

Second Class, Working Class



*An International
Women's Reader*

*Women changing the face
of the left - political parties
and unions*

Strikes and resistance

*The other side of
unemployment: prostitution,
immigration, and reproductive
rights*

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In 1977, a group of women from Peoples Translation Service began talking about publishing an anthology of world-wide women's news. The idea remained with us, but it was not until May 1979 that work on the project actually began. Eight of us conceived, planned and carried out what has become *Second Class, Working Class*. Another twenty people helped with translations and production during the long hours of work in the past five months.

In putting together this booklet, we relied almost exclusively on the foreign women's press. We wanted to provide information on women, by women, information that is unobtainable elsewhere in English. The booklet's theme - working women - has been an issue for women in the US for some time now. We feel our readers will agree on the importance of being informed on how working women in other countries deal with their conflicts and problems. The three chapters - *women changing the face of the left, strike and resistance*, and *the other side of unemployment* - illustrate both the similarities and the differences in women's lives in various parts of the world. Differences between women in industrialized and Third World countries, which seemed striking at the beginning of the project, diminished in importance. Working women share similar experiences whether on strike in France or fighting in the resistance in Eritrea. As much as women might start out with different ideas, they ultimately find themselves fighting against the same oppression and for the same rights.

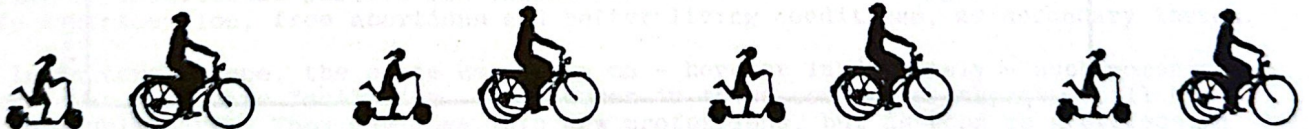
We have tried our best to provide background information, documents, analyses and interviews to cover these issues, and to connect them as much as possible with each other. Not everything we wanted to print found its way into *Second Class, Working Class*, due to space and money limitations. Other limits on our coverage were not of our own choosing. Western Europe, which has a strong women's movement, also has an extensive network of women's magazines and presses, dealing consciously with issues from a feminist perspective. Most of the Third World lacks these facilities, a fact that made it harder, and sometimes impossible, to find material from those countries.

We hope you will enjoy reading *Second Class, Working Class* as much as we have enjoyed producing it. In the course of the production process, all of us have learned a great deal about working women around the world. *Second Class, Working Class* was printed by Up Press, an all-women's press in Palo Alto. Recently, many women owned and operated businesses in the San Francisco Bay Area have been forced to suspend operations. For us, publishing a booklet on working women called for supporting women's business by printing it at a women's press. You can support us by sending for more copies, asking a friend to buy the booklet or a local bookstore to carry it, or just by sending a small donation. All of these would be greatly appreciated.

If you have comments, criticisms or questions, feel free to get in touch with us. We would like to get your feedback.

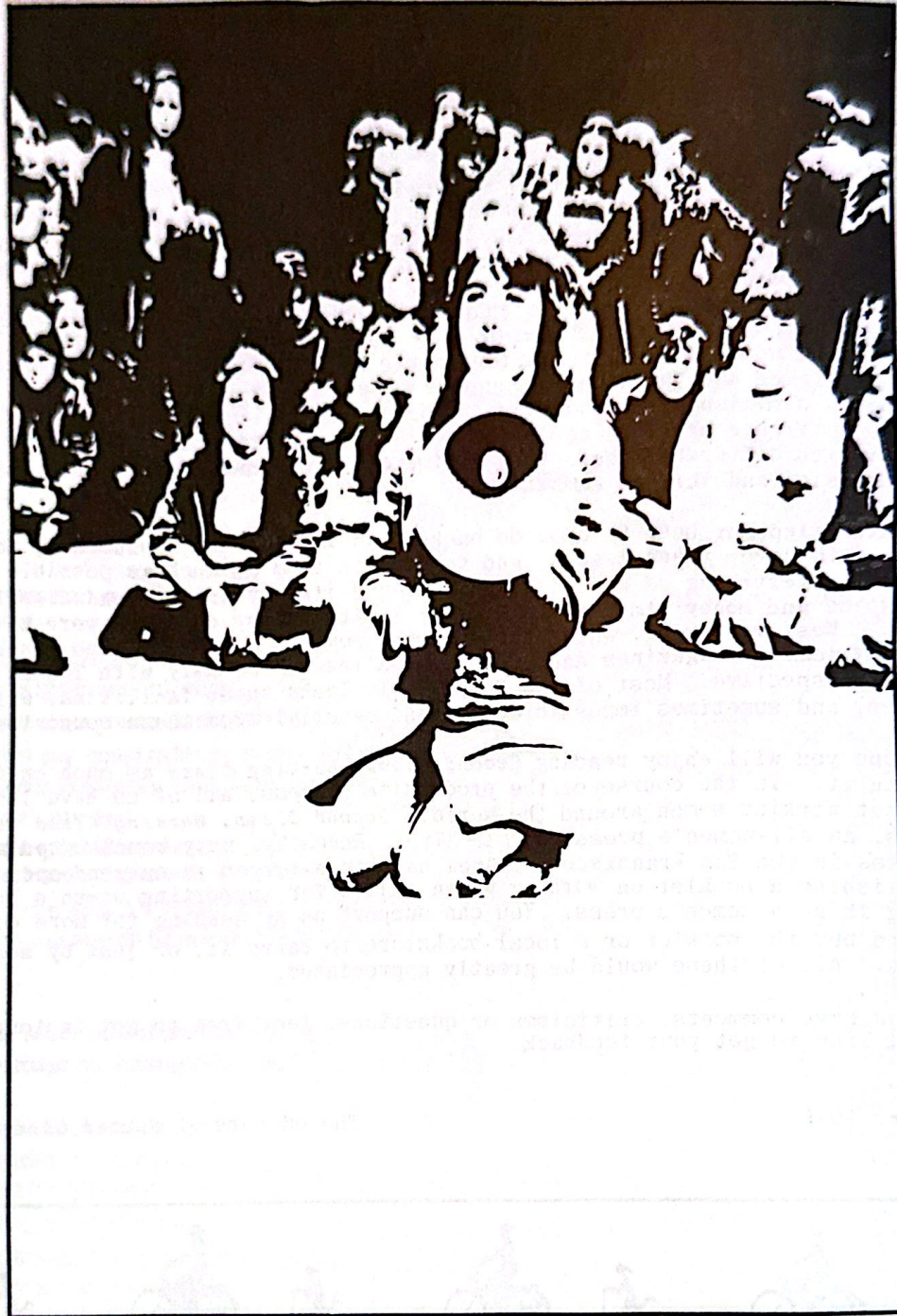
November, 1979

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Women changing the face of the left- political parties and unions

Introduction

The political situation of the European left is quite different than the US left. Traditional workers' parties - Socialist and Communist - are strong in several Western European countries, and have come frustratingly close to power in France and Italy. Feminism has historically identified itself with the left. Few feminists imagine that major changes can be achieved within the status quo of capitalism. Women from different countries and class backgrounds have come to the same conclusion: the present system offers only minimal opportunities to improve their second-class status.

The highly industrialized countries of Northern Europe - those which have long social-democratic traditions, a high standard of living and efficient welfare systems - are marked by a generally low level of class struggle. In these countries, the women's movement draws its base mainly from the middle class and the intelligentsia. Part of the movement in these countries is oriented toward mysticism and spirituality.

This is different in the less industrialized countries of Southern Europe and the Third World. Here, women typically experience their oppression first as members of the working class. Feminist consciousness grows out of conflicts between work and home. It is always women who have to carry a double work load and a double responsibility. Traditional parties and unions often see women's struggles for childcare, safe contraception, free abortions and better living conditions, as secondary issues.

In Eastern Europe, the state has taken on - however inadequately - such women's demands as childcare facilities. Most women in these countries, though, still have to do double work. They may move into new professions, but as soon as a profession is regarded as a woman's job it loses its social prestige.

The traditional left structures in France have recently been the scene of an explosion of feminist activity. In many ways, this has been an example of a widespread tendency toward broadening the base of European women's movements. The French party women have been trying to break down barriers and join forces with the autonomous women's movement. This contrasts with earlier tactics, which were marked by exclusion of the autonomous movements, rendering them more marginal and politically ineffective, and attempts to absorb the autonomous movements by bringing straying feminists back into the party fold. Such a change on the part of party women in France reflects an increasing recognition that a socialist revolution will not be a solution in itself unless it is strongly based in feminist consciousness.

Women see red

THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY



The most recent hopes of the French left to come into power were dashed with its defeat which, although narrow, was still a defeat, in the 1978 legislative elections. With membership left licking their wounds, and leadership taken up with growing internal dissent, a new voice suddenly erupted on the scene. The women of the Socialist and Communist parties, exasperated at their longstanding exclusion from leadership and at their respective parties' inability and unwillingness to deal with their demands, exploded. Openly criticizing their parties, they organized into a formal feminist opposition.

In the Socialist Party (PS), the women organized into a new 'faction' and declared their intention to demand official recognition at the next party congress (April 79).

(The structure of the PS allows for official representation of a 'faction' on its central decision-making body if that faction's candidates obtain 5% of the national vote at the party congress.)

Cecile Goldet, one of the group who launched the move, explained the goals of the new opposition shortly after its creation, in an interview granted to *histoires d'elles*.

It was after the defeat of the left in the recent elections, and the general bewilderment and lack of direction that followed, that we decided to create this new current.

The idea of forming an autonomous group was something we had been discussing for some time: a growing number of socialist women have been going outside the party to work on feminist issues, or joining other women's groups, and this double militancy was a measure of the failure of the political organizations to address the needs of the feminist struggle.

The creation of this new current is our only chance to achieve autonomy within the party structures. We want to give women a chance to speak, and, in doing so, to address all the important issues in a language that is both simple and understandable, whether the subject be education, the army, nuclear power, the economy or rape. In other words, we want to take our

feminist consciousness beyond specifically feminine problems to create a global political vision of the socialist society we wish to build. We believe that the feminist struggle must break out of its confines as a more-or-less marginal movement to realize its potential as the most revolutionary mass movement the world over.

We believe that it would be a mistake for the left to try to integrate our feminist struggle completely into the traditional framework of the class struggle.

Feminist opposition within the Communist Party (PCF) took the form of launching a new women's publication, *Women See Red* (*Elles voient Rouge*), outside of the party hierarchy, and "addressed to all women, to establish a new relationship between communist women and non-communist women." In an article entitled, *The Communist Party Laid Bare by its Women* from June 1978, these women took their party sorely to task for its failure to effect any real change in party ideology or practice, and especially for its long standing moralist attitudes that still confine women to a primary role of motherhood. The obstacles they met in trying to publish the article are illustrative in themselves of traditional PCF attitude towards its women members, and to any form of internal opposition. Although the article had been widely circulated among PCF members, much altered and toned down in an attempt to make it acceptable to party leadership, the PCF organ, *L'Humanite*, still refused to publish it, and it finally appeared in *Le Monde*, France's prestigious liberal daily.

The dissatisfaction with party leadership expressed by the Communist and Socialist parties women is pretty much the same, with a few variations. Although both parties have officially recognized the legitimacy of feminist demands, they have effected no real change in their policies or practices. The PS, at the National Convention on Women's Rights organized by its women in January 1978, officially recognized the validity of the demands of the women's movement on such issues as employment, the family, abortion and rape. A few months later, the PCF followed their example and admitted to a specific oppression of women which cannot be reduced to a "super-exploitation of class," and that this oppression preceded the class division of society. The PCF has also, on several occasions, come out in open self-criticism of its "backward attitudes" and the fact that it has frankly been lagging behind in the feminist struggle.

THE UNIONS: CGT AND CFTD

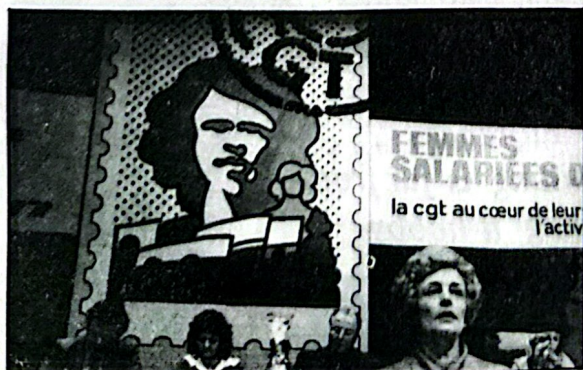
The first issue of *Elles voient Rouge* provided a succinct analysis of the situation of women in

unions. The following is a summary of some of the main points.

The two left unions, the CGT (General Workers Union, close to the PCF) and the CFDT (French Workers Confederation, close to the PS) have shown a more rapid and more radical change in their positions on women than the parties. This is partly due to their structure, which is not only more flexible, but also allows for more contradictions because of the diversified positions of their activists, who are often politically or ideologically opposed. The unions are also close to, and therefore more sensitive to pressure from the working class. But this specificity is relative, and the unions often have the same policies and share the same ideologies as the parties they are affiliated with.

The CGT has been slow to support women's specific issues, because of a diehard refusal to deal with social problems that are not directly related to work. The CGT only joined the battles for contraception, and later abortion, because the women's movement had already organized mass mobilization on these issues around the country. Despite pressures brought to bear on the CGT to take an official position against the autonomous women's movement, it has ultimately not been able to do this. This can be seen as a measure of the growing audience the women's liberation movement has been gaining in France.

The CGT has its own women's publication, *Antoinette*, which has a wide circulation. The tone of the articles has changed noticeably over the past few years, and the magazine's general perspective now includes a clear stand against the patriarchal system. But this is not true for the union itself, and at the last CGT conference, in spring 1979, only a small paragraph was devoted to women. This is illustrative of the basic contradiction common in political organizations. While, on the one hand, CGT union structure allows for women's caucuses, a women's publication and a published "Charter of Women's Demands," women are still excluded from policy and decision-making.



cahiers du feminisme

Jeannette Laot of the CFDT, has frankly admitted to the existence of this dichotomy between the rank and file and leadership in her union. We have files on these questions that have been around for 15 years, and have never gotten into the organization. However, while the CGT has tended to remain aloof from women's struggle, the CFDT has often participated in action led by outside women's groups, especially in the battles for abortion and contraception.

Eighteen months have passed since the party women exploded but it is still too early to evaluate the long term effects this feminist ferment may have on the parties. Organized feminist opposition in the PS was shortlived, and virtually fizzled out before the party congress in April 79. Two of the three founding members dropped out to re-join the other factions, and the feminist platform only got 0.3% of the votes.

The women of the PCF published the first issue of *Elles voient Rouge* in March 1979, and the year that lapsed between their first statement in *Le Monde* and the publication of their journal, served only to sharpen their criticisms of and increase their dissatisfaction with the party. While acknowledging the positive changes that have been made in party attitude to women, they deplore the fact that the women's caucuses and committees have been maintained in a marginal position and excluded from any participation in party policy-making. They attribute this to the fact that both parties, while taking up feminist slogans, have continued to ignore the fundamental theoretical analysis that forms the basis of feminist demands. They feel that the failure of the PS women's opposition is illustrative of the paradox of trying to create a women's current within what essentially remains a men's party.

While the question remains, can the left parties and unions really effect the fundamental structural and ideological changes necessary to incorporate a feminist analysis, the other side of the same question is - how long can they continue to ignore women's demands without alienating an ever-growing portion of their membership? ■

(*Le Monde*, 6/12/78; *histoires d'elles*, June/July 1978; *Elles voient Rouge*, May 1979. See also *Newsfront International* #211, #216 and #222)



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"We'll end the conspiracy of silence"

Italy's high unemployment rate creates extremely difficult conditions for women who wish to enter the labor force. Employers, who can afford to pick and choose, generally choose not to hire women. Therefore, many women are forced to take in 'household' work: that is, monotonous piecework which companies contract out (at meager pay) to women who perform the tasks at home. This 'decentralized', isolated, and unorganized labor force is easily manipulated and exploited.

HOUSEHOLD WORKERS

The following opinions, expressed by a typical Italian employer, exemplify a prevalent attitude toward these women workers who are not considered part of the socialized labor force.

'Household work' is typically women's work because, in the business world, women employees are more expensive than they're worth. Personally, I would avoid at all costs taking women into my business. Not because women don't produce; they are even more productive than men, but on the whole, they cost more (due to absenteeism, maternity leave, their refusal to work certain shifts, or to work at night and overtime). With 'household work', certain untenable risks are thus reduced: since the workers foot their own expenses and there's a lot of labor available, the cost of labor is cheaper. Moreover, since they're not taken on as dependents by the business, you can cut them off at any time without owing them anything. It's even better if they organize little businesses or partnerships of their own, since all responsibilities and risks then fall on their shoulders. This is achieved extremely well in convents; the nuns are excellent workers and have a lot of time at their disposal.

There are about one and a half million 'household workers', of whom 85% are women. The general tendency is to believe that this sort of work disappears with the development of industry; the truth is that it has been on the increase and, bit by bit, has become a staple form of industrial organization. The woman who works at home tends to consider herself primarily a housewife. Her contracted work is integrated into her domestic chores. Fathers and husbands often encourage women to take in 'household work', rather than finding jobs outside the home. Here are some of the experiences and observations of Umbrian (a province in Central Italy) women attempting to work under these conditions:

I embroider eight hours a day and, in some seasons, up to fourteen. When my eyes start to hurt,

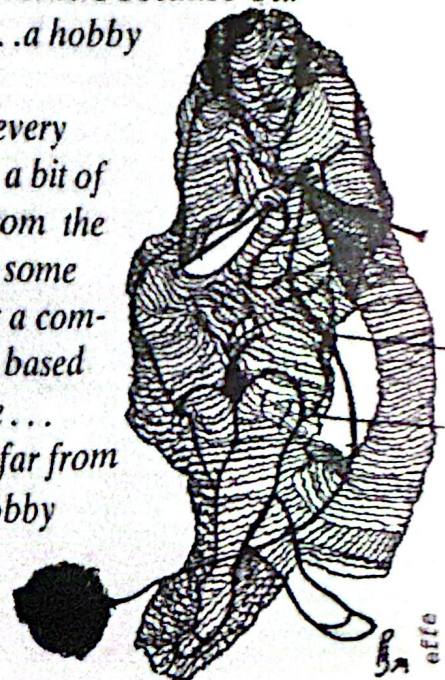
I bathe them and go back to work. I earn from 30-50,000 lire per month (presently about \$35-50). Maybe it seems silly to take on so much work for so little money, but even 500 lire is something - a lot - to me.

A few years ago we all found ourselves suddenly out of work. We decided to go and talk to the man who assigned our jobs, and ask him for some explanation. There were 32 of us women, but the day of the meeting there were only five of us, because the others were afraid. Since then I've become a black sheep. When I meet people on the street, they ask me, "What on earth came over you? I never would have expected such a thing from you."

Two years ago, I heard on television that a law had been passed for household workers. I spoke about it with a factory representative but he told me we couldn't really be defined as household workers because our work was... a hobby he called it. For years, every time I have a bit of time off from the fields, I do some knitting for a company that's based in Florence. My husband, who is going blind, can only find work as a shepherd, but, if it rains, the sheep aren't brought to the pasture and he doesn't get paid. So this knitting is far from being a hobby for me. We've never attempted to rebel, to ask for more money; there's always someone else whose need is so great that she's willing to work for even less.

"But the factory representative told me we couldn't really be defined as household workers because our work was... a hobby he called it.

For years, every time I have a bit of time off from the fields, I do some knitting for a company that's based in Florence... knitting is far from being a hobby for me."



We women from the Waimer factory are the only ones in Umbria to have organized our own union for household workers. At first there were only five or six of us determined to change the situation. We got in contact with the CGIL (Italian General Federation of Labor, Italy's largest union, in which the Communist Party is predominant). We understood that only a great many women united together would be capable of changing something.

"When I working I was exhausted, but I was happier. Now I'm always alone."

When other women who did household work for Waimer went to deliver shoes, we stopped them and talked to them. Many were afraid. Finally ninety women signed up for the union. Our husbands were almost all in favor of our struggle, but they were a bit wary. Sometimes they were angry because we were gone a lot and dinner was cold.

At first there was a bit of tension between us and the women who worked at the Waimer factory, because household workers were being used by the bosses against factory workers. The only possible solution is to come out of hiding, out of our conspiracy of silence, and develop a platform of legal proposals to better the lot of household workers. Only when women present a unified front can we emerge victorious from our struggle.

UNEMPLOYED WOMEN ORGANIZE FOR JOBS

The 'conspiracy of silence' is beginning to dissolve slowly. Women are beginning to participate actively in unions, as well as forming discussion groups of their own. Like the decentralized household workers in Umbria, a group of isolated unemployed women in Turin also felt the need to come together and organize. Major problems remain unsolved, but at least there is the comfort of a joint effort and the gratification of some results. What follows are excerpts from a statement from the Committee for Unemployed Women in Turin, which is organized around the Fiat-Mirafiori plant, one of the largest in Italy.

At first, there were only a handful of us who met at the union local of the Mirafiori plant, but with the help of local women's groups, more and more women have been joining us.

There is a conflict between our home and family duties and our need to get out into the world and join the labor force. Today, we understand that this 'choice' to remain at home was not really a choice at all. Many have said, "When I

was working I was exhausted, but I was happier. Now I'm always alone." When we gave up our jobs to marry, we found ourselves completely alone, with money problems, kids and housework. Housework is as tiring as factory work, but nobody considers it real work. In our husbands' and sons' eyes, we are no more than 'kept' women.

And then came the austerity measures. Prices went up; our husbands' salaries were no longer enough. How can four or five people live on 245,000 lire (\$290) a month? And there is the problem of dependency. If we are completely dependent upon our husbands, we can't change our relationships with them at home, nor can we win the right to go out at night to our meetings. Our relationships with our sons suffer too when our lives are spent at home serving them. Once they reach the age of 12 or 13, they don't bother with us anymore; they only talk with their fathers.

We tried in vain to find jobs, going to all the factories in the area. The bosses have ordered massive layoffs in the last few years (15,000 at Fiat alone), so today they can pick and choose. They don't want women, or the young, or anyone over 40. We went to a meeting of the women union delegates at Fiat-Mirafiori. All of us decided to form a Committee for Unemployed Women to struggle for access to new jobs which have been written into the union's contract with Fiat. We achieved unity with the women delegates. Our next goal was to achieve the same results with the women workers. When we arrived at the factory gates with our pamphlets and placards to talk to them, we were a little afraid of not making contact. But five

"We understood that only a great many women united together would be capable of changing something."

minutes were enough. One woman said, "Last night there was a general meeting about the Fiat union contract, and jobs and labor turnover, but I didn't really understand. But what you're saying is clear. We will have to check, shop by shop, how many women have been dropped and not replaced. I'm going to talk to my delegates about it.

We attended the last joint production committee meeting at Fiat-Carosserie to discuss these goals. Our Committee intends to maintain a check on hiring in order to ensure that Fiat hires more women and young people from the organized unemployed. ■

(effe, January 1976; l'etincelle, 3/31/77; Rouge, 6/15/77. See also Newsfront International #185, #200 and #204)



The 35-hour work week

Flexible work schedules, part-time work, Wednesdays "off," a 40-hour work week but in four days time - the list of proposals is long with the 35-hour work week the most popular at the present time. Although considered "utopian" by many a short time ago, the demand has grown and many trade unions, especially those in which women workers are a majority, have put it forward. The struggle of 100,000 West German steel workers, who struck for weeks in the winter of 1978 for a 35-hour work week, indicates that the desire to end

the 40-hour work week is growing stronger as millions of workers become unemployed.

But there are dangers inherent in this demand. As much as management is hostile to any massive decrease in work time (even more so if this includes maintaining present salary levels), it is nevertheless ready to seize upon all possible "redistributions" of work time which are likely to increase productivity. This is in reality the essential concern - increase work speeds, and extract as much profit as possible from the workers. Stricter and stricter controls are

exercised upon the employees, in exchange for the so-called "liberties" granted.

