TROUBLE & STRIFE 12

WINTER 1987 £1·95

Trouble and Strife is cockney rhyming slang for wife. We chose this name because it acknowledges the reality of conflict in relations between women and men. As radical feminists, our politics come directly from this tension between men's power and women's resistance.

Trouble and Strife is produced collectively by Lynn Alderson, Margot Farnham, Cath Jackson, Susanne Kappeler, Liz Kelly, Sophie Laws, Judy Stevens and Sara Scott, with help from Harriet Wistrich (taping), Alison Dickens (proof-reading), Lyn May, Jill Denton and Diana Leonard (paste-up).
With many thanks to the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre and the Women's Health Information Centre for the use of their space and resources.

Although we take collective responsibility for the contents, we do not necessarily agree with every article we print – only that we feel it is interesting. The collective is also responsible for titles and illustrations. Unsolicited articles are welcomed; please enclose a stamped addressed envelope. We do not intend to publish poetry or fiction.

Typeset and printed by Amazon Press, 75 Back Piccadilly, Manchester 1 (061-228 2351).
Distributed by Turnaround (01-609 7836).
Trouble and Strife is available on tape.

Cover photograph of YAMAKAWA Kikue

Trouble and Strife

Contents No.12

LETTERS

Don't close off debate

Dear *Trouble and Strife,*
I was dismayed to find in the Summer issue of *T&S*11, yet another letter attacking Marge Berer's article on reproductive technology in issue 9. In all the issues of *T&S* so far, and I have been a subscriber even before the first issue dropped through my letterbox, I have yet to read such a sustained barrage of letters against any one specific article.

What is it about the reproductive technology, (RT), issue that creates such emotive responses, forcing a divide between those who want to discuss the implications for women from a critical, but not necessarily anti, viewpoint and those women who advocate resistance against the technologies along the lines of FINNRAGE. Although FINNRAGE claim to be a network of women with varying opinions that variety has not been expressed in the letters pages of *T&S.*

I first encountered the strong emotions this issue raises for women at a party several years ago. I got talking to a woman who is a member of FINNRAGE and doing a PhD in the area. Having done genetic engineering many years ago, with bacteria, and having experienced the messiness of laboratory research, I discussed with the woman concerned the practicalities of RT, or should I say the impracticalities, as many people including Robyn Rowland accept that some of the RT techniques have a high failure rate. I was open-minded about the issue and was really interested in why my companion was so passionately involved in campaigning against RT. My openness was misinterpreted as being against the aims and objectives of FINNRAGE and my scientific background condemned me anyway, no matter what I said, or so I felt at the time. I was accused of perpetrating similar splits among feminists around RT as has happened with the pornography debate in the States.

I was astounded at this allegation, feeling that I was attempting to engage a sister feminist in why she had chosen RT as her political priority whereas I, who had done laboratory research in genetic engineering and although keenly interested in this field, had not chosen it as my political priority. It was more an attempt at an analysis of why one chooses one's political priorities, self-reflective on my part and was certainly not an attack on her. However, although this is a personal anecdote, I have subsequently met a similar response in other women who condemn one as anti-feminist almost, if one is not as adamantly against reproductive technologies as they deem appropriate.

Having been born and brought up in a country where women's reproductive role in life is very effectively controlled without the need of any technology whatsoever, I do have some misgivings about the current high priority given by some feminists to campaigning against reproductive technologies. That country is Ireland and the Catholic Church there knows very well how to control people's sexuality and women's reproduction. Unmarried mothers and lesbians alike take the boat and plane to England, to have abortions and/or to live in a slightly more liberal society. Ireland is now the first, and to my knowledge, the only country in the world to have a right to life of the foetus, (or 'the unborn'), equal to that of the mother, written into the constitution in 1983, by referendum in a supposedly democratic society although the turnout at the polls was less than half the electorate.

Back home in Ireland recently, I was intrigued by the response to reproductive technology at the recent International Congress on Women held in Dublin, in July, which I attended. Several well-known western academics, among them Hilary Rose and Joan Rothschild, who have worked and written in the field of women and science, although not renowned for their stance on reproductive technology, felt compelled, almost it seemed to me, to make statements on the *dangers* of reproductive technologies in order to maintain their credibility as feminists on the issues of technology and women. Yet, Madhu Kishwar, from India, where reproductive technology, in the form of amniocentesis, is actively and widely practised, in her paper to the conference, explained how she would not ban the use of this technology but would use other methods to combat the societal pressures which make the birth of girl children such a liability. And Krishna Ahooja-Patel, from the Dominican Republic, in her contribution as a panel member, expressed amazement at the concern at the Congress about reproductive technology when technology in the workplace causes far more disease and problems for more women worldwide that RT. 'Why was this not our concern too?', she asked.

Having worked for many years in the area of women, science and technology, I am concerned with how and why women react to, perceive and challenge science and technology. Last year I ran a course entitled Risks and Benefits – Women Take On Science. When we asked the women who came what they were interested in and what they wanted to discuss, not one woman in the class mentioned RT, although nutrition, water pollution and nuclear power were mentioned. A friend of mine had to close a class for women specifically on RT because not enough women came to the class.

Why this lack of interest? I cannot be that women do not know what RT means, some aspects have been making the newspaper headlines for several years now and it has been featured in women's magazines and in TV soap operas. I suspect that there are many reasons for this but perhaps one of them may be that women, although knowing about RT do not feel that it is the threat to them that some feminists think.

Are these students, ordinary adult women, right in their disinterest? Are those feminists who claim passionately that RT poses major dangers for the continuation of woman as part of the species Homo Sapiens right in their analysis? Are those of us who are ambivalent about the dangers of RT, feeling that patriarchal society will continue to use whatever comes to hand as a means of controlling women, that there are more powerful societal pressures in action than RT, right in ours?

Surely what we need is more 'solid, factual information to give women a basis on which to judge the technology ourselves' as Marge Berer advocates. There is a variety of opinion about RT as I have indicated earlier. I hope women will be moved to read Marge Berer's article if only because of the controversy she has created. We need more opinions and articles about science and technology. We need to explore more, find out exactly what is happening, what women think and experience about RT, even if, or especially if, it does not match our preconceptions.

As a feminist, trained as a scientist and working as a technologist, I have never wanted other women to accept my opinion solely because of my background. I have answered Marge Berer's question, 'Can those of us who are daunted by science and technology and its obscure language save ourselves gruelling work by accepting (others) opinion rather than forming our own?', by working long and hard, running classes and projects, to help women form their own opinions. This does involve learning some science perhaps but also unlearning some myths about science, that it is all powerful and intrinsically destructive to women, more so than any other tool of patriarchal control of women by men. Our analysis of science and technology as feminists is not so far advanced that we can close off debate at this early stage.

The essentialist theorem:
Reproduction = Women's bodies
Technology = Male Power
Therefore RT = Male control over women's bodies
QED

is a dangerous proposition.

In sisterhood,
Mary Jennings

LETTERS

Demand for an inquiry

Dear *Trouble and Strife*,

Camden Unemployment Action Centre Funds have been frozen. According to the centre's co-ordinator Mick Gavan this is because Camden Council are using allegations of financial mismanagement, racism and sexism to justify this action and a possible closure attempt. He claims that the allegations are a smear campaign by political opponents who want to close the centre down.

A number of women who fought to develop women's day events on a regular weekly basis, faced persistent harassment and intimidation. Thuggish reactionary and sometimes openly fascist elements were not only allowed to use the centre, but got away with racist and sexist violence. This included the fascist charged with the murder of the Asian waiter Abdus Sattar.

Dorothy El Muracy, who had been especially active in organising women's day events was threatened with physical violence, told she had 'No fucking rights in the centre' and was called a "Dirty fucking lesbian". The attacker threatened to punch her in the face, then picked up a chair to smash over her head. Whilst Dorothy was under attack, the co-ordinator Mick Gavan sat smirking, he only intervened at the last minute. This has been his attitude on all occasions where women and others have been threatened or attacked. He has defended the attackers at management meetings. In fact, he has pandered to their reactionary attitudes and made use of their prejudices to divide unemployed members, silence any political opposition or initiatives he didn't control. Mick Gavan was repeatedly told by management to abide by equal opportunities policy and support women's day, in fact at one centre members meeting he used his casting vote as chair to try and close down women's day.

A number of women's groups and individual ex-unemployed members have boycotted the centre because of this serious situation. This struggle existed *long before Camden proposed any cuts! None of the women want to see the centre closed.* We want to see a *proper investigation.*

We want effective anti-racist and anti-sexist policies established.

No fascists in unemployed centres. The right of unemployed women to organise themselves. Gavan sacked from his job for encouraging racism violence and sexism in the centre.

Dorothy El Muracy,
c/o Camden Women's Bus,
2nd Floor, 4 Wild Court, London WC2.

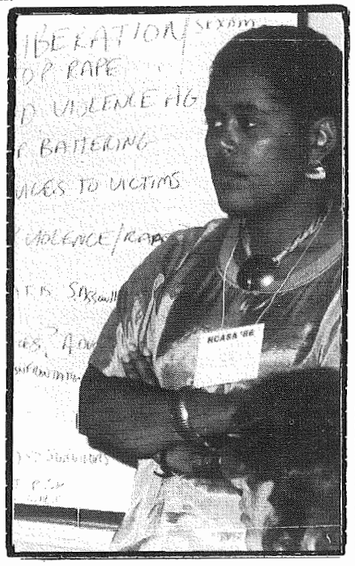
Coalitions, Leadership and Power

Beth Ritchie is a member of the Women of Colour Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and co-ordinates the Victim Intervention Project in East Harlem, New York. In this interview with Liz Kelly she argues that coalition building involves re-ordering power within organisations and that feminists need to reconsider the issue of leadership.

Liz Kelly: *Can you explain how the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) has managed to become an organisation which reflects and deals with diversity?*

Beth Ritchie: I think you really do have to look at the history of our organisation to understand that – why now, at least when you go to a conference, NCADV looks like it represents the diversity of women who are battered. NCADV looks more diverse than the battered women's movement looks and is probably more diverse than local programmes and state coalitions. I think that is because of the structure of Task Forces.

It was about three years after NCADV started that Women of Colour came together at one of the meetings to say to the organisation that their needs and the experiences that they had as workers in shelters, as well as battered women weren't being represented. The organisation responded by developing a resolution, that at every meeting of the national organisation, at every steering committee meeting and every conference, there would be a certain representation of Women of Colour – I think it was 25%. So the goal was to have 25% Women of Colour at any gathering of the organisation. The second part of the resolution was that a Women of Colour Task Force would be developed that would meet separately in conjunction with the organisation, to specifically address the issues of Women of Colour. This Task Force was fully sanctioned by the organisation, meaning that they would have time to meet, resources allocated to the work of Women of Colour, and also that the organisation would take on the responsibility of doing anti-racism work.



DIANA KLEIDON

That was the first Task Force. The second one was the Lesbian Task Force, following the same ideology that there would be separate time to meet, resources allocated so that organising in the lesbian community would mean that more lesbians would be represented at the national level as well as in local programmes and also that the organisation would take on work around homophobia. A similar history is in the Formerly Battered Women's Task Force. Those are the three task forces that look at the needs of women who are on the steering committee who otherwise might not be represented. Then there was concern about children's needs not being represented by NCADV and those of rural women. The development of the Child Advocacy Task Force and the Rural Task Force have a slightly different history, but still they had the purpose of making sure that the needs of children and rural women were involved in organising an end to violence against women.

So today there are five task forces. At our last conference in 1986 we heard lots of other groups asking to be recognised as Task Forces. In the year since the conference it seems that the prostitute group and the older women's group are probably the next to be formerly recognised, with the exception of the Jewish women's which I think was confirmed at the last steering committee meeting. The purpose of Task Forces is to make sure that those women are represented on the steering committee, in the national organisation, as well as to go back into communities and organise so that the issue of violence against women is raised in places which the mainstream white feminist movement and organisations might not have access to.

LK: *Does this type of organising come out of discussions in the States about how to build coalitions?*

BR: Yes, although I think it needs to go a little further. I think the idea is that the way you build diverse coalitions is to equalise power. You have to build that into the structure of the organisation not just Have a few more Women of Colour on the steering committee, but have an organised group of Women of Colour there. My sense is that you could have 25% Women of Colour on the steering committee, but you are more likely to create change if you have five Women of Colour who are organised in a structure which is given power. I think what Task Forces do is build into the structure of an organisation a way for groups to have power. It's different from a model of integration – just having lots of diverse people there. They reorder power – because Task Forces have a vote at the national level and they have resources specifically allocated to their work. It's a model of autonomous organising and then coming together to work as coalitions, as opposed to just integrating. That's what makes the difference, and I think that is what's not necessarily happening in the battered women's movement at the state and local level yet.

The other thing I think is important is that NCADV over the last three years learned how important it is that Task Forces not be set in competition with one another. For a long time all of the Task Forces met at once. So if you happened to be a child advocate who was also a Woman of Colour who was also a lesbian you had to choose one of those Task Forces to go to. As opposed to being able to fully participate in all of the different Task Forces that meet the needs of the constituency that you represent. I think the other thing Task Forces do is provide a support function for those who feel not as welcome and or as recognised during steering committee meetings. So more women have access to being representatives and more access to the National Coalition because they feel more support.

My sense of building coalitions is a way to have lots of people join in social change efforts and encouraging diversity through some sort of structure. What coalition building says to us is that we want lots of people involved. We want everyone to come with their important issues, their priorities, their experience to a common place from which we can then define our work differently. What that means is that if everybody comes with their priorities and their experience then we are going to have to do some negotiating when we are together about what direction to take. I think when organisations build in a commitment to diversity, that's when we are building a coalition. Otherwise what we say is, come everybody join us on our agenda, and do work that we say needs to be done. As opposed to really looking for diversity – not superficially but diversity through true struggles and truly different life experiences.

If I were to use the example of women of colour, historically building diversity has meant that Women of Colour are asked to join white organisations, work on white issues, in a white way. Coalition building means we find out what the issues, needs and strategies are for Women of Colour and we do the same asking of information of white women and we put it all together and find out what is common and what we can build upon for a common agenda. That we recognise that by doing this not all of everybodies issues are going to be addressed at the same time, but that is less important than the strategy of working together to try and create some change.

Coalition is one of the choices

What we also have to recognise is that coalition building is one strategy, it's not the only strategy. There are times when coalitions work and there are times when we have to work separately and autonomously on different issues. It becomes a political choice that we make at any given time. I think if people really see it as a choice to work in a coalition on an issue at any particular time then they don't feel as frightened. It doesn't feel as threatening to give up total control of work if you know that there are other times when you might have control because you are working alone. So I think what coalition means is that it is harder work, but in my thinking it is better work because it brings together and structures diversity; not in a tokenising, superficial way but in a way that requires a really deep commitment to involving lots and lots of people. It's much harder to work that way but I believe it's the way to create much broader change in a way that's much more inclusive.

LK: *Is it the case that within US feminist coalitions you have an agreement to disagree so that the coaliton isn't threatened by conflict?*

BR: I guess it is built into a notion of how coalitions work that there is not going to be constant agreement. And that that isn't in fact the goal – agreement, rather the goal is to unify and find some common way to work together. My sense is there has to be some agreement on what the purpose of a coalition is, in terms of agreeing on particular strategies or priorities at a given time. The agreement would be a balance, that there needs to be an emphasis on certain groups and certain issues at some times, the balance is that at other times other issues get the full attention of the group. So yes, there is an agreement to disagree so that doesn't threaten the coalition – in fact that is coalition and it enhances coalition. Clearly the issue of power comes in here because you can say let's agree to disagree and the same people always don't get what they want addressed. So one of the important things that coalitions have to do is build in a process for equalising power, especially if it is bringing together diverse groups. The diverse groups come, by definition from unequal power bases. So I want to be careful about this agreeing to disagree – an inherent part of working in coalitions is finding ways of equalising power so that the same group aren't always in disagreement with the coalition.

Diversity is not automatic

LK: *You've talked about Task Forces as one way of encouraging diversity in feminist organisations, are there other factors we should be looking at?*

BR: Diversity is not an automatic way for us to live. Most countries, communities and organisations are segregated. Segregated not only in terms of race but in terms of class, sexual identity, life experience, political affiliations and so on. Our challenge to organisations is to look at that seriously and figure out whose not here yet, and to think of ways organisationally to bring them in here. It might mean that we have to move. In other words, it doesn't mean just bringing women with less resources into a middle class organisation – it might mean that people who are part of the middle class organisation having to go and work physically in a different place, as well as an emotionally different place working with people who have different experiences. It doesn't mean that Women of Colour come in to colour up a white organisation – a white organisation has to change organisationally so that women of coloure are able to be a part of that as a working group. So when we think about being more inclusive we think about what

we have to change organisationally, as well as what we need to change attitudinally. It's not thinking how we need to change other people to be like us, but rather how we have to change so that inclusiveness is automatic, rather than something we have to constantly think about.

We've done some work trying to get groups to think what inclusiveness really means. It really means taking on an appreciation and a commitment to the struggle of other people's lives. In one session we produced a whole list of who we would want to be included and there were 25 groups who weren't here yet with this organisation working. It involves everything from learning different languages, changing surroundings, to meeting at different times, providing child care – all these things structurally and organisationally. It also means attitudinally to say that what women can bring to us we accept and we value, we don't measure or judge the differences in terms of better or worse, more or less, intelligent not so intelligent, committed not so committed, hard working not so hard working. We don't make judgements on differences but accept them and use them to enhance our work. So those are the attitudinal things that also go into a model of diversity that's inclusive, rather than the exclusive forms of organisation, which are so easy, in fact, to create.

LK: *Was it just the establishment of Task Forces or was it also shifts that happened amongst white women that facilitated the change in NCADV?*

BR: It was both – it's a parallel struggle. If it's a question of involving Women of Colour, if you only do anti-racism work then you don't create organisational change, but then organisational change will only work if you work on anti-racism. So there are parallel pieces of work that have to happen. More often what happens is that white women will work on racism and there won't be any efforts to organise Women of Coloure. So they still remain, maybe a less racist, but nonetheless a white organisation. I think there is real need for doing both anti-racism work and figuring out how to become multi-cultural at the same time. The establishment of Task Forces or some organised group that has real power in the organisation is vital, along with some power that has to do with accountability. For example, I don't think white women should be doing anti-racism work without some form of monitoring by Women of Colour. However the change is created, it really has to do with white women giving up power in organisations. I think it's a really different question for lesbians, if there is not a recognised presence in an organisation. It is really very difficult to open your arms and give up power when it is so unsafe to actually take power. So I think organised groups with recognised power really is the answer.

A new sense of leadership?

