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# WOMEN IN ITALY



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TORINO





THIS IS THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES OF PAMPHLETS THAT EUROPE AMERICA COMMUNICATION SERVICE WILL PUBLISH. FOLLOWING THERE WILL BE A PAMPHLET ON THE ITALIAN WORKING CLASS (DIRECT TESTIMONIES AND INTERVIEWS\*HISTORICAL BACKGROUND\*NEWS ON THE RECENT STRUGGLES FOR THE RENEWAL OF LABOR CONTRACTS)

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# WOMEN AT WORK

In learning about the role of women in the workforce in Italy, we soon discover two sets of overall statistics. One of these describes the large number of women who are unemployed within the female population as a whole. In 1970 those unemployed comprised 80.7% of all women, as compared with 45.4% of men unemployed within the general male population. The second general statistic is the declining employment of women in the workforce as a whole. In five years the number of women employed has decreased from 20 out of every 100 to 18.5 out of every 100. These statistics alone are sufficient to show the subordinate and marginal nature of female labor in Italy today.

But in order to understand better the workings of a mechanism that makes of women a cheap reserve labor force, it is necessary to look at the different branches of industry where women are employed, as well as at those where they are not employed.

## HEAVY INDUSTRY

This is the area in which women are least employed. Here they constitute only 20.4% of the entire labor force. Furthermore, only a fraction of that 20.4% are employed in leading branches like the chemical, electronics and auto industries. (Here, women are excluded because their level of skills is always judged inferior to that of men). It is assumed in these areas that women's labor cost is greater than men's (in the auto industry "absence for reasons of childbirth" accounts for 27% of the whole labor cost). It's also worth observing that women constitute nearly half of the "unskilled labor" category—a category that includes both men and women—but only 11.2% of skilled labor. This means that though women are employed in major industries, they still perform the most menial tasks at the lowest wages.

Women are mainly employed in "feminine work" like the garment, textile, shoe, and tobacco

processing industries. These industries require less skill, but great accuracy and patience. It is no accident that these are the most unstable and fluctuating areas of Italian industry, and women's wages are consequently extremely low there.

In order that an economy based on mass production and geared for export be established, it was necessary for post-war Italian capitalism to introduce new machines, new techniques of production. To do this, it was essential that the costs of capital improvement be reduced to a minimum. Consequently, companies dismissed a large number of workers. They sold the old machines to these workers, who then carried on production at home, while the new machinery was being set up in the factories. In the 1950's at Prato, a famous textile and garment center, the companies closed their shops, and distributed 2.3% of the work to homes around the area. The companies managed thereby to weather what would have been certain economic crisis.

"Home industry" frequently emerges in depressed agricultural areas in conditions of crisis and unemployment. Such areas become sources of cheap labor. This is what happened in the late 1950's in the province of Modena. At that time, around 500 knitting shops were created, and these had an extremely high productive capacity. By 1967 the knitting industry had become the leading Italian exporting sector; its output exceeded even that of the auto industry.

Most of the people who perform such work are women. Their working conditions are unbearable. This is true in terms of hours, wages, and the kinds of machinery with which the women must work. Their hours are extremely long, averaging between 10 and 12 per day exclusive of housework. (In this, the lack of a tight schedule is an obvious disadvantage, since the workers are tempted to cram as much production into the day as possible,



paid as they are by the piece, not by the hour).

Generally the companies determine how much will be paid per item produced. For a certain quantity of stockings, for example, a woman is paid 4.4% of the final sales price.

Such piece work is often performed in deplorable conditions. Many women work in the kitchen, in the basement, or in garages. Children's noise, chill, humidity, all concur to make the job even harder.

Whether it is sold or rented to the women, the machinery they use comes out of their wages. This creates one more incentive for them to step up production. Moreover, this machinery becomes obsolete very quickly.

In all, the disadvantages for the workers are immense. What comparative benefits they might enjoy in the factory are canceled out. Only 2.4% receive insurance. Work-related illness is high, the result of poor working environments, dangerous implements, and a general lack of safety precautions.

In "home industry" there is no contract, so if you're employed there, you're always worried about losing your job. Added to this is the fact that isolated as the women are in the home, no solidarity, no common growth in consciousness, is possible. The possibility of common struggle is very limited. Moreover, working on such an individual level, you don't even know who your real boss is (most women know only the middleman). 1,700,000 women in Italy work under these conditions, while the total number of women in the labor force is 5,210,000. For women employed in "home industry," it's clear that factory work seems to be an enormous improvement, and this helps to break the will of workers to struggle there.

#### AGRICULTURE

Here, female employment has also been declining. Since 1965, 400,000 women have been laid off. Italian agricultural work is still organized for the most part in small family units. In these, woman is first and foremost "wife and mother," and helps her husband "once in a while." Clearly, this may mean only several hours a day, or for short periods of a month or so, during which the woman works 15 hours a day. Since she isn't considered a real worker here, the peasant woman has fewer union benefits than the woman working in the factory does. In the South, where there has been an enormous exodus of male workers towards the industrial centers of the North, the women remain. They work as migrant laborers in the large, single-crop farms, at the low salaries that the male emigrants had refused. The women are employed in the most repetitive tasks—grape picking, harvesting, etc. With all this, the structure of the family is

tighter, and the power of the Church more pervasive, than they are in the cities: these institutions naturally have an enormously oppressive effect on all the social aspects of women's existence.

#### SERVICE WORK

Here the number of women employed is greatest of all. Moreover, there has been a small increase in the percentage of women employed in this branch (6%), though male employment in the service sector has increased by 16%.

No matter what jobs they perform, in this as in all other sectors, women are employed in the most monotonous and subordinate jobs.

Given that many of these jobs involve contact with "the public," women are required to look attractive, which is to say that they are required to be sexual objects. Make-up, dress, hairstyle, all assume an overwhelming importance. Women know that their physical appearance determines whether or not they'll get a job, whether or not they'll advance (from being, say, a secretary in a large typing pool, to being a private secretary). All of this physical adornment means a loss of free time (one must get up very early in the morning in order to prepare oneself); moreover, it makes for a great expense. Sweetness, compliance (whether in her relations with the public or with the boss), a ready smile, are integral parts of a woman's job, as essential as knowing how to type at a certain speed.

#### TEACHING

In Italy, as in the U.S., teaching on a certain level is "women's work." Italian women comprise 62% of all teachers, but they teach mainly in elementary schools (from grades 3 through 5), or in scuole medie (lit.: "middle school," grades 6 through 8). It's clear that teaching children or teenagers constitutes a "mission," one that women are supposed to be able to carry out better than men. But the qualities projected by Italian society onto women, which "fit" them for such work, are not required at higher levels of education, where the higher wages and prestige go to male teachers. University "barons" don't share their power with baronesses; at best, you succeed in becoming the assistant-secretarial-lover of the "baron," as professors are familiarly nicknamed in Italy.

Women are taught that teaching is a good job, since it permits them to care for the children and mind the house. (In Italy, teaching is considered a part-time job). It is said in Italy, as in the



U.S., that since most women teachers are married, they can afford to do part-time work, and they shouldn't fight for higher wages. (It should be said that women teachers have engaged in wage struggles).

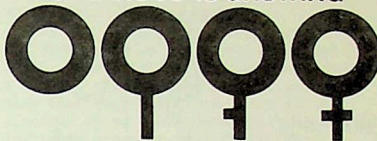
To sum up: woman is by far the most exploited worker in the Italian labor force. She is the first to be fired. If

she manages to keep her job, she always is engaged in the most repetitive, the least creative, the most subordinate tasks, and the ones that are lowest-paid. Everywhere her exploitation as a worker is increased by her oppression as a woman. This means that she must be a sexual object on the job, or that her "feminine patience and precision" make her able to do certain routine chores.

The most important thing about Italian women is that whether they work or not, they are still, first and foremost, housewives. If for the young, single woman, getting a job means an escape from family authority, a way of asserting and defending independence, when she marries this simply becomes another heavy obligation she must perform. Since being a woman is still synonymous with being a housewife, she generally "chooses" to quit her job (obviously she has no real choice).

A quarter of working women are under 25 years of age, and the percentage of women working between 14 and 19 years of age is very high. On the other hand, few women over 50 are employed in the labor market.

## SISTERHOOD IS GROWING



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# ITALY: 2,500,000 abortions; 40,000 women die a year!

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## i gave birth to a child at hospital in 1965

My daughter's name is Silvia.

According to the doctors, the pregnancy and delivery were "normal," and in a certain sense that was true, since the baby was born healthy, and after 5 days I was able to do everything a woman is supposed to do: nurse, change diapers, soothe and cry.

Yes, crying, too: I cried for two months, first of all when my baby was crying, and then at other times, hiding it from my husband since I was ashamed.

Later, I read in a book that this was a "normal" post-partum crisis, that happens to almost every woman after the birth of her first child. But that's the point: I really can't dig this "normality".

I still can't see this crying business as a normal thing, because I have experienced the way one is made to give birth. But let's start from the beginning.

I was very happy to be pregnant, so I prepared for the delivery in the most careful, "modern" way. That is, besides sticking to my doctor's advice, I also attended a course on childbirth at the same hospital where I had the baby.

The class was given by two obstetricians who explained carefully how childbirth takes place, how diapers are washed ("possibly by hand"), and relaxation and

SHUT UP!  
YOU WEREN'T  
YELLING SO LOUD  
WHEN YOU WERE  
MAKING LOVE.



breathing techniques to make the labor more comfortable. They emphasized the point that the word "pain" should never be used, but rather "dilation," which is more correct, and this made me feel very good.

At five in the morning the sac broke, and at six I was already in the hospital. I wasn't at all afraid: I felt prepared.

