

**mayday manifesto**

**women's liberation  
& the new politics**

by Sheila Rowbotham

2 | 6d

pamphlet 4

WOMEN'S LIBERATION  
AND  
THE NEW POLITICS

BY

SHEILA ROWBOTHAM

Other pamphlets in this series:

- (1) Thugs and Wreckers : the case of the LSE by Jill West  
(out of print)
- (2) The Miracle and after : the new socialist opposition  
in W. Germany.
- (3) The revolutionary movement of the Class Struggle in  
France 1968/69. Text by the Action Committees of the  
Sorbonne Vincennes and Nanterre.

Subscription rate - £1 for minimum 6 issues. Single copies obtainable  
on request from :

May Day Manifesto,  
11 Fitzroy Square,  
London W. 1.

(1) Introduction

The so called women's question is a whole people question. It is not simply that our situation can only be fundamentally changed by the total transformation of all existing social relations, but also because without us any such transformation can only be partial and consequently soon distorted. The creation of a new woman of necessity demands the creation of a new man.

Revolutionaries have always been rather behind those who wish to conserve in fully grasping this. True the conserver has a certain advantage in that the society as it exists is his, which enables him to survey his terrain whole, observe the strategic strengths and weaknesses of his position, and take precautions in advance. The revolutionary moves along a specific route, has a more restricted viewpoint, and less information. With a particular aim in sight, despite his body of theory, he sometimes fails to survey the situation as a whole. Perhaps because of this conservers have seen immediately the complex interlocking relationships in the structure of authorities and realised how crucial for their preservation is the subordination of women. "You have stepped out of your place", Anne Hutchison, a leader of Antinomianism in seventeenth century Massachusetts was told, "You have rather been a husband than a wife, and a preacher than a hearer".

More recently E.E. Evans-Pritchard pointed out that the position of women and the relationship of the sexes called into question also those between parents and children, brothers and sisters, teachers and pupils, managers and workers, citizens of one country and another.

"In so far as the problems of the relations of the sexes are not those just of sex as such, but of authority, leadership, control, co-operation, and competition, they are problems which occur in every sort of society; and they cannot be solved by an insistence on absolute equality but rather by recognition of differences, exercise of charity and acknowledgement of authority".<sup>2</sup>

The case is most beautifully put. The domination of women is at once the most complex and the most fundamental of links in the chain. Accordingly in moments of acute social unrest, the question of our position leaps to the surface. Consistently from the right comes the implicit commitment to the smothering of the womens revolt. Our uprising is the most terrible to the conservative, precisely because it is so important

for the revolution. The opposition to the women is always more intense than that towards any other group, and it is always expressed in the most hysterical terms. The imagery too becomes sexual almost immediately.<sup>3</sup>

Now while the left has always included the 'women problem' and 'equal rights for women' on the agenda, it has placed them rather far down. There is a hesitancy and a hopelessness about the issue, a tendency to 'if' and 'but' and 'of course'. This is expressed in a curious fear that the subject is 'diversionary'. Of course it is diversionary. It is one of the largest diversions that could possibly be made - the diversion of one half of the human race towards social revolution. Partly the matter is very concrete. It is about 5s an hour and the suicide rate, about nursery schools and legal discriminations. All these need to be studied. But there is another important aspect to the 'woman problem' - how it feels in the head. If the external social situation subdues us, it is our consciousness that contains us.

The attempt is here to explore the nature of women's containment, to examine the ways out, and to see how these ways out relate to a total social transformation. At the same time it is necessary to try and understand the awkwardness with which marxism has touched upon the situation of women, which of necessity involves questioning the emphasis of some species of marxism.

To think of providing final answers would be absurd. But hopefully it should be possible to begin enquiry.

### On containment

The first question is why do we stand for it? The oppressed are mysteriously quiet. The conservative answer is because they like it like that. But the revolutionary can't afford to be so sure. He has learned to be doubtful about the 'happiness' of the exploited. He knows that containment cannot be directly related to quietness. The subordination of women only achieves perspective when it is seen in relation to the mechanism of domination. The way in which we are contained only really becomes comprehensible when it is seen as part of the general situation of the oppressed. In order to understand why those in control stay on top and the people they use don't shake them

off it is necessary to trace the way in which the outward relationship of dominator to dominated becomes internalised.

'But they are happy like that'.

'Can't you see they enjoy it'.

Superficially there is a complicity between the subordinated and the authority figure. But this is in fact the mutuality of whore and pimp. They associate because of the way the game is rigged. She continually keeps back a percentage, he continually steals her clothes and beats her to survive. Deceit and violence are the basis of their relationship, and continue to be so until the external situation is changed. However the conception of change is beyond the notions of the oppressed. They are confined within the limits of their imagination of the possible. For the dominated without hope the relationship is habitual. There is neither the memory of a different condition in the past, nor the possibility of difference in the future, but an always world of domination and dominated without moral belief in change or the means of effecting it. The oppressed in their state before politics lack both the idea and practice to act upon the external world. Both coherent protest and organised resistance is inconceivable. They do not presume to alter things, they are timid. Life is cyclical, weary, events happen, disaster impinges, there is no rational order in the universe, to the authorities properly belong the business and responsibilities of government. They play dumb and the superior people assume they have nothing to say, nothing to complain about. Those in power conclude their 'inferiors' must be a different order of people. This justifies their subjugation. The impression is confirmed by their inability to take the advantage offered to them, by the shrugging off of responsibilities, by the failure to take initiatives. They refuse to help themselves, they are their own worst enemy. But meanwhile they survive. They are skilled in collaboration and subterfuge. They do not compete, they resort to indirect, sly methods. Like Brer Rabbit they lie low.

All these characteristics can be detected amongst oppressed groups before they have created a political movement. They are also most common among those women completely dependent on men. The same mistake has been made about these traditional women as the rest. Because they do not articulate their complaints in terms recognised by those in control, they are presumed to be happy.

Women have been lying low for so long most of us cannot imagine how to get up. We have apparently acquiesced always in the imperial game and are so perfectly colonised that we are unable to consult ourselves. Because the assumption does not occur to us, it does not occur to anyone else either. We are afraid to mention ourselves in case it might disturb or divert some important matter he has in hand. We are the assistants, the receivers, the collaborators, dumb, lacking in presumption, not acting consciously upon the external world, much given to masochism. We become sly - never trust a woman, we seek revenge, slighted we are terrible, we are trained for subterfuge, we are natural creatures of the underground. Within us there are great gullies of bitterness, but they do not appear on the surface. Our wrapped up consciousness creeps along the sewers, occasionally emerging through a man-hole. After death, hag-like spirits roam the earth, the symbols of frustrated unfulfilled desires. But in life our spirits are contained.

#### On the language of silence

The revolutionary who is serious must listen very carefully to the people who are not heard and who do not speak. Unless attention is paid to the nature of their silence there can be no transmission of either memory or possibility and the idea and practice of transformation can accordingly not exist.

