

# POLITICS

VS

# THERAPY



one woman's view . . . .

“ Maybe it's different for a woman; being 'political' for me didn't involve the same split that Fritz and Carl talk about - at least not when I first got involved with the Women's Movement. Politics meant discovering that my isolation, feelings of inadequacy at work, and as a student and a mother and a lover were not just my problem; that other women were like me and we didn't have to see it as our 'fault'. Women's politics was a relief; it meant support from a group in the fight at home over who should wash up, change the nappies or cook the dinner. Politics meant reading a book and feeling that what I got out of it would be of interest to others and might relate to my life. It meant that for the first time I had so many things to do that my husband and son were complaining about me going out, instead of me always wanting more attention from them. Now I was the one who had to go rushing out at midnight to write and print a leaflet. I didn't need to lose the fight over the washing up so that I was significant in my martyrdom; I could be significant in the world. With other women I could challenge authority outside and the authority in my head. The first time I sat in in an S.S. office was a real high.

I think that 'high' made me and other women underestimate the strength of both our internal and external enemies - our conditioning and the patriarchy and capitalism. I remember one member of my women's group saying she thought 'revolution would take maybe ten years, or maybe only five,' and we didn't argue with her. When prices began to rocket and everywhere women were grumbling we put out a leaflet and called a meeting to take action against rising prices. We weren't sure that lots of people would come but we partly expected that the self-evident,

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discontent with rising prices would naturally lead women to take action. Similarly in my living situation once I'd understood the benefits of collective living or shared child care I thought my new life style would progress smoothly. What I think I had failed to understand was the way in which I had internalised my role as a woman just like the other women on the market who got rid of their anger at the prices by grumbling rather than using it to change the situation.

After a while I realised that I could still feel like a martyr even if I no longer did all the washing up; could still pay more attention to making sure that the man I was making love with had an orgasm than making my own sexual needs explicit, although I knew in my head that I had as much right to orgasms as he did. I could go to meetings with the same sense of duty which had led me to cook an evening meal for my family every evening after a full day out at work.

Therapy for me has been a safe space to look at my own inner controls and contradictions - an essential part of my politics - which only really emerged through being politically involved. I wouldn't have recognised the dual nature of my martyrdom if I'd gone on washing all the dishes; I'd still have been complaining about my husband. In therapy I'm in a position to see how my martyrdom operates and to struggle against it rather than pretend it doesn't exist because I'm writing leaflets instead of doing domestic chores.

I want to see this spreading to other women, and men too; which is why I'm writing part of this pamphlet and feel very good about the ways Red Therapy has 'gone public'.

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“ Speaking personally 'cos I can't speak any other way...

I've just left the Troops Out Movement because I became increasingly aware of how dissatisfying and ineffective it had become, at least in my area. My experience in therapy and my political activity before I got involved in TOM made me draw some conclusions - So much political activity on the 'straight' Left is based on guilt and self-denial. People are manically driven into activities by their own unrecognised needs and dare not stop being busy to analyse what it is they are doing for fear it will all turn out to be meaningless.

I went to so many ill-tempered organisational meetings where everyone moaned at each other for not doing more and there was masses of resentment all round. Nobody tried to understand each other and there was a lot of putting-down. Over the years the meetings proliferated, and the committees and groups identified by initials grew farcical. At the same time local organising and propaganda work suffered from lack of time. Resentments grew as it became clear that a people who did most of the talking did least of the work and that many of the political 'heavies', who talked about 'the working class' all the time, could not in fact relate to another person well enough to talk about the weather, never mind imperialism and oppression.

