitration) body which discusses if they are able to receive the increase or not. (On this body) sits the owner of the factory, a member of the government and two other people, and only one worker is on that negotiating table. So there is not the possibility of the workers getting what they are asking for. So the only way they have now is just to strike, but even strikes are illegal under this new law. So they're in the position that they have to keep on struggling, and only a new form of struggle against the military is going to change that situation.

And who are the most affected by this? Women. Because now the policy of the dictator government is that women don't need to be educated, because what for? they are going to be mothers, they are going to get married, so they don't need that. So their careers have been closed and they deny the possibility for a woman of becoming professional because their role under this new system is that women are supposed to be fulfilling the role that Western and capitalist ideology has imposed upon

women. And they have said, even in their speeches, even Pinochet said, "We have to congratulate the Chilean women because they are the power of our government, because they are very abnegating, self-sacrificing, women, and they are very sweet women, and they are very generous women and we need them to keep on looking after the stability of the country, to teach their children" and so on. So they are calling them in all the mass media and all the propaganda is trying to convince women that they have to fulfill their role.

But the government have met this other thing, that now women are getting organised as women in my country, and they are discussing women's issues, and relating that to the class struggle. So now there is a very strong attack by Pinochet and from the people who work with Pinochet against those women's groups which have been born in our country, which are shouting for democracy, for the same kind of work, for the right of education and health centres and so on. Because they are seen as a threat to the system, because it is said that they have been contaminated by marxist ideas. So they have been having a campaign through the newspapers that women have been manipulated and that even in the USA and in the European countries governments have been keeping closed eyes and they haven't done anything to stop these women who have been infiltrated by the marxist-leninist ideology, and they are a threat to the stability of the country and to the security of the family. And they are calling our women not to join those bad ideas, that bad ideology.....

So if women get organised in our country it is in a very militant way because with all that mass media against them and all the repression that has been launched against them now to join the resistance through any of those semi-legal organisations is really important.

SW: So how can women in this country help women in the struggle in Chile?

P: Well actually that is a very important question because those 25 women's groups that have been created in Chile are trying to set up a training centre for women, not only to discuss women's problems, but also to train them with a new skill so they can compete in the market and where they can save young girls and women from the trade of prostitution. And for that they need to have a house and they need to have the equipment to set up a programme like that, which is a very big scheme. And they are asking us, the women abroad, to try to raise some money for that programme.

I think that there is very much that women in this country can do. Our sisters in this country help our struggle also in terms of support for the people who are going back to Chile to join the struggle, because in the conditions they work in they need support from abroad. We have read in the newspapers the case of Clare Wilson and her friend who is a militant of the MIR who went back to Chile to join the underground struggle, to be part of it. We need support not only to make possible for those women to have that training centre, but also to make possible for other women who are living abroad to go back and to have somebody from abroad who is supporting them while they are participating in that struggle.

You can adopt political prisoners, you can set about campaigning, asking for the release of women, or men, when they get caught because of the action that they carry out against the dictator government. And with that you can save the lives of those people. We are not asking you to adopt that political prisoner and bring him or her back here, but if you start to do something by trying to adopt a political prisoner, you are saving that life, even if that woman is never allowed to leave our country.

But the military won't be able to kill her because they will know immediately that people know that she is in jail and are campaigning for her, or his, release. So this can save a lot of lives. And not only in Chile but in most Latin American countries, in El Salvador, Bolivia, Argentina, because it is a pity this interview is only related to Chilean women,

because we as Latin Americans, we feel for the struggle of other people who are fighting against other repressive regimes and who are struggling for their national liberation and who need as much support as we need in our struggle. For example, in El Salvador we can see an intervention by the USA forces is very imminent, and we have to denounce that publicly because if they interfered in El Salvador, the Nicaraguan revolution will be in danger. So you see that for us as Latin American revolutionaries, the whole situation in South America is very important.

We have to discuss with our sisters here what is the real situation of women back over there in economic, social and political terms and develop a wider understanding with our sisters here, to ask them to decide for themselves how they can express their solidarity, but in more militant terms. Because if we are going to have a socialist feminist conference where we are going to discuss the implications of imperialism in the life of women in under-developed countries, then we have to think in terms of a more militant solidarity.

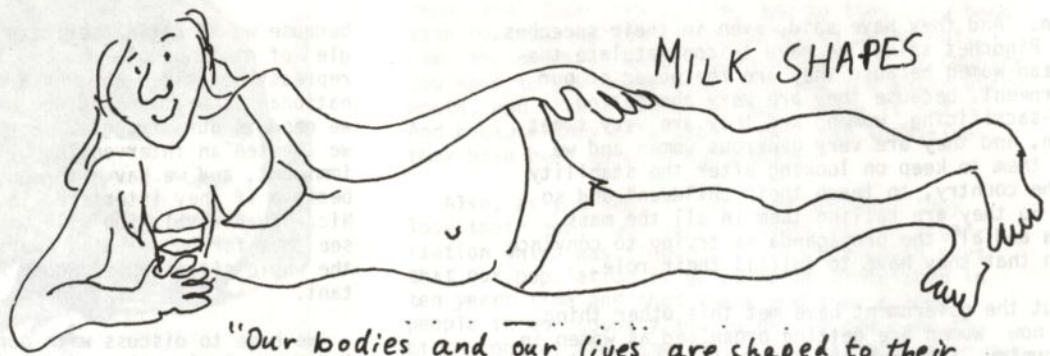
SW: What can women do in a more militant kind of way?