LK: *One of the things that really interested me at the NCADV conference was how you talk about leadership, there seems to be a very different sense of what that means than say here in Britain.*

BR: I think we talked about that in the context of the Leadership Institute for Women and the kind of training that we were doing. Leadership has for feminist organisations been considered such a negative term because it is so associated with patriarchy. We were really trying to think of a model of leadership that has a more organising sense to it. So that leadership was not defined by a person or by a position but more by a set of activities that lots of people could have access to. In that you could recognise lots of women's abilities and lots of women's contributions and therefore almost by definition you would have a more diverse group of women being recognised as leaders. The model of leadership that has been put forward before is much more restrictive so that only those with privilege, which is usually white, middle-class women, were recognised.

I think if we were going to try to define leadership, we would say it is not only the ability to instruct, lead or plan work within an organisation, but it is more to organise lots of people to assume roles that are necessary for making social change. Those roles include public, highly recognised and supported ones and others that are less public, less affirmed but are equally important. We really try to give due credit to the wide range of things that women do when they are assuming leadership. It includes addressing conflict, problem-solving, doing lots of work, asking hard questions, keeping an organisation true to its mission, having a vision, as well as public speaking, writing a proposal, fundraising and that sort of thing. We see leadership as an organising function and believe that the best leaders are those that pass on leadership and enable the involvement of lots and lots of women. So we have a less rigid or traditional notion of leadership. One that is inclusive rather than exclusive, involves lots of women rather than a few with the attributes or resources that traditionally lead women to take on those roles. We think this is new and different sense of leadership. We have recognised that in many ways our title is a misnomer – when people think of leadership training they think about things which are much more skillsy, whereas we focus on organising.

If we think of leadership as more a potential for organising and involvement, with a more inclusive model then we can think about more diverse leadership. Task Forces fit into that because then they support a woman who is assuming a leadership role or leadership activity or giving leadership guidance to an organisation so that she isn't set up – seen as either selling out her constituency group or not able to fit into the mainstream leadership style.

Challenges for white feminism

LK: *You've been in Britain for almost a month now. What are the main differences for you in feminist organising – particularly for Black women?*

BR: I don't know that it feels so different – I haven't thought about it much. It doesn't feel so different except in terms of the real sense of distance of Black women from white feminist organisations. Part of this might be linked to my experience working in NCADV rather than the experiences of most Black women in the US. Except I think it might be a difference in the battered women's movement. Most Women of Colour working in battered women's programmes feel that there is more possibility for multi-cultural organising there, at least than in most of the other parts of the world that we walk in. I think for me it is because of my experience with NCADV and the women who are affiliated with NCADV. It is not a tokenised exploitative involvement, I really believe that more than any where else, although it's certainly not 100%, there is concern about being a diverse organisation and a diverse movement. I haven't heard that very much from Black women over here. I think that's probably because Black organisations are different – the problems they are facing in their communities are different and probably because the white feminist movement is different here.

The reason I say it's not so different is the thing that I think is similar is that Black women tend to organise more in community based organisations than in women's organisations. I think that's been quite clearly the way that Black women feel that they can create change. So that if there is going to be involvement of Black women in national organisations and local programmes here it will be because those groups turn to the leadership of community based organisations, where there are women who have been working on lots of issues but in community based organisations which may be male dominated. This poses a challenge for women's organisations and groups to work out how to inter-face with those women who come to the same problem from a different perspective. It is more an organising perspective which would probably enhance the work of local programmes.

I think the other difference I felt here that you could talk about is everybody being lumped into one category. I think that is ultimately disempowering to the people in that category, because it leaves them without a sense of differentiation that I think is really important. It ultimately leaves them more competitive against one another for something – I don't know if it's a sense of power or a sense of difference – without definition almost. It's important to think through how the full cultural expression that People of Colour have, the religious, language, historical and political differences can emerge. *Then* you'll have a strong presence of Women of Colour. I don't really know how to do it when everyone feels really saddled and misrepresented by the label Black. *No-one* I have talked with is happy with everyone being called Black – so that's another challenge. □

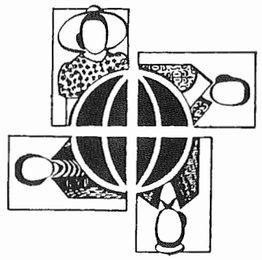
For A Song

These articles by Tono Haruhi, Tsukamoto Yumi and Iyori Naoko analyse the changing patterns of the sex industry in Asia; from servicing the US military, to sex tourism, to importation of women into Japan. They point out the increasing official legitimisation of the sex industry due to the part it plays in economic growth.

MILITARY OCCUPATION AND PROSTITUTION TOURISM
by Tono Haruhi

I was born in a small village near Sasebo, and spent my childhood in Yokosuka before Japan's economic growth. From the nearby hills we could see the American military base, and the presence of prostitutes on the base was quite common. Seeing the human rights of Japanese women violated by the American military wounded my childish national pride, and that anger later caused me to turn to the problem of prostitution tourism in Asian countries today.

In the course of my research on prostitution tourism, I came across one fact which linked all of those countries. It had to do with American military aggression in Asia during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Prostitution zones were established and then expanded through Rest and Recreation (R&R) centres and, after the withdrawal of US troops, these zones became areas for prostitution tourism. Today, wherever the US military goes, they have women on their bases. From spring through summer of last year I visited prostitution zones on bases in the Philippines, Thailand and Hong Kong, and I saw that the rise and fall of prostitution went hand in hand with American military strategy in Asia.



Logo of WISAP (Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines)

Rest and Recreation

When the Vietnam war escalated and American forces were making great efforts to infiltrate Asia, R&R centres were built for soldiers in Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Korea and Taiwan. In order to relax and enjoy their short vacations after gruelling combat, these soldiers squandered their dollars on the momentary pleasures of Asian women flown over on warplanes to these zones. In Saigon, a centre of R&R activity, there were 400,000 prostitutes. Those women were chased from their homes on farms into Saigon by the "strategic village" policy, and sold their bodies for from one to three dollars a night.

With the end of the war came the end of prostitution on the bases in Vietnam, but the 7th Fleet's home port, Subic Naval Base, and the R&R centre in Olongapo in the Philippines remain the largest base for prostitution in Asia. Separated from the base gate by a small river, 500 go-go bars, night clubs, hotels and the like are crowded together. When night falls, the American soldiers come out from the bases into town to make their selections among women and girls, some barely past childhood. In Olongapo, there are a total of 7000 "hospitality girls" and prostitutes who, in exchange for weekly checkups for venereal disease. obtain licences from the city. These women come from the most destitute areas of the Philippines such as Leyte or Samar, and they sell their bodies for $15–20 per night. The entire economy of Olongapo depends on dollars spent on this sex industry, along with the labour of some 20,000 Filipinos employed at the base.

Japan, too, is not without its ties to Olongapo. Prostitution tourists make visits and Japanese construction companies have contracts to build bases in Olongapo; Kawasaki Heavy Industries has its shipyard adjacent to the base.

Consumption culture

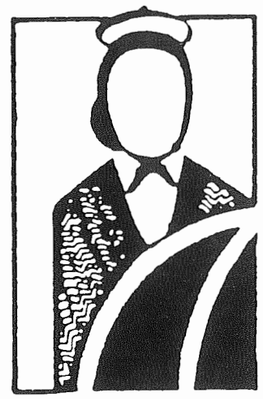
Nakhon Ratchasima, which was at the time of the Vietnam war the largest US air base in Thailand, is quite different from Olongapo. It is located at the entrance to the north-east region, the poorest area of Thailand. Most of the shops are now closed down, but it is easy to imagine the time when the bars and massage parlours were open for business. They line both sides of a big, wide road, their paint chipped, and their neon signs broken. This street is like a momento left behind by the US army. There are no cars and few people; only rickshaws roll up and down the street in the blazing sun. "Consumption culture", which is more peculiar to military bases in general than to America in particular, forced its way through this quiet farming village like a flood. In its wake, it left not only the town in ruins, but the huge base itself: given over to the Thai airforce, it was never used, and weeds grow thick over the ground. The huge radar, now rusted, is only a dim reminder of the days when 100 bombers daily flew north to bomb Vietnam.

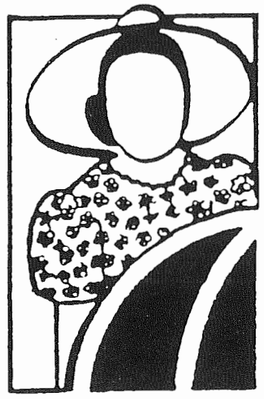
Most of the women who were here have gone south to Bangkok or Pattaya Beach in search of prostitution tourists. The women who remain work for Thai soldiers or those tourists who have wandered up from Bangkok. The ubiquitous massage parlours have names like Ginza and Osaka, showing clearly the extent of the contribution of Japanese men.
In Thailand, base prostitution now exists in a different form. Pattava Beach, which has degenerated into all sorts of decadence, has made its name as a mecca of prostitution tourism, but it is also an R&R centre for the 7th Fleet when it calls at port. Pattaya is called "the island of dreams"; here, soldiers have a wider selection of goods and women to buy than at Olongapo. For several days after arriving at port, the Midway troops carry on with their boisterous merry-making, and in five days they drop more than a million dollars! The women I met in bars eagerly await these Midway men who promise to return after one week.

The 7th Fleet stops at many ports in Asia. Wanchai in Hong Kong is one. The bar towns that arose during the Vietnam war have declined, but Hong Kong and Philippine women still service the US soldiers. In Kwajalein in the Pacific Ocean eleven-year-old girls sell their bodies to American soldiers, and in Sri Lanka, Australia, Korea, Okinawa, Yokosuka and other places where the 7th Fleet stops base prostitution continues. The form of prostitution on each base varies according to the social and economic situation of each country, but what they have in common is the sexual exploitation of Asian women by the US military.

Women as currency

There are many circumstances which oblige Asian countries to promote tourism. About the time of the Vietnam war, the Asian countries had begun measures to industrialise. In the 1970s, these countries, struck by the end of the Vietnam war and the oil crisis, turned their attention to tourism, an industry without smokestacks, in order to secure foreign capital needed for their industrialisation. In newly industrialising countries such as Korea and Taiwan, and now the Philippines and Thailand, tourism promotion has become a national policy. The mainstay of tourism in these countries is prostitution. Here, women are sacrificed for the sake of acquiring foreign capital. Industrialisation policies, military policies, and prostitution tourism policies in these countries are all promoted simultaneously.

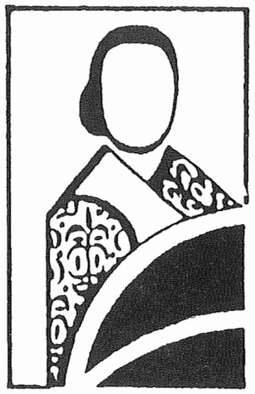




TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN: SEX TOURS COME HOME TO JAPAN
by Tsukamoto Yumi
trans. Martha Ono

As I wandered among the procurers who "import" women from all around Asia to work in the pleasure districts of Japan, I was buffeted by offhand remarks like, "I got this girl for a song and sold that one for a cool profit . . ."

Tens of thousands of Asian women have been lured to Japan under sham work contracts only to be subjected to the worst treatment that the sex slave trade offers. Some say that things are looking up because of the rapid decline in sex tours to Asian countries. But the underlying significance of this declaration is that the "North-South sex tour problem" has just assumed a new form, bringing the issue closer to home, where it is continuing to escalate to unknown heights.



There has been a sudden rise in the number of women entering Japan, corresponding to the liberalisation of international travel by ASEAN countries, starting with Taiwan in 1979. Entering on tourist or business visas, in fact they engage in unauthorised work such as bar hostessing or stripping. Soon they have overstayed their short-term visas.

The number of deportation cases has also skyrocketed. 70% to 80% of deportees are Thais, Taiwanese and Filipinos, and 93% of those deported for engaging in unauthorised work are women.

It is difficult to estimate the real number of foreign women working illegally in Japan, but the Metropolitan Police Department records for 1980 show that among Filipinas entering the country 8500 came on business visas and 9000 came on tourist visas. There are said to be between seven and ten thousand Korean women working as *kisaeng* (ostensibly entertainers who sing and dance in nightclubs, but often prostitutes) in "Korea Clubs" scattered throughout Japan. Add to these figures women from Taiwan and Thailand, and the number of Asian women now in Japan easily reaches the tens of thousands.

"Young Thai girls were being auctioned off left and right at knock-down prices before my eyes. I couldn't stand to watch it." A male journalist I know thus described the slave trading on Showa Avenue in Ueno, Tokyo. In recent years, the row of business hotels lining a corner of this street has become an auction block for human bodies. The journalist infiltrated behind the scenes and reported, "Dealers came from all around — Nara, Osaka, the Kansai area. The highest bid was ¥750,000 (about US$3,000) for six months' service, but one little black girl went for only ¥200,000 (US$800)."

How did these women get here? The route from Thailand used to take two basic forms: a Japanese scout would go and find recruits, or enterprising women aspiring to advance their financial conditions would come to Japan on their own. Recently, however, a new figure has appeared on the scene: the Thai agent who procures and brings women into Japan.

Behind the scenes, however, the real masterminds of the Asian sex traffic are organised crime syndicates. According to officials at Narita International Airport, between January and October 1981, 535 people with gangster connections departed from Narita on smuggling operations to buy women and contraband.

While the dealers are making huge profits, most of the women receive relatively little for their work. A report published by the Ministry of Justice on service fee income levels indicates that 80.6% of them receive less than 3 million yen (US$12,000) per year. This figure can be further divided as follows: 10.8% receive 2 to 3 million yen, 20% receive 1 to 2 million yen, 11.2% receive ½ to 1 million yen, and 10% get less than ½ million yen. Those who work without any pay at all constitute 28.6% of the total.

Facts like these make it easy to see the "crime" in "organised crime" and who the victims are. Would the same treatment be given to Japanese or Westerners? And yet tens of thousands of Asian women are being bought, imported and sold as cheap sex commodities. These women suffer the compound curse of being Asian and being female, which justifies whatever treatment they get in the eyes of those involved in their exploitation.

International Trade Relations and Sex Trade

The homelands of these thousands of women are in many cases the very countries which are struggling with rapidly mounting foreign debts.

For example, South Korea's foreign debt, exceeded only by Brazil's, Mexico's and Argentina's, is now 36 billion dollars (about 9 trillion yen). The annual interest payments alone total 6 billion dollars (1.5 trillion yen). In January of 1983 the country teetered on the brink of a long-feared default in payments.

The Philippines follows South Korea and Indonesia with a foreign debt of 17 billion dollars; Thailand owes 10 billion dollars. Moreover, as the world recession drags on and jobs cannot be found at home, as many as 600,000 Filipinos have gone off to some 60 countries in search of work. Thailand, for its part, has reduced its national budget by one place figure in each of the past two years.

These straitened circumstances push more and more women out of their countries to work as prostitutes abroad.

Korean *kisaeng* come to Japan with their government-issued "entertainment licences" in hand. After training them for two or three weeks in impromptu singing and dancing, the government administers a test and issues the licenses.

However, as a Korean journalist stationed in Japan confirmed, "The monthly wages from the Korea Club, depending on the contract, are remitted directly in won to the woman's parents or family in Korea. The only cash the woman herself sees is a meal allowance of ¥1,000 to ¥1,500 (US$4 to US$6) per day supplied by the production company that manages her contract. But almost all the women are already in debt to the management for advances made in preparation for the journey. Who can pay back a debt out of a meal allowance? About all that leaves is prostitution."

The seven to ten thousand *kisaeng* scattered around Japan get about ¥200,000 (US$800) per month. Add to this prostitution earnings, and the total figure can have a substantial impact on the national debt hanging over South Korea.

The journalist continues, "The government recruits prostitutes and licenses them. This can only be seen as government-controlled prostitution for the purpose of foreign income."

Japanese Economic Aggression

The encouragement of international prostitution by Asian countries is in large part due to Japanese economic aggression. Considering the relationship between the Japanese national economy and the rest of Asia, Japan's profits from the one-sided robbery of Asia's wealth stand out in stark relief. This calculated exploitation includes taking advantage of the "nationalised prostitution" of despotic governments through the massive importation of Asian women as the cheapest sex objects on the market. Sexual exploitation and economic exploitation are two sides of the same coin, the interplay of which is intensifying the sex traffic problem in Asia.

These women streaming into a strange land follow in the footsteps of Japan's own unfortunate *karayuki-san*, women who set out for lives of prostitution in Southeast Asia, Australia, India and even Zanzibar around the turn of the century. Transcending time and national boundaries, the poverty of women continues to be exploited.

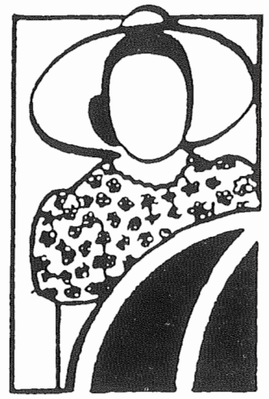
SICK AND TIRED OF JAPAN

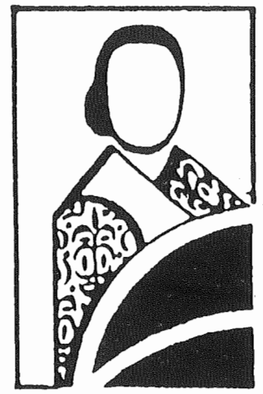
by Iyori Naoko
trans. Martha Ono

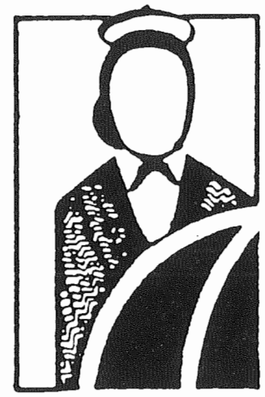
A report based on interviews with fifteen Filipina entertainers working in and around Tokyo:

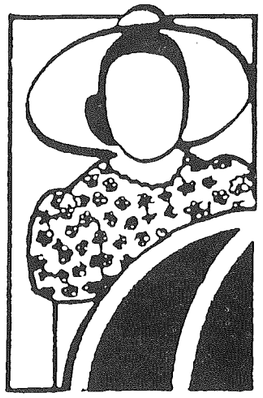
Southeast Asian women who work as hostesses and entertainers in the Tokyo area often live in very cramped quarters. The women I met live in apartments or houses owned or rented for them by supervisors, the owners of the nightclubs where they work. Usually these places are off on back streets, behind railroad tracks, next to parking lots or fields, hidden from view. Often the apartment is perched over a seedy diner, mahjong parlor or shop, accessible by a steep, narrow stairway in the back. At times, as many as ten women are jammed into a one-room apartment (3 by 4 metres square with a 2-spare-metre kitchen), without even enough bedding to go around. The only furnishings to speak of are a TV set (to practice Japanese songs for work), a table and a couple of chairs discarded by the bar. Clothes hanging from curtain rods clog the windows.