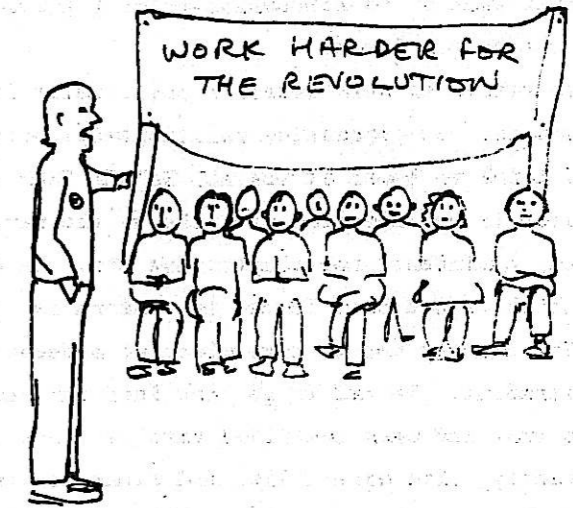
'Local activity' to raise consciousness and organise support for the TOM was only seen by the 'straight' Left as being meetings and rallies where famous people and 'good speakers' talked at the 'masses' who just passively listened and occasionally asked carefully circumscribed questions. There was no room for a dialogue, for listening to what people thought - the whole perspective was to tell people what they should think.

The meetings were so unenjoyable and uncreative that it was not surprising the TOM didn't grow fast. It was clear that most people thought it couldn't be enjoyable if it was to be effective. Occasionally 'socials' were organised, to make money. Grim they usually were too - Leftie men huddled in corners drinking pints and arguing about tactics and strategies, and each other. Often outsiders who came for a beer were either harangued or ignored.

It was hard for me to talk to people about TOM in the end - the politics had become stale from constant repetition and I felt so unenthusiastic for the organisation what could I offer?

Many of the people in TOM I liked, the basic demands are right and there is a need for an anti-imperialist grouping in Britain, but there needs to be serious thought about the current definition of what is 'political'. We need to be aware of our motivations and our own needs and we need to be able to relate to people in a real way, not hiding behind slogans, leaflets,

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platforms and 'speakers', megaphones and banners. Once I got caught up in that merry-go-round it was very hard to try and get another form of political activity together.

Also the current accepted definition of who is worth talking to - who can wield influence and has power - is so awful: a few Lefties pursuing the same few shop stewards, councillors, MPs, trades council members, and the rest, the lumpen, considered unimportant, or even non-existent, if they aren't in a Union - those are 'bosses' definitions of who is valuable (those who are in waged work).

....repressive, resentful, alienated, guilt-ridden .... but I know there is another kind of effective political action which is fun, creative, warm - 'cos we experienced it sometimes in the TV group, so it ain't just Utopian.

An effective way of not looking at TOM critically, in response to complaints, was to put down political differences coming from 'libertarians' as 'personal problems' (in other words, out of TOM's sphere) - even if the criticisms came from seven people they were dismissed as personal problems and and not seen in a political light at all.”

...and  
another  
woman's view

Some of us had been active in libertarian politics and the Women's Movement and had had experience of consciousness-raising groups, collective living, personal politics - trying to change our lives.

"We wanted to work together politically in non-hierarchical ways, find some kind of sexual freedom and non-oppressive relationships between men and women and adults and children, etc.

"I think we found it was ALL HARDER THAN WE THOUGHT - that we couldn't somehow will ourselves to be liberated and wake-up the next morning feeling wonderfully collective, non-jealous, confident, non-competitive etc. We couldn't suddenly change the patterns of a lifetime which we had been forced to conform to in this society.

"The changes had to take place at a deeper level than just intellectual and political understanding. We had to go back into our pasts, unlearn our conditioning, break out of the blocks that had been instilled into us since childhood. Only then would we be able to behave differently, live more fully, and fight for the revolution we want - not just with a perspective of changing the ownership of the means of production - but with changing and reclaiming every part of our lives - our leisure, our relationships, feelings and sexuality, our work, our living conditions, our creativity..."

# History/Herstory

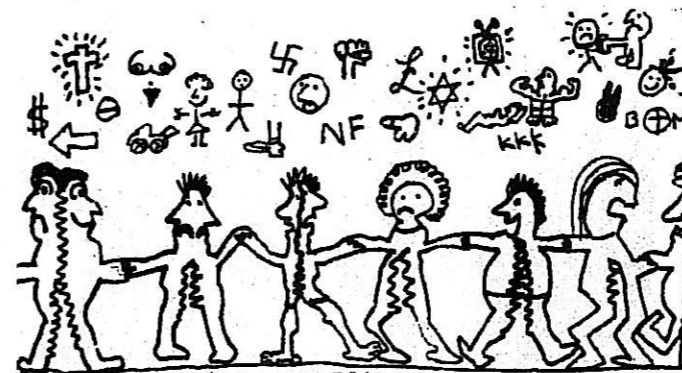
*We can change our minds in a minute but it takes our feelings and bodies more time.*



