

Communist Federation of Britain (ML)

Women Lib – a comment

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womens' liberation - a coment

"If you get across to a man the idea that all women are sisters, and that he with all men is a political oppressor, you may change his thinking process, but you don't touch him anywhere it hurts. But if you look at a man, your man, your husband, boyfriend, brother, father, straight between the eyes, and ask him to cook your dinner/look after the baby/wash the lavatory etc., not as a special favour, but because you see it as his responsibility too, you confront him."



Women strikers at BSR East Kilbride last year.

With handy feminist hints like these, and with advice on abortions, contraception, which books to read, and poems on phallic jealousy, the Women's Liberation Workshop publication, 'Shrew', has even managed to get a mention in The Times' women's page of October 19th.

Women's Liberation Workshop is one of 20 emerging liberation movements in London, according to The Times article, which groups them as either 'feminist' or 'socialist' organisations. But their aim (and middle-class composition) appears to be the same whatever label they choose that is, freedom from the bondage of home and children, and the desire, by joining together as women, to change the attitudes of men towards them.

Yet whatever the intended purpose of Women's Liberation Workshop, what is the effect? What sort of woman is attracted to participate? Is it possible for women to be liberated by joining forces as sisters, and demanding that men take their turn in cleaning the lavatories and looking after the kids?

It is true that many women in England today feel like commodities, like objects to be bought and sold, whose desire in life is expected to be to please her man by titillation and child bearing, by cooking delicious meals, cleaning home sweet home, and making £6 housekeeping stretch until next Friday.

The picture of women as social prostitutes stares blatantly at us from most of the hideous advertisement hoardings, from television, radio and bourgeois journals. Most women must have some sympathy with the American group of women who, to make their point, slink along New York's streets crudely wolf-whistling at young men.

But is grouping together as women ~~and~~ concerning oneself with social issues the correct way to change the situation? Once involved in Women's Liberation, what does one do? According to 'Shrew', its members meet (presumably during the carefree days when husband is out breadwinning), to organise play-groups, community activities, and discuss their marriages. Members of other organisations spend their time campaigning for nursery schools fighting for women deserted by their menfolk and so on.

They are all a far cry from the women sewing machinists at Fords, who went on strike in June 1968 for equal pay. This was the start of it all, claims one organisation.

Frederick Engels would not agree that by attempting to change social attitudes, these organisations are going to achieve any freedom for women. He wrote in 'The Family' -

"The emancipation of women will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of time."

In other words, the way to emancipate women is primarily an economic one.

Yet Women's Liberation movements exist on a purely subjective plain. Their members rightly complain about the lack of nursery school facilities, and the clumsiness of the abortion law, but they take all these factors as isolated problems. They cannot see the political issues involved, and therefore can only respond subjectively, and according to their own individual circumstances.

They might just as well join the Women's Institute or the Vicar's afternoon tea parties for all the real changes that they are going to make. Are they not merely deceiving themselves as to the causes of their exploitation?

They should be fighting for the liberation of all men and women from the system where labour is bought, and where after grafting for 50 years for a boss, we are considered of no further use.

women's liberation

(contd.)

Is any sort of liberation possible for a particular group under capitalism? Perhaps attitudes may change enough so that husband will voluntarily take his turn to clean the lavatory, but this isn't what liberation is all about.

No liberation is possible until society has changed, until people are no longer exploited for the benefit of others, but strive communally, man and woman, to work, to education themselves, and to create a decent environment into which their children can be born.

Mao wrote in 1955

"Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realised in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole."

The struggle for the change of society with its rich experience and impact upon all involved, men and women alike, is the beginning of freedom, and the understanding of its full promise.