P: There are revolutionary organisations all over under-developed countries involved in national liberation struggles and in those organisations there are women who are active militants who need support. Not only in terms of you being sympathetic, because sometimes when we talk about the horror our people are going through, when I said, for example, there is a woman with four or five children who have nothing to feed them during the whole week and she has to go out to the streets to sell herself in order to bring in some food for the children, it sometimes sounds like something so far away from our own life, it can only last for a few minutes. We are listening to one of our sisters speaking in front of somebody else, but afterwards you forget about it, you don't do anything about it.

But you can send money to Chile, to some of those women that we have contact with and who are active in the resistance and in those women's groups. You can send clothes, you can even finance new projects, so that they can have some living in Chile, where they can feed their families, but also to keep on the task of the resistance under the dictatorship government. There are so many things, and that is militant solidarity. Not that solidarity expressed in a meeting when one sister said

'Could you tell me how is the situation of this or that?' and afterwards they left the meeting and just forget about it..... and then go the next day to another meeting and be very impressed and be very moved about what another woman is telling them.....





The Baby Killer Scandal.

"Will Nestle abandon the Third World? We will not. Our products are weapons for the "Third World War" against poverty, malnutrition and disease, and indirectly against revolution and war." Bold claims and significant words from the world's second largest food corporation, one of the many multinational companies coming under attack because of their aggressive promotion of powdered baby milks in the Third World. Rather than preventing poverty, malnutrition and disease, the inappropriate use of baby milks produced by Nestle and the two dozen other companies involved is exacerbating the problem. The rhetoric of the company's public relations hand-out is stirring stuff. The reality of the company's actions is much more chilling.

Women in developing countries have been bombarded with sophisticated marketing techniques to convince them that powdered baby milk is the modern, safe, convenient way to feed their babies. The milk itself is not usually the problem. It is a high quality preparation, carefully manufactured. It approximates to human milk and although inferior because it lacks important anti-infective properties it is an adequate life-saving tool for those women who are unable to breast feed.

The problem is the conditions in which it is used. Senator Edward Kennedy summed it up well in a question he asked during Senate hearings in to the market -ing of powdered milk in the US in 1978: "Can a product which requires clean water, good sanitation, adequate family income and literate parents to follow printed instructions, be properly and safely used in areas where the water is contaminated, sewage runs in the streets, poverty is severe and illiteracy is high?" A doctor in Sierra Leone answers the question: "In many instances, taking a baby off the breast is tantamount to signing the baby's death warrant." From the Phillipines a doctor describes a baby's suffering: "He was burning with fever, dehydrated and suffering from severe diarrhoea." A report from Kenya talks of a baby with dysentery for almost two and a half days. The mother, worried as it is not certain the baby will live, cries that "the radio, her friends, even hospital nurses, had said the formula was the modern way. The babies on the tins are always smiling!"

The babies in the paediatric wards of hospitals and clinics in the Third World are not smiling. They are crying out in pain, suffering from malnutrition, from diarrhoea, from gastro-intestinal infections.

But despite their high-sounding words about poverty in the Third World, the infant food industry is not going to improve the conditions in developing coun-

tries. So far profits have come first and their massive promotion campaign for baby foods continues, exploiting Third World women's desires to do their best for their babies. Mass media advertising, free samples, posters; all bombard the mothers. "Buy mother's milk! Buy Morinaga!" screamed the headlines of a newspaper ad. in Bangladesh promoting the produce of a Japanese company. Nestle was advertising Nido, a full cream milk, on television in the Dominican Republic in March 1980. The ads featured a crying baby and a feeding bottle, with the message that Nido was best for baby. Three Cow and Gate milk nurses in Trinidad were reported doing home visits and distributing samples and literature to mothers. A March 1980 letter from the UK headquarters Export Division to one of the nurses congratulated her on the good work she was doing: "It is good to note that sampling is having its effect in increased sales, which of course, should be the case."

Promotion to the consumers is not the only approach of the companies, however. Far more effective, in some cases, is the promotion to the medical profession, for the companies are then able to gain "endorsement by association." An American paediatrician, Dr. Paul Fleiss, explains how the profession is manipulated:

"The effect of the major milk producing companies is more than subliminal. They don't even have to advertise their product. They can use the paediatricians to advertise. They get to the paediatricians both directly and indirectly."