At first reluctant about flexible work schedules (i.e. the time of arrival at work optional as long as an 8-hour day is put in), management quickly understood that they, too, could benefit: large decreases in absenteeism; increases in production (an average of 15%); less overtime, and increased difficulty for unions to organize in the shops. Such advantages couldn't be ignored for long, and the companies, acting on the basis of experiments in Switzerland and West Germany, soon became partisans of the flexible work schedules as described in a little book by J.F. Baudraz:

An important fact must be considered: all the psychological factors combine and support each other in a sort of progression, an accumulation, the results of which have often surprised us...Just as the employee is psychologically reconditioned by the release of various constraints, his new situation creates results on various levels, the final result being a considerable benefit for the business.

The lesson was quickly learned, and flexible work schedules soon became the latest "liberating" up-to-date step. Women, with their double workday, were management's first guinea pigs, and could only be pleased by the new step, which allowed them to better reconcile their various obligations. The new schedules were a great success with over-worked women, a success which allows the benefits for the owners to go unnoticed. *F Magazine*, in an article full of enthusiasm for the new plan, cites the example of a business where productivity had tripled and absenteeism had dropped from 11 to 4% after institution of the new system.

The *Conseil National du Patronat Français* (CNPFP, or National Management Organization) was quick to act, asking the government for an overall loosening of the labor laws and in the process threatening many of the gains of 1936. (The Popular Front, in 1936, established many protective labor laws in France, most of which are still in effect.) A few of the owners' suggestions: elimination, or at least modification, of the limitations on the maximum work hours in a day; modifications of night shift work laws (women being forbidden to work night shift was discriminatory, argued the Association - ever worried about equality); greater flexibility of schedules throughout the week, abolishing the law of 40 hours and keeping only one idea, a maximum work week of 52 hours. The government was quick to agree to these suggestions. As for the possibility of reduced working hours? It was not up for discussion.

So this is the background to management's great welcome to modified work schedules. It's up to the worker to accept the "economic constraints" that go along with it, to accept the rules of this new game - work speed-ups and overtime paid at regular salary - in short, modification of work time as a function of economic interests, not those of the workers.

For two years the question has been hotly debated...Will a reduction of work time create new jobs? No, not really, argues management. If a reduction to the 35-hour work week was instituted and the same salary levels maintained, the cost of benefits would oblige the employers to raise prices, competition would increase and the end result would be more unemployment. At the root of such "realistic" arguments lies a single concern: productivity and therefore, a deep refusal to question the logic of the entire system. It is clear that the 35-hour week will create few new jobs if the workers don't struggle against this reduction being put to profit by the owners.

Another example of "redistribution" of work time is that of Wednesdays off. (*In France, school children do not attend school on Wednesday afternoons, so this measure would particularly affect women with families*). How will the work not done on this day get done? By an increase in workloads the other days, or else an increase for fellow workers? The employer, in either case, gains on salaries. It is this kind of logic that is unacceptable. Even more so in that this allows the question of adequate child care centers for these days to be sidestepped. Clear profit, in other words.

It's the same logic that is at the heart of the new promotion of part-time work. If you complain about too long hours, or the difficulties of reconciling professional and domestic work, here's the solution - part-time work. And if you don't want it, we'll force it on you! And often the choice is between part-time work or nothing. Who would refuse the possibility of working just four hours a day? No one, except those who mind half-salaries, which are, in most cases, not enough to live on.

To all these proposals, we from *Cahiers du Feminisme* say no! To the "freedom" offered by the companies, we say no! We demand a sufficient amount of day care centers with qualified personnel, free laundries, etc. We are not looking for "readjustments" of our various obligations and constraints, but simply the removal of them. ■

(*cahiers du feminisme*, February/March 79)

Two jobs, one salary – women in Hungary

Socialism had solemnly promised the liberation of women. But what is the life of a woman like in Eastern Europe? Maria Markus describes here the position of women in Hungary.

Markus is a sociologist, and worked at the Advanced Institute for Sociology and Psychology in Budapest, until forced to emigrate for political reasons. She is currently at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Letrobo, in Australia.

In contrast to Western feminists, Markus does not equate the terms "emancipation" and "liberation." Socialist governments actually use the term "liberation" to indicate parity in wages, judicial equality, and so forth. The feminist opposition at that point speaks only of "emancipation," intending to address itself to that wider and, more meaningful process of liberation (cultural, political, and sexual) of women.

Q: The governments of the Eastern European countries claim, at least in theory, that with social-

ism, on the one hand women will enter en masse into social production, in conditions of equality with men, and that, on the other hand, domestic labor will be progressively socialized. Can you tell us something of how women in Hungary live? Is their life really different than that of women in the West?

A: It is said that in the countries of Eastern Europe, women "are liberated, but not emancipated." This is half-true. In Hungary more than 40% of the women, and more than 66% of those in the working age (15-55) are economically active; that is, they work outside the home. If you add in students and those who are unable to work, the proportion is higher. On the other hand, their participation in socially recognized work is very far from a condition of equality, either from the point of view of the occupational structure of the female labor force, or from the unresolved problems of the 'second job'.



Hungarian women work at jobs which are among the least skilled and, consequently, among the lowest paid and least interesting. According to 1973 data, one man in four has some kind of occupational training, but for women the ratio drops to one in 17. Only 15% of the professionally trained labor force is composed of women. But even in those activities (the 'female' professions) in which the employment of women predominates, the positions of higher responsibility still are occupied by men. The most outrageous example of this situation is in educational activity. Although 85% of the teachers are women, only 17% of school administrators belong to the female sex. Obviously, the situation gets worse in sectors in which the female labor force is smaller. The difference in median salary between a man and a woman in Hungary is greater than 50%, a pretty high percentage, even in comparison to Western countries. But this discrepancy persists even in conditions of job parity. Although the law guarantees in principle equal pay for equal work, the salary of men and women who do the same job is unequal, and this disparity is exacerbated by the uneven distribution of various benefits. The situation gets worse, as I have already mentioned, if we consider the 'second job' of working women. After the Communists came to power, it was believed, in accordance with the traditional spirit of Marxism, that the newly-created society would furnish services that would eliminate the heaviest share of 'domestic duty', and that a superior distribution of housework among all members of the family would permit women to play their proper role as equals in production and in social life. This hope was not realized. On the average women do three times as much housework as men. If we consider that household appliances are poorly distributed, that public transportation is always congested, and that goods at low prices are scarce - so much so as to make doing the shopping a real job in itself - we can understand how domestic labor not only takes up time, but eats up a lot of energy as well, including nervous energy.

According to some studies, two-thirds of Hungarian families make no use of public services, such as laundries and restaurants, in part because they are too expensive, and in part because they are not easily found (especially in small cities and towns). Canned goods and prepared foods are too expensive for working families. But let's see how the typical day of a working woman unfolds in Hungary.

Our heroine wakes up at six in the morning and prepares breakfast for the whole family. She takes the children to day care or to school, then goes to work herself.

Work lasts until four or five in the afternoon. Then it's time to do the shopping. Sometimes this is done by the husband, or, if work doesn't finish too late - many people do overtime - it is he who goes to pick up the children. After shopping, dinner is prepared. As a rule, the woman cooks every day, given the low quality of workplace cafeterias, and because a hot meal there would be too expensive. (Only families with the highest income can afford this, as a rule.) After dinner, and after having put the children to sleep - sometimes with the husband's help - but often alone, she washes the dishes, does the sewing, puts the house in order. In short, she does all the so-called "women's work." It is common for her to go to bed after midnight.

The fact is that Eastern European societies, which claim to be socialist, not only have shown themselves to be incapable of alleviating the weights and responsibilities that oppress women, they have failed to modify sexual role models which have maintained their traditional characteristics. The models of women's behavior have diversified, but not in the sense that the opportunities offered to women have multiplied. It is claimed that women have "arrived," all at once, and this is an added psychological burden. With a lack of faith in themselves, a constant state of stress is generated among women, a sense of guilt: "I don't succeed in being an outstanding mother (or wife or homemaker) and, at the same time, an outstanding worker."

Q: Then nothing has changed?

A: With the entry of women into remunerative activities, something has certainly changed. But not enough. The majority of women do not enjoy any real change in their actual conditions of life. With difficulty one can speak of "liberation," but certainly not of "emancipation."

Q: In some Eastern European countries, part-time work has been introduced. Also, in several countries, working mothers are allowed to stay at home for a few years, being paid for child rearing. Do you think that this is the solution to the problem of "double work"?

A: No. Perhaps I am suffering from Marxist orthodoxy, but I believe in the positive role of socially organized labor. Not that I have illusions about the conditions or the character of concrete labor; as a sociologist I believe that material necessity does not constitute - in contrast to what people believe and say - the principle impetus of labor. The need to meet other people, to participate in some way in collective life, to confront different experiences and problems beyond those of the family - these are sub-



stantial components of the decision to enter into the work force. And, in spite of all the difficulties, this has already become a habit, an integral part of life for the majority of Hungarian women.

The Eastern European tendencies which you mentioned are also found in Hungary. More than that, in terms of the introduction of these kinds of measures, Hungary has been several steps ahead of other Eastern European countries. I am thinking, first of all, of the "maternity subsidy," introduced in Hungary as part of the conception of the "domestic salary." Now a woman may remain at home until her child is three years old without losing her job or the right to an equivalent one. During this period she receives a monthly wage of 800 florins (\$40) from the state (about one eighth of the average monthly wage). There are three reasons behind the introduction of this measure: the net fall in the birthrate; the fear of the growth of unemployment among young women; and the high costs of creating and maintaining state run child care centers. Although this right can be seen as useful from the point of view of the interests of women, it again shows traces of a fundamental ambiguity. The "maternity subsidy" helps those women who cannot afford or do not want to entrust the education of their children to others in the first period of their lives. It penalizes, however, those mothers who, for their own reasons, prefer to or are constrained to continue their work, but still do not have the possibility of finding a place for their children in a child care center. (In the state centers, in fact, there is only room for 10% of the children under three.) Besides, it is a provision which officially states that it is the mother, and only the mother, who has the duty to care for the children. There is no possibility of hav-

ing the father do it, not even in cases in which the mother has already chosen to remain at home with the first child, or where the father intends to do it with another child, or dividing the three years in half.

Q: These provisions then reinforce the traditional sexual division of labor?

A: Certainly. I would not be opposed to these provisions if they represented an alternative offered to women. I am opposed because they point to a compulsory way. This is not a solution for women, but a solution at their expense, presented as an 'objective justification' for the persistence of a prejudice against women. In addition, it makes any process of modification of the division of labor within the family more difficult.

Q: Have Hungarian women expressed any dissatisfaction with these attempts by the government to solve the problem of 'double work'? Does a women's movement exist in Hungary?

A: In Hungary, the government does not tolerate any form of activity spontaneously formed at the base, nor any form of control of society outside the bounds of the bureaucratic apparatus. Not only, then, is the existence of any spontaneous movement impossible, but there is no forum in which the needs and demands of different social strata can be articulated or can reach compromises with those of other groups. Hungary is the freest country in Eastern Europe, but these spontaneous organizations of movements have nevertheless failed to emerge. Thus, no women's movement can exist. Things are done by the government for women, in a most paternalistic manner. Before 1970, a recognized women's organization did exist, but its formality and impotence were so obvious that it was disbanded. Now there are various 'Women's Committees' within the Popular Patriotic Front at both local and centralized levels, like in the unions and the factories. But

these committees are exclusively consultative organs, and the key posts inside them are designated from above and not through elections.

The existence of a women's movement in rural areas would obviously be very important, not only from the point of view of the creation of 'pressure groups' capable of representing the specific interests of women, but also for the processes of self-organization, self-education, and the articulation of demands and needs. The traditional stance of women has been one of waiting for "what the majority decides." One of the most important functions of the movement would be precisely to change this attitude, actively involving women in the construction of their own lives, with the consciousness

that these problems are not solely the domain of women, but can be seen in a wider context.

Q: Does this mean that the entire social system must be criticized, and not only the position of women within it?

A: In my opinion, the solution is not to be found in 'raising' women to a level defined by men, but rather in creating the conditions of a more humane life for both. And this means choice of one's place within the social division of labor, control over the processes of production and distribution, and movement toward self-realization and not toward adjustment to externally prescribed models of life and work. ■

(il manifesto, 11/24/78. For complete text of this interview see Newsfront International #224)

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Equality in theory, but not in practice

1946: NEW YUGOSLAVIA'S FIRST CONSTITUTION

Women are equal to men, in all areas of government, economic and socio-political life...Women have the right to equal pay for equal work, and in addition have special advantages in work...The state must especially protect the interests of mothers and children by creating childcare facilities, and women have a right to a leave of absence both before and after the birth of a child.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The constitution of 1946 made Yugoslavia into a federation of republics, each with their own government. To counter the risks of centralization, the Yugoslavs reduced the powers of the federal administration and of the Communist Party in 1952. In 1953, the parliament proclaimed the "partial dissolution of the State," which now only deals with national defense and foreign relations. Decentralization is pushed as much as possible - the basic organizational unit is the commune, which manages the municipality as well as the industrial and agricultural enterprise on its territory. Since 1950, factories are directed by worker's councils. In the agricultural domain, though, collectivization as planned in 1946 has been abandoned. Nationalizations have taken place but private property remains.

THE CONFERENCE

In October 1978, an international conference entitled "The Woman Question: A New Approach" was held at the Student's Cultural Center in Belgrade, capital of Yugoslavia. Two reporters from *Des Femmes en Mouvement* were present and brought back the following report.

The Yugoslav women spoke to us of the enormous progress made towards "social equality" since the liberation of their country right after World War II. This has been achieved through collectivization of work and in particular, collectivization of 'household tasks' such as child care, meals in the workplace, etc. They also spoke of the limitations of this "equalization," limits which are primarily due, in their opinion, to the maintenance of the family as "a specific social situation which perpetrates women's subordination," as well as the separation of the "public and private domains." They believe that the family must enter into the public domain, once a certain degree of "collective satisfaction of individuals' needs" has been achieved. Today, they continued, the private domain is still ruled by a "patriarchal ethic, in spite

of important laws authorizing abortion and against rape." (A wife may charge her husband with rape). As for these laws, one of the women stated that it was not the State which has passed them, but the Committee for Women's Social Action, with the "active participation of many women." Many others, however, insisted that women rarely take advantage of these laws ("the level of consciousness is not yet high enough") and that they are the result of the work of a small vanguard.

MOMENTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

A Yugoslav sociologist: *In the socialist countries, socialism is still in a process of transformation which is far from being finished. It's a banality to say that the social equality of women has not yet been achieved in these countries, for the simple reason that the socialist transformation has not yet been achieved. It would be more helpful, and more interesting, to start from the possibilities which have been created in these countries, the efforts made toward a solution of the problem and to see how, starting from these efforts, the process has begun and what paths it is taking. In reality, enormous progress has been made in Yugoslavia, considering the situation that existed before the war, when it was a completely backward country. I'll just give you one figure - in Slovenia, the most developed republic in our country, 42% of the women are employed. This is the same percentage as in the US and in other developed nations.*

"It is a banality to say that the social equality of women has not yet been achieved in socialist countries, for the simple reason that the socialist transformation has not yet been achieved."

For the rest of Yugoslavia, the figure is around 35%. This has been accomplished in only 30 years, since the liberation, and it has taken the capitalist nations a hundred years to reach the same point.

This is important, but obviously not enough to obtain a truly qualitative transformation of the condition of women in our society. We must look at what the obstacles are to women's social equality. It's in this way that we must

analyze the role the family plays in the subordination of women.

The division between public and private life within the family itself is one cause of this subordination. When I say family, I'm not only thinking of the archetypal patriarchal family, but of the family as a functional unit within the framework of the social division of labor. Developing beyond this type of system involves a qualitative change in the social position of the family, as well as the abolition of a hierarchical division of labor in socialist society.

Women will not be able to achieve a transformation of society without making themselves part of a general transformation. What about organizational autonomy for women? Autonomy would be nothing but a kind of segregation vis-a-vis all the other progressive movements in society and would not be capable of effectuating a real change. It should be pointed out, though, that we have always had a relative autonomy, when it comes to analyzing and resolving our specific problems, within the framework of a larger progressive movement.

Another woman: We can no longer think that the family does not need to be changed. The problems of women within the family must be resolved publicly. In our society, we have on the one hand a socialist, self-governing structure, and on the other, regarding the family, a bourgeois mentality which does not question the traditional relations between the sexes.

Dunja: If we haven't spoken of sexuality here, it's because we feel that in large part these problems are resolved. Abortion is legal, the woman alone decides whether or not she'll keep the child. Now the question is to have true sexual education for men and women, especially concerning contraception. A law also exists which allows women to keep their names, and to give their name to their children. There is a law against rape, which is applicable to husbands also. These are elementary rights, and from here, we can start to analyze our situation.

Another woman: True, there are laws against rape, laws which allow women to keep their names. But they are rarely used by women...

WOMEN: A NEW PROLETARIAT

In a study concerning six steel factories and three banks in Zagreb, a city in the North, a sociologist found:

In the steel industry, 30% of the workers are women. In the banks, the opposite is true - 70% of the employees are women. As for management, 80% are men in both industries. So we see that in the service sector, a new kind of proletariat is being created: the 'routine workers'. It is into this kind of work that women are pushed when they enter the work force. The excuse for this: less physical effort is required for it. A classic mystifi-

cation, which is reflected in salary levels. In principle, the Yugoslav system does not take such a position; it is the fault of traditional, deep-rooted values which have not changed.

"...in the service sector, a new kind of proletariat is being created: the 'routine workers.' It is into this kind of work that women are pushed when they enter the work force."

You could say that the condition of women is a point of reference for measuring the process of transformation, the correspondance between the level of norms (i.e. the laws) and the level of people's mentalities. But the Yugoslav system, that of socialist self-management, has created the possibilities for an active participation in society on the part of women.

LIFE IN YUGOSLAVIA

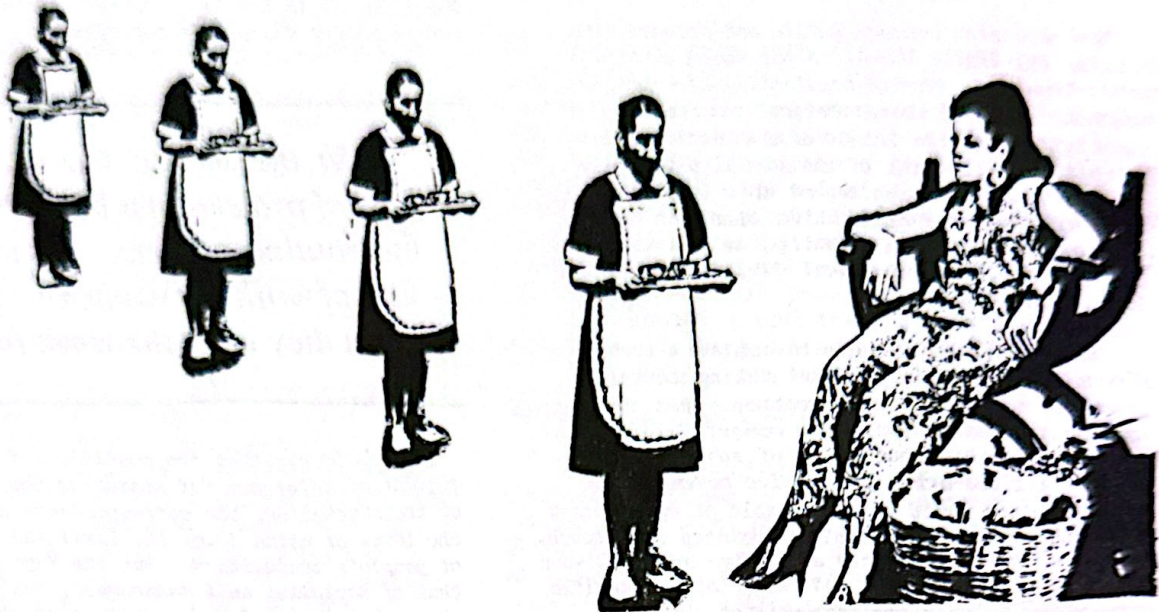
Bojana: Our salary, that is, what we have at the end of the month, is 60% of what we actually earn. 40% of our salaries is set aside: 12% for culture and science; 10% for housing; 10% for social security. Everything is clear; we know where our money's going. When you come to cultural centers, for example, you don't pay for films, theatre, etc. All are free, as they are supported by your contribution to culture. Most apartments are provided by the place where you work, and you only pay utilities. It's possible to buy an apartment, but you must apply at the City Hall, or where you work, and the waiting lists are long. A few people still have their own apartments, even though after the war, most of the wealthy families with several apartments had them expropriated. People with children receive an allowance for each child.

Private property still exists in craftwork, shops, etc., but all factories and businesses are considered 'social property'. Not state property, but social property. Until the war, the country was essentially agricultural. There was no industry. After the war, everything was put into reconstruction - there had been terrible bombings, everything had to be rebuilt. Movies from that time show women at work, fighting, in the factories, struggling for a better system of production.

Now, all that has changed...Today, in *Politica*, the largest selling newspaper, there was an article on the conference and right next to it, an article on hair styles, "If you want to be beautiful..." ■

(des femmes en mouvements, November 1978)

Colombian maids: Work for room and board



In Colombia in 1973 over half of all working women were employed in the service sector. Of these, three fourths are hired as domestics. They are called chicas de servicio or muchachas. Almost all of them come from the countryside. A few of them have been meeting regularly for half a year to put an end to the kind of treatment they suffer.

A women's movement, as we know it in the US, does not exist in Colombia. Women's organizations have formed within the various political parties - bourgeois and leftist - but rarely do specific woman's issues or activities become public. While the women of the middle class mainly occupy themselves with charity events and the like, the women of the left join strikes against companies that hire mainly women. Besides those groups, there exists a diversified range of independent women's groups which concern themselves with such problems as self-experience, the role of women within traditional Colombian literature, or sociological and psychological reflections on the situation of Colombian women in the family and in the area of work outside of the household.

In December 1978 a national Women's Congress took place in the town of Medellin. Nineteen women's groups showed up to discuss for the first time the oppression of women within the context of Colombian history. The women agreed upon certain basic themes: sexuality and reproductive rights, the class struggle, parties and the liberation of women.

More concrete, however, are the struggles which directly confront the situation of women on the work place. The strike of 1976 at Vanitex, a textile factory in which mostly

women are employed, indicated that women have decided to fight together against the inhuman work conditions and the low wages (\$1-1.50/day). We know that the company earns millions. In only one work hour each one of us produces what we earn in a week. The company began in 1955 with \$56 million and today has more than \$500... And who made that? We workers.

Life for women in the rural areas, especially if they are farm workers, is often hard. Selling coffee and vegetables generally brings in only a little money, and rarely is the money available for their own use.

Even more gruesome and brutal, however, is the struggle to survive for the women who move from the country to the city. In 1964, 40% of all migrant women were between the ages of 15 and 19. They come to the city hoping to find a better life. If they're lucky they may become street merchants, garbage collectors, prostitutes or maids.

The chicas des servicio, constitute an integral part of the Colombian middle class household. The number of maids varies according to the income of a household. Only around 10% of all women in Colombia are employed, half of them work in the service sector, a majority of those are domestics. About 30 chicas from Bogota have been regularly meeting with each other for over two years in order to discuss their economic and personal situation and to find means of organization and operation. They share a common background and plight.

A Colombian girl from the country is doubly disadvantaged because of her sex and the poverty and underdevelopment of the rural sector. At an early age both boys

and girls participate in the difficult harvest and housework. The women and girls often become the object of sexual harassment - daughters are frequently raped or impregnated by their fathers.