Movements develop in the process of communicating themselves. The forms of communicating consequently define considerably their shape and direction. Communication for people who have no name, who have not been recognised, who have not known themselves, is a difficult business. For the women it is especially difficult. We have accepted for so long man's image of himself and of ourselves and the world as his creation we find it almost impossible to conceive of a different past or a different future. MANkind is his, WOMANkind is his, huMANity is his. We have not even words for ourselves. Thinking is difficult when the words are not your own. Borrowed concepts are like passed down clothes, they fit badly and do not give confidence. We lumber awkwardly about in them or scuttle off shamefacedly into obscurity wondering whether we should do our/their flies up for us/them.

First there is the paralysis. Their words stick in your throat, their setting caused you to flounder. This is of

course not peculiar to women. It is part of the common condition of the subordinated. In the 1848 revolution in France the people stormed the Assembly. A fireman adjusted his helmet and leapt onto the rostrum as if it were a roof. The people cheered him and told him to speak. But he stood there dumb, unable to cope with the constructions of those who had been his masters for so long. He was dragged down in shame and disgrace.<sup>4</sup>

There is not only the paralysis there is the labour of making connections. Theory and the removed language in which it is expressed, presents a means of going beyond the immediate. It crystallises innumerable experiences, it puts a canopy over the world, which enables it to be regarded as a relating whole. It makes reality intelligible. But this theory is constructed from the experience of the dominators and consequently reflects the world from their point of view, they however present it as the summation of the world as it is. Their model of existence, ideology, to reaffirm their position. Thus the struggle to take hold of definitions, the tools of theory, and to structure connections, model-building, is an essential part of the politicisation of the oppressed. Without this it is impossible to shatter the hold of the dominators and storm their positions of superiority. But the struggle becomes a kind of agony. In the making of the working class in Britain the conflict of silence with 'their' language, the problem of paralysis and connection has been continuous. Every man who has emerged through the labour movement expressed this in some form. The embarrassment about dialect, the divorce between home talking and educated language, the otherness of 'culture', their culture. It is happening now in the relation between teacher and pupil in every working class school. The intensity of the degree of accommodation has varied. It has meant sometimes a stilted borrowing from the culture of the ruling class even at the point of denouncing their political and economic hold most fiercely, or it has resulted in a dismissal of theory as something contaminated by belonging to the rulers. The persistent elevation of understanding through direct experience has become both the strength and weakness of British working class politics. It provides security in the defense of existing strongholds, and weakness in the creation of an offensive strategy.

Similarly relevant is the understanding of the movement of Black America.<sup>5</sup> For an oppressed group to successfully

challenge those who control them they have to be able to create construct a total alternative kind of being. Such an alternative does not drop neatly from the skies. It has to be hewn out through suffering, in struggle, over time, and with thought.

In order to see how this relates both to the situation of woman in a traditional state of complete social dependence and to the situation of the woman in the process of casting off this dependence, it is necessary to consider the ways in which these women understand the world and the ways in which they communicate their understanding. While such a study requires, in fact, volumes of empirical research, some impressions will have to do for us now. The first mistake of superior people is to equate the silence of the oppressed with stupidity. The second is to assume the 'inferiority' of experience knowing to theoretical understanding because the former has been associated with those lower down. Those few who rise from the ranks before any cultural or political movement exists tend to fall into a similar misconception. This is not surprising because it was that very instrument of the oppressors removed language that enabled them to 'make' themselves. It is necessary both to understand how the oppressed refine and develop their capacity to apprehend directly what is going on, and at the same time to see how this reinforces their defensive outlook on the world.

Most important is observation. If you are safe and sound you don't need to keep a sharp look out and if you have absolute power you don't need to take into account the feelings and reactions of those you control. Consequently the self-consciousness of a dominant class or group increases as they become less confident. As for the weak they excel in perception. The traditional woman who knows the ways of a man, who can meet him with flattery, who can delight him, will be successful. Her ability to succeed is inseparable from her capacity to excite his desire, and to entangle him in obligation. This woman lore is a delicate art, half imparted by other women, half learned from experience. She attunes herself to him, she picks up the slightest quiver of resentment, nurses his vanity with tenderness, follows the flow of his speech, responds to his rhythm. She accordingly is able to distinguish precisely and exactly the difference



between what is said and what is meant - intention does not exist for her in the word alone. After all, what he says with his pants on invariably does not relate to what he does with them off and the consequences are very real for her. Not surprisingly the weakness of her position makes her unwilling to state exactly how she feels; she takes refuge in ambiguity, cultivates mystery. In response to forthright questioning she becomes devious and dumb. She avoids direct and open confrontation preferring to get her opponent in the dark. Her tactics are manipulative. She takes pride in her subtlety and her ability to get things from the man deviously. We women have our ways.

To locate this more exactly, think of three characteristics especially associated with women and often regarded as marks of inferiority: giggling, gossip, and old wives tales. All three make considerable sense in the environment of the dominated. Girls giggle at the moment of taboo. It is a way at once of making a point and avoiding the issue. It precludes criticism and does not give the game away. A guerrilla tactic rather than encountering head on, it irritates in moments of weakness. Gossip provides another important way of perceiving and describing the world. In an underground and rather subversive way it communicates through anecdote the reflection form it has become to novel. For the woman dependent on men it provides also a powerful form of social control over the behaviour of other women. Gossip can determine who is within the protection of society and restrict other women from moving over into self-determination and giving the game away. It is specifically directed against any manifestation of liberation, sexual or otherwise and is designed to prevent women scabs taking on some of the powers of the men. Not surprisingly it is most common amongst the older more established women and is aimed at the younger ones yet to find a settled place. The greater the institutional bondage, the more gossip becomes a fine art. Related to gossip is the old wives tale which presents a series of myth warnings within which forbidden subjects can be contained. This satisfies curiosity and restrains young girls from wandering out of the protected territory of dependent womanhood.

Experience-knowing is thus characterised by symbol,

myth, allegory. The dominated can tell stories, they can fantasise, they can create Utopia, but they cannot devise the means of getting there. They cannot make use of maps, plan out the route and calculate the odds. The dominators continue to hold ideology. Thus while the traditional woman is able to defend herself she is unable to create the conditions which would make such defense unnecessary. Moreover she has no separate identity because she has no way of defining herself or her condition. Experiencing herself in isolation she can only know herself in the situation in which she is put, as object. She has only article awareness. Her highest aspiration can be to become merely his most elaborate commodity, clothes pegging the proof of his wealth about, or playing intellectual foil to his thinking, her leisure the confirmation of his ceaseless striving to accumulate, her passivity the proof of his ability to subdue the world. This fragmentation, isolation and lack of identity makes it impossible for her to relate her own situation to that of any other oppressed group, or to seek a way out. Trapped, she turns round and repeats the process of domination within her own group. She translates the outer authority inwards repeating what is done to her by men, to other women. The woman of the upper class despises the working woman, the married distrust the unmarried, the old suppress the young. The conflicts between women are well known, the war between wife and mother-in-law, or in polygamy between the wives, or between wife and concubine. Most venomous are the feelings of the dependent toward the emancipated. This causes the free woman to view the rest with a mixture of contempt and fear, she feels at once superior, i.e. more like the man and at once more insecure - accused of being incapable of being a woman. While feeling more able to fend for herself she has shed many of the traditional defences and in a society structured for men, can become suddenly very defenceless. If the traditional feminine presents no alternative and exhausts herself in internecine conflict, those who become 'free' are at once uncertain of their position and inclined to rush off down blind alleys.