They gave me injections until six in the evening, but nothing new happened. I was starting to be tired, and a little uneasy, too: they had put me in the labor room, where I could hear other women moaning and screaming. I would have liked to have my husband or at least somebody, near me. The pain started after six in the evening. After a few hours I felt like I was going crazy, nevertheless I didn't scream. The nurses who examined me said I was doing very well. They said they could tell I'd taken the course. I know I wasn't screaming because I didn't have the strength to, but I was well aware by now of the reasons that the other women did, and I understood very clearly that any criticism that was made of them could be made of me, as well. I especially remember a nurse who said in great irritation about a woman whom I could hear screaming in the next room: "She didn't yell like that when she was making.." I later learned that this woman was going through her second Caesarean delivery.

One of the obstetricians who had given the course and who I would have thought would at least look in on me, passed by without even stopping.

The doctor visited me twice and, as he was leaving and I was near collapse, he advised me to...take a nap.

I would rather not recall anything else about those 12 interminable hours: when they brought me to the delivery room I was exhausted. There, the chief obstetrician began yelling that I didn't know how to do anything, that I wasn't pushing in the right way, that I was irresponsible because I wasn't thinking about the baby (at that moment, of course, I wasn't even able to think about myself). At a certain point I heard her tell the other obstetrician to call the (male supervising) doctor.

With what little courage I had left, I managed to ask her what was going on. She yelled at me that it wasn't my business to wonder about that. I ended up by apologizing to her and, perhaps frightened by the possibility that the same doctor who had suggested to me that I take a nap during the labor might intervene now. I gave birth at the very moment he was walking through the door.

Only when I saw my mother waiting outside did I have the courage to ask if the baby was O.K.

## five months have passed...

...since the night I gave birth. I wasn't and am not married, nor have I been "abandoned." Let's just say relations between me and the father of my daughter aren't all that good. I say this in order to explain why I went through pregnancy full of indecision, doubts, second thoughts, suffering, so much so that I might have decided not to carry it through. But I had decided that way three times before, and it had cost me so much anguish and depression that this time I wasn't able to get enough money together to pay "the woman."

I arrived, therefore, at the point of childbirth, exhausted and tense as a bow. After six hours of pains I entered the hospital, it was two in the morning. Immediately I was visited by three or four women who commented in a very vulgar way about



how I was "abandoning" myself on the hospital bed, but because of my three abortions I was afraid to answer them. Then I entered the "labor room" and remained there for four hours in the company of other women who arrived later.

I won't talk about those four hours of absurd, insane pain, of insulting jokes, of voices overshouting mine for the sake of shutting me up. Instead I want to tell about the repeated suggestions, suggestions repeated again and again and again, that I give up my child once it was born. Suggestions made by the obstetrician during the last moments of delivery-suggestions that spurred me on perhaps to push harder, just so I could be removed from those words, which began acting on me like a hypnosis.

Suggestions repeated again by the pediatrician, who came into the recovery room, suggestions made in well-modulated tones, "discreetly." Suggestions made once again by the nun every time she passed my bed, also in a manner "so discreet" that I finally answered her back in an extremely rude fashion.

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# up to now i've tried to hide it,

from others, but also from myself. I've hid it from other people so that I would not be legally and morally persecuted, and I've hid it from myself because I was trying to forget what happened—although it were some thing I've done a long time ago, an act of teenage responsibility.

When I became aware of the fact that my reasons for acting like that didn't stem from my ignorance, irresponsibility, or murderous aberration, but had their roots in a social organization that exploits "my" sex, I also realized the importance of talking about this experience with other people.

But now, even when I think back over those times, I still feel the same stiffening,

almost if I was defending myself physically or making myself less sensitive to the violence I was about to impose on myself.

It was June. I was eighteen years old. I'd just taken my last exam at school. I was alone, like a dog. I knew an address, a doctor... Maybe the right one, after the many that only had given paternalistic speeches about my responsibilities, my faults, in order to mask their fear of compromising their careers by dealing with someone "underage".

But then, to the same question, repeated yet another time, I answered, "I'm 21!" He replied in a tone of annoyance that he didn't do that sort of thing, but that he knew "a woman". I asked for an appointment with her. She exhibited her every skill for

20,000 lire. She took all the instruments from a kitchen drawer: a knitting needle, a probe, a speculum. I didn't see anything else because I didn't want to. I wished I didn't have to listen to her theorizing about the fact that all men were pigs, and selfish, and that on account of her husband, who, like all the others, was 'not able to "be careful", she had to have abortions once every three or four months, she'd already grown used to it, and she was on the job almost all the time. "You won't feel too much pain, since you're only two months pregnant," she said. Although I was almost four months pregnant, I didn't say anything, since I was afraid she'd refuse to do it.

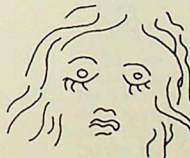
Labor started the morning after, at six.



8 A.M.



NOON



6 P.M.



10 P.M.

At nine I could'nt leave the bed anymore to go to change into the bathroom,because I was leaving a wake of blood on the floor,and my mother could have found out evrything.

Pain,blood,fetus,placenta,dread.

Everything ended at night.The fourth day afterwards I still could'nt get out of bed, and I did'nt know what to say to my parents, since I was supposed to go to school.

I could'nt refuse to beexamined by our family doctor,though I was terrified by the possibility of being discovered.He found nothing wrong except that my blood pressure was down to 80 and I was having a nervous breakdown.

Fortunately for me,if I can use that expression,it all ended there.

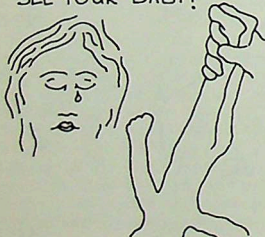
Last year I realized I was pregnant,but I did'nt even consider getting an abortion, and nobody could have convinced me.to do so-not because I'd have felt guilty,or for any other moral reasons,but because of pure and simple terror,trivial fear,which I tried to mask by deciding to try the experience of motherhood.

I lived this experince.It was'nt sweet, tender,beautiful,the way they try to convince us it is.It's painful,dangerous,frustrating, discriminating,meaningless:another violence.



1.A.M.

WHAT,  
DON'T YOU WANT TO  
SEE YOUR BABY?



# ABORTION AS AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

## interview with women workers at Siemens

(A TELEPHONE FACTORY IN MILAN)

- Q: Besides intentional abortion, there is also a kind of miscarriage caused by work that's too heavy, or by speed-ups. It's called "white abortion" (tr. a literal translation from the Italian. There is no English equivalent. Deaths caused by industrial accidents are similarly called "white homicides") Do you know of any women in your factory who have had such abortions?
- A: There is a shop, the Boler shop, where most of the women become sterile or, if they've succeeded in becoming pregnant, they generally have miscarriages. In this shop the women work standing on the machines, with a sort of wheel around their waists. To make the machine run, they have to move their hips continually, for eight hours. In such conditions, the fortunate ones ruin their kidneys, but most lose their babies.
- A(2): There's also the shears shop, where women work with their feet, hands, every part of their bodies. In this shop 99% of the women have abortions, or miscarriages. The company wants women to do this job, since they can work faster than men.
- A(1): The management is responsible for these abortions. The union delegates have asked them several times to move pregnant women, at least temporarily, to easier



jobs. But the Siemens management replied that the women are supposed to be making phones, not babies.

A(2): The bosses should be given the harsh sentences that poor women who can't afford to have a baby now have to serve.

Q: How great would you say the cost is in terms of money, health, and fatigue, that a woman worker has to spend to give birth to a child and rear it?

A(1): A lot, because no one gives her any help. She has to do all the housework. When she goes to work she doesn't know where to leave the baby. In a large factory like ours we don't even have a nursery school. If you're lucky you can find a place at Onmi, but you're not sure you're putting your child in the best of hands.

A(2): Many women have to leave their babies with their parents, with neighbors, or with women who charge money for child care. These women charge from 40.000 to 80.000 lire a month (between \$66 and \$140) which is very expensive for a working-class family income.

A(1): At Siemens there are more than two-hundred unwed mothers. Most of them are women from the South who were thrown out of the house when they became pregnant. Many of them probably didn't want the baby. If it had been possible they would have gotten an abortion. But the social workers encouraged them to keep their babies. Many gave away their children immediately after giving birth: the others go crazy trying to raise them on their own salaries.

Q: Is the pill known? Is it used?

A(2): There are married and unmarried women who take the pill, but they're ashamed to talk about it. The factory physician discourages us from using it, because he says it's unhealthy.

A(1): Some women, especially the married ones, don't have complete confidence in the pill. So what they do is take the pill, but at the same time have coitus interruptus. Others are afraid of the unknown side effects of the pill.

A(2): I myself know of a sort of vaginal suppository that you put in before sexual intercourse, but it doesn't seem to be 100% sure. It's bad that we never talk about these things. There's no one to explain, to tell us how we can use birth control.

Q: Have you heard about legal projects to legalize abortion?

A(1): We've heard vague things about that, but we have the impression that if they are going to legalize abortion they'll do it only when you're sick, so it would be very ineffective. In society as it exists at present it's a tragedy for a worker to have children. We can't afford to have all the children we would like to have. Often one more child brings unbearable economic problems to an income that's already collapsing.

A(2): We should abolish all laws against abortion, because whoever gets one certainly isn't doing it for fun. We should be free to have children when we want and when we can afford them. We should say to those gentlemen who are responsible for lovely laws like the ones that exist at present: "You have no right to punish. You have no idea what it means to live under the conditions we do. Your wives can get abortions in private clinics, and they can get all the medical care they want to, because they have money."

Q: What would you propose?

A(2): First of all they should have publicity about birth control. Instead of advertising products on TV, they should advertise the pill. They teach us how to work, how to produce. They should also teach us these things.

A(1): We should have gynecologists and social workers in the factories to help with these problems. Abortion should be legal and on demand in all cases. No punishments. The bosses should be punished, because it's they who are making us do difficult and dangerous work, and they give us no social services.