Thus, it is often the fear of the father or the extreme poverty and hopelessness that pushes the girls to wander to the city. Through the promises of advertisements, stories from friends or through offers from rich city dwellers, who combine an outing to the country with the purchase of an inexpensive maid, the city life becomes the answer to a girl's dreams and wishes.

Because the manner of exploitation and living habits in the city are so foreign, life becomes that much more frightening. The fear of being raped or murdered forces the young women to search out a family. In exchange for hard work the woman receives a roof over her head. Usually the women are paid for their housework in the form of room and board. That is particularly true for the youngest. On the average a *chica* earns 800-1000 pesos (\$25-27) per month, living and eating with the family.

This fundamental bondage to the work place makes a slave out of the woman. Regulated times for work and leisure are unknown to a maid. Usually her work day begins around 5-5:30 a.m. and goes into the late night hours; she works up to 19 hours daily, at times without a break. She does everything from cooking to serving, housecleaning to child caring. She must even wash the family's laundry by hand.

What the women are especially rebelling against is the inhuman treatment they experience at the hands of many families. For the mistress of the home, they are no more than a machine; for the sons and husbands they are mere sex objects. A pregnant maid is considered as useless as a sick one. In both cases she is usually thrown out in the street. Social security is not available, although on paper she is legally protected. (There are laws regulating work time, vacations, sick leave, etc.) However, the employer pays little attention to these stipulations and the maids are generally unaware of their rights. Usually they have no medical benefits, no unemployment insurance, and no retirement plan.

A maid can work for a family until she dies - during her last years she receives free room and board without salary since she is no longer fully 'capable' of working. Or she can end up on the street as a prostitute or beggar.

The lack of education is a major problem for these women. Most of those that come

from the country cannot read nor write. Some have had at the most two years of elementary education.

The social norms set by employers are seldom questioned. The extreme fear of a father authority common to Colombian culture is transferred to the employer. Often the *chica* is forbidden to go around with a young man if he is not acceptable to the family or if they fear losing a cheap form of labor. Few women can use marriage as an escape. First, because most men view them as socially inferior. Second, they rarely have the opportunity to have contact with men. The women have on the average one day off every two weeks, and must work on all holidays. Since most of the houses are located outside the city center, the women have little opportunity to ever leave their restricted work areas, making it nearly impossible for them to meet people. In order to compensate for their feelings of social inferiority, a few sacrifice their free time and their money for courses such as stenography, typing or sewing. Thus, during their so-called free time the women are further exploited by throat-cutting institutions. They harbor the illusion that with a bit of education they will go further and improve their lives.

But some women have come to another conclusion. They define themselves as women who, because they do not have the opportunity for self improvement, belong to the most exploited sector of society. However, this exploitation is not strong enough to break their will to rebel against the miserable living conditions. These women, who meet every two weeks on their day off, are, as they express it, fighting "for human dignity," so that they no longer "have to be treated worse than animals."

The goal of these women is the establishment of a union in order to defend their rights. Their demands are clear: 1) regulated working hours (10 hours per day); 2) a minimum wage (about \$42/month); 3) health insurance; 4) protection of rights; and 5) living quarters away from the work place. One of the biggest problems within the organization appears to be the lack of publicity. Because of their isolation and separation within the family, it is almost impossible to acquire a large number of women. Contacts are usually made through friendship with other maids. It's not possible to reach each other by phone since they fear the repression of the family. Moreover, the group of *chicas* works independent of political parties. In spite of everything, they have managed to contact women in other cities and to send women to various congresses in order to drum up some publicity for their work. ■

(blatter des iz3w, May 1979)

A real woman is a real revolutionary

(On October 8, 1967, Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia. On September 11, 1973, Salvador Allende was assassinated in Chile. On October 5, 1974, Miguel Enriquez, Secretary General of the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) was killed in Chile. On October 12, 1977, Beatriz Allende, Salvador's daughter and friend of both Che and Miguel Enriquez, committed suicide in Havana where she was living in exile.)

The following is the transcript of a conversation with Carmen Castillo, a MIR militant in exile, about Beatriz Allende's suicide. Carmen was Miguel Enriquez' companion and eight months pregnant when the Chilean military shot him down in her presence. She was later saved by an international campaign, but lost her child soon after its birth. She has lived in exile in Paris since early 1975.)

CARMEN: All the papers say is that she was Salvador Allende's daughter, that she was in a deep depression, that she had never been able to get over her father's death and the perpetual suffering of the Chilean people, that she shot herself during October...and that's it. But it isn't enough.

Why? Why does a woman like her decide to commit suicide? Should we attempt to answer this question, or should we once again tranquilize ourselves, reassure our consciences by telling ourselves that she was a woman, that she was depressed, and that therefore she committed suicide? It's too easy. That isn't asking the necessary questions.

Q: Who was she?

CARMEN: A 33 year-old woman, mother of three children, and a doctor. But where did she come from? From a family which has always been involved in politics. At a very young age she decided to learn a predominately "male" profession - medicine. And she did it brilliantly, because when Beatriz committed herself to something, she went through with it.

In this same way, having been a socialist since adolescence, she joined forces with the Cuban revolution, and even became the "pivot" of Che's rear guard in Chile. She underwent military training without anyone knowing it. Like most women in revolutionary movements, she took on communication and infrastructural tasks. No one knew that this young and beautiful medical student was a link in the long chain of Che's Bolivian campaign of guerrilla warfare. Beatriz was a member of both the Chilean Socialist Party and the Bolivian National Liberation Army (ELN), which continued guerrilla fighting after Che's death.

I recall that she was overcome by Che's death. But she would say, "We mustn't cry, we must continue." And she continued up to the definitive failure of the Bolivian enterprise. This coincided in her life with her father's victory as President of Chile. From November 4, 1970 on, she acted as his personal secretary.

Q: What exactly did she do?

CARMEN: She served as liaison between Allende and all the Latin American revolutionary movements. We, of the MIR, knew that we could call on her at any time. Beatriz was divided between her affection and loyalty to her father, whom she adored, and her history and experience in other forms of struggle. On September 11, 1973, (the day of the coup in Chile which overthrew Allende) she was pregnant, and her father asked her to leave the Moneda presidential palace.

Q: For the first time since 1970, a unity was realized between Beatriz, her history, and her father. He was under attack, and had taken up his gun. She chose to remain in La Moneda, but was excluded.

CARMEN: The men excluded her because she was a woman. They said, "You must leave to give birth to your child." The woman had to overrule the militant in her. But you're screwed if you can't be a woman and a militant at the same time.

Q: And you commit suicide. So Beatriz Allende didn't kill herself only for herself, but for all those who, since September 11, are hovering between survival and suicide. Everytime someone commits a heroic act, it is said that s/he is a fighter for the Chilean people. However, no one will say this of suicide....

CARMEN: It was not only Beatriz who committed suicide. Her act engages all women who are surviving between action and death. Because a woman among men cannot speak; because a woman's solitude, her daily self-destruction, is also a form of suicide. For her, it was a pistol since it was integrated with her life. But for others, it is tranquilizers, drugs.

We never speak of the survivors. But there are different ways of dying. We say that exiles are free, that they have been torn away from torture, so everything is fine. They are outside of Chile, and live wherever they can. But Beatriz tells us what it is to be an exile...by her suicide. What is terrifying is that, in order to say it, she had to kill herself.

Q: Exactly. When I saw her in Cuba a few months ago, we spoke of a revolutionary who couldn't stand being in exile and returned to Argentina. She was furious, saying that he was walking straight into the enemy's bullets, that he was going to get himself killed. I realize now that she was making a political statement, not only about him, but also about herself. But I didn't understand it then. When you place yourself in a certain political frame of reference, you become deaf and blind.

CARMEN: She was saying to you: "I don't accept that a militant should commit an error which costs him his life." She saw in his political action a feeling of her own - a man who was looking for his death. And she condemned it. Such lucidity is very new and important in Latin America. It marks real progress to no longer accept the accumulation of dead heroes. We are starting to rid ourselves of this mythology of dead heroes. We are starting to understand that a hero can be living.

But we can say it, we can repeat it when talking of someone else, yet dare not ask the question of ourselves. We are exiles, protected by countries who have taken us in; we don't have the right to ask ourselves these questions. Beatriz was able, with the perspective of a woman who thinks politically, to say about a revolutionary friend, but not as an exile who, as such, isn't risking death. Unrecognized as a woman, she couldn't accept this contradiction between her sex and her politics. She couldn't stand it any longer.

Q: And how are militants reacting to her death?

CARMEN: A young militant just called me and said, "I can't accept it. I don't understand. No militant has the right to kill herself. I find it disgusting." Right away, a moral judgment. As if one doesn't have the right to commit suicide.

Q: It's absurd to say that it's politically incorrect or that it isn't a political act. Her suicide is a political act and that is what seems to be unacceptable.

CARMEN: The explanations given reveal a whole conception of militant life. We were told, we were taught, that women militants have no personal problems, that they are made of steel, that they can't suffer. As long as we don't submit to torture and military repression, everything is fine. . . when in reality, nothing is. We're charged with this guilt and we don't have the right to speak of life.

You're forced to accomplish tasks and play a role without building a real life. And after years of exile and mutilation, you no longer believe in your role; you no longer find the words, no longer find anyone to talk to. Until the day you tell yourself: "I've no purpose. My death takes away nothing. I'm too tired,

I just want to sleep and end it." Beatriz' political act is tied to the emptiness, the real emptiness of the lives of women which are filled with nothing but a series of escapes.

Real politics must take into account people's daily existence. You struggle for others only if you struggle for yourself too. You must be a real woman to be a revolutionary. For example, the day when a political movement will have the courage to say that love allows one to live a better life underground, many things will change. Everyone knows that life is made with love. But as a political woman, you are always cut in two: your militant life and your personal life. At each moment, Beatriz had to be in harmony with the symbol that the resistance had imposed on her; she had to be strong, her feelings untouchable.

Q: Proof of what you are saying is that the only political text that speaks of the human element in politics is a novel, *The Snow Burns*, by Regis Debray. It's abnormal that a novel was needed, even if it is a very beautiful one. It is scandalous that only crumbs of such a topic can be found in any political text.

CARMEN: This is what makes for the ineffectiveness of certain politics. It denies daily life. By keeping women from speaking of themselves as women, they are led to solitude, and therefore to destruction.

Q: If you "castrate" people by excluding love from the human, daily political life, two solutions are left. You can either cease to be a militant, or you can commit suicide. And when you are Beatriz Allende, you can't stop being a militant; you don't have that freedom.

CARMEN: By saying "castrate," you are using a term which applies only to men. It is nevertheless striking. In fact, women militants must have masculine-type relationships. But for Beatriz, work as a militant could not overshadow the fact that she was a woman. The split in two finally made her crack. So she had to die when she became a woman. It is the final action of a militant destroyed in her condition as a woman.

Q: This means that it is necessary to completely transform political ways of thinking and acting...

CARMEN: And only women can do it. Only women, but not women alone and isolated. Women divided within themselves and separated from each other can do nothing. Only women by reaching out, by talking to each other, in Latin America and elsewhere, can transform the political movement and the relationship of their everyday lives to politics, and therefore to revolution. ■

(Liberation, 10/15/77. See also Newsfront International #208.)



rouge

Strikes and resistance

Introduction

The need to improve their lives and reach equality with men have been the classic motivations for working class women to join strikes and resistance movements. It is during the course of these struggles that women often come to realize that they are not only oppressed because they are working class, but also because they are women.

Historically, paid women's work has been closely related to housework. Women have typically worked in textile and food factories, and as domestics and prostitutes. Highly industrialized countries have added clerical and sales work. Women have always been regarded as temporary help, thus justifying their lower pay. But more and more women are working in order to support themselves and their children; in many working class families one salary is not sufficient to maintain a decent standard of living. Very few countries have facilities such as childcare centers, public laundries and cheap restaurants, which ease the burden of housework for women. The resulting double burden often hinders women from participating in political parties and unions, but it also tends to radicalize women faster, and in larger numbers than men, once they are drawn into strikes and liberation struggles.

Participating in a strike or a liberation movement, women are confronted with new family problems. Public and private life can no longer be easily separated. Relationships between couples are often severely strained, and break-ups not uncommon.

Newly-formed women's groups within strikes and liberation movements are the hallmark of developing women's consciousness. By working in autonomous groups, women not only strive to change their work situations, but also to integrate previously 'private' problems and concerns into the broader struggle.



The liberated broom

"Here everything is for the students. There's no way out," says the unscathed young man as he guides us through the maze of the Belgian university at Louvain-la-Neuve (in Walloon) to Building #12 where we have an appointment with the cleaning women of the *Balai Libere* (Liberated Broom).

We have no trouble believing him. There are 4,000 students in this brick city, a universe closed like an egg. The university, located 20 kilometers from the real city of Louvain, is cut off from the rest of the world, far from reality. A "ghetto for students" as the sociologists say. We feel a little bit lost. Maybe we should go back to real life as fast as possible.

Real life is in Building #12 which seems just as impersonal as the others. France, Eliane and Mireille, three employees of the *Balai Libere*, are waiting for us there. When we say 'employees' it's just a manner of speaking. Can someone be her own employee? The *Balai Libere* is the cleaning agency that maintains the university facilities. It's a women's business and, since March 16, 1975, a self-managed agency.

Before, it was an agency like the others - normal. There was a boss who ruled over 42 cleaning women. Only one of the women who greeted us lived through this prehistoric epoch.

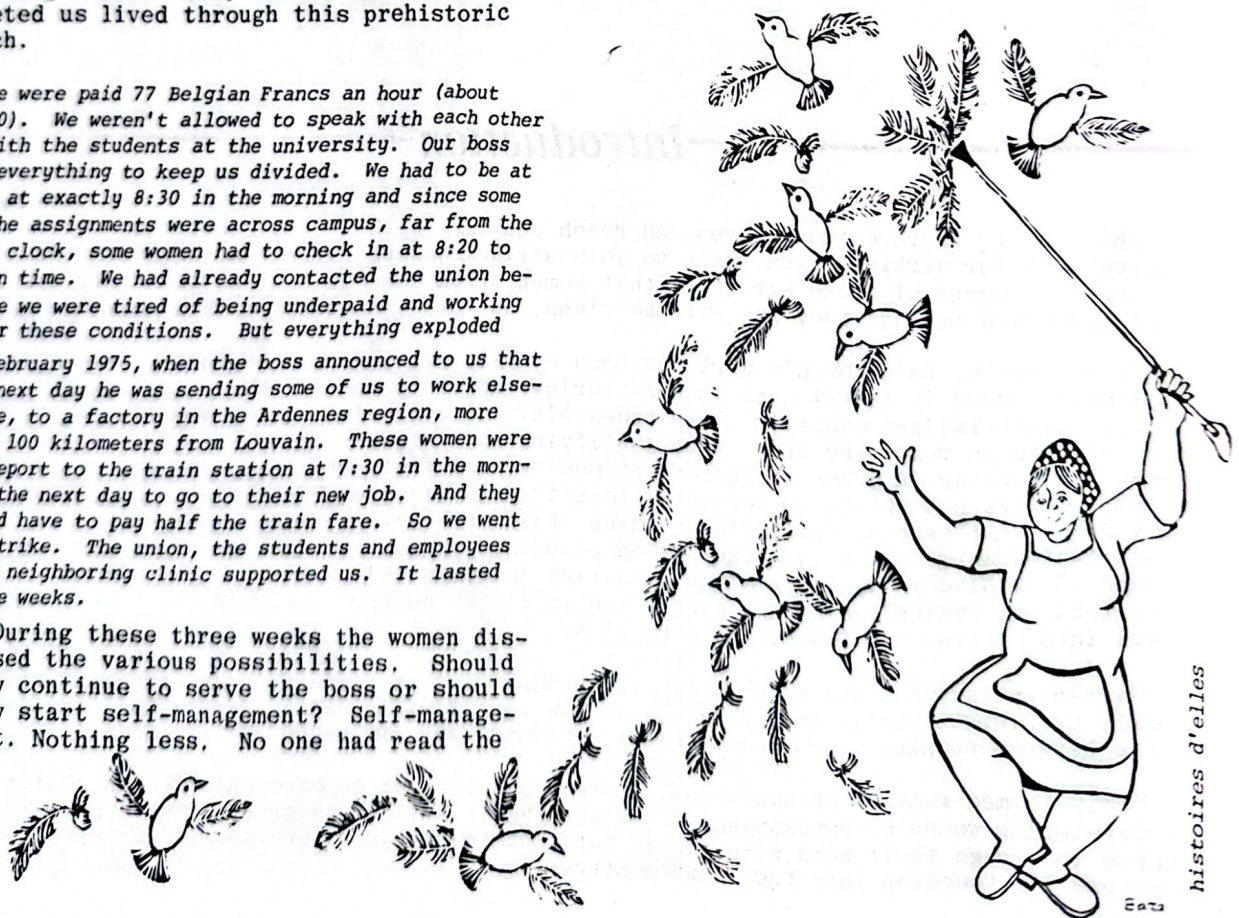
We were paid 77 Belgian Francs an hour (about \$2.50). We weren't allowed to speak with each other or with the students at the university. Our boss did everything to keep us divided. We had to be at work at exactly 8:30 in the morning and since some of the assignments were across campus, far from the time clock, some women had to check in at 8:20 to be on time. We had already contacted the union because we were tired of being underpaid and working under these conditions. But everything exploded in February 1975, when the boss announced to us that the next day he was sending some of us to work elsewhere, to a factory in the Ardennes region, more than 100 kilometers from Louvain. These women were to report to the train station at 7:30 in the morning the next day to go to their new job. And they would have to pay half the train fare. So we went on strike. The union, the students and employees of a neighboring clinic supported us. It lasted three weeks.

During these three weeks the women discussed the various possibilities. Should they continue to serve the boss or should they start self-management? Self-management. Nothing less. No one had read the

countless books on self-management. No one knew the stylish theories. Maybe this was lucky - otherwise they might have been bogged down at the level of analysis. Out of 42 workers, five left, not believing that such a change could be possible. "Our families," said Eliane, "also had doubts. They had always groveled before the boss - never daring to do what we did."

After three weeks, the women summoned the boss, fired him and returned the equipment they had confiscated. Since then it has gone well. The beginning wasn't easy, although the union supported their project. Eliane: We had no equipment. No bucket, no brush, no rag. We made some things which the students helped sell. With the money we bought some tools. Next we signed an agreement with the university. We were given a budget which allowed us to buy some vacuum cleaners. For one month, we worked entirely by hand. As soon as the money started coming in, we raised our salaries.

This is the method of self-management at the *Balai Libere*. There is a general assembly which meets when there is an important decision or change to be made and there is a steering committee consisting of a representative from each crew which meets twice a week. The crews consist of



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two to seven workers who always work together. The delegate to the steering committee changes every six months. The two women organizers are relieved of ordinary work to organize the schedule, a position rotated every two years. Monique, who was recruited from among the cleaning women, is in charge of bookkeeping. At present, she is training two people, a man and a woman, to succeed her. Then she will go back to the mop.

There is an efficient rotation of duties. Although in principle there is an 'absence of power', since each 'bureaucrat' must return to the mop, complications do arise. The problem is that all women do not have the same desire to accept responsibility. Thus, at the beginning, when women organizers were needed, only two women volunteered. The next time there were three. The three of them worked together on a rotating basis. This year there will hopefully be more candidates. But the risk, if the number of active women remains limited, is the reconstruction of power.

Eliane, France and Mireille believe otherwise. Anything can happen at the *Balai Libere*. It is a world in movement, in permanent evolution. There is a lack of rigidity; rules are made according to practice. They are modified or turned upside down if need be. For example, the rules concerning special time-off. There are authorized absences which are not paid for - administrative chores, purchases or work to do at home. Then there are paid absences if the husband or the children are sick. If the husband is operated on, the woman gets one day off. But Eliane makes it clear: "This is not to take care of him if he has a cold." For children's illnesses there was at first one week of full pay and one week half-pay. It seems there were abuses. Now it's three days at full pay and two days at half-pay with presentation of a medical certificate. But that is for each month. This is unique in Belgium where the law does not provide for children's illnesses. Do the men have the same benefit? The interviewees seem perplexed, silent. *No man has ever asked for a day off because of a sick child. If the situation comes up, he would have the same right - provided that his wife works.*

The steering committee authorizes days off after listening to the worker's reason. But besides absence for personal reasons, there are also 'educational days' which are paid like work days. The general assembly works with a special organizer to decide the theme for the educational day. There are different topics: children, school, consumer issues. Visits are arranged to other self-managed enterprises.

Participation is voluntary according to one's interest. The rule is to force no one. For children a weekend day care plan is under way. It's complicated; there are legal obstacles. If it's really wanted it will be done. Who's to stop them?

The legal foundation of the enterprise is based on the French 1901 statute of associations. The business is non-profit and pays no dividends. What used to go to the boss is now invested in materials or salaries which have practically doubled in three years. The number of workers has also increased to 68 women and six men who are the window washers. There is no foreman, no boss; almost everyone earns the same salary. The six men are paid slightly more. Why? *Because of the risks they take in their work. Washing windows from the ledge of tall buildings is dangerous. And besides, because they are men. They have families to feed.*

The women do not feel defeated. Their objective is to be paid a salary equal to men. The window washers get raises based on cost-of-living increases, but they don't get those raises decided upon by the general assembly. When the salaries are matched, the window washers will be given a 'risk bonus'. The men don't like it, but they are clearly in the minority. Sometimes there are problems. *They are not in solidarity with us. They stay because they would not find work conditions and salaries comparable to the Balai Libere. We have lots of candidates for hiring and the waiting list grows from day to day. There are no lay-offs, and the hiring principle is to follow the waiting list. We explain the system to the new women. They work a one month trial period before being hired. Then the general assembly decides with the advice of the team-unit and the two women organizers.*

The women feel free. Even though they scrub floors from 8:30 to 4:00 everyday. *We don't work less, but everything has changed. We don't have to punch a time clock. We arrive at 8:30, but if we want to have coffee together and talk before beginning work, we do. When we want to talk, we talk. The barriers the boss put between us no longer exist. We are free to talk. In the steering committee anyone can speak.*

Outside the big bay window the students are walking by - hurrying to laboratories full of animal skeletons or to auditoriums where they will take notes on the advantages and inconveniences of self-management. It's a utopia that is not for tomorrow and probably not for the day after, some professor is no doubt saying. There will always be a need for managers to keep things working. Most of them don't know that utopia is there, just two steps away in this incubator for young intellectuals. Living like Eliane, France and Mireille. ■

(histoires d'elles, February/March 1978)

An insignificant little strike . . .

Six women workers of a Paris factory had never before rebelled until they occupied their foreman's office for three weeks, winning a wage increase for 110 workers.

It happened suddenly, just like that, in a moment of madness and anger - like a cyclone. On Tuesday, February 8, 1979, at 8:15 a.m., we stormed into our foreman's office and demanded to see the head of the department.

Even in '68, Emma continued, hardly anything happened here. The boss gave a \$20 bonus to those who hadn't gone on strike, and harassed all those who had actively participated. In our shop, we women did nothing more than grumble in our corners. At the time, there was no contact between us; we never even spoke to each other. I knew Germaine, but never said hello. We all worked in isolated spots in the shop. That Tuesday, we suddenly found ourselves in the foreman's office with another worker, an Algerian man, also one of the lowest paid; we hadn't



Emma, 44, a production worker at the BBT factory for the past six years, tells the story. The factory, located in the outskirts of Paris, manufactures industrial lamps for airports and street lighting - the army is one of its major customers. It is a small paternalistic company, dating back to the 19th century. There are 359 employees with most of the managerial staff consisting of retired military. Emma, Jeanine, Germaine and three others are the only women in a shop of twenty production workers. They receive the lowest pay for doing the dirtiest and most difficult work. However, until that famous Tuesday morning they had accepted their situation with no outward signs of rebellion. Despite years of service, none of them were union members. The factory had little history of unrest, aside from a few small strikes to obtain the '13 month bonus' (a European practice of giving workers at least one month's worth of extra pay per year). The unions had found their way into the company only as recently as 1972.

even gotten together beforehand to plan anything. It happened just like that, in a flash of anger. We had overheard the boss tell a worker who had requested a raise, "We can't do that. We must first give the lowest paid a raise."