#### The anxious object<sup>6</sup>

The girl who for some reason breaks away intellectually is in a particularly isolated position. She finds herself

straddled across a great gulf, which grows wider, while she is pulled both ways. Almost perilous and lonely condition, comparable to that of a black or working class militant. In the process of becoming interested in ideas, she finds herself to some extent cut off from most other girls and inclines naturally towards boys as friends. They do more interesting things, discuss wider topics. She really defines herself as a boy. Other girls appear curious and rather boring, passive and accepting. She has little to say to most of them. The social contempt in which women are held confirms this, She is constantly being told she is 'quite good for a girl'. Femininity becomes synonymous with frivolity, stupidity and narrowness. It seems obviously better to be a man. Doesn't she feel like a man, do their things, talk their talk. It is natural for her to define her situation in terms of a kind of sub-manness.

The image is constantly reaffirmed. The books she reads and the films she sees are almost invariably by men. The women characters created by them, however sympathetically and with whatever intuitive understanding must of necessity be the projection of their responses towards women. One is simply not conscious of men writers or men film makers. They are just writers, just film makers. The reflected image of women they create will be taken straight by women themselves. These 'characters' 'are' women.

Throughout this process the educated girl probably takes her 'emancipation' as being beyond question, not worth even stating or discussing. The suffragettes happened a long time ago.

Men will readily accept her as different, an exception, an interesting diversion. She lives in fact as a man. There might be a hint of strain over her virginity, a flicker of doubt, the discovery of a strange duplicity lurking still in men. But no connection is obvious. She can not see a condition of women. It is not until she becomes older, grows less decorative, has babies, that the rather deep cracks in the gloss of 'emancipation' appear. She has the rest of her life to explore the limits and ambiguities of her 'freedom'. And what a spurious freedom. We walk and talk and think as living contradictions.

Most of us find the process too painful and not surprisingly settle for limited liberated areas. We give up struggling on every front and ease into a niche of acceptance. We become the educated housewife desperately searching for dignity and fulfilment through ever more elaborate cooking recipes or constant redecoration schemes, suspicious and defensive about women who are unmarried or women who work. Or the occupational variant of this Proopsism doing a womany womanness to a very male style. These two responses are described as mature integration. They are of course simply avoiding the issue in a peculiarly complicit and false way.

Obversely we become the popular (distorted) image of the suffragette. A tweedy sensibly-shod battle-axe with a severe hair style and a deep voice, advancing aggressively on the male world and the board room. The sexual corollary of this is the retreat into lesbianism. Both share a profound distaste for the male. Emancipation is doing without men.

Our other retreat is into sexuality. Because women have traditionally been deprived of the power to make 'free' choices, our bodies have been part of somebody else's belongings, we prove that we have control, that we are liberated simply by fucking. But if the definition of our constraint is not extended beyond sexuality we are only entrammelled in a greater bondage. We may not be choosing but reacting, ironically under the compulsion of our real subordination. We could be expressing in our sexual life the very essence of our secondariness and the destructive contradictions in our consciousness, through the inability to meet and communicate and love with a man on every level. The same 'free' women could still expect men to pay for her, buy her expensive presents. She must of necessity be excessively preoccupied with her appearance and regard other women's men as fair game. After all she needs constantly the reassurance that she is wanted and beautiful because only through these is she capable of defining her freedom. We shelter as well as retreat. We take refuge behind the privilege of class and education, using the manner and accent of the rulers to secure respect and serious consideration, a protected dignity at the expense of the working class and a protected liberation based on the underpaid labour of an au pair. Most of us live a combination of these or run the whole gamut knowing them for subterfuge - at certain moments struggling through and beyond them all. However they are peculiarly stultifying, peculiarly paralysing. They present neither the possibility for

the individual woman nor for women as a group to emerge in a redefined and whole way. They never go beyond confirmation or denial of what men say we are, and they ignore the infinite acceptability, the infinite absorbability of exceptional individuals and privileged elites, from an oppressed group with no real effect on the position of the rest. In their existing form such 'emancipations' can no more provide a means of transforming the situation of women than the dreams of the traditionally dependent women. Consciousness is atomised, the situation is met at the moment of psychological aloneness. The free woman merely exchanges fantasy for neurosis. Schizophrenia and psychosomatic illness are the real expression of her condition. Not surprisingly too such a false freedom is never attractive to the vast mass of women, even those whose position of class privilege would attain to it. They see the emancipated woman as a kind of fake male, as someone playing at being a man. They feel a certain revulsion and do not trust her.

In reality the simple 'abstraction' between 'unfree' and 'free', 'traditional dependent' and 'emancipated' cannot be maintained. Under closer examination such polarization dissolves. Rather like the innocent idea there are girls you can sleep with and girls you marry, clearly defined categories can only be observed from a distance. Individuals weave between the two poles in an infinitely complex manner, but the freeing of reality in this way helps to indicate what is happening.

#### On men

Amidst such ambiguity and confusion it is not surprising that men are unsure how to react. There is the assumed superiority but there is also the suspicion of the traditional dependent woman. They notice most women seem incapable of behaving like men and quite naturally assume this implies inferiority. They feel the dependent woman clings to them, that she cannot relate to them in certain ways. They turn to the 'free' woman, expecting to find at once a kind of forbidden fruit and a decent chap. Few women can sustain these roles together. Even if they could there would still be dissatisfaction and unease. The free woman seems to switch from their game back to the behaviour of the traditional woman or she brings competition into bed. He wants her to be independent, but fears she might outstrip him. Such anxieties make even the most benevolent of men unwilling to let go of the certainties retained within their external control of the traditional relationship. The origins of the fears would seem to be partly sexual, partly the terror of

dissolving identity - with nothing fixed in the world - but also the whole social pressure within capitalism, to compete, to prove yourself by subduing nature, by grappling with existence and in the process dominating others - Men as the makers of the world are subjected to these most intensely. The emergence of women thus creates a tension. Any breakthrough must occur dialectically. As women's situation becomes more defined the conditions will be created in which men can clarify more exactly the nature of these fears. At the moment of clarification such anxieties begin to dissolve and a new process of release begin for both men and women. While individual men and women are obviously engaged in this now, in order for there to be a significant shift in the social sense, the beginning of a new series in the process of change, there has to be the intensification of experience which takes place when individuals combine and collectively create their consciousness together. In other words there must be some kind of interaction - discussion and action - interlocking - organisation. If this is not to defeat its own purpose the initiative must come from the group immediately concerned - women themselves. A movement is thus an essential form of group expression. It is the means of finding a voice.

