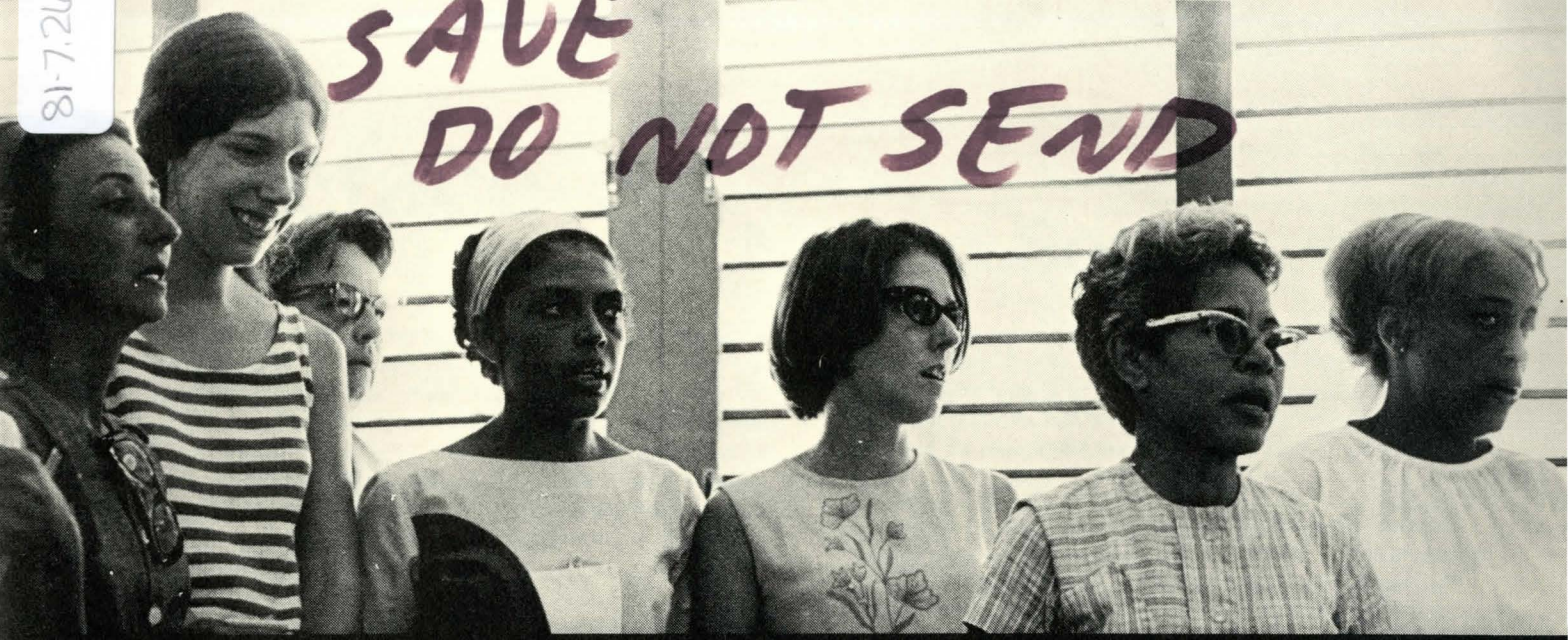


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**TOWARDS A SCIENCE  
OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION:  
An Analysis from Cuba**

**Isabel Larguia  
John Dumoulin**



# preface :

## by Marian Sedley

'Towards a Science of Women's Liberation' is an English version prepared by the authors of an article published in the March-June 1971 issue of the Cuban magazine *Casa de las Americas*. Its aim is to contribute to a Marxist basis of analysis for Women's Liberation, taking into account some of the particular problems of both the capitalist and socialist stages today. It does not attempt to indicate specific lines of development for the women's movement, least of all in the developed capitalist countries.

The article to a large extent will speak for itself. But since it was written primarily with a Cuban readership in mind, the emphases and omissions within it might be better understood and evaluated by readers here if it was situated in the historical, economic, political and social context from which it emerged.

Before the Revolution in 1959 the Cuban economy was dominated and drained by the United States. Havana was like a gigantic brothel-cum-casino servicing the US, while the countryside was a scene of misery and oppression. The acute poverty forced many to the capital, including young girls and women whose only chance for survival was as maidservants or prostitutes. Sickness, unemployment, hunger and illiteracy were the order of the day, and women received a double share of this exploitation – triple, if they were black. Women were among the first to gain with the Revolution. Those prostitutes who stayed were given the cultural and social possibilities for a new life. 20,000 women enrolled in the first Schools for the Advancement of Domestic Servants. And the process has continued. The Cuban Federation of Women, set up in 1961 with the joint purpose of promoting women's greater participation in the Revolution (by education and so on) and furthering their own particular interests, now has in the region of a million members (out of a total population which is less than that of Greater London). In the space of 14 years women have achieved a status and participation in society previously undreamt of. They play an important role in the Committees for Defence of the Revolution – neighbourhood committees for defence and education – in which they do everything from running classes on hygiene to patrolling on guard duty at night on the look out for saboteurs. They may belong to the militia and be adept with a gun, be elected by the neighbourhood to serve as a judge in the People's Court, they study (in almost the same proportion as men) and are building up a substantial participation in traditionally male subjects – engineering etc. In addition, they comprise more than half of the Young Communists – a cadre organisation.

These are some of the undeniable advances. But of course, none of these is without its problems, and there are areas as yet unchallenged in any systematic fashion and which, if they remain so, can potentially act as a brake on further advance, or even allow the clock to be turned back.