The women then made inquiries as to who these lowest paid workers were, with whom management was so concerned. As far as they knew, they received the lowest wages. They then went to ask for their raise and were given the reply, "Oh no, we can't do that right now," leaving the six women and the Algerian furious. When the head of the department refused to see them, they decided to occupy the foreman's office until their demand was met.

They didn't try to stop us. They thought it would be over within five minutes - a flash in the pan - knowing that none of us had ever before been in a labor dispute. The managers here are mostly ex-army people and pretty phallocratic. As far as they're concerned, women aren't quite dogs, but hardly much better. They seem to feel that a woman is only good for doing her work and keeping quiet. The manage-

ment never imagined that a bunch of women could stand up to them. But we stood up. I sat down on the desk; we played cards. The foreman moved out of his office. At lunchtime we went into the canteen with banners pinned across our chests stating "We are the lowest paid." We immediately contacted the CFDT (French Workers' Confederation, affiliated with the Socialist Party) shop steward. Our demand was that everyone receive a minimum wage of at least \$3.90 an hour.

As the strike continued, the director became anxious. Although the women occupy the lowest place in the hierarchy, they hold key jobs. Their stoppage caused a general slowdown of all production. The work was piling up. At one time they were having difficulty getting

give each other support, because if just one had relented, the whole battle would have been lost. Five of the women are presently union members - but that's not the most important accomplishment. Personally, it taught us how to live together, to get to know each other. Now we view each other quite differently.

AVOID ALL PUBLICITY

The "flash in the pan" lasted three weeks. The other workers were impressed by the determination of these seven individuals who had dared to do what they themselves had never done. Immediately they organized slowdowns to express their solidarity for the strikers and collected money to help compensate for the loss of wages.



material for the other workers. They weren't able to honor their clients' contracts anymore, and were liable for penalties. After the first two weeks, they tried to get the foreman to do our work. But every time a foreman tried to work our machines, we jumped on him and crowded around so he couldn't breathe. Eventually they had to give up. They even tried threatening us with the police, but I think, more than anything, they wanted to avoid publicity.

This little strike never did get mentioned. Instead it got lost in the general pandemonium of the metal industry crisis. This insignificant little strike led by six women and one man, nevertheless, ended in a victory. After three weeks, management granted a raise of 50¢ an hour, only slightly less than what the women had demanded. The raise was given to all 110 workers.

Now that it is over they admit that it wasn't always easy. Twice they were tempted to give in. They had to constantly

Management was amazed that the other workers would go on a slowdown without demanding anything for themselves. This was a definite change in attitude. The workers formed a fund into which they all contributed one hour's worth of pay each week. Only the production workers contributed. None of the clerical staff did, although they are mostly all women and also very poorly paid. They feel that they're better because they're in the offices. Altogether over \$1000 was collected covering half our losses.

A union delegate, present at the interview, commented in a serious voice, "These women liberated themselves." Emma laughed aloud, We literally burst open and that gave us more confidence. The supervisors don't treat us in the same way anymore; they don't use the same language when they talk to us. If one of them says something wrong, he now comes over to apologize. That would have never happened before. Things are different now. ■

(histoires d'elles, March 1979)

Don't count your plates before they're painted

Between 1960 and 1975 the number of working women in Denmark, especially among married women, increased dramatically. In 1960, only 20% of all married women worked outside their homes. By 1975, the number had increased to 60%, comprising 40% of the Danish labor force. However, only 52% of all working women are union members, as compared to 90% of the working men. KAD (a women's union), in existence since 1901, has a membership of 90,000: 25,000 of which have joined only within the last three years. A significant number of KAD's members, 23,000, presently receive unemployment insurance.

The overall unemployment rate in Denmark averages around 10%; unemployment among women tends to be 2-3% higher. The number of strikes, especially those involving women, has increased during the last few years. One significant strike at the royal porcelain factory in Copenhagen lasted for 13 weeks. During the summer and fall of 1976, factory workers struck for a raise of \$1 per hour.

The 200 year old royal porcelain factory in Copenhagen employs 1250 production workers, mostly single mothers, as well as 450 office workers. In former times, daughters from 'good families' used to work there, without pay, because the work - a special painting technique - was considered refined. In 1976, only some of the women received the minimum wage for piece work. Despite the low pay and the piece work, working conditions are not considered intolerable. The women sit together in a quiet room where they may talk with each other as they paint. For this reason, many of them stay

on. Although the women's work requires more skill and training, men working on potter's wheels, make much more money.

The fact that all employees were striking was extraordinary, as the wage increase would effect only 200 of the 1250 employees. Although all the women were fired, they went to the factory a few hours each day to organize the strike. The women also went in groups to other cities to inform people of the strike and to collect money for a strike fund making it possible to pay each striker \$50 per week. As a statement against the company, the women painted designs used in the factory onto paperplates and sold them for \$1.60 each. The demand for the paperplates was so high that the women barely had enough time to produce them. After several demonstrations and much negotiating, the workers' demands were met.

Due to their strike activities many women experienced conflicts within their families as they began to question their roles as women. One woman, who later divorced her husband, told us: *At the beginning, some husbands supported their wives. As the strike continued, they lost patience. At first, I felt exhausted and believed that I had messed up my life at home as well as in the factory. We just take our families too seriously. We accept lower wages than men because our wages don't seem to be so important. We are not as active in unions as men. We have never tried to be strong and to put pressures on others. This strike helped us to find out that we can be strong and that we are worth something.* ■

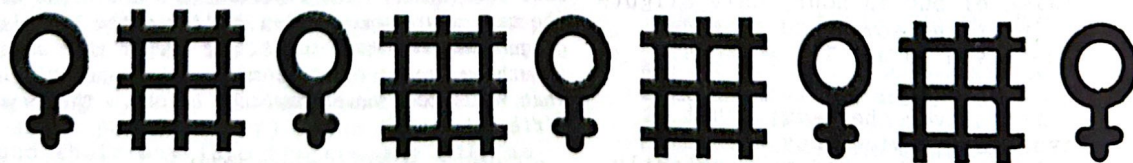
(Informationsdienst, 9/4/76; Arbeiterkampf, 8/23/76. See also Newsfront International #187)

Equal pay, equal rights - in jail, too

During the fall of 1977 male inmates in many Dutch prisons won their struggle for higher wages. Consequently, the women at Holland's only women's prison, in Rotterdam demanded similar rights. They, however, were less successful. In response, the women rioted in their cells on New Year's Eve. The issue was brought to the attention of the women's movement. In support of the female inmates' demands, action was

immediately taken. On April 2, 1978, a demonstration began at the women's center in Amsterdam. From there, the women marched to the train station, boarded trains to Rotterdam and assembled in front of the women's prison carrying banners stating their demands: "Equal pay! Equal rights! Also for women in prison!"

(Arbeiterkampf, 3/6/78)



Women in national liberation movements

Women in the underdeveloped countries of the Third World suffer a double oppression. In addition to the oppression of women by the sexism that is reinforced and institutionalized by traditional patriarchal societies and strict religious codes, they share with the vast majority of the population the economic oppression of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Many of these countries are colonies in fact: direct military domination and economic exploitation are imposed and maintained by foreign governments

national liberation movements have evolved and gained mass support in many Third World countries. Carrying out a strategy of protracted guerrilla warfare, generally their goals are to wrest state power from the colonial or neo-colonial regimes and, once in power, to form governments, economies and social structures which serve the needs and interests of the population. Drawing their essential strength from the rural peasantry (who serve as their camouflage and intelligence system), they operate from bases in the countryside, attacking cities



Women in the Western Sahara

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whose goal is to drain the wealth of the colonies in order to serve the economic needs and interests of the "mother" country. Others are "neo-colonial" states whose economic and social structures are also controlled by foreign powers and international capital, but indirectly via the cooperation of indigenous military dictatorships or pseudo-democracies which represent the interests of the country's wealthy elite - an elite which wishes to preserve its privileged position and which stand to profit from foreign economic exploitation. In either case, the results are the same for the majority of the population: economic oppression resulting in poverty, hunger, illiteracy, illness, and lack of control over basic necessities and the forces which shape their lives. The resources of the country are exported and consumed elsewhere and the wealth received in exchange is funnelled primarily into the hands of international capital and removed from the country. This economic oppression reinforces the hierarchical, competitive and exploitative relations in society through which women usually find themselves at the bottom of the pecking order.

In response to this economic exploitation and the suffering which it perpetuates,

and military outposts. However, as a political army, they also engage in many non-military tasks, such as helping the rural population with food production, setting up refugee camps and supply stores, providing health care services, and engaging in literacy campaigns and political education. Although the majority of the fighters are men, many women have active roles in the organization and implementation of the non-military projects in the refugee camps, as well as in the distribution of weapons, ammunition, etc., at the battle front. Through their achievements, women have demonstrated impressive capabilities, and many women are now demanding an integrated role in all of the activities of the liberation movements.

ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN DURING NATIONAL LIBERATION

In the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon, many women belong to the Palestine Women's Union which is part of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The activities of the Women's Union include health care services and literacy classes, distributing food and supplies and repairing weapons. They have established people's committees in each camp in order to encourage the

politicization of women, as well as child care centers and sewing centers which will enable women to acquire means of economic independence.

In Western Sahara, where the Polisario Front is resisting the annexation of that country by Morocco, the women of the Front are in charge of most of the administration of the camps in the liberated zones. They provide health care and cultural programs, and often travel to different areas of Algeria, organizing meetings to obtain material help from the Algerians for their struggle.

In Eritrea, the women of the Popular Forces for the Liberation of Eritrea (EPLF) participate in the struggle against Ethiopian domination by running people's stores, providing health care and forming small women's groups in the villages of the liberated zones to mobilize and politicize the village women. The EPLF has set up day care centers in order to enable women to carry out these activities. Some women have been elected to the newly set-up people's assemblies, and 15% of the popular militia is comprised of women.

OPPOSITION TO EQUAL PARTICIPATION

Through their participation and achievements, the women of the liberation fronts have discovered an assertive pride in themselves and their capabilities and will not return easily to the submissive and subservient roles prescribed by traditional cultural mores and religious codes. However, although one finds different levels of women's participation in the various liberation movements due to differing cultural and religious traditions and political necessities, in most cases women do not participate equally in all tasks of the movements (particularly military tasks) or in leadership. Even those cases where they may participate equally, this has not been achieved without difficulty. They have met with resistance not only within the home, the extended family and the community, but also within the liberation movements themselves. Although the leadership and the official rhetoric of the movements generally stress the need for women's equality, the men are still influenced in varying degrees by age-old prejudices.

The following are excerpts from an interview with a woman who has been active in the Palestinian resistance since 1967:

For three years I worked on a Palestinian newspaper. I left my parents eight years ago for the Palestinian resistance. At first it was very hard. A girl who lives alone, who works and who struggles on top of that, is surrounded by comments: Where is her family; where does she come from; what is she doing; etc. At the newspaper, when I stayed at

night to work, the men said to themselves that if I stayed there it was because I was "loose." If one wants to struggle with the Palestinians, one has to be patient - as soon as they see a woman working with them, they ask her to get married.

In 1976, the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) proclaimed a women's day to talk about the situation of Palestinian women. They say that in the Palestinian resistance women can participate in the struggle; that they are given weapons, but when it's a matter of going to the battlefield, one only finds men. Why? During this meeting the question was asked: "Will Palestine be like Algeria for the women?" George Habache, a PFLP leader, responded: "For the PLO, I don't know; for us they will be liberated." In his words, all the militants agree that women should be liberated, but ask a militant why his wife is at home. His wife is his wife after all...

In respect to the role of women in the Polisario Front of the Western Sahara, British journalist Tony Hodges, who spent some time traveling with the Polisario guerrillas, stressed that a distinction should be made between mobilization and liberation. Although the women of the Polisario Front are highly mobilized, their activities take place within a classical sexual division of labor. Women there are predominantly located in refugee camps where they have been forced by circumstances to take on responsibility for the administration of the camps. Men carry out most of the actual fighting. On the political level women are present and active at meetings and rallies, but very few have leadership roles on the executive council.

In Eritrea, the EPLF (Popular Forces for the Liberation of Eritrea) has introduced a new family code in the liberated areas: free choice of spouse; elimination of dowry; equal divorce rights; sharing of child care by both parents; etc. They have also stressed equality in land redistribution to women as well as men. These reforms have met strong resistance in the more conservative sectors. The decision to join the EPLF women's organization is a difficult one for many women. If their husbands do not keep up with their own politicization, they run the risk of serious conflicts, even divorce. Many husbands, seeing their privileges threatened, accuse their activist wives of neglecting their duties as mothers and abandoning their children.

AFTER NATIONAL LIBERATION

After national liberation has been won, what is the role of women in the newly transformed societies? Here, too, the situation varies from country to country depending on cultural and religious traditions, levels of education and employment, and the political values of the new government.

Angola

Since its war of national liberation from Portugal during the sixties and early seventies, the government of Angola has attempted to reconstruct Angolan society along egalitarian socialist lines. By creating systems of popular democracy and institutions such as dynamization groups and people's commissions, it hopes to gradually bring about new relations between men and women, people and the law, town and country, and new mentalities against racism, sexism and cultural imperialism. The late Angolan President Agostinho Neto, frequently spoke of the importance of the growing role of women as leaders in this new stage of national reconstruction.

The Organization of Angolan Women (OMA) - some of whose leaders have been elected to the central committee of the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and appointed to ministerial positions in the government - is assisting government efforts toward these goals by carrying out mobilizations of rural women. They have organized brigades of women health workers and literacy campaigns, encouraged women to participate actively in new government production programs, and mobilized 20,000 women to take military training under the Organization for Popular Defense (OPD). Many Angolan women, clinging to traditional roles, are still reticent about participation in these programs. Due to the low level of literacy and education in Angola, the large percentage of rural population, and the strong patriarchal tribal traditions which still influence a majority of the population (particularly in the countryside), these mobilizations and consciousness raising efforts may be long and slow.

Cuba

Prior to the Cuban revolution in 1959, most Cuban women were unemployed and illiterate. If they had to work, the primary occupations open to them were those of domestic servant and prostitute. The only role expected of them - or that they expected of themselves - was that of wife and mother. In the twenty years since the revolution, the image and role of Cuban women has changed radically. Following the revolution, the government abolished prostitution and domestic service and set up special re-training programs for those women in skills such as child care, sewing and clerical work. Literacy campaigns, adult education programs, and study and discussion groups were instituted throughout the country and women were actively encouraged to participate. The principle of equal pay for equal work became law, and compulsory education was established for all Cuban children. (In 1974, the percentage of women students in various fields of higher education was: science 50%; biochemistry and biology 60%; medicine 50%; technology 23%; agriculture 35%.) An extensive system of child care centers was set up and continues to grow which, while aiding in the social development of the new generation of children, also enables more and more women to become an active part of the paid work force. Many others are volunteer workers in agricultural projects (such as sugar cane harvests), neighborhood defense committees, schools, trade unions and other political work.

The goal of the national women's organization, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), is a massive incorporation of women into the productive work force. Its efforts in reaching this goal include national



afrique-asie

propaganda campaigns, door-to-door discussions, preparatory education, assisting mothers in the location of nursery schools and childcare arrangements, and conducting a follow-up on those women who drop out of work. The FMC also conducts political education and workers' advancement courses for women on such topics as cattle raising, tractor driving, electrical work, etc., as well as courses on more traditional female occupations and basic education.

As more and more women entered the work force, a serious problem became glaringly apparent. Because of the strain of the 'second shift' of childcare and housework which women felt obligated to perform after a full day on the job, so many women began dropping out of work each year that it almost cancelled out the gains. After a number of years of discussion of the problem, a Family Code (ratified by an overwhelming majority of the population) was enacted into law in 1975. The code stipulates the total equality of men and women in all aspects of Cuban life beginning with the family unit, and stresses the equal responsibility shared by husband and wife for all aspects of childcare, home maintenance and domestic duties. Gradually, as the justice and pragmatic necessity of this concept sinks in, more and more Cuban men are beginning to share the housework in varying degrees. However, there are still many, influenced by 'machismo', who consider it 'help' for their wives, rather than their shared responsibility. In addition, many women are still influenced by a concept of 'femininity' which dictates subservience to the husband and sees housework as a wife's obligation. However, considering the negative reinforcement given these attitudes by the new Family Code, by the government, by FMC's nationwide propaganda efforts, and especially by the schools which are educating the new generation of Cubans, the Cuban government may be justified in its optimism that though it lacks the bolstering effect of economic necessity, these old attitudes and the 'second shift' burden of Cuban women, will eventually disappear.

Algeria

The following is an excerpt from a leaflet distributed this year by Algerian women at the University of Algiers. It is in response to the Ayatollah Khomeini's call for Iranian women (who were instrumental in the popular revolt which overthrew the Shah and brought Khomeini to power in Iran) to return to wearing the veil and abide by strict Islamic laws:

We are disturbed by what is being done to Iranian women. These women raised their voices in revolt, but now the new government is trying to silence them.



jeune africaine

Algerian women also fought: as guerrillas, in the streets, in the fire of the colonial army. After independence, and for the past 17 years, the patriarchal power has been working to silence them. This is being done in the name of thousand year old religious principles, in the name of the so-called priorities of a developing nation...in the name of revolution!!! Algerian women join their voices to the cries of Iranian women, who refuse the fascist utilization of an Islamism that is trying to suffocate them...

According to *Algerian Women in Struggle*, a booklet published by the Algerian Women's Group in France in 1978, the role of women in the Algerian war of independence from France (1956-1962) was never really equal to that of men. In spite of their willingness to take part in the struggle, they often came up against opposition from the FLN (National Liberation Front) leadership to their total integration into the struggle. As women began to represent an uncontrollable potentiality within the movement, the FLN called repeatedly for women to contain their participation in the struggle "within the context of (traditional Islamic) family life." It was only toward the end of the war that their participation became more massive. Although some fought as guerrillas, most participated as nurses, secretaries to officers, academic advisors, etc. This opportunity for increased participation was created by the gradual upsetting of traditional social relations in society and within the family, brought on by the prolonged war effort. This social upheaval also brought on an awakening of consciousness for women. Along with their calls for national liberation and independence, they began to include demands for liberation and equal rights for women as well.

During the period 1962-1965, following the end of the war, and while struggling to construct a socialist society, women continued to protest against their unequal position in society. The establishment of the Boumedienne regime in 1965, however, brought with it a stepped-up campaign against the loss of morals, excessive westernization and the abandonment of cultural Islamic values. (This provoked a demonstration of 15,000 women in Algiers in 1965 against the wearing of the veil.) Prior to 1965, the role of women in the new society had been that of participating in the popular struggle against the remaining elements of capitalism. But in 1966, the Family Code, which defined the role of women strictly within the framework of Arab-Moslem traditions, began to be unofficially applied.

For Boumedienne, social change for women would be assured by their integration into the production process. However, although the participation of women in production has increased to some degree, it has not had any significant effect on social relations or the place of women in Algerian society. For those women who do work, there has been some loosening and modification of the structure of traditional Moslem family life; however, for the large majority of women, work is largely unavailable, and marriage and family remain the only way to economic survival.

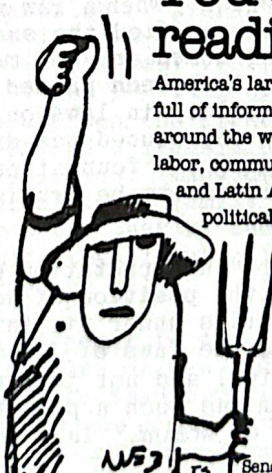
Algeria's industrialization policy has led to an emphasis on heavy industries demanding sophisticated technology and equipment. This requires a highly skilled work force. Thus, women generally find themselves excluded from industry because of their lack of training and skills. The

rate of employment for women is 2.3% in the industrial and agricultural sector and 14% in the service sector. The stronger concentration in the service sector corresponds to the increasing rate of education for women; however, most jobs are limited to clerical and secretarial work. The strongest concentration of employed women is in undeclared work such as small businesses and craftwork. However, this sector remains undeveloped due to government priorities in favor of heavy industrial development.

Although the government continues to stress the necessity of investing women with political responsibilities in the different mass organizations and in the party, the actual percentage of women elected to political offices remains dismally low.

In 1972, the government attempted to institutionalize the Family Code which had, up until then, been applied only unofficially. Among other things, it specifies that marriage cannot be contracted without a dowry (thus keeping alive the idea of the market value of women), and prohibits marriage between Moslem and non-Moslem, etc. This proposal provoked a large mobilization of women who organized sit-ins in the universities to denounce the plan. Since 1972, groups of women have kept alive this spirit of protest by continuing to participate in public demonstrations and strikes, both in regard to class-related struggles and in protest of specific aspects of women's oppression. ■

(LSM News #13; *algeriennes en lutte*, January 1978; *Cuban Women Now* by Margaret Randall, 1974; and *Children of Che* by Karen Wald, 1978. See also *Newsfront International* #191, #196, #219, #220 and #222)



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Islam's

- Marriage is a social contract under these laws. Dowry is paid by the groom's family to the bride's family. Men are allowed to marry up to four women at one time. They may initiate marriage and stand in contract for themselves. Women are allowed one husband at a time. A distinction is made between virgins and non-virgins: a virgin may not initiate a contract on her own, but the widow or divorcee has the right to undertake a contract by herself, for herself. The dowry for a virgin is greater than that for a widow or divorcee.

- A woman must sue for divorce through a judge, but a man may just announce the divorce of his wife. In a divorce, the woman is assigned the task of raising the children, but they must be "given back" to the father at a specified age.

- The property and guardianship of a woman are in the hands of her father. After his death, this is passed on to the nearest male relative (son, brother, etc.). The woman's share in inheritance is half that inherited by each brother (after one eighth of the total has been set aside for the father's widow).

- A woman has complete liberty to administer and dispose of her possessions. Her husband has no power over his wife's possessions. Islamic law always provides materially for the woman in some way. Women

hold onto their property rights which is their only access to power.

The degree to which these laws are applied varies within the Islamic states. Tunisia is the most advanced Arab country in terms of legislation for women. In 1956, President Bourguiba liberalized the laws by giving women rights in marriage and divorce and by forbidding polygamy. Later, abortion was authorized and the Pill sold legally. However, Tunisia is also influenced by the emergence of Islam as a political force. Since 1968, when a law was passed on adultery, which specified the same punishment for men as for women, no new measures in favor of women have been passed. In 1975, the idea of equality in laws on succession that Bourguiba introduced was dropped. As elsewhere, women, as the foundation of the family, are considered to be crucial in the rebirth of Islam.

The interpretation of Islam, and therefore the position of women, varies in the countries under its influence. It is because the laws of Islam apply to all aspects of civil and not just religious life that Islam has such a powerful effect on the role of women. In countries where religion



new veil

is completely divorced from the state, the status of women is totally independent from the law of the Koran (such as the Moslem republics of the USSR, Yugoslavia and Albania). But in many of the Islamic states of the Middle East, the Sharia (divine law as set forth in the holy books of the Koran and the Hadith) from the seventh century still provides the basis for their laws.

In other countries, progressive measures have been less successful. In the twenties, the reformist King Amanullah of Afghanistan lost his throne for having tried to unveil women. In Saudi Arabia, the most reactionary country in terms of the position of women, women have not been given the right to vote, to attend schools and universities, or to participate in politics. Many of Morocco's laws and the official Family Code are taken directly from the Sharia, and women only become adults legally when they are widowed or divorced.

In Western Africa, Senegal in particular, where religion is a mixture of new (Islamic) and old (pre-Islamic), the tradition is much more liberal. *We are much more marked by traditions older than Islam, which is relatively new. In*

Senegal, the practice of Islam is kept to a minimum: five daily prayers; fasting; prohibition of pork; one doesn't serve Islam to make women its servants. Women from Senegal, who make the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, are shocked by the status of their Arab sisters.