#### On breaking the silence

There is nothing like learning from example, apart from doing it yourself. We are fortunate to live in a time when all manner of people who had previously been "trodden in the dirt, people with no place in society, people with no right to speak have audaciously lifted up their heads (and) taken power into their hands".<sup>7</sup> We are thus able to learn from their audacity.

It is possible to trace a dialectic in the breaking of silence. Most important at first have been those amongst the rulers who cut themselves off from their own time to take up the cause of the "inferior" people in an ideal or moral sense. For instance, the enlightened aristocrats before the French Revolution, the intellectuals in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the white liberals in America. They are able to communicate possibility to the oppressed. Not all of them can withstand the time when the dominated use the tools they gave them against them. Some of them retreat. Then there is that section of the subordinated who break away under their encouragement. At first they will only be a few isolated individuals, immediately absorbed within the dominant culture. However, as the rate of migration intensifies, entrance becomes limited, and under certain specific conditions the

possibility of a mass movement from below emerges. Such a dialectic can be seen working in the making of the proletariat, in the national liberation struggles, in the history of the black people of America. An important speeding up process is the relating of one struggle to another. To know someone else has made it, however far away, can be a most powerful encouragement.

Various phases of consciousness can be observed. First there is the simple moral protest against oppression, as against religion or common humanity. Secondly there is the more material demand of the privileged amongst the inferior to be allowed to compete equally with the dominant group. This is conceived as equal rights. The oppressed are still able to define themselves only according to the terms of the domination. The black man must still want to be white because white represents power over the world. Thirdly there is the realisation that the real liberation of the oppressed group can only be achieved through the transformation of the economic base and of social relations - i.e. that it consequently affects others who are dissatisfied. This is the discovery of marxism. Fourthly and closely related is the realisation within marxism of the inter-locking nature of oppressions and the significance of hegemonic control.

In order to locate the situation of women more exactly it is necessary to examine what kind of movement has been created in the past, what relevance it has now and how marxism relates to our liberation.

#### On feminism

It is most important to be clear about the way in which we use 'feminism'. There are two possible interpretations, one ideal the other historical. Feminism can be seen as the conception of a society in which the roles of dominator and dominated are reversed, and in which women take over the superior status of men. It can also be seen as the demand for equality for women made on religious or ethical grounds. This feminism wants to compete more fairly with men and is expressed in the struggle for equal rights.

Feminism in the first sense is utopian - i.e. it exists in the realm of stories and visions not as a political movement. Detailed study of these myths would be illuminating. There is for example an Anglo-Norman poem, 'Des Grantz Geanz', probably composed in the mid thirteenth century. Thirty

daughters of the king of Greece plotted to murder their husbands. None of them wanted to have a master and to be in subjection. Each wanted to be her own mistress. Their plot discovered they were punished by being set adrift in a boat, and arrived very sea sick on a desert island. Albine the eldest took seisin of the land which was called Albion after her. The sisters learned to trap animals, they grew 'big and fat' and began to want human company. Incubi or bad fairies came to satisfy their needs. These incubi were both invisible and undemanding. Together they bred giants, who flourished until Brutus conquered the island and called it Britain.<sup>8</sup> Again in a Chinese novel written in 1825 by Ju-Chen a hundred fairy folk turned into women and oppressed them, binding their feet and generally holding them in subordination.<sup>9</sup>

Utopian feminism found an existential gesture when Valerie Solanas tried to shoot off Andy Warhol's balls because, 'He had too much control over my life'. Her S.C.U.M Manifesto - Society for Cutting up Men, is a kaleidoscopic vision of the ways modern capitalism crouches in the inner crevices of the psyche, combined with an acutely myopic political perspective. S.C.U.M. could never get mass woman appeal. For a start S.C.U.M. can't cope at all with sexuality. The S.C.U.M. female has to 'condition away her sex drive' in order to be 'cool' 'cerebral' and 'free'. Nor can S.C.U.M. present anything but the reversal of domination and the elimination of first men and then women. Not much to make a social revolution for. S.C.U.M. gives women the chance to cut off men's balls to fuck up our own cunts.<sup>10</sup>

What about the more sedate kind of feminism? It is possible to trace two phrases. The emergence of the religious and moral idea of the individual worth and dignity of women and the movement for specific reforms, legal, educational, the vote, etc. To locate this more precisely to Britain, the first glimmering assertions were expressed not surprisingly in religious terms. Religious mysticism undoubtedly provided a shelter in a situation where it was impossible to conceive any alternative. For example, Margery Kempe, a 14th century mystic, saw devils after a difficult childbirth, communed with heaven, and subsequently 'never desired to commune fleshly with her husband, for the debt of matrimony was so abominable to her that she would rather



have eaten or drunk the ooze and the muck in the gutter than consent to consent to any fleshly communing save only for obedience'.

It was no coincidence that the effect of man's questioning his relationship to God created an element of doubt about the nature of his relationship to woman. All were, after all, equal in the eyes of the Lord. Within the puritan sect women could find a certain degree of self-expression. But the division of loyalty produced some confusion. Women not only preached and prophesied as handmaidens of the Lord, they divorced their husbands for spiritual deviation.<sup>12</sup> However the puritan woman was as yet incapable of feminist justification. The women petitioners of Parliament against popish lords and superstitious bishops reassured the gentlemen of the Commons in 1642, "We do it not of any self-conceit or pride of heart as seeking to equal ourselves with men, either in authority or wisdom."<sup>13</sup> But by the late 17th Century on the "authority" of "reason and good sense" the case that woman was "as good as the Man" was being argued.<sup>14</sup> The grounds were now that given a similar external environment women would prove themselves intellectually as capable as men. Not surprisingly this took the form of demanding education, "Had we the same literature they would find our brains as fruitful as our bodies".<sup>15</sup> Richardson's novel *Clarissa Harlowe* marks a further stage in this moral revolt. *Clarissa* resists an arranged property marriage, remains 'pure' despite being raped, and is able to extend her experience with the generalised reflection on 'one half of humanity tormenting the other and being tormented themselves in tormenting'. Corresponding with Richardson a woman brought home the radical nature of his position home to him. Lady Bradsheigh declared the laws of society were made by man 'to justify their tyranny', argued for equality in sex relationships and said of the views of the Old Testament Patriarchs, 'If they took it into their heads to be tyrants, why should we allow them to be worthy examples to imitate'.<sup>16</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, often taken as the 'beginnings' of feminism, was really the important theoretical summation of this moral phase. Along with William Thompson's *One Half of the Human Race* in 1820 it put the case firmly on the secularised basis of equal rights, though Thompson's work is more radical in emphasis because when Mary Wollstonecraft wrote it was still necessary to justify the woman's right to self-

development on the grounds that it would make her a better mother.

While radical theory played an important role there were good economic reasons for the development of the movement in the second half of the 19th Century, which tried to improve the legal status of woman and enable her to be educated and enter the professions. The increasing prosperity of the middle class released many women from housework into aristocratic leisure. But it also deterred men from marrying young, as the conspicuous display of the household increased. For the unmarried gentlewoman on the capitalist labour market the only hope was to become a governess. The vote seemed the obvious way of carrying into effect a general improvement in the position of women.<sup>17</sup>

There were two crucial weaknesses in feminism in its liberal-radical political phase. First it could not come to terms theoretically with social class. Secondly it could not define itself except in terms of the dominant group. The New Woman was in fact merely the upper middle class man in a peculiar kind of drag. These weaknesses made the split with Sylvia Pankhurst and the patriotism of World War I inevitable. It was a case of anything they can do we can do better. There was no alternative social vision.