One of the main emphases in the article is on 'invisible labour' (housework) and the 'second shift' – women doing a day's work in the factory, fields, schools or offices and returning home to several hours of unpaid drudgery – a phenomenon familiar in both capitalist and socialist societies today. Specifically, in Cuba hundreds of thousands of women today work outside the home, in many fields of work to which they were previously denied access. At last they have an economic independence which removes one of the major fetters of the marriage institution. If they do work, their children have the chance of attending one of the well-run nurseries from the age of 6 weeks. Yet, while production outside the home is now seen increasingly as both the right and the responsibility of men and women alike, the responsibility for the home and care of the family in general remains on the shoulders of women. This is not to say that men don't help. In many cases they do, but 'help' is the operative word. All too frequently, housework and childcare are still seen as a secondary sexual characteristic, which makes women less than 'women' if they don't fulfil it, and men less than 'men' if they do. And this of course against the background of a society with its inherited share of *machismo* (Latin version of male chauvinism). With this in mind, the article attempts to take the nuclear family household off its pedestal, so that the constructive elements of interpersonal relations can be disentangled from the oppressive and exploitative ideological and economic chains.

In order to draw the links and see useful parallels between the process of women's liberation under capitalism and under socialism, as the authors intend, we first have to locate the essential differences, especially those which arise between underdeveloped and developed economies.

Most Cuban women would perhaps identify more readily with their Vietnamese sisters than with liberation-conscious women in the advanced capitalist world. Their immediate struggle is that of participating in the broader anti-imperialist struggle being waged by their country. As their participation increases and develops, so their consciousness of the need to fight their oppression on many other fronts grows too. The women's liberation movement here,

on the other hand, sprang largely from middle-class, educated women with relatively high aspirations who got together and found that where the reality of their lives didn't match up to the ideal (as in nine cases out of ten) the fault lay not in individual, personal inadequacies, as bourgeois ideology would have us believe, but in social structures. Working class women here are able increasingly to draw on the close studies of sexual and psychological oppression and economic exploitation which have formed a central part of this movement, and in a country like Cuba where the economic base has been changed in such a way as to facilitate true equality, access to and the development of such ideas is of tremendous importance.

In Cuba there is more work to do than the hands to do it. Since the Revolution the population as a whole has expanded much more rapidly than the adult labour force needed to sustain it – largely a result of the new medical facilities bringing a startling drop in infant mortality and an extended life expectancy. The children born since the Revolution are still only 14 years old at the most, so it will be a few years yet before they are of an age to swell the ranks of productive workers in any consistent way. The main untapped source of labour remains among women, despite the vast inroads already made in this area. Hand in hand with this objective economic factor calling for women's release from the home in order to contribute to the process of national economic development and independence, goes the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Revolution. This clearly sees the advance of half the population from the isolation of the individual home into collective work as an integral step in the liberating process for this sector itself, bringing economic independence for women, and a recognition by them and by the rest of society of their importance to society as a whole, and not just to a husband and family as before.

But while old forms continue to exist side by side with new forms, while women are tacitly expected, and expect themselves, to do a double day's work in a single day, not only does injustice continue, but there is always a danger of a reversion to old patterns – women who can't keep up the pace will be tempted to drop the new activity and stick to the one which may still be regarded as 'natural'.

For women to have a full participation in the revolutionary process, far more nursery schools, collective eating and laundering facilities are needed. But an underdeveloped economy does not have the material conditions to produce these out of a hat. Until these conditions are created (with the help of women), housework and childcare have of necessity to be carried on largely within individual families. However, if the 'second shift' is not recognised for what it is – a second day's economically necessary yet unpaid labour, and not some voluntary act of love and self-fulfil-

ment – half the population will continue to be oppressed. While the equal sharing of the work in the home does not in itself 'liberate' anybody, it is an important step in the process of re-learning which the transition towards socialism requires, whether pre- or post-revolutionary. Just as women must learn to see a new breadth to the scope of their activities, so too must men, and the average Cuban man is no keener than any other men to take on this extra burden of labour.

Before going ahead with the publication of this article in Britain, it was circulated among a number of people, particularly in the women's movement, for comments and suggestions as to what would be useful in a preface. Something that was consistently raised by them was the question of the gay movement – surprised that laws against homosexuality could co-exist in Cuba with ideas such as those expressed in the article about sexuality and the negative aspects of sex-role conditioning. This is a complex subject to try to understand in Cuba, especially from an advanced capitalist country where an analysis of sexual oppression has provided the initial impetus for both the women's and the gay movement. It is important, however, to try to show some of the factors which come into play.

Firstly, to the average Cuban, the whole notion of homosexuality (and this is usually assumed to be between men) is bound up with their view of American bourgeois decadence. And secondly, to go back to an earlier point, the origins and inspirations of the women's movement in Cuba are quite different from the recent history of the women's movement here, the latter springing as it has from mainly middle-class women initially fighting their oppression, rather than economic exploitation. The gay movement has comprised an integral part of this sexual struggle.

A satisfactory understanding of homosexuality will not be achieved until the economic and ideological function of the family as we know it is fully understood. The family under capitalism requires both men and women to play certain more or less stereotyped roles, and a socialist revolution does not change such deep-rooted expectations overnight. Both men and women are deformed under capitalism, in different ways, but with the common link that what they can and cannot do is defined and limited for them partly by their sex. Any behaviour which does not conform to these roles is implicitly a threat to the status quo, and therefore taboo.