Lack of familiarity with the language (the Koran is written in Arabic) provided a barrier between Moslem followers and the Koran, thus limiting its influence. Marriage and divorce laws in Senegal are more liberal, though the laws of succession are those of the Sharia. Women are theoretically viewed as equal but different, from men. However, in practice, they are still men's "private property." The religious chief can make the marriage choice for her. The veil is not required, but the wearing of a scarf is suggested. Also, it is common for women to bring their complaints of the overbearing attitude or the unsatisfactory performance of their husbands to the Council of the Elders, an attitude which is hardly Islamic.

THE VEIL

The veil is the symbol of all the conflicts, complexities, and ambiguities

of the situation of women in Islamic societies. The veil dates to pre-Islamic empires; it was a custom of the high courts in the Byzantine and Sistine empires. In Islam, the veil was implemented as a symbolic form of seclusion of women and of sexual segregation; it is customary but not required by law. In many areas the veil is still the symbol of high status. Women aspiring to higher status may want to be veiled and kept at home - something considered a luxury in contrast to work in the fields.

The veil is, in the eyes of the foreigner, the status symbol of the Islamic woman: To convert the woman, to win her over to foreign values, to uproot her from her status, this is colonialism's means of destroying the existence of a national reality, writes Frantz Fanon (in reference to Algeria under French rule). The first gesture of "liberated" Arab women was to discard the veil for

Western dress. Thus, the maintenance of the veil was affirmed as a preservation of cultural originality against exterior threats and, therefore, as an expression of nationalism. On the other hand, the mushrooming of beauty salons and ready-to-wear boutiques in Moroccan towns can be interpreted as a forerunner of the woman's urge to claim her own body, which will culminate in more radical claims, such as the claim to birth control and abortion. (*Beyond the Veil*, by Fatima Merissi).

Obviously the liberation of women under Islam is much more complex than merely "discarding the veil." The response to keeping the veil can be more easily understood in its historical context, but this in no way answers the many questions posed by the liberation of women in Islamic societies. ■

(*Jeune Afrique*, 4/25/79; *algeriennes en lutte*, January 1978; *Beyond the Veil* by Fatima Mernissi, 1976)

Iranian women's continuing struggle

Nothing falls from heaven

Since the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the Iranian left has been faced with the important task of preventing a new dictatorship in the name of Islam. Through demonstrations in all major cities in Iran, they are demanding the abolition of the *chador* (the veil used in Iran) and an end to all forms of oppression.

Before the takeover of power by Khomeini on February 10, women wore the *chador* to demonstrate their solidarity with poor and exploited women, and as a sign of protest against the destruction of their own culture by imperialism. But after the takeover, women knew the time had come to take off their veils and participate equally in the construction of a new society. The reactionary forces around Khomeini

want to force women to wear the *chador* and keep them in an oppressed position.

Khomeini not only wants to collect all the weapons which are in the hands of the left; he also intends to issue laws based on the precepts of the Koran - laws which cut back the rights of women.

- Women will have to wear the *chador*, even at their workplace;
- Marriage laws, which have only partially protected women, will be completely eliminated;
- Abortion will be made illegal;
- Coeduction will be prohibited.

WOMEN IN THE STREETS

March 8, International Women's Day, was the first day of women's demonstrations in Teheran. Despite bad weather, ten thousand women marched through the streets of Teheran to the seat of the prime minister. The crowd's slogans were: "We wanted Khomeini, but not anymore," and "We fought against one dictatorship; we don't want another." Upon their arrival at the prime minister's office, the women were shot at and many were attacked and injured with knives. The attacks against the women were mostly carried out by the "Committee" (a group of fervent Khomeini supporters).

Impressed by the women's demonstration, religious leaders tried to change their positions. They declared that women only had to wear scarfs on their heads to



liberation

protect their "dignity." Women decided to choose their own "dignity" and planned a second demonstration for March 10. This demonstration was an overwhelming success. Hospitals, banks, government offices and many companies with large numbers of female employees were closed down as these women participated in the march. Children from coeducational schools came to the demonstration together with their female teachers. Passers-by threw away their *chadors* and joined the ranks of the marchers.

This time, members of the "Committee" shot into the crowd, seriously injuring some of the women. The government issued an order to the "Committee" to leave the women demonstrators alone. At that point, women were so angry that they organized demonstrations for the following days, not only in Teheran, but in all the major cities in Iran. On March 12, 50,000 women demonstrated in Teheran alone. The main slogans were: "No restrictions on our freedom." "We have not made the revolution to have to start all over again." "Those who attack women attack the revolution."

ORGANIZED TERROR

Khomeini supporters have purposely chosen women as their target. Surprised by the immense uprising of women, they tried to repress the women's movement. As they were unsuccessful, they decided to disrupt the big demonstration of March 12. Men tried to block the streets with trucks, and built barricades at the beginning and end of the march. Men lined up along the sidewalks, shouting a variety of accusations at the women. Rumors were spread that the women were SAVAK agents (*SAVAK was the Shah's famed secret police*) or that they were tools of international communism. The director of the Iranian TV Broadcasting company had a stop put to all reports on the women's demonstrations and ordered instead programming hostile to women. These attacks against women are only part of the general attack against the left.

FOREIGN MEDIA

The establishment press in the U.S. and Western Europe reports as much as possible on the activities of counter-revolutionaries in Iran. Every little event which involves the Islamic "Committees" is a welcome opportunity to denounce the revolutionary process. At the same time, they ridicule the women's demonstrations. One West German report describes the situation as follows: "Embittered amazons are fighting against a soft thing like the veil...They were pretty, young women who protested against the disappearance



histoires d'elles

of their fashionable hair style and clothing under the black body-covering veil." The struggle of women is seen as the struggle of "young women" against the old-fashioned Khomeini. This report makes no mention of the assaults on women by the Islamic Committees.

MORE THAN THE CHADOR IS AT STAKE

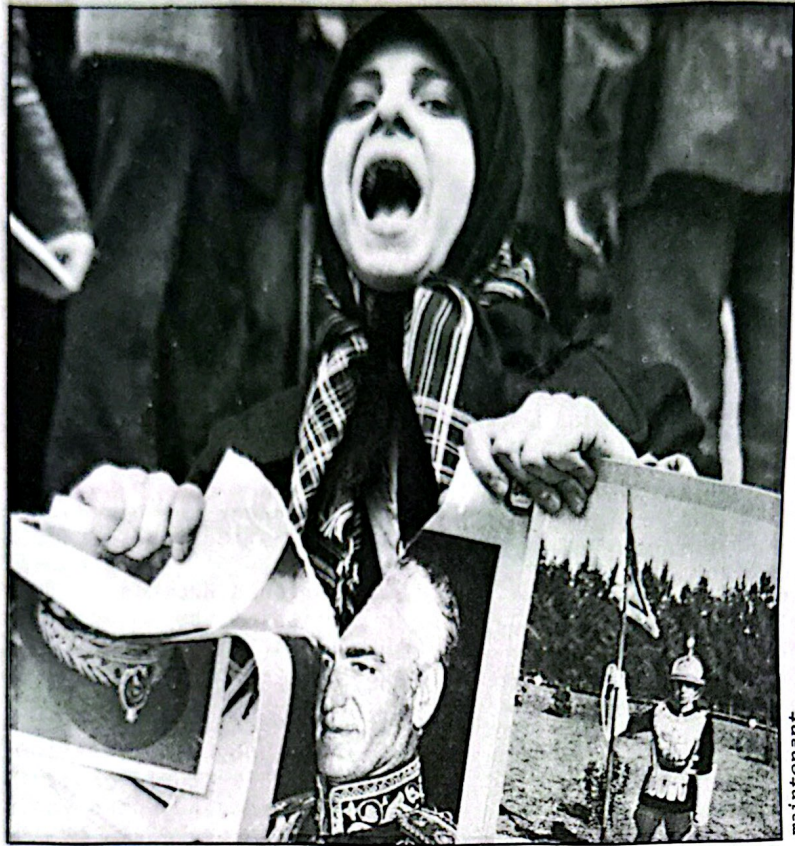
The situation in Iran is a prime example of the double oppression suffered by women in Third World countries; they are oppressed both as women and as members of a society oppressed by imperialism. Their fight is not only a fight for the liberation of their people, but also a fight for their own liberation. Thus, in joining the liberation movement, women have an important influence in the struggle and usually are more radical than men.

Years ago, when Iran seemed completely calm, women were the only ones who dared to demonstrate. Despite strict government orders which prohibited mourning ceremonies for murdered opponents of the Shah, women organized ceremonies for the victims.

A group of West German and Iranian women who work together in West Germany (See *Newsfront International* #222) offered the following analysis: Often we are confronted with the argument that women will have to return to their homes as soon as the struggle is over. Algeria (see related article), where women played a similar role in that revolution, is always the example for such an argument. But there is no mention of the fact that this development was connected with the elimination of the left, which also fought in the Algerian liberation struggle. The role of women in all societies is reflected in the social, political and economic conditions. The outcome of the revolutionary struggle in Iran will determine the eventual position of women.

IRANIAN WOMEN: BACKGROUND

The Pahlavi dynasty that came into power in 1921 in Iran did not bring lib-



eration and equal rights to women, who were in many respects tied down by a Middle Eastern society. Within the growing industrial sector - and under the worst conditions of early capitalism - women took the worst jobs for the lowest pay. At the turn of the century, the first women's movement began developing around the fight for equal rights. For the first time, many women's magazines and books were published articulating issues and ideas important to women. But with the defeat of the movement in the early 1920's, women were forced back into their traditional roles. Publishing was declared illegal, and many active women were put into prison.

After the democratic movements were destroyed, the reforms "from above" began. Reza Shah (the ousted Shah's father) had been put into power by the British and wanted to change Iranian society to better fit the interests of Western capitalism. This necessitated the entrance of women into the labor force so as to boost production. His policy regarding women was simple: In 1936, he declared the veil illegal. Without a political and social groundwork to support this sudden change,

most women felt their identities threatened. Violent scenes took place in the streets. Soldiers tore the veils from the heads of women who resisted, ungrateful for their "liberation."

In addition, women had no chance to get an education. Nor had there been any legal changes that would have encouraged them with better opportunities. Women were still the private property of men, and, like "beggars, bankrupt citizens, criminals, mentally ill people and children," they did not have the right to vote.

In the early 1960's, the Shah made new attempts to adjust the old societal attitudes to the needs of the world market. Partly to impress the United States, he started the so-called "White Revolution." The Shah's sister, Ashraf, hated by everyone, initiated a demonstration for women's suffrage in 1963, led by the "Highest Council of Women" which she had founded. This organization had no support among the Iranian women and was simply a part of the government. That same year, Iranian women obtained the right to vote. Though this was heralded as a great advancement, it was quite obviously a farce as there were no democratic elections in Iran.

In the legal sector, too, changes took place. In 1967, the marriage and family laws, based on Islamic tradition, were reformed. Polygamy was abandoned, although men could still take a second wife if the first one agreed. The temporary marriage, a special form of paid-for love, remained in existence. In some cases, women could ask for divorce and this alternative was widely used - provided the woman had the means to do so.

Nevertheless, the husband remained the head of the family. He decided where the family would live. The woman still needed his written approval for taking a job, travelling abroad, or having an operation to do with her reproductive organs. And of course, if a husband caught his wife with another man, he could kill them both without fear of punishment, while a woman committing the same act would face the death penalty for murder.

Iranian women were also completely disadvantaged within the educational sector. In 1971, 74.5% of all women over six years of age were illiterate: 97% in rural areas, 52% in the cities. Only 30,000 women finished high school. Even though 1/3 of the university students were women by 1978, women completing university studies still obtained the least prestigious, lowest paying jobs. Most of the women became high school teachers. Generally, their jobs could not offer them economic independence and they remained dependent on their husbands. Most other women worked in the textile and carpet

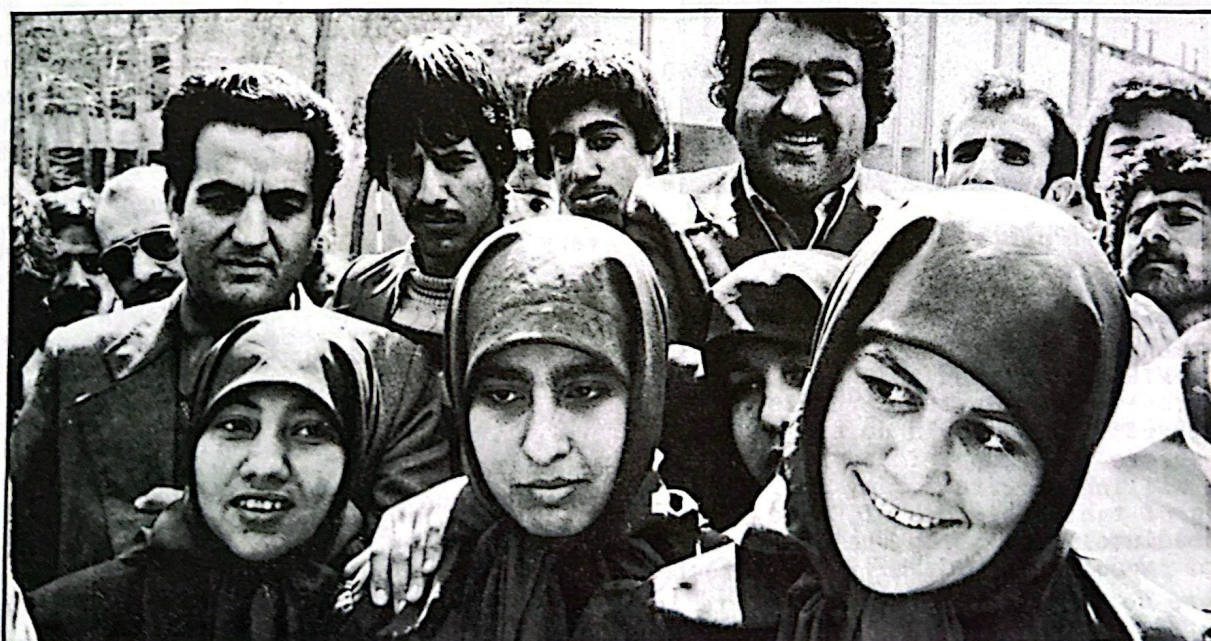
industries. For young women, the situation was especially depressing; faced with few job possibilities, low wages, traditional barriers, poor social benefits and general poverty, most married young or went to work as domestics. Child labor was never illegal.

THE VEIL

In the countryside, the veil was never strictly used. Both farm and nomadic women worked in the fields where the veil would have been a hindrance. In cities like Teheran, the rich and privileged women rarely wore the veil, either. This was not the case for the poor women in the cities, though. It was this latter group who desperately fought the military during the uprising against the Shah.

During these demonstrations, bourgeois and intellectual women alike wore the veil, both as a symbol of solidarity with the most oppressed classes and as a symbol of their resentment towards the lifestyles of the extremely wealthy. At that time, the veil also had tactical advantages - women could conceal their identities as well as leaflets and weapons. But none of this meant that the women wished a return to their veiled past, or to the Islamic religion. But then, neither are Khomeini's attacks on women's rights so much a question of religion as they are an attack by Islamic reaction on the Iranian left. ■

(*Courage*, February 1979; *Arbeiterkampf*, 3/19/79.
See also *Newsfront International* #222, #225)



maintenant

Interview with Gladys Diaz

"I refused to leave without my son"

(On December 7, 1976, Gladys Diaz, militant of the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) and well-known journalist during the Popular Unity government, was released from prison along with 325 other political prisoners. Diaz was arrested by the Chilean secret police, the DINA, on February 20, 1975. The following interview with her was conducted by Arbeiterkampf on December 10, two days following her arrival in Hamburg, West Germany.)



Gladys Diaz

MIR had predicted the military coup for some time. One only had to insert the day and the month. It was clear that it would happen. MIR had decided that all militants should stay to keep up the struggle. We all believed that we would do so, and two months before the coup I found a person who was willing to care for my son. I was thinking of taking him out of Chile later on. Immediately following the coup, they began to pursue me. My family was arrested. They were not imprisoned, but they were interrogated and told that I was being sought.

I knew that sooner or later they would find out where my son was. In October, shortly after the coup, I had to take my son back. This was a pretty difficult task, since he might have been under surveillance and my whereabouts would be discovered. We were extremely cautious. He came back to me and joined me in the underground.

My son was just five years old at the time. He had to get used to a different name, go to school under a different name, know that his mother had different names in different places. He adapted very easily and never made a mistake. He knew why his mother was living underground, why she was being pursued and he himself developed an underground mentality. He listened to conversations in the neighborhood, never talked, and returned to me immediately to tell me everything. If people started to ask him too many questions, he spoke to me about it and suggested that we move. I mention this to demonstrate that a child is perfectly capable of living underground.

The boy got so accustomed to his new name that, later, when he was living aboveground, he could not remember his real name. My clandestine existence took place in working class neighborhoods - the safest for me. Despite my height, which is very unusual in Chile, I always managed to look like my neighbors. All those who knew who I was did their best to protect me.

When Miguel Enriquez (then Secretary General of the MIR) was murdered, I tried to learn from this painful experience. I explained to my son that we would have to separate for reasons of safety. It was very, very difficult for him. He would not accept this; he refused rational explanations despite all my efforts. The separation came as a shock to him, even though he was placed in a very secure place, where he received a lot of attention. We two had a very close relationship. It wasn't possible for him to have a similar relationship with someone else.

It was a very good thing that we separated. Three months later I was arrested and he would have been arrested with me. During my torture there were times when the DINA was more interested in finding out where my son was than in my betraying Pascual Allende (successor to Miguel Enriquez as Secretary General of the MIR). I want you to understand that for a woman comrade in MIR, her relationship with her child is part of her responsibility to the working class, whatever the circumstances may be.

Despite the separation, I had arranged to be informed of my son's development and to see him, without letting him know when or where. When I was arrested, the boy must have sensed that something had happened because a lot of time passed with no word from me. He said nothing. He first learned of my arrest on the radio, when the news had just been released. The people in the house were not aware that

...he gave me a little kick in the ribs and said, 'You have always been so brave and now you let yourself be caught by the military.'

he knew, however, for he remained silent. Two weeks later at breakfast he announced: "I know that mother is in prison. She always spoke of this and I'm prepared. I want to know the truth. Is my Mommy already dead?"

When I appeared at Libre Platica the boy was told that I was fine, that I was imprisoned and that he would see me again. The first meeting was crucial. All my comrades were very nervous. When we entered the visitors' room, he saw me and ran towards me. He embraced me so violently that I fell to the floor. We rolled and wrestled. Then he gave me a little kick in the ribs and said, "You have always been so brave and now you let yourself be caught by the military!"

Up to this point, the boy had always reacted very well. But now he started to have many problems. He was very saddened by my being in prison and it became too much for him. All his drawings from this period are of prisons. The poems he wrote were very sad and bitter. His drawings showed hate for the junta and he began to have difficulties at school. He was very rebellious - everyone was responsible for his mother's imprisonment. This was the worst time for Alejandro.

The worst time in prison was not the days of torture, nor the day when I received news of my friend's death. It was the day I was brought in chains before a judge, without knowing what was happening. In the court, I met my child's father and his lawyer, the lawyer of Pablo Rodriguez (A leader of *Patria y Libertad*, an extreme right-wing organization which, according to the U.S.

Senate report on Chile, was funded by the CIA prior to the 1973 coup.) I was totally unprepared; I had no lawyer and had to represent myself. I lost custody of my child because I could not care for him while in prison.

I did not give up the fight for my child. Attorneys tried to win back my right to custody and to get my child out of his father's house, where he was miserable. I lost this battle but won another. I was granted the right to see my child, and he visited me regularly. I started to work politically with him so that he could learn to make life miserable for the people in his father's house...to the point where they would have enough of him. My son did a beautiful job. His father gave him back, disgusted that the kid had created such chaos in the house. He returned him to me, but stipulated that the child was not allowed to leave the country without his consent, which he refused to give.

This was the problem that I was confronted with when I was ordered to leave the country. I declared that I wouldn't leave the country without my son. The military junta would have to keep me and I would declare to the whole world why I refused to leave; I refused to leave without my son. His father got really frightened, since he was aware of the solidarity campaign for my release. The government tried to apply some pressure, but eventually he gave in and signed my son's papers. This means that my arrival here with my son is a victory for international solidarity...

"I want to make this perfectly clear, that the price my child has had to pay is part of the price that many children in Chile have to pay."

I want to make this perfectly clear, that the price my child has had to pay is part of the price that many children in Chile have to pay; children who suffer from their parents' disappearance, whose mothers, returning from prison, are physically and emotionally handicapped, or children who starve to death or suffer from malnutrition. My child's problems are problems of all working class children in Chile. ■

(*Arbeiterkampf*, 12/13/76. For complete text of this interview see *Newsfront International* #193 and #194)

Bolivia – women's hunger strike

On December 28, 1977, 25 women and children burst into the Archbishopric of La Paz. Under the protection of the Archbishop, they began a hunger strike that was to last 23 days.

Within three days the number of hunger strikers had grown to 80, and within a week the movement sparked off by that small group of 25 women and children had spread throughout the country, the number of strikers soon swelling to over 1500.

The hunger strike also received support in many cities outside of Bolivia. In Paris, the Latin American Women's Group declared their firm support: Our Bolivian sisters have demonstrated their determination to continue the strike to its ultimate consequences. We, women of Latin America in Paris, call on all women and feminist movements in all countries to join forces in the struggle against repression of the Bolivian people.

The women who started this national movement were members of the Union of Mothers of Mining Families, an organization founded in 1963 by a handful of women. Within ten years the union had grown from a small resistance committee into a veritable women's union with branches in all mining centers throughout Bolivia. Domitilla Chungara, one of the founders of the union and now leader of the Miners' Wives Union at the country's largest mine, was part of the group that launched the hunger strike.

Union leaders had been sent into exile after the crushing of a strike in 1976. The wives and children of these miners occupied the Archbishopric and demanded amnesty.

On January 18, 1978, the government announced an unrestricted amnesty for all political exiles and the release of 200 hunger strikers taken prisoner during the three week strike, and no further reprisals. ■

(Rouge, 1/19/78; liberation, 1/16,19,24/78.)

See also Newsfront International #211.)

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by Domitila Barrios de Chungara
with Moema Viezzer
Translated by Victoria Ortiz

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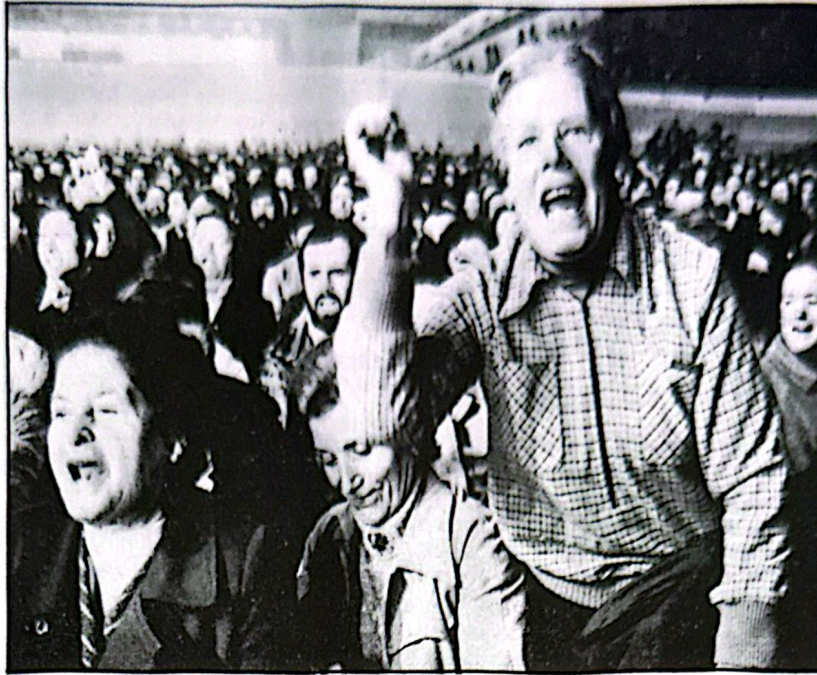
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maintenant

How can women be peaceful ?