The direct means are through personal visits by sales representatives and through ads in the medical journals. The indirect methods are through gifts to doctors and nurses, sponsorship of meetings and conferences, grants for research and the purchase of equipment for hospitals and clinics.

A doctor in Thailand explains some of the subtleties of promotion. "The government is undertaking a programme to train village health volunteers in the rural areas. These are young women, 18 - 25 years old, who will be given rudimentary health care training and then return to their villages. I know that samples of baby foods have been given to these volunteers. Obviously if they bottle feed their own babies, all the other members of the village will follow because of their status!" A doctor from the Cook Islands reports: "They have infiltrated into the health care system. Birth cards provided by the hospital are supplied by Glaxo and calendars advertising Golden Glaxo are displayed prominently in the clinics." Nestle has exclusive rights in provision of milk in the hospital Maternidad, the largest hospital in Lima.

After more than a decade of protest about this abusive activity - with paediatricians and nutritionists calling for change, with international health organisations calling for an end to promotion, with hundreds of articles, television documentaries, hearings, an international consumer boycott of Nestle, two legal battles in court, and a specially convened WHO/UNICEF international meeting last year, - changes are beginning to occur.

The WHO/UNICEF meeting arrived at a series of recommendations which called for an end to direct consumer advertising, and the restriction of promotion to the medical profession to factual and ethical information. It also recommended that an international code of marketing should be drawn up. A series of consultations on that code are taking place this year under the auspices of WHO/UNICEF. Earlier this year, the World Health Assembly affirmed the recommendations of last year's joint meeting and stressed the need for further action:

"The effect of malnutrition and diarrhoeal diseases, with artificial feeding as a common denominator, on the health of infants and young children is phenomenal - in terms not only of measurable morbidity and mortality - but also of human suffering and loss" said one Third World delegate at the Assembly. The outrage at the abusive practices of the companies was well expressed by a delegate who exclaimed: "Either the multinationals follow the book, or we'll throw the book at them!"

The infant food industry is reluctant to change. They claim the material they produce for mothers is educational and informative. They claim that close collaboration with the medical profession is essential, and that they provide them with a useful service. Dr. Vernon Coleman, talking about the information provided to doctors by the pharmaceutical industry puts paid to the value of corporate 'information'. "The trouble" with drug company information and the reason why it does not suffice alone, is that in it the advertisers are mixing information and promotion material. They are trying to tell doctors about drugs and at the same time trying to persuade them to prescribe them. Any sponsored information must be biased if it is to be commercially valid. As Dr. Charles has said: 'The goal of promotion, even when travelling along a circuitous path under the guise of 'education' is to achieve uncritical acceptance of a preconceived message - to captivate the mind; stimulation of sceptical thinking would block the purpose. This is in sharp contrast to the objective of true education which seeks to cultivate the use of the mind for independent judgements.'

The pressure on the infant food industry is increasing. An international network of concerned groups has been formed to co-ordinate activities. In the UK, War on Want has researched the subject

Third World Womens season- Tickets 80p
Last two meetings at:
Oval House, Kennington,
London (behind Oval Tube)

For details phone *Oct 28: Campaign against DEPO
PROVERA. Barbara Rogers: Effects
of Development Programmes on Third
World Women + VIDEO.*

10-582-2068

or 01-855-1474. *Nov 4: Chile Cttee of Human Rights:
Women's Patchwork + Exhibition.
OXFAM: Women's Cooperative Jute
Works in Bangladesh.*

SCARLETWOMEN CONFERENCE

We are thinking of holding a Scarlet Women conference in the spring to discuss issues raised in pass Scarlet Women and the development of socialist feminist theory. We would probably hold the conference in the North of England. We'd be interested to hear what readers think of the idea. Please contact Scarlet Women at 5 Washington Terrace, North Shields, Tyne and Wear.

and is actively publicising the problem. War on Want is also involved in helping to formulate the code of marketing. Another UK group, the Baby Milk Action Coalition (BMAC) is doing all it can to halt all commercial promotion of bottle feeding. It recently brought the Nestle boycott to Britain, calling on people to leave Nestle products off the shopping list as a protest against the company's practices as a way of increasing pressure. The only time the companies appear to be ready to change their tactics is when enough public pressure is brought to bear upon them. The BMAC hopes to focus that pressure in this country using some of the tactics that have been successful elsewhere.

The issue of appropriate feeding for babies is a complex one. A workshop at the Alternative Non-Governmental Organisation Forum in Copenhagen in July discussed the problems. Some organisations concerned about the baby food issue appear to be putting pressure on those women who genuinely cannot breast feed. Other women do not wish to breast feed, and in the women's movement one issue above all is a Woman's Right to Choose what she does with her own body. To be able to exercise that choice properly she needs information and education. These are vital in the Third World. In some of the Primary Health Care projects supported by War on Want they aim to provide the proper information and the choices.

