

WOMEN AND SOCIALISM

There's been a lot of talk in the Women's Movement about the relationship between women's struggles and the class struggle. Generally the arguments have been of three kinds:

First, those who have seen women's struggles as prior to the class struggle, and have insisted that its no good waiting 'till after the revolution' for women's fight against their own oppression to begin, since a revolution which did not take into account questions of Sexual liberation would soon turn out as oppressive as the society it replaced. These arguments have tended to come from feminists in the women's movement, who have as a consequence concentrated their efforts in struggles around women's sexuality and consciousness, and have refused to work in 'male dominated' political parties, around working class issues.

Second, in contrast to these, have been arguments put forward by women in the Trotskyist and Communist parties, who have seen the fundamental oppression of capitalist society as the extraction of surplus value by the bosses from the workers, to which all other forms of oppression are reducible, and who have seen the struggles of women as important in so far as they are a struggle against this oppression.

Thirdly, there is the tendency which unites the insights of both of these groupings in a perspective which sees that women's struggles are the class struggle as waged by women. (They have a broader understanding of class struggle than women in the second groups). This is the position of PÖW and other Marxist feminists; we feel we share much of the analysis of PÖW, but we think that a campaign for 'wages for Housework' is the wrong strategy with which to back up this analysis, for reasons which we will try to make clear.

We have learnt a lot from all of these tendencies. From the feminists we have learnt not to rely on others to fight our fights for us: we must fight against our own oppression as women with other women. We cannot assume that a post-revolutionary society will be any less sexist (or hierarchical or authoritarian) than bourgeois

society, unless we make struggles against these part of the revolution. We think that 'seizing the means of production' is too narrow a conception of what the revolution is about - a lesson we have learnt from the failure of the Russian revolution. To be a revolution at all, it must assert the value of people's lives in every area of their lives, not only in production.

From the Marxists in Trotskyist and Communist parties, we have learnt that we must look for material reasons for women's oppression if we are to understand and fight it. We must look at the role women play in society to see why they are oppressed in the ways they are oppressed. We come to see the enemy not as 'men' but as the capitalist system; we see that we cannot fight against our own oppression without fighting against the system which institutes and perpetuates our oppression.

With Marxist feminist we share the analysis that the class struggle doesn't just take place in the factory, but is fought in the community, in the home, in bed. It is not just a struggle for the 'ownership of the means of production' but a struggle to revolutionize the social relations of production; and that includes the work that women do, in and out of the home. But we don't believe that it's only as 'workers' that people can organize, whether it's houseworkers or factory workers. In fact we think that it's part of the con of capitalism that we come to see ourselves primarily as workers - because workers is what they need. We feel it is important to organize and fight around our needs as people, in every area of our lives.

We have seen that in the factories capitalism has used worker's struggles for more money to serve the capitalists' needs for more productivity; the result is a growth economy, which suits the capitalist, and a steady rate of inflation, which means that what the worker wins in wages, he loses to the shopkeeper and the landlord. This has happened largely because the Trades Unions, which usually act as the mediators in these negotiations, accept the capitalist's right to make a 'fair' profit, so long as the workers are getting more money too. 'After all' they say 'if the boss doesn't get a fair return on his investment, there'll be no incentive for him to provide work for us all, and then we'd all be unemployed, and there'd be no union either.'

We don't accept the boss's right to make a 'fair' profit, and we do think we'd be better off without any bosses at all. That's why we don't agree with the strategy of getting women into the unions, to fight on an equal footing with other factory workers. Because that's fighting on the bosses' ground, within their definitions - time as the bosses fighting us as the workers. But what we're trying to challenge is the whole boss/worker relationship. The same with 'wages for housework'; we feel that maintains that same boss/worker relationship, whether the boss is your husband or the State. What we should be fighting for is 'Wages for doing nothing', but that's a contradiction in terms, because wages is the money you get for working. It's no use fighting for what we feel we've earned under the capitalist system, because that'll always include a 'fair' share for us, and a 'fair' share for the capitalists. We should fight for our needs and wants as people, irrespective of whether or not our needs and wants can be met by the capitalists.

As women, our needs and wants are sometimes the same as men's, sometimes specific to ourselves. Organizing around these needs is what we call 'the politics of autonomy'.