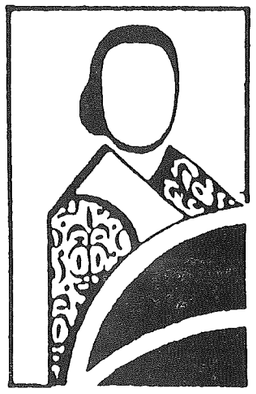
The women I interviewed received a meal allowance of ¥1,000 (about US$4), but they made do on ¥2,000 a week in order to save the rest. Their wages are withheld until they change bars or until just before they leave the country, so living and clothing expenses must come out of these savings. Extra money from tips is soon spent on gifts for family and relatives back home: cameras, watches, radio-cassette players, and whatever else they can carry back with them. One woman told of how once when she was working in a rural town, she lived in her supervisor's house, so instead of a meal allowance, she was provided with only one meal per day. In conditions like these, it's not hard to see how women are soon reduced to tactics like getting customers to order choice dishes just so they can eat on the job, or even to prostitution as a











means to get extra money.

Home life here, which begins at 6.30 am upon return from a night's work at the club, means simply eating a fast breakfast and going to bed. Getting up around 2.00 pm, there is just enough time to eat a combination lunch/dinner, bathe, do the laundry and other chores before it is time to get ready for work again. Around 6.00 pm, the boss comes to pick the women up in his van, its curtains drawn tight to block the view both in and out of the windows. The club opens at 8.00 pm, but the women have to be there an hour early to get dressed, practice some new songs and make other preparations. From opening time until 5.00 am, they must sing, dance and cater to customers without food or drink unless a customer orders something for them. Even if it's a slow night, resting on the job is not permitted. They must keep what customers there are from getting away by constantly smiling and prattling away in broken Japanese. After closing time there is still another hour of work before they can go home.

Wherever there are Japanese hostesses working at the same place there is a marked difference in wages. Japanese hostesses can make as much in six to eight days as Filipina entertainers receive for the whole month. Usually, the only days off are national holidays and, though they may alternate shifts on slow days, they average only one day off per month. If a woman gets sick or doesn't get along well at work, she's fired on the spot. Someone from the agency that brought her into the country and will suddenly appear at her apartment and escort her to her next assignment without any explanation. Going from job to job in this way, some women had worked at six different clubs in as many months.

There are also cases of direct physical abuse by their bosses. Kicking, beating and other mistreatment can be the penalty when a boss chooses to blame declining business on the bad attitude of the entertainers. On the other hand, some bosses single out favourites and keep them as mistresses.

Living like this, all that these women look forward to is finally going home. One young Filipina just kept repeating, "I'm sick and tired of Japan. I'll never come here again."

A HEIGHTENING APPETITE FOR ASIAN WOMEN
by Tono Haruhi

In 1979 Taiwan and then other ASEAN countries lifted their travel restrictions and the number of Asian women coming to Japan on tourist visas to work as hostesses, strippers and prostitutes increased. In the '80s more Filipina and Thai women began to arrive coinciding with a rise in general tourism from Korea and Taiwan. The Asian countries promote the export of their labour in return for foreign exchange to pay off their debts.

Most Japanese people think that the poverty in these countries itself causes this problem. However, poverty is not the only factor which brings these women to Japan. The purchasing of "sex" by Japanese men is also involved. Against this background of "demand", Japan's sex industry still has need of Asian women, especially Filipinas, in the business of buying and selling women; a business which is prospering today.
My interest in the Asian women who are exploited in the Japanese sex industry began when I overheard a conversation in a coffee shop between a promoter and a manger of a bar who hires Philippine women as hostesses in 1983. The manager had asked the promoter to get some Philippine women for his friend, an owner of a coffee shop so that she could make more money by extending her business hours till 2.00 am.

"You can't earn much by serving 280-yen coffee, even if you sell 100 cups a day," he said. "The owner said she would give them accommodation, though I told her they'd make the rooms dirty. I don't know if she will make them prostitutes."

I was able to learn about their recruiting methods. A Philippino promoter gets some women together in Manila for his Japanese promoter to pick out the ones with the best looks and bodies. "The younger the better," he said. "Women over 25 are only good as prostitutes."

A promoter may visit the Philippines up to 30 times a year, sometimes staying for only three days. Recruiting there is easy enough, the difficulty lies back here in finding bar managers, called *Hako* (containers). Managers can also earn commission by introducing other managers to promoters.

In the Philippines after a woman is targeted, her picture is taken and filed in a catalogue. Promoters exchange their catalogues and show them to customers, such as bar managers.

"This girl is a 17-year-old high-school student. She's got a terrific body, but is a drug addict," is a typical comment by the promoter when he shows the women's pictures in the catalogues.

"This one has bought a house on loan, so she badly needs a job."

"This one is not good-looking, but she's good natured. When the house is not full, she won't get any pay."

New Trend of Japanese Sex Industry

During the early 1980s, new trends in Japan's sex industry and in prostitution included the involvement of younger and inexperienced women, and women from other countries. By 1985 the number of businesses involved in the sex industry in Japan had increased as the industry grew in parallel with the rapid growth of the economy.

Expensive bars prospered from businessmen on expense accounts, and men went to the sex districts to forget the stresses caused by too much work. The media served up more pornography and information on bath-houses, while women were given more how-to articles on sex.

"Pink cabarets," which were cheaper than bath-houses, were also popular in the '70s, then strippers were in mode, with their acts becoming more and more lurid until it was customary for them to have sex with customers on the stage.

The sex industries in the '80s have changed drastically. First the media, particularly television, weekly magazines and sports journals, embraced pornography. Then coffee shops sprung up where women served without any underpants; peeping dives showed women masturbating; prostitutes rackets hid behind euphemisms such as dating clubs; even telephone sex became available through its own special club.

These fads made big profits in a short time. Crimes connected to prostitution reached a peak in 1959, then declined until 1982 when they started again to increase and in 1984 more than 10,000 cases were recorded.

Now corporate sex is in vogue. In 1983 a college girl established a "lovers' bank" which acted as a go-between for college girls and rich, middle-aged men. Around the same time the media transformed the image of prostitution from an industry controlled by the *yakuza* underworld to one accessible to ordinary, happy women who could dabble in it part-time for extra income.

The International Slave Trade Traffic

The influx of Asian women over the past decade has also influenced today's Japanese sex industry. About 100,000 Asian women are now working in Japan, though the exact number is unknown because many have remained here illegally.

In 1984, of the 7255 women investigated by police in relation to prostitution, non-Japanese women numbered 496, or 6.8% of the total. Of these, 90% entered Japan on tourist visas. The places out of which they worked as prostitutes were often snack bars or clubs, but the call girl system has also continued to operate (Table 2).

Working in the bath-houses requires highly specialised sexual massage techniques. As Asian women who come to work in Japan have not been trained in massage techniques, and as they are in Japan for only a short time, they are not able to work in the bath-houses.

Although an employer of these Asian women pays ¥250–300, 000/month per woman to the promoter, he then employs these women as the very lowest workers on the scale of women working in the sex industry. Nevertheless, for the same pay, Asian women are a better bargain for the employer, being young, able to dance and sing, wash dishes and perform other chores as well. In addition, they offer greater merchandise value. By providing them with a room and a small food allowance, they can work six months on a working visa. Receiving almost no days off, these women form a stable labour force, at the same time providing a solution to every employer's constant problem of a high turnover/absence rate, characteristic of workers in the sex industry.

Making use of Asian women as a commodity to be sold and bought has become a giant business for the Japanese sex industry. □

Pieces reprinted and edited from UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service *Female Sexual Slavery and Economic Exploitation: Making Local and Global Connections*, 1985. Acknowledgement to Asian Women's Liberation — Newsletters 3–6, 1980–84, c/o Shibuya Co-op, Room 211, 14–10 Sakuragaoka, Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan 150; *Ampo: Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, 1986, 18:2–3.

The Controversial Feminist

Whatever happened to feminist polemic? Dena Attar questions why feminist writing has come to mean fiction, poetry and personal accounts.

We need a feminist polemic. The dictionary defines 'polemic' as controversial discussion. I would define feminist polemic as writing which is for and about feminism, unashamedly persuasive and political.

We have such writing already, of course: in newsletters, magazines, and journals both internal to the Women's Liberation Movement and more generally available (*Wires, Spare Rib, Outwrite, Trouble and Strife, Feminist Review,* a few other nationally available titles and many more local ones), in anthologies of feminist writing usually taken from these journals, and occasionally in other full-length books brought out mainly by feminist publishers. Countless women have experienced the impact of such direct writing and found it useful in our personal lives, while the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) could hardly have existed without it. A lot of us can remember the effect of reading for the first time books and pamphlets which were full of anger but also gave us a sense of our own power – it could have been *The Dialectic of Sex, Sexual Politics, Against Our Will, The Female Eunuch, Redstockings' Feminist Revolution* (to name only those I have heard women of my generation single out as early influences for them) amongst many others. It does not matter what we think of those books now – ideas move on, we learn and change and we are hardly likely to read them again uncritically. The point is, they set something in motion. Yet such writing is still hard to find in spite of the success of feminist publishing ventures generally. Why?

Typing this at the last possible minute, ten months behind schedule, I certainly do not underestimate the problems women have to overcome before they can sit down to write anything at all. Still, it does strike me that women find it easier to start on a full-length novel (even if finishing one is another matter) than to attempt a short non-fiction article. I formed this impression at the conference which sparked off this article, where most discussion groups concentrated on the writing of fiction, poetry and autobiography, and I find it confirmed every time I go into a bookshop and see the range of books now appearing with a feminist imprint.

Feminist writing has virtually come to *mean* feminist fiction, poetry, and autobiography, rather than referring to the written versions of the political discussions going on in the WLM. Feminist ideas continually evolve through the activities and discussion of our groups, meetings, and conferences – but most of this is never written down. In other words, we lose a lot of our work, and ironically this is happening just at a time when there is a growing audience for feminist literature (though *Catcall* – a unique political journal of feminist controversy – folds, while *Women's Review* – inspired by the tremendous current interest in women's writing – opens). I want to consider here the particular hazards of political writing which deter us from putting our arguments and ideas down on paper – what happens in-between those moments of sudden insight in discussion, or after some revealing experience, when we feel we have something to say which we ought to communicate to a wider audience (promising to do it, even, as editors know) and the point when we give up the idea as impossible or not worthwhile.

Myths of objectivity

Before we can even begin to write we face the problem of form – how to set about saying what we want to say. Writing directly about your ideas and experiences takes a different kind of confidence from that required by women writers-as-artists: you may not have to worry about the artistic merits of your work, but on the other hand you are obliged to write as yourself. You have to own what you say. You are free to disown your ideas at a later date, of course, but you cannot deny that *was* once what you thought. This is a worse problem for us precisely because we are feminists, and we do not play the game of pretending to be neutral, objective, and uninvolved in what we write. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise in *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) do an excellent demolition job on the myth of objectivity which male academics in particular build up around their work. It can still be hard for us to break away from the impersonal essay/textbook model of writing, whether because we have been exposed to so much of it that we think it is the only 'correct' way to write serious non-fiction, or because it does provide a refuge for the writer, allowing her to keep a safe distance between her writing and herself.

There are now plenty of books which are *about* women as seen by social scientists, historians, anthropologists, and others writing as 'observers', which are not necessarily feminist books at all. They may indeed reveal that women are oppressed, although they are less likely to say that it is men who oppress us, but if they are written as academically respectable 'objective' texts, they are probably unable to make the reader feel that oppression matters. For that, we need writing with no pretension to objectivity, which is fully involved, as fierce, angry, and passionate as we want to make it.

The essay/textbook style is not the only one to be wary of, for the publications of other, non-feminist political organisations on the left offer us a different model. I have heard feminists saying they wished we had an equivalent paper to *Socialist Worker* and its counterparts to sell to women; I have also heard it said that we need a feminist *Capital*, a single authoritative text to wave (presumably) at our opponents. I disagree. I find the versions of its political writing which the mixed left produces for popular consumption – sometimes quite cynically – deeply disrespectful. In its worst form it treats the audience merely as a target for propaganda. As feminists, we have not only to include our own experience, but somehow leave room for the reader to include hers. We learn about our oppression through our own lives, not through simple slogans, and while we may want to challenge other women into debate and into re-examining their opinions or behaviour, for example questioning heterosexuality, we cannot ask that women accept feminist ideas passively. If the WLM goes on dealing in slogans it will go on excluding and alienating groups of women. Think for example of 'Free abortion on demand – a woman's right to choose' which formed one of the basic demands of the WLM in the '70s, and how long it took the Movement to reconsider it in the light of the different experiences of Black women, women from minority groups, and infertile women. As for needing the one right book which says it all, analyses every woman's oppression, and tells us what to do, I can hardly tell if I think it's a dream or a nightmare, but I cannot see how a movement founded on the experience and involvement, potentially, of all women could give birth to such a one-dimensional creature.

Throughout its history, in its efforts to create a non-hierarchical movement, the WLM has properly been wary of authoritarian creeds, demands, and manifestos, but as it gets harder to produce definitive political statements, the danger is that we will find it hard to make definite statements of a political nature at all. Whatever our doubts about the purpose of the seven demands, gradually adopted by the WLM in Britain at

various national conferences in the '70s, these demands at least provided a statement, admittedly limited, of what we wanted to change and of what we wanted for ourselves. If we make no such statements, it is much easier for our opponents to claim that feminism is merely a matter of dress and style, or that it only applies to a few women, or that we have already achieved everything we wanted.

Beyond personal accounts

Faced with the difficulties I have described, many women have found that an obvious solution is to adopt a personal and expressive form of writing, which fits in well with feminist theory and process generally – 'the personal is the political'. It is easier both to write and to read, but if the writer never generalises from her own experience, this can have the disadvantage of undermining the value of her statements. Personal writing can be extremely powerful in its own way, but it can also be dismissed more easily than the words of a woman who insists 'this means you too', particularly when separate individual accounts can appear to cancel each other out. The anthology *Why Children?* (The Women's Press, 1980) is an example of a collection of separate personal accounts of having or deciding not to have children which somehow never adds up to anything, so that I find it impossible to say what, if anything, the book contributes to the feminist debate about motherhood. Letters pages in journals can also give me a sense of clashing personal histories which never quite turn into a debate. A further problem of purely personal accounts is that they can be used in a token way, meaning that a one-off story implies a one-off experience and an exceptional woman. Sometimes the point we want to make may indeed be that our experiences differ, and that no one woman can represent another. But this should not be taken to mean that we have wholly different concerns – as if racism, violence, sexuality, could be issues for some women but not others. When a woman writes about experiences she has had which have not been shared by most of her readers – describing a specific religious upbringing, perhaps, or writing as an incest survivor – there will still be connections between the readers' experience and the writer's. It may be particularly important to spell them out, to stop readers assuming that because the writer's personal history seems completely different from theirs, she is not able or entitled to make comments relevant to other women's lives, even to those who don't share her experiences.

The political is after all more than the personal. We can learn a lot from telling our stories to each other, but as we can never hear every woman's story, that on its own is not enough. In any case, we do sometimes want to set out what we know to be true without limiting it to our direct personal experiences or qualifying it in any way. We have to take the next step towards creating a politics based on our experience of oppression and make brave, quite bald statements.

Words of prophecy

Feminism has produced a form of its own for expressing such direct political statements, a poetic-polemic where the writing itself claims our attention as much as the ideas swept along with it. I find it a mixture of ancient and new, with echoes of the Old Testament prophets. Reading the work of feminists experimenting with this form in their political writing – Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Andrea Dworkin, Susan Griffin – I am sometimes irritated at having to clear a path through to what they are actually saying. As a reader you are given more time to feel but less time to think. Perhaps it is no coincidence that many women I know who thought Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* beyond criticism when it was first published are now having second thoughts.

I am not saying, and I do not believe, that there is an ideal feminist form for political writing waiting to be invented, but I would argue that since anyone who writes has to make a decision about the form in which she writes, the least we can do as feminists is make sure we think about it consciously. The WLM has already produced guidelines we can use: steering us away from false objectivity, expecting us to acknowledge the contributions of other women, and above all *not* expecting us to be utterly sure of ourselves or to wrap everything up neatly.

Why activists don't write

If we get past the difficulty of finding the right way to write, there is another obstacle – can we phrase what we want to say 'correctly'? The idea of 'correctness' implies that there is some higher authority waiting to judge what we write. As we have become aware of oppressive forms of language, so feminists – mainly middle-class White feminists – have acquired a fear of inadvertently betraying themselves in speech or through the written word. I encounter these fears mainly in discussion with other women about proposed pieces of writing, but I also believe that some women stay silent altogether rather than risk criticism for saying or writing something that others may interpret as racist, heterosexist, imperialist, class-biased, oppressive towards disabled women or mothers, and so on. I do not wish to trivialise the serious study of language, or to dispute how important it is for us to take care when we write not to use offensive words and phrases. But we need a more open way of confronting one another and of keeping debate going. At the moment, we avoid a lot of possible confrontations, because some of us who are confident that we know the right words to use go unchallenged, while others of us, afraid of using the wrong ones, stay silent.

Words do not have fixed meanings, and when we pay obsessive attention to correct and incorrect vocabularies we are not necessarily changing what we think; we could just be learning a new set of rules. Meanwhile women who fear that they do not know the rules become discouraged, rather than thinking through or working out on paper their insecurities, while other women who feel that they do know, who may for example have been able to attend racism awareness courses, can become complacent. Rules which stop women from being articulate about their ideas and experience, which mark out exclusive groups from those not in the know, can hardly help us in developing and communicating feminist politics. From any number of examples I can recall two which seemed to me entirely unhelpful. One was the rule that you should never say 'girls', always 'women', because it is oppressive and trivialising to call a woman a girl – but a child of 8? The other was a whole set of rules invented by a group of women (wimmin, womyn) in defiance of patriarchal spellings and in particular aiming to avoid English word-forms which included the letters 'he' or 'men'. Women using the feminist variants communicated to each other, and to other women, that they belonged to an exclusive group of pioneers, but I could not and still cannot see that the variant spellings communicated much else about language and oppression. We need discussion rather than prescription, and we also need to deal more with what women say, not just with how they say it.