The Feminist movement at this stage consequently failed to produce any prospect for a real social emancipation which could include all women, or to create a consciousness through which women could appropriate their identity as a group.<sup>18</sup>

#### Now

Liberal-radical feminism expressed the way in which women could see themselves in a particular context. But it obscures the real contradictions of the woman's position now. It cannot contain within it the possibility of real change for the woman with a family, it cannot speak for the exploitation of the working woman, it cannot comprehend the process of objectification. It cannot break the silence.

Certainly the struggle phrased in the terms of equal rights effected a vital and necessary exposure. It laid bare one level in the structure of domination. But like snakes skins as one idea system is peeled off another forms beneath it. Liberal-radical feminism is now only the shrivelled skin of a past reality shed on the ground. It is no good waving cast off skins. We are

concerned with the living creature.

Because of the inadequacies in the liberal radical feminist approach there has been a tendency to dismiss 'emancipation' as such, to conclude that there is something peculiarly immutable about our position. Instead of course, we should examine the real conditions from which change could develop. It is necessary to look more closely at the situation of the housewife in the family, at the position of the woman at work and the means by which women are thingified in the head, here and at this moment, in order to begin to find out what can be done. Such a separation is for convenience only, in fact they are completely intertwined.

### Housewife

The housewife is not considered much except by those who want to make sure she stays put. Yet here social secondariness is experienced most intensely. It is here that the real contradiction in the woman's situation is most clearly expressed. Susanne Gail in the Penguin 'Work' describes this.

'It was never a burden to me to be a woman before I had Carl. Feminists had seemed to me to be tilting at windmills; women who allowed men to rule them did so from their own free choice. I felt that I had proved myself the intellectual equal of man, and maintained my femininity as well. But afterwards I quite lost my sense of identity; for weeks it was an effort to speak. And when I again became conscious of myself as other than a thing, it was in a state of rebellion that I had to clamp down firmly because of Carl. I also grew very thin and I still do not menstruate'.

The pregnant housewife is not only unable to escape from her femininity she is economically socially and psychologically dependent on the man - From this point 'free' choice becomes impossible. Think of the social position of the housewife with a family. In order to clear up the confusion it is necessary to place the housewife socially. There is much conservative cant about the respect due to motherhood. Imagine these benevolent gentlemen if all mothers demanded a wage from the state for their important work and threatened a general strike if this was not granted. A hairdressing day release class using the criteria of cash and respect created a model of social stratification:

The Queen  
pop singers (various grades)  
employers

principal of college  
 vice-principal of college  
 teacher  
 hairdressing students  
 black people  
 mothers

It is no coincidence that mothers came at the bottom. Firstly consider the housewife as a producer. Rather than producing marketable commodities her function relates to the development and sustenance of people. Those who make people rather than things are not valued very highly in our society. The relationship to production is connected very nearly to the relationship in distribution. This is obscured because the housewife who does not work receives money from the husband. In other words the society pays him to pay her. If the housewife wants to 'improve' herself she has in fact to 'improve' the situation of her husband. She has to translate her ambition into his person. Thus the respect due to her is delicately adjusted by the respect due to him. The more of herself she pours into her image of him the more she loses herself. The relationship is at once that of economic social and psychological dependence. It is exploitative: in terms of cash she undoubtedly puts in much more than she receives back. The individual man will vary in what he demands or extracts from the woman in labour as will her ability to bargain with him personally. But the exploitation of women at home only becomes clear when it is seen in a social way. The individual man acts as a kind of middle-man or channel through to the rest of society. The domestic work of the housewife is socially vital, recognition is shown by paying the woman through the medium of the man. Any individual man - especially the working class man - is unable to avoid this whatever his private intention. Both the work situation and social assumptions are too rigid for him to experiment with a different division of labour. Essentially the woman gives her labour to the community and the community gives her nothing in return. She is a social attachment.

In the situation of poverty such reflected 'exploitation' is clear and apparent. In the case of many working class women it is easy to locate the way in which the family situation reflects in microcosm the deprivation of the man at work. He translates the alienation and frustration he finds in the external world into the home. The woman experiences a reflected alienation. But it is a mistake to conclude that the alleviation of poverty will solve this. Increased affluence merely enables the less immediate problems to emerge. After two centuries of conditioning teaching us

to value worth in terms of money we are now having to learn that it is possible to have enough money to live comfortably and have no sense of worth. Production for waste does not apply to things, it applies to people. As modern capitalism devises ever new and ingenious wastage disposal schemes a great revolt of the useless begins. Student unrest is only the anticipation of the malaise of vast numbers of lower managerial, white collar and skilled workers who receive high material 'rewards' but who have little fulfilment or control at work. They spend their time in tasks which do not see whole, do not believe in, and cannot take hold of. Such expenditure of self cannot be measured neatly. It is close to the situation of the middle class housewife. She will actually seek for more and more tasks. She will lose herself in work - either inside or outside the home. This loss of self is the only way in which she can achieve a sense of virtue - of worth. The more she puts of herself into the objects around her the more the objects come to dominate her. Such alienation will also be experienced by the working class woman especially after her children grow up. So far 'welfare' capitalism can only shovel aside the useless who express their futility in neurosis, by putting them into cold storage until they emerge tranquillised.

The woman at home is thus a victim of the reflected alienation of the man's work situation and also an alienation of her own. Only significant structural changes can radically affect this. The production relations of the man would have to be changed, the woman would have to be paid directly by the community, and the social division of labour would have to be transformed. Such changes would necessitate social ownership as well as control.

No such total immediate solution can be envisaged yet but there are specific concrete ways in which the sheer drudgery and monotony of housework can be alleviated, and possible means by which women could have more sense of fulfilment and more control over her external environment. There are firstly particular improvements like more nurseries, launderettes, good cheap municipal restaurants in all areas, better housing and imaginative architecture, which takes the needs of the people as a prime consideration - look at the space considered necessary for the working class, compared to the space in middle class areas, as though being working class meant you needed less air to breathe, - cheap council flats for teenagers who want to live away from home. Eventually we should make detachable enlargeable dwellings because while most people settle

in a relatively stable way in couples to bring up children that doesn't mean they want to be falling all over one another all the time. Under socialism it should be possible to build for much greater personal flexibility, so the environment would be quite literally both living and moving.

Meanwhile though, 'improvements' are not enough. The important way in which reforms become a means to more substantial transformation is when they are consciously made by the struggle of the people who benefit from them. When women take part in tenants' campaigns, in squatting, in sit-downs for zebra crossings, in demonstrations with dirty washing for more council launderettes, when they organise co-operative play groups in their street or flat there is the beginnings of the possibility of breaking the silence. It means that people in groups are creating and controlling aspects of their immediate environment. At this point socialism can make sense as the natural and necessary development of such control.

