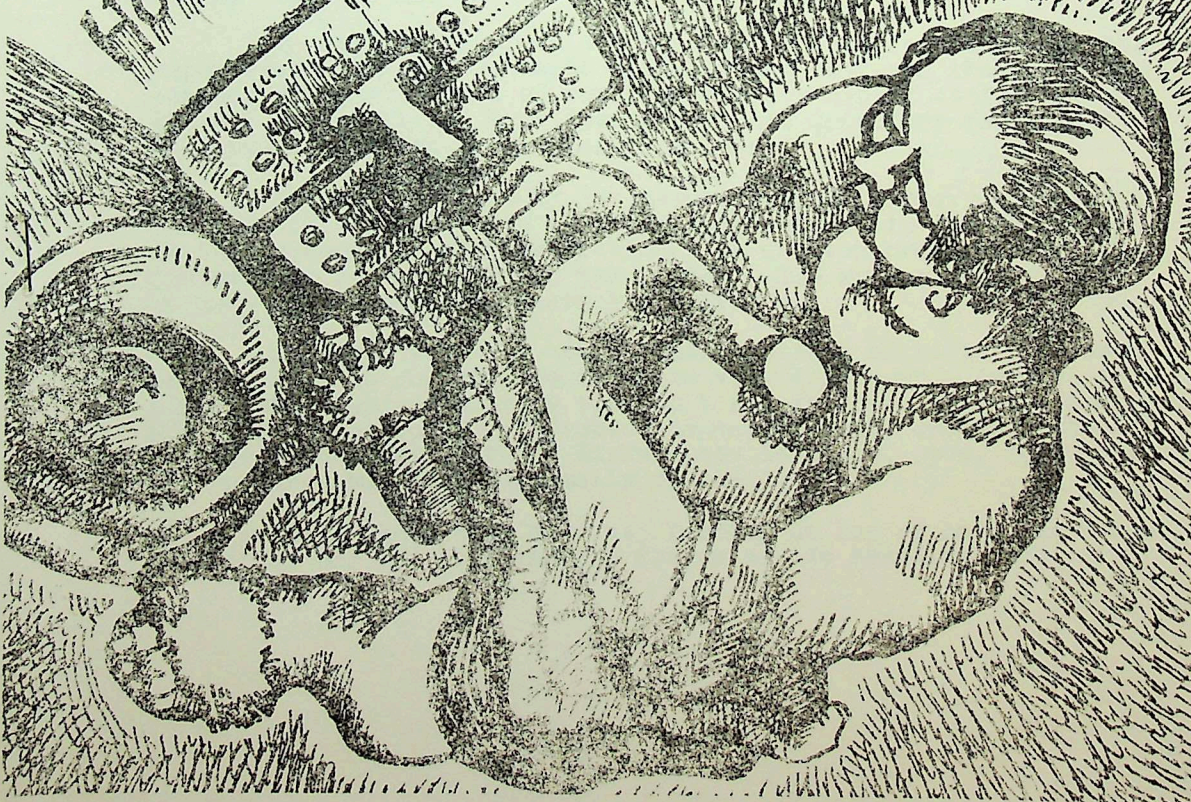


IN DEFENCE OF FEMINISM

A London Conference report

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK



IN DEFENCE OF FEMINISM

Preface

The report which follows was written and distributed in duplicated form early in 1973 after the National Women's Conference of November, 1972 in Acton (London). If it were only a report of what occurred there, its interest would be merely historical. But it is not that. It is a political report, a selection of significant events with an interpretation of them against a background of previous and related events. It records a major confrontation within the movement, whose reverberations are still ringing in our ears. In short, it makes a good introduction to the present stage of the women's movement.

This not to say there haven't been changes in the women's movement since 1972. Some of the changes that have occurred will be noticed in footnotes to the original text. This preface will deal with developments of larger and more general significance.

A movement, because it is broadly based and spontaneous in character, cannot be confined in a permanent program or set of demands. Its vitality rests on its ability to give expression to a widespread revolt against a condition of life. A shared condition of life. The women's movement grew out of the shared constraints of women's lives and the continual revolt of women against them. It grew out of the shared sense of an historical opportunity to make a successful, united struggle against them. That opportunity was prepared not only by the struggles of women in home, factory, office, in whatever workplace, but also by the successes of the black movement.

Like any living organism, a movement grows and changes, has experiences and learns, makes mistakes and corrects them. It has periods of activity and of rest, of clarity and of confusion, of ebb and flow. It can have aberrations and momentary fads and it can make astounding recoveries from these.

A movement is also by its nature a contradictory organism. The fact of its existence is a contradictory fact, as each of us in the movement is a contradiction. We are the creatures of the System, and we are fighting the System. The System made us and we made the movement to destroy the System.

A movement contains other contradictions as well. As women we have much in common. We are also very different. Once we form a movement, our differences take on a new and crucial significance. Not only our personal differences in temperament, emotion, intellect or psychology, but our differences in class, race, age, nation and culture--but most especially of class.

Because the System made us, forming us out of helpless babes, each of us has had to fight the System inside herself. And just

as that individual internal struggle goes on, allied to it but larger than it, a corresponding struggle goes on within the movement to rid it of the System. This struggle takes the form of confrontation within the movement of individuals and of opposing political tendencies, that express differences of class and differing class interests.

It has always been so in any popular movement. Internal struggles, expressing class conflict, rack any movement that has vitality, at the same time that the movement confronts its external enemies. Sometimes internal conflicts are the device of the System to short-circuit the movement. Sometimes internal struggles, if they are hopeless of resolution, hobble a movement. Sometimes a movement can by its internal conflicts make itself irrelevant to the mass struggles outside and thereby lose its vital connection.

The women's movement at present is in no such danger. It is true that we are in a period of disarray, of internal conflict, of some alienation from the mass of women. It is true that the System has strong representatives in our midst. But there are more hopeful signs. The possibility exists, not only of a recovery from present confusions, but of a leap forward.

Three tendencies in the movement now claim to speak for the interests of the mass of women. Most of the women in the movement are in or gravitate towards one of the three tendencies. The report that follows shows all three at one stage of their development and confrontation: the women from the male-dominated left, the Radical Feminists, and the group to which the writers of the report belonged. Today names and the alignment of forces have changed-- as has the political articulation of the three tendencies.

Those who have changed least are the women from the male-dominated left. Perhaps because their political ideas and practice are pegged down by groups outside the women's movement, they have less scope for development and change (although even among them there are instances of a breakaway from male-dominated politics). Since Acton, the relation of the left women to the women's movement has remained ambiguous; for them the question of the movement's autonomy is still open to debate. They have sponsored a campaign, working with men and with trades union bureaucrats called Working Women's Charter, whose impulse is consistent (though it has engaged the energies of many rank and file women) with the politics expressed in 1972. That is, to increase women's activity in the unions, to pursue reforms in the unions and in the programs that unions formally espouse. They still see a second job outside the home as a liberating course for women to take. There appears little difference, in the last analysis, between their plans for women and the plans of the ruling class for women.