A(2): Men should also be instructed about contraception.

A(1): We should make very clear that abortions have to be performed in hospitals and clinics, in the best possible way. They should be paid for through medical aid, so that an end would be put to all the people who are now making profits off women's lives.

A(1): The whole society has to care for children. Bosses should be forced to pay child care for the children of their workers. That's the only way to end "white abortions" and their tragic consequences.

# esteemed and gracious sirs:

You are doing a good deed in fighting against the causes for our fears, it's something done from the very start especially for women. Because my own fear was so great, I too did it once, since by a misfortune my husband earned a very small salary, which wasn't enough to keep the family going.

So the strength and the idea came to me to do it--go to that woman...She put in the plunger and pierced my uterus with the knitting needle.

I came back home on my bicycle, but after three hours I hemorrhaged everything out, I saw my menstruation come out and felt my uterus contract and I had terrible pains in my stomach and I was very frightened because I didn't know what was happening.

My fever went up to 40° C., I couldn't stand it anymore.

At two in the morning my husband brought me to the hospital and there they asked me so many things, but they already knew what it was all about. When the doctors came around at 9 I still had a very high fever and they scraped me, then they disinfected me inside with alcohol that burned so much I couldn't stand it.

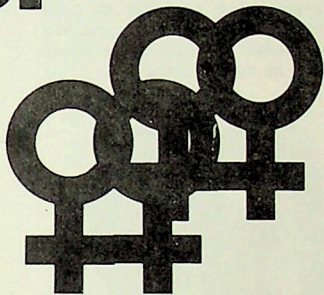
I was in for three days, and the thing ended there, but I won't do it again because you face death and it happens because you don't have enough money to take care of your affairs.

Very truly yours...

[Tr. note: This letter was originally sent to the editors of a pamphlet containing personal testimonies. Written by a very poor, workingclass woman, its formality is not ironic. The booklet's editors were women who had publicly advertised for testimonies about personal experience of abortion and childbirth. To the writer of this particular letter it must have seemed that people in a position of authority to advertise publicly an investigation into crimes committed against women, must have been upperclass men. Hence the opening, "Cari gentilissimi signori, "Dear gracious sirs.]



# A WOMAN FROM THE SOUTH TALKS ABOUT HER LIFE.



Let's talk about your relationship  
with your mother.

I remember my mother giving birth to her sixth child. She had all her babies at home, and the day after, she generally got up and did the housework as usual. That day I wanted to go in and help her, but my father stopped me. The baby died, which put my mother into a terrible state of shock, because the baby was a boy, and my father had blamed her for years for not having any boys. Actually I think that my father behaved like a pig: sometimes my mother unbosomed herself to me and I could tell that when they made love he thought only of his own enjoyment and cared nothing about her. I think her whole life was disillusionment. For example she would have liked to study, but when she was young this was very uncommon in the South. Only very rich girls, or "easy lays" went to school. I myself am an exception: all my classmates are higher on the social ladder than me. So my mother projected all her intellectual ambitions on me.

My relations with her went through different stages. When I was a teenager she was always blaming me because I was 'nt pretty I was 'nt able to do housework, I had pimples too... She was saying that only a fool would have marry me. Naturally, I developed a lot of complexes from her criticism. Later on we became closer. But while she could be sincere with me, I could 'nt do the same with her. See, in the South, if you are a "Signorina", (young unmarried woman) you are supposed to know enough about sex to listen to married women, talk about their experiences, but you are not supposed to speak about your own. She wanted me to study, but at the same time she wanted me to fit her ideal of virtuous woman.

So I could 'nt tell her the first time I made love; it would have been to hard to for her to handle. Not the thing itself, but the fact that I told her. She figured out that my sister was making love with her boyfriend but she never had to face the reality,

# WOMEN BECOME A PART OF THE WORK FORCE...

In Italy, as in the United States, one of the major tasks to be undertaken by a feminist movement is the discovery of our own history. As history is generally taught us in school, it falsely implies that we played no role. It is extremely difficult to search out the organizations and struggles in which women took positions of leadership. This isn't only because of the sexism of history-writing, but also because the history we are taught is nearly exclusively ruling-class history. As Brecht remarked, the names of the cooks who prepared Alexander's victory dinner are recorded in no book, and neither are those of the thousands of slaves who built the pyramids. As for more recent Italian history, we learn that Garibaldi was "the hero of two worlds," "the condottiere who freed the South." But we never learn that it was in his name that the Sicilian peasants who had begun occupying the land were shot, tortured, and jailed. Those peasants were the same people who, crying "Land and freedom!" rebelled against the Bourbons and prepared the way for Garibaldi and his forces to conquer Sicily and "liberate" it.

Our first obligation, then, is to forget the lies taught us in school, and find those few books that discuss real history—the history of the working class. But even in those books where proletarian struggles are discussed, women are rarely mentioned. No wonder: we realize that the Left never recognized the peculiar nature of the so-called "woman question." At best, they recognized that women have problems "as workers," and as a solution they offered the dictum that women should "enter into relations of production." Perhaps such books make a few points about the real history of women in Italy, as they do about the general political and historical framework of proletarian struggles, and these we can use for our own ends. But finally we must be the ones to forge the tools of our liberation.

## WOMEN BECOME A PART OF THE WORK FORCE...



The dawn of its unification as a nation (1861) saw Italy's economic development lagging far behind that of the U.S. and other European countries—England, France, Germany. The persistence of patriarchal social relations, particularly within the family, is in good part due to Italy's slowness to move from an agricultural and craft-based economy to an industrial one, and to the fact that industrialization happened only in the North. At the end of the nineteenth century, Italian women entered the factories, providing a cheap labor force for the performance of repetitive and monotonous jobs, just as they had in other European countries and in the States.

Women in industry, moreover, were concentrated in particular trades like garment and textile work, and they were generally excluded from heavy industry (steel, etc.) In this, they were evidently divided from male workers. Since the more active socialist and anarchist cadres were among workers in heavy industry, the division between men and women was certainly responsible for the minor role played by women in the early socialist movement.

In agriculture, too, women were divided from men by the decline of the small property and the concomitant rationalisation of large landed estates, which employed day-laborers. Women either stayed at home while men went to work, or they were themselves employed only in "feminine" branches of agricultural labor.

The pervasive influence of Catholic ideology also prevented women from developing the consciousness with which they might have begun pushing for changes in their social condition. Such an ideology chained women to the roles of mother and wife, and held that any attempt at liberation was a subversion of "nature's decree."

Despite their meager role in the organized workers' movement, women workers led several strikes and staged rebellions at the end of the 19th century against their oppression. For example, they took active part in the large socialist rebellion that occurred in Sicily in 1894, which involved both peasants in the country and intellectuals in the cities. Again, at Piana de'Greci, where there was a very high level of struggle, women created an autonomous organization. Still another important movement arose among women working as day-laborers in the rice fields. Their songs are still popular today, and show a high level of political consciousness.

Finally, in many places and more generally, struggles proceeded among day-laborers in the fields and among women in textile work, against high food prices, for higher wages, and for longer hours.

Throughout the 19th century, feminism in Italy was restricted to a very narrow elite: it was debated, for example, in the cultural clubs and circles of the upper bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. It did not spread to the masses of women. In the U.S. and in England, the rise of feminism roughly coincided with women's entry into the workforce. But in Italy one finds a working-class movement and feminist ideas developing quite exclusive of one another.

The Socialist Party envisaged a purely economic solution to women's problems. Only a few isolated militants like Emilia Mariani and Anna Maria Mozzoni (the translator of John Stuart Mill's On The Subjection of Women) pointed out that women's oppression wasn't just a matter of unemployment and low wages, but concerned women's larger social roles and condition. However, the majority of the Party saw women's liberation as a "humanitarian" goal, which they tried to fit to the Party's electoral politicking. They had little or no understanding of the enormous untapped energies a women's movement might have released. Still less did they comprehend the revolutionary potential of such a movement.

Such blindness did little to heal over the rift between the great masses of women workers and an Italian bourgeois feminist movement that began at the beginning of the 20th century, much as similar movements were beginning to do in England and the U.S. This movement dealt with the issues of women's suffrage and general rights. In 1908 the first Congress of Italian Women took place in Rome.

**& fight  
AGAINST THEIR  
EXPLOITATION.**



Though it was attended by the Queen, it dealt seriously with questions of marriage and labor legislation, equal pay for equal work, suffrage, and other issues. Still another organization, the National Committee for Woman Suffrage, might be seen as being somewhat more radical than the Congress: it saw in the female proletariat and the working class as a whole the major instruments for women's liberation.

Indeed, during and immediately following World War I, the female proletariat demonstrated great militancy. Women led mass strikes against the war, like the one in Turin on March 18, 1917, in which 9,000 women workers participated. Women also acted in the forefront of riots like the Turin bread riot, August 22-26, 1917, in which the working class showed great opposition to "the bosses' war." "A swarm of women," writes one historian, "emerged from the gates of buildings, broke fences, and stood in the paths of the tanks that were sent by the government against the rioters. The tanks stopped for a while. But orders were that they should proceed by any means necessary, even if this meant firing the machine guns, and so they started rolling again. At this point the women rushed, unarmed, against the tanks; they climbed on the heavy wheels; they reached for the machine guns, begging the soldiers to throw away their weapons. Their faces streaming with sweat and tears, the soldiers refrained from shooting. The tanks moved on slowly, but the women wouldn't descend from them. So they had to stop."

Immediately after the war, there were strikes against low wages and long hours. Those who were most active were textile, tobacco and rice workers. Thus, on the one hand, the importance of women's issues was urgently posed by the strikes of the female proletariat, and on the other, by bourgeois feminist propaganda.

But just as feminist consciousness seemed to be awakening, Fascism arose. Within the general abolition of workers' rights and the repression of workers' organizations (which survived as underground organizations for over twenty years), women workers were even more exploited than they had been before. Their wages were decreased to 50% of men's wages (which in turn were reduced, too). Their daily working hours were increased from 8 to over 11 per day.