This article is a contribution to just such an analysis of the role of women and therefore implicitly of men too.

Marian Sedley

# towards a science of women's liberation

by

Isabel Larguia  
John Dumoulin

The division of labour . . . is based on the natural division of labour in the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another . . . (with it) is given simultaneously . . . the unequal distribution of labour and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family is the first form of property, but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour power of others.

(Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*)

Women are on the margin of production, it's generally thought; they'd begin participating on a large scale only on entering the money economy, in which they're destined to play an auxiliary role; their fundamental duties are in the home, in the family, where they have a specifically feminine place, quite apart from the economy.

Such notions, very common in the modern scheme of things, both for specialists and among the people in general, are based on a deep-going ideological confusion. They deprecate women in several ways. They deny the economic value of the work which has generally been assigned to women and at the same time maintain that women are born with physical and spiritual features which make them naturally bound to do certain types of work. This ideological confusion prevents a full understanding of the functioning of the economy. More important, it clouds over one of the oldest and most persistent bases of class society.

Marx and Engels discovered how, during the formation of a society divided into classes, the family crystallised into a means of control over women's labour power, a means of private accumulation. Their work aimed above all to fill the urgent need to arm the working class with scientific knowledge

of the bases of its exploitation, demystifying bourgeois society, uncovering the inner workings of the money economy and capitalist production. They also analysed the division of labour, the whole trajectory of private property and its close links with the individual family, pointing out that in capitalism it continues to be the 'economic unit of society'. They left valuable notes on women's oppression and the ideological superstructure which grew up to justify it.<sup>1</sup>

The original meaning of the word 'economy' is 'the art of household management'. The property rights of the head of the household implied inheritance through the paternal line, and the dominion over and confiscation of women's labour power.

Things had not always been this way. In the primitive community labour and the rest of social activities were communal affairs, and both property and kinship relations reinforced these collective bonds.

The family, in its form recognisable to us, arose with the break-up of the primitive community. It's no accident that the word 'family' originally referred to the property rights of the *paterfamilias*, both over the people and over the goods making up the household. The 'household' was the first form of private enterprise, property of the family head, for production, exchange and competition with other households, for the accumulation of a surplus-product.

It was only with the rise of the patriarchal family that social life was divided into two clearly differentiated spheres: the public sphere and the domestic sphere. These two spheres had an unequal evolution: while in the first great historical transformations took place, the second, which evolved more slowly, acted as a brake on the first.

With the development of trade and the division

of society into classes, all the economic, political and cultural changes were centred in the public sphere, while all that took place in the home was the consolidation of the individual family as we know it today. Women were relegated to the domestic sphere, and at the same time there developed through the millennia an all-powerful ideology which still determines the image of woman and her role in social life.

In order to understand the bases of this ideology and the enormous importance it had for the development of class society, one must make a clear distinction between the different activities which have been privately carried out by women in the home. They are basically the following:

- a) strictly biological reproduction,
- b) education and care of children, the sick and old people,
- c) replacement of the labour power consumed each day.

When these three aspects are seen as one romantically blended whole, biological reproduction is systematically confused with the *private replacement of labour power* which includes both that spent by men and women in their daily tasks, and the early formation of the new generation of workers.

Such confusions are the basis of the pseudo-scientific notions brandished in modern society to justify the division of labour between men and women. The biological factor cannot have been determinant in the changes that have taken place in the family from the primitive community until present times – since it's remained the same throughout the existence of the species – nor does it explain women's work role and hence their social position. Besides, reproduction affects men as much as women, except for nursing (and in some societies the latter part of pregnancy).

Women do not 'naturally' do housework. Ethnological studies have long since belied the 19th century genre image of women spontaneously cooking and spinning from earliest times, while men strode off to till distant fields, waging epic battles with nature.

Scoresby and Routledge, for example, in *With a prehistoric people*, point out that in the group they studied, the men were incapable of lifting weights greater than sixty pounds, while the women carried a hundred pounds or more. 'When a man says',

the authors write, 'that "this is a very heavy task for me, that a woman should come and do it," he's simply stating the truth.'

In the essay *History of the USSR* by Briusov and others, we read: 'In the neolithic metropolis of the Transbaikal, hunting weapons – bows and arrows – have been found in the graves of both men and women, which is characteristic of a matriarchal system.'

Even if we put ethnology and archeological discoveries to one side, the daily papers contain ample information on the struggle of the Vietnamese women, for example, two million of whom took up arms in the Tet offensive.

## VISIBLE LABOUR AND INVISIBLE LABOUR<sup>(2)</sup>

The position of equality held by women in the primitive community was determined by the value of their productive labour, which was done collectively. Beginning with the break-up of communitarian structures and their replacement by the patriarchal family, women's work was progressively individualised and limited to the making of *use-values for their direct and private consumption in the home*. Segregated from the world of exchange and surplus, women became the *invisible* economic underpinning of class society. In contrast, men's labour crystallized through the different modes of production in *economically visible* objects destined to create wealth through exchange. In capitalism, whether as owner of the means of production or as operator of them through the sale of his labour power, man is basically defined as a *producer of commodities*. His social position reflects this and the class he belongs to is determined by his situation in the world of production for exchange.

Women, expelled from the universe where surplus is produced, nonetheless fulfilled an essential economic function. The division of labour assigned them the task of replacing the greater part of the economy's labour power, through the transformation of raw materials into use-values for direct consumption; they thus contribute to food, clothing and maintenance of the dwelling as well as to the education of the children.