The Radical Feminists have changed in name and in spirit. About the time of Acton these groups underwent splits over the issue of separatism, the idea of women living totally separate lives from men in an all-female counter-culture. In the fracturing process, separatism, if it did not win a majority, became the dominant tone from that quarter and gave the name of "separatist" to the tendency. Finer distinctions are still in process, and the separatists, like the early religious protestants, continue to split their ranks in the search for purity. So we have "pure separatists," "drastic dykes," "toughey separatists," etc.

In 1972 we worried that the Radical Feminists might be "on the way to making themselves irrelevant" to the struggles of the mass of women. Since 1972 they have gone beyond this point to one of actual hostility to the mass of women. Though the expression is sometimes comic ("don't take the underground--it's driven by men"), it has tragic and oppressive possibilities ("put your male children in care"). And its scope for abstractions that avoid anything like actual struggle is immense. (As example, it exercises itself about the possibility of parthenogenesis at the very time that the practice of induced labour in NHS hospitals has become a national scandal.) Separatism has accomplished the irrelevance of Radical Feminism to women's struggles. And it has done more. Having pushed the ideology to its ultimate expression, it has exposed its anti-feminist, anti-women potential.

Such an outcome could have been foreseen in 1972. We saw then the symbiotic relationship between the Radical Feminists and the women of the left. It was the latter, we said, who split the struggles of women from the class struggle and gave the Radical Feminists an ideological base for constructing separatist politics. The writers of the report held that no such split was feminist or revolutionary. As Marxist-feminists we saw the women's movement as an independent and autonomous expression of women in the class struggle. But the group we represented was small. The brunt of attacks on our position fell on one woman. From the volume of "replies to" and attacks on Selma James as an individual, one would not have thought it was the women's movement that opposed "star-making" or the identification of ideas with particular women.

That situation has changed. In March, 1973 a group of women gathered to discuss the revolutionary feminist politics presented in The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community. We wanted to explore the perspective of wages for housework and the kinds of demands and actions that would flow from it. Because the housewife, whether employed in a second, waged job or not, is the index to the condition of all women, because her dependency and exploitation are at the heart of women's low level of power to direct our own lives, we hold that our social role and social work, as housewife, are the key to our struggle as women. Whatever our

personal triumphs or opportunities, in an important sense we are all housewives; those who hold power define us in that way.

We called our group the Power of Women Collective. In March 1974 the first issue of our journal, Power of Women, was published; other issues have followed. We have also published a document on the nurses' struggle, a pamphlet called "Living Through the Crisis," two pamphlets on wages for housework, as well as this report. A book-length anthology of our writings is in progress. Nor have our activities been confined to writing, publishing and distributing our materials (though other groups in various countries have taken them up, translated and published them -- as we have theirs).

We are also an action group. We have been involved in the struggles of women like the nurses, women in Ireland, and the Asian women of Imperial Typewriters; we have sponsored or spoken at many meetings of women; and we are preparing a market stall in London for dissemination of our ideas and organization within a given community. All this has taken the time and energies of many devoted women, women whose ranks are always open to other women who want to join the struggle with us.

It should be said that since Acton, many of the ideas we struggled for have gained general currency. Now, every woman concerned with the issue of abortion also recognizes the importance of the right to have children. Few women involved in trades unions credit them with a higher consciousness in struggle than women possess. And it is now commonplace, from U.N. documents to left analyses, for women's work in the home to be considered a vital part of the working day. Women entering the movement today find it, in these respects, on a higher level politically than it had reached in 1972.

In an important sense, the Power of Women Collective also grew out of the London Conference of 1972. If we had been able to see then what has since developed for us, the confident optimism of the last three paragraphs of the report would have been sounded with trumpets.

Priscilla Allen

February 1975

* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Rd., Montpelier, Bristol 6. (35p + 5p postage)

IN DEFENCE OF FEMINISM

A LONDON CONFERENCE REPORT

"Within the women's movement, therefore, we reject both class struggle as subordinate to feminism and feminism as subordinate to class struggle. Class struggle and feminism are for us one and the same thing, feminism expressing the rebellion of that section of the class without whom the class struggle cannot be generalized, broadened and deepened."

from the Statement of the International Feminist
Collective

Introduction

The draft of this report was shown to a few women for their comments, and one or two, though they agreed with much of it, were against its circulation. They felt that there was some bitterness at the conference which was better left alone than stirred to life. Also that to present so controversial a view of the conference might be seen as sectarian.

That there was bitterness at the conference the report attempts to account for politically. But we had other reasons for acting against the advice of our initial readers in circulating the report.

First, it has not been the habit of the women's movement to sweep feelings under the carpet.

Second, many women in the movement, we among them, have complained strongly from time to time that women who are neither liberals nor members of the male left have to shut their mouths for the sake of avoiding controversy, for the sake of "sisterhood" as it is not uncommonly defined. The price of our peace is being subjected to a politics we had hoped to escape by leaving the male left. We feel the conference liberated us from this restraint and that sisterhood, like charity, begins at home.

Third, we as a movement are in the habit of shying away from articulating political controversy, especially with those we love, women or men. But if we are unable even within the movement and among those closest to us to articulate firm political positions, then we are not prepared for the new situation in Britain. This situation demands more than articulation of political controversy in words.

Increasingly the State in Britain is more repressive, the class confrontation bolder and vaster. If we are unable to discover and invent a political practice which is both effective against the State and feminist, we can become politically irrelevant, even helpful to that State, and drive women back into the arms of the male left. This is what is happening to some degree in the United States where a massive movement could not find an autonomous mode of thought and action which was anti-capitalist and anti-sexist as on totality.

We wrote the report to help that process of discovery and invention, and for another closely connected reason. That reason is this: we, as a movement, do not take ourselves seriously enough. In London on November 3-5, 1972 two thousand people from Britain and a number of other countries, not only European, gathered to discuss the condition of women and, as women, what we could do about it that nobody else could, that nobody else had ever been able or wanted to. That is a major political event. The report tries to give a context to that event and to describe it as a moment in the process of our development as women and as a movement.

The point of view is one which sees women and their movement as objectively part of the class struggle, and which is trying subjectively to ensure that the line between women "in" the movement and "out" of it, from the most to the least powerful among us, is continuous and unbroken--a lifeline.

If it were a report for a bourgeois liberal paper like the Guardian, it would be a different report. Soon after the conference Red Mole, a Trotskyist newspaper, published a different sort of report too (even though the conference had decided that no report should appear except within the movement). It was written by two women of the male left and therefore suffered from the limitations of its source, limitations which this report will try to define and illustrate.