Here in Ardoyne, we'll never let the 'Brits' in. I've been accused of planting five bombs; my trial comes up in a month. I'm out on bail now, but I've already been in jail twice, so I'd be surprised if I get off this time. My husband's in jail now, he got four years for possession of firearms.

I joined the struggle years ago, when I realized that the only role in life I had was to be some sort of house pet with a mind. I divorced my first husband, and at that time, Catholics didn't do that. It was my first act as an independent woman, and it went against everything I'd been taught all my life: Catholics don't divorce; women are supposed to be obedient, to struggle to work things out, and save the marriage for the children. Everything the man says is law. I finally realized I didn't need to see men as a crutch to lean on anymore. In Ardoyne, it's accepted now for a woman to divorce. It's the same thing for having children - there's no need to rush into marriage anymore. And all this has changed because women are taking part in the political and military struggle.

I've always worked, mostly in hotels and places like that. I'm not working now, my baby's only two months old. Probably when he's old enough to work, I'll be in prison again.

UNIONIST DOMINATION

In the flour factory where I was working ten years ago, the boss used to put English flags on the machines on July 12 (*Protestant holiday*). We complained, but he told us there was nothing he could do about it. He was a Protestant - of course. All our bosses were Protestants; no Catholic ever became a boss, at least not in any factory I worked in. People were fed up with being dominated by the Unionists (*Irish Protestants in favor of union with England*). The government was giving us just enough to keep our mouths shut. That's the year the fighting began.

It began in 1968 with the fight for civil rights. In 1969, we were attacked in this neighborhood. The men here tried to defend us, but they didn't have any weapons. The Protestants surrounded us;

they burned down entire blocks. They were supported by the B Special (police) and the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary- Northern Irish Police), and all we had to defend ourselves with were rocks, sticks and Molotov cocktails. When the British Army was finally called in, we believed at first that they had come to protect us. But we soon realized their machine guns weren't pointing at the Protestants who were attacking us, but were turned on us. They weren't there to protect us at all. They only came when shops and factories were on fire. They never came when our houses were burned, or when working class people were being shot down. They only came when big business was threatened. That was when we started fighting the 'Brits', and we haven't stopped since.

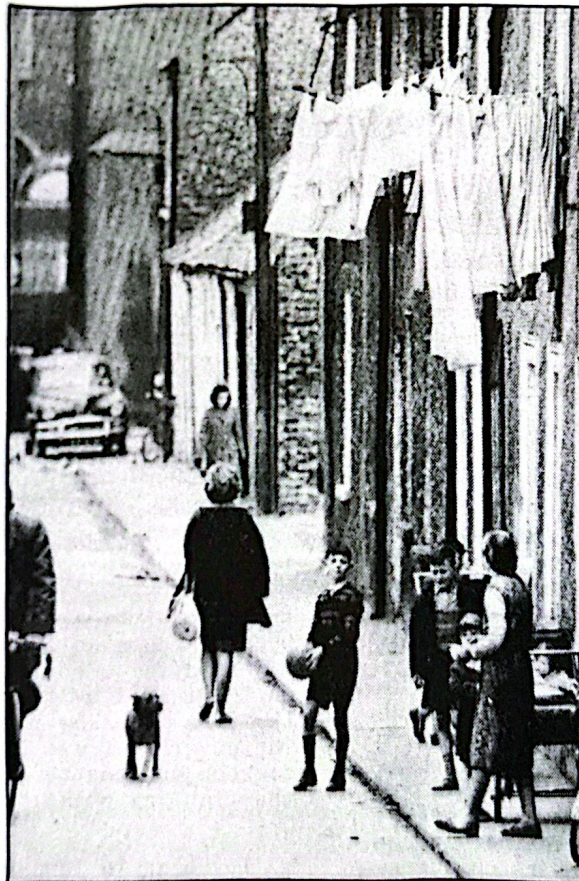
THE PEACE MOVEMENT

As for the "Women for Peace" movement - those women aren't taking part in the struggle, they're just looking for something to do with their time. People like

me who're trying to raise a family and who have lived through ten years of war, we know that the "Peace" people will do nothing for us. Mary Craig and Betty Williams (leaders of the Peace Movement created in 1976) have never set foot in this neighborhood. How can they help us if they don't know what we need?

A few weeks ago, a grandmother here was shot down; her son had been killed four years before that. Another woman of 74 - she lived near here - was burned alive, and we found a bomb on her door knob; her ten year old grandson was seriously wounded. Mary Craig and Betty Williams have never condemned things like this. It's obvious they've been manipulated. Everything they say is biased. They seem to have the Brits, the intelligence service, and the RUC on their side. They're not supported by the working class people.

Anne and Kitty live in Andersontown, a Catholic neighborhood of Belfast. They are members of the Belfast Women's Collective.



die internationale

Anne: We used to be in the socialist women's group which met near the university. Then we thought that we could do better work in our own area. The war is limited to working class areas, where women are constantly oppressed by money problems and by the British Army.

Kitty: I was working at one time as a sewing machine operator in a shirt factory where they had a piecework system. We weren't allowed to leave our machines. It was terrible. I saw pregnant women who were sick in the toilet being told, "Go back to your machine. There's nothing wrong with you." And vacations - two weeks a year for working from 7:45 in the morning to 5:30 in the evening. That was in 1970, and if you worked very hard, you could bring home about 8 pounds (\$13) a week.

Anne: Once I was working in a laundry, and I tried with two other women to organize a union local. Two weeks later I was fired.

Kitty: Today, they can't fire you anymore when you have a baby, but if you don't come back at the end of your six week's maternity leave, you're laid off.

Anne: It's the working class women who suffer most. In areas like Turf Lodge or Ballymurphy many women are on their own, their husbands are either in prison or away. Often, they have large families, and they have to take sole responsibility for them. This has made them stronger. They can't say to their kids anymore, "You'll get it when dad comes home." Nine years ago, few would have dreamed of being able to support their families.

Anne: As for the Loyalist women (*Catholics loyal to England*), we'd gladly talk with them, but they won't have anything to do with us. What's the difference, really, between having twelve children and a bathroom on Falls Road, and having twelve children and no bathroom in Shankhill?

There was a time when we thought we would be able to approach them, but when that idiot queen came here and we saw how adults could act, we could have cried. There were these women exclaiming ecstatically, "Look how beautiful she is!" - and

all the while, she's bleeding them white. It's true, we're being murdered as well, but the Loyalists are being exploited and laid off by the same system. And they think they're superior to us. It's hard to talk with people who have assimilated the capitalist mentality to that extent. It's not by chance that of all the women's groups here, not one was formed by Loyalist women.

Many women have realized how oppressed they were before, especially those whose husbands try to take back control over the family when they come home from prison. I think a lot of families have broken up like that. But then, some of the men coming back from jail are delighted to see the changes in their wives. Today, it's often they who make all the important decisions for the family, and this has made them more self-assured, and especially, very militant. They're not going to let anybody walk on them anymore, because they realized that the political situation is at the bottom of all our problems here.

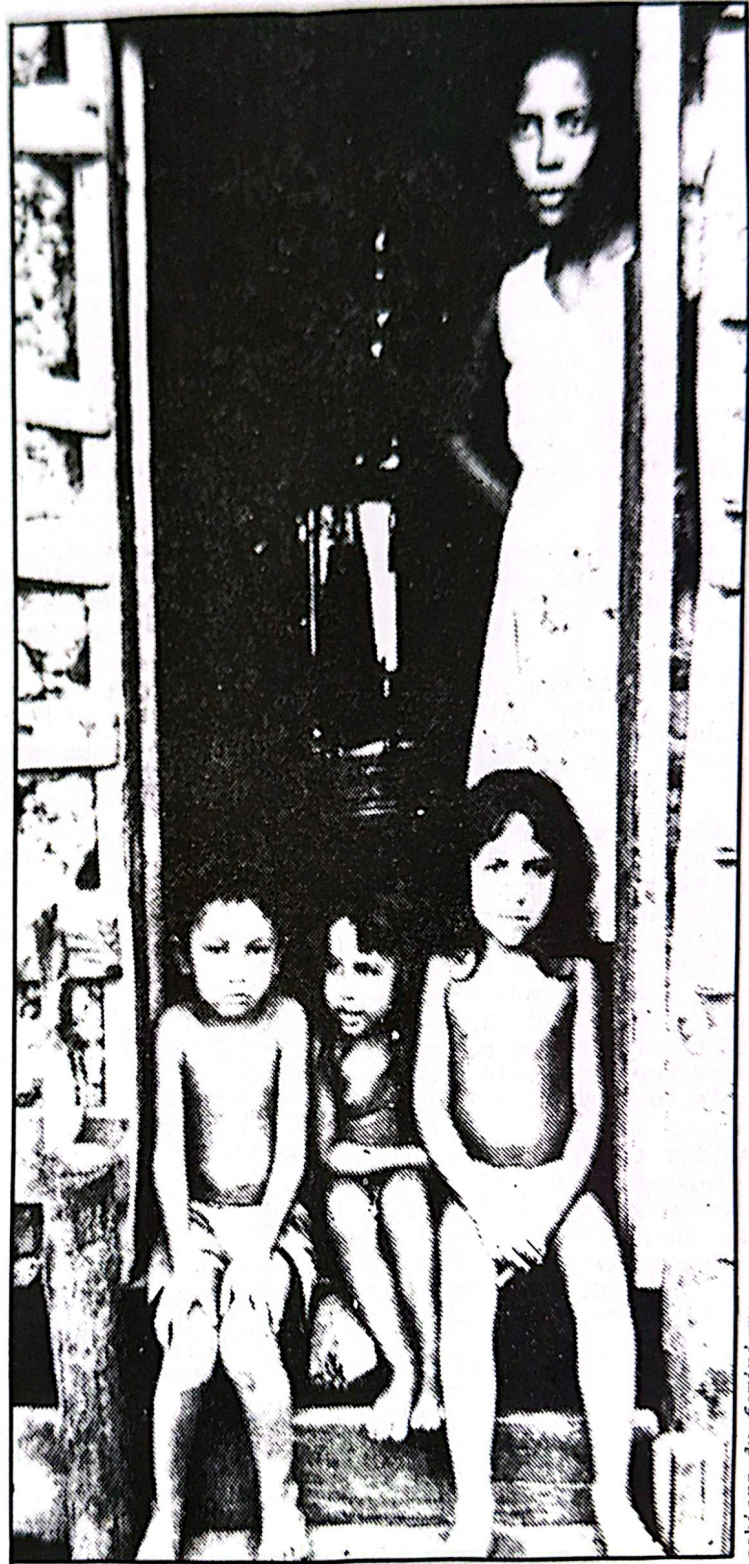
Kitty: As for the Peace Movement as we know it today it's purely and simply a product of British propaganda.

Anne: How can you expect a woman to be peaceful? Her door's been kicked down in the middle of the night, her husband shoved out with gun butts, her children made to sit still for four or five hours on the sofa surrounded by guns. You're not allowed to talk, you can't feed them, can't even change the baby's diapers. The soldiers have said that it's the women they're most afraid of, but they've never asked themselves why. It's not easy to see your few little household goods broken in the space of half an hour, your daughter taken away by men who have often been recruited from correctional institutions - and you know of girls who've been raped by the soliders. No, they can't tell us to be peaceful. The women here will defend themselves.

At one point in Belfast, it was women who led the war. Because the men weren't there - they were either in jail or had been forced completely underground. I don't know much about the structure of a military organization myself, but I know that women have proved themselves in this field. It's obvious. ■

(des femmes en mouvements, April 1978)





cahiers du féminisme

The other side of unemployment: prostitution, immigration, and reproductive rights.

Introduction

Prostitution is one of the few options women have to earn more than their marginal position in the work force would otherwise allow them. This is true not only of capitalist countries, but of socialist countries, too. For many people, prostitution is an act of moral deviance. But how can a prostitute's work be judged in isolation, apart from the demands of men? Like women in and out of the home, it is not she herself who decides how and under what conditions to work, but men who control and dominate. Pimps control the prostitute's profit. In especially brutal cases, exploitation of the body is combined with psychological exploitation - as with Asian women who are sold as 'specialties' to European men in search of an 'exotic' change.

The situation of Asian women brought to Europe is illustrative of the conditions of immigrant women in general. They come to a country where they neither speak the language nor are they familiar with the culture. They are hampered by religious and cultural traditions of their homelands. Contraception can be either hidden or unavailable. They are often not permitted to work outside the home. If they manage to get a job, they suffer further discrimination on the basis of race, and are sent back to their native countries as soon as their labor is no longer needed. In many cases, a husband's job was the only reason for leaving the home country. Often, with no other means to survive outside the family, prostitution is the only means to acquire economic independence and support themselves. Else, they are imprisoned in the home and forced to be servants to the family.

The final section deals with the relationship between economic conditions, especially unemployment, and the fight for reproductive rights. In the eyes of many men, women are still defined by their biology - by the secondary sex characteristics that come with the capacity to give birth. Having children is seen as a personal problem, not as a social phenomenon. It is also used as the main argument to keep women in the home. When economic conditions demand it, women join the work force. They are sent back to the home when these conditions change, and the myth of motherhood is again proclaimed sacred and decorated with financial incentives.

A women's work is to have children; her refusal to have children is seen as a threat to the family system. The burden of contraception, and its accompanying guilt, has always been woman's. Abortion is either illegal and dangerous, or performed under humiliating circumstances. And for women whose race is a political 'problem', sterilization is the answer. It is only in this perspective that abortion and contraception can be understood, not as moral issues, but as matters of class, race and money.

Prostitution

Prostitutes are no different from other women. And this is what bothers society and all those who try to explain the phenomenon of prostitution in terms of individual behavior, and gloss over the class reality: the large majority of prostitutes come from rural, working or lower-middle class families.

I was a prostitute, and I know that money is an enormous problem. But I got over that prob-

lem the day I found some real friends, people who believed in me. I know another ex-prostitute who's managing now on just over \$500 a month - and she has a kid, and the rent to pay. She's beginning to discover her working-class consciousness; she told me, "Really, I belong to the working class, and when I see them marching by in demonstrations, I want to march with them, I feel that it's with these people that my place is."

(cahiers du feminisme, June/July 1978)

Prostitution and the law

International legislation on prostitution falls into three major categories:

PROHIBITION: In countries where prostitution is prohibited, a repressive legal system criminalizes all persons practicing, organizing, exploiting or using prostitution.

This attitude that defines the prostitute as a delinquent/law breaker who is answerable to the penal institutions for her/his sexual activity, is currently in effect in the US (with the exception of the state of Nevada) and in some Eastern European countries. It has frequently been shown that this system aggravates the situation of the prostitute by sucking her/him into a veritable life of crime.

REGULATION: Prostitution is subject to specific legislation, and prostitutes are, on the one hand, identified and placed under police and sanitary controls and, on the other, grouped together either in specialized establishments or in geographically specified areas. This form of legislation has the advantage of ensuring a clear legal situation, where both prostitutes and police know exactly what is allowed and what is not. However, in addition to the disadvantages implicit in any situation that is subject to regulation and control, the stigmatization involved in regulations not only adds to the degradation suffered by the prostitute, but also creates an obstacle to her/his reintegration into society.

ABOLITION (DECRIMINALIZATION): This system recommends the abolition of all legislation on prostitution. Prostitutes are subject to the same laws as all persons, and, theoretically, are not singled out for their sexual activities. Supposedly, the government neither controls nor prohibits prostitution, and only the exploitation of prostitution is reprehensible; neither the prostitutes nor their clients are punishable by law. However, while prostitution is not considered an infraction, it is not

recognized as a profession, and long-term social action is to be directed at its disappearance. The corollary of the abolition or repeal of legislation is thus the implementation of preventive measures and the social reintegration of prostitutes

A Convention on the Repression of the Traffic in Human Beings and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, drawn up along the lines of abolitionism, was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1949, and has been ratified by 32 countries to date.

FRANCE

Prostitution in France has gone through the stages of prohibition, regulation and decriminalization. In 1946, the "Marthe Richard" law closed the brothels and stepped up the struggle against pimps. In 1960, France signed the international Convention and adopted the abolitionist system (see above). However, prostitutes still suffer heavy harassment: by means of laws prohibiting "incitement to debauchery" and procuring, the government effectively continues to repress prostitutes. Thus there is an essential contradiction between the fundamental principle of the freedom to engage in prostitution, and the actual prohibition thereof which is reflected in French police practices. (see box)

Prostitutes are no different from other women.



Prostitutes in France are penalized for passive or active solicitation:

Passive Solicitation, Article R34-13 of the Penal Code: "Shall be punished with a fine of \$20-40, those persons whose attitudes in public places is such as to incite to debauchery."

Different court decisions have defined infraction in the case of:

- stopping on a public by-way for about 10 minutes while trying to attract the attention of men;
- standing or strolling down the road while staring insistently in a particular way at passers-by so as to leave no doubt of the intentions of the person;
- standing in the road, wearing excessive make-up, and staring at passers-by of the masculine sex with a piercing look.

Active Solicitation, Article R40-11 of the Penal Code: "Shall be punished with imprisonment from 10 days to 10 months and a fine of \$150-220, or either one of these sentences, those persons who, by their gestures, or words - both spoken or written - or by any other means, publicly solicit persons of either sex with the intent of inciting them to debauchery."

Why are men on the make allowed free run of the streets, while only prostitutes are penalized?

The misdemeanor of procuring is established when a person aids a prostitute in any manner. The numerous clauses of the law are often used as a means to repress prostitutes, either by accusing them of mutual procuring, or by penalizing the persons they live with.

(cahiers du feminisme, June/July 1978)

French try to bring back brothels

COMMUNIQUE

We are a group of prostitutes from the Paris area. We do not agree with the proposals of M. Le Tac (see below) in regard to the reopening of brothels. His proposal is ambiguous, as well as revolting...How can a man make such a proposal in 1978, a proposal which promotes the degradation of women and reduces us to the status of human livestock?

We have noticed for some time now that police repression and harassment has increased. Is it because they want to encourage us to enter into the proposed "establishments"? We will not yield. We do not wish to go into either the Eros Centers, or controlled brothels, no matter how well-kept they might be. This is incompatible with our dignity.

We want only one thing, that is to escape this situation one day and to do that we need help, but not through laws which lock us into prostitution, as in a golden prison.

Instead of looking for new laws, and dubious ones at that, we would prefer that the legislative texts voted in 1960 concerning the prevention of prostitution and our reinsertion into society be truly enforced, as they are not at the present time.

GROUP OF PROSTITUTED PERSONS IN PARIS

THE "LE TAC PROJECT"

In December 1978, Joel Le Tac, a representative from the RPR (Rally for the Republic), a right-wing French party, proposed a bill to regulate prostitution through the reopening of official government-controlled brothels, or through the creation of special "prostitution districts." This proposal meant France's withdrawal from the 'abolitionist countries which have signed the 1949 UN Convention condemning trade in human beings. This return to a regulated system would constitute a serious attack against prostitutes; not only against 'professionals', who would then be classified with no hope of reintegration, but also against the many women who only prostitute themselves occasionally and who would then be officially registered as prostitutes.

What exactly was Le Tac's proposal? In short, the creation of municipal brothels and reserved districts, as well as the re-establishment of the sanitary controls that were done away with in 1960. The proposal, he said, "answers both the needs of public health and those of public order." Le Tac waves the spectre of venereal disease seeming to ignore the fact that statistics from the Ministry of Public Health have established that the increase in venereal disease within recent years is due to relations with a prostitute in a minimal percentage of cases.



Le Tac's second big argument was the defense of public order. Prostitutes are everywhere, he exclaims. On foot or in cars, in bars, on sidewalks, even in parks and gardens. Impossible to escape this shocking scene. As for the pimps, who often used to cooperate with the police, now they use their profits to finance "larger operations - hold-ups, drug traffic, etc..." And if more and more cases of rape and attacks against women are coming before the courts these days this has nothing to do with the women's movement. According to Mr. Le Tac's logic this is simply the inevitable consequence of the disappearance of brothels, "harbors" for the "excesses of super-males." Hence, the only solution - reopen the brothels.

Le Tac insists that it is not a question of "reopening the old-style houses, under the former conditions." Rather, what seems to hover behind his proposal is the sinister shadow of the Eros Centers, West German style. First established in Hamburg in 1967, these enormous brothel-factories house hundreds of prostitutes in ultra-modern buildings, where women have a room for which they pay about \$30-\$40 a day. Some of the Centers have a 'meeting hall' where the client makes his choice. In others, the prostitutes simply wait on the hall of each floor, or in their rooms with the door open.

The system seems to be highly profitable for the promoters. The prostitutes, on the other hand, flee these concrete sex-factories. During the French prostitute revolt in 1975, the refusal of any proposal of official brothels, even in the form of Eros Centers, was unanimous among the prostitutes. In June 1975, in a letter to the President,

they wrote: "We will never agree to work in brothels. We will never agree to be public sex-employees, earning money for the government."

Le Tac's proposal was defeated in the French parliament. But it was not the first time that the right has tried to reintroduce the brothel system since its abolition in 1946; doubtless it will not be the last.

The following are extracts from a questionnaire published in Paris-Match, conservative French monthly; Cahiers du Feminisme printed the 'Group of Prostituted Persons in Paris' reply:

Do you feel that prostitution is/is not necessary for social peace?

We prostitutes do not see the relationship between us and "social peace". At whose expense is it to be acquired? Is it absolutely necessary to sacrifice some people for the happiness of all?

Prostitution is currently practiced in the streets. Does this shock you?

Porn posters, men on the make, certain publications, sex shops, and sexual harassment and aggression - aren't all of these as shocking, if not more so?

If the choice is between street prostitution and prostitution in brothels, which do you think would be better?

We prostitutes refuse to choose between two forms of slavery, between the plague and cholera: however we prefer the street because there we still have the choice of saying no; the street seems a lesser evil. Brothels shut us up forever, they are traps. By shutting us up in brothels the system would lock us into our condition as prostitutes with no hope of ever getting out. ■

(cahiers du feminisme, February/March 1979)

Only for US dollars: Prostitution in Poland

A cafe in downtown Warsaw. A weekday - 11 a.m. All the tables are taken, either by foreigners or by young women. My guide has trouble finding a place for us. Next to us, four foreign men - dark hair, brown skins. At a neighboring table, four women - very young and very blond. They exchange looks and smiles. A red rose changes tables. One of the men gets up and approaches one of the women. She scribbles something on a piece of paper. The man nods his head, satisfied. "See you at noon," the woman says to her girl friends.

This frank report of prostitution in Poland does not come from the Western press. It was written by the Polish journalist, Wanda Falkowska, and published in the highly official weekly *Polityka*.

My guide continues:

They've gone off to have some fun. I bet that they (the men) are Syrians. They are not considered first-class tourists. Not all the women will accept to go with them. The women we saw are simple "cafe-girls." Those who belong to the higher classes don't go to the cafes unless they are already with a customer. They wait to be called at home, or they have tables reserved in the classier night-clubs--the "best" work only with foreigners. In fact, all of them prefer foreigners. They look down on Poles, whom they call "donkeys" or "dummies," but there's respect in their voices when they say "my Swede," "my Japanese" or "my Arab." Here in the cafe, they're less picky - whoever can pay in dollars is welcome.

Clients from the South have specific demands.

They want blond, plump women for their money. There are others who go to student bars to pick up high school students. Sometimes you can get a "beginner" for a sweater or a pair of tights from the West. These women, at least in the beginning, prostitute themselves mainly for clothes, and then, afterwards, they stay with the job.