Economists usually say that in order to replace the means of production and life (machines, food, clothing, etc.) under continual wear and consumption, men have to produce new material goods. This process of constant re-creation of production

is called *reproduction*, which takes place within each enterprise just as within the whole society. But what they omit is that economic reproduction takes place on two distinct levels, and that one of these is still that most primitive form of enterprise, the household. Men and women workers reproduce labour power through the production of commodities for exchange and therefore for their indirect consumption, while housewives *daily replace a large part of the labour power of the whole working class*. Only the existence of an alienating ancient sex ideology prevents the clear perception of the economic importance of this form of direct and private replacement of labour power.

To put it crudely, it could be said that if the proletariat were not firmly seated on this feminine base which provides it with food, clothing, etc., in a world which lacks sufficient services to replace its labour power collectively, the number of hours of surplus-labour would be significantly reduced.

In evaluating a country's economy and its possibilities for development, it's not enough to compare the surplus value with that portion of the worker's labour the value of which is paid for the maintenance of himself and his family. The worker and his family do not maintain themselves just with what they buy with his wage; the housewife and other members of the family have to spend many hours doing work in and around the house. To get an idea of the housewives' contribution, suppose each spends on average only one hour a day on each member of her family (a very conservative estimate); even so the world total would be well over *three thousand million hours of invisible labour every day*. It is only with these hours of invisible labour that the proletariat can produce surplus value in the economy. It can therefore be said that women's labour in the home is *transferred into the creation of surplus value through the wage labour force*.

We have to think in terms of the total labour consumption, of the whole work force of all kinds which maintains and develops an economy. In estimating the relative magnitude of the surplus generated by a system, it must be compared with the total of work done, both for the market and for direct consumption.

This second proportion is not usually taken into account, reflecting the fact that economists limit themselves to the categories of the commodity production, which are those of capitalism.

Capitalists have no direct relation to subsistence production although they exploit it indirectly. The enormous amount of subsistence work done — especially in the non-industrialized countries — added to the low standards of living, enables them to pay the lowest wages and to extract juicy profits even though productivity is relatively low. The economists' omission is a reflection of the discrimination against women and the confusion of biological reproduction with the private replacement of labour power.

The division of labour specialized men in social production, concentrating in their hands the creation of surplus. Through this specialization they were also freed from an important part of the replacement of their own labour power, allowing them to concentrate their efforts in social production and public activity. Thus men's labour crystallised in socially and economically *visible* products. Women's work in the home did not directly produce a surplus, or visible commodities; they were segregated from the world of exchange where value turned on the accumulation of wealth. Women's work was hidden behind the facade of the family, remaining *invisible* up to the present time. It seemed to vanish into thin air since it did not produce *economically visible* products. Therefore this specific kind of labour, even though it absorbs an immense effort, has not been considered as value. *The housewife who did it found herself segregated from the economy, from society and from history.*

The housewife's invisible product is *labour power*, and only under capitalism does labour power become a commodity, with the creation of the working class. Capitalism thus links the woman more directly than before to the money economy, producing as she does, in a sense, for the market — the labour market. But she is not the owner of the labour power she produces and which belongs to her husband and sons; it is they who sell it. On the other hand, the prevailing ideas of bourgeois economics don't recognise this new commodity, considering that the capitalist buys 'labour' instead of labour power. The housewife's contribution thus remains as invisible as before. The confusion between biological reproduction and the private replacement of labour power gives it a physiological appearance: *housework is treated as a secondary sexual characteristic instead of standing out as an economic category.*

The full-time housewife does not sell her labour power or its products; she simply accepts the obligation through the marriage contract which confiscates her invisible labour power, to take care of her family, do the shopping, process and serve in return for her keep and for the acquisition of a social status determined by that of her husband. She will be 'proletarian' insofar as her husband belongs to the working class. The fact that her specific work is invisible means that her contribution to the development of the productive forces remains hidden. There is in the division of labour between the sexes, in this internal relation of the household, sufficient flexibility to adapt to any form of class society, be it feudal, capitalist or other.

It may even be suggested that in this home relation a peculiar status is defined for housewives of working groups – that of sub-class (the 'ladies' of the leisured classes are not included here). Housewives do not exchange among themselves as producers, nor with other classes (like slaves – except that housewives don't work collectively nor produce visible commodities). They do not take part in the public parade of lords, slaves, serfs, workers, capitalists and other classes. They do not participate in the public property relations through which surplus arises and is appropriated. Their situation (which seems unique although it shares some features with patriarchal slavery, and others with subsistence peasantry) is that of contributing to this process in a satellized way, through the direct replacement of labour power of the rest of the workers.

#### THE DIVISION OF LABOUR AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF OPPOSED SEXUAL MODELS

Division of labour and private property are the same term: one of them says in reference to slavery the same as the other in reference to its product.

(Marx and Engels: *The German Ideology*)

'The dominant ideas are simply the ideal expression of the dominant material relations . . . therefore the relations which make a given class the ruling class are also those which confer the dominant role to its ideas.' (*Ibid*)

Thus Aristotle said: 'It is a general law that there should be naturally ruling elements and elements naturally ruled . . . The rule of the freeman over the slave is one kind of rule; that of the male over the female another . . .'

And Napoleon Bonaparte: 'Nature intended woman to be our slaves . . . they are our property . . . They belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener . . . Women are nothing but machines for producing children.'

Jean Jacques Rousseau: 'The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them – these are the duties of women at all times and what should be taught them from their infancy.'