Which brings us to our final point. Perhaps the reader will be surprised that we have spent so much time discussing the left. We are working in a long tradition: that of disentangling our struggle as women from the meshes of the left. Remember Beverly Jones's response to the SDS in 1967, Marge Piercy's "Grand Coolie Dam" of 1969, and Robin Morgan's goodbye to the "counter-left, the counterfeit left" in 1970. Many of us have hoped that not too many more statements of that sort would have to be made. But for this conference the Radical Feminists wrote: "Absent physically /the left/ remain directors with their female representatives" and "they have made the Women's Movement, to a large extent, a branch of the male left." The difference between the Radical Feminists and us is that we take that charge seriously enough to try to wrest the movement from the left's hands.

It must have struck others besides ourselves that at the conference the organizations of "the left" could not be distinguished one from the other. To conclude that they are all sexist merely is to state a truth which hides a bigger truth. Of course they are sexist. At present, every organization in which both men and women work together cannot avoid being dominated by men. This is why we don't allow men in our movement, and we have never heard another reason given. But the question is: are they against what we are against? The Black left is. And the white left?

We are in a tradition in a profounder sense. As the revolution advances, the enemies of the class seem to be buried deeper and deeper within it. The co-optation of the Social Democracy, an organization built step by step by class action, announced itself in 1914 when it supported the imperialist war. The sixty years since 1914 have seen many other organs and institutions created by the class co-opted, and other hands are beginning to trace how even shop stewards now play, at best, an ambiguous role in the struggle.

To see the left today as being "on the other side"--however fine individuals among them, especially but not only working-class women--to see it as being not only against us but not against what should be our common enemies, this too is part of a tradition. When we speak so much of women in left organizations it is because we are deeply concerned about the co-optation of our movement, about the mediation they can offer to our enemies.

One specific and obvious example is the Communist Party, whose international record on "the woman question" (as on every question) does not bear examination. The power of our Movement gives CP women the courage to fight the men in their organization on this question. They will succeed in making the party adjust its line on women, the better to influence our movement and gain more women members. (Grandma, what big teeth you have!" "The better to eat you with, my dear.")¹

1. Recently a conference of bureaucrats of all the Communist Parties in western Europe met in Rome to set the line on women. Although the top brass of the different countries had trouble getting together on the subjects of abortion and divorce (what is expedient differs from one country to another), they could agree on one topic: they unanimously opposed wages for housework. Corriere della Sera, Milan, November 19, 1974, p. 11. Behind the palimpsest of trivial decoration that Communist Parties the world over use to paint women's struggles and campaigns, the hard line of the counter-revolution stands out clear in this decision.

So it is that a struggle for power between women and men brought about by our movement's autonomy becomes a means, ironically, of creating a greater threat to our autonomy. But there we see a clear example of a tradition of co-option and attack on co-option that describes the condition of our life, of our movement, of our struggle.

We hope that sisters will consider the report. We hope too that when they are involved in action, they will not put that action aside to discuss the report. (One reason why this report is so late is that we have been involved in actions.) We hope some people will be very angry. But we hope others, angry or not, will find it useful in sorting out their own politics and taking them seriously enough to organize to fight like hell for them. The last sentence of this report is meant to point to a new beginning which, owing to historical circumstances to some degree peculiar to Britain, it has devolved on our movement to spearhead.

The Background

No single mass event provided a general background for the London National Conference of Women's Liberation in 1972, as had for the national conference in Manchester the previous spring. The Manchester conference had reflected the high level of struggle that the mining community had reached in its strike, when it succeeded in ignoring a threat by the State to remove its livelihood. The militant actions of this community opened the way for a freer and wider expression of revolt in all sections of the exploited population. It opened up possibilities of struggle. The mining strike was directly responsible for the pamphlet introduced at Manchester, Women, the Unions and Work, or what is not to be done, which, all agree, has changed the character of discussion and actions in the women's movement. The excitement it generated in Manchester was due to a new appreciation of the importance and power of women's struggles and of their centrality in the class struggle.

After the mining community, the dockers took on the State, and the long campaign waged by the Night Cleaners of London, mostly women, burst into a strike. The threat of violence posed by 10,000 workers converging on the Saltley coal depot to support the mining community became actual violence during the strike of the dockers. The reaction to this growing violence was repression on the part of the State; and on the part of the unions and, to a certain extent, the left it was disavowal. The unions discouraged, denied, and where they could not deny, condemned the violent acts of their members in defence of their struggle. The State had already rounded up eight people in the Stoke Newington area of London to use as scapegoats and warnings to working-class militancy. The established left gave the Stoke Newington Eight virtually no support while it condemned in its press "violence and terrorism." The trial of the Eight, which included four women, was going on at the time of

the London conference. All of these factors, within the context of high unemployment with inflation, confronted the continuing struggle of the class. All these were operating on our minds at the London conference whether we articulated them or not.

We did not leave the Fourth National Conference with the same unmixed enthusiasm we felt on the way back from Manchester, even if it was a demonstration of our growing forces (nearly 2000 women were present), even if the creche run by men and the social without men proved again to be great successes. This conference was more oriented towards action and mass organization, which meant also it was more than any previous conference an arena for theoretical debate on the politics of the movement. After years of ideological drift, a recognition of the need for theoretical clarity in the movement bespeaks a new stage of development. On the brink of new and different struggles, women wanted naturally a firmly based perspective.

There were two possibilities. They were: to discuss a political perspective beginning with women's struggle and our movement in particular; or beginning outside of the movement and incorporating ourselves into an already worked-out, male-oriented perspective. To do the former is the most difficult task a movement of women can set itself; it is to posit its own power and its own revolutionary perspective against all the male-dominated groups with dozens if not hundreds of years of history behind them. In terms of this conference we failed. Which is to say that the conference became an arena dominated by the ideology of the organized left.

Since Manchester, the Women's Liberation Movement has seen its potential go beyond the specific struggles for free abortion and contraception. The six demands published in Women, the Unions and Work have been the impetus for the political heightening of the women's movement, but also, because the "general struggle" was under the hegemony of the organized left, which had already established its "revolutionary" strategy, the demands aroused violent reaction from them--C.P., Maoist, or Trotskyist.

Since the six demands presented at Manchester were so much discussed, they deserve full quotation here.

1. WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO WORK LESS. A shorter work week for all. Why should anybody work more than 20 hours a week? Housewives are hesitant to ask men after a week of at least 40 grinding hours to see after their own children and their own underwear. Yet women do just that, for themselves and for men. When women are threatened with redundancies, the struggle must be for a shorter work week. (Maybe men will take our lead for a change.)
2. WE DEMAND A GUARANTEED INCOME FOR WOMEN AND FOR MEN, WORKING OR NOT WORKING, MARRIED OR NOT. If we raise kids, we have a right to a living wage. The ruling class has glorified motherhood only

when there is a pay packet to support it. We work for the capitalist class. Let them pay us, or else we can go to the factories and put our children in their fathers' laps. Let's see if they can make Ford cars and change nappies at the same time. **WE DEMAND WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK.** All housekeepers are entitled to wages (men too).