If you need more information on the issue, "The Baby Killer Scandal" by Andy Cheley, published by War on Want, is a useful source and for further information on the Nestle Boycott, a full product list can be obtained from BMAC, c/o Sadru Kheraj, Trinity College, Cambridge, England.

Zelda Curtis

AD'S.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONFERENCE

22/23 November in Leeds.

*Cost: £4 waged. £2.50 unwaged.
Venue: Royal Park school, Queens Rd, Leeds 6.*

We want to discuss our experience of sexual violence - from page 3 to rape- work out why it happens and how it affects women. The focus will be on how we can organise to fight back.

*Are all men potential rapists?
How do all men benefit from the acts of the ripper/pornography?
How does sexual harrasment at work undermine attempts to achieve equal opportunity?
Should we be fighting prostitution and how do we do this whilst supporting women who work as prostitutes?*

These are some of the questions we want to raise.

There will be a wide variety of workshops covering all aspects of sexual abuse; at work, on the street, at home, on the phone, in childhood, in marriage, in the media, in institutions, etc.

We want papers on all these themes and more

*Send to Sexual Violence conference,
Nottingham Women's Centre, 32a Shakespeare Street, Nottinham.*

Advance registration forms from the same address. Please enclose s.a.e.

Letters

and responses to S.W.11.

I am sick to death of the prevailing feminist attitude that any women outside of its allowed walls who dares to organise themselves to fight a particular oppression are being manipulated by some hidden brickwielding Svengali. In the case of Scarlet Woman 11, Svengali takes the looming form of THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT. (Shock ! Horror ! we clasp our fist to our ever-vulnerable bosoms !)

The attitude also implies that these women have no independent thought of their own, that if the women's movement did not initiate it then it must be a male plot. That these 'breakaways' are obviously totally dependent on them for every thought, word and idea because if they were not then they would surely see that only the women's movement has the right line on these matters. Fact of the matter is the women's movement has not got a coherent line on anything and as Irishwomen working in the midst of a war we have not got the time or the tolerance to wait around for British feminists to search every nook and cranny looking for Svengali before they decide to participate in the saving of our lives.

So meanwhile factions of the women's movement continue to deride years of hard-fought for autonomy and anti-imperialist work by dismissing it as a thinly-disguised male republican plot; despite the fact that we in Belfast Women Against Imperialism have shown that feminism is not divisive of anti-imperialism and more importantly vice-versa. We have worked on all fronts, not allowing ourselves to fall into the common trap of polarising the situation in Ireland by deciding which priorities come first i.e. working only on conventional feminist issues, thereby lending no strength to the anti-imperialist struggle and serving British Imperialist interests by raising no force against it, or by working solely on anti-imperialism and laying down no ground work for the immense task of destroying the Irish Patriarchal rule which would follow in the aftermath of that neglect.

As an Irish anti-imperialist feminist I do not want Abortion and Homosexual Reform in the north-east of Ireland, courtesy of the British State given at whim, and taken away by like whim when the fancy takes them (which it so often does). I want the destruction of that State's power over me and my country-people, and to ensure that in a new socialist republic those things are a right and not a privilege, the same way as my sisters in Armagh are prepared to die in cells caked with menstrual blood, shit and urine in order to protect their rights as political prisoners and to bring home to the governor his error when he dares to call the use of toilet and washing facilities 'privileges'.

In some of the articles, N. Irish feminists have complained that the way we work is exclusive to working-class catholic women and to maintain our anti-imperialist politics means further alienating protestant, working class women; but they provide no constructive means of bridging that gap just continue

Ellen McGuigan in her cell
One of the photos smuggled out
of Armagh womens prison



(Taken from August issue of
Republican News.)

to complain what a terrible problem it is and slag Women Against Imperialism off for not joining in the chorus of their swansong.

The common denominator in this problem is working-class and will be the key to any solution, but not while the British State and Unionists continue to indoctrinate the protestant working-class with promises of privileges to come if they remain loyal to the N.I. State.. they may seem like empty, impossible-to-fulfill words to most of us but given the economic crisis which has been prevalent in N. Ireland long before reaching Britain, it is not so difficult to see why they choose to clutch at straws. The Catholic community has never had such straws so we have only one choice, to destroy that state !

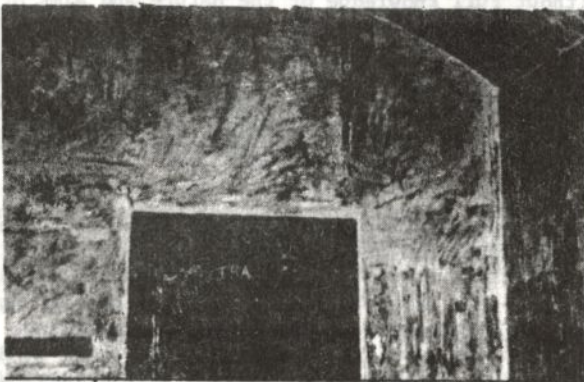
And while we are waiting for protestant women to awake from their imperialist-supporting sleep and suddenly see with foggless eyes the error of their ways, (in much the same way no doubt that they expect the white inhabitants of Zimbabwe to embrace the Black population who were constantly engaged in struggle with them.) what do we do with the women in the nationalist areas who are daily becoming more conscious of their plight as women through their daily resistance to the forces of British colonialism ? Say sorry sister, don't call we will call you !