Red Therapy had its origins in a group of people trying to change their lives by living collectively and by active politics in a working-class area of East London. Some of us were part of Big Flame, and contributed to its first magazine issue; but there began to appear some important differences, particularly round questions of personal living, women's struggles, and how we saw ourselves as revolutionaries. A few of us had some previous experience of therapy - individual Reichian and gestalt therapy, psychoanalysis, and groups within the growth movement. In Autumn 1973 we set up small leaderless groups for ourselves and a few friends outside that group, because we felt we needed some way of doing therapy. This was in addition to the existing political activity, which was already taking up a lot of our time and energy. "At that time it was manic politics and manic therapy, with little connection between them." It was difficult to talk about therapy within

the political group except very defensively, or to bring our therapy understanding into our political activities - though this latter problem changed later on when a small self-help therapy group began out of a food co-op that the women helped organise with working-class women on a local housing estate. In the main therapy group "there were a lot of problems because two of us - men - did a lot of leading. But we were all getting into a lot of feelings - sometimes did a lot of shouting - and felt we were learning..."

In May 1974 there was a large open meeting in London, organised by people in the growth movement, on therapy and politics, at which Jerry Rubin spoke, saying how fantastic the days of 1968 had been for him and a lot of others, but how he often didn't understand where he was going, how he would get clobbered by events and not understand what was happening because of self-alienation. He felt he couldn't be political if he was that out of



IN THIS SOCIETY AN IDEAL GROUP IS IMPOSSIBLE

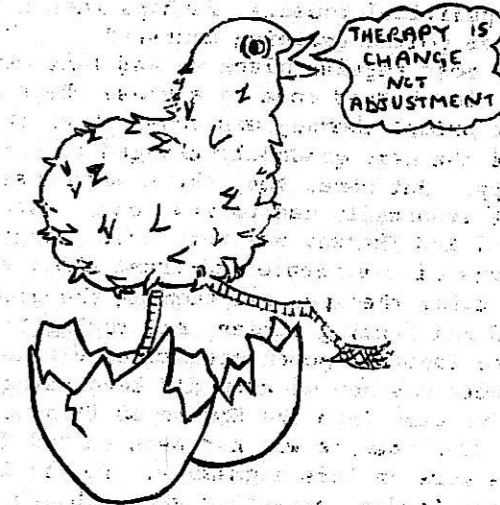
touch with himself and his own body. He felt he had to go back a step and work on himself. However, in the long run the only real therapy was social revolution. It was a well-attended meeting with a lot of energy, and some very moving statements were made by Brian Dempsey and others.

Two people from the East London group spoke, criticising the growth centres, and suggesting a further meeting for all those who were interested in linking up therapy and politics. There was a good response to this, and over the summer several meetings were held with a lot of very diverse people. The discussions tended to get very abstract and generalised, and people drifted away; the people who stayed were those who wanted to do therapy rather than talk about it, and those who had some kind of commitment to the kind of politics which the group had already been into. We didn't believe in the group leader as a kind of infallible authority; we didn't believe that you had to define yourself as sick before you could get benefits from doing therapy; we didn't believe in the "stand on your own two feet" ideology which seemed to us basically liberal individualism; we didn't want to take class for granted or sex roles for granted. We also wanted to do therapy in a way that brought in our experience from consciousness raising - of the social determination of social experience - and that allowed us in therapy to work on political issues without having our values put down as head trips or reduced to our relationships with our parents. And somehow we also hoped to relate this to what we were doing outside the groups. It was about this time that the group began to be known as Radical Therapy.