P. J. Moebius: 'If the feminine abilities were developed to the same degree as those of the male, her maternal organs would suffer and we should have a repulsive and useless hybrid.'

John XXIII: 'Woman . . . was given different tasks by God and by Nature which perfect and complete the work entrusted to men.'

Bourgeois science has produced a number of theories designed to prove the biological inferiority of women. Just as slavery, imperialism and fascism have given rise to numerous pseudoscientific theories supposed to demonstrate the inferiority of oppressed races and justify their genocide; psychoanalysts, psychologists, biologists, doctors, sociologists and anthropologists have worked up a considerable array of arguments for keeping women 'in their place'.

The radically opposed sexual models we know today are the result of the division of labour. Although they refer to obvious physiological differences, in the course of history a copious superstructure has been erected which not only assigns physical types to men and women but also encourages different features of temperament, character, inclinations, tasks and talents which are assumed to be biologically inherent in each sex. They are considered as secondary sexual characteristics, immutable, inevitable and ahistorical.

Marx, following Adam Smith, wrote: 'By nature a philosopher is not in talent and intelligence half so different from a street-porter as a mastiff is from a greyhound.' And: 'The difference of *natural talents* in different individuals is not so much the *cause* as the *effect* of the division of labour. . .'

If we could for a moment throw off the whole weight of prejudice and slanted personal experience which has formed our ideology of the sexes,

we'd see clearly that the man-woman opposition we know today is not so much due to physiological differences as to thousands of years of division of labour.

Throughout the history of class society most women's lot has been to stay in the home and maintain the family, and in that process there were evolved the culture traits and juridical structures most appropriate to such a situation. Morals, legislation and custom consolidate and support the opposition of masculine and feminine models.

Women are made responsible for the continuity of the family, overlooking men's co-participation. At the same time, women are allegedly incapable of the 'heavy', 'dangerous' or 'responsible' tasks.

While in the classic feminine model *reproductive behaviour* is determinant, in the masculine model the principle things are *work for exchange, war, and the legal defense of property*.

The canons of behaviour crystallized over prolonged periods of time predetermine the educational formation, and therefore the social destiny, of each new human being according to its sex, male or female. A girl's education, especially in the underdeveloped countries and among the exploited class, inhibits her from violent games and competitions, affecting her physical and character development from the first months of her life. Any curiosity for mechanics or for tools is ill-advised.

Limited to the narrow bounds of the family, the first inevitable gift the little girl receives is the traditional dolly (why isn't she given a gun or a carpentry set?) complete with household furnishings of little pots, little brooms, little pans, little chairs, little sewing sets and little mirrors. Together with these early play objects she classically receives a long decalogue of prohibitions, instilling in her the fear of curiosity, of the world outside the family.

She is transformed into something decorative, pretty, 'feminine', with the conviction from early on that she was born to give pleasure through sex and not to act through work. All her creative forces are thus channelled towards the reproduction of the species and the private replacement of labour power (the little brooms and other crap are there to prove it).

As children, both men and women receive miniatures of the tools they will use as adults. Their permanent use conditions them and makes them

conform in one way or the other, both physically and psychologically. The secret division of labour is thus assured; the underpinnings of class society are guaranteed by the early recruitment of invisible labour power.

Class culture — poetry, the novel, popular music, the mass media, habits and customs — will carry on the scrupulous and devastating work that was started in earliest childhood. Early boxed into this asphyxiating mould, the growing woman will inevitably see her best energies deviated towards false problems of love and reproduction. On reaching adulthood she will be atrophied, considering herself a human by-product. The scale of values with which she has been provided and to which she slings desperately in a world hostile to her full development, convinces her that her social advancement can only come from using her sexual characteristics. The classic woman is expected to be meek, passive, abnegated, and pathologically afraid of the outside world. Our western Christian society knows how to smother with cotton wool. No need to bind the little girl's feet to prevent her escape. It is enough to provoke the death of energy, daring and curiosity.

These are the internal chains which make woman conservative, insecure, afraid to begin an open struggle for her full liberation. Even rejecting the traditional feminine mystique, even when she joins a revolutionary struggle, she tends to seek the approval of higher masculine authority. This accumulation of virtues, which alienates woman from her human condition and which goes under the social pseudonym of 'femininity', is the most convenient for the direct replacement of labour power.

Meanwhile the young man is expected to be just the opposite. As a future *visible* worker he will be stimulated to the utmost development of his physical strength — which is repressed in the woman — of his intelligence, daring and fighting spirit, traits which are identified by the worn-out slogan of *virility*. The existence of a dual morality sanctions the daily relations of the oppression between men and women. These morals demand from men a demonstration of sexual aggressiveness pushed to obsession in some societies, and from women the corresponding masochistic provocation. The ideology arising from the male-female opposition finds its folk expression in false chivalry and wolf whistling, destined to inculcate in woman the conviction that **she** is nothing more than the object of male



possession. What the average woman never realizes is that the aim is not only possession of her beauty, of her poetic and ideal being', but ultimately the confiscation of her invisible labour power through the marriage contract.

Romanticism was a useful smokescreen to conceal the exploitation of this slave labour force. The plump Cupid who hovered round our grandmother was actually the most effective gendarme in the service of private property.

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND SELECTIVE INCORPORATION OF WOMEN INTO THE WORKING CLASS

The family began to suffer some important changes with the full development of capitalism, but not so the exploitation of women within it. Only incorporation into proletarian work brought about any substantial change in the situation of the mass of women.