A "protective law" instituted in 1934 for field workers, for example, stipulates that "hours of work per day can't exceed 10 for boys and 11 for women under 16 years of age.

# WOMEN'S CONDITION UNDER FASCISM...

Fascism made the oppression of women a principled part of its ideology. It dictated that woman's place was in the home, and that her true destiny was giving birth to children. (The statutes of the National Fascist Party explicitly exclude women from the Party's political work). Less airy and romantic than the notion that woman was "the angel in the house," was Mussolini's message to Italian women, best summed up as a dictate to "make children, lots of them, for numbers equal power." The real message, of course, was that women should increase the armed forces in order to create two, three, many Ethiopias: more fodder for Italian imperialism.

A children-producing machine needs little education, nor is it meant to be economically independent. Laws narrowly limited the possibilities for women's obtaining an education: they had to pay double taxes for attending high school and university. Those few who could afford an education could not teach subjects like history and philosophy, since women weren't supposed to understand such issues or deal with the concepts they entailed. At best they could teach subjects like Home Economics, a course introduced into the Italian school system under Fascism. Here, girls learned how to be good homemakers. Teachers measured girls' hemlines, because "modesty" and "shame" were laudable traits in good Fascist women.



Fascism, moreover, created its own ghettos for women: organizations like "Fascist Women," "Fascist Women Farmers," "Fascist Women Youth," were created to control women and make them docile supporters of the regime.

In 1925 Mussolini conferred upon Italian women the right to vote, saying, "Italian women deserve the right to vote, because they haven't fought to obtain it." However, only women above a certain income level and with a high level of education could exercise the right to vote. Moreover, even those women didn't have the opportunity to exercise their privilege, for shortly after 1925 all political rights were revoked.

According to Matilde, a woman who was born under Fascism and who joined the Resistance in 1943, "We women had the feeling that we were members of an inferior race—the race of women." In creating the conditions in which such an impression was nurtured, Fascism discovered in Catholicism the ideological basis and main support for its sexism. In "Quadragesimo Anno," Pope Pius XI stresses that "women's work is at home or wherever she goes to carry out her responsibilities as a good housekeeper and mother." In 1929, in "Divini Illius Magistri," he conjures up an "ideology of those who would refute the doctrine of Original Sin to convert legitimate human cohabitation into promiscuity and leveling equality [between the sexes]." To oppose this "ideology," Pius XI proposed separate and differential education for boys and girls, in order that schools carry on "the necessary distinction and consequent separation [of the sexes]."

Thus Fascism and Catholicism substantially agreed on the matter of how to treat women.

## ...AND THEIR REBELLION!

Against this reactionary scourge, the female proletariat hit back with its major tool: the strike. Only one of many examples was the big strike of 180,000 rice weeders in 1931. They

were organized by the General Italian Workers' Confederation, an underground organization. Women struck against the attempt to decrease their wages by 35%. They leafleted in the fields and on the farms, and they sold their newspaper, "La Risaia," to let the other workers know what was going on. At the same time as such strikes were happening, other strata of women were becoming aware of the nature of Fascism, and were developing their own means of resistance. These were mainly women like Matilde—intellectuals, students. The springboard of their rebellion was the sexist discrimination they encountered in school, as in Fascist society generally. They were deeply aware of the fact that they lived in a society where the only recognized actors were male heroes. Militarism and male heroism (war and the glorification of "the race") were values with which women could not agree.

The women's defense groups, formed after September 8, 1943 (collapse of the Italian Fascist regime) represented an attempt to organize the various levels of female resistance into a common struggle against Hitler's Fascism. They fought for two years in connection with the CLN (National Liberation Committee). The following is the story of the women's defense groups, as told by Bianca, a famous radical lawyer and former Communist Party member.

At the end of 1943, when the Resistance movement had just arisen, the Communist Party ordered its local branches to form mass women's organizations. Their task would be to organize support for the partisans and to lead women in opposition to Fascism. Women were particularly exploited during the war, because they had to support the full burden of the family and a full-time job. Where war had further diminished the already low incomes of the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, women at once performed men's work for lower wages, and assumed responsibility for daily food rationing, for bearing the brunt of scarce housing, wood, and coal.

The work of the defense groups developed in three directions:

- 1) Support work: women collected food for comrades in jail, and gave all sorts of material support to partisans working in the cities.

2) Community organizing: they engaged in propaganda work among housewives, encouraging them to struggle against food scarcity, and even to attack and rob Fascist coal trucks, then to redistribute the coal among women who needed it.

3) Factory organizing: they joined the Underground Struggle Committees. Obtaining a woman representative in each factory, they struggled to get equal wages (the first issue of the defense groups' paper, had an article entitled, "Equal Pay For Equal Work.") They also engaged in strike support work.

The groups were composed of women from every antifascist organization or party, and they had representatives on the steering committees. But in reality most of the work was done by the Communist cadres. The groups were very successful in all their tasks and in providing an outlet for the feelings of antifascist rage and rebellion among the masses of the people. When two young working women were raped by Fascist soldiers, they groups succeeded in leading a mass strike of all the factories: they stopped only when they were told that the rapists would be punished. In Turin they organized a large demonstration for the funerals of two young group comrades, Vera and Libera Arduino, murdered by Fascists. Hundreds of comrades occupied the cemetery, bringing red cloves (an old socialist symbol). Four hundred were arrested, but they were soon released because of the menace of a general strike.

Very important was their action immediately before the general insurrection. They called for a general strike of public transportation workers and mail officials (all of whom were women). The strike was carried out and supported by all the women.

Since most of the men were in the mountains fighting in the Resistance, or were working in the factories, women had the important role of carrying on political propaganda and agitation. They gave public speeches outside or even inside the factories. During the whole time, they wrote and distributed an underground paper, "Noi Donne," that was later to become the official organ of the Italian Women's Union.

Bianca's account reveals some deficiencies of the groups, deficiencies later to be reflected in the Italian Women's Union. For one thing, a total dependency on the Communist Party led to the refusal to deal with all aspects of women's oppression. Such a refusal resulted from the lack of a clear class analysis within which the condition of women could in turn be considered. Then, too, the groups' dependency on the C.P. led them to follow unquestioningly the Party's United Front line in creating a common organization with all antifascist forces, including the Catholics, who were and still are the main enemies of women's liberation.

# ITALIAN WOMEN'S UNION

UDI (Unione delle Donne Italiane), the Italian Women Union, was founded in the fall of 1945, at the same Congress where the Groups were dissolved

On this occasion a debate developed. One group argued for the preservation of the old structure of the women's defense groups, in order to underscore the heritage of resistance struggles. Another, which was composed of former Groups leaders, was closer to the Communist Party, and it argued for a new structure that would project the CP politics of cooperation with Catholicism. The Catholic faction, tied with the Christian Democrats and the Vatican, saw in everything that menaced the traditional family structure, a threat to the power of these conservative institutions. It withdrew from UDI, which thereupon assumed the character of the left's feminist arm.

Whereas the groups had engaged in political activity in the factory, in the community, and among the peasantry, UDI strictly turned its back on the factory. In its eyes, working-class issues, in the cases of both men and women, were the exclusive province of the unions.



As for the unions, they seemed at first to understand that women's issues were significant enough to create (In Turin, for example) an internal organism exclusively devoted to the problems of women workers. This formation, however, died almost as soon as it was born, in 1948.

When the Groups were still active, an agreement was made whereby every internal Commission-shop stewards organizations inside the factories, which took the place of the agitational committees—had to include at least one woman representative. The collapse of the intra-union groupings on women workers, together with UDI's abandonment of the factory as an organizing arena, meant the end of that agreement.

Bianca's remarks clearly show the degree of militancy demonstrated by women workers at the time UDI was founded. Take, for example, a demonstration of women workers to demand equal hiring practices, a demonstration called in Turin by the Women's Commission of the Bureau of Labor. This demonstration received a terrific response from the masses of women workers, and a militant march broke into the offices of the Owners' Association. The demonstration devastated the offices, and finally threatened the Association's director physically, thereby obtaining the companies' agreement of all demands.

Why did the unions ignore such militancy? Because the union represented the interests of a traditional base—a skilled, Northern, male workforce. For this reason, when it was confronted in 1948 by company attempts to wipe out jobs, the union chose to defend the jobs of the men at the expense of these women. (Such an act exhibited a gross misunderstanding of the problems of unemployment in the South.)

The position of the union was closely linked to a prejudice widespread within the bureaucracy, according to which women are hard to organize. (Carolina observes that this is equivalent to saying that women are stupid, a judgment that blatantly testifies to the fact that the union hasn't ever thought of analysing the situation of women workers.)

It is necessary to understand the overwhelming obstacles faced by the working woman if she wishes to participate in the life of the union.

Bianca recounts the allucinatory existence of a postwar union organizer. She was the mother of four children, all of whom were under fourteen years of age. The youngest child was two, and she had therefore to take him to the factory with her, where she placed him in a daycare center. Every morning she woke up at four in order to rouse her son and take him with her at work. To wake the child up she reached the point to hide under the bed, twittering, "Look, there's a little bird waiting for you!". Then she woke the others up, prepared breakfast for everyone, and only after this did she go to the factory. After eight hours of job, she went to the union offices where he stayed for at least two hours. After arriving home she would prepare dinner and stay up till eleven to finish what she had to do around the house. On Sundays she did the laundry. As a former woman leader in the Party remarked, "We conquered the right to work at three jobs!". The very sexism of the union leadership in political things was bolstered by the physical exhaustion of its women workers.

The result of UDI's abandonment of the factories and the union's neglect of the problems of women workers, was the official left subsuming all of the problems women faced within those of the housewife.