Initially the group was very slow in getting off the ground. We had decided to be leaderless, in the sense of not having a paid leader; but that people with particular skill and experience should take turns in having responsibility for one evening. The group was very unequal, in that some people had had quite a lot of group and other therapy experience, whereas many people only had a little or none. Another kind of inequality appeared in the way that the original East London group appeared en bloc and seemed to know what it was all about more than others did. So people

with little knowledge or skill tended to hang back and feel unconfident and hesitant; sometimes the more dominant people held back their contributions when they became aware of this, but it did not help much to have them "looking over your shoulder", so things could become very slow and sticky. We also had quite a large turnover of people at this period (Autumn 1974), so that you never quite knew who was going to be there. This initial large turnover contributed to the slowness and nervousness of the group - you have to feel reasonably safe to be able to get into your more scary feelings, and that doesn't happen in an unpredictable group. When we realised what a problem this was, we made great efforts to stabilise it, to ensure that people came regularly, and that new people only joined at certain times.

As well as these internal difficulties, we had a lot of external difficulties too. These all centred round finding a suitable place to hold the group meetings. It is difficult enough at the best of times to find



"I find group therapy necessary for the solidarity and to feel a social context, instead of a unique freak. I've never fancied an analyst, an individual who knows better to tell me what's what, I've always argued with people in that role. The support of a group is necessary, especially perhaps in a big city, but I need other leftists - otherwise I feel like a freak again."

"My strong prejudice has been in favour of free therapy, rather than what is paid for; both because I am mean about money, and because I don't like experts who are going to tell me what to do or what to believe. So I have gone for things like co-counselling and leaderless groups wherever possible. Politically, too, this fits with any analysis which wants to reduce the power of the expert."

# THE MEN'S THERAPY GROUP

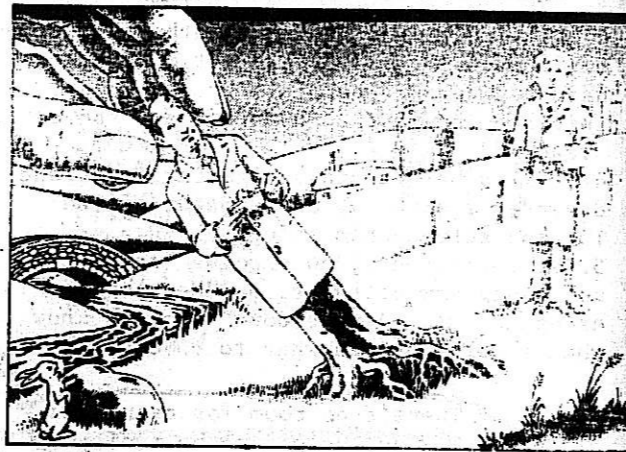
The men's therapy group started in the summer of 1975. It grew out of a number of different needs.

One need was for a safer place to work on our sexism. We had found that this was a very heavy issue to work on in the mixed group; on one occasion a man saying that he did not fancy one of the women in the group (on an occasion when there were five men and only two women in the group) had meant that the woman had lost trust in the group as a place where she could be open; on another occasion a man had felt so judged by the women in the group that he had lost trust in the group as a place where he could be open. Maybe these things shouldn't have happened in an ideal group, but we had become aware that in this society the pressures are such as to make an ideal group impossible.

"I became more aware that in some way I was missing something - that I had lost something. Something emotional. A woman I really depended on left me - saying at one point that she felt that 'there was nothing there'. So I was made painfully aware of my unresponsiveness to her. Came my first introduction to therapy, where I suddenly discovered the extent to which I had frozen up - the extent to which I was afraid to feel. Pain, grief, joy, anger - I experienced these feelings more intensely than at any time since I was very young. She had been right and wrong at the same time."

"While I was always trying to prove myself to be strong, independent and successful in the outside world of men, it was impossible for me to see my relationships with women as anything other than a separate private world of emotion and love. I desperately needed Meg to be around to talk to, touch, fuck with, just

be with - a person I could be myself with, whatever that was at any moment. With men I was on show, almost performing, watching and being watched; scared to admit I didn't understand, scared to follow what I felt about people and situations. And yet that was the world that mattered most, the only world I could prove myself to be a proper person in. So I tended to take things with Meg totally for granted. I needed her badly, but as long as things were O.K. our relationship was secondary, hidden, unmentioned. Caring for men has allowed me to care more for women."