The formation of the working class brought forward a group of free workers who had no material possessions to speak of. Inheritance and paternity, pillars of the family in class society, thus lost their economic relevance for a large part of the population. This did not happen with the small producers who continued to exist, in developed countries and especially in the underdeveloped world, where patriarchal forms were sometimes maintained.

Industrialization required a certain level of culture in its workers. The bourgeoisie implanted universal basic education to serve its own ends. This meant compulsory state intervention in the formation of the new generation of workers, sharing it with the family. The road was opened for the extension of this process, which can only be completely effected under socialism. But the basic division of labour between the sexes was not modified.

Capitalism introduced some important changes in the legal status of women in marriage, extending to them for the first time, in principle at least, the rights of an individual personality:

In changing all things into commodities,' Engels pointed out, 'capitalist production . . . replaced time-hallowed and historical rights by purchase and sale, by the 'free' contract . . . In order to make contracts, people must have full freedom over their persons, actions and possessions. They must also enjoy the same rights.

The creation of these 'free' and 'equal' persons, was precisely one of the main functions of the capitalist production.

Finally this principle was also extended to the marriage contract.

On paper . . . the love match was proclaimed as a human right; and not only the man's right (*droit de l'homme*) but also for once as woman's right (*droit de la femme*).

However, the practical exercise of this right, like all other liberal rights, depended on the realities of the division of labour.

The Industrial Revolution required the massive incorporation of women into factory production. The female proletariat was created, a new factor in history, which would have immense weight in the future course of events. With mixed public education it was possible, for the first time, for girls to invade the public world and compare their mettle with that of young men.

Despite the relative modification which these changes produced in the traditional models of behaviour for the two sexes, these models continue powerfully to influence the selection of jobs open to women.

Although the struggles of middle-class feminists, together with the relative security of their social and economic position, allowed some women to make openings in architecture, engineering and other professions, the existence of women solderers and lathe operators is not accepted.

The division of labour between the sexes among wage-workers is an accurate reflection of the secret division of labour which freed men for public activity while it secluded most women in the narrow confines of the private reproduction of labour power.

It's no coincidence that women are incorporated into the textile and clothing industries, the food and drug industries, and into the services in education, nursing, secretarial posts, and as lift operators, telephonists and maid-servants. These activities are simply the projection into the public sphere of the tasks which women fulfil within the family.

With the exception of periods of war, in which necessity obliges the incorporation of women into heavy industry, women have in general been systematically discriminated from those branches of industry where the productive forces are most highly developed. In some countries the capitalists in power sanction this discrimination by modestly covering it with the sheep's clothing of safeguards for the health and well-being of women workers.

The notion that woman is only capable of performing secondary tasks is thus engraved on the social consciousness of the proletariat.

The ideals of beauty of the ruling class tend at the same time, through the mass media, to create in woman a fear of the healthy development of her physical strength.

The division of labour in the heart of the proletariat contributes to the consolidation of the old sexual prejudices in the field of labour. These prejudices have two functions:

a) To justify the payment of lower wages to the working woman than those paid to men (generally 45%) for an equivalent job and the same qualifications.

To show how the discrimination against women relates to racial discrimination in the United States, a comparison may be made of the following figures for average annual income, taking the white man as 100%:

White men . . . . .	100%
Black men . . . . .	63%
White women . . . . .	59%
Black women . . . . .	42%

(Statistics from the Labour Department of the United States 1965)

b) By assigning to women those tasks in production which are considered to be 'light', to justify the working women's obligation to continue replacing labour power in the home on returning from the factory.

## SECOND SHIFT

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Frederick Engels expresses concern about the future of women, saying that they will have to choose between being housewives and being workers. He couldn't conceive that women could take on both jobs, and we believe that he was quite justified. Yet women are educated to resignedly accept both tasks, hoisting a weight of super-exploitation which cancels out for them all the reduction of working hours won by the working class.

This double working day was not denounced politically in capitalism until recently, despite the fact that it places women in the position of workers legally bound to a twelve-hour day. The invisibility of domestic labour, its apparent valuelessness, and the fact that it is regarded as a secondary sexual characteristic, a biological quality, even today, make it seem the most natural thing in the world

that women workers burden themselves with a second shift.

Though women advanced tremendously with their incorporation into *visible* labour, wage labour in social production, they achieved it at the cost of a sacrifice which is conveniently silenced by official ideologies. If a woman works eight hours in a factory, receiving a wage in payment, on returning to her home sweet home a second day's work awaits her — three to eight hours of unpaid, unqualified, stupifying drudgery which wipes away any illusion of her equality with men and her touted independence.

The following table shows the work week of French women in 1959, taken from *La Femme dans la société. Son image dans des différents milieux sociaux*, by Chombart de Lauwe and others:

Number of children	Women's work week (hours)			housewives
	working women paid work	housework	total	
0	50	27	77	54
1	45	39	84	71
2	37	47	84	76
3 or more	34	50	84	78

Several conclusions can be derived from this important study.

1) For a mother the second shift is as long as her 'social' labour time; if she has two or more children it is longer.

2) Working women are forced to limit their work outside the home as the second shift grows longer with the number of children. It might seem from the table that a woman's working capacity has a limit at around 84 hours weekly (compared to 49 for men in France) but the Chase Manhattan Bank has estimated that, for American women at least, the work week is one hundred hours.

3) Full-time housewives spend much more time than working women in coping with the same problems. The housewife with no children spends *twice the time* on this than working women do. Mothers spend about thirty hours more on housework when they have no other occupation. Why is this? A psychological factor intervenes forcefully here: the housewife's impulse to be obsessively busy in the home, over-protecting her children, unloading onto them all her forces repressed by the division of labour; an impulse which leads her to leave aside other activities (cultural, recreational and political). In Betty Friedan's words: 'Housewifery expands to fill all the time available.'

