

FA, Costella 1, 19

I thought the best way I could be of use to you is to give you some idea of the problems you are undoubtedly going to face in relation to forming a movement and the relation of a revolutionary women's movement to organisations that call themselves revolutionary.

If we make the assumption (as we did yesterday) that fundamentally the position of women historically from the birth of capital - in terms of the struggle that has been waged, and in terms of the way that the women's movement relates to the "general" political movement - that their position is based on the separation of the home, that is, the family, from production which were united in previous societies; then our movement is for the purpose of destroying the separation between those who are directly productive (that is, men) and those who are indirectly productive (that is, women) - between production and education and between the generations, ~~xxxxxx~~ those who are older than we are and those who are younger.

Then we begin to see that the nuclear family, ~~xx~~ which the anthropologists mystify as some strange and unrelated creation, is merely the unit that capital needs to prepare the labour force and to service the labour force. That means first of all that labour power is the creation of the woman: that is the commodity she produces. The reason that there are homes for the aged and hospitals for the sick is that the nuclear family has no place in it for anyone who is not being trained to work or actually working. So that the nuclear family is a mobile unit and can be ~~xxxxx~~ shoved wherever ~~xxxxxxx~~ the man is needed in production. Then we can see that it is impossible to have a women's movement which is integral to the society, which can conceive ~~of~~ for itself of the solution for women's liberation being found in this society, because we are concerned with the destruction of ~~every institution, not only with the destruction of~~ the institution of the factory and the institution of the family, which are mutually interdependent, ~~xx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ Every institution in the society is directly related to our position in the family and the separation of the home, the community, from the directly productive centre.

Because we do not have any inheritance of revolutionary history that we know about, we have to begin from the ground up and we have suffered because of this vacuum. I am not saying, however, that the vacuum actually exists, I'm saying that because we have been deprived of our history, it appears that we start from scratch. One way in which this vacuum presented itself to us in England was the relation between the Women's Liberation Movement and the "political" women in the movement. I want to list some of the things they did (and do) because they give us a very hard time.

First of all they came into the movement to recruit for their political organisations. Second they believed that the movement was for the purpose of raising the "political consciousness" of women to the level of men and did not understand that the reason that the movement

was necessary was that the political level of men was low, i.e. fragmented.

The third was that they conceived of the working class as being white, male, over thirty and only in the advanced world. They believed the struggle was only in direct production, which was the view that they had had of the whole of the Third World. According to this view only people who worked in factories could make the revolution and the result of this was that they thought that housewives had no social power. Women came from a situation of underdevelopment: the house is in no way a representation of modern technology and of modern social relations - i.e. capitalist technology and relations. So that their position in relation to women was a direct outgrowth of their general position in relation to the Third World; that is, it was an imperialist view of the class struggle.

The next point which they put forward, sometimes hidden and sometimes open, was that the working class issue - bearing in mind their definition of the working class - was the "wider" issue. I earlier made the point that all the institutions of society are dependent on the separation of the home from direct production - one can see from this that the female issue is the widest issue because that is the working class issue. That is particularly true in a country where women make up 30% or 40% of the labour force, where they are in direct production as well as in the home. One can see in a situation like that that women form the link between the various institutions of the society and therefore women are ~~the~~ key to their destruction.

The final thing which characterises these women and the thing that made it possible for them to put these points forward was that they refused to examine their own position as women in the political organisations of which they were members.

The immediate result of these political women putting forward these ideas was destructive to the formation of the movement because it denied the viability of the movement and its independent validity in the struggle. This resulted in a reaction by many middle class women in particular: refusing to have anything to do with class. It is the responsibility of those of us who are "political", that is, who have alliances or who are members of so-called revolutionary organisations to put forward our view to prevent the movement from ~~becoming~~ <sup>(becoming)</sup> a movement which is fighting to make capital more advanced rather than to destroy it. The danger is always that middle class women will translate Women's Liberation into a liberation movement for middle class women. "Political" women in excluding middle class women from the struggle of class reinforce this tendency. We have evidence that in England capital wants to integrate a lot of middle class women: by lowering wages and by shortening the training period, a lot of jobs are made available to women (engineering for instance).

While we fight for abortion we must bear in mind that it means for different classes of people. For instance, we can measure the social wealth of the working class not by whether they can have abortions but by the freedom to have children. We are deprived of being able to have children so that we have to fight to have abortions.

We have some very specific tasks to perform in relation to laying the foundations for a movement, which by the way have not been laid anywhere - not in the U.S., not in ~~England~~ England. We have a lot of ideas and a lot of great discoveries, penetrations into areas not penetrated before, but the real theoretical foundations are still to be laid.