In Gerry's article 'Notes on Feminism and N. Ireland' she expressed great interest in wanting to know what WAI 'the so-called feminists' (if she has some doubt about our standing as feminists maybe she would send us the application form, not that I was aware there was an examination, - obviously in the British style of feminism - so maybe we wouldn't pass after all !) had to say about the punishment shooting of a woman by the INLA last year. This incident has been constantly used by both Gerry and Derry Women's Aid in an effort to provoke a response from WAI - the so-called feminists - all I've got to say is no, Gerry we won't rise to the bait to satisfy such petty nit-picking used in an effort to discredit us - just ask yourself this Where did that woman get the weapons from that she distributed to the young kids of the area to carry out robberies for her own financial gain ? And maybe when you have answered that you will let it drop if only for her sake and the fact that British 'Justice' hasn't caught up with her yet.

As for the idea that with Britain gone, Ireland would decline into a 32 county state of catholicism - is Brit propaganda and nothing else. One reason for this impossibility would be the Protestant population themselves who are unlikely to sit idly by and watch it happen and I'd be the first to get up Beside them along with the rest of WAI. Another reason is the fact that even the prick-wielding Svengalis of the Republican movement have to make the commitment that in the event of an independent Ireland, Church and State MUST be separate and that was laid down in 1916.

One other thing I object strongly to being called a Trotskist feminist, by Gerry in her article when referring to WAI, that kind of language does nobody any good !. Anyway I'm a gut-feminist.

Yours in frustration,
Marie Mulholland,
Belfast Women Against Imperialism.
Vice-Chairwoman,
Provisional Sinn Fein National Executive,
(Great Britain).



Cell walls and ceilings covered in excrement; cell door covered in republican slogans

The following article was first presented for discussion within the Women's Aid Federation, because the writers felt that there was not enough debate around the position of women and violence in Northern Ireland.

One of the main problems seems to be whether we see Women's Aid as primarily a social work organisation doing casework with individuals, or as a campaigning organization that fights for the right of all women to be free from violence.

Should we be indifferent to the fact that women in Northern Ireland have for the last eleven years suffered continual brutality from the occupying British troops? Should we be indifferent to the fact that our sisters are suffering violence in Armagh prison?

The situation in Northern Ireland must be recognised as being fundamentally different from that in Britain. There is a war going on. In Women's Aid we have always opposed both physical and mental battering. Of course we recognise and condemn the existence of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, as in Britain, and therefore support the work of Women's Aid in

Northern Ireland, in providing Refuges, we cannot though ignore the massive and institutionalised violence that Northern Irish women in struggle against oppression are subjected to daily.

No woman in Northern Ireland is immune from direct physical assault from the British Army. Women are not only suffering from degrading personal searches at city check points but as the following reports show, from physical violence:

"Private Eddie McTeer of the Kings Own Border Regiment was fined £50 by Belfast magistrates for burning a 17 year old girl under the chin with a lighted match at a city centre checkpoint".

"On finding that Bernie Hylands husband was not there the troops proceeded to punch her in the eye and mouth. They then dragged her out and kicked her in the stomach, and then knocked her unconscious with a blow from a rifle butt to the back of her head. Mrs Hyland was beaten and kicked in the stomach even though she was pregnant."

"The soldiers told Sadie Hagen to get dressed, but as she was about to do so she and her sisters were grobbed and thrown into a landrover. Sadie was punched in the face and was taken away with no shoes underwear or coat, and her baby was wearing only light pyjamas. They were taken to Fort Monagh. There Sadie was questioned, she and her 14 month old baby were insulted, called filthy names and threatened with a "head job". Finally she was thrown out without charges being made, still in her nightclothes on a freezing cold morning. Her sisters, who had not even been questioned were also released wearing sleeveless teeshirts, jeans and with no shoes on."

"Mrs Margaret Darling objected to the harassment of an army patrol. She was struck by a soldier with his rifle. She was bruised on the chest and had her right ear cut. Mrs Darling, who is 60, and suffers from epilepsy, had to be admitted to hospital."

"Twelve year old Majella O'Hare was walking down a street with some other children. They passed by a patrol of soldiers who shouted some taunts to which the children hardly replied. There was a loud single bang - like an explosion according to eyewitnesses. A paratrooper lying on his stomach on the verge, with a general purpose machine gun had touched the gun's trigger and discharged three shots. Two of the bullets hit Marjella in the back and came out through her stomach. The soldier who murdered Marjella was later acquitted."