The way in which the family has developed in capitalism is so closely related to the system of production which has emerged through the private ownership of capital and the growth of factories, that certain changes are bound to appear under a system of social control. As the society takes over some of the functions of the individual family this makes possible a changing relationship between men and women. Most important is the independent social security of the woman.

Though we have the advantage of the experience of the socialist countries, these indicate more the complexity of the family relationship and the primitive level of our thinking about it rather than a clear guide. In order to replace it by a more honest way of living, we should remember the reasons for seeking to transform it, rather than making a fetish of its form. The objection to the bourgeois family is the necessary dependence and isolation of the woman, the internationalisation of the competition and struggle for dominance, the tension and the possessiveness of man and woman directed towards the children. Rather than presenting only the institutional form of the state nursery school which is by no means a complete answer we should agitate for unnumerable ways of reducing these. We should produce a multiplicity of practical schemes for social living some of which we can achieve immediately, which would at once liberate individuals and enable them to see that a socialist society would mean more choice and allow people real alternatives.<sup>19</sup>

Worker

It would seem then that any real change for the woman at home would have to be social. It would involve a fundamental recreation of the structure of society and the ways in which people relate to each other. When the position of woman as worker is considered the case becomes conclusive.

Here again the contradiction between the 'role' as woman and the 'role' as sub-man is most marked. The woman has to run the home and go out to work as sub-man. The more privileged can avoid this by hiring other women but the working class woman is forced to carry the double load. An immediate way of lessening this apart from a determined campaign for better facilities in the home situation is for the unions to press for a much more flexible attitude to part-time work, convenient hours, for more creches at work - why not for men as well as for women, with time off work to play with the children so the child would have continuing contact with parents of both sexes. As for the future when we talk about work in the socialist society we should consider in a positive way not simply the breakdown of the specialised division of labour between men and women. It is simply no good to avoid any positive thinking about these things and trust to some magic 'revolution' to create completely new forms of living, the depth of revolutionary change will be considerably dependent on the conscious conceptions and struggles formed in the old society.

The working woman is subordinated both as a woman and as a worker. Her demand for equal pay carries profound economic and social implications. Firstly, it's going to cost someone a lot of money - anything between £600 to £1000 million. The question is of course, who? Within the terms of the Labour Party's incomes policy 'equality' would mean a readjustment between men and women workers, i.e. it would be contained within a struggle between two groups of workers divided only by the intensity of their rate of exploitation. It is apparent that equal pay must be phrased in terms of the social redistribution of wealth. Even so the securing of equal pay alone wouldn't solve the problem, unless the whole social subordination of women is challenged. This is summed up in the phrases 'women's work', 'girls' work'. When men and women are not working side by side it is possible to define work customarily done by women at work which does not require skill. The other aspect of this is the refusal to admit women into the more highly graded paid jobs. At Fords last year the Court of

Enquiry into the dispute revealed that whereas one man in four was on a grade C, only 2 women in 900 amongst the machinists were receiving pay at this rate. Though when they went for the job the women had to pass a test on the three machines. If they failed they weren't employed. Indeed at Fords the real issue was over the question of grading.

The assumption is really that women exist through their husbands and the whole work situation is geared to this. Consequently innumerable attendant secondarinesses arise. Women on the buses are not only not allowed to drive them, they have to wait five years before they can get sick pay. Men get it after only one year. Similarly the inequalities in training opportunities - only 7% of girls enter apprenticeships (predominantly hairdressing) compared with 43% of boys. Very few girls get day release in Colleges of Further Education. Employers are reluctant to let clerical workers have day release partly because they can't be spared from the office, partly because they leave quite soon to be married.

Equal pay then is a vital demand not because it will solve the situation of working women but because it will expose more clearly the nature of their oppression. This is understood by the National Joint Action Campaign for Equal Rights, and the placards the women carried on the recent demonstration expressed the demand to be generally equal to men in the work situation. 'We want the chance to prove we can do the work of any man'. Though this is obviously so important and while the whole movement is of extreme significance the demand for 'equal rights' cannot take it far enough. Given our real situation we have to demand UNEQUAL rights, i.e. the concept of equality has to leave the realm of moral abstraction and become concretised in the existing social situation. Fords employers justify discrimination against women on the grounds that women have to have time off to have children. Unequal rights has to take this kind of thing into account.

Even when the class disadvantages don't exist, the middle class women experience a special and peculiar secondariness. The socialisation, education and opportunity for development and expression of women is a preparation for a complementary role. In terms of work there exists great difficulty still in securing jobs which require considerable initiative and responsibility and at the same time are not just extensions of the familial role.



Even more significant is the fact that women don't apply for such jobs even when they have a chance of getting them. Part of secondariness is the assumption of it.

Nor is this something that is confined to work. It penetrates right inside the labour movement. There are only 5 women amongst 151 men trade unionists on the industrial training boards, half the members of U.S.D.A.W. are women but only an eighth of the executive. When Lil Bilocca and the fishermen's wives campaigned against the unsafe conditions on the trawlers they met considerable hostility and ridicule.<sup>20</sup> Girls who are students are not at work and relatively free from the domestic situation but the assumed subordination remains. Glance at any left theoretical journal or go to any large meeting, you won't find many articles either by or about women and you won't see many women speaking. Think of the way women relate to left groups. Very largely we complement the men we hold small groups together, we send out reminders, we type the leaflets, we administer rather than initiate. Only a small number of men are at once aware that this happens and take positive steps to stop it. In fact in some cases they positively discourage women from finding a voice. Revolutionary students are quite capable of wolf whistling and cat calling when a girl speaks, more common though is tolerant humour, patronising derision or that silence after which everyone continues as if no one had spoken. The girl in the process of becoming interested in socialism is thus often treated as an intruder if she speaks or acts in her own right. She is most subtly once again taught her place. She drops back again, lets go, settles into a movement as somebody's bird. None of this develops confidence. Ultimately this 'politics of the gang-bang' cannot secure deep committment from most women.

In terms of organised power the militant action of women at work is obviously crucial, the demand for equal pay would be merely paper resolutions unless there was the possibility of grinding things to a halt. But there is also the need for a political campaign for equal pay. This would be most effective if it acted as a means of co-ordinating industrial activity and circulating information about the various struggles. A respectable main body working through traditional channels would be accompanied by less orthodox action by a smaller group. In the short run by struggling on specific issues which express the ways through which we are contained it will be possible to generate a confidence and enable more

women to act consciously to change the world... It will also be possible to make reforms of a social nature which will make more obvious the potentialities of a fundamental social transformation. Ultimately this social transformation must be a revolution in both the domestic and the work situation of women. Marxism has customarily gone this far. In the experiments with house communes the discussion of attitudes to sex in the 1920's, in the real improvements in the position of women in the Soviet Union, in the communes in China, and in the general raising of women's position in Cuba it is possible to see some of the potentialities. But there is still very much to be done.