UDI directed his work exclusively towards the community; its demands were for daycare, maternity leave, and in rare instances for the reduction of some symbolic price, like the price of milk.

Though UDI had office in many provinces, these were meetings places by and large. And even UDI's formal demands received no mass impetus or support. Carolina, a member of UDI for several years, explained the reason for this. The official left considered UDI a women's auxiliary. To put it briefly, if you had the time for political activity, you joined the Party or the union; if not, you stayed at UDI. Real activity within UDI was therefore impossible.

The absence of real activity within UDI had two results. On the one hand its work was largely auxiliary work supportive of the actions in which the union was engaged. On the other, UDI simply stagnated politically and its leadership, consisting of former Women's Defense Groups militants, grew older while new forms of leadership failed to develop.

The fact that UDI had no mass base meant that it could undergo no autonomous ideological development in relation to the Communist Communist Party. At the same time, the CP tended to leave UDI to the fate of being a "dead branch". One testimony to the Party's lack of concern with UDI is that it provided little financial support for it. Thus one observes today that "We Women", UDI's official periodical, continues to be a vivid expression of the Party budget and politics even after 1969, when the CP cut UDI out of the Party budget and forced the organization to become financially self-sufficient.

UDI's continuing dependency on the CP is reflected in its increasing refusal to struggle against the Christian concept of the family. "We Women" is not engaging in the proabortion struggle, which ironically is being carried forward even by bourgeois women's groups. UDI has also accepted the modifications the CP, in its eagerness to make compromise with the Christian Democrats, is trying to introduce in the divorce law.

The rule of the day for UDI has always been the eighty-year-old, superannuated theme of "female emancipation". This in fact underscores all the old prejudices against women that are widespread throughout the official left. UDI's major goal is "parity". But while in theory it stipulates full employment for women as the final solution of the "Woman Question", in reality its exclusive emphasis is on woman's role as housewife, and thus it refuses to deal the need to consider the condition of women who actually are working, saying that this is the province of the unions.

In every way, then, UDI failed to grasp the essential and elementary fact, one that Engels described clearly and unambiguously: the revolutionary significance of woman's entry into relations of production is in their capacity to be organized against the nuclear family. Instead, UDI has opted for maintaining the greatest reverence and support for the traditional family and all its ills.

# WOMEN AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Immediately after the war, the question of women's role in the political life of the Party was debated inside the C.P. After all, the Party had demanded of its female members that they share the same risks and responsibilities during the war that men had shared, and its vision after the war was that old values and habits of life would be overturned. It is little wonder that women within the Party demanded more influence. Bianca recalls that occasionally women would call meetings to deal with the problem of the inferior roles they played inside the Party, of their hesitancy about talking in the presence of men, and so on. But she also recalls that among the rank-and-file women, there was a blurred perspective, which turned the meetings into mere gripe sessions. Even the most careful analysis of divisions of work within the Party would end with the conclusion: "Comrades [male] must help us." At this point, of course, the male comrades adopted the tactic of promising to do their best. The women's mistake was in not understanding that in order to achieve equality within the Party, it would be necessary to reject the role of housewife within the home. That is to say, they refused to examine the whole condition of women within the society as well as within the Party.

Moreover, a tactic the C.P. used to overcome controversy and criticism was accusing recalcitrant dissenters of being provocateurs. A women's caucus would have run the risk of such a charge, and the women within it would have been expelled.

The Party gave its official answer to the question of women at the first meeting to take place after the Liberation in December, 1945.



Rita Montagnana, who had been a leader ever since the Party's underground existence (and a woman who felt she had no specific "female" problems), made the proposal that there be a cell (the basic Party unit) specifically for female Party members. The reasons for this seem to have been serious: if women felt intimidated by men, they would probably carry on discussion best by themselves. But on the other hand, the women's cell could easily become a ghetto where discussions didn't really happen, either because the women would have little time for participating in politics, or because they would end up recapitulating the discussions already elaborated and concluded within the cells of the male comrades. They would then mull over the usual problems —daycare, maternity, and so on, problems already settled within the Italian Women's Union, UDI.

For this reason, one part of the female membership of the Party opposed this proposal (Bianca was one of these). And in fact, when the proposal was passed, its outcome was that any real participation by women in the Party came to an end.

At present, women are only one-third of the membership of the party (1,500,000). This percentage is still smaller when one considers the actual part women take in the Party's political activities. For example, only 4% of women as against 15% of male Party members attended the discussions that preceded the last National Congress.

Who are the women in the C.P.? Outside the Party it is commonly believed that women in the Party are the wives of the Party's members [sic]. But on the contrary, inside the Party, people often joke that if the wives of all the [obviously male] members joined the Party, its numbers would double. We can say with

confidence that the reason the spouses of the male Party members don't join the Party is that they see in the Party's program no serious effort to change the condition of women.

At the same time, the influence of the Church is a potent force in keeping women out of the Party. Ten years ago, under Pope Giovanni the 23rd, there was a sudden increase in popular votes for the C.P. No wonder: Pope Giovanni initiated better relations between the Church and the Party. He received Kruschew's son-in-law, Adzjubei, at the Vatican. Many women felt freer to vote for the Party; for the Church abandoned a past practise of threatening to excommunicate persistent adherents of the Party.

At present it's clear that the female membership of the Party is composed of workers, peasants or ex-partisans who have themselves been deeply involved in political struggle, and who don't care at all about the opinions of their husbands. Since the role of even these women is a very limited one, it is little wonder that women constitute a very meager presence within the Party leadership. Women in leadership positions are generally in their forties. They often are people who achieved positions of power after the war of resistance against Fascism, and who "denied themselves as women" in order to mount to such positions. Though the presence of women in the ranks of leadership is often pointed to as proof of the fact that the Party "cares about women," it is not really very significant. For one thing the achievement of leadership implies that these women have denied their connection with women whose condition is different from theirs. And the fact that they are in their forties is another obstacle to community with younger women in the Party, who generally do the office shitwork. For these younger women, joining the Party means accepting a tight discipline without having the compensation of any creative work, or of dealing with the sexism of their male comrades.

The general political result of the Party's approach to women's problems is that housewives are divided from workers. As Carolina says, Marxists have always been concerned about the production of commodities under capitalism, but never about the production of the workforce. But housewives obviously produce and reproduce the workforce, even though they are not seen in this way. UDI makes reforms that deal with women's problems in the home; it tells them that they can free themselves only by entering production. But it fails to see they are already in production. At the same time, unions deal with workers' problems, and these alone. Thus no connection is made between housework and factory work, even though many women bear the full burden of both jobs, and are, so to speak, the "missing link" that intimately connects both arenas.

# a few notes about the italian women's movement today

The first Italian feminist groups arose at the end of 1969. Their earlier origins were in the student movement, which in Italy as elsewhere had blossomed around 1967-68. Women who participated in the New Left student organizations had expected to overcome the inferior role to which family and school had consigned them. In this they were completely frustrated. They achieved only a questionable sexual freedom--questionable because through it "good girls" who made love only once in a while with their future husbands became groupies. Thus, on the one hand women lost the benefits of a former role, while on the other they were shunted aside at meetings, in their classes, where they lost none of their accustomed submissiveness and timidity.

The Communist Party had at least acknowledged the existence of women's problems (see section on C.P.) even if they did so in order to exploit the issues for its own electoral political campaigns. The extraparliamentary (New Left) groups\* denied the very existence of these problems, as they did anything that didn't fit preconceived pseudo- or vulgar Marxist categories.

As a result of their experience in the Extraparliamentary left, the feminist groups that arose in '69 were still influenced by the peculiar dogmatism that marks the Italian New Left as a whole. They keenly felt the criticisms of the male comrades--for example, the criticism commonly made, that feminism is a bourgeois movement that divides the class struggle. They were stung to the quick by the statement of the men that proletarian women were the 'most oppressed', a statement that ignored the manifold cultural and psycho-sexual bases of women's oppression and stressed instead only material deprivation. Since women in the extraparliamentary groups were mainly middle class, they finally found it very difficult to identify with a theory that called for solidarity with a class to which they hadn't been born and with which they weren't familiar.



This period of crisis, one that was experienced by almost all the groups, was weathered in consciousness raising sessions. Here women learned to connect cultural, religious, and psycho-sexual oppression with the economic analysis they began developing on their own. This meant that they didn't reject the notion that workingclass women were oppressed in more ways than middle class women were; it meant that they began to find themselves capable of defining the statement in richer and more precise ways, and that thereby they discovered bases of unity with proletarian women, even as they understood the ways in which they were divided from their workingclass sisters.

Even while these developments were taking place, the social basis of the groups was widening. Not only did more students and teachers join the groups, but also housewives, secretaries, clerical workers, cashiers. The result of this was that some groups began giving the roles of white-collar women workers and housewives a central place in their analyses. Clerical workers can be seen as part of a "new working class". Even though they have advanced vocational degrees, they have to perform repetitive and routine tasks in typing pools or behind desks or in large department stores. Their distinction from women who work in factories is that formally they have more education and their wages are sometimes - though certainly not always - slightly higher. Their numbers are slowly increasing: within a workforce where women's employment is generally declining, the service sector is the only branch where women are not being pushed out. That women are increasingly employed as service workers also owes to the fact that automation is creating unemployment for everyone = both men and women - in the factories.

On the other hand, as Maria Rosa Dalla Costa indicated in "Women and the Subversion of the Community" (printed in RADICAL AMERICA, Vol. 6, No.1), housewives play the role of producing living labor and performing crucial social services - cooking, cleaning, and so on. Such new analyses have been helpful in determining the largest scope of women's potential political struggle.