The army uses many different types of sexual harassment as well. Sometimes it is an implicit threat rather than actual violence. Women are left felling vulnerable everywhere. As one Irish woman wrote recently:

"The Brits are very clever in that they are able to capitalise upon the strict morality within the community and the silence on sexual matters, which leaves girls very ill equipped to withstand treatment of this kind".

Despite the reluctance of women to report sexual harassment some have come forward to tell their experiences:

"Anne Cassidy, a 16 year old, was walking home with a friend. A soldier stopped her and asked her 'Why do you hate me you little bastard? Listen love, I could do anything with you and there's nothing you could do about it, in fact I could fuck you.'"

Sometimes it is a whole family that is intimidated: "Mrs Elizabeth Anderson is a widow with two teenage daughters. During last winter she suffered a series of harassment raids; a campaign of obscene phone calls against her and her daughters; and an obscene letter containing specific threats of sexual violence. In raids on the houses the soldiers have paid special attention to underclothes and sanitary towels making crude remarks as they examined them."

A woman describes her daughters experience;
 "They were made to 'stop-search' that means that they were stripped to their bra and pants. She was taken in and interrogated 3 times I think. Now she is terrified....There may be something she's holding back, I don't know. She told me she was stripped to her pants and that makes me think....."

This is part of 18 year old Patricia's report of her interrogation..."They put plastic handcuffs on my wrists and ankles. A soldier was holding my arms and he asked one of the women to hold them so he could search me. He said he could not get at me, so he took the handcuffs off my ankles and put his finger inside me; I was crying with the pain; they turned me over and he did it again...and then they said they were going to charge me with assault."

The women in Armagh prison have been denied the rights guaranteed to them under the Geneva convention. The protesters have been locked up for 23 hours a day, denied the use of toilets and washing facilities, kept in solitary confinement, denied adequate medical care, and have lost all remission of sentence. Rose McAllister was recently released from Armagh. In an interview she described the attempts made to force them into surrender: "... (the gov'nor) thought that he'd break our backs, but he did the opposite. What he did was put his own back against the wall, He'd taken everything off us; remission is the most important thing, but we'd lost that anyway, so he had no weapons to use against us. He thought he knew us... he thought with enough pressure, enough fear, we'd eventually break. What he did not realise was that there are women who with more pressure find more strength and determination...He said he would restore the 'privileges' (if they ended the protest) the washing facilities, the toilet facilities and free association. You do not go to thirty-one strong women and say that washing facilities are a privilege"

These women have asked for our support, they want us to counter the lies and propaganda of the Northern Ireland Office and the British Government. We believe that Womens Aid should discuss this issue and give our support to these women as well as those suffering from domestic violence.

KATH CAULFIELD
 JILL PARTRIDGE



71, Saltoun Road,
 Brixton, London SW2.
 14, September. 1980.

Dear Sisters,

Our first response to Scarlet Woman 11 was anger. We take exception to the accusation that we are being manipulated by the Republican movement, "without full knowledge of the nature and aims of the groups they are thinking of supporting". (pg. 55). As feminists we reject the "victim/silly woman" stance, often adopted by the British Women's Liberation Movement and consider ourselves more than capable of taking an autonomous political position in relation to anti-imperialist struggles both in the north of Ireland and elsewhere.

The composition of SW11, said to be a "collection of individual and group expressions... to reflect a cross-section about things here" presents a facade of balance - but as a package is weighted heavily against those of us who support the Republican movement. For example "Everyday Life, Two Women Speak (pg. 34/35) - both present themselves as victims of the IRA. We recognise the difficulties for Gerry as co-ordinator, but consider as socialists and as feminists that we should move away from the presentation of a collection of ideas in the guise of objectivity. This issue is like a school-book, the Feminist Handbook to Northern Ireland. It does nothing to make us examine our own collusions and/or struggle against the British state. It perpetuates the attitude that Ireland is too difficult for us, and therefore we can't do anything without a course in the history of British colonialisation of Ireland in the last 800 years.

We see the Republican movement as the only movement which is actively confronting the British state, and support it in this.

Gerry wanted to know what we thought of the shooting of a woman by the INLA. The war situation makes it impossible to discuss all the facts of this incident in a publically available journal; but suffice it to say that any further discussion will lead to further reprisals against this woman - not from any para-military organisation but from the British State. The press in this country is full of distorted coverage of "mad IRA murderers and bombers". The information in SW11 re this incident is indistinguishable from that presented by the Mirror or Guardian. We are surprised that this question is asked by a feminist who considers herself to be anti-imperialist. Self-determination for the Irish people must mean that they conduct their own war of resistance.

Women Against Imperialism, South London works from a basis of unconditional support for the Republican movement and works for political status for Irish prisoners of war, to end the PTA and for the withdrawal of the troops from Ireland - and can be contacted at the above address.

Women Against Imperialism, South London.