Structural changes will interact on the way the woman can see herself, and call into question the assumption of social secondariness. But unless the internal process of subjugation is understood, unless the language of silence is experienced from inside and translated into the language of the oppressed communicating themselves male hegemony will remain.

Without such a translation Marxism will not be really meaningful. There will be a gap between the expedience and the theory. This will make a movement impossible, it will lead people to say 'women are reactionary'. By this they mean only that revolution has proved itself unable to relate to what is happening. Marxism will prove incapable of speaking for the silence in the head, for the paralysis of the spirit. If women are to be convincingly mobilised it is necessary for marxism to extend into unexplored territory. The struggle is not simply against the external mechanisms of domination and containment but with those internal mechanisms. It is the struggle against the assumption that men make and define the world, whether that is capitalist or socialist. Unless this is made explicit and conscious revolutionary policies will remain for most women something removed and abstracted.

Really because the movement which demands at once social revolution and the possibility of creating a new woman is still politically embryonic it is difficult to visualise clearly the means of effecting this. This recent brief experience of revolutionary women's groups provide some clues. Discussion is vital. At this stage this is the way in which the individual woman is able to stop experiencing her situation as neurosis. The confidence is essential too. The decision to exclude men should be made on the basis of the experience of each group. It may be necessary in the early stages for women to discuss the

situation without men because their nervous hostility or benevolent patronage are precisely the points at which we become hysterical or dry up through lack of confidence as a group. However there are considerable dangers in continuing on a separatist basis. Some women may simply drop into the 'male' aggressive role, also the interaction between our situation and that of men under capitalism can be forgotten. The way is not open for men to redefine themselves. This can create a polarisation. Most dangerous too is the tendency for us to see our struggle as proving we are as good as men. This achievement consciousness is obviously a problem for both the working class and the black people but if it becomes predominant it can eat a movement away. All the competitive and egotistical characteristics of capitalism penetrate the attempt to transform it, and the same authoritarianism, the same projection and elevation of individuals starts to happen. There is danger too though in the dogmatic opposition to groups which consist only of women. There can be considerable dishonesties at work here. A refusal to explore the real situations of women, a desire to strait-jacket our consciousness by a talmudic obsession with 'correct' texts taken out of their particular historical context. Such a response is frequently one of fear. It is the deep seated feeling that people have to be school-mastered/mistressed into socialism. Such paternal maternalism is misplaced. A marxist approach to the situation of women can be justified only on its ability to illuminate our position and the way out not as some kind of moral imperative.

It is necessary not only to learn more about our social position and the means of changing it, to communicate we have to find the symbols which express our oppression. The Spanish peasants destroyed Virgins in the churches, the Chinese put paper hats on the local gentry, in a more abstract way the exam is a symbol for the student movement. The symbol has to carry a whole complex of experiences within it. Thus women in the States located Miss America as a symbol, in England we have located in a tactical way the Ideal Home exhibition, the ICA women's exhibition, the Nelbarden swimwear campaign which is based on women experiencing themselves as objects. These express in a fragmentary way some aspects of thingification, women as sex-objects as consumer dust-bins, as rarefied art objects, the woman as unreal unless she is being regarded by men.<sup>21</sup> Such spheres of consciousness are both intangible and

complex. This means they need to be thought out more not less. Object-consciousness is the common condition of all women, it is our normal state of mind. A peasant woman in yellow Fan Shen said, 'Our husbands regard us as some sort of dog who keeps the house. We even despise ourselves'.

A West Indian woman in Dalston, London said, 'We women are just shells for the men'.

An English woman in Guildford said, 'When I'm in the bath it's the only time I'm myself'.

An American girl said, 'Really being a groupie is like borrowing a series of lives from people and thinking you can be them. It's not something you can do'.

It is not a question of simply rational enlightenment. Intellectual awareness of what is going on does not mean object-consciousness dissolves. When I go out without mascara on my eyes I experience myself as I knew myself before puberty. It is inconceivable to me that any man could desire me sexually, my body hangs together quite differently. Rationally I can see the absurdity of myself. But this does not mean I experience myself in a different way.

The naive belief that institutional change will automatically penetrate the concealed pockets of the psyche, that it is not for marxists to be bothering their heads about such airy-fairy nonsense, still prevails. Not only does such myopic mechanicalism screen itself from understanding what has happened in the countries which have made revolution it ignores the explicit warnings of innumerable marxists. Of course no single idealist liberation is capable of personalising this object - consciousness, of course revolutionary changes in the fabric are essential. The way sexual 'freedom', despite its liberatory implications, has been grotesquely distorted under capitalism is the most convincing proof of this. There is a cruel irony in the way the assertion of the dignity and honesty of sexual love has become the freedom for the woman - object to strip to sell the object - commodity, or the freedom for the woman - object to fuck her refracted envy of the dominator man. But this doesn't make transformation simple. Modern capitalism beguiles with flickering lights, it mystifies with a giant kaleidoscope. We lose ourselves and one another in the reflected images of unrealisable desires. We walk into a world of distorting mirrors. We smash the mirrors. Only pain

convinces us we are there. But there is still more glass. Your nose is pressing against the glass, the object suddenly finds herself peeping at herself. There is the possibility of a moment of illumination. The femine voyeur finds her identity as pornography. The 'emancipated' woman sees herself as naked buttocks bursting out of black suspenders, as tits drooping into undulating passive flesh. WHO ME? Comprehension screeches to a halt. She is jerked into watching herself as object watching herself. She is being asked to desire herself. The traditional escape route of 'morality' is blocked. She can either shutter the experience or force some kind of break through.

Revolution must relate to both the means and nature of this break through. There must be the acceleration of collective demystification accompanied by the conscious dismantling of the external framework, there must be the connection with the experience of the other oppressed groups, there must be a political alternative, a way out which relates to all the groups. Object - consciousness cannot be shattered by individual rationality, it cannot be simply eliminated by external change, it cannot be bypassed by psychological or cultural concentrations. It demands social revolution and it demands it whole. It demands release from the inner and the outer bondages. It is not to be fobbed off with an either or. Which brings us all back again to marxism and the whole people question.

#### On the whole people question

Well here we all are then - millions of us - our situation demanding a fundamental redistribution of wealth, a profound social transformation in the ways people relate to each other and an end to alienation. Communism is the necessary condition of our freedom. A communist society means having babies in a state of social freedom. It means you don't starve when you're helpless to fend for yourself or be a dependent. It means the possibility of such communication that human beings share the pains of labour and the ecstasy of creation. Real comradeship involves the end of subjugation and domination, the explosion of sado-masochism and the climax of love.

However there are a few inescapable points to be considered before we make it.

The subordination of women cannot be reduced simply to our exploitation either as a class or our exploitation at work. These

exploitations are part only of the oppression of some women. The full extent of our oppression is not fully revealed by the isolation of these particular forms of exploitation. The woman question is not comprehensible except in terms of the total process of a complete series of repressive structures. Thus the particular form of domination changes but the process operates in both pre-capitalist and post-capitalist society. The function of revolutionary theory is to keep track of this moving shape of these subordinations. Such a revolutionary theory is compelled to be continually reforming and recreating itself. It has to understand the way capitalism subdues us as consumers as well as workers. It has to follow the particular experience of domination not only of the worker but also of the student. It has to understand the condition of blackness as well as the condition of womanness.