Poised to write, what do you do now about the worst fear of the lot – how will other women react when they find out what you really think? The writer is vulnerable – the difficulties I have just listed remind me just how vulnerable she is. Our most important source of help here is the support of other women to give us the courage and confidence to go ahead, which may sometimes mean seeking out women who are likely to agree with what we want to write. Women who set out to write explicitly feminist articles do not have the protection of a party line, or of a sense of academic detachment, or of a literary persona. There is also usually no money in it (though there may eventually be for someone else). But we need the written word because ideas get lost, are forgotten or distorted, because there are always new aspects of our oppression for us to understand and analyse, our strategies need changing, we get tired and pessimistic and want new sources of inspiration. So many good discussions go unrecorded, so many groups and campaigns leave hardly any traces of their existence, of what they achieved and of what they learned. We need to know about our successes and our mistakes. We need to know about our fears and doubts, we need to talk about being wrong as well as about knowing we're right. We need to criticise each other's writing without condemning, and to read and write without fearing to criticise. We can change the world, and a feminist polemic can help us to do it. We have a lot more to learn from each other than we can ever learn face to face in meetings. □

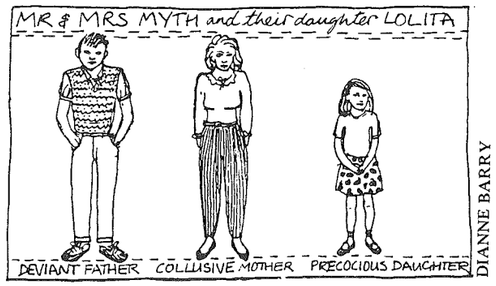
Reprinted from *In Other Words: writing as a feminist*, edited by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielson, 09 164681 2, paperback £5.95, published July 1987 by Hutchinson in association with the Explorations in Feminism Collective.

Getting Him Off The Hook

In the light of the current 'crisis' over sexual abuse, Carol Ann Hooper analyses the theories which inform professional responses to show how yet again women are being blamed for men's violence.

The Silenced Partner – Mother Blaming Systems in Child Sexual Abuse

The sexual abuse of children is not a new discovery. There have been earlier waves of public recognition, followed by periods of silence and denial, and research on incest dates back to the late 19th century and government report on sexual offences against children published in 1925 contained many of the facts that have recently been rediscovered, for instance that sexual abuse is a crime committed primarily by men against girls, that within the family father-daughter abuse is the most common form and that offenders come from all social classes. Feminists in the 19th century and again in recent years have developed an analysis of incest as male violence, part of a pattern of male dominance manifested also in rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence. The dominant analysis influencing current professional practice, however, focusses on disturbed family dynamics as the cause of sexual abuse and argues that both parents are equally responsible.



The denial or blurring of male responsibility is a recurring theme in the research. During the 1930s and '40s the "seductive child" got most of the blame, under the influence of psychoanalytic ideas. Later the introduction of the "dysfunctional" or "pathological" family, shifted the mother to a central "role" in father-daughter incest. Despite feminist criticisms of both the assumptions and the lack of evidential basis for the dysfunctional family analysis, at a recent conference devoted to developing a feminist professional practice, there was still considerable confusion over attitudes to and expectations of mothers.

There are a range of ways in which mothers have been and are blamed for father-daughter incest, derived largely from the patriarchal assumptions and professional ideologies of the researchers and clinicians involved. In criticising these I do not wish to deny that some sexually abused children and adult survivors are angry with their mothers for not meeting their needs for protection. But we need clearly to separate the abuser's choices over his behaviour from the responses of mothers to discovery or disclosure. And to remember that no woman should have to expect to protect her children from sexual abuse by the men in her family.

Collusion and failure to protect

The idea that mothers collude with father-daughter incest was constructed in a series of studies from the 1950s on which influenced by family systems theory, focused on the interpersonal dynamics of the family.

Based on small clinical samples, these studies start with a review of previous research, in which mothers' collusion is seen as part of the family pattern, and repeat this assertion at the end, whatever the mothers in their sample actually did. One study for instance notes that most women responded with separation to the discovery that their husbands were sexually abusing their daughters and still argues collusion, on the basis that very few reported their husbands to the police (Browning & Boatman 1977).

The term more commonly used to refer to mothers today is "failure to protect". This phrase derives from the child protection movement established in the late 19th century which incorporated a family ideology based on a clear sexual division of labour. In this model fathers provide and mothers protect and any failure in either function is attributed according to these roles. While women clearly do not always meet their children's needs when sexual abuse is disclosed due to their own distress, their fear of the abuser's violence, or their fear of losing the family, "failure to protect" usually refers to the mother's supposed "role" in the abuse, implying that for the child to be sexually abused at all the mother must have been at fault.

Abandoning her role as wife and mother

Focusing on the family dynamics, recurring themes since the 1950s have been: the sexual estrangement of husband and wife, the estrangement of mother and daughter, and role reversal between mother and daughter. An example of this approach summarised is:

> . . . the mother, then often plays a key role in whether incest occurs. By 'abandoning' her daughter in terms of not offering adequate parenting or protection and expecting that daughter to assume her responsibilities, she invites hostility and revenge from the daughter. By 'abandoning' her husband in terms of withdrawing from him sexually, she invites him to turn to the daughter. (Justice & Justice 1979)

"Abandonment" and "desertion" are common words, and usually refer to such activities as going out to work, being in hospital etc. The mother's role in fact comes down to absence (including death), and this analysis is sustained against an image of the mother's role in the family as ever present, ever servicing the needs of others, and with no needs or rights of her own. Ultimately mothers are responsible for preventing trouble in the family, and where trouble has occurred they must be at fault. That the sexual "needs" or demands of the father should be met within the family appears to be unquestioned.

Other questions that are rarely asked include: if there is sexual estrangement why? In fact many men continue sexual relationships with their wives (and other women) as well as abusing their daughters. If the mother and daughter are estranged, why? Does the father making the daughter keep secrets, threatening to kill her mother, for example, contribute to this? If the daughter is expected to perform her mother's duties, sexual or otherwise, who is it who expects this? And finally, if the mother is absent, for whatever reason, why does the father not take over the role of nurturing parent? Clearly such behaviour is not expected of fathers.

This sort of analysis simply reflects the excuses offenders give for their behaviour and comprises rationalisation rather than explanation. So fathers who are often competent men in other areas of their lives become helpless victims of their family circumstances. An influential article by Lustig et al in 1966 sums up this approach:

> Despite the overt culpability of the fathers, we were impressed with their psychological passivity in the transactions leading to incest. The mother appeared the cornerstone in the pathological family system.

While this sort of overt mother-blaming is less common today, the idea that mothers are active and fathers passive is still reflected in much of the language used. Women are described as "setting up" the conditions for incest by going into hospital, "keeping themselves tired". Actions concerned with their own needs tend to be presented as acts of deliberate neglect. Fathers on the other hand are described as "finding themselves" touching their daughters genitals, or as "cast into" the role of primary caretaker by unemployment and a working wife.

Does the mother know?

In this analysis the distinction between assuming that mothers play some causative role in father-daughter abuse, and suggesting

that their responsibility lies in knowing and not stopping it, is frequently blurred. This is largely because it is assumed that mothers always know, "at some level". Kempe & Kempe, pioneers of child abuse work in the USA, claim they have never seen an innocent mother. Where mothers claim they did not know, the irrefutable notion of "unconscious knowledge" is raised against them. The pattern and dynamics of sexual abuse in fact make it unsurprising that many mothers do not know initially, since the abuse may occur when she is away, at work, and the child is likely to be sworn to secrecy, and threatened with harm to herself and/or her mother if she tells. Many mothers looking back later feel they should have seen the signs, but so do social workers reflecting on cases they handled before they went on training courses to help them recognise child sexual abuse. In fact one of the problems some women experience in coming to terms with the sexual abuse of a child and in making appropriate decisions is that they never do know exactly what happened, but are often surrounded by conflicting messages. The abuser will probably deny it, the child may be afraid or too young to tell, and the professionals uncertain or uninformative – how then are mothers to know?

The dispute over the mother's "role" has little to do with evidence and everything to do with professional and patriarchal ideologies. This is illustrated by the response in a US professional journal to a study which made a rare attempt to present the first hand accounts of mothers in families where father-daughter incest had occurred:

> To turn a blind eye to the role of the mother . . . turns away from what is known about family systems as well as what is known about object relationships and the role of the unconscious in playing out past traumas in current reality. There is no empirical reason to think that such a destructive event as incest could occur in the family relationship field independent of any contribution on the part of the mother, whether conscious or unconscious, active or passive. (Ellenson, quoted in Johnson 1985)

Neither can there be any empirical reason to believe that mothers always know what is going on in the home, wherever they themselves may be.

Cycles of abuse

One of the most popular themes currently is the common statement that mothers whose children are abused have often been abused themselves as children, with the implication that some form of "intergenerational transmission" is at work. Since retrospective surveys suggest that 30–50% of women have been sexually abused as children it is not surprising that such a connection should exist. Such surveys are in fact likely to underestimate the real incidence since children often "forget" or block out memories of sexual abuse, only to remember them much later in life. The memories come back sometimes after long months of therapy, sometimes triggered by an event such as a TV programme on incest or close contact with someone else's experience of rape or sexual abuse (including a child's). It is highly possible that women who have experienced the trauma of discovering their child has been sexually abused are more likely to remember their own abusive experiences.

The "evidence" that mothers' own experience of sexual abuse plays a part in the sexual abuse of their daughters rests largely on one study, a survey of 500 "normal mothers" compared with 100 mothers whose children had been physically or sexually abused (called "abusive mothers" by the authors), which found that a history of sexual abuse was significantly more common in the groups of mothers whose children had been abused (Goodwin et al 1981). The explanation given for this connection is speculative, and relies on an inappropriate use of psychoanalytic concepts. (If psychoanalysis is about understanding individual subjectivity, surely it should not be used to explain survey results.) It is suggested that the mother "unconsciously recreates" a sexually abusive situation for her own child to resolve her own "repressed conflicts". While it is conceivable that our "repressed conflicts" affect situations where we are present, it is carrying the power of the female psyche to an extreme to suggest that it can account for the behaviour of men in our absence. The study also suggests that "victimisation of the mother, consequent frigidity in the mother, victimisation of the child" could be part of the connection, leaving the offender with a remarkably invisible role in his own actions and apparently unquestioned rights to sexual access within the family.

If women whose children are sexually abused are more likely to report experiences of sexual abuse themselves, this may in part be accounted for by the process of remembering. It may also be because the man who abused them was a member of their family and through this connection has access to their child as well. The term intergenerational transmission is sometimes used to refer to one man who abuses all the women and girls within his reach whatever their age. It is then argued that mothers who allow the man who abused them access to their child are passing on "victim roles". But they may allow him access because their own abuse is long past and they believe he has changed, because they were told it was something particular to them which caused their own abuse, because it is difficult to cut off from family relationships even when they have been abusive in the past. These things in no way comprise a desire to see their own children abused or an indifference to the possibility.

It is also sometimes assumed that women are made powerless to stop their children's abuse by their own childhood experiences, but women who were sexually abused themselves are often more than usually protective of their children, more likely to suspect abuse where others may not consider the possibility. And there are many other ways in which mothers are made powerless than this. For many women social isolation and poverty are the price to be paid for removing their children from an abusive father.

In the last analysis, the intergenerational transmission argument suggests that women who were sexually abused themselves are likely to marry abusive men and in this way are responsible for contributing to their daughter's sexual abuse. Since all the experts have not yet come up with any identifying features of sexually abusive men apart from their gender, one wonders how they expect women to distinguish so easily. No woman marries with the expectation that her husband will abuse her child. Even in the rare circumstance where she knows that he has abused a child before, may she not, as most professionals do, believe in the possibility of reform?

Cycle of abuse theories are popular both for child sexual abuse and domestic violence, despite the weakness of evidence to support them. The suggestion that "violence breeds violence" and is passed down through generations isolates the problem to a few deviant "multiproblem" families, legitimises professional attempts at "treatment" and diverts attention from structural factors of power and gender.

Family systems theory

The idea that the mother's "role" is of central importance in father-daughter incest is a post-war development, largely attributable to the development of family systems theory. Family systems theory grew out of psychoanalytic thought but extended the focus from the individual as a product of her/his own internal conflicts to viewing each person's behaviour as the product of interactional patterns within the group. It has various approaches, but the basic tenet adopted in the incest literature is that all members of the family contribute to family problems. This is an assumption, not a tested theory. On this basis, the non-participating or "silent partner" (the mother) is a part of the interactional patterns which sustain sexual abuse. Hence, the personality traits and behaviour of mothers become fair game however widely they vary.

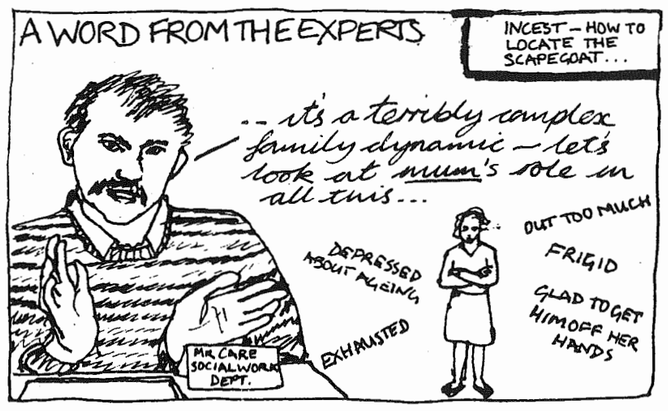
DIANNE BARRY

Family systems theory may be helpful with many family problems, but its applicability to child sexual abuse is highly questionable. The behaviour of abusers can often be traced back to patterns established in adolescence, the only way to explain the predominance of men amongst abusers (95%) is in terms of masculine sexuality and power, and there is increasing doubt about the possibilities for 'curing' offenders through therapy. Men who abuse their daughters often abuse other children outside the family as well. The family is simply the most common place where men have access to and power over children.

In therapy groups based on the family systems perspective, mothers are expected to look to their own childhoods and part in the marital relationship to discover their contribution to the father's abuse, although expression of their anger and a sense of betrayal is allowed as part of this process.

Patriarchy, violence and the feminist analysis of mothers' position

Men who sexually abuse their children are commonly also violent to their wives, although the current violence women are experiencing generally receives far less attention than their childhood experiences. Women in this position may be being beaten, raped and systematically psychologically abused themselves, and are often in fear for their lives, their options for protecting their children and themselves limited by lack of social and economic power. The feminist analysis developed over the last ten years has noted that sexually abusive men often treat their wives as well as their daughters as their sexual property, and that mothers are often victims themselves of domineering and violent men. Where they are unable to act protectively, they may be immobilised by fear if not torn by divided loyalties. Feminists have identified the way that the power structure of the family in a patriarchal society, sustains and supports father-daughter incest, and traps mothers in a powerless position. Sexual abuse is the product not of the pathological family, but of the patriarchal family, in which men who regard their wives as their sexual property are still supported in this by law, as well as by cultural constructions of masculinity.



DIANNE BARRY

There are limitations however to focussing exclusively on women's own victimisation for a feminist analysis. Where does this leave women who are not being abused by their husbands but have simply trusted them and been betrayed? Do women have to be victims as mothers of sexually abused children for us to exempt them of responsibility for their husbands' behaviour? We should be careful not simply to substitute another stereotyped "role" – the powerless mother – for the collusive mother. Although violence against women and children is clearly an expression of male control, women do not necessarily see themselves as powerless but may struggle to resist the control of men over their lives in a variety of ways.

In our anxiety to protect children from what seems the inevitability of male violence, feminists have sometimes run close to the arguments of family system theorists, suggesting a disturbingly similar 'monitoring' role for mothers, "God's police in the family" as Elizabeth Ward called it. For instance, Diana Russell, in an article identifying the high prevalence of stepfathers amongst abusers, suggests that women should be more careful about remarriage, that they should evaluate men's interest in their daughters:

> . . . observe the way they relate to them, avoid placing their daughters in vulnerable situations with them, warn their daughters about the problems of incestuous abuse, and work even harder that they otherwise might to establish a relationship of trust between themselves and their daughters.

We need to reject the whole notion of women's "role" in acts committed in their absence. The question should not be whether women are personally powerful or powerless in the family, but whether we treat the family as a unit or expect individual adults to be responsible for criminal actions in or out of the family. Sexual abuse is a crime, commonly extensively planned by an individual perpetrator. This fact is often obscured by the language of disease in which it is currently discussed – as a 'symptom' of family dysfunction, an epidemic or the subject of disputed diagnosis.

Holding men solely responsible for the choices they make about their own behaviour, we still need to understand women's responses to the discovery of child sexual abuse. I think we can better understand women's responses by focusing on their own trauma than through terms which see women only in relation to others – collusion (with the husband) or failure to protect (the child). Women whose children have been sexually abused, whether by their husbands or by another member of the family, often describe this as the worst thing to happen in their lives. One woman described her reactions to discovering her child had been abused as follows:

> My own experience . . . (was) to go into a state of shock . . . It is a horrible feeling of numbness as though the world has stopped still and mentally you can't function backwards or forwards . . . To be betrayed by the person you've trusted as a husband and father you can't really be expressed in words. To suddenly discover that everything you believed in was an illusion is no joke. There is nothing you can think of during your marriage that is remotely amusing or happy to console yourself with, because it's all been a sham. I felt totally inadequate as a mother and a person for not saving my children even though I didn't know it was happening. It's not a feeling you can shake off easily because so much importance and responsibility is placed on women as mothers and as wives.

Many women are profoundly threatened in themselves as well as having to make major decisions about the future of the child and their marriage. The pattern of reactions has been described as similar to that following a bereavement – denial, depression, anger, guilt and finally, for some, acceptance. Denial, which is sometimes equated with collusion, is often a short-lived reaction, sometimes a longer-term resistance (Myer 1984). This pattern is similar also to people's reactions to other threats, the news that they have a terminal disease for instance. From the child's point of view it may seem the same, but from the mother's it is important to distinguish between self-protective reactions, as a form of resistance to threat, from the common perception of them as protecting the abuser.

Many people when they imagine themselves in the position of a mother hearing that her child has been sexually abused, switch quickly into some form of self-protection. At a training course on child sexual abuse I attended, participants were asked to watch a video of a child acting out her abuse with dolls and to imagine themselves in another role than their own. Reporting back afterwards one man said he had started off imagining himself as a parent, but had to switch to another role immediately as it was too painful. Yet later in the same course when another video was shown of a family interview – the father had abused all three daughters – and the trainer remarked cynically 'this mother says she knew nothing about it', many people laughed, using their disbelief to distance themselves from her pain and comfort themselves with the illusion that they were not like her and could never be in her situation.