In Italy as in America, the issue of internal democracy has been a major concern within the groups. Class and age differences among women have raised problems of creating organizations in which each woman might teach and learn something from every other. Much criticism was brought to bear on the elitism of the Extraparliamentary groups, and the way false leadership was used to intimidate people. On the basis of this criticism, the feminist groups developed with little formal structure. Some groups decided that if disagreements developed on particular issues rather than on basic principles, those comrades who wanted to engage in the enterprise would do so, and the others would assume no responsibility for it. Such a decision was made because it seemed silly to have major disagreements or splits over tactical issues, particularly when much theory and many major tasks still remained to be clarified.

There were of course other groups that developed tighter structures. But here the most important thing to realize is that the issue of democracy occupied a major place in people's political concerns.

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\* In Italy the New Left groups are called the "extraparliamentary left" to distinguish them from the C.P. and Socialist parties.

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At the same time there was the problem of engaging in concrete, ongoing work. After a brief experiment in distributing leaflets, most of the groups decided that it was false to "lay on" and to try to "direct other people's struggles". It does to explain the background for such a decision, for although it resembles an opinion pervasive throughout the American New Left, its perspective is rather different. In Italy, the Extraparliamentary Left as a whole had from the very start a clear workingclass perspective. The way the New Left groups carried out their conviction that the workingclass must lead revolutionary struggles was to distribute leaflets outside the gates of major factories, particularly in times of major movement--the massive eruption of nationwide strikes in the fall of 1969, a period later nicknamed "the hot autumn," was such a moment. Since a major activity of the New Left or Extraparliamentary groups had been engaging in propaganda work outside factory gates, it was easy for the feminist groups to adopt the tactic without much initial forethought. After this tactic was abandoned, two fundamental facts became clear:

1) It was necessary to propagandize about feminist issues, so that feminist ideas would become pervasive throughout the country. This might be done through concrete work like birth control counseling.

2) It was equally necessary to deal with the class situation in Italy, and thus to continually compare feminist issues with political and union-related questions. This would not be to restrict feminism, but to make feminism an instrument with which to expose the glaring contradictions in capitalist society. Feminism is essential to organizing in factories, in schools, in communities, offices, and department stores, because women are everywhere. Even where they are excluded--for example, in the army--sexism is a major factor in the exploitation of soldiers and in the army's efforts to make them submissive.

At present, there are several feminist groups in every city. At this early stage, unity among the groups is unlikely. Small groups are better for furthering discussion and political development among women. Once in a while there are regional and national meetings where political differences among the groups are discussed, and common political actions are planned. Each group, however, must discover its own way of development at a local level. Examples of such projects are the development of a centralized source of printed material--both Italian and foreign; a national proabortion campaign that will be carried on next year.

As the historical section of this pamphlet makes clear, Italian workingclass women have always played important roles in political struggle, while bourgeois feminist movements have been short-lived. In the past ten years, since class conflict has spread from factories to the community, women, and children, too, have been in the forefront of political actions like housing occupations. In such situations they have often achieved roles of complete autonomy and sometimes of leadership. One of these was a housing occupation, in Turin, during the winter of 1972, in which a women's assembly was the decisionmaking structure. Other struggle, like the "smile strike" of department store cashiers in Bagnoli (Napoli), in which cashiers refused to smile or be "pleasing" to customers, are examples of feminist concepts placed in the content of labor demands. These examples are still localized only in places where the level of class struggle is very high, but feminist women must spread them everywhere. It's important that they define themselves as comrades, and that they see women's liberation as being closely related to revolution.



# TO BE COMRADES, TO MAKE THE REVOLUTION, WE HAVE TO BE FEMINISTS!

LETTER TO IL MANIFESTO , DAILY OF THE NEW LEFT

Comrades, we think that in the articles recently printed in your daily, there is great confusion and misinformation on the WLM, that is about the action of innumerable and disparate feminist groups that are active all over the world. In the articles there is above all the tendency to tilt at windmills; you pose false problems which you tendentiously attribute to feminist theory, or you emphasize, even mystify, very partial elements of actual feminist analysis. Finally, obviously, you superimpose the most obvious and therefore superfluous, marxist analysis.

Does it really seem to you that eliminating the oppression and exploitation based on sex division would mean the abolition of sex? Or that drawing half of the population from isolation and impotence would mean "to depart from a general political strategy?" Your way of relating to the whole issue and even the idea of an ideological debate in your newspaper certainly isn't good to solve the problems which the feminist movement is dealing with right now.

The forces of the left in fact exist outside of the experience of this new social movement, and they are unprepared to deal with it. At the same time the feminist movement was born of the contradictions of the traditional political and cultural channels of the left, and shares the deficiencies of these. Therefore the reaction of the left to the feminist movement is inquisitorial, paternalistic, didactic. We feminist groups are against any interference from the outside. We are not disposed to accept any goals, any confrontations which are not born of our own needs.

The feminist movement in Italy and in the world is a growing and working reality. Sexual discrimination under capitalism has increased the oppression that women have suffered in different cultures and economies; sexual oppression has made capitalism all the more vital, lending support to thousands of other instruments of capitalist domination. At the same time sexual oppression has exposed capitalism, it has created explosive contradiction, because women's oppression is an increasing discrepancy, both within capital's leveling and integrationist ideology and practice, and within the advanced level of the present class struggle. In this historical moment then, women are discovering decisive conditions for an enormously complete raising of consciousness, which, in order to be real and enduring must arise from their own specific oppression. In this moment, too, women are finding the possibilities for organizing and developing as political subjects, and this has nothing to do with the sporadic involvement of single women in traditional ways during political struggles. Consciously or unconsciously, the feminist movements all over the world are moving against capitalist relations of production. They emphasize the complexity of the elements at the basis of the system, they enrich the class struggle with a deeper analysis of man's oppression of other men, and of the long path that must be traveled for the total elimination of such oppression. Above all they bring millions of women into the political scene with self-conscious strength and thereby permanently. This cannot be done and has never been done by any other political movement.

Denying feminism, denying the spontaneous or organized revolt of women as a social group, or as a caste, is a blind act. Providing it has the strength, such an act can only delay the maturation of a new social and political force. Feminism and the class struggle are not contradictory. Feminism is a fundamental necessity for class struggle, and this is what matters for revolutionaries.

Women have begun mobilizing themselves and assuming responsibility for themselves. The development of this process is ensured by the fact that the women's movement will be an autonomous one for some time to come. Two steps must be taken to ensure the most fruitful development of the women's movement within the context of the left. One is the refusal of individual, daily confrontation with one male on that territory he has created for living and struggling. The other is building a feminist movement that is at once valid in and of itself, but that is dialectically linked with the class struggle. We are not afraid of causing a division within the proletariat; that division already exists, and exists very deeply. The male proletarian not only has chains but also a certain "power" - power over "his" woman, over "his" children. This creates inequality inside the proletariat itself; one half is more exploited than the other. Unlike those who subordinate women's liberation to a predetermined strategy, we no longer wish to ignore this contradiction. Blowing this contradiction sky-high is to reach a real unification of the proletariat, a unification that no longer sacrifices a single proletarian male or any of the women.

The sacrifice of women exists throughout society and also in the extraparliamentary political groups, which are more strongly committed to a communist praxis. In these groups too the female comrades are repressed daily in their revolutionary potential, forced to play the game of being sexual commodities, or to justify their presence by showing modesty and industriousness (qualities demanded of woman by society as a whole). Inside these organizations the women who refuse feminism play the unnatural role of intellectuals allied with the working class, instead of having the much more spontaneous and useful consciousness of being part of an oppressed caste allied with the proletariat. All of us women comrades have to admit that the strong identification we feel with the exploited working class comes directly from our own experience of oppression. To be comrades, to have comradly relationships, to make the revolution, we have to be feminists.



# the problem is that every woman who wishes to become a mother be able to do so only when she wishes.

## MATERNITY AND ABORTION

by the Padua Movement for Feminist Struggle

At the present time, one of the ways that the worldwide feminist movement is stripping away from the issue of abortion the veils that have hitherto hidden it, is for women who have had abortions to make mass self-denunciations. This is underway, for example, in France and Germany.

We feel the need to explain, once and for all, the terms of our participation in the abortion struggle. Therefore, we feel it is also necessary for us to explain the terms of abortion as that has been imposed on us up to now.

We shall begin by declaring that the same system that has forbidden abortion has also forced us to abort, and continues to force us to abort in all those instances where working conditions cause miscarriages for women who don't want to terminate their pregnancies. Thus, we should begin collecting the signatures of all the women whose working conditions have ripped their unborn infants from their wombs. Let us therefore denounce the bosses who have imposed abortion on us.

But first, let us go over a little history.

As we indicated in a previous document, the moment that women became isolated in the home (tr. note: in the 18th century, at the onset of industrialization, and increasingly throughout the 19th) and the other members of the family were forced to work the entire day away from the home, the myth began to be spun that through "motherhood" women achieved the "fulfillment" of their "biological destiny". Women were told that motherhood was "their natural vocation", since female physiology was "oriented" towards the perpetuation of the species. However, the reproductive function has been decreed neither by single instances nor by "nature", and thus the business of talking about "natural destiny" is rottenly mistaken from the start. It reeks still more when one considers that the whole weight of this so-called natural destiny is thrown onto the shoulders of the individual woman.

Despite the fact (as we observed in our first document) that we women, by force of circumstance, grow up rich in beauty and virtue and poor in intellect, it's nevertheless a fact that a man is also needed to create a child. A quick look at the way the normal complementary procreative functions of men and women have been distorted, reveals the following:

- 1) The more woman has been restricted to the role of "mother" purely and simply, the more she's been negated as a person, an individual. That is, womanhood has been made synonymous with motherhood (and by motherhood is meant not merely the business of conceiving, but the whole burden of childrearing to boot). Womanhood and maternity have been made identical insofar as woman has been sexually castrated and excluded from the whole life of the society.
- 2) Her personality and sexuality thus construed and subsumed under the rubric "maternity", woman has also been forced to perform her "maternal" functions according to the demands of the labor market and of capitalist political controls. With equal abandon these forces exalt or debase woman's "maternal functions" according to exclusively market needs. To cite various examples: the practice of mass sterilization of women in Puerto Rico goes back to 1930 when doctors were pushing sterilization as the only form of contraception; between 1947 and 48, 7% of women there had been sterilized.