Thus while the working class is undoubtedly the most crucial force in modern capitalism for creating a new society this does not mean that the specific experiences of other oppressed groups are in any way invalidated. It does not imply they must relate to socialism simply as an abstract idea or merely project their own situation on to that of the working class. Every group has a particular struggle coming directly from the position in which it finds itself. It accordingly has a particular consciousness of oppression.

Not only is it consequently possible to mobilise many more people, it is possible to mobilise them at several levels. Capitalism has to be resisted not only at work but in the home, not only in the institutional apparatus of government, but in the head. The revolutionary struggle is thus extended and sustained in a multi-structural multi-dimensional way. As well as the macro-theory, which is about systems at war, about about a mass movement for political power, marxism has to explore the way human beings relate to one another. This means noticing all the little unimportant things which revolutionary theory tends to regard as not worthy of attention. Like how we live with one another and how we feel and regard each other, how we communicate with each other. We are contained within the inner and the outer bondages and unless we create a revolutionary theory of the microcosm as well as the macrocosm we shall be incapable of preventing our personal practice becoming unconnected to our economic and institutional transformation. We

will consequently continually lose ourselves in the new structures we have created. In order to comprehend this it is necessary to replace a mechanical model of social change base superstructure by a complex and inter-related self-regulating revolutionary model. It also means some forms of action will be directed specifically towards transforming peoples perception and comprehension of themselves and the world as well as being concerned with material change. The so called womens question is thus a whole people question not only because our liberation is inextricably bound up with the revolt of all those who are oppressed but because their liberation is not realisable fully unless our subordination is ended. Nor does the particular experience of women speak only for itself. Like the consciousness of all the people who are kept down it brings its own species of implication for the revolutionary struggle. Trotsky's comment on the complaint of Russian working women, 'You only think about yourselves', is more apt.

"It is quite true that there are no limits to masculine egotism in ordinary life. In order to change the conditions of life we must learn to see them through the eyes of women."<sup>22</sup>

Such a leap in consciousness would undoubtedly shatter whole layers of comfortable paternal authoritarian assumptions, within the revolutionary movement.

But that comrades is another story.....

1. Keith Thomas, *Women in the Civil War Sects, Past and Present* 1958 no. 13. p. 48.
2. E.E. Evans Pritchard, *The Position of Women in Primitive Societies and Other Essays in Social Anthropology*. 1965 p. 56.
3. Edith Thomas in *The Women Incendiaries*, 1963 describes this in connection with the Paris Commune. Wilhelm Reich's *The Sexual Revolution*, 1967, contains an account of the hostility to the Somens Club after the Russian Revolution as well as the whole dilemma of the Bolsheviki about their approach to sexuality. Helen Foster Snow, *Women in Modern China* 1967 mentions similar hostility in China.
4. Ed. J.P. Mayer, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville* 1959 p.p. 132-3.
5. See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* 1965 parts 4 & 5. F. Graus, *Social Utopias in the Middle Ages, Past and Present* 1967 no. 38. Any biography of worker students. e.g. Thomas Bell *Pioneering Days* 1941, Thomas Cooper, *The Life of Thomas Cooper* written by himself. Gwynn A. Williams *Rowland Detroisier, a Working Class Infidel 1800-34*. University of York, *Borthwick Papers* no. 28. 1965.  
See also E.P. Thompson *Education and Experience*, Fifth Mansbridge Memorial Lecture, 1968.  
Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Black Power Literature in general especially Stokely Carmichael in *The Dialectics of Liberation*, ed. David Cooper & Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*.
6. This section is taken from *Women, The Struggle for Freedom* by me in *Black Dwarf*, 10 Jan. 1969.
7. Mao Tse Tung, *Investigation of Peasant Movement in Hunan, The Movement of the Riff-Raff*. Selected Readings, 1967.
8. Beryl Smalley, *English Friars and Antiquity, in the Early XIVth Century*, 1960. p.p. 17-18.
9. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, 1958, p.139.
10. Valerie Solanas, *S.C.U.M. Manifesto*, 1968.
11. ed. W. Butler-Bowden, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 1954, p.p. 15-16.
12. See Thomas *Women in the Civil War sects*, op.cit.
13. Ellen MacArthur, *Women Petitioners and the Long Parliament*, *English Historical Review*, vol.24.
14. Roger L'Estrange, *The Woman as Good as the Man or the Equality of both Sexes*, 1677.  
For a strong dose of anti-feminism see, *The Womens Fegaries shewing the great endeavour they have used for obtaining of the Breeches*, c.1675.
15. Hannah Wooley quoted in M.S. Storr *Mary Wollstonecraft et le mouvement feministe dans la litterature anglaise*, 1932.
16. Christopher Hill, *Clarissa Harlowe and her Times*, in *Puritanism and Revolution* 1962, p.p. 367-394.
17. See J.A. & Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning*, 1964.
18. See David Mitchell, *Women on the Warpath* 1966 and George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* 1961, for accounts of the suffragettes. For a contemporary criticism of bourgeois feminism see, A.M. Kollontay, *Critique of the Feminist Movement* in R.A.J. Schlesinger, *Changing Attitudes in Soviet Russian, The Family*. 1949 p.p. 45 - 48.



19. See Juliet Mitchell's *Women: The Longest Revolution*. *New Left Review* 40. Nov/Dec. 1966 for a brief account of socialists and marxists approaches to the family and the reaction. The literature is voluminous but apart from Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, see especially A. Bebel, *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*, 1887, Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*. Alexandra Kollontay, *Communism and the Family* 1920, *Lenin on the Emancipation of Women*, Alexandra Kollontay, *Free Love*. Leon Trotsky, *Problems of Life*, 1924.
20. See P.E.P. Report, *Women at Work, Women's Wages Labour Research*, Aug. 1968. Sabby Sagall, Interview with Rose Boland, *Socialist Worker* Sept. 21 1968. Audrey Wise, *Equal Pay is not enough*, and Lil Billocca and Hull Trawlers, *Black Dwarf*, Jan. 10 1969. Working Class Girls, *Black Dwarf*, May 2 1969. Sabina Roberts *Equal Pay, the First Step*, *Socialist Woman*, March-April 1969. Kath Fincham & Sabina Roberts - *The Struggle for Democracy Who says Women can only do unskilled work*. Sue Pascoe, *Conference of London and Westminster Trades Council on Equal Pay for Women*. - *Socialist Woman* May-June 1969. *Woman's Rights*, account of Equal Pay demonstration and information about the various women's groups which exist. - *Black Dwarf*, June 1, 1969.
21. I.C.A. *Woman, Women's Liberation Workshop*. *Black Dwarf*, June 14, 1969. Nelbarden *Swimwear*, *The Shrew* no. 3 July 1969.
22. Trotsky, *Problems of Life* op.cit.p.99