The first thing to work on seriously in relation to the countries we live in is the economic functions that women have performed in relation to that economy. It varies from place to place. In my view the fundamental labour of women in relation to capitalist society is the production of labour power. They are always accusing us - they say that we do not have a commodity and therefore we cannot be revolutionary - we have a very big commodity on which the whole of capitalist society is based.

The second thing along with the economic work that has to be done is the historical work. No question that if we look for it, we'll find the struggle of the working class to prevent the fragmentation of the community, to prevent the State from taking over the functions previously performed in the home, education, etc. And we'll also find tremendous activity by women acting in groups, acting autonomously in every important revolutionary situation. We have evidence that in 1860-70 the working class of the East End of London - which was a great centre of the working class in England - fought bitterly against compulsory education, to keep their children at home - against having to be taken to hospital (apart from the fact that they were so bad that you died if you went there). These were struggles to protect their own people, to refuse to have the family pared down to the nuclear family - totally vulnerable to what capital wanted.

Why did women get the vote in England? I believe it was to prevent a movement which was already there from growing. We have to find ~~that~~ that out.

Dealing with women we have to cross out the definition that we have inherited of what a struggle is. In my experience I know of individual women in individual homes waging individual struggles which were in every sense a total social struggle, ~~xxxxxxx~~ except that they waged it alone. In the U.S. the struggle of individual women against their husbands, family, ~~xxxx~~ neighbours for the right to divorce. They fought alone but at a certain stage they made it socially acceptable. These are social struggles which take an individual form.

I want to relate this last point of our history to the kind of specific problems that you all may have to face - in comparison with the kind of problems that we have to face in England. In England what we have to do is

destroy sociology, to destroy psychology, psychoanalysis, to destroy the progressive educators, because they are the theoreticians of the Welfare State, and they are the theoreticians of policy to manipulate men, women and children. Of course the first of these are the economists, there is no question about that: we have absolutely to destroy them.

By Welfare State I mean very specifically the health service and social workers, National Assistance, etc., the doctor who when you go to him to tell him that you are having a nervous breakdown because you can't stand it any longer being in the house, gives you a tranquilliser. They are the people who study us very carefully to tell capital exactly how little they can give us in order to avoid a struggle, or to distract us from our objectives. This is really what their function is. That is the theory of the modern State. The U.S. is full of it, absolutely full of it. We have studied the State and Lenin has said that the State is the body of armed men, you know, the police and the army; but in my view the State in the U.S. is ~~xxx~~ also the body of ~~armed~~ men and women who plan you economically, socially, politically, ~~xxx~~ educationally, and sexually; who come and tell you - if you are refusing to be part of the society or to be part of the exploitation of the society - their function is to say "You are not normal and we will fix you up so that you will be normal, that is, you will conform to all the exploitation that we wish to put upon you". Probably there is as much money given to that as there is to arms.

I think, however, that - I don't know to what degree sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis - I am sure the economists and other so-called social scientists - how pervasive they are in Italy. What is pervasive in Italy is the Catholic church - that is perfectly obvious. That's your enemy and these are the people you have to destroy, and what I was saying about history I think can be useful in the destruction of the Catholic church. I don't mean the physical destruction - that will come down when the rest comes down - but theoretically you have to destroy their position and practically you have to challenge them. And it seems to me that if you begin to get into touch with working class ~~C~~atholic women, you will undoubtedly uncover many areas of struggle that they are waging against the church at the same time that they go and light candles - I am not saying that they are not religious - I assume and we must assume that they are rejecting the hold that the church has over them and specifically the exploitation that the church has always put ~~xxx~~ upon women - you know the fundamental principle on which the church operates is that the highest aspiration for a woman is to be able to endure suffering.

I am now making another point because what we have to be careful about is alienating women who are Catholic from coming into the movement, and the best way is to give them their own struggle back and I am assuming that this struggle is going on. This I assume because of my experience in Spain - I lived for six months in 1968 among very religious peasant people, and the women told me that when the nun came round to see them and told them: "You

must not use contraceptives", the women kissed the cross and then kissed the sister's hand and then said, "Sister, when the church buys my children shoes, I will not use contraceptives. Until then I have to." Now if you tell women what they are doing and present their own activity on individual or community level as "the social revolution", which it undoubtedly is, then you draw them out and you clarify their own struggles for them, which is what your purpose always is in studying history.