The sexual abuse of children raises complex responses in everyone and it is often easier to deflect these onto the all-encompassing role of mother than to tackle their real source. Women whose children are sexually abused may be silenced by shame at their partner's behaviour and by fear of the reactions of others if they seek help, as well as often having to risk the material basis of their own lives to protect the child. It is not surprising that many women who seek help do so tentatively and with ambivalence, and that others try to cope without outside intervention. If women are to be enabled to regain control over their own lives and to protect their children, they must not be further silenced by attitudes which hold them responsible for their partner's behaviour, and in so doing deny their own pain and anger. □

References:
Browning DH & Boatman B, 1977, 'Incest: children at risk', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, January.
Goodwin J et al, 1981, 'Prior incest in mothers of abused children', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 5:2.
Johnson JT, 1985, *An ethnographic study of mothers in father-daughter incest families*, DSW Thesis, University of Pennsylvania.
Justice B & Justice R, 1979, *The Broken Taboo: Sex in the family*, Peter Owen Ltd, London.
Kempe RS & Kempe CH, 1978, *Child Abuse*, Fontana, London.
Lustig N et al, 1960, 'Incest, a family group survival pattern', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 14:31.
Russell D, 1984, 'The prevalence and seriousness of incestuous abuse: stepfathers versus biological fathers', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 8.
Ward E, 1984, *Father-Daughter Rape*, The Women's Press, London.
Myer M, 1984, 'A new look at mothers of incest victims', *journal Journal of Social Work and Human Sexuality*, 3.
Report of the Departmental Committee on Sexual Offences Against Young Persons, 1925, HMSO, London.

JAPAN'S FIRST WAVE

Why did a member of the temperance movement attempt to assasinate the Emperor? Why did the author of Japan's first fictional declaration of female independence stop writing? FUJIEDA Mioko, a Japanese women's studies teacher and feminist activist, talks with Diana Leonard about first wave Japanese feminists.

D: *In Britain we know very little about what is going on among Japanese women today, let alone about feminism in Japan in the past, so I was interested to see the calendar and postcards produced by your friends ASATORI Sumie and YAMAMOTO Yukino. Where did they get the pictures?*

M: Most of them come directly from private collections of the relatives of these women in the calendar and postcards.

D: *Is the history of early feminism taught in your schools?*

HIRATSUKA Raichoh

In Japan second names are always written first, they are in capitals here to make this clear.

M: A few individual women may be mentioned here and there, but the women's movement and feminism is totally absent from textbooks.

D: *Your government carefully monitors history books doesn't it?*

M: Not 'carefully' monitors, but 'very heavily censors', I would say. There's a very strict inspection system. And as far as I know, there are no women involved in the censorship. And even if there were any woman involved, it would not make much change, I'm afraid.

D: *And the women's movement is not something which the Japanese nation is proud of?*

M: I don't think so. For example around 1975, a group of women – mostly teachers – who were active members of the women's movement, got together and went through the text books used in primary schools up to upper secondary schools. They listed all the approaches, comments and the illustrations that they found discriminatory or sexist; and they made an excellent booklet, which they took to the Ministry of Education. They were politely received with 'Well, we didn't know this kind of thing existed in our textbooks'. But that was all the comment they got. Of course things have improved a little bit since then. International developments such as International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women, definitely had an impact on the government. Even so, feminism still is not given its rightful place in our school curricula.

D: *Do most women in Japan have any knowledge of their history?*

M: Of women in the West, not, of course. But of women in Japan itself, well, HIRATSUKA Raichoh (1886–1971) is very well known. There is probably no-one who doesn't know of her – at least her name. She started the *Bluestockings* magazine (in Japanese *Seito*) in 1911. And YOSANO Akiko (1878–1942) who wrote the poem 'Mountain Moving Day' is also well known for her anti-war poems.

D: *When were they prominent?*

M: Before the so-called Pacific War[1]. The movement was at its strongest in the early 20th century.

YOSANO Akiko

A real first

KISHIDA Toshiko (1863–1901) was a real first. She came from a wealthy merchant family in Kyoto. At the age of 17 she was called up to the imperial court to give lectures on Chinese classics to the Empress. Which she did marvellously. But as she grew up in a merchant family she found the court life awful, unbearable, so conventional, superstitious, and hierarchical. So she resigned. But she couldn't resign with that reason, so she pretended she did it for poor health.

After her resignation she travelled with her mother throughout Japan meeting people. She was such a beauty, and brilliant, and also she worked for the Imperial court. That gave her some aura. At that time it was usually impossible for a woman to have that kind of background by the age of nineteen or twenty.

During these travels she came across activists in the civil rights movement, which was on the upsurge at that time (it lasted from the 1870s to 1880s when it was brutally supressed by the government), and she immediately involved herself with the movement, making speeches *everywhere*, throughout the country. She was the only woman leader and she seems to have been a very good speaker. She had an electrifying effect.

This was the period immediately after Japan's modernisation and there were still feudal conventions. Life was based on Confucianist moral principles, a convention in which women were simply biologically inferior to men. They were there to serve men and to produce the family line. She spoke against this and was criticised very strongly.

D: *It seems extraordinary that a daughter from such a class could do such things, could escape the pressures of her family.*

M: Well, it was a period of transition. There were very big social changes, an upheaval. Everything was changing. Up to 1867 and during the civil war, the warrior – Samurai – class was the ruling class, followed by peasants and craftsmen, with the merchant class at the very bottom. Wealthy but low status. Despised. But toward the end of the feudal days, it was the merchants who controlled the whole

KISHIDA Toshiko

economy. The samurai class was impoverished, and in debt to the merchants. Among the merchant class one could say that there was considerable liberalism as well as criticism of the feudal system. And her mother's supportive role was extremely important to Toshiko's intellectual development. It was her mother that encouraged her to study and pursue her thinking.

D: *What happened to her subsequently?*

M: In 1884 she got married to a politician, a Liberal Party leader, and retired from speaking engagements. But she continued to do much to promote the education of women. Through writings, she always kept her anti-biological determinist line. She died in 1901.

A woman of action

One young woman who was very much inspired by her was KAGEYAMA (later FUKUDA) Hideko (1865–1927). She heard KISHIDA Toshiko give a fiery speech in Okayama about the liberation of women when she was about 17 and the speech made her pursue the same path.

Feeling the need for women's economic independence and an education enabling them to achieve it, she founded a school for women, ages six to sixties, but it was closed down by the government. Her involvement in a subversive plot – which has come to be known as the Osaka Incident – resulted in her arrest, trial, and imprisonment and made her famous as 'Japan's Jeanne d'Arc'. Her successive attempts to run schools for girls and working women ended in failure. In her later years, her personal association with the then emerging socialist groups led her to socialism. In 1907, she issued *Women in the World*, a journal with a socialist feminist line.

FUKUDA Hideko

Her life was always a financially difficult one, as she was the main supporter of her family most of her life – her parents, her children and her sick husband who died of syphillis in 1900. She "always fought, never wavering because of any setback", as she says in her autobiography. But she was a woman of action rather than theory. If I may say so, she became a socialist feminist not by her own yearning, but because of the relations she had with men who happened to be socialist. So if they had been liberal . . . I don't know what would have happened to her.

Independence versus marriage

From that generation there is also SHIMIZU Shikin (1868–1933) who was at one time a friend of FUKUDA Hideko. A women's rights advocate, journalist and writer, Shikin was a feminist pioneer in many ways. *A Broken Ring*, her earliest story – believed to be based on her own life experience and written when she was 20 – is strikingly feminist, in that she portrays a woman who left the marriage out of her own will when she found her husband unfaithful. The story was literally a feminist declaration of independence, very much advanced for the period.

As in the story, in her real life she divorced from her first marriage, which was arranged by her father, because of her husband's involvement with other women. After divorce, she was involved with the civil rights movement. An affair she had with a leader in the movement made her pregnant, and while working as a journalist, she gave birth to a so-called illegitimate child.

Some time later, she was proposed to by an extraordinary man, who later became the president of Tokyo University. He proposed to her with passion and wrote *beautiful* love letters in which he talked about his own feelings – which again is unthinkable for that period. Obviously she was deeply moved, but did not want to fall into the trap again. So she told him everything – not of her feelings but of the facts in the past. This man accepted it, saying "I don't question about your past. I love you as you are now." This rational approach and respect for their own feelings – not respect for conventions and other people's views – such independence is remarkable for the period. Now it is not uncommon; but this was the first couple I know of who married out of their own feelings.

But after the marriage, it showed the romance didn't work, because it was *she* who had to suffer. She had to retreat from her writing. Sometime after marriage he went to Germany and stayed there for 5 years without her. And during that period she continued her writing, criticism and essays. But when he came back, she stopped writing – in her early thirties. After that you don't hear from her. She was put into oblivion. Completely. She suffered all through her life because of the lack of a social life of her own. She knew that was important to her. But her husband became important, President of the Tokyo University and all other stuff . . . She died before he died.

Her writing career was short, some 10 years, and ironically she ended up being a model of a good wife and wise mother. Her work was reread only in the '70s. One of their sons is a well-known marxist philosopher, and in the '70s he began to write about his mother. He recalled how his father would say, while his mother kept silent with her eyes full of tears, "You are now a fool. You who used to be a genius are now a fool". A malignant kind of teasing.

D: *I've noticed that most of the women you talk about married at least once. Did all women have to marry?*

M: Oh, *yes*. Marriage was a norm for women those days. A woman's marriage was customarily arranged by her parents or relatives frequently against her own will. Even today, though there is a gradual increase in

SHIMUZU Shikin

single women who prefer not to get married, pressure to conform is still very strong. We also have the lowest divorce rate of any industrialised country.

The autonomous women's movement

D: *We have talked about individual women and their attachment both to the civil rights movement and the socialist movement. Was there an autonomous women's movement?*

M: There was. It must be understood, however, that in 1890 in the face of women's mounting demand for their political rights, the government revised the Article 5 of the Police Security Regulations, thereby placing a total ban on all sorts of political activity by women. It was made impossible for women to participate in any political activity: to hold meetings, to make speeches, to attend meetings and conferences, let alone form political organisations. Japanese women had to wait until 1920 when the New Women's Association was formed, the year the suffrage movement started. Up to then, the Reform Society was the only organisation that could somehow manage to exist.

What brought women of different inclinations and persuasions together at the

ENDOH Kyoko

end of the 19th century was, therefore, the campaign to repeal this notorious Article 5. All the women mentioned above, together with countless numbers of other women, engaged themselves in this difficult task.

One of the women who took part in this action and thereafter remained an active feminist was ENDOH Kiyoko (1882–1920). A journalist and a regular contributor to the journal *Bluestockings* which I mentioned earlier, Kiyoko kept energetically writing for the cause of women as well as the protection of minors employed in industries.

The basis of Japanese capitalism (the first industry established, was textiles) was using sweated labour in all sizes of enterprise, from factories to workshops. We have one photograph from a rather later period (1931) showing a woman textile worker, whose name isn't known, making a May Day speech appealing for better conditions. You can see the audience is almost all *men*; and at the front are policemen both in official and plain clothes. The trade union movement was very much suspect, and always under control. So you had to be *very* brave and committed to stand up and speak like this, because you would surely be put on the black list and would be followed everywhere you went.

Christian women in the Reform Society were very active. The Reform Society is a Japanese equivalent of the temperance movement in the west. The Japanese temperance movement was much more geared to combatting prostitution than alcoholism, and established refuge centres so the prostitutes could run to them. Up to as late as 1956 Japan had licensed prostitution, a brothel system. Certain quarters were established in towns and women were recruited from the countryside. They were sold by their parents, brothers, uncles, because of poverty. And once they were sold, few could get out of it. Money after money, wrong after wrong, debt after debt. They really were feudal slaves.

You should remember being a Christian and fighting against prostitution was something not very acceptable in the Japanese context in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Male Christians were more acceptable, and women were okay if they just happened to be the wives of male Christians. But not women Christians, working on their own . . . That was exactly the situation, for instance, of YAJIMA Kajiko, the Society's militant leader (1832–1925).

From reformer to revolutionary

KANNO Sugako (1881–1911) who, after unsuccessful marriage, worked as a journalist,

was involved in the Reform Society. But around 1906, she set out to develop a socialist women's movement for liberation, together with such women as FUKUDA Hideko and SAKAI Tameko. But police brutality made her feel non-violent action too lukewarm, and this realisation led her to resort to direct action for socialism and revolution. In 1909, she planned to assassinate the Emperor Meiji, together with some men. The plan to make bombs for this purpose was uncovered by the police. She was arrested with other associates, and even some who were not involved in this attempted assasination were also arrested. Known as the Great Treason Incident, the 24 accused were put on trial which proceeded behind closed doors with many frameups. Sugako and 11 men were hanged. The reason she resorted to this was she thought the Emperor System rather than the Emperor himself was the cause of the people's misery and she couldn't wait for gradual change. Until the very last moment of her life she is said to have remained calm as well as firm.

It is quite likely that her attempt was inspired by Lenin's brother trying to assasinate Tzar Alexander. In any case it was the time of socialist as well as anti-colonialist agitation in many parts of the world. Meiji was a turbulent period (1867–1912) internally with rapid modernisation which was carried out by coercive means from above, and outwardly with two wars waged, one against China and another against Russia, while colonising Taiwan and Korea. The following Taisho period (1912–1926), though brief, was relatively peaceful. This period is often referred to as Taisho Democracy, and this period saw the emergence of a new breed of feminists.

A new breed of feminists

HIRATSUKA Raichoh of *Bluestockings*, for instance, fell in love with a man much younger. He was an artist. She sent a statement to him (I think in 1912) in which she said, "I criticise marriage as an institution" and asked his response. "If I choose cohabitation, how would you react? If I propose to live separately even though we love each other, how would you react?" She asked his response publicly. His reply is not known – at least I don't know, but ultimately they lived together, and maybe after the war they got married. She was the woman who took up the issue of sexuality in a very open and public way through *Bluestockings*. In that way she was a real pioneer. Not towards lesbianism, but heterosexuality, though.

But this openness ended with the Manchurian incident in 1931 when Japanese military intervention in China began. There was then an increasing militaristic atmosphere. Of course the whole climate of the country was backward, but still a women's movement, recognising women as individuals, even if it was a minority movement, *did* manage to survive somehow up to the mid '30s, though there was a process of their being coopted into the government war effort. But when the Pacific War broke out, the women's movement was suppressed very severely, harshly, by the government and the military.

Ironically, nationalism encourages women to be good at sport in international competition. They do gymnastics – parallel bar. At one time Japanese women did quite well. As a late comer to the modern world, obviously people thought they should send women as well as men to represent Japan, as a modern country. That was the image they had at that period. We have a picture of the first Japanese woman who got the medal in the Olympic games. In the '20s I think. This is the moment she was running out to get the medal. She died at the age of 24. Very young. She worked as a journalist for a famous paper. She did all she could to promote sport for women. But again she was completely forgotten until quite recently. Feminism brought her back to life. She was a pioneer for women in athletics.

Perhaps it's very hard for you to imagine what things were like in pre-war days, during and immediately after the war. It's difficult even for young Japanese women. I was born in 1930 so I remember quite clearly. ICHIKAWA Fusae (1893–1981) for instance writes in her autobiography that either she had to go to jail or collaborate with the war or withdraw completely from public life. She chose the second one. Through collaborating with the government she thought the women's movement could maintain at least its existence and show that

KANNO Sugako

ICHIKAWA Fusae

women could be full citizens, fighting for the cause of the country. In that sense she was politically naive. After the war she was expelled from public life as a war criminal for years. Not imprisoned, but she was not allowed to appear in public.

From suffrage to women's liberation

D: *And then did the women's movement re-emerge in the late '60s?*

M: No, earlier in Japan, because of the defeat in the war. Right after the war, the women's movement became quite active. ICHIKAWA Fusae, who worked for the suffrage for women, was one of the most active. On the day or the day after the surrender she went to the Prime Minister and other cabinet members, and persuaded them that women should get the vote immediately. And that was even before the occupation forces (chiefly American) ordered the general sufferage. She was very prompt. She was not very happy when people said that Japanese women didn't get the vote by their own will and by their own strength, but were given it by the occupation forces. It wasn't true. In the form, yes; but the suffrage movement did exist in spite of the harsh repression. The vote was not just given from above. It had been already cultivated.

D: *I take it the US occupation forces didn't order women's enfranchisement because it cared about women?!*

M: No! They were very much concerned about demilitarisation and democratisation of the country. And that included equality between the sexes. There were a number of progressive people involved in policy making through the army in the earlier years of occupation.

Right after the war the women's movement came into full force, but not in the women's liberation sense. But it was the first time in Japanese history women became individuals. Because of all the hardships created during the war, life was very hard for everyone. The degree to which Japan was stricken by the war perhaps you can't believe! Everyone had to work hard, and women particularly had to work outside their homes. They couldn't afford the luxury of staying at home. So there came a very strong demand for the creation of nursery schools *everywhere*. A very strong women's pressure. That's why we still have more – still insufficient, but more than most of the victor countries.

After her expulsion was over, ICHIKAWA Fusae for one went into politics. She was elected three times to the upper house of parliament in the post war period. And she always gained one of the largest votes. She was known for not using bribery, always fighting a 'clean election'.

D: *What sort of causes was she connected with?*

M: Feminism. Peace, and clean politics. A society with no discrimination. Because of this clean election – everyone else in the Diet spent money like water and she was the only person who stuck to that principle – she was very popular.

But as the autonomous women's movement grew stronger, the political parties came. They wanted to organise it. They took the women's movement 'under their wing'. As a result, the women's movement lost its autonomy. It became respectable, acceptable. But acceptable so long as it remained as the appendage to the male dominant political parties and labour movement. To regain its autonomy, it had to wait until 1970, when the women's liberation movement began. □

Notes:
1. The Pacific War is in Japanese history the final stage of their fifteen year war with China, which started with the Manchunian incident in 1931. It is equivalent to what is recognised in the west as the war with the US and its allies.

IN LABOUR

What are women in the Labour Party up to? Lynn Alderson talks to feminist and Labour Party activist Sarah Roeloffs about her vision of a party which could include and be strengthened by radical politics.

Sarah: I joined the Labour Party in 1980. A large part of joining it has to do with my socialism as much as with the feminism – it wasn't so much joining the Labour Party as joining the political party of the labour movement, where women have historically always played a major role. It's very interesting as feminism grows in the party through the early 1980s, to compare this with what happened when the Labour Party was first set up.

The Labour Party as we know it now, as an organisation with individual membership, was established in 1918 – previous to that it was a federal organisation composed of numerous affiliated sections. One of the affiliated but independant sections was the Women's Labour League. I find that very attractive, and to me it still represents something I would like women in the Labour Party to be discussing more. There was a resolution passed at last year's conference that the Women's Section should be reorganised. That's the first attempt to reorganise Labour women since 1918 when the Women's Labour League was abolished. The WLL groups were incorporated into the Labour Party as the women's sections that we know today, based on individual women's membership.