3. It is in this context that **WE DEMAND CONTROL OF OUR BODIES.** If even birth control were free, would that be control? And if we could have free abortions on demand, is that control? What about the children we want and cannot afford? We are forced to demand abortion and sterilization as we have been forced to demand jobs. Give us money and give us time, and we'll be in a better position to control our bodies, our minds and our relationships. Free birth control, free abortion for whoever wants them (including our sisters from abroad who are denied this right--sisterhood is international). **WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO HAVE OR NOT HAVE CHILDREN.**

But childbearing is not the only function of our bodies that capital controls. At work we make them do what they don't want to do: repeated jerks on an assembly line, constant sitting or standing, breathing fumes and dirt. Work is often painful and dangerous. It is always uncomfortable and tiring. After work your body is too numb for you to feel it as something you can enjoy. For this reason it cannot develop sexually. Our physical feeling is further destroyed by the limited kinds of sexuality and the shallow relationships this society promotes, and by the scarcity of times and places where we can make love. Our bodies become a tool for production and reproduction and nothing else.

4. **WE DEMAND EQUAL PAY FOR ALL.** There is a rate for girls and a rate for boys, and a rate for women and a rate for men, a rate for "skilled" and a rate for "unskilled" and a rate in the North and a rate in the South. Whoever works deserves a minimum wage, and that minimum must be the rate of the highest grade.

5. **WE DEMAND AN END TO PRICE RISES,** including tax, rent, food, and clothing. There is a battle brewing on housing. As usual, with tenants' struggles, women are going to be at the heart; they are the ones who will refuse the rent collector when he knocks on the door in a rent strike. But our intervention can help guarantee that the women will lead it, instead of being confined to making tea in the back of the hall while men make speeches in front.

6. **WE DEMAND FREE COMMUNITY CONTROLLED NURSERIES AND CHILD CARE.** We are entitled to a social existence without having to take another job out of our homes. Mothers too have a right to work less. Young children as well as women are imprisoned in their homes. But we don't want them to go to a State institution instead. Children, women and men must be able to learn from each other and break the ghetto existence to which they are confined. We will then begin

to destroy the State's authority over our children and our possession of them.

In the same way as children are to be wrested from the State, so old people and the mentally and physically ill must come back to the community's care. We need time and we need money to destroy the prisons in which our children, our grandparents and our sick people are confined.

* * *

The earliest version of these demands was first discussed in one workshop at Manchester and revised there. When the discussion was reported in the full session, an even larger (300 women) second workshop on the demands resulted. In full session again the conference decided that the first day of the next conference should be devoted to the six demands. This spontaneous response came from women who on the whole had no experience in left organizations. Many of them were in the Claimants Union, whose demand for a guaranteed income and wages for housework had already organized women to confront the State. Or they were like the women of the "Tough and Tender Collective" whose response to the pamphlet is described in their booklet, A Plan for Action:²

The group of us writing have read the two pamphlets "Women, the Unions and Work, or what is not to be done" by Selma James and "Women and the Subversion of the Community" by Mariarosa Dalla Costa. For us the pamphlets started huge discussions and meetings and sorted out a lot of our ideas. It was a good opportunity for us to get together more. But still our ideas were too theoretical, too vague and woolly. The idea of this pamphlet is that we are trying to get an overall picture of the situation. Not only the condition of women in our society, but how this system controls all of us and what this means, and how we as women can fight it . . . Our emphasis is on Action and organization. Having understood and agreed with Mariarosa's description of the housewife's fundamental role in capitalist society and taken Selma's point that we don't have to "go to work" to be part of the working class and that Trade Unions are not and never can be the pivotal point of "revolutionary consciousness", we now know what perhaps we have been leaning towards in the past two years; that we can and should be organized in the communities we live in, around the things which oppress us most, financially, emotionally, psychologically.

2. This collective of women no longer exists. Many of the women who were once part of it have joined a mixed group of the left.

Women of the political organizations (CP, IS, IMG) were left behind by a movement which had gone beyond their ideological control. They had expected the women's movement to be subsidiary to the "general struggle," to be confined to "women's problems" such as contraception and abortion and in a purely ideological struggle against sexism. They were the first to ask for further discussion. Soon after Manchester they recovered from their surprise and prepared to do battle.

For the left the issue was singular. It was not any one demand which cut to the quick, but that we should be so presumptuous as to premise demands based on the movement's autonomy from them and from the unions. For if this were permitted, then they were out of a job: there was no need for them as vanguard parties, which represent the "generalization of the struggle" and are the "political" counterpart of what the unions represented to the class "economically." This issue never clearly emerged at the conference. Yet by their presence in every discussion of the demands during the eight months between the conferences, by the literature they wrote for the London conference, by their attempt to isolate the demands from the movement by speaking of them as one individual's, they were able to control or at least sidetrack meetings before and during the conference and by attrition wear down the confident enthusiasm that Manchester had sparked. Such behaviour has always been characteristic of the "vanguard." At London they expected a vote on the demands would be taken which would finally dispose of them. A large part of the literature of the conference must, we think, be read in this light.

Conference Literature

The movement has always refused the initiative of actions offered by the organized left. Where the left dominates is in ideological debate, holding back action by insisting on theoretical discussion and thus preventing an autonomous move forward on a national and co-ordinated level. For that reason conferences like this one are not representative of local groups in Women's Liberation and their autonomous actions. The conference overflowed with publications full of theoretical debate. Access to publication is a power that women's sections of male-dominated groups derive from them. (The question of why women cling to men for power is much wider and has been continually discussed in the movement.) The Maoist women, because they refused to accept the feminist basis of the movement, had been expelled at Skogness (the second national conference) where they had brought men and where they had come in control of the then-existing Women's National Co-ordinating Committee. However, they were present at the London conference with a 50-page document ("A Reply to the Reactionary Selma James") and an open letter which they circulated proclaiming that they were not taking part and that they would not take part until the movement acknowledged the correctness of their political line. They also

presented a resolution in the last session of the conference, but in speaking for it their spokeswoman gave her political identity away; the middle-class women there, she said, were concerned only with their "bloody orgasms." When its failure became obvious, they saved face by withdrawing the resolution.

The penetration of the left has not always been so blatant-- or so inept. Other groups, though giving their first loyalty to male-dominated left organizations and participating in Women's Liberation on carefully defined and independent grounds, espouse the idea of an autonomous women's movement and at conferences or other large meetings act as part of it. Whatever differences they have, inherited from the political line of the male organization, these groups (and we can include the Maoists here) have an essential similarity when it comes to the "woman question." Because their political line is essentially reformist, whatever the bombast of their rhetoric, the left women have found allies among liberal women, whose feminism finds expression in egalitarian sentiments or lobbying in Parliament Square, who have a distaste for revolutionary theory or struggle (but not for its rhetoric apparently), and some of whom consider themselves "apolitical." Although they are integral to Women's Liberation as women from the various male groups are not, together their liberalism forms a crust against the eruption of revolutionary ideas. In the literature of debate and in workshop reports, you could hardly tell one from another in their basic approach. Whether they attacked "Women, the Unions and Work" for its "primary concern with sexism" or for its "primary concern with capitalism" (and they did both), their views on women, on unions and on work were notably alike. Using the topics of their debate against the six demands, we can summarize their positions.