Women are invisible - we must think of ourselves as having been invisible for many centuries - that there are all kinds of struggles which are being waged which nobody has recorded, which nobody has paid attention to, which nobody has respected and which nobody has elevated to the level of social revolution. Discovering what women are actually doing is the same thing that we are doing when we write history; we are giving to women, to ourselves, our own history. The old radical idea (at least in England and the U.S.) is that people have to understand that they are exploited - and the radical groups had to tell workers that they were exploited. Now we don't have to tell women that we are exploited and oppressed - every woman knows that. The important thing is to tell them: "Listen, there is something we can do about it. My evidence is that this is what we have done in the past - and this is actually what we are doing now." That means that you have to write history so that every woman can understand it - and this is much more difficult than doing the research.

This sums up very briefly what must be, I feel, what we must all be doing - and what I hope I'll be doing. That does not mean that there are not many, many other things to do, but I'm now talking about the theoretical framework which must be laid. I want now to speak about our experience with the kind of organisation which is useful for the kind of work that we want to do. Now I'm not talking about the theoretical work but about the practical work.

We have found, and I don't know if this would be true of you, that we function best in the small group - and we function best without men. That there are many things no woman will say in front of a man especially if she has a relationship with him. That these small groups must really be founded on the very particular experience that women have had - that is, the discovery of the fact that the uterus has been fundamental in our social and personal relations, our whole psychological make-up, the work that we do, our whole relation to society. The people that we are has been determined by the fact that we were born with a uterus.

I said that when we talk about the small group - talking on the basis of the individual experiences, experiences of the members of the group - what we are really doing is discovering how the uterus has been the foundation of all our relations, and the work that we do - our total relation to society - we are discovering the power structure that is related to the uterus.

The small group is the only place where this experience can emerge,

and it is the only place therefore where a redefinition of politics can emerge - you know, you are doing the historical work and the economic work but at the same time you must be finding out exactly what is the experience of women - what is it? - and you begin with yourselves - you are that experience - it is not something outside of yourself.

The other function that the small group performs is that it begins to discipline women like me to keep their mouths shut and let other women speak.

Now, since it is a middle class movement in England, since most of the people who are in the liberation movement are middle class, I believe that a fundamental position that we must begin to take is that we, middle-class women, refuse to be integrated into this society. The first flowering of the Black movement was a movement to integrate, then at a certain stage it became a revolutionary movement - it said, "We don't want to integrate into this society, we want to destroy it." And it is very important in the movement, I think that we, in refusing the kind of co-optation that capital wants to make of our movement (because it is middle-class), that our orientation as "political" women: middle-class women refuse to integrate, refuse to become part of the capitalist power structure. That means in practice that those women who are sociologists and economists and psychologists and ~~teachers~~ teachers must begin to destroy from inside the institutional structure into which they have been incorporated. With working class women it is much more complicated than that, and we must see ourselves as a movement of women in two ways in relation to the working class women.

First of all, I believe that where housewives are concerned, we can make an appeal to them as a women's liberation movement to get community organisations formed - community organisations are struggles of women. You will know. I was told what you have done here about saying to women whose families were on the point of eviction that: "We have done enough free labour in the house that we have no need to pay any rent." This I think is wonderful. As I said yesterday, our next question in England will be inflation, the other side of wages.

The second point that we must bear in mind is that it is very unlikely - I may be wrong, this is what I think now, I may change my mind tomorrow - but my experience is that the working class woman, especially the Black woman, although she will form autonomous organisations, is not likely to form organisations outside of her class; that is, when there is a tenants' movement against eviction, what she is likely to do is to form a women's group within the Black movement rather than leave the working class to join with middle class women.

But we must be very self-conscious about the work that we are doing. Because if we are doing our work on history, and we are doing our work of recording the actual rebellions of women and the work on the economic relation of women to society; and if we are disrupting and protesting against beauty

contests and if we are rewriting fairy tales - as some women in England are doing - then we are helping women who are not in the movement and who might even think that our movement has nothing to do with them; we are nonetheless influencing them to take an autonomous position within the working class movement.