The problem with discussing the idea of returning to an independant but affiliated women's organisation is that in the present political climate it amounts to heresy. But I think it will be on the agenda as Labour women become increasingly frustrated with their lack of effective power.

L: *We hear a lot about differences within the Labour Party as being the reason why they lose elections. Surely, they are very afraid of disintegrating into different groups, for example the Black Section, or a women's organisation. Can you really see that happening?*

S: Oppressed groups having the democratic right to autonomous organisation is *not* disintegration. I think it would tremendously strengthen the Labour Party to encourage affiliation of independent groups.

I'm not certain how the British Labour Party is going to develop. Tony Benn, The Socialist Society and others have now called a major conference in which socialist feminists are very prominent, for the end of October. This is a major attempt to link the Labour left in all its forms with organisations outside of the Party. That sort of development is very important – whether it can be maintained and whether it will form the basis of a future reorganisation – I don't know. But certainly, I'm not expecting support from the leadership for an autonomous women's organisation – even one that was clamouring to affiliate to the Labour Party!

L: *It's attractive to join the Labour Party because it might get into power, that's one reason why lots of people are in there rather than working outside of it.*

S: Personally, I didn't join the Labour Party to fight for another Wilson-type Labour government. I joined because it was the political organisation of the labour movement and it had local branches in which I could participate that were fighting for a form of change nearer to what I would like to see ideally. But there is a world of difference between that and another Wilson-Callaghan government. The big debate today is to what extent a Kinnock Labour government would have been different from a Wilson or Callaghan one. So when you talk about 'achieving' power, we are talking about different things; I didn't join it to achieve government in that sense.

L: *I take the point. It's probably my line of thought. During the '60s and '70s I'd*

never have thought about joining the Labour Party. I thought we'd achieve a much more radical alternative than that, with lots of constituent parts. It's really the rule of the Tories and the devastating effect that's had that's made me think that maybe I'd rather be working against them specifically, than feeling marginalised in terms of that level of politics.

S: I was in a revolutionary left organisation which I left because of political disagreements on a number of issues including women and also the Labour Party. At the point that I joined the Labour Party there had been a major opening up in terms of democracy and that's crucial. Part of the problem with feminists joining the party in the '40s or '50s, is that it would have been very difficult for our voice to be heard. But in the late '70s, early '80s there were a number of far-reaching changes, on democracy, so that different voices and views actually had an opportunity within the party to be heard.

What followed very quickly from that was the Benn deputy leadership campaign. He represented the idea that the Labour Party had to turn outwards and had to develop links with Black people's campaigns, the Women's Movement, and other groups fighting for change. Benn later also called for a refounding conference – to re-establish the Party and turn it into an organisation that all sorts of groups could affiliate to but also maintain their independence and autonomy. Anyone could then be part of the labour movement – not so much the Labour Party, but the labour *movement*.

I don't think the idea was thought through carefully enough or articulated clearly and certainly it was misunderstood by some women in the women's movement to mean a take-over. They saw it as a threat to the raison d'etre of the women's movement, which is our autonomy. But affiliation to a broader movement can give you strength and collective action.

L: *So what about the tension with the Kinnockites and the idea that you simply have to prioritise getting Thatcher out, above all else. A lot of people would blame the influx of exactly people like you and me and the kind of political issues we represent for the decreasing popularity of the Labour Party and sabotaging this.*

S: Yes, this is indeed a raging argument. Some Labour MPs have complained about what became known as the 'London Effect' – this is the euphemism for Black sections and lesbian and gay rights. They were saying it had nothing to do with traditional labour politics. But that just begs the question of what is traditional labour politics? In terms of votes you have to go out with a properly integrated campaign.

One of the bases of the GLC's success was that they had an incredibly good publicity machine, and you need that, it should not be underestimated.

You've got to have that sort of publicity machine and you have to *believe* in your policies as *right*. I think Margaret Thatcher believes in herself and she believes in her policies – in a way that I'm not at all certain the Labour Party does – even its bread and butter policies, let alone its lesbian and gay rights policies. That lack of belief is patently obvious – it comes across

And in some sense, Thatcherite toryism is good for some people. Of course it's proved appalling for others, not least women.

L: *Yes, it has a powerful appeal even amongst people whose interests it doesn't serve.*

S: During the election, in East Lewisham, a lot of people weren't aware that the candidate Russell Profitt was Black. When they did realise, a frightening level of racism came out. The stories of Labour canvassers being cased off working class council housing estates are horrific. But this isn't something about the 1987 general election campaign or about so called 'loony left' policies, this is about the origins and development of racism in Britain. When you're into a third successful Tory term, when the racism card had been played and played – these are the results of that.

L: *Do you think that if the Labour Party put their backs into selling their more radical policies such as anti-racism, that they would prove to be much more popular? If they had the courage of their convictions?*

S: Take the GLC again – there are drawbacks of 'municipal socialism'. But nevertheless, they had a political leadership that believed in lesbian and gay rights, Black rights and other issues like lowering the fares and support for *public* transport. One of the troubles with the way local government has taken up lesbian and gay rights and other 'London Effect' issues is that it hasn't been as part of a whole package. This gets nasty, for example in Haringey, lesbian and gay rights were being played off against Black rights. There was a feeling that nothing had been done on Black issues for many years, then all of a sudden there's this tremendous fuss about lesbians and gays. People who aren't particularly clued into the smaller print of political debate are going to feel hard done by (housing is a tremendous problem in this respect). The GLC attempted to have complete policies – so that was seen more as an overall package and not as playing one need off against another, which is an incredibly dangerous, divisive thing.

It's very interesting to look back over the last five years of the development of feminism in the Labour Party. Feminist ideas and policies are now much more widely accepted, but as we win increasing support there's also the danger of co-option – or femocratism as I call it. Its indicative that women Labour MPs are now meeting regularly as Labour *women*. I attended my first National Labour Women's Conference (NLWC) in 1982 in Newcastle. So many women had registered that a larger venue had to be found at the last minute. It went down in history as the Conference where feminists ran riot – mostly in protest against Michael Foot's support for the Falkland's Armada, but also over the complete inadequacy of the creche. There was a major row on the Conference floor on whether creche facilities should be automatically provided. Older women delegates who appeared to be mostly from the trade unions, were very upset by what they saw as upstart, dungaree clad college-educated, middle-class Consituency Labour Party (CLP) delegates demanding child care as a right!

There are some incredibly patronising middle-class CLP women – Head Girls some of us call them – but the politics of this debate go much deeper of course. Trade union women are not properly represented at Women's Conference – not because CLP women don't wish them to be, but because NLWC has never been treated seriously and democratically constituted.

We have been campaigning for reform for years to give us effective power in the Party, but we are certainly not convinced that that is the 'reform' we are going to get.

But on radical socialist and feminist politics women lead the Labour Party – except that we're not in the formal leadership positions. We're in the rank and file campaigning locally through our Women's Sections.

Of course our political leadership is deliberately kept invisible – but that's true historically too. Women were at the forefront of the Chartists in the 19th century and throughout labour movement history.

It's a bad mistake to assume the Labour Party is homogenous. We are under *no* illusions that we can change the public, electoral Labour Party. We are campaigning for a genuine party of labour. By that I mean a political organisation for all who labour – a traditional idea which has always been pretty exclusive – of women, Black people, lesbians and gays, those with disabilities as well as the traditionally-defined 'working class'. But who traditionally defined the working class – not working class women!

That is our vision, that is what the Labour Party should be – it should be *our* party. We will keep on fighting for it to really include all of us until we win or we're expelled! We think the current Labour Party needs a radical transformation – Benn's proposed refounding would have allowed for this – to be a genuine party of labour. I'm working with a lot of other Labour women who all agree on this and though the bureacracy trys to block us at every turn we fight on.

My inspiration is the Women Chartists, the Lancashire suffragists – I almost feel we *owe* it to them not to say 'to hell with it, we can't handle the male domination' – I think that would be turning our backs on the *women's* labour movement. It does exist, and it needs supporting and building. We're fighting for that – the women's labour movement having its rightful place in the sun. □

a difficult, dangerous honesty

In 1986, prompted by the historical research of Cristina Loughran (see T&S 11), a conference took place on the development of the women's movement in Northern Ireland. In this article Margaret Ward reflects on the conference and suggests that Northern Irish feminists are now able 'to talk about our divisions in a manner which makes us face them and not deny them'.

This article is a reflection on the outcome of a symposium on "Feminism – Our Early Years" which I helped to organise in Belfast in March 1986. [1] Joanna McMinn (co-organiser) and I felt that such an event was long overdue and in providing this opportunity for celebrating our achievements we would also, and perhaps more importantly, be creating an environment where a much-needed discussion on the future priorities and direction of the women's movement could begin to take place. Over the past few years feminists have been so busy organising events or acquiring premises that no-one has had time to draw breath, sit down and reflect on what is actually being achieved. But action without reflection is a luxury we can no longer afford as the political situation continues to deteriorate. It is now becoming increasingly evident that there are a number of questions we must begin to ask ourselves, particularly concerning any unifying potential that feminism might have to offer a divided society.

However, before we, as feminists, can address ourselves to the wider society, we need to focus upon the extent to which we have been successful in working together. With this in mind, a representative from each of the ten women's groups that had been active in the '70s – and whose activities then have certainly helped to shape, for good or ill, the form taken today by feminism in the north – was asked to talk about her personal experiences, with an emphasis upon what she had learned from that time, and what she felt about the present situation. Inez McCormick, with many years of tough trade union experience to sustain her, agreed to chair the symposium which took the form of a ten-minute contribution from the invited speakers in the morning and a general discussion in the afternoon.

The morning session of reminiscences was both informative and enjoyable and much appreciated by those who had not been around the women's movement at that time, while the afternoon revealed many things: positive proposals for the future, disillusion and anger, prejudice and tolerance. What we didn't succeed in doing was discovering the ability "to talk about our divisions in a manner which makes us face them and not deny them", as Inez phrased the responsibility Irish women must eventually shoulder. In her concluding remarks Inez urged us to begin to "articulate that difficult, dangerous honesty between us". Discussing the events of that day is one way of embarking upon that process.

While Irish society disintegrates into an industrial wasteland and sectarian divisions become more bitterly entrenched, the outlook for women is bleak. The gains and losses of women in the 26 counties is beyond the scope of this article, but what has taken place in the south has obviously had depressing reverberations upon the consciousness of many northern women. One result has been to provoke a reassessment of the events of the past decade – a sober calculation of our gains and of our losses. What we urgently need to do, is to begin to forge an identity as Irishwomen and as feminists living in Ireland, which will not be a pale reflection of the very different problems and concerns of the dominant Anglo-American tradition.

Beginnings

Organised feminism began later in Ireland than in many other countries, and it emerged out of a vastly different environment, where the influence of religion, both Protestant and Catholic, was all-pervasive, and poverty much more wide-spread. There was a smaller pool of middle-class, university educated women to draw on and, in a much smaller and more closely-knit society, the divisions between feminists and other women in the community could in some instances be more easily overcome – superficially at least. We were also caught in the midst of war – the military campaign of the Provisional IRA was at its height and the British regime was becoming increasingly repressive: the emotive symbol of that repression being the H Block prisoners' fight for the retention of political status. Sectarian assassinations were also at a height and every day unionist and nationalist became more bitterly divided while political divisions were almost as savagely experienced within a community as they were between the opposing communities.

As far as Northern Irish women were concerned, we had been, since 1972, under the direct rule of Westminster and had the promise of an Equal Pay Act, albeit with no Sex Discrimination Act to give it teeth; we were not to have divorce law reform, in deference to the strength of religious feeling in the province; abortion was still subject to life imprisonment, and of course there were no refuges, no rape crisis centres, no women's centres, homosexuality was illegal . . . Despite all the criticisms that were made during the course of the symposium, and despite the heated discussion on whether we could actually even say that a women's movement existed, I believe feminists can take credit for much of what has been achieved over the past decade. Despite the bleakness of the context, those of us who were active in the tiny groups of that early period, experienced the same kind of euphoria that any vanguard movement does: we were challenging convention, daring to be different.

Feminists were not a united group with an agreed manifesto, but what we had in common was a determination to have women's needs listened to. In the absence of any defined role for women within political groups, or indeed any political programme for women at all, theory and practice had to be developed from first principles, out of our own perceptions of the situation. And so some argued for parity of rights with women in Britain; some attempted to influence Republicanism, to make a rigidly masculine tradition more receptive to women's needs; others argued for the integration of revolutionary socialism with feminism, while still others concentrated their energies upon single issue campaigns. The successes and failures of these various perspectives were discussed openly and honestly by all the invited speakers. No attempt was made to invest the past with

JOANNE O'BRIEN

Coleraine Women's Group

Eileen Evason spoke of her involvement with the Coleraine Women's Group, a mixture of women from the university and the community beyond. It began in '74 as a consciousness raising group where, over the next two to three years 20 or 30 women would argue and debate and as Eileen said, they never really resolved anything but 'the crack was great'. Because they had women from less privileged circumstances than the university within the group, they also, in response to the expressed needs of such members, began to campaign on behalf of single parents and rural women. Housing issues became a major concern of the group, members of which formed Women's Aid as well as a women's housing association. Their other major focus was law reform and they were active in the feminist campaign to get the Sex Discrimination Act extended to NI. They also, in 1976, initiated a campaign for divorce reform for NI. Both of these were successful. Eileen began political life as a republican socialist feminist but said that as time went on, she 'reversed that order of priorities' now seeing feminism as a much broader and more encompassing ideology. In a phrase which was echoed by many participants, Eileen concluded by saying she now believed in 'anarchic fragmentation' — the more that goes on the better, and let's stop fighting about it.

the nice thing about Coleraine Women's Group was we never really resolved anything but we just carried on

NI Women's Rights Movement

Lynda Edgerton of the NI Women's Rights Movement, an organisation formed in 1975 and still in existence, spoke of her initial involvement in community issues and anti-internment street committees before she went back to full-time education and became a mature student at Queen's University. She had two young children, now aged 19 and 21, and a lot of her experiences were coloured by the fact that she did have children, unlike the women she was organising with. The NIWRM began principally as an attempt to persuade political organisations and trade unions to affiliate and agree to a charter of demands for women. It was also a leading campaigner for the extension of the Sex Discrimination Act. The fact that it refused to exclude men became an extremely contentious issue, leading to several splits. It remains a contentious issue today. The NIWRM now runs a women's centre in central Belfast and through the links that the majority of its members have with communist parties internationally, it is an active host for delegations from overseas women's organisations. Lynda's primary involvement is in attempting to establish closer links between the women's movement, the trade union movement and community groups, as part of a policy that the only way forward politically is through unity on working class issues; a policy underpinned by a belief that women, because of their concern with the future of their families and their children, are the most receptive to overcoming sectarian divisions. It's a strategy that will be examined in more detail during the course of this article.

In fact it was my idea to phone a farmer up and ask him what were the chances of borrowing two cows to take on a demonstration in protest at Margaret Thatcher's milk cuts and he referred me to the Farmer's Union who promptly lent us two cows and they were marched through Belfast.

Craigavon Women's Group

Craigavon Women's Group, which began around 1976, was quite different from the other groups. Craigavon was a new town, with vast housing estates populated by people who had come from all over the province and who had no family ties, no networks of support. Many were young families with wives who were isolated at home with their children, knowing no-one. Patricia Morgan was one of those women, gradually losing all self-confidence, and only very reluctantly being drawn into helping to start up a women's group. One woman's flat was used as the meeting place — children and husbands were excluded as the women escaped from their domestic lives and began to organise discussion classes, inviting speakers from organisations like Women's Aid. As the group increased in confidence they became involved with the Community Council, lobbied Craigavon Council on issues like support for mother and toddler groups, and eventually, along with other community organisations developed their own community centre, with Patricia as the paid worker. That level of community involvement took up the bulk of the group's resources.

we organised very much from the very beginning on a woman-only policy and used Fran's flat as the one single entity to escape from our humdrum lives and husbands and families.

It was a dynamic, hard-working group, always concerned with the practical, but while it eventually came to a natural end, various individuals within it still get together to organise one-off events in the Craigavon area. Later in discussion, Patricia was critical of many feminists for being insensitive to women with less experience as political activists, through being too theoretical and remote from their everyday problems.

Socialist Women's Group

The Socialist Women's Group originated out of the need of a few women to develop a forum where a specific analysis of the opression of women in Ireland could be initiated. I spoke on behalf of the Socialist Women's Group. Some members had been involved with other women's groups, such as the NIWRM, but felt that this wasn't sufficient; others were already members of left groups, but felt very isolated as women within those groups, as the left had failed to develop any awareness of women's oppression or any programme related to women's needs. The SWG attempted to analyse imperialism as well as put forward women's demands specifically. It published a Manifesto in March 1976, engaged in dialogue with various political groups, started a paper, *Women's Action* which was sold outside linen mills (none of which are left today), from door to door, and in the city centre. It also initiated several short-lived campaigns amongst the trotskyist-oriented left, although that was problematic because the SWG found itself forced to operate as a semi-trotskyist group itself, with the assumption that the group had policies on a whole range of issues, and this became an impossible position for group members.

A branch of the SWG was formed in Andersonstown and the group became extremely active within the Relatives Action Committee, formed by women relatives of

Photographs reproduced from *Women in Focus*, ed. Pat Murphy and Nell McCafferty, published by Attic Press, Dublin.

JOANNE O'BRIEN

the men in the H-Blocks. Some SWG members were important in supporting the women's right to organise as they saw fit, as opposed to the gradual domination of the RAC's by the Republican movement. The group was increasingly orientating itself to West Belfast, where the political struggle was at its most intense, but this had drawbacks as it wasn't where the majority of members lived, and it ignored the fact that women in other parts of the city also had needs. It was also obvious that the SWG itself could never form the basis for a broad-based women's movement and so a decision was taken, in May '77, to dissolve the SWG in order (very optimistically) to provide the groundwork for the formation of a broad-based women's movement. Those of us who opposed that decision did so because we felt that we were in danger of being submerged by nationalism and that we would lose any identity of our own. Now, in the 1980s, I feel much more strongly about looking at what unites women and how we can work together, rather than maintaining the old divisions.

I remember the first issue of 'Women's Action' coming out and me typing with two fingers on this electric typewriter we had borrowed and the others laying it out and we hadn't a clue what it would look like, we didn't understand anything about the printing process at all. There were lines on the layout sheets and we didn't know whether that meant if you went over the lines nothing would come out. When I look at it now, it's so unreadable I don't understand how anyone bought it . . . we were so missionary about it that everything was full of exclamation marks.