It is also a fact that working women can count on a larger money income with which to socialize a part of their second shift, paying for laundries, restaurants, and other services.

Conservative political forces in France and other industrialized countries, recognizing the existence of the second shift, have proposed part-time work as an official solution.

The application of this measure *tends to defend the traditional division of labour*, hindering the socialization of the second shift and the growth of social wages as against individual wages.

Since the replacement of labour power is still considered as natural as menstruation in women, instead of a specifically economic function, men generally consider it degrading to participate in such labour. The worker who is militant in his place of work is unaware that part of the surplus-value that the boss extracts from him comes from his wife, and that he acts as foreman in this exploitation.

## MALE SUPREMACY

In the sex models of class society, the repressive function corresponds to man. How do women feel about this?

If I protest the whole of society will quickly put me back 'in my place', condemning any outburst of 'female hysteria' in this sense. Male supremacy acts as a vigilant gendarme both to prevent my getting out of control and to brake any process of humanization on the part of men. The husband who understands his wife, who cleans, washes or irons together with her, will be considered less than a man in many countries and environments.

The totem of classic 'virility' stands there, stiff, dry and (hopefully) menacing. It demands no blood sacrifices. Worse, it is a vampire sucking from us thousands of millions of working hours, invisible, unqualified, unpaid.

Implacable frontier guard of the division of labour, it appears inevitable at each step I take in the road to liberation. Emulating the big stick policy, it was there during the first years of my childhood to inhibit me. It appears in all sectors of working activity, taking tools from my hands, closing the road to political authority, blocking my access to the military and to all the branches of high development in production.

When force doesn't get results, the hungry totem disguises itself as a sheep. Taking on paternal airs, it appeals to hygiene and labour safeguards.

When defeated by reason it falls back momentarily, adopting an air of learned self-sufficient irony.

I know it well, its ideology, its why and wherefore. Like the eunuch who kept the keys of the harem, it's entrenched in social consciousness to guarantee my slavery, for the private production of labour power. It's there to serve the ruling classes, confusing the people, preventing women from realizing our great potential, which if massively turned to social labour would provoke a massive leap forward. It's there because if all my sisters understood how much they are deformed, how far they are exploited, the foundations of class society might break up before their time.

## WOMAN, PRISONER OF THE CONSUMER SOCIETY

There is no underestimating the ideological and economic importance of sex for the survival of class society. Liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights, a whole philosophy of individual freedom, seems to be indispensable to the maintenance of capitalism on a stable basis. (fascism as a system has not proved to be a durable alternative.) But, in a society dominated by monopoly, liberalism has completely ceased to correspond to economic and political reality.

Sex is the only terrain where liberalism is still actively developing. It has at its disposal here a vast ideological reserve in the complete and unconscious acceptance of deformed sex models. The first decades of this century saw the development of a whole culture of sex whose most important ideologist was Sigmund Freud. The avant-guards in the arts, and later the mass media, incorporated notions like 'sexual repression' and the corresponding 'release from inhibitions' into the social consciousness of the advanced capitalist countries.

The theory that culture is the product of the sublimation of the sexual instinct was accorded a scandalized, but nonetheless warm reception by the ideologists of the ruling classes, who were not long in incorporating it into the bourgeois system of thought. The theory of sex as the basis of all culture, and the therapeutics of disinhibition, formulated by psychoanalysts, were soon given a place in class culture and commercialized through the media. The sexual puritanism which originally characterized bourgeois morals has now been sub-

stituted by the call to get rid of your inhibitions, and to be a heretic in the face of established norms.

Sex, skillfully manipulated through advertising, films, TV and the press, has dominated the social consciousness of the developed countries. It constitutes the last refuge for the myths of individual initiative and sovereignty – which had been born, paradoxically, of puritan wedlock. The sex campaign distracts attention from the falsehood of the dominant values – from economic exploitation, social isolation and political impotence. It promotes sex as the only aspect of life where a certain space still exists for the individual. Capitalism is vitally interested in expanding that space, because the day liberalism is left without a leg to stand on, the show may well be over.

This development is also a product of economic necessity. The characteristic problem of the capitalist economy today is no longer that of creating the conditions for the production of commodities, but for the *sale* of these commodities; their circulation is constantly threatening to slow down and stagnate, preventing the realization of profit. The neo-capitalist solution is the co-called consumer society. Advertising becomes central to continued economic expansion; light industry, aimed at the consumer, becomes the most dynamic sector.

Demand no longer 'exists'; it is *made*. Radio, TV, cinema and mass publications push the continual creation of new 'needs', guaranteeing a state of permanent non-satisfaction of material appetites. The highly developed prestige race is one of the principal ways of permanently sharpening material stimuli. Prestige is associated with the purchase and 'enjoyment' of consumer goods which year by year become more alien to the real lives of the poor in general and the Third World in particular. The competition among families and individuals is greatly intensified in order to guarantee the sales of neo-capitalism.

As commodity relations penetrate into the tiniest crevice of society, people find themselves more and more bound to the world of *things*, that is, to their own products.

Woman's new economic function in consumer society emphasizes her responsibilities as proprietor of her sex and co-participant in the prestige of her family. Her function is increasingly to *buy*. A large part of advertising is aimed at her, dignifying her in relation to men and stimulating her

to buy goods which create a mystic sphere of attraction and masculine approval. So she continues to be subordinated to men as before, only in a more subtle, less barbarous manner.