Again, Puerto Rican women later served as guinea pigs for experiments with the contraceptive pill before the pill was put on the market in the United States.

In the United States black women who are brought to hospitals for miscarriages, abortions, and gynecological treatment, are continually sterilized without their knowledge. The consequence: they prefer to have abortions without medical aid.

As things of this sort are attributed with merry abandon to "population explosions" in Asia, Latin America, and the Third World generally, their foundations are hardly a mystery to anyone.

- 3) The delay with which contraceptive research has made its entry on the scientific scene. This development is taking place long after the Church with rank opportunism helped stifle contraceptive methods that were discovered and perfected much earlier than now. The political delays imposed on getting contraceptive information out to the masses of people has been an infamous act of deception on the part of the scientific establishment and the state - an act which takes its toll on our bodies, our health. If today we still need to use abortion as a last resort, we are prompted by such a necessity to accuse once again the monstrous deficiencies and willful delay of this research.
- 4) Although it constitutes the only possible alternative to the deficiencies of contraceptive research, abortion is PROHIBITED on a nearly worldwide level. In some countries it is conceded for "therapeutic" reasons (that is, if one succeeds in finding doctors, psychiatrists and sociologists who will declare you physically or mentally infirm or in disastrous economic straits) This is to say that nowhere is woman granted the right to decide when she will become a mother and when she may have an abortion according to the dictates of her own judgement and free will.

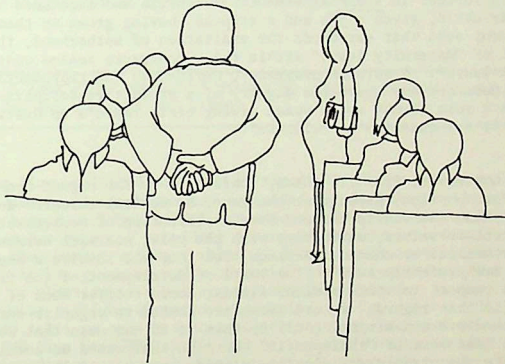
THE PROHIBITION AGAINST ABORTION IS SO WIDESPREAD THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO  
CONSIDER ABORTION AS ONE OF THE RISKS IMPLIED BY THE FEMALE CONDITION ITSELF



We should add that the risk we allude isn't so much that "grave risk" that the penal code invokes: because in reality, as even the most backward physician has felt constrained to admit, abortions performed in hospitals with competent medical means involve no risk at all. The "risk" is thus incurred by the conditions in which we are forced to have abortions, since we are compelled to abort illegally.

- 5) As for the "moral problem", it is hardly worth the trouble to consider the disquisitions of the Catholic Church on the issue of when the fetus begins having a soul, but we might note that among such debates, in the past, the Church has also considered requestion of when the female fetus begins to have a soul. One can deduce from the fact that such a debate was even raised, that if it had been possible to see whether the fetus was masculine or feminine, the Church might have given permission to abort if it was found that the fetus was female and not male. The disgust we experience in going through the ecclesiastical literature on the subject prompts us to close the question of "moral problems" here. For those who wish to pursue the issue, however, periodicals of the feminist movement will be increasing their publication of the finest flowers of such ecclesiastical classics.

ONE OF YOUR CLASSMATES HAD  
AN **ACCIDENT**..



- 6) Instead we declare that the very concession of therapeutic abortion as an exception to the general prohibition has functioned and continues to function essentially as an instrument of class discrimination. In fact, only women whose class position gives them a certain degree of power, succeed in obtaining and in sufficient time utilizing the medical and social warrants that are necessary for getting a therapeutic abortion. As for the others, it is nearly impossible for them to obtain such statements, and they therefore become the primary victims of the social sadism (which exists within the liberal establishment) that demands at least some mothers at any cost.

- 7) In this-the "children-at-any-cost", so to speak-we see definitively the true face of the system.  
Those who have not succeeded in getting abortions, give birth.  
Those who have not succeeded in getting abortions, in general, belong to the most proletarian strata.  
But, once the child has been born, once the limits of repression have been touched, the same state that has forced you into maternity divests itself of all responsibility. "It's yours, and you'll have to shift as you can to support it." At most the state will give you 5,000 lire a month for the first year of your child's life, and 2,500 lire up to five years of age. It's certain that whoever needs 5,000 lire a month to live cannot maintain anyone else with 5,000 lire a month. The child winds up in the orphan asylum. At this point the State comes back on the scene. Not, obviously, to help the mother, still less to help the child, but to give itself a job. The 5,000 lire formerly designated for the mother are instantaneously transformed into 45,000 designated for every child who is put into an institution for abandoned children. We might note that almost all of these institutions are maintained by the Church. We should also note-the newspapers this year were full of reports on this-how children are maintained and raised there. Malnutrition, violence, sadism of all kinds.  
Produced in such institutions are: those destined for the lower religious orders, for the lower rungs of the occupational ladder, for emigration, for the reformatory, and for the prisons. We denounce and fight against the Church as the right arm of such an enterprise.
- 8) For those who with God's blessing and the agreement of the system (we need not elaborate further in their agreement) give birth and succeeded in maintaining their child, given a job and a stipend, having grown up themselves in the unctuous aura that surrounds the exaltation of motherhood, they find the conquest of "maternity leave" within their contracts sealed under the rubric "sick leave". A welcome pregnancy, defined as the reproduction of the work force, does not even have the dignity of a productive definition. Between a woman with a sore throat and a woman giving birth there's no distinction: in either case it's a question of "illness".

Conclusion: we find ourselves, like all women, confronted by the urgent necessity to organize a struggle for abortion, given that the level of medical research does not permit us simply to demand the widespread and free distribution of contraceptive devices. In this we don't content ourselves, obviously, with the pill, nor with hormone injections, nor with other medical or chemical devices, for they all involve a degree of risk, and of this we are perfectly aware. The level of development of the field of gynecology, very low with respect to other medical fields, doesn't offer much of a basis for being optimistic in this regard. We are therefore forced to organize ourselves for abortion as an immediate and minimal goal. By this we do not mean that we are organizing to request some sort of "therapeutic" abortion that would do nothing but reimpose and exacerbate the class discrimination already upon us. Rather we mean free abortion (with anesthesia) on demand, for everyone.  
If certain feminist literature that has begun to circulate has invited European mothers to assume "a social responsibility" in the planning of the production of children, we reply on the spot that the sort of SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY we feel isn't in any way the responsibility of adjusting family capacity to salary levels. On the contrary: it is the responsibility to destroy all salary levels, all salary incentives, so that we may have as many children as we wish, and only when we wish. It is in being capable of struggling to gain completely the right to bring a child into the world whenever we want, that we measure the social responsibility we feel. We must rebuild this right throughout whole provinces of grass widows\* whose children are born only in September, and throughout legions of housewives who make love only on Saturday night.



It is a right that must often still be achieved by the way of the struggle for a bedroom for two. For if the community in which parents made love in front of their children may have been a lost paradise, today given the original sin that separated Adam from Eve and both from their children (see our first document), a bedroom for two is a minimal goal in Turin as in Reggio Calabria. The pathology that goes under the name of "promiscuity" is the direct opposite of the community we wish to rebuild. To make love as often as we wish, to create children whenever we wish, in comfortable, well-heated, and beautiful surroundings. Which means, in other words, that we experience motherhood neither at the expense of our salaries nor at the price of exclusion. Only by assessing how greatly we enjoy this right can we assess how much of society's wealth we enjoy.

At the same time, however, we declare and denounce the fact that up to now the very illegality of abortion has functioned as a support for a market in human flesh, insofar as it has been a means of delaying or downright discouraging research in anti-fertility methods that do not ruin the physical and psychological health of women. Not merely this: the illegality of abortion has been the foundation on which such a market has been built in the sense of a selection on which abortions are concentrated. In such a market, too, the whole organization of legality and illegality has likewise been concentrated through which the medical novice finds his business, or the academic baron, who is on the lookout for a clientele for private clinics.

Precisely because we understand all of this business from beginning to end our struggle is above all against the social structure and power alignments that have permitted it. Therefore, we must plainly declare from the very beginning, so that the standard of our struggle not be turned on the wrong side.

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THE PROBLEM IS THAT EVERY WOMAN WHO WISHES TO BECOME A MOTHER BE ABLE TO SO ONLY WHEN SHE WISHES AND WHENEVER SHE WISHES.

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If at the present time workingclass women in the South give birth to fifteen children, and middle class women somehow succeeded in producing only two or three, the privilege of not having children is NOT our major desire, our ultimate goal. At bottom, the system has begun by providing measures that are both insufficient, and that accord with the present economy, which dictates, "Don't have children unless you can afford it". It has given us badly concocted pills, injections that don't work, and it may even give us abortion as a better preventative measure. We want to point out that such a step will still be dictated by a capitalist imperative. The fact is that the present system tells us one thing and one thing only, "Economize a little. If you are earning 100.000 lire have one child, and if you are earning 150.000 have two children". Our immediate response is that we refuse. We refuse now, at this very moment, because this expense account that we have to deduct from whatever our husbands and we earn, and on which we have to plan a family, is one that must be completely re-examined and completely revised.