Noreen Winchester Campaign

One of the most successful campaigns ever waged by women in Northern Ireland was the Noreen Winchester Campaign. Noreen had been sentenced in March '77 to seven years for the manslaughter of her father, who had raped and brutalised her for the past five years. The appeal judge upheld the original sentence, but the campaign to free Noreen developed in momentum, uniting groups north and south, and two weeks later Noreen was granted the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. Women's Aid was a major figure in the organisation of the campaign and Karen McMinn recalled the great feeling of achievement and power when Noreen's release was celebrated. In talking about Women's Aid, she made the point that the mental and physical violence experienced by some women is the extreme end of women's oppression and "unless we as women are offering them an alternative to that, we are not actually achieving very much". Women's Aid, as well as providing refuge for women, has given working class women access to the women's movement and Women's Aid is a major force in the women's movement in Northern Ireland. During the numerous splits that have taken place within feminism, Women's Aid has remained a source of stability, and very often a means of reconciling various elements.

The women I've met through Women's Aid have enriched my life beyond belief so they have . . . it has given working class women access to the women's movement . . . It has transformed all of our lives and I think particularly for working class women that has been very important.

JOAN COLLINS

Belfast Women's Collective

The Belfast Women's Collective began in September '77, bearing, as Marie-Therese McGivern said, the hallmarks of the old SWG, at least for the first 18 months of its life. The main tension was between a complete orientation towards nationalism – marked by the group now meeting solely in West Belfast, which necessitated a mass trek from the south of the city every Thursday night – and a broader orientation towards issues which affected all women. But gradually, health became one of the dominant issues that the group took up – particularly child birth, contraception, abortion and mental health. This change in emphasis coincided with the group deciding to meet in the city centre, as a compromise between the various conflicting opinions of its members. In response, Women Against Imperialism was formed by those women who wished to organise exclusively in the west of the city, around the question of imperialism. The Collective increased in membership and organised some very successful events: a Health conference in February '79 (out of which emerged the impetus for the Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign), and also the idea of developing a forum for discussion which would enable all the women's groups to meet together. Given all the splits that had occurred in the last few years, this was becoming increasingly necessary.

our lives were totally obsessed by the women's movement, there was nothing else, men did not exist, we socialised together, we ate together, we almost slept together, we did everything together in that period.

The Collective also continued to publish *Women's Action*, which improved greatly in quality and readability; members formed *Women in Media*, publishing a pamphlet on abortion and a resource pack for women's studies, as well as making a video on the need for nursery schools; the Collective formed *Wayward Women*, a theatre group that put on two plays and it also organised the first Reclaim the Night march, in response to a series of rapes in south Belfast. But by '81 the polarisation within the women's movement between those women who had a nationalist orientation and those women who didn't had become intolerable for members of the Collective, who felt themselves in the middle of the controversy, and a decision was taken to dissolve the group. The various members then continued their single issue campaigns, which seemed less problematic and more achievable.

In her conclusion, Marie-Therese looked at where the members of the group are today – and discovered that the majority work in the community in one way or another. For her, that was bringing feminism into the work women do in the wider community, in a much more constructive manner. She felt very optimistic about what has been achieved, over the last decade, particularly in terms of changes of consciousness about women.

Unity Meetings

The forum for discussion first mooted by the Collective became, between 1979–81, the Unity meetings, which were held on the first Saturday of each month, open to all women's groups and interested individuals. A number of positive initiatives developed out of those meetings: the Action on Debt Campaign to repeal the Payment for Debt Act was one such, as was the decision to produce a northern Irish issue of the socialist-feminist journal *Scarlet Woman*. Pressure from the Unity meetings also finally persuaded the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to allow a woman's banner to be carried on the annual May Day march, as the majority of women didn't belong to a Trade Union and consequently felt totally excluded from May Day. However, women from West Belfast did not participate in the Unity meetings for long, possibly because when the NIWRM opened the women's centre in central Belfast, it became the logical venue and there was too much disunity for them to enter those premises, particularly as the NIWRM didn't support the prisoners' campaign.

Lesbian Group

The invited speaker for the Lesbian group was ill and her replacement confined her talk to events that occurred in the late '70s because she only came to Belfast in 1978. An earlier Lesbian group had been responsible for the organisation of the all-Ireland Women's Liberation Conference of 1977

which occured at a time when the women's movement was in a state of flux, groups dissolving and reforming, and the conference certainly helped to re-establish a lot of feminist priorities. The lesbian group that Miriam Titterton had the most contact with eventually dissolved as a result of a dispute over the national question. Miriam's main feeling over that period was how isolated lesbian women were, even within the women's movement, and that there was very little understanding of how all women's struggles are interrelated. Thankfully the situation today is very different with lesbians an important part of feminism in the north.

Anarchic Fragmentation

In setting the tone for the afternoon discussion, Inez reminded us that, as women in Ireland, our discipline was to be relevant to each other and relevant to the condition of oppression of women in Ireland. "If we are about anything as women in Ireland, we are about articulating that difficult, dangerous honesty in which we can speak to each other about the oppressions that we experience."

The discussion began by taking up the theme of "anarchic fragmentation", with women wondering what could be done to enable people to work together, regardless of whether or not they held the same views. Could an effective network of support be developed? This led on to proposals that we attempt to network with women in the south and begin to compare notes about our respective situations and how we could support each other. Another speaker wholeheartedly endorsed the building of a network and said that she would like to see the Unity meetings revived because we needed a forum where we could discuss issues. She felt that those who now had paid employment within the community were possibly deluding themselves that they were changing things by 'getting into the community' and a revival of the Unity meetings might help in regaining the more radical political perspective we used to have, and which could now be applied in a more concrete manner.

A heated debate began on whether we had been coopted by the state, losing all our 'revolutionary zeal' as a result. Some felt there was a danger that this was happening, while others vehemently denied it. There is certainly no denying the achievements of the women's movement in terms of government money and resources, but has this been paid for by a toning down of demands and activities?

Many personal testimonies poured out in response to this debate, but while efforts were made to come to some kind of agreement in relation to the positive aspects of the women's movement, another speaker broke in to say that in her opinion there was no women's movement and there would not be one until we honestly recognised the political differences that existed between us. She said that as imperialism, class and power divided women from each other, alliances could only be made with those who shared the same political perspective.

Our chairperson reminded us that there were a million struggles being undertaken by women outside in the community and our priority was to listen to them and empower them to become visible in a way that would not submerge those differences.

Underlying many of the accusations concerning the state coopting the efforts of feminists is the fact that for many people, it is the British state's presence in the north that is the crux of the problem. So do we simply make demands on the state as though it were an unproblematic social democracy that we live in, or do we mobilise against the British presence as the overriding priority? And how does one work with both nationalist and unionist in the context of a bitterly divided society? Does one refuse to raise any contentious issue, hoping that a fragile unity can be forged which might in time become strong enough to support differences of opinion, and which might even become the instrument of reconciliation, dissolving all differences? Or is the realistic option to accept that there are political differences but that the only honest and meaningful way forward is through open debate, painful though that may be? Indirectly and directly, the remainder of the symposium's discussion revolved around these questions.

Women's Information Group

A concrete example of these different approaches is illustrated by the experience of the Women's Information Group, which is an informal gathering of women from working class estates throughout Belfast.

Its primary aim is to act as a pressure group on the social services, as well as being a resource for local women's groups. Through its monthly meetings it has become an important force for working class solidarity – or is this an illusion, based on notions of false unity? Its members come from intensely loyalist and nationalist estates and yet they have not allowed this to divide the group. Such unusual harmony has not been achieved as a result of painful yet open discussion, but remains instead a fragile entity that no-one dares investigate too closely, the result of a deliberate policy of refusing to comment on any controversial political questions. This strategy is endorsed by, amongst others, the NIWRM, who argue that agreement on class issues is achievable through such methods and will eventually lead to a more permanent unity.

However, during discussion, other women expressed very different views. A former member of Women Against Imperialism, who had been asked to speak about her group for the symposium but who decided to speak instead from the floor during the afternoon session, said that she felt women should be organising solely in their own areas, even if this restricted them to their respective ghettos. The feminist role was therefore simply that of support, for example, explaining how to get grant aid. But such a policy would lead to the total isolation of one group of women from another, whereas the chief virtue of the Information Day is the pooling of information and resources from every part of the city. Belfast is so severely segregated on sectarian lines that many women would never meet those of different religious backgrounds were it not for that monthly get-together. The limitations of the Information Group are many, but a major strength is that unique and invaluable opportunity it offers women to explore what it is they have in common.

One of the few younger women to enter into the discussion felt very strongly that feminism had much more to offer than mere technical advice. As she said of her situation, a Catholic working in a hard-line Protestant estate, 'I can see there's a lot to offer from the women's movement in that community . . . our women's group brings up socialist issues which have never, ever been broached in the community.' Class issues yes, but the national question remains unvoiced. Can that situation continue indefinitely, or must we, despite the inevitable traumas, begin the task of raising uncomfortable, unpalatable issues, thereby facing the national question within each other?

Building on Our Differences

In her concluding remarks as chair, Inez McCormick argued that we shouldn't deny our political allegiances, because they are part of what we are and if we deny that, then we will not be relevant to the women in Armagh jail or to the women on the Shankill. She mentioned the NUPE rank and file members that she works for, who are (unlike the feminist movement) attempting to do precisely that. When they attended a recent ICTU conference they had to vote on a motion condemning strip searching. Although the wording made it difficult for both republican and loyalist, "they stuck by the decision they had taken because they believed in each other as women."

By the end of the afternoon, those of us gathered together in that hot, smokey room, felt upset at the divisions that had been voiced and angry at some of the more sectarian and dismissive opinions that had been uttered. It had, however, been instructive, leaving some of us much more clear about where we stood and where we felt the movement should go. A decade on, there are no women's groups with political programmes and manifestos, but many more women from a wide variety of backgrounds are involved. A new movement may be slowly developing. International Women's Day 1987 will see a series of workshops on the theme 'Building On Our Differences', an initiative which stems directly from the experience of the Symposium. The organising of the IWD events has led to an unprecedented level of cooperation between groups, although much mistrust and suspicion still has to be overcome. If memories of the past decade leave any legacy, the message is surely that women in Northern Ireland must begin to believe in each other as women and begin to face up to the national question without denying their differences. Only when we can do that, will we discover a way forward. □

Note:

1. The Symposium was organised by Joanna McMinn and myself in our respective capacities as co-ordinator for the Women's Education Project and women's officer within the Community Services Department of Belfast City Council. A transcript of the proceedings has now been published under the title *A Difficult, Dangerous Honesty* and is available from Women's News, 7 Winetavern Street, Belfast 1, price £1 plus postage.

Who's Afraid Of Andrea Dworkin?

Susanne Kappeler uncovers an alarming trend in the reviewing of feminist political writers. In an anxiety to prove themselves 'pro sex and pleasure' reviewers, feminist and non-feminist alike, invent a parody of both the writer and her work; Andrea Dworkin and her book 'Intercourse' being the current targets.

Andrea Dworkin, *Ice and Fire*, Secker & Warburg, 1986.
Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, Secker & Warburg, 1987.

My original intention was to review Andrea Dworkin's new book, *Intercourse*. But a look at American reviews, and at the first English ones, quickly convinced me that this was a naive project. Although Andrea Dworkin has become a feminist of such stature that her work is reviewed in establishment as well as feminist publications, something extraordinary seems to be going on that has little to do with reviewing as I have known it. A peculiar practice of writing, a new form of argument, a special style and technique are developing which it is worth getting to grips with, since this is happening at the heart of feminist debate.

There hasn't been a review of *Intercourse*, nor of *Ice and Fire* for that matter, which sees its purpose simply in the critical engagement with the ideas and arguments presented in the book(s). Instead, reviewers seem most concerned with making their own position in relation to Andrea Dworkin and their own politics clear to the reader. There wouldn't be so much wrong with this if it were the accummulated and developed ideas of the feminist political thinker Andrea Dworkin which constituted such an intellectual checkpoint for contemporary writers. But the name 'Andrea Dworkin' has become a monument in the political landscape which has little to do with the ideas and politics of Andrea Dworkin. What her name has come to stand for, what it is *made* to stand for, is usually defined by the reviewers themselves. Some of the things it seems to stand for in some way are 'sex', 'feminism', and 'censorship'.

'It seems like Dworkin doesn't like sex', writes one commentator in *Off Our Backs*[1]. Dworkin's 'single argument', in *Ice and Fire* as well as in *Intercourse*, is that 'sexual intercourse should be abolished', according to the reviewer of *The New York Times*[2]. And according to our own *City Limits*, both these books are 'hysterical rant . . . in the sexually paranoid '80s' pushing an '*anti*-feminist line' from a 'fundamentalist premise'[3].

What Intercourse is not about

For one familiar with the work of Andrea Dworkin this spells puzzlement. But even for a hapless reader ignorant of the vagaries of recent ideological struggles, feminist and otherwise, the prime message of most reviews of Andrea Dworkin's recent books is: 'This reviewer is *for* Sex!'. With a variant in the lesbian press: 'I am claiming the right to sexual pleasure for women'.[4] And when a reviewer goes on to tell us what Andrea Dworkin's book is *not* about – 'lesbianism is pretty much invisible in this book. Granted, it is a book on heterosexual intercourse, but . . . [it] does not even mention lesbianism in the index', or 'One male writer Dworkin does not mention, Henry James'[5] – we begin to realise that reviews are no longer about books just published, but about books that ought to have been published instead and opinions authors ought to hold, never mind what opinions they do hold.

This is of particular interest, as a logical phenomenon. For, although reviewers seem to disagree so strongly with Andrea Dworkin, they often disagree with what they then tell us she doesn't say anyway.

> It seems like Dworkin doesn't like sex. It's impossible to read her chapter "Skin" and not feel that the author really loathes the loss of self and deep intimacy associated with love-making. But Dworkin doesn't admit that nor does she say that all sex gives her the creeps. Instead, her focus is strictly on what happens between men and women, aka heterosexuality.[6]

Her focus is on heterosexual intercourse, strictly (as the title promises). It's just that the reviewer's isn't.

Another reviewer writes: 'The book sounds as if it sees celibacy as the only or most likely option for women at the present time. I am not sure this is what Dworkin means to convey.' And from what Dworkin probably doesn't mean to convey to what she certainly does not say (but the reviewer feels strongly about): 'I do not think most women will accept postponing sex until after the always-postponed revolution.'[7] I don't think most women will vote Labour, but what does it have to do with reviewing *Intercourse*, and who is making these proposals? Not Andrea Dworkin in her book, so far as I have been able to establish by reading it.

What strikes me on reading these reviews and any other gratuitous comments on Andrea Dworkin in the press is that the name 'Andrea Dworkin' is used by each reviewer to stand for what they wish in their own pen to disagree with. Some have the decency to tell us that Andrea Dworkin doesn't talk about this particular topic of their choice and fails to give any indication of her views on that specific matter. Others set the agenda in more circuitous ways. The simplest of these is changing the topic, although there are sophisticated ways of doing so. This usually means changing to a subject the reviewer much prefers. She writes a book about pornography, they talk about sex, or female pleasure, or censorship. She writes a book about heterosexual intercourse, they talk about lesbianism and Henry James. She talks about sexual libertarianism at the New York Conference on 'Sexual Liberals and the Backlash Against Feminism', her critics turn it into 'the New York Sex Conference' at which Lesbians played another match against Straights and won 2:0[8]. (I didn't notice, although I was there.) This was also the occasion where Andrea Dworkin didn't say that all sex gave her the creeps. (Again, I can't help, since it is difficult to confirm hearing what someone didn't say.)

The meaning of IF

'If', writes another commentator with a more sophisticated strategy, 'MacKinnon and/or Dworkin believe in eliminating all sex or sex with men, or intimacy, intensity or passion, I want to know how that worked in their lives.'[9] If they – one or the

other or both – have a political theory and an analysis which have implications for the personal, I want to know how that affects their sex lives. But rather than discuss the theory, follow the analysis and draw out the implications, the writer posits a 'belief' which these theorists might hold, presumably as an article of faith. Little does it matter whether 'they' believe in eliminating all sex, or just sex with men (you might have thought it makes a difference) or whether they wish instead to eliminate intensity, or intimacy, or passion. Least of all does it matter whether they hold any such belief at all: 'they' are known to want to eliminate, since they used to work on pornography, which spells 'censorship', and now they work on intercourse, which spells 'eliminate' and 'abolish'. The rhetorical 'if' is swiftly eliminated, so that henceforth 'their theories remind me a lot of the catholicism I grew up with.'[10] And if you still don't know what 'their' theories are, suffice it that you now know that they are a lot like the old catholicism. (Although the catholicism I grew up with never advocated the elimination of sex with men.)

Not all critics are equally forthright in setting a different topic or stating what they want to talk about. In some cases it looks as if the focus slipped more imperceptibly. Carol Ann Douglas of *Off Our Backs* in many ways writes a 'sympathetic' review of *Intercourse* (she got her come-uppance in the following issue), including among other things quite a bit of what Andrea Dworkin *does* say in her book. She states early on what in fact is quite an interesting observation, namely that Andrea Dworkin's 'severe questioning of intercourse is not so new to radical feminism . . . Celibate feminists and lesbian feminists, in particular, have challenged sexual intercourse as an institution and as a practice. Dworkin, however, is the first to write an entire book on the subject.'[11] Note how while the critique of heterosexual intercourse in feminist theory is apparently the subject of discussion, there is the same urgency to inform the reader about the sexual practices or abstinence of the theorists concerned – in case you 'want to know how that worked in their lives'.

And when we are just about to get into some pretty interesting theoretical territory through the reviewer's careful synopsis of the argument in *Intercourse*, we quietly drift into an altogether different swamp. The issue is Andrea Dworkin's thesis that while intercourse serves to guarantee men's supremacy and pleasure, reinforcement of supremacy and power is the first purpose of the systems of laws created by men, whilst pleasure is clearly secondary and regulated. This opens up a series of questions which are not only fascinating in themselves, but of crucial relevance to sexual politics today. For instance:

> Can men violate the rules that keep gender intact without compromising male dominance . . . ? Which laws are fundamental, essential, to maintaining the authority of men over women? . . . Can sodomy, for instance, become a legal form of intercourse without irredeemably compromising male power over women, that power premised on men being entirely distinct from women in use, function, in posture and position, in role, in "nature"?[12]

Coitus interruptus

But Carol Ann Douglas interrupts to say that it seems to her that 'the criticism of classic intercourse as an act designed around male needs and reinforcing male supremacy is more universal than criticisms based on men's emotions and behaviour.' I wouldn't have been sure quite what she meant by criticisms being 'more universal' if I hadn't drifted along a bit further. 'Many men doubtless treat women coldly or brutally in intercourse or care little about the individual women, but men do not always behave this way.' Whilst Andrea Dworkin is troubling her head about the future of sexual politics, the strategies of feminism and the theoretical relationship between power and pleasure we are assured that for some women it has 'worked in their lives': men do not always behave in this way! 'My point is not to defend men', continues the review,

> but to say that the question of whether intercourse as a practice is utterly against women's interests, even if it were no longer the established sexual institution, and of whether engaging in any sexual acts with men always is or always will be against women's interests, depends on whether men do have the capacity for tenderness.