ANITA FOUND A JAPANESE

After more description, all as detailed and suggestive, *Polityka* goes on to facts and figures: "Only 25% of the prostitutes have their own apartments, 45% rent rooms, and the others have no fixed place. Their search for somewhere to take their clients has created a way of earning extra income for many. Prices for these rooms vary considerably, from 50 zlotys that a pensioner will charge for a half-hour in his room, to the 1,000 zlotys a month a high-class prostitute will pay for a nice downtown room. (30 zlotys = US \$1 at the official rate. On the black market, it is four or five times as much. An average salary is 4,000 zlotys.)

My guide continues:

This elderly lady comes here often. The people who work here know her well. She's looking for "renters" for her room - those who pay in foreign currency. One of the girls will help her find a client and get something out of it for herself, too. This is the kind of business that gets transacted in the cafes.



Courtesy

Nearby, there is a municipal office that offers to find foreigners lodgings with local inhabitants. There's a crowd of people inside, but an even bigger one outside. People come from all over Warsaw, many of them pensioners. The chronic housing crisis encourages the trafficking of housing for prostitutes, helping many pensioners to make ends meet. They have "quiet" rooms to offer, various other services, too, a woman if requested...

A prostitute explains:

I'm going to work until I'm 25, and then it's over. I'm going to get married - the best would be to find a foreigner. Anita found a Japanese. She lives in Yokohama. Beata found a Swede, but things didn't work out for Sylvia. She went to Rome, but her friend left her and the other women cut her face with razor blades...

THE BLACK DOLLAR

Prostitution is obviously not a new phenomenon. It has always existed, especially in Warsaw, as one of the services offered to the delegations of bureaucrats who come to the capital. Polish police statistics report 13,000 prostitutes, but these are only the women who have dealings with the police. The same statistics show that the prostitutes come from the most disadvantaged sectors of the population.

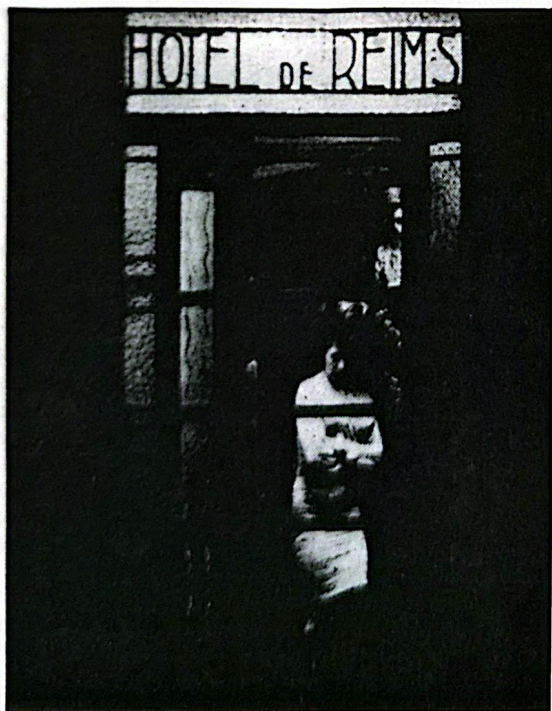
In the last few years, three factors have contributed to the development of high-class prostitution in Poland. First

is the high exchange rate of zlotys to the black market dollar, 120-150 to one. Second is the sudden expansion of tourism and increased exchanges with the West: 54,000 Westerners visited Poland in 1960; 934,000 in 1975.

Finally, the system allows any Pole unlimited amounts of foreign currency with no questions asked. The only catch is that the money be deposited in the state banks and spent in state shops. And to reabsorb all the "hard currencies" circulating in Poland, the government has opened a chain of special stores, PEWEX, which sell everything the general market doesn't have, including Western products like jeans, perfume, pocket calculators--as long as you pay with Western currency. With foreign currency, you can buy a car or an apartment in 24 hours. If you have only zlotys, you must wait years.

It is understandably tempting to take advantage of the influx of tourists to earn a few of these first dollars. Daily life for the majority of Poles isn't at all easy. Workers' salaries (except in a few sectors, such as mining and naval work) are very low. One "makes do." There are many ways of getting around the system - and prostitution is just one. ■

(Rouge, 11/17/78. See also *Newsfront International* #224)



cahiers du féminisme

Kiss and tell

Prostitutes are demanding the decriminalization of prostitution in England. Under present law, prostitutes can be imprisoned for solicitation in the street; two prostitutes sharing an apartment are liable to charges of keeping a brothel. In March, 1979, Maureen Colquhoun, a lesbian and Labor Party representative, presented a bill to abolish legislation on prostitution. The prostitutes' organization in Britain, PLAN (Prostitution Laws Are Nonsense), threatened to publish a list of all bishops and members of Parliament who are regular clients of prostitutes if Parliament rejected the proposal. It passed the first reading.

(Arbeiterkampf, 3/19/79)

West German traffic in Thai women

Softness and docility sought

WOULD YOU LIKE TO MARRY A THAI WOMAN?
Girls between the ages of 21 and 29 are waiting for you. Marriage within three weeks, a honeymoon with a guarantee! Travel opportunities available on various days. Send only letters with serious intent to: Menger's Thai Service, Berlinerstr. 50, 6115 Munster.

Thai women are often brought to West Germany, or German men travel to the vacation paradise of Thailand. Thailand, a military dictatorship, is also a paradise for employers; since all union activity is suppressed, wages are kept low. West German sex tour bureaus, as well as marriage arrangement agencies, have been active in Bangkok since about 1972. Legal action has been taken against the best known of them; Horst Jensen was arrested in 1977 for fraud (after earning about \$150,000 in three months). He had discovered a profitable business in pairing of "marriage travelers" with three Thai women he himself had bought from a West German man in Bangkok.

Gunther Menger, head of International Marriage Travels, is also being investigated for suspicion of fraud, slave trading and aiding and abetting prostitution. He arranged trips to Bangkok where four to seven women were introduced to each client. "To hasten proceedings" he asked his customers to fill out order forms beforehand, giving preferences as to hair length, size, etc.

If a customer marries one of the women introduced to him in Thailand and brings her back with him to Germany, Menger receives a commission of \$1000 to \$2000, in addition to his fee for arranging the trip. Through such commissions alone, he may have taken in up to \$225,000 in the course of three years business. Menger denies any relationship between his business and prostitution, although his business partners include the madame of a brothel in Austria and the travel director of a company called Super Sexy Trips.

The Thai women often have no control over what happens to them after they arrive in West Germany. Because they cannot speak the language and are barely familiar with German society, they are generally helpless, particularly if they are

forced into prostitution. According to the director of the Social Welfare Department in Bangkok, approximately 1,000 Thai women work "voluntarily or involuntarily" as prostitutes in West Germany.

As the wife of a German man, a Thai woman lives in a precarious situation. Typically, her husband, knowing nothing of her language or background, was attracted to her by the promise of softness and docility. Now she is expected to live up to this image. Other Germans see her in the same stereotypical way: men see her as a sex object, and it is difficult for her to make contact with other women. Given this isolated, subordinate position (compared to the close cohesion and relatively great independence which working class women experience in everyday life in Thailand), it is not surprising that nervous breakdowns and illness are often the fate of these women.

WOMEN'S ROLES IN TRADITIONAL THAI SOCIETY

According to ethnological studies, daughters in rural Thailand have traditionally been more important to the family than sons. Women were always the primary workers in the peasant household, which produced goods mainly for its own consumption. The women planted and harvested rice, spun and wove clothing, did the housework and sold the surplus at the weekly markets (and thus were able to exchange news and information with the women from other villages). They also gave birth and raised the coming generation. The youngest daughter often remained at her parents' home with her husband and inherited the farm; the elder daughters usually moved into their own homes after the first year of marriage and only rarely into their in-laws' home. Unlike many other Asian women, Thai women are not quasi-slaves of their husband's families. In the rural household economy, women had relatively great independence, despite the fact that men held the leading positions in village politics and in the Buddhist religion.

In the last twenty years, as large holdings of land became more commonplace, many peasant families all over Thailand lost the land that they had cultivated for so long. The peasants fell into debt as market forces beyond their control came into operation. This development is directly linked to the role of Thailand in



kommentar



Southeast Asia Chronicle

"I have to whiz around at night to make money to send to my parents. I don't live in a brothel because I would not have the freedom to go to work during the day."

the international division of labor: it supplies the world with rice and raw materials, while it purchases consumer goods from abroad - the typical fate of an underdeveloped country. "Agrarian reforms" and international development programs emphasized the large-scale commercial production of rice for the export market, an operation which had been taken over by large landowners. The peasants became tenants and day laborers. Meanwhile, textiles from abroad, or from foreign firms located in Thailand, flooded the market. The consequence was that the traditional areas of productive labor (textiles and rice) were taken away from the women, along with their selling at the market. Their families lost their former basis of existence.

Yet women retained their traditional obligations to materially provide for their families. Since only remnants of their former work were still open to them, (such as day labor or dealing at tiny local markets), many of their daughters, following the same dictated roles, now seize new "opportunities" - they migrate to the cities to search for work. There, they find only meager alternatives: factory work at subsistence level wages, domestic work at even lower pay, or prostitution.

Somporn Rakachua tells her story:

I was born in Udon Thani. My parents still live there. My father works in a garage. He has to feed ten children with his meager income. Therefore, I could only go to school up to the fourth grade. For years, I did not have a job and could only help in the house. Then a woman friend of mine talked me into going to Bangkok. At first I found work as a waitress in a restaurant, but it was hard work and the 500 Baht (\$35) were hardly enough to live on. That's why I'm working in a bar now.

Twenty-year old Noi seeks customers at night in coffeeshops. During the day, she works in a battery factory:

I earn 25 Baht (\$1.75) a day, but that does not cover my living expenses. How is that supposed to be enough for rent, bus fare and other expenses? And I tell you, I'm frugal!

Noi's eight brothers and sisters live with her parents, who are peasants. Noi is the only one who supports them financially.

I have to whiz around at night to make money to send to my parents. I don't live in a brothel because I would not have the freedom to go to work during the day.

Many prostitutes are socially recognized as the breadwinners of their family,

although in other respects, quite rigid sexual norms are in effect for young women. But such a strategy of survival means a terrible plunder of the dignity and health of these women. Of the approximately 100,000 prostitutes in Bangkok, an estimated 70-90% suffer from venereal diseases. Gangster bands (partly under West German leadership) are extending their power as more and more women are lured into Bangkok and kept in brothels like prisoners. Some of them were turned into drug addicts, beaten, or even disfigured with acid. Much of Bangkok is geared to this commerce - from the signs in the windows advertising in German, "Pants For Sale," to the women on display in the bars.

Who really profits from this mass prostitution? It first appeared on a large scale during the Vietnam War. At that time, the prostitutes were instrumental in making U.S. soldiers fit for the war, by giving them "human contact" with East Asian societies. Since the tactical withdrawal of the United States, the women have been used as an attraction in the growing tourist industry, which earns foreign currency for the government. A new class of entrepreneurs has sprung up along with them with the purpose of exploiting these women for fun and profit. In addition, by continuing to support their families, these Thai women

save the government otherwise necessary social welfare payments and stabilize the social situation to some extent. It is therefore not surprising that the Thai government takes only half-hearted measures to shut down big business prostitution.

Under the Thai military dictatorship, women can do little to articulate their interests and organize themselves. According to reliable sources, a woman representative of the Thai Iryo Textile Workers Union was shot in April, 1977. In January 1977, four women, active in the same union, were hit by two trucks and killed. This is just the tip of the iceberg, though. Beneath it lies daily firings, harassment, threats and controls.

Since 1970, Japanese women have been confronted with the growing phenomenon of prostitution-tourist trips of Japanese men to South Korea, and with the protest against this by South Korean women. A group of 50 Japanese women gave a "welcome" at the airport in Tokyo to men returning home from such a sex tour; they publicly vilified the men and hung signs on them saying "sex-animals." This action had the effect of slowing down and quieting such sex-enterprises in Japan. ■

(Courage, October 1978)

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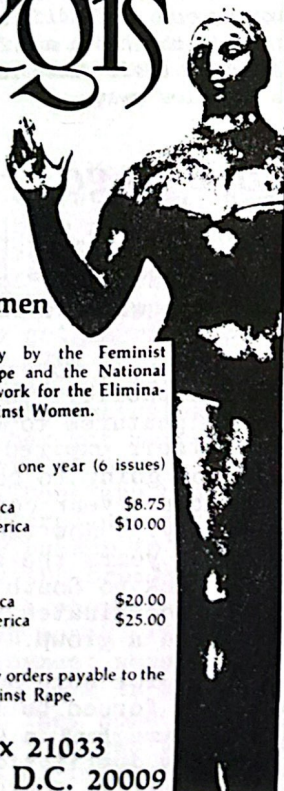
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die verkauften bräute

Immigration

Immigrant workers represent at least 10% of the active European population. Confined to the hardest jobs, the work of immigrants is often indispensable to the standard of living and to the economic needs of the industrialized countries. In the sixties, missions of modern slave traders were sent to look for Algerians, Turks, Greeks, etc., in good health. At the beginning of the seventies, the economic crisis arrived and the winds shifted. Since then, most of the European governments have

adopted new laws, piece by piece, to close the borders and to remove foreigners. The following articles tell of the difficulties faced by immigrant women. We were unable to find any report about those women who must remain behind in the home country while their husbands emigrate to find work. But these women, too, face difficulties, as they are left with all the house and field work and the children while their insecure financial support is hundreds of miles away.

South Korean nurses have to go

Before us they had the Turks, Italians, Spaniards and Greeks to help their economy and keep up the standard of living. Then they got thousands of us from South Korea because the hospitals were in trouble since there weren't enough orderlies to take care of the sick people. With the help of West German institutions, we were hired in our home country to work in West Germany. They opened up schools for nurse's aides in South Korea. But if you get a degree at one of these schools, you find that it's completely useless at home because this profession doesn't exist there. The sole purpose of starting these schools was to educate Korean women to work in West German hospitals.

This is a quote from an open letter by a group of South Korean women. It was sent to the West German Department of the Interior and a number of important federal and state institutions. Because of the rise in unemployment, many foreign workers have been sent back home under the assumption that

foreigners take jobs away from German workers. Thousands of nurses from Asia are treated this way without the public's knowledge.

About a year ago, Korean nurses turned to the general public. They collected more than 11,000 signatures to a statement protesting that their expired three year contracts were not going to be renewed. Previously, the three year contract had been a mere formality. "Now they are very strict, and after three years the women are automatically sent back to South Korea," says Won Hea Kong, who coordinates the activities of the Korean women's group.

No one knows for sure how many Korean women have been forced to leave West Germany. The Caritasverband, a Catholic charity, is the only institution with any statistics. They are in contact with 17 counseling centers for Asian women, and are

currently the only advisory board for Korean women. According to their figures, about 6,500 Korean women work in West German hospitals. In 1976, at the height of employment of Korean women, there were 8,500 working. Although not all nurses are registered with the Caritasverband, they estimate that at least 2,000 women have been deported.

There is no consistent policy governing the contract renewal. In Bavaria (one of the 11 West German states), the situation is worse than anywhere else. In one city, only three out of 23 nurses are still working. They were allowed to stay because they are married to Germans. This is not unusual. An edict in Bavaria states that only "full" nurses can get their contracts renewed, meaning that all South Korean children's nurses and nurse's aides must return to South Korea. Altogether, approximately 50% of the Korean women were forced to leave Bavaria. Very few of them could find jobs in another German state. In Neu-Ulm, a city in Baden-Wurtemberg (a state in Southern Germany), a Korean nurse was told to leave the country although the hospital wanted to retain her. Furthermore, if these women lose their jobs, they are not eligible for unemployment.

They go as far as they can. If a foreign woman does not know her way around, if she does not insist on her rights, she goes back to South Korea - and for the West German government it is merely a question of saving money. If she goes to court - well, I don't even think a trial would ever start because the Immigration Office would step in. And then she'd have to leave. I haven't heard of one single case where a Korean woman got support in West Germany.

Once back in South Korea, a woman often can't find a job there either, especially if she only has training as a nurse's aid - a skill not recognized in South Korea. In fact, only half of the nurses find jobs when they go back. So what happens if they can't find a job? They get married or they live on their savings. The advisory board of the Caritasverband is still in touch with about 500 of the women who went back to South Korea. The majority of them got married because it was nearly impossible to be a single woman in South Korea. Those who can live on their savings are considered privileged, but most of the women were unable to save any money. Many of them were the breadwinner for a family of six or seven people and sent home about \$400-450 each month. Because of the spectre of unemployment upon their return, many women want to work in West Germany as long as possible. They hope to save as much money as they can, because they know that at home they will no longer have any kind of financial security.

It takes awhile to get used to the social climate of a foreign country and to learn the language. In the beginning, many of the Korean women have very little contact with German people. They withdraw into their rooms, picking up bits of the culture here and there. When they return to South Korea, they are confronted with the moral prejudices of their own people. Having spent time in Europe, the women feel freer - mainly in an area where men like it the least: their sexuality. The women are no longer obedient and are used to "luxury." For the women, the transition is painful.

It is quite difficult to readjust to the old family structure. The less time you are away, the easier it is. After five years, many things have changed. Also, things that didn't bother me before now get on my nerves. For example, the way I have to behave toward my father and older brother. That all seems so ridiculous now. Before, I didn't mind. I always did what I was expected to do.

The Korean women who leave for West Germany are usually between the ages of 21 to 23. When they return, they are 25 or older. In South Korea, a woman is expected to be married by age 25. And now, many who have remained in West Germany are 27 or 28. They have to decide whether they want to return to South Korea and find a husband as soon as possible, or remain in West Germany and marry a German in order to insure their financial stability. As working conditions in West Germany become less and less secure, more women are deciding to return home "voluntarily." And recently, their German co-workers have begun to make them feel that foreign workers are no longer wanted. ■

(Courage, April 1979)



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The virgin immigrant

In the beginning of February, 1979, the *Guardian*, a British daily, published an article exposing a common British immigration practice of the last ten years. A 35 year old Indian woman teacher wanted to immigrate to London because her fiancé was living there. Upon her arrival, she was informed that she would have to undergo a gynecological examination to prove her virginity. She was taken to a separate room and told to undress completely. Her request for a sheet to cover herself was denied. A male doctor entered the room and asked her about previous or present pregnancies. The Indian woman, not used to male doctors, asked for a female doctor. This request was also denied, and her protest that Indian women do not allow male doctors to touch them, was ignored. Intimidated, she signed a statement allowing the British Immigration Bureau to make a routine check-up to prove her virginity. Despite continued protest,

the examination by the male doctor was carried through. The woman later said that she felt extremely humiliated, it being the first time in her life that she had been examined by a man.

After the release of this woman's statement, it was made public that similar practices have been in use for the last ten years. Many immigrant women have had to prove that they are either virgins or that they have never been pregnant. Subsequently, the British government has issued an order prohibiting such examinations. Indian women took up the protest and staged a demonstration outside of the British embassy in New Delhi. A spokeswoman of an Indian women's organization said: "The real reason for this is to discourage women with children from immigrating, since they don't contribute to the work force." ■

(Arbeiterkampf, 2/19/79)

West Germany's Turkish "guests"

Turkish women migrate to West Germany for only two reasons: either to keep house for their husbands, or to work at jobs no one else will take. They are the lowest on the immigrant scale. The life of a "mere" housewife is miserable, but the life of the working woman is no better. Turkish women are foreigners in a country which they don't like; they receive the lowest pay possible and they are isolated. In recent years, immigrant workers and children have

received some government support. However, housewives, who are in need of much attention, have received none. They live in a hostile environment, with no money of their own and little contact with either their husbands or their children.

Nevin K., a 26 year old housewife who lives in Stuttgart, is a typical example. She is from a small village near the Turkish capital, Ankara. Her husband, who first went alone to West Germany, sent for



die verkauften braute

courage

le septieme homme

her and the children once he was settled. Her children attend elementary school and meet other children there. During the day, her husband Ahmed works in a repair shop; in the evenings he is out drinking with his friends. Most of the day Nevin is home alone. She is very homesick and afraid to leave the house by herself. In any case, she has nowhere to go. She speaks no German. If she leaves the house, she covers her head and part of her face with a scarf. During the week, the children do her shopping; on weekends, Ahmed accompanies her to the neighborhood market. If Ahmed can't go, Nevin doesn't dare go by herself.

Commonly, Turkish men do not converse with their wives; they speak openly only with other men. So even if Ahmed stays home at night, he hardly speaks. In Turkey, Nevin had all her relatives to talk to - her mother, sisters and aunts. Now, in West Germany, she speaks only with her children, not having any relatives, female friends or neighbors to talk to. Most of the time, she is silent and suffers.

Among all the immigrants in West Germany, Turkish women are the hardest hit. In 1977, there were about 250,000 immigrant housewives. A recent study indicated that most of these women are desperate, yet feel guilty about their despair. They consider themselves "too stupid" to learn German. If their children were left behind in Turkey, they think that they are "bad mothers." But worst of all, they don't make any money. In fact, they are an additional expense for their husbands. Very few among them come to West Germany of their own accord; for the most part, their husbands come first and they are ordered to follow.

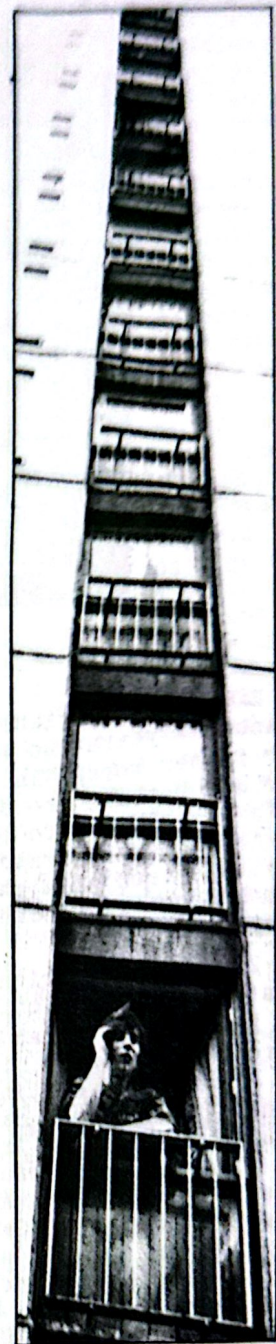
Fatma came to West Germany eight years ago. Looking back at her first year, it seems like prison to her now. She is one of the few who was strong enough to struggle to change her life, but she also had the support of her family, especially her brothers. At one point, her husband tried to leave her for a West German woman. Fatma's brother supported her and talked to the husband. She is still married, and now works in a large restaurant kitchen. Her German is fluent and whenever possible she helps other Turkish women, talking to them, translating, giving advice. She has, from her own experience, a special understanding of the problems facing these women.

Sexual relationships between Turkish husbands and wives are a big problem. Usually, the men start to consider their wives dull once they have come into contact with West German women. Turkish customs are strict, and hold that women must be virgins on their wedding day. Living in West German society, where virginity is not considered a special virtue, puts additional pressure on them. Suicide attempts among teenagers, who feel this moral pressure the most, are very common. Before marriage, many women are obliged to undergo a gynecological exam to determine their virginity. A Turkish woman doctor, practicing in West Germany, has refused to continue such examinations:

Turkish women don't know at all how to relate to their sexuality. One of the biggest problems in marriage is sex. If one questions the necessity of virginity, Turkish men get extremely angry because they feel that the 'degenerate Western culture' wants to make whores out of their wives.

Those Turkish housewives who have the energy and determination to change their lives have very few options. There are few jobs for unqualified, non-German speaking workers. Mothers have to prove that their children are taken care of while they are at work. A few years ago, this wasn't the case; nobody was concerned with childcare. But now, with the rise in unemployment, childcare has become an important issue to the employment agencies. ■

(Emma, August 1977)



maintenant

Algerian women in France

Between two cultures



Zina, an Algerian woman, was born in France 17 years ago and grew up in Paris. Her father worked in a factory to support her and her six brothers and sisters. Her life was similar to that of many young Algerian women in France: school during the day, and then straight home. Home was a two bedroom flat with no bathroom or running water.