The Demands as Demands

Both the Leicester statement which asserted that demands "distort" and an unsigned Libertarian "Reply to Selma James" which rejected demands because they "restrict thought by tying it down to something too immediate and specific," chose to attack the six demands, which had been brought to the movement for discussion, without mention of the four demands that had been foisted on the movement earlier without any discussion and without any vote by the membership. (The four demands were for: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion on demand.) Or perhaps their sudden opposition to demands as such was a recognition of the newness of the six. In this they differed from the writers in Red Rag who saw the first, second and fifth demands as new, but identified the third, fourth and sixth with the old four demands (as they wondered why the demand for equal education and job opportunities had been left out of the six). Equating three of the six with three of the four was quite wrong, of course, for the scope and content of the demands were different. For example, the demand for equal pay for women bears little resemblance to the demand "equal pay for all." The

latter attacks all disparate rates, for regions, skills and age as well as sex, and in doing so attacks the objectification of human beings which is the heart of capitalist wage relations.³ But paradoxically most of those critics or "repliers" were too busy explicating Lenin to notice a detail of this sort. In the process they demonstrated that they knew nothing of the nature and use of demands, little if anything of actual struggle, and still less about the real conditions of most women. They were joined by a chorus from the left, who had been responsible for the four demands, who called the six demands "divisive" of the women's movement. (One recalls that this was the charge levelled at the whole women's movement--by men--at its beginning.) They were against the six demands. What they were for emerged as they stated their own positions on unions, work and wages.

The Unions

On the subject of trade unions there was almost universal agreement among the repliers. Though not one denies the record of the unions in regard to women especially, they conclude nevertheless that women must join trade unions to "democratize" them and to rid them of "sexism." Instead of seeing unions as a historical creation of the working class co-opted, like the Labour Party, they see the unions as identical with workers--from which one can only infer their low opinion of the working class. For if trade unions are admittedly reformist and if they express the spontaneous aspirations of the class, then the class must be seen as fundamentally reformist. (Cf. Marx's statement that the working class is revolutionary or it is nothing.) For a woman to join a trade union means of course, that she must join the ranks of waged labour, and for most women, at the lowest, most sweated rank. Obviously their opinion of women is even lower than their opinion of the rest of the class. For low as they say the class is in its "consciousness" of its revolutionary tasks, women can only learn and participate in this low consciousness through the trade unions. Indeed they speak frankly of the "backwardness" of housewives. A telling verbal exchange illuminated this attitude in one of the workshops on the six demands. In answer to a left woman who had been describing the backward attitudes of "ordinary housewives," a Black woman asked, "Who the hell is this ordinary woman? And what makes you so special?"

We must interject here that many women who opposed the pamphlet's analysis of unions, however, did so on an entirely different basis. Workers, male and female, continually take action against their unions, but only the ruling class seems to articulate this when they say with increasing frequency: the unions have lost control over their workers. However, those who traditionally attack unions attack from the right. To express the actions of the class by attacking in words what workers attack in action (and also in words if you are there to listen) is new in Britain, frightening--and vital.

3. see page 15.

Work

The only people in Britain who are as worried as the capitalist class about workers' rejection of work are those dominated by the ideology of the organized left. This concern is demonstrated by the writers in Red Rag. Speaking about the absenteeism of women, Sheila Rowbotham wrote, "I don't see how we can stop the Tories /sic!/ cheating us out of equal pay if we never turn up for work." Sue Cowley worries that work might be identified with capitalism (though she shows her opposition to the "work ethic" if not to work). Micheline Victor, in a condescending apology for the Unsupported Mothers for demanding wages for their work, relates their demand to the fact that they "don't have a job" and are forced to "choose between two forms of insecurity" (husband or State). Her assumption, a very privileged one, is that a job equals security (and also, by the way, that men in "private" employment are not also working for the State). Caroli Mullen says that "the minimal pre-requisite for any degree of equality must be economic independence; the fact that a woman's job is in itself not liberating or is even quite awful, does not invalidate that point." The ease with which these women consign other women to double slavery, to "quite awful" jobs, is notable, whatever its rationale. The pamphlet of the IMG women tells us: "THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION IS BASED ON ITS ECONOMIC POWER AS A RESULT OF ITS ROLE IN PRODUCTION" and "A LIVING WAGE TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO SELL THEIR LABOUR /sic!/ WOULD CONTRADICT THE NATURE OF CAPITALISM." (With the last we completely agree, but then we thought contradicting the nature of capitalism was what the class struggle was all about.) Finally the Maoists conclude in their list of charges, "Not only is /Selma James/ anti the unions, she is also anti-work." One can see that these planners of the future society would be hard taskmasters.

Wages

For those who approach the ongoing struggles of the working class in terms of some blueprint for the future socialist society and who define demands under the categories of "transitional" or "ultimate," depending upon how closely they fit the ideal plan, the concept of wages for housework is anathema. Immediately they see visions of a State where housework is paid for, where time-study men follow a woman around her kitchen to calculate on the boiling of an egg; the issue of Shrew from London's Arsenal WL group actu-

3. The revolutionary potential of the demand for equal wages for all was hinted at in the wage discussions broadcast on national television and radio, sparked by the miners' pay claims in January 1974. Workers were asked about differentials of pay in general, about who was a "special case," who was more "important," etc. Many newspapers carried features and editorials on the subject as well. It was manifestly explosive material.

ally says this. They worry that housework wages would be unrealistically high, since the housewife works an 80 to 90-hour work week. To this vision they prefer the reality of unwaged housework, which is not, according to them, institutionalized. Indefatigably planning, they think in terms of "fair wages" and also of differentials, though they want no disparities by sex. This is the epitome of trade union consciousness and what the demand "equal pay for all" was designed to undermine.

Finally and most important of all, they do not see housewife as productive, that is, they do not see housework as work, as part of capitalist production. Housework is "not at the point of production," and therefore, in the capitals of IMG, "A CALL FOR REWARDING THIS WASTEFUL USE OF HUMAN LABOUR IS POSSIBLE ONLY IN THE IDEOLOGY OF PETTY BOURGEOIS SOCIALISM." Their more revolutionary demand (if they made it) would be for the abolition of housework and the institution of public canteens and nurseries. "Backward housewives" are not to be trusted with a wage (or even a demand for one) but capitalism can be trusted to create canteens where we can collectively eat shit and nurseries where Mrs. Thatcher, the Minister of Education, can imprison babies at an earlier age.