The point is that Andrea Dworkin's point and argument have been entirely lost and abandoned in favour of the burning question whether men are part of the human species and hence capable of human emotions. (Andrea Dworkin assumes this as one of her premises.)

What Andrea says

The question whether intercourse is intrinsically against women's interests, even under changing social and political conditions, is precisely one that Andrea Dworkin carefully considers. She finds it a very difficult question, given the absence of any known conditions in history of equality between the sexes, given the centrality of intercourse in the creation and maintenance of inequality of gender, and given the peculiarity and asymmetry of genital intercourse. She analyses known conditions of different historical periods and varying legal organisation, precisely in order to prepare for 'the fundamental question of feminism and freedom: can an occupied people – physically occupied inside, internally invaded – be free . . .? (p124). [Can] intercourse itself be an expression of sexual equality'? (p127).

The reviewer's second question – are any sexual acts with men always against women's interests – isn't strictly within the brief of Andrea Dworkin's book on intercourse, although she notes that

> for increasing numbers of men, bondage and torture of the female genitals . . . may supplant intercourse as a sexual practice. The passion of hurting women is a sexual passion; and sexual hatred of women can be expressed without intercourse (p139).

Her point is that the male gender's primary objective is maintenance of power, not a particular form of pleasure, and that intercourse is a means to that purpose, to which the individual pleasure of men is secondary, and adjustable. How it adjusts, under changing historical conditions, is what she shows by analysing the emotions and views of prominent men in the history of culture.

Despite what reviewers say, she doesn't argue that intercourse is the source of all women's troubles, she knows it isn't: 'It is not that there is no way out if, for instance, one were to establish or believe that intercourse itself determines women's lower status' (p138). And despite what reviewers say, she doesn't say that it should be abolished. She knows it has been abolished as a necessity for human reproduction already by the new reproductive technologies. And she knows that it has already been abolished by contemporary pornography as the central form of the humiliation and subjugation of women.

That IF-word again

But our reviewer still lingers with her question about men, deploying the famous 'if'-technique: 'If feminists say that men can't be tender, and some women have known men who are, these women won't believe us.' I am sure she is right, and these women won't believe us. The trouble is that some women might believe that Andrea Dworkin was one of those feminists who said such a thing, if they have become accustomed to the current practice of eliminating the meaning of 'if' and to the suggestive misuse of the 'if'-construction in reviews. For by this stage they may long have forgotten what Andrea Dworkin really said, having become engrossed in the reviewer's own argument; and since instead of returning to Andrea Dworkin, the review goes on to tell us how it worked in the reviewer's life with her former husband. Her experience with him leads her to 'think men should realise that they can change themselves, and that [she] believe[s] they are capable of doing so.'

All this leads me to believe that the most serious failure of Andrea Dworkin in the eyes of the critics, is that she writes the books of Andrea Dworkin. It leads me to think that what critics most want to

avoid hearing or reading anything Andrea Dworkin actually says or writes. She is taken to task for permitting herself to choose her own topic for her own book and for not writing what Barbara Ehrenreich published shortly before:

> Instead, her focus is strictly on what happens between men and women, aka heterosexuality. She has done this at a time when Barbara Ehrenreich has analysed the sex scene in America. She proclaims that women have had a sexual revolution [?]. Women's sexuality is now widely accepted [!]. Ehrenreich has a great time showing the evidence especially among Christian evangelicals. They now teach classes on better sex in marriage [intercourse?] focusing on women having orgasms . . . Regrettably, this change wasn't integrated into Dworkin's analysis.[13]

She is rebuked for keeping to her subject when reviewers wish to change the subject. She keeps her focus just exactly on what they do not want to engage with. They wish she had written anything rather than what she has actually written. In a roundabout way, in a very contorted and complicated way, this is a mammoth compliment to Andrea Dworkin. No other feminist writer attracts such intense resistance, such elaborate circumvention tactics, such sophisticated avoidance techniques. It is worth asking why.

Why?

One problem obviously is the topic. Not so much because of what it is – since reviewers rarely inquire – as because of what it isn't. It isn't enough about what Andrea Dworkin thinks of 'sex', about whether she likes it or not and how that worked in her life, or whether she wants to take it away from you. It isn't enough of a recipe for a 'positive female sexuality'. The hot topic of the sexually paranoid '80s is what everybody does for sex and with whom or what they abstain from. What everyone wants to know is what they can do here and now, and before 'the revolution'. No time, apparently, to carry on thinking about 'sex' or analysing the ideological construction of sexuality or building a feminist critique of what sex, sexuality, sexual practices and institutions mean for women politically. Yet this still doesn't explain why, when it was apparently alright for other, mostly 'celibate and lesbian feminists', to engage in theory and analysis of sexual intercourse as an institution, it causes such furor when Andrea Dworkin does it. I suspect it has to do with the uncompromising consistency, the impeccable logic and the unflinching focus with which she does it. These aren't, as we have seen, highly prized qualities.

She has earned censure and blame before for displaying them. It has become the statutory introductory insult, especially in England, to point to her eloquence and 'oratory' command of the English language, which apparently are suspect in themselves. The problem with this new book, *Intercourse*, is that she deploys her formidable capacities not only to draw together the implications of twenty years of feminist theory and analysis on the subject of heterosexual intercourse, but does so with her critics already in mind. Her argument, if you like, is merciless – without let-up for the reader who is anxious that her politics might have implications for the most intimate, intense and passionate 'personal'; without mercy for the anxious male lover/friend/flatmate of the reader, who wishes to see himself mentioned at every turn as the laudable exception which disproves feminist analysis. Merciless with regard to the therapeutic feminist who feels that what matters are men's emotions and not the structures they create and inhabit. Whilst her critics rush to assure us that they know some very nice men, Andrea Dworkin patiently explains again that

> [woman] is devalued not only in people's thoughts but in the way she is treated . . . The ways in which she is devalued are concrete, material, real: sexual, economic, physical, social. They happen to her . . . Inferiority is done to her; it is real and she is real . . . Nice attitudes to her as an individual, while perhaps a welcome respite, do not change her status (p171).

All solid radical feminist stuff – with the difference that this time, all the objections, all the resistances and defensive reflexes, all the arguments and strategies of its critics, have not only been anticipated, but are addressed, as a systematic phenomenon of patriarchal cultural politics, with the same scrupulous but devastating logic with which she analyses pornography, woman-hating, and intercourse. The political connection between these phenomena could not be lost on a reader who reads and listens to what Andrea Dworkin says. □

Notes:
1. Vickie Leonard, *Off Our Backs*, (July 1987), p12.
2. Carol Sternwell, *New York Times Book Review* (3 May 1987), p3.
3. Helen Birch, *City Limits* (16–23 July 1987), p90.
4. Nancy Polikoff, *Off Our Backs* (July 1987), p25.
5. Carol Ann Douglas, *Off Our Backs* (June 1987), p15.
6. Vickie Leonard, p12.
7. Carol Ann Douglas, p15.
8. Vickie Leonard, p12.
9. Pat Gowens, *Off Our Backs* (July 1987), p24.
10. Pat Gowens, p24.
11. Carol Ann Douglas, p15.
12. Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1987), p160.
13. Vickie Leonard, p12.

The Mancunian Way

In Manchester in the early '70s there was a thriving Women's Liberation Movement. In this interview Angie Cooper of Amazon Press talks to Sara Scott and Al Dickens about her memories of that time.

S: *How did you first become involved in the Women's Movement in Manchester?*

A: Well, I've always lived in Manchester. I'm one of the few people I know who's always lived in Manchester. I was 22 in 1972, I'd just finished college and was ready for doing all those sorts of things. It makes a big difference if you're 30 or if you're 22 how you approach things and what you do and how everything seems to you. I was first involved in gay politics at the beginning of the '70s. I remember that we had Gay Liberation Front (GLF) meetings at the Union Pub in town and then they moved to the Women's Centre once that started. The men and women in GLF split just before that, which was something that was going on countrywide. There were gay groups and then the differences started to become apparent – that the women didn't have much in common with the gay men, so they became gay women's groups, and ours met at the Women's Centre.

Al: *So you were a lesbian before you were a feminist?*

A: I didn't have a vast sense of myself as a lesbian. I'd been a closet lesbian for years. I was still a student and there just weren't many others around. I can remember a women's conference at the University where the lesbians were really in the closet and trying desperately to get out. It wasn't 'in' to be a lesbian – it was very much out at the beginning of the '70s, the women's movement was scared of the association.

Al: *So how did you get involved with feminism?*

A: The first actual women's meeting I went to was in a pub in town and that was the International Marxist Group (IMG) and the International Socialist (IS) women – the ones out of the straight left becoming liberationists. I drifted along to it and it was all very peculiar – no-one really knew what they were on about. But the politicos appeared to know because they were used to meetings and the rest of it. The rest of us just went along with it because nobody really had any particularly formulated ideas.

Knowing I was going to do this interview, I was trying to think about what has changed for me, and I think one of the biggest changes over the years is the sense of optimism. At that time, at the beginning, the Women's Movement definitely felt like something that was growing bigger and bigger all the time and would never end. There was this real emphasis on drawing women in, working class women . . . Here's something that shows how we were: me and this friend of mine went down one night to this (gay) club on Shude Hill – actually it was the first time I met Luchia – and going in with leaflets to meet "the lesbians", and we were actually giving out leaflets in this club, and there were all these totally straight gay women looking at us. Funnily enough, Luchia latched on straight away and started telling everybody 'Oh god, I've been saying this for years, we all ought to get together'. We really thought

that the gay scene would go, and everyone would be drawn, like the Pied Piper, out of the clubs and into this golden era of lesbian feminism. We were so idealistic – but then we didn't know enough not to be idealistic.

Things got organised much more off the cuff. Like this guy got a really light sentence for rape, so we put a letter in the Evening News and 20 or 30 women came along to talk about stopping that happening. It was quite a difficult meeting because there were quite a few 'hang 'em and flog 'em types – I mean rape's difficult enough, I mean *I* don't know what to do with rapists, and there we all were trying to find some common ground. There was a lot of that.

S: *A sign of the times – if we did that today everyone would know it was feminists and not come if they didn't have sympathies that way.*

A: I suppose things were a lot more open, although people were talking about women's libbers, bra burners, that sort of thing. So you were trying not to appear as one of those harpies that they were on about, and yet not totally water down what you were saying. I remember we went to Sheffield to talk to a bunch of students about being lesbians – loads of men there – I mean now, I'd think 'Oh my god . . .'. We did a huge talk at UMIST[1] – all the mechanical engineers and all the nightmares they have there! There was a Swedish Sexologist on the panel and me!

We had nothing to lose – I didn't know anyone with mortgages and kids and cars and all the trappings we've got now – it was almost an outlaw mentality, sniping away at society, fighting on every front.

S: *So how did the Women's Centre begin?*

A: As I remember a woman called Ann Willis and another called Jill Norris had heard about this house for rent near the University on Upper Brook St. I can't remember how I heard about it but I needed somewhere to live and it needed living in, so Luchia and I decided to move in – and we moved into this – horrible – I wouldn't dream of living there now, but at the time it was all exciting and I suppose vaguely glamorous, moving into this pit.

It was this three-storey building and we had a front room where we did pregnancy testing on a Saturday.

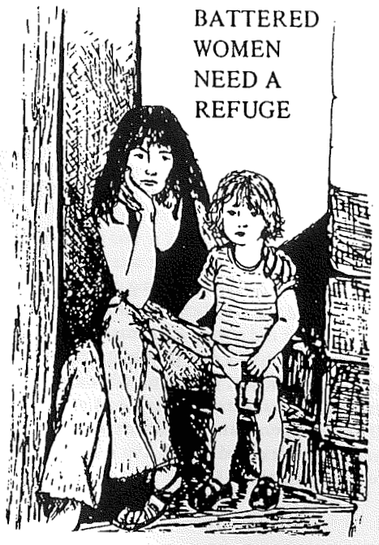
It was so unappetising, if you got to the door it was really seedy – there was no grant or any thing to do it up – it was just like 'Oh I've got an old chair, or I've got a table I don't want' – so the meeting room in the front was like that. And at the back was the room where the phone was. Our kitchen was through there and upstairs we had a bedroom and a smaller room, and then I had a room at the top. There was probably two or three women living there at any one time, and various kids, and all these odds and sods that used to turn up.

S: *It sounds like absolute hell!*

A: Well it didn't feel like hell at the time. I mean those were the days when you could *live* on social security rather than exist. And you're a lot different at that age – I'd got my degree and that just sat over there somewhere, and I did a bit of work at this, a bit of that. I'd work for six months, then I'd go on the dole for six months – do work at the Centre – get bored with that, so I'd go back to work. I saw myself as basically being paid by the state to run the Women's Centre. It was a very fly b'night existence, but at the time it was fun. It felt very different to today. You felt you were part of the Women's Movement, conferences, meetings, articles, and there seemed to be the real *will* to make things happen.

A1: *How did the Centre actually work?*

A: The way it was run was that there were various groups in Manchester – there were area groups: Chorlton Women's Liberation 1 and 2; Didsbury 1 and 2, Central Manchester, lots, and then there were 'Women in Education', 'Women in Medicine' – women in all this, that and the other, and they used to have their meetings at the Centre. The consciousness raising (CR) groups still met in their areas in women's houses so the Centre functioned as a place for larger meetings. We had a monthly meeting where representatives from each group would come. We used to have a rota that meant that five nights a week somebody would be there to answer the phone – and we kept a log book. We used to get calls for everything under the sun. Sometimes like 'where's there a nursery?', and then other times it was somebody that was quite freaked out and upset about being a lesbian or being a battered woman or something. People would ring us up, social workers, people like that and pass women on to us, and we'd say 'come down and see us'. It wasn't really official, but that's the way Women's Aid started in Chorlton, because as the Women's Centre developed we ended up in a position



where I had things like a policewoman ringing me up at 2 o'clock in the morning: 'Will you take this young woman in – I don't want to send her to a remand place and she just needs somewhere to stay', and Social Services used to ring and say 'Can you take this person in?', and it got to the stage where we had quite a few battered women coming because Chiswick had opened and that was to the fore so we were the only place for people to home in on.

And we just couldn't cope – we had a woman and five kids there at one time. It was crazy. And then this woman said there was a house next door to her that had been empty for two years and why didn't we squat it, and it just came about like that from the inadequacies of the Centre and the obvious needs that existed, sprang the refuge.

We lived in the Centre from 1972 for nearly four years, and it gradually built up and was really great for a while, but in the end it rested more and more on us. We became disillusioned with all the women we saw who staffed the 'phone, and of course we were the ones who were always there and women talked to. Some of them had never met a lesbian before. It seemed quite a few of them were married and it was all 'how am I going to deal with all that I'm finding out with the rest of my life'. They were really in a state of ferment. At the beginning you're in something and that's all there is and you listen and you talk and give loads of support. But two years later you hear the same things being said and you wonder if this one's going to be like a lot of the others and do a bit of tinkering around with her marriage and then slot all the pieces back together, and carry on and we'll never see her again. In the end the place really got us down – like the ceiling collapsed on my bed, stuff like that.

S: *You mentioned the expansionist feel of the movement, and about wanting to draw in working class women, was that true of the Centre?*

A: Yes, there was a lot of grass roots stuff going on in general in Manchester, Claimants Unions, Mosside Press, Militant Christians, – all sorts of odd bods, and a big emphasis on communities, on doing things in your own area. One of the drawbacks we all thought the

sisterhood is taking a short break

Women's Centre had was that it wasn't in a community, it was on this big road near the University. We would have liked to have been in a street. The whole idea of a Women's Centre was that it should be a house in a working class area and draw women in. Like there were things going on in Salford, people were running market stalls and stuff and we felt at a real disadvantage.

Al: *What were the politics of women who were very active in the Centre?*

A: Very mixed. In the women's band, for example, I was an anarchist, situationist, there was Luchia off the gay scene, Jenny Clegg and Francis Bernstein who were Maoists, and two women who'd left the IMG, that gives you an idea of the sort of mix in a microcosm, plus all the women you couldn't identify like that, who'd never been into any other politics, who were 'just' feminists. Particularly at the beginning it was like 'we're all in this together, let's not notice the cracks'. You wanted everyone to get involved, like a particular couple of women who were in the refuge and were really glad that we found them somewhere to live and just to please us they came once or twice to meetings over at the Centre – but they just couldn't understand what people were talking about and so they never came again.

And that was when I probably realised that it wasn't going to happen – the Women's Movement wasn't going to absorb these women. For starters it was going to have to change the way everyone spoke. Everyone's much more familiar with the terms now, the media's pumping it out night and day, but probably then you either knew it or you didn't – there was no access into it. I think part of our disillusionment when we decided to move out was just realising that it was a long term job, that and hearing a different bunch of women going through the same stuff at the Centre and hearing yourself sounding like a right old hack saying 'we tried that already, and . . .' And you'd done the big marches and the street theatre and disrupted the Festival of Light at Platt Fields, and you'd got a historical perspective and you realised it looked like a long haul, plus we were plain burnt out. Being in the Centre morning, noon and night. You can only keep that up for so long.

S: *What was particular about it being Manchester? Were the same national splits replicated here?*

A: No, 'cos there's quite a few nutcases in London in my opinion. Odd people gravitate to London don't they?, in general, all the odd bods of the country, looking for a fight. And the same applies to some extent to the Women's community. I don't have a lot of praise for London really.

I suppose the Women's Movement started earlier in London and there were a lot more involved – a lot more capacity for division. And I do tend to think there are certain people in London who do like controversy. Of course you get one or two in Manchester but not as many funny individuals, so we did get the splits here but later, and they never really tore us apart. I think things disintegrated more gradually up here.

I wonder sometimes if it was really how I think it was in 1970/71, or was it just like it is now with everyone getting on with their business and the odd little feminist dotted about. But it did seem like a mass movement and there felt like a real possibility of change. You look back and you think what a sweet little thing you were, and you look at 19, 20 year olds now and there seems so little they can get excited about. I'm really glad I was around then. □

Footnote:
1. UMIST – University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.

No.12 Winter 1987

£1.95~$3