The discussion around Ireland that has been occurring within the women's movement this year seems to be becoming polarized between two positions. Firstly there are those feminists who strongly disapprove of the Republican Movement and, while seeming to accept the imperialist role of British troops, believe that women should ignore all republican causes and wage their own autonomous struggles against patriarchal oppression. The second position demands that we give complete unconditional support to the Republican Movement as the first step in a consistent anti-imperialist stand.

We are a Women and Ireland group active in Britain, yet feel that our ideas are not described by either of these positions. We recognise that a colonial war is being fought in Northern Ireland against the British state and that the republican movement is bearing the brunt of this struggle. By the republican movement we mean Sinn Fein and the IRA, the IRSP and INLA and many other individuals and organisations who support the nationalist struggle. As anti-imperialist women living in Britain, we believe that our prime task is to succeed in getting the troops out of Northern Ireland and to break all of Britain's colonial ties with Ireland. We are well aware that even after Britain withdraws the troops (which seems unlikely in the near future), these colonial ties can still be maintained by covert actions to promote sectarianism and civil war, as well as by economic manipulation. We feel that the removal of the British presence in Ireland is the crucial thing and that statements concerning the Republican Movement do not affect our position. All our actions, such as leafletting army shows with anti-recruitment publicity, supporting Troops Out Movement pickets and demos, working in support of Irish prisoners, have this main aim in mind. We feel strongly that Irish sisters should be allowed to determine their own future and not have constant interference and criticism from outside. This kind of interference and criticism, however well meant, is in itself imperialist.

As a woman's group we want to support initiatives by Irish women in the north and south to improve child care facilities, to secure abortion and contraception rights, to abolish the payment of debt act and many other oppressive measures that constrict them. We have had to accept, however, that these aims are often put to the board in the face of an occupying army and the battery of "emergency" legislation that backs up the troops. The squaddies invade all areas of women's lives: they intimidate them and their kids, they physically and sexually assault them, they destroy all privacy with their raids and surveillance. The state also uses economic and social conditions as a definite weapon to wear down women's resistance: the payment of debt act with its wide powers to deprive families on benefit of half their income is specific to Northern Ireland. The North of Ireland Housing Executive despite its rhetoric, quite deliberately makes no attempts to improve the intolerable housing conditions that many people live in.

Above all we need space to debate the issues that have been raised and to listen to each other. In trying to understand the struggles and divisions in Ireland we can come to a better understanding of imperialism and start to see that imperialism is not just economics: it is cultural and political imperialism, it affects how and where people can relate to each other and how they think. We need to explore the relationship of feminism to imperialism, to work out what that means in practice. How should sisters in Northern Ireland, for example, campaign for better abortion rights - by demanding Britain extend its legislation to its colony or by linking with feminists in the south? How do we in Britain practically link our anti-imperialist campaigns against the troops in Ireland, against immigration controls, against SUS, with our feminism? Despite the fact that these questions have yet no firm answers, we still feel it is necessary to fight Britain's colonial involvement in Ireland in whatever ways we are able.

Manchester Women and Ireland Group.

Some years ago Ian Paisley described Northern Ireland as the "last bastion of Christianity". This description could well be applied to the whole of Ireland, for Christianity - whether of the Protestant or Catholic variety - permeates the whole of Irish society through its Churches with their male dominated ideologies. The traditional link between Nationalism (both Orange and Green) and their respective Churches has ensured that the ultra conservative view of women as both the property and the inferior of men, remains strongly entrenched in Irish society.

The poetic imagery of Ireland as a female figure - beautiful young girl/sorrowing mother/destitute old woman - whose devoted admirers/sons/defenders protect her femininity against violation from 'male' England, is a sexual fantasy much beloved by nationalist writers and their supporters: even the Protestants refer to Derry as the "Maiden City".

On one side therefore stands the exalted, pure, adored female myth: on the other the demeaned and degraded female reality. Yet women have joined with men in nurturing this paradox - to their own detriment. Despite the fact that the reactionary element of all male dominated organisations (religious or political) is revealed the minute women's issues are raised, women still continue to derive their self-value from the teachings of the Church and their status from the political groupings in society who claim their allegiance. At times this allegiance has been brutally utilised by men to uphold male values; e.g. the Romper Room Murder in Belfast where women members of a Protestant para-military group tortured and killed another woman or, on a few occasions in Derry, when women have tarred and feathered other women under the direction of men. On one occasion men crowded around the victim who was still tied to a lamppost and ran their hands over her body, urinated against her, and shouted lewd insults. The women who carried out the punishment not only encouraged the men in these activities but joined them in hurling sexual abuse at the victim.

Organisations also use women members and supporters to condemn the demands of women's groups. From public platforms comes the cry that abortion and contraception are anti-Irish, anti-Christian and an English plot to degrade Irish womanhood. The link between Churches and Nationalism has resulted in homosexuality remaining a criminal offence and abortion remaining illegal. The confusion between Nationalism and Feminism recently raised the question in one women's group, "Should we protest if a police-woman, female soldier or female prison warder is raped?"