REPRINTED FROM DOCUMENTS ON THE CONDITION OF WOMEN (UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE  
MOVEMENT FOR FEMINIST STRUGGLE, BOLOGNA) DOCUMENT #2

**FERRARA MOVEMENT**  
for women's struggle

**TALKING ABOUT OUR  
CONDITION  
AS  
WOMEN INSIDE  
SCHOOL**

**MEANS**

**TALKING ABOUT OUR  
CONDITION**

**INSIDE  
THE  
WHOLE  
SOCIETY**

Whether we are housewives or workers, we are still oppressed and exploited today as in the past. In every instance, housework - taking care of the house, of the children, of the husband, etc. - is the focus of women's oppression. In fact, even when we are working outside the home, we still bear the weight and the responsibilities of housework. All of these things add up to a very hard, enervating, destructive job, without time limits or rest periods. The job we are expected to do outside of the house is always the lowest paid, the hardest (textile work, domestic work, service work, being maids, cashiers). Even when we think we are lucky, for getting a supposedly "privileged job", it is often the case that the importance of the job has decreased and is now considered not to have much status or require much skill. Moreover, there is great demand for female teachers for since its hours are shorter than other jobs, teaching allows you to fulfill the "true" tasks of woman, those of mother, cook . . . housewife.



SCHOOL CONTRIBUTES TO MAKING US ACCEPT ALL OF THIS. The primary function of school is to train the workers of the future. If, on the one hand, it must train technicians for the shops, on the other it must provide the skilled labor for the "shop" which the family represents. The function of schools is consequently to instill consent. This is particularly true in regard to women, because we, as women, will have to guarantee consent to the capitalist system inside the family.

Everything we learn at school, what is written in text books, the way these are taught, the way we are treated, works against us and supports the inferior role the society has imposed on us. Women's ghettoes have even been invented: vocational schools for girls, schools for elementary school teachers, secretarial schools, schools for nursery teachers, schools for domestic work, schools for seamstresses. These and other branches of education are based on the assumption that women have some "natural qualities" (sensitivity, sweetness, delicacy) which make them fit for "feminine" jobs which are, as we observed before, the most degrading and low status positions. Our illusion is that in going to school we will escape the life of fatigues and sacrifices our mothers have led. But in fact we are expected to fulfill the same function, even though it seems momentarily better.

We never think we women have a right to education. We all know that in poor families, where all the children cannot finish school, the one who is allowed to complete his studies is always the son. But even when these economic considerations do not exist, our finishing school is always seen as a great concession to us. To merit this concession we must be "outstanding", or try our best to be. For this reason we are the grinds of the class. If we are in a mixed class, we are nearly always the best; in any event, we are always the most dutiful and shy.

The reason why we girls like going to school more than boys do is because for us school is not simply our only social outlet. If we do not have a job, it is also our only illusion of having a different destiny. For us, school means a chance to know other young people, to go out, to have a minimum of social life. For boys, on the other hand, getting out of the house poses few problems, and for their free time places have been established: bars, sport clubs, cultural clubs, sezioni di partito. In our case, not only have we no freedom, but if we can slip away from the control of our families, we have no places for meeting friends. That's why we look on school as a gift that we must accept without complaint.

The absence of women from the student movement is significant. Even when we join it, our role is totally subordinate. During student strikes or school occupations, we were given the tasks of printing leaflets, making sandwiches, sweeping the floors, giving sexual comfort to our male classmates. All of us can recall our silence in political meetings. It was not only traditional fear and shyness that kept us silent, but also the fact that male comrades accepted and carried on the same models of discrimination against us. They, too, think that our subordination, our silence, are natural, or caused by individual deficiencies which we can resolve on a personal level. When any of us is successful in the movement she becomes an "exceptional woman". The price she has to pay is not talking about her difficulties as a woman, and denying the problems of all the other "normal" women. The student movement, too, pits women against women in this way, and exploits "exceptions" to show that there are no common women's problems. But we have found, on the contrary, that our problems are not personal at all; they are the problems imposed on women as a whole by capitalism, they are political problems, and can be solved only collectively. We agree with the issues of the student movement: 1) Free school, so that we may be excluded no longer; 2) Fighting against the function of education to brainwash us - since our birth our consent to a subordinate condition has been presupposed as a "feminine attribute"; 3) Fighting against the function of school to perpetuate our unemployment in the labor market. At present, school does not allow us escape from our permanent condition of "the hidden unemployed", that is, of being housewives. But we do not think that these goals are sufficient, and of this fact the absence of women from the student movement is a proof. This absence is very bad because it robs the student movement of half of its potential strength. Ways of fighting and issues which accept our inferiority as a "natural" are a great damage to the movement as a whole. IN THE SCHOOL TOO THERE IS NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT WOMEN'S LIBERATION, NO WOMEN'S LIBERATION WITHOUT REVOLUTION.

# TURIN MANIFESTO

turin  
feminist group

## 1) WHY WE ARE A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

We are a political movement because we are struggling against the division of labor and tasks between the sexes, a division that is one of many forms of exploitation.

a) In fact, the division of labor between men and women is such that woman invariably performs unpaid household work, and she frequently does precarious, ill-paid work outside of the home as well. This is the economic foundation of the system. Indeed, for every man who works there is a woman who sees to all his basic needs (eating, dressing, washing, raising of children, etc.), while there is only one pay envelope.

b) The family thus constituted is therefore indispensable for the functioning and maintenance of the present society. Because both the family and society exist, it is necessary that women be repressed both in social and in sexual life. On the labor market, besides being badly paid, devalued and always subject to firing, women often are persuaded that they are not as worthy as men, that therefore woman's true place is in the home, that her children need her constant physical presence. Regarding sex, we are taught that woman's sexuality is a secondary thing, which can manifest itself only within the circle of the family, and towards reproductive ends (which in reality means the reproduction of the workforce). The other side of the coin, meanwhile, is that we are exploited as sexual merchandise (prostitution, advertising, pornography). To denounce such forms of oppression and exploitation is to make a political declaration; to struggle against the kinds of discrimination that support our present socio-economic system is to act politically. In sum, for us women, using the examination of our own oppression to change a general situation means becoming political subjects.

## 2) WE ARE A NEW KIND OF POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Everything we do, we do and discuss collectively, and what we do is the expression of our immediate experience. Among us we have no leaders or hierarchy, and we are against the domination of whomever wants to impose her/himself and control others. We do not believe, moreover, that politics is merely that which is done for or against government, but that it is as well something which infuses a person's whole way of life and conduct. We therefore consider politics as a way of beginning to live a different life.

At the same time we are against all forms of sectarianism, while within the realm of particular, basic political decisions our group is at once open to all women, and ready for any confrontation.



3) WE FEEL OURSELVES PART OF THE LEFT

- a) We feel ourselves part of the left because we know that the contradictions between the sexes can be resolved only with a radical change in the society in which we live, and a change in the values of that society. We steadfastly believe that there is no women's liberation without revolution, nor can there be a revolution without women's liberation.
- b) Because we think that our movement will have the greatest space in which to grow only as repression diminishes, and that the more certain laws (free contraceptives, abortions, divorce, day care) partially liberate women from their "tasks", so such laws will permit women to regain the energy to think and organize collectively. But we also know that we must conduct such struggles together, on our own, in order that the solutions be effective, and in order that they not be turned against us.

4) WE ARE MEMBERS OF NO OTHER PARTY, OF NO OTHER GROUPS

Because the parties and the extraparliamentary left have ignored our oppression as women.

- a) In fact, the parties and the New Left groups reproduce within themselves a division between "political" tasks, in which the intellectual work falls to the men, and the manual labor, which falls to the women.
- b) Because all of the laws "protecting the working woman" (pregnancy leave, time off for children's illness) in reality discriminate against us all the more, since the greater our "freedom" to take time off from work, the less likely is it that we will be given fixed and skilled work.

5) WHAT DOES A WOMEN'S GROUP OFFER YOU?

- It takes you out of isolation, and gives you political consciousness concerning your own condition; it enables you to understand that your dissatisfactions are not individual hangups, but arise from your exploitation by society.
- It brings you the friendship of a collective, and it brings you solidarity.
- If we remain isolated we are dependent on our men, fearful of saying what we really think, and fearful of acting on our own. Together, we learn to have the courage to speak, to act, to struggle.

THEY TELL US

- You are robbing the class struggle of strength, and diverting the forces of class struggle into a secondary, sectoral movement.
- You are dividing the forces of revolution, pitting women against men.

WE REPLY

- We are not robbing the class struggle of its strength; on the contrary, we bring new strength to that struggle, because up to this point women have never been a mass revolutionary force.
- Ours is not a sectoral struggle, for it concerns half of humanity.
- To reveal contradictions is not to divide the people, but to bring new forces to the world revolutionary movement.

ARE YOU WILLING WITHOUT ANY PAYMENT  
TO HONOR, TO OBEY, TO WASH, TO SEW,  
TO CLEAN, TO COOK, TO BE FAITHFUL,  
TO BE QUIET, TO BE CHEERFUL, TO RAISE  
HIS CHILDREN, TO KEEP HIS HOUSE,  
TO PROVIDE HIS PHYSICAL  
NEEDS, ETC., ETC., ETC.







1A E ACS 140 6th st,  
Cambridge-Mass 02142

Care compagne,

questo pamphlet che riceverete è stato portato a termine da  
donne italiane e americane e vuole essere una documentazio-  
ne di quella che è la condizione della donna oggi in Italia e  
delle direzioni che il movimento di liberazione della donna ha  
assunto e assume oggi nella società.

Sarebbe molto interessante e utile ricevere possibilmente  
documenti, articoli che mostrino il lavoro che state facendo, le  
posizioni che assumete, preferibilmente legate alle diverse  
situazioni di lotta. Questo perché i gruppi femministi ameri-  
ni a cui è stato inviato il pamphlet sono realmente interessati  
ad avere un contatto diretto, non solo per la questione della  
conclamata "sisterood", ma soprattutto perché la lotta che coin-  
volge oggi giorno le femministe porta alla consapevolezza

dell' assoluta necessità di uno scambio di idee e esperienze  
per la comprensione dei limiti, delle possibilità di quello  
che è un grosso movimento che può di fatto avere una carica  
rivoluzionaria enorme e può essere in realtà un grosso salto  
qualitativo.