Finally I come to my last point. There is in the U.S. a movement of women - I don't think it is very large, but it is growing - of women who have been in the liberation movement for two or three years and who have discovered that every relation with a man is a compromise with ~~sex~~ capital. They have decided therefore that they are going to become "political lesbians", not necessarily because they find women more attractive than men, but because at least with women this compromise is not necessary. If we so-called "political women" are functioning properly in the movement we will be able to understand what a movement is as opposed to an organisation and will be able to understand therefore that these political lesbians are absolutely vital to the work that we are all doing - because they have gone to the ultimate position. I believe absolutely with them that in any relation between a man and a woman, a woman must compromise herself. However there are millions of women like me who at the moment are willing to make the compromise. But in order for the movement to progress and drive forward, there have to be some women always pointing out to the rest of the movement that this society cannot liberate us. We will be able to form for instance a new kind of commune, we will have a co-operative, and we will have nursery schools and we will incorporate men into the home to some degree, and all the kinds of desires that all women have in order not to drive the logic of the position to a conclusion, to try to envisage a structure within the society that will itself be liberating. These women by their very existence say: "No such thing can be formed." The power structure can only be destroyed; it is not a "problem" that can be solved. And this is in defence of those women because there are going to be many attacks upon them by members or sections (both "political" and "non-political") of the movement. It is in defence of these women that we begin to build a movement because, on the one side we will have the political lesbians (I hope in England we will, because they are fundamental to the movement); on the other side we'll have the civil rights wing of middle class women who will struggle for abortion, birth control (and by the way I'm not saying that only middle class women will struggle for these), the kind of civil rights demands which lead to capital being less backward but which do not

necessarily lead to its destruction - that is also part of the movement. And it is only from day to day and not by any political theory, but doing the work that has to be done that we'll be able to work out at any particular point what our relationship to the rest of the movement is.

I also see the Gay Liberation Movement, the movement of homosexuals, as an absolutely vital part of the liberation of the whole of society, and vitally linked with women's liberation. It is our job not only to defend gay brothers and sisters but to make the attack on capital that the life it makes us lead, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other physically or emotionally - it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline. We cannot have profoundly intimate relations with men - that is what we are complaining about.

What I believe we should be saying is that you have a situation in this society where you have a division of labour between men and women. What that means in actuality is that for instance you have a thousand women working in a factory, they spend eight or nine hours with the woman who works next to them, they spend three or four hours with their husbands except when they are sleeping. They are more intimate with the women they work next to - they know when they have their period, how they are feeling and what their husbands do to them - more than the men they sleep with - and that is a lesbian relationship.

This is what we have to face: capital undermines heterosexuality on any other than its own power-structured basis. The division of labour divides the history of exploitation of one sex from that of the other; it drives women to each other and drives them away from men, that is what we are complaining about: the contradiction between the idealisation and worship of heterosexuality and the master-servant nature of our relations with men. The Gay Movement, oppressed by the heterosexual religion, undermining it, undermines the division of labour which lies at its core, and opens the way for an individuality free of sexual identity. But the division between the women's movement and the Gay movement is more ideological than actual. The only way in which most of us are not lesbians is that we do not participate in the actual sexual act of lesbianism, but the relationship between women on the one hand and between men and women on the other - the sexual act between women is a "logical" conclusion. Capital undermines heterosexuality even while it



is fundamental to capital's structure; we are driven to lesbianism by the relationships that we have with men at the same time that we are filled with sexual guilt if we acknowledge where history has forced our intimacy and our political alliances to be.\*

We got "sidetracked" by the question of homosexuality but what I was trying to say was that we are confronted with a dilemma that we have to continually deal with - on the one hand women in the movement who have political positions different from ours and who are very hostile to the political positions we may take. Our major responsibility it seems to me - I am open to disagreement because my mind is not absolutely made up on anything (except that we have to be free), we are only at the beginning - it seems to me our major loyalty must be to the women's movement for one reason: because the whole of society has a hostile attitude to the movement. When the mute speaks for the first time, someone tries to put words into her mouth. Now this is what the women's movement is, this is the invisible and the mute who for the first time opens her mouth and appears, becomes visible. Our major responsibility at the moment, which may be a responsibility that shifts and changes, is to see that this movement gets off the ground. That the women who have never spoken - even if we think that what is coming out of their mouths is nonsense - and by the way, it will be much less than we think because if we always give serious thought to the things that women are saying, we'll be able to help make connections which perhaps we were not yet able to make - that when they speak nobody is to tell them what to say. We will discuss among ourselves but nobody from outside and particularly no political group can come and tell us: "You have a wrong political line." What you have to tell them is: "You have never had any political line on this subject and we will work out our political line. In short, fuck off."

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\* Whether ~~xxxxxx~~ the new society will be bisexual is a completely open question. ~~But~~ Nothing said here implies that it will or will not be, nor that homosexual or bisexual people in any way prefigure Communist ~~xxxxxx~~ personality ~~xxxxxx~~ or relationships.