Men have a long and successful track record in training women not only to respond favourably to their ideas, but to eagerly absorb and reiterate them. For this reason the assertion that women's liberation is an integral part of the national liberation struggle bears closer scrutiny. Throughout the history of Irish Nationalism women have played and still do play, an important role. But that role is, and always has been, subsidiary to the role of men. Women have been used as fund raisers, providers of accommodation, organisers of campaigns and champions of the cause. The demands these women have always articulated however, have been those decided on by men. Few women have risen to positions of authority within the Nationalist organisations except where they have adopted male aims, ideologies and discipline. One has only to look at the position of women in Southern Ireland which, despite the contributions towards its independence made by past generations of women, is far worse off than Northern Ireland, to realise that the women's struggle is not part of the National struggle.

Women who think they can bring about change by entering nationalist organisations and raising feminist issues have failed to learn the lessons of history. Only by forming their own organisations and challenging the ideologies of existing political and religious groupings, plus the attitudes of society in general, will women's liberation be achieved.

Derry Women's Aid.

THE LONDON WOMEN'S CO-ORDINATING GROUP ON ARMAGH.

The London Women's Co-ordinating Group on Armagh was formed shortly after International Women's Day 1980. The initial meetings were concerned with organizing solidarity actions following the picket on Armagh jail by over 500 women from all over Ireland, Britain and Europe.

The group comprises a number of non-aligned women, and women who represent diverse established groups such as Women and Ireland, Women Against Imperialism, Troops Out, Women and Entertainment, Women and the Media and others. We see our role primarily publicising the political background to and the conditions of the 33 women Republican prisoners in Armagh jail, and building a campaign to support their demand for political status. We see this working through three main areas.

Firstly, by challenging the censorship that applies to the Armagh issue in the context of the general neglect of the war in the north of Ireland in the British media. Because most of the women in the group are already involved in some form of political organization on the Left and in the women's movement, the socialist and feminist media have presented themselves as the most obvious context for our work in this area. The way in which the issue of political status for the women in Armagh has been taken up in the press has been through contributing articles in The Leveller, Time Out, Spare Rib and correspondence to these and other magazines. In relation to the straight media, the group organized a successful intervention involving over 50 women in a live broadcast on Capital Radio in which the condition of the women in Armagh and their demand for political status was publicised. This event also involved one of the other main strategies of the group which is organizing direct action.

The group has itself organized pickets and leafleted the Central London Law Courts in Fleet Street, The Royal Tournament and Brixton Prison. We have also supported pickets and demonstrations called by other groups such as Troops Out and Sinn Fein. We are currently involved with Women and Ireland and Women Against Imperialism groups from Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester in organizing a mass picket of Durham jail where there are five women held on political charges under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1976. This is provisionally scheduled for November but is subject to confirmation.

The third main area of the group's work is educational. As a direct consequence of media censorship, many women committed to political struggle in Britain feel confused about the historical role of the British State in Ireland. We therefore see one of the vital functions of the group as educational; dissemination of information through literature and discussion within the women's movement and socialist groupings. This has taken the form of not only writing to publications as mentioned above, but also initiating and participating in Conferences, Day-schools and educationals. A workshop on Armagh as a feminist issue was held at the London Regional Women's conference, and we held a Day-school on Why Political Status (the women in Armagh).

The basis of the group is support for the demand for political status for the women held on political charges in Armagh jail, and those on remand in jails throughout Ireland and Britain.

These women are not just struggling for 'material privileges', but for recognition as political prisoners and they insist that their demands be met in full. They have called on the women's movement in Britain to support their struggle for the five points of political status:

- the right not to do prison work.
- the right to free association.
- one visit and one parcel a week.
- recreational and educational facilities.
- the right to proper medical and ante-natal care.

If you are interested in the work of the group and would like to know more, we meet every Wednesday at 7.30p.m. in the Camden Neighbourhood Centre, 12, Greenlands Rd., N.W.1. Further information is also available from The Women's Co-ordinating Group on Armagh, c/o A Woman's Place, 48, William IV St., London W.C.2.



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Scarlet Women

is fighting a losing battle against inflation. We have to sell more to get the money to print more, but we don't have the capital to pay the printers for extra (its an old story eh !)

We think we should distribute Scarlet women to as many women as possible, but there are only a few of us, it takes a lot of time and energy to get an issue together, we just cannot publish, distribute and fund-raise as well.

HELP ! we need women to send donations (we owe £500) we need women to hold benefits, jumble sales, raffles and parties for Scarlet women OR WE MAY NEVER BE ABLE TO PRINT ANOTHER ISSUE. we think this would be a big gap in the discussion and debate of the women's movement - DO YOU ?



Published by Scarlet Women Collective,
5, Washington Tce, North Shields,
Tyne and Wear.

Printed by MOSS SIDE COMMUNITY PRESS
WOMEN'S CO-OP
21A PRINCESS ROAD, MANCHESTER 14
061-226 7115