The Workshops

The first day of the conference was organized in workshops. Sixteen workshops went on, some throughout the day, some beginning in the afternoon. Reports on them were given in plenary session at the end of the day, and it is from these reports that we have a general view of the workshops. Their division by subject is significant. Two workshops on old campaigns: anti-discrimination and abortion-contraception. Six which focussed on particular topics, interests and actions: sexism in textbooks, a literary anthology, women in media, women's studies, self-help therapy, a "guide for brides." The other eight workshops drew their impetus, openly or implicitly, voluntarily or unintentionally, from Women, the Unions and Work and the six demands. A few were organized to answer the pamphlet, a few to find an alternative revolutionary line. One which tried to ignore it found the discussion "abstract" and had to turn to the concreteness of the pamphlet. No attempt will be made here to describe each workshop, but several will be remarked on for their approach to the basic questions of the conference.

A workshop called "plan for action" discussed women's role in the tenant and rent struggles. And they saw the need for national conferences on particular issues affecting women, and called one on housing for December 9-10.

A workshop organized by the Northeastern Paper (another "Reply") group proposed to work at developing an analysis, to engage in socialist education either in Women's Liberation or "other left groups." Another similar workshop aimed especially at "uneducated women" called itself "women's voice." They wish to start a

magazine written in simple language and to "work around rent struggles and factories."

"Women and the State" workshop was organized on a statement almost identical with the report that came from the workshop. It held as foremost in importance the taking of "social wealth" by squatting and shoplifting, without mediation by unions as in factory struggles, but in direct confrontation with the police and the State. Struggles for wages, this workshop felt, are reformist because to use the medium of money does not undermine the basis of capitalism.

The workshop on "Capitalism and Sexism" found a similar contradiction in the demand of wages for housework. The question was asked, "how can we demand a wage for something we want to get rid of?" Sexism was divorced from women's wagelessness: "wages do not define a relation" (our italics). By this logic, of course, no wage labourer should take wages from capitalists unless it's her intention to remain a wage slave.

Two workshops (Plan for Action and Family Allowance) actually got to work on new campaigns, but the workshop on the six demands and actions flowing from them found itself hampered in following its subject by women from the left who insisted on a theoretical discussion. An attempt to split the large workshop into two groups, each of which could follow its own bent, failed because those who wanted to discuss actions were joined by those who wanted theoretical debate.

The reports from the workshops often seemed a single-voiced statement, too neat to reflect development within a workshop. Indeed some reports were almost identical with the statements which had proposed the workshops.

Thus the plenary session became on the whole a platform where political lines could be pushed--and unprecedentedly dull. But it reached a high point of tension suddenly when the microphone was snatched from Selma, as she spoke in sympathy with a feminist who had called the whole session a "male charade." She asked why we had not heard from the Claimants. After the mike was taken from her by one of the chairwomen of the day, there were shouts of "let her speak!" and a group of women at the side of the hall offered her another microphone. As she spoke she was interrupted once more, this time by a CP woman who grabbed the mike at the front of the hall and delivered a personal attack on her. The explosion had been building for the whole day, and it had historical echoes. No attempt (aside from Skegness) had ever been made before in the movement to prevent any woman from speaking, but the tactic of removing the microphone from a speaker is well known in left circles.

Radical Feminism

At Manchester it had been decided to devote the morning of the second day of the next conference to a discussion of Radical Feminism. Although these workshops were not reported on in plenary session, the general impression was that they were a relief. Many of us thought that these workshops "saved" the conference because here the emphasis was on our individual experiences as women. Some women in one workshop expressed their frustration after two years in the movement, saying, in effect, "we know only what we don't want; we don't want only consciousness-raising groups. We would like to organize on actions with other women, but not if that means, like yesterday, to depart from the reality of our female experience, from what we feel we want in our bodies and minds." The insistence on a feminist view was like coming home.

The Radical Feminists have always rejected male politics explicitly and they have given an analysis of the relations between left women and the movement which, in our view, expresses their dilemma. In Thoughts on Feminism, a series of feminist essays presented at the conference, a woman writes:

The fact that many women come to WL thro the male Left, that is, having been politicised first on issues of concern to men (i.e. class, homosexuality) and because they continue to identify with the Left, has made the Women's Movement, to a large extent, a branch of the male Left. While the men get on with the real revolution (concerning economics), the domestic side of the struggle (abortion, childcare) is left, traditionally, to the women. Progressive men have coopted revolutionary potential.

The left, of course, understands that their male presence is not feasible in WL. Absent physically, they remain directors with their female representatives in the Movement reminding "non-political" sisters of the bigger struggle outside, preventing women from concentrating too much on themselves.

Despite this strong statement characterizing the functions of the left women, in practice the Radical Feminists accommodate themselves to the presence and politics of women whom they charge with being agents of men. There is a logic behind this accommodation. For it was the left women who first split the struggles against capitalism and against sexism. For them there was the class struggle, the "general struggle," on one hand and on the other women's struggle--not so serious or fundamental in nature as the class struggle. With their emphasis on the "general struggle" they demoted women's struggle to a subordinate, supportive role. It was the working class (white, male and over 30) who would make the "real revolution, and class was therefore the more central division of forces than sex. Capitalism was the "main enemy"; sexism was merely an ideology, a superstructure of the system. Many women

rejected this political line; many rejected the "class analysis" on which it was based. Ignoring class and putting their emphasis on sex alone, the Radical Feminists have made an ideology based on anti-sexism. When they fail to defend the movement from attack by left women (as at the plenary the day before--though it was a Radical Feminist who called the plenary a "male charade"), they are expressing a political logic: the split of capitalism and sexism has given them a foundation for their rejection of class politics. And accepting that split, they, like the left, end up characterizing the working class as male.

The Radical Feminists seem not to have a perspective of a mass movement--so far as their document allows us to generalize their attitude:

If we really, sincerely want to change society and be rid of sexism, capitalism in all their subtle and not so subtle forms, we have got to change our living--which doesn't mean just spending hours talking about possession of people/property, free love/sex, etc.--it means withdrawing from our male-oriented lives, living, trusting, working, playing, sexing, loving, hating WITH WOMEN--giving up all heterosexuality--really putting into practice what we've talked about for ages--SISTERHOOD.

Though such a perspective envisages fundamental changes in individual lives, they are no substitute for a political perspective. Nor can they have impact on the development of the movement in its present attempt to relate to other women through action and organization. Where they could be of help to women in individual struggles against men, in schools, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, the Radical Feminists' effect is limited. For their only answer to the problems of the mass of women in their daily struggles is separation. Their advice is to leave, get out of the oppressive situation. Ignoring the clear impossibility for most women of following such advice, failing to see how oppression is in fact the ideology of exploitation (attitudes that express and reinforce capitalist power relations), they leave the mass of women to the tender mercies of the left, the unions, "private" employers and their State, who propose doubling the exploitation of women more generally.