Zina and her friend Saida had plans to continue studying once they finished school in Paris. At 18, and no longer subject to parental authority, they hoped to go back to Algeria and continue their studies. But Zina's parents had different ideas. Zina was to marry a man from their village back in Algeria. She refused at first, but eventually gave in and was sent off to Algeria for the marriage. Saida still doesn't know if Zina was drugged and taken back (a not unheard of occurrence) or if she went back on her own will.

This is the fate of many Algerian women. Their education remains very neglected; usually they are taken from school at the age of 16. Marriage is still a family affair, complete with contract, dowry and trousseau. The father is the principle negotiator for his daughter, and the marriages are arranged when the children are still young. Daughters are generally excluded from the negotiations and their consent is not considered necessary. "Keep that girl for my son," is an often repeated phrase, and it doesn't matter whether the son is in France, Belgium

or Algeria. Only a few Algerian women manage to escape from the traditional lifestyles of their parents.

There are about 100,000 Algerian women living in France who represent only a small part of the total number of 4 million immigrants. Among these immigrants, however, their situation is probably one of the worst. The majority of Algerians who go to France come from rural areas. More than 90% are Moslem and most families follow the traditional teachings of Islam. The Maghreb (of Arab-North African origin) woman is expected to be a full-time mother and housewife. Only 15,000 out of the 100,000 Algerian immigrant women work outside of their homes. The rate among other nationalities, such as Spanish and Portuguese, is much higher. For Maghreb women to earn an income is considered a social disgrace. Thus, men object strongly to their wives holding a job outside the home, despite the growing financial difficulties of many Algerian families.

Even when these prejudices are overcome, though, the women encounter others as soon as they enter the work force. Unskilled and unable to speak French, they must accept the least favorable jobs with the worst pay. The salaries of immigrants are usually 17% less than that of their fellow French workers, and women earn an average of 30% less than men. Thus, an immigrant woman working a 40-hour week can expect to make 47% less than her fellow French worker.

The living standard of Algerian families is consequently much lower than that of a French family. Not only is income lower, but the housing situation is worse. About 50% live under unhealthy conditions; 56% of the immigrant families live in overpopulated apartments, of which 26% are considered critically overpopulated.

The high birthrate among Maghreb women contributes to this situation. But there are concrete reasons for having numerous children: for one thing, having many children affects the family's social status and guarantees long-term material security. Maghreb women are also well aware that a high number of children diminished the risk that a man might leave them or take a second wife. In addition, social dishonor and failure are frequently attributed to the sterile woman (and contraception, even temporary, is considered synonymous with sterility). It is inconceivable that a man might be sterile, so sterility is always attributed to the woman.

Should an Algerian woman decide, in spite of the obstacles, that she wants contraception or an abortion, she is faced with several problems. Only women who have lived in France for more than 3 months and possess residence permits are legally entitled to abortions. In addition, immigrant women have difficulty obtaining information on contraception, as the counselors in the family planning centers are poorly prepared to advise foreign women, due to linguistic and cultural differences.

Nervous breakdowns and depressions are common among these immigrant women. Their traditional role is challenged by too many outside factors, and the avenues of support offered by the traditional society in Algeria are no longer available to them. Furthermore, they are faced with the fact that their children, who have such importance in their lives, are acquiring new values while attending French schools and frequently are alienated from them. Even within the home, then, they find themselves isolated and estranged from a culture which is not their own.

Ghani, living in the town of Lille in northern France, made an important decision when she joined a local women's group. *My first attitude was to disregard the importance and relevance of the French women's struggle because they didn't have the same life, the same oppression as mine. For a long time, I stayed out of it, until I realized that the women's struggle isn't a national struggle. I don't exclude myself any longer because of my ethnic background. We Arab women have a tendency to exclude ourselves, as that's what we are taught by our men. They like to remind us of our Arab identity. If we forget about it, it could be a threat to their male supremacy.*

THE DJURDJARA GROUP

Djouhte, Fatima and Mahla are three sisters who have challenged the traditional role of Algerian women. Their father had been a leader in the FLN (*Front de Liberation Nationale*, which fought for Algeria's liberation from French domination). They enjoyed attending school, where they were taught traditional music and dances. However, when they grew older, they were told that it was all over. Their father would not allow them to continue with their singing and acting but instead, decided that the oldest had to study law. Her choice was between law school and staying home. Although law held no interest for her, still she preferred it to the latter. Eventually, she quit her studies and went back to her home village in Algeria. At first, it seemed wonderful to her - a return to her roots. She tried to get used to the different life. She studied her native language, Kabyle (a Berber language; Berber tribes live throughout Northern Africa), which she had almost forgotten. She'd wanted to go into filmmaking on her return to France, but discovered that it held little interest for Algerian women. Although Algerian women don't go to movies, almost everyone in Algeria listens to the radio. Hoping to make a contribution to Algerian culture that would carry an effective social impact, the three sisters decided to go into singing instead of film. Their own personal experiences, combined with conversations with many immigrant women and students, provided material for a variety of themes. One such theme is emigration, not only seen from a French perspective, but also from an Algerian one. The soil in Algeria does not provide for everyone, and the men emigrate, leaving only women, old people and children. Emigration is seen as the enemy of women, their biggest rival. It takes their men, and many are never seen again. They sing about this and many other problems and they are successful, because they sing about women's reality -- a reality which is experienced by many women in France as well as back in Algeria. ■

(des femmes en mouvements, March, June, July 1978; *algeriennes en lutte*, January 1978; *histoires d'elles*, March 1979)



The economics of birth rate National suicide!

The most important issue for men and women is full employment. As women, we have a hard struggle ahead. We are facing a terrible regression in the advances we have made over the past years. Mothers are made to feel guilty about the care needed by young children, as well as for the declining birthrate. Alarmists are crying, "We're turning into an old country; we're going to be poor because there aren't enough children!" Psychologists and demographers alike provide a scientific aura to the call for women to get back into the home. Of course, nobody is going to make them stay home; this isn't a fascist country. It's not going to be another '36 with Hitler and Mussolini, and Pétain here in France, who prohibited married women from working. But they're going to see to it that there are all sorts of dissuasive measures taken. I'm afraid that what Betty Friedan was talking about in the U.S. 20 years ago (in the *Feminine Mystique*) might well be happening here.

Huguette Bouchardeau, National
Secretary of the Unified Socialist
Party
(*Histoire d'Elles*)

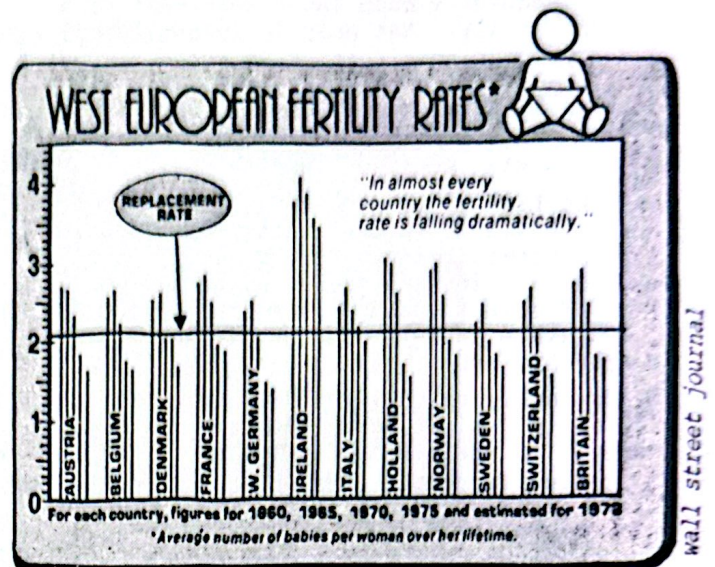
1979: THE YEAR OF THE CHILD

In France, as in all industrial nations, birth and fertility rates are continuing their 15-year downward trend. Cries of alarm and proposals to change the situation are being heard from the government. The French historian and founder of the Right To Life movement, Pierre Chaunu and Congressman Michel Debré, are increasing the number of their publications announcing the end of the West's superiority and the "death" of the white race. What really is the demographic situation in France and Western Europe? Has there really been such a dramatic drop in the birthrate? Why are we having fewer children?

AN OLD AND IRREVERSIBLE TREND

A look at the demographic patterns of the past three centuries provides some answers to these questions. From the early 1600's to the mid-1700's, France enjoyed a period of relative demographic stability. The high mortality rate, due to plague, war and famine, balanced the high birth rate and prevented any substantial increase in the population. There was no widespread practice of contraception; the only "method" used was to delay the age of marriage.

Then, from the mid-1700's to about 1820, a period of sudden growth in the population followed. This, however, was due to a massive drop in infant mortality and not to an increase in birthrate. In fact, the birthrate had already begun its downward trend



at the end of the 18th century. The mortality rate was stabilized and the use of birth control began to spread. The economic and ideological changes brought about by the French revolution also played a role. Children were more integrated into the emotional life of the family; new inheritance laws made it impractical to have large families. Previously, the family fortune went to the eldest child, but now the wealth was to be distributed equally among the children. Hence, the more children, the smaller the share.

During the next 100 years, from 1820 to 1914, a slow-down of this demographic growth occurred, in part caused by a further stabilization of the mortality rate, but mostly due to the sharp drop in the birthrate. This era saw the rise of the Malthusian ideology among the middle-class, especially after 1870. This ideology stressed that the world's resources were finite and encouraged the bourgeois family to narrow its size to one or two children, thus helping these children to rise up the social ladder. The small, middle-class family became a model for workers and peasants. However, the drop in the fertility rate occurred more slowly among the working class, due to a high infant and child mortality rate which continued throughout the industrial revolution. To compensate for their losses, the only recourse for the workers was to maintain a high level of reproduction. Up until World War I, the family with 2 to 3 children remained the predominate model.

During the war, however, France lost 8% of its population and those in power decided to take the demographic situation in hand. A strict pro-birth policy was instituted immediately after the war to repopulate the country. Its essential features were the

1920 law prohibiting abortion and information on contraception, and the withdrawal of women from the work force who had held men's jobs during the war.

These policies proved to be remarkably ineffectual - the birth and fertility rates, exacerbated by the 1931-36 economic crisis, continued to drop during the period between the two wars. The cries of alarm from successive French governments, anxiously watching their own population decrease in the face of the growing German enemy, were of little avail. In 1939, a Family Code was enacted to implement further pro-birth policies; aid to large families was increased, while the allocation for the first child was suppressed; tax and inheritance legislation was modified; anti-abortion measures were intensified; and the study of demography became mandatory in schools.

But the demographic boom did not occur until after World War II. It coincided with a period of economic recovery and the introduction of more global social policies into which the pro-birth policies were integrated. The birthrate continued to rise, until it reached its peak in 1964.

DEMOGRAPHIC STAGNATION IN EUROPE

In 1964, a sudden drop in the number of births was noted not only in France, but in all the European countries. The plunge continued into the 70's with the number of births dropping by 18% in France between 1972 and 1976; by 37% in West Germany between 1966 and 1973; by 16% in Belgium and by 23% in England and Wales between 1971 and 1975.

A real right to choose depends not only on free contraception and abortion on demand, but also on the possibility for women who wish to have children, to be able to do without sacrificing their standard of living, work, or freedom.

A birthrate of 2.1 children per woman is necessary to maintain population size. Instead, the present birthrate is 1.8 child-

ren per woman. Consequently, in 1967, the French government launched a new pro-birth campaign. So far, it has had little effect. The birthrate curve continues to drop, as the effects of the economic crisis take their toll on the standard of living.

THE SHADY SIDE OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC ALARMISTS

Racism is usually behind the pro-birth pamphleteer's anxiety about the "decline of the West" as it is faced with a galloping increase of the Black, Yellow and Arab populations.

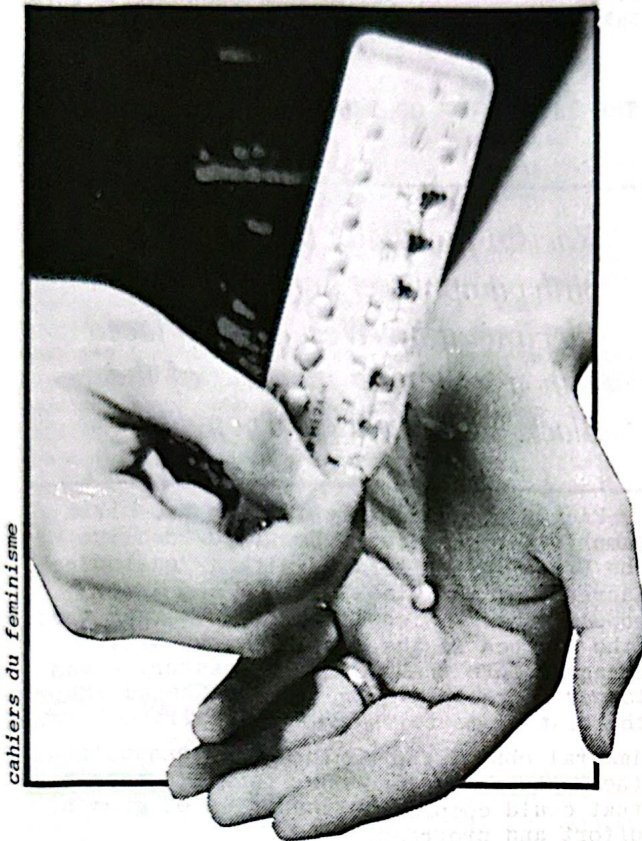
Racism is usually behind the pro-birth pamphleteer's anxiety about the "decline of the West" as it is faced with a "galloping increase of the Black, Yellow and Arab populations." Michel Debre has warned that "the balance in the Mediterranean will change before the end of the century - and to our detriment." And Pierre Chaunu exhorts the West to meet its 'responsibilities': "The immoral ebb of the world's rich constitutes the most serious and most tangible threat that could compromise centuries of growth, effort and progress."

As unemployment rises, in France and elsewhere, women are the first fired. There has been an increase in pro-birth propaganda and measures taken to incite motherhood (such as longer maternity leaves). Sterilization treatment is fully reimbursed while abortion is still not free nor readily available. Nor are there funds to develop day care centers. All this can only mean one thing - women's free choice is being limited.

A real right to choose depends not only on free contraception and abortion on demand, but also on the possibility for women who wish to have children, to be able to do so without sacrificing their standard of living, work or freedom. Recent polls conducted in France have shown that fewer than half of the mothers wishing to have another child actually do so, and that this disparity between women's expressed desires and their realization is most marked in the working class. ■

(cahiers du feminisme, April/May 1979)

"Contraceptives unlimited"



cahiers du féminisme

Contraceptives Unlimited is the name of a Dublin shop opened by the Contraception Action Program in December 1978. A shop that only sells contraceptives is surprising, perhaps, for those who are used to simply going to the pharmacy down the street - understandable, however, in the present context of the Republic of Ireland, where customs officials have been seizing supplies of contraceptives arriving in the country for Family Planning Clinics.

Under Irish law, the sale of contraceptives is considered a criminal offense (even condoms are illegal), as is the dissemination of information on contraception. In 1972, customs officials confiscated a woman's diaphragm as she was entering the country. She filed suit and won her case. The Supreme Court ruling set a precedent: not only could customs officials no longer seize contraceptives destined for personal use, but the ruling also made it possible

for the first Family Planning clinic to begin distribution of 'free' contraceptives to their patients in exchange for a 'donation'. The clinic was brought to trial for the sale of contraceptives, but won their case by proving that they only accepted donations to ensure the continued existence of their clinic. Since then, nine other clinics in Southern Ireland have followed their example of providing contraceptive information and distributing contraceptives. Hence, the government has decided to prevent contraceptives from entering the country. About \$20,000 worth of contraceptives were seized within the first months of 1978.

It was in response to this situation and the extremely repressive attitude of the government and Catholic Church that the Contraception Action Program decided to form Contraceptives Unlimited. The CAP held a press conference at the launching of their project and the publicity brought crowds rushing to their doors. Within the first four days, \$2,000 worth of contraceptives were sold. Widespread public support for the project forced the government to submit to Parliament a bill on contraception at the beginning of 1979. However, due to pressure from the Catholic Church, the bill limits the use of contraceptives to married couples. Infraction of this new law would be punishable by a fine of \$1,000 for a first offense, and twelve months imprisonment for second offenders. This would apply not only to those using contraceptives, but to doctors involved in providing an unmarried person with contraceptives.

In the Republic of Ireland, the Catholic Church and traditional ideology weigh heavily on the shoulders of women whose "vocation" is considered to be that of wife and mother. There is an unmet need for social services such as day care centers, hospitals, schools and housing.

Abortion is illegal except in the case of uterine cancer or difficult pregnancies. The taboo on sexuality is so strong that the issue of abortion has not yet been approached. Instead, efforts are concentrated on the struggle for the right to obtain contraceptives. ■

(cahiers du féminisme, February/March 1979)

Europe's most liberal abortion law is not enough

In 1971, Italy was still under the fascist Rocco law which declared abortion a criminal act. That year marked the beginning of a seven-year struggle which ended with the passage of a new law in Parliament. In 1974, in the city of Trento, 263 women were sentenced after publicly declaring that they had undergone abortions. Although women were continually being sent to prison, an estimated three million illegal abortions were being performed yearly and an average of 2000 women died of complications. Still, both the government and the Church refused to acknowledge the problem. In 1975 - an important year for women - 10,000 demonstrated simultaneously in Rome, Milan and Turin. In May of 1978, Parliament finally passed a new abortion law. The law was the result of a political compromise between the major political parties, in particular the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party. The main proposals of the women's movement, which was in the forefront of the struggle and responsible for the collection of the signatures necessary for the referendum, were not considered. The women angrily criticized the resulting law, which although it is considered the "most liberal abortion law" in Western Europe, seems to have many serious problems. These are:

- the law limits the performance of abortions to regular hospitals, thus disregarding neighborhood women's health centers;
- it permits doctors to declare themselves conscientious objectors, which accounts for numerous abortions performed in secret at an extremely high cost;
- in order for a doctor to legally perform an abortion, s/he must be in at least the fifth year of medical practice. Often the more established doctors are the most conservative on this issue of abortion;
- the law allows abortions only during the first three months of pregnancy. Due to the severe lack of hospital beds, this three-month limit can be an insurmountable problem;
- women under the age of 18 need parental consent to get an abortion;

- a woman desiring an abortion must submit her case to a commission of doctors, often a humiliating process.

Although the law reflects a good deal of moderation, it has encountered enormous opposition. After its passage, the Vatican, fearing a weakening of its power, threatened to excommunicate any Christian woman, medical worker or parent for their participation in an abortion. All religious hospital personnel (a high percentage in Italy) were ordered to quit if abortions were performed in their hospitals. The pressure exerted in the country by the Church has led 72% of the medical profession to declare themselves "conscientious objectors." It is in fact often these same doctors who earn an average of \$10,000 for performing an illegal abortion.

To protest the difficulty of obtaining abortions, women are occupying hospitals throughout Italy and continuing to be vigilant to ensure that the abortion law is being put into practice. They denounce well-known doctors who have performed illegal abortions and who now hide under the guise of "conscientious objectors." Six months after the law's passage, statistics have demonstrated that only in large cities has there been a considerable increase in the percentage of abortions performed. In small towns, where the Church is as powerful as the government, the situation has hardly changed. In order to completely institute the abortion law, it will take both time and continuous struggle to change people's prejudices. Unfortunately, the Church's strong opposition and the growth of the Right To Life movement are fighting to stop any innovation in provisions for abortion. Signatures are being collected, calling for another referendum which demands a two-year prison term for any woman caught having an illegal abortion. The drop in the size of the European population poses yet another threat to the liberalization of the abortion laws, as well as to women's freedom of choice. ■

(*effe*, 1973-79; *il manifesto*, 8/6/78; *Liberation*, 4/15/78; *la Repubblica*, 4/10/78; *Rouge*, 1/28/78)



effe



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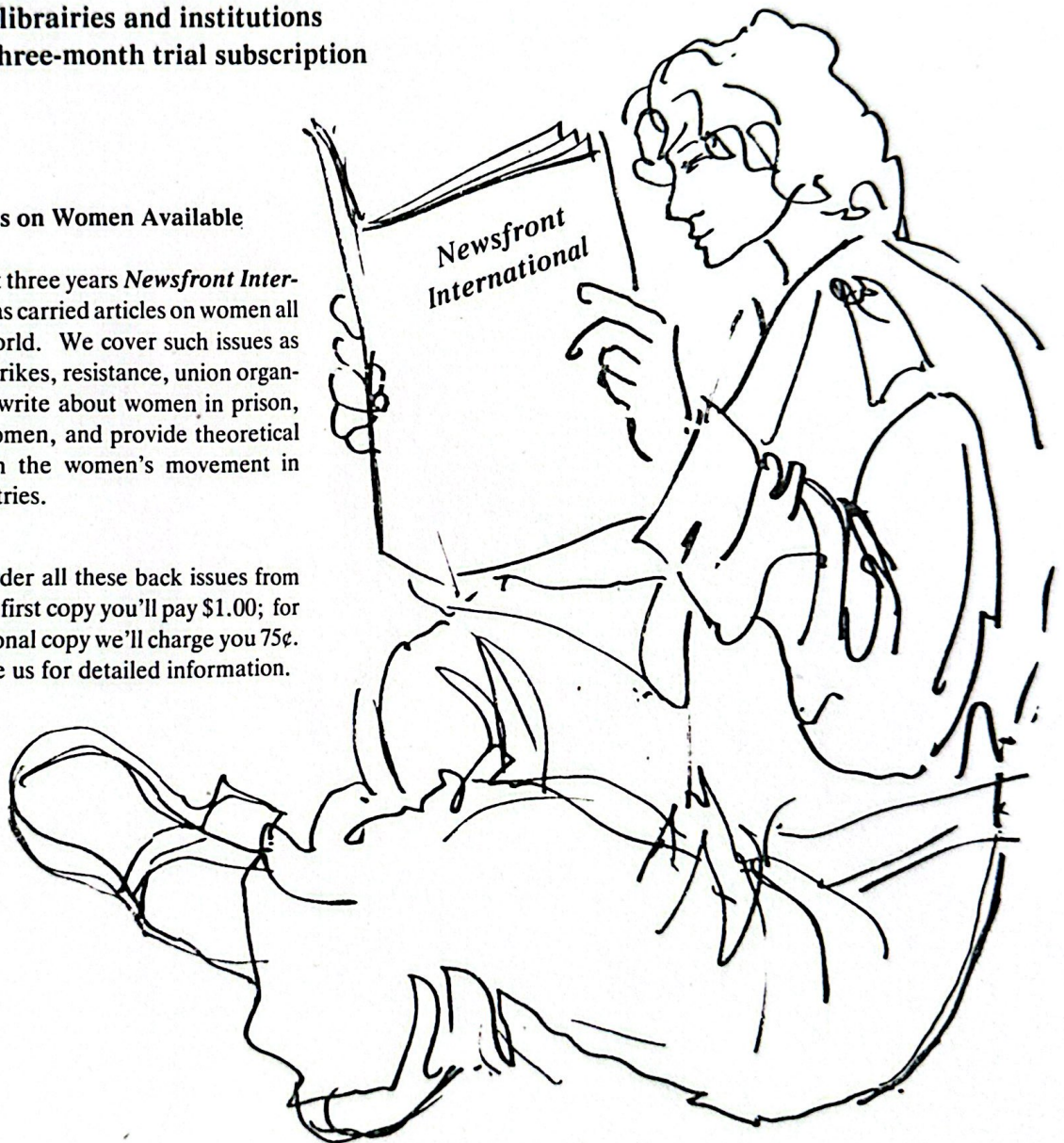
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