Another important area involved those of us who felt inadequate as men. Some of us needed to work on how we hadn't made it as men in the roles laid down for us - that is, cool, capable, responsible, powerful, aggressive, competitive, etc; on how we couldn't get relationships together easily; on sexual difficulties; on how we felt powerless, tended to court, expect and accept failure at whatever we tried (if we got as far as trying) on how we assiduously avoided commitments and responsibility - both for ourselves and others.

"Initially I think an element of my interest in therapy was based on a desire to be successful in the externally defined role of

'man'. I've learnt that that is a possibility for me now. But more importantly I've discovered some of the wider, freer possibilities in being a man. I've moved from a position of almost total invalidation to a space where I'm beginning to own myself. All the little bits of me that I'd somehow excluded are now allowed a bit of space and I'm discovering that, contrary to my expectations, it feels O.K. and is O.K.

One of those bits is feeling anger. I've been an incredibly 'nice guy' for a long time - completely unable to allow myself to feel anger, let alone express it. This often takes the form of not hearing; or not seeing that which might make me angry. Feeling and expressing anger - at being put down, being pushed around at work, at the people I live with and love - gives me energy I didn't have before. I feel more alive and paradoxically maybe, more loving. I have had the greatest difficulty getting angry with women that I have relationships with. I found it terrifying. Now it is still scary but I know how important it is for me not to bury it. I seem to be getting a bit of my power back in this sense.

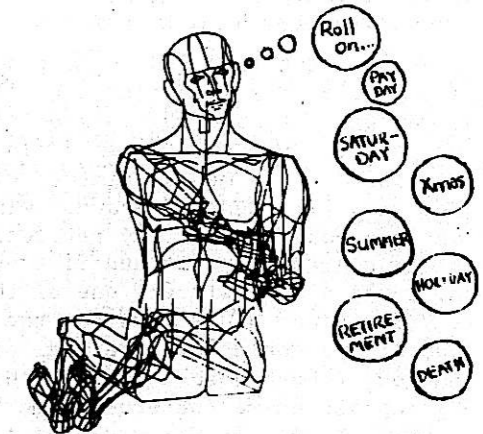
Another need was to work on our relationships as men. We found quite strong feelings for each other appearing once we allowed ourselves to look at them.

"I've always pretended that I wasn't sexually competitive; made out that I was above it all. Then one day in the men's therapy group I exploded into my contempt for another, older man there. It was incredibly scary. I told him he was old, past it, unattractive, that he couldn't get any women any more. I was arrogant, vitriolic, spiteful - John was sad and hurt. I got more and more bullying, more and more invulnerable, cockier and cockier. Then John asked for help. Two of the other men came to his aid, incredibly angry at me. I felt isolated, but I didn't want to give in. I kept my head up. Then I realised that the insults I was flinging at John all reflected how I felt in relation to another bloke that the women I was sleeping with also slept with. In that situation it was me who felt older, unattractive, unlovely, unwanted. As I realised this, my feelings changed. I felt deeply humiliated, then deeply hurt, and

I cried long tears at the way her energy had left me for him. It was all a weird powerful experience, but after it the group seemed much closer, as if we had all been through a trial together."

"During this period my relationship with Susan began to change. We had been expressing a lot of anger in our relationship. At first this had meant a lot to me - to learn to express real anger instead of being 'nicey-nicey' all the time. Then this anger stopped being releasing and somehow became stultifying. We spent hours, nights and days in angry exchanges and shouting matches. But somehow very little seemed to change through it.

Discovering my hurt and sadness at her relationship with someone else did become a real breakthrough. When I could show my hurt I could be seen as a much softer, gentler, loving, vulnerable person. I was more open to her, and she had more - was prepared to give more - to me."



Another need was to work on our work situations. This was something which seemed to come up much less in the mixed group. On one occasion when someone was complaining about all the different activities he had to keep going at the same time, we used books, shoes, scarves, socks, coats, cigarette packets and anything else that was available to represent all the different interests in his life, and spread them all over the floor. He could then get into his feelings about each one, and end up in a clearer space.

IT ALL STARTS EARLY...



AND THEN AT WORK



BUT AT HOME



HERE COMES THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT!!



SO LUCKILY INTO THERAPY AND THE MEN'S GROUP



AND YATTER YATTER YATTER