Whatever the virtues of the Radical Feminists in their rejection of the left mode of politics and in their emphasis on women's autonomous struggle, they may well be on the way to making themselves irrelevant by their failure to see and act on the actualities of power relations. One has only to look at another document circulated at the conference to appreciate the contrast between their approach and the actualities of women's lives. This document, a narrative by a woman from the Notting Hill (London) group of her attempt to organize with factory women, entitled Scrooge and Stooge: Company and Union v the Workers of Chesoborough Ponds, gives a picture of real conditions. No single article or document on women's

oppression and exploitation--young women or old, married and single, Black women and white, women with kids or without--has been written with the depth and richness of this document. It has the reality of life seen through a woman's sensibility and understanding of the relationships between life at home and in the factory, between men and women, of their attitudes towards work and the unions and the difficulties of the struggle. It is a very Radical document. It is a very Feminist document.

The Claimants Union

In contrast to other occasions and to the previous conference, in London the voice of the Claimants, particularly of the Unsupported Mothers, was not heard. Women from the CU, which also includes the unemployed, the sick and the aged--all those living on Social Security pittance--had been active participants at Manchester. They had behind them the strength of the organization that they were instrumental in founding, an organization directly confronting the State. A few weeks before the London conference, the CU had had a national conference in Birmingham, whose tone had been depressed. Part of this depression resulted no doubt from the fact that their sisters in Women's Liberation had given not even lip service support to their activities, and no support of substance no links with the struggles of women dependent on the wage given directly by a capitalist or through a man. Indeed quite the reverse since the organized pre-conference discussions for the most part undercut the Unsupported Mothers. The battle about the six demands was particularly hot on the subject of wages for housework; next to the question of trade unions (with which it was linked), this demand infuriated the left-dominated women. But the demand had originated with the women in the Claimants Union, in their handbook for Unsupported Mothers, not as ideology, the coinage of the left, but as political direction for struggle, in the most positive sense a political line. Not only had they demanded wages for themselves--for their work in producing and caring for the labour-fodder of the future--but they called on women who have men supporting them to join them in the demand, since these women too are wageless for the work they do for the State. The left women's antagonism to the demand reflected the policy of their organizations, one of which had been so careless as to let leak its intention to turn the CU into a union of the unemployed, leaving behind the sick, the old and the Unsupported Mothers. This intended manipulation of the Claimants' organization was totally subversive of the Unsupported Mothers, and so it is no accident if their conference was depressed and that the Claimants did not find their voice at the London conference.

It must be left to other articles and documents to place politically the potential and actual importance of an organization, central to which are women, whose struggle against the State is not mediated by trade unions, by individual employers and by individual men. But here we must make it clear that for us there is not a

feminist movement and by its side somehow related some Unsupported Mothers who are poor and to be pitied. The Unsupported Mother as she has organized herself and as she gives leadership to the rest of the class poses for us our future directions.

Claimants were in attendance at the conference. And a workshop on their activities was suggested. But what seems to have happened is that the Claimants dispersed to try to follow their interests in the various workshops debating the six demands. The workshop on Claimants was combined with the workshop on Family Allowance. Their particular and unified voice was thus lost. Ironically, in the heated or bored atmosphere of the plenaries, their presence was graphically represented in the huge feminist paintings by Monica Sjo, a Bristol woman, who is active in the CU; the paintings lined both wall of the auditorium.

Abortion and Birth Control

One campaign which has been active, popular and effective of change concerns the rights to abortion and birth control--of all the campaigns first launched by women in the movement. Not only in Britain, but internationally this is true. At the three international meetings of this conference, women from France, Holland, South Africa, Canada, Spain, Ireland, all emphasized their work on these subjects. The only delegate announced as "official" from the United States was not from Women's Liberation but from WONAAC (Women's Organization for National Action on Abortion and Contraception, a Trotskyist-led organization), and she reported only on WONAAC's activities, especially on the international tribunal which was being organized in New York City. In Britain, the abortion and birth control campaign is the only one flowing from the four demands of 1971 which got off the ground.

Women's need for control over their bodies, over their sexual and reproductive functions, is immediately obvious to all. The demand for this right to individual control supplies an outstanding example of how the personal is political and the political is personal, a basic premise of our movement. But this need and this demand also brought out some of the contradictions that our campaigns encounter.

At the first international meeting the woman from South Africa expressed her fears about the way abortion and sterilization (the ultimate in birth control) are being used in the Black hospitals of South Africa. Later, during the international reports of the plenary session, Bobby Sykes denounced the active genocidal policy of the Australian State against the Aboriginal population, by means of abortion and sterilization--in addition to malnutrition and starvation. So the conference reports immediately exposed the issue of population control as a capitalist device for planning the work force. The danger of capital's plan to co-opt our campaigns for its own purposes was posed by a leaflet circulated by a group of

women from Richmond, London (but unsigned), entitled "Fertility Control--Control by Whom?" By its allusion to Paul Erlich, the leaflet made the connection between both the exploitation of fears of overpopulation and the repressive ecological notion that women are polluting the earth with children, both useful to capital at this historical moment. The reminder of the two sides of the choice, the right TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN, was timely, since some of the campaign literature, in concentrating on abortion and birth control only, has played into the hands of ecologists and others working for the State. (One piece from WONAAC in fact equated choosing with abortion.) By echoing the phrase as it appeared in the six demands, the Richmond women supplied the broader context of the issue necessary for it to be truly woman-liberating, truly revolutionary, and truly non-co-optable at this time.

The International Meetings

The international meetings had a life, a mode and a development almost independent from the conference. Since they were organized separately from the conference organization (by women from Notting Hill), this was inevitable. But even if their integration had been planned, they would have been different because the international women necessarily reflected different conditions of women, different situations and organizations, and different possibilities of struggle. Another distinction was that, after the first, these meetings were not the arenas for battles between feminists and women of left organizations that other meetings of the conference were.

If there was a political division among the international women, it was not like the British split. Some women, in flight from male political domination, were concentrating on "consciousness-raising" as opposed to "political action." This division took various forms. A group in Milan concentrates on a study of sexism and patriarchal institutions and relations. A larger group in France works to link politics and psycho-analysis. The Dutch male-led Dolle Minas were opposed by women who are forming an organization which excludes men and which concentrates on exploring the female experience. Two French women, one a night-cleaner of Algerian parentage, oppose the MLF; the situation in post-1968 France is illuminated perhaps by the fact that they now belong to no women's group. But none of the international women spoke for male organizations of the left. That the emphases of some on "consciousness-raising" keeps them for the moment from active public struggle and cuts them off from the mass of women in their countries may be helpful to the left parties, but it is not their willing intention to help these groups. In the last analysis, this may be the only basis of autonomous female politics--as many of us now politically active can testify, though we must also testify that it is in itself no guarantee.

The large number of women from Italy (Padua, Milan, Ferrara, Venice, Naples and Florence) gave great life and depth to the international meetings. (When even the Guardian recognizes the immanent possibility of insurrection in that country, this fact is hardly surprising.) Most of them were from an autonomous women's organization called Lotta Femminista, and they set a high level for discussion. The woman who reported from Padua began not with the internal affairs and ideas of her group, but with a detailed description of the objective conditions of women in Italy and of their struggles. Against this background full of hard data, she utilized the ideas and campaigns of her organization.

Another woman, from Fascist Spain, where a meeting of more than 20 persons must be registered with the police and where in spite of this a women's movement is beginning, used a like pattern for her report. In passing she remarked that the clandestine CP has had a harmful effect on the women's movement in Spain, by its arousing of guilt feelings in some women about the martyrs of the working class and making them doubt the legitimacy of their own movement. We were moved by the situation she described and at the same time deeply impressed with the calm and firm approach. Her feminism found its solid base, its index to the condition of all women, in the lives of working class and peasant women.

Despite brutal repression, despite being cut off from international currents, the women of Spain begin their movement with class politics and feminism already integrated, because of the experience of that class, which has behind it the revolution of 1936. That experience was dramatized once more as the meeting climaxed in the reading of a letter from Mujeres Libres, an organization of refugee Spanish Anarchist women which has lived for 36 years and maintained a newsletter in three languages for women on three continents, keeping touch and taking care of each other. Their representative at our conference, reluctant to speak to us in English, gave us this letter:

Dear Sisters in Struggle:

I bring to your conference the most hearty greetings in the name of the Federacion "Mujeres Libres" de Espana en Exilio--Spanish Federation of Women for Freedom in Exile.

We hope that through your deliberations you find the right way to fulfil the aim of liberation not only for women, but for all human beings.

In these crucial and critical moments, when humanity suffers the traumatism of political immorality and material ambitions, we must struggle to conquer a society based on human rights under the motto of the mutual respect and solidarity between equals.

On these principles "Mujeres Libres" initiated 36 years ago their struggle in Spain, struggle that to this day we maintain in Spain and in exile.

The world looks to women in revolt!
 We must give the right answer.

From "Mujeres Libres"

The letter provided a high point and all the greater impetus for the next meeting, which was decided upon spontaneously.

The third and last international meeting occurred as the conference ended and it was held not at the hall in Acton, but at the South London Women's Centre. There the international women who remained were even in number with local women, and this fact, along with the more intimate quarters which were not rented for the occasion but belonged to us, created a closeness that the other meetings had lacked. The discussion was fiery with enthusiastic debate over the questions and problems raised by the conference. Every woman spoke and not as "international" or representative of a group but as individual member of an international movement. Even the Anarchist woman found her English tongue and plunged into the discussion. One of the subjects raised was the problem of the left-dominated women and their obstruction of feminist politics, beginning with Spain in the thirties where the Anarchist women had struggled against the stranglehold of the CP. This account gave us a deeper insight into where the two generations of Spanish women were coming from and explained further their political sophistication. Our conclusions opened up a new perspective for all of us. And they will be useful as a conclusion to this report.

Conclusions and Perspectives

The final session of the conference was devoted to the posing of resolutions. By their nature, resolutions are not generally subject to debate. They express an opinion or feeling on a question that affects the general welfare of women that all can agree on. And they rarely entail a commitment to action. Most of the resolutions posed were of this nature. But posing resolutions can be used to push an extraneous political line, and there were a few such instances at the London conference, one of which we have alluded to above. But in general the conference passed all and only those resolutions that spoke to them as women on a general and basic level.

Among them was one of important and immediate concern: that denouncing the British State's plan to eliminate Family Allowance payments. The subject of this particular resolution, the subject of a workshop as well, will also be the subject of actions. Already women have mobilized to fight the cutting off of the only sum of money that goes directly into the housewife's purse, that affects her welfare as well as her children's, that changes the level of power between men and women in their households. We believe that Family Allowance is for a woman a wage, that is, a wage from the State that we all serve. Other women are against wages directly from the State but know it would be suicidal not to oppose the

government's taking this money away from women. It can be expected that many left women, particularly those of the CP, will join the campaign to keep the Family Allowance. It is possible that they may try to narrow or diminish it, try to turn it from a mobilization of women into a charity lobby. For the latent or instinctive feminists among them, to do this will not be intention, but the product of a political perspective infused with a notion of the incapacity of the class, and most especially of women, to fight and win. Only such a notion can explain the attempt to narrow and diminish the demands of the Unsupported Mothers of the Claimants Union and when the attempt failed, to ignore them.⁴

This subject brings us to our conclusion and to the perspectives alluded to above. There is good reason to believe that the London conference will be the last of its kind. Although it was a large organizational success, it appears not to have accomplished much, hamstrung as it was by the organized left. Aside from the international meetings, it showed little immediate development or growth from the coming together of nearly 2000 women-- though that fact in itself was an inspiration to many women. And yet nothing has been quite the same since. Perhaps the conference, by demonstrating the organized power of the male organizations' influence and their animosity to feminist politics, made feminist politics more urgent and even more accessible.

Since there is no way to prevent the left women exercising their male influence in any movement gathering which is not itself an action, what will probably happen within the movement is a crystallization of forces on an issue-oriented rather than a geographical basis. The frustrations over inaction and the desire for action will burst forth, no doubt, in the form of campaigns. One important one will be the ongoing campaign to keep and to extend Family Allowance. Its implications have not yet all been discovered and its relation to fundamental issues of our struggle as women and as class against capital have yet to be posed. As we move on a mass scale these will emerge.

4. The Women's National Family Allowance Campaign had a victory that was in proportion to the forces it gathered. Divisions within the Campaign on the lines suggested by the report prevented our moving beyond a petition campaign. With the exception of a few instances, we were unable to organize other kinds of activities and actions. Nevertheless the Campaign had some impact. When the Select Committee on the Tax-Credit Scheme reported to Parliament in July, 1973 they had revised the plan in accordance with some of the campaign demands. But the Campaign did not kill the tax-credit scheme itself. That scheme is still high on the Tory agenda. The Labour Party has a similar scheme in view (by another name), but has not broached it formally. After an attempt to play mothers off against pensioners in the summer of 1974, the Labour government talks, off and on, about raising family allowance payments.

Only in contrast to the potentials of the situation, of the ingredients present in numbers and ideas, and to the enormity of the tasks ahead do we say the conference accomplished little. In another sense it accomplished a great deal politically, and even its shortcomings must be seen in proportion to the great tasks and issues posed. For what we discussed, directly at times, obliquely at others, were basic questions of our time: how to avoid slavery to capitalist work and yet make a living; how to get control over our bodies and our lives; how to get back the value of our work, past and present, from those who control it; how to make our social relations human instead of objectified; how and why to build a mass movement.

It is no accident that these basic questions underlay our discussions, for in women's lives they define themselves most clearly. It is women, married or unmarried, with jobs outside the home who bear a double burden of work; it is the housewife who by her unwaged labour must question the whole concept and nature of work and her dependence on men as a dependence on capital. Finally women in the persons of the Unsupported Mothers must daily confront the ultimate master, the State, without the mediation of a man, a trade union, or even a boss. For them the power relation is laid bare.

The questions were posed, positions taken, and no resolution arrived at. But it is to the credit of our movement that these questions, destined to be at the heart of every movement and struggle of the working class and of the building of a left in Britain integral to and expressing that class, were posed at the London conference by women.

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