Romanticism stressed a woman's rights over her sex, laying down a heavy smoke screen over the confiscation of her labour power – surrendered voluntarily in marriage, no longer man's property but his in permanent usufruct. Woman's right was recognized, to do with herself as she liked, making her proprietor of her sex. But, like all property under capitalism, it has a commodity character, implying the continual search for buyers. Woman must sell herself, make herself a permanent focus of sexual attraction. While man's labour power is his commodity – and he competes in selling it – woman's socially recognized value is her sex and everything that goes with it. Sexual competition is to women what competition in the labour market is to men. While a man's social advancement is a result of work, a woman's is generally due to the subtle employment of sex. Even when women enter the labour market, they use the old weapons of 'charm', 'beauty' and 'femininity' to ascend socially and economically.

A fluctuating, generally accepted fashion is one of the products (and barometers) or sexual competition. Fashion is a normative expression of the sex market analogous to the stock exchange. These characteristics of standardization plus constant change suit the mass production of consumer goods very well. Advertising makes sure that every woman is aware of the latest trends, and of her obligation to be up to date.

The basic canons of beauty in the sex market are no spontaneous expression of a popular culture. They have a marked class character, which is evident not only in their function of guaranteeing the market, but fundamentally in infiltrating the morals and aesthetics of the ruling class into the consciousness of the exploited. The ideal woman offered by the mass media, by the literature and commercial music of bourgeois society, possesses certain features which are unquestionably of leisure class origin: she is velvet-skinned, svelte, delicate and lacking all muscular definition. Too much physical development from manual work or sports, the mark of study in glasses or a wrinkled brow, are systematically excluded by class culture, not recommended for the girl who from childhood is preparing for sexual competition.

An outrageous culture of sex has marked popular ideology and social psychology under neo-capitalism, reflecting the economic and ideological requirements of the system. Advertising has tended to overdevelop sexual characteristics and functions to the point of exasperation. In this dizzy race of sex and profits women are converted into attractive commodities – objects for the consumption of a male population avid for new sensations.

Even when a woman tries to free herself, it turns out to be difficult to get outside the ideological rules of the game. On becoming aware that she is an OBJECT (that is, that her human essence has been alienated by a dominant and uncontrollable power), she tends to revert this condition to men. The 'emancipated' woman begins to consider THEM in turn as instruments of play and pleasure. A tragic war is engaged, in which the sexes conquer and dominate one another, seeking escape from the tremendous pressures of monopoly-controlled society. Modern woman finds no rational explanation of her situation. Not understanding that her oppression comes from the division of labour she will adopt revengeful attitudes towards the male sex.

The culture of class society has instilled in women the idea that their humanity is realizable only within the narrow confines of sexuality; it has blocked the understanding that the development of their true capacities can only come from labour. As a result, a woman will see in the relations of biological reproduction the reason for the oppression she suffers, instead of in those of social production. She tends spontaneously to rebel against the traditional patterns of sexual conduct. She will trade the single husband for a thousand brief encounters. From an object, she will try to become a sexual subject, living an imaginary independence which cannot restore her human condition. Her fixed preoccupation with men remains unchanged. She is as dependent on the male sex in general as her grandmother was on one man. Concerned only with revenge and domination within the love relationship, she continually postpones her integration into the political struggles against the system which oppresses her. Tired at last of the ups and downs of unending warfare, she will fall prisoner to the individual home and end up docilely replacing the labour power of the definitive conqueror.

Consumer society takes full advantage of this new phase in her life. Glorifying the role of the

housewife through the mass media, it pushes her to buy TV, refrigerators, mixers and so on. Capitalising on both roles, advertising has joined the two ideals, the beautiful, fashionable woman (be lovely, retain your husband), and the good housewife firmly anchored in the kitchen.

This woman suffers from a contradiction which can only be resolved through the acquisition of costly household appliances, since she must provide her family with a high level of consumption without ever having the appearance of a worker. The obligation to do housework and at the same time to look like Jacqueline Kennedy, the contradiction between the lady and the domestic slave, can only benefit light industry.

The working-class woman who cannot afford the latest consumer goods is no less a prisoner of the mass media than the middle-class woman. In consumer society there is no shelter which can adequately protect human beings from the continual ideological bombardment.

Neo-capitalism, which binds women to their condition of sexual objects, offers them escape valves for their potential rebelliousness (while male supremacy becomes less blatant, more refined). They are left with ingrained ideological features which tend to stick with them even when they turn to active militancy for women's liberation and for socialism.

The left movements have passed over the study of these specific ideological features. Such analysis is, nevertheless, much needed, for their survival in socialism could greatly impede the development of proletarian consciousness.

These sectorial ideological features are manifested in:

a) *Sexual liberalism*. As we saw before, this serves as a last resort of the survival of the characteristic values of liberalism. This feature is a modern ideological projection of the division of labour between the domestic sphere and the public sphere. It thus sustains the right to existence of an individualistic morality, opposed to the formation of a collectivist morality. It argues for the destruction of the family, without taking account of the fact that it is still 'the economic unit of society', and that it can be made obsolescent only through the disappearance of class society.

In political life, it would make 'sexual liberation' the main issue, de-emphasizing the class struggle.

It has influenced some feminist and new left groups in recent years, inspired by ideologists like Wilhelm Reich, who try to find the centre of human problems in authoritarian sex relationships and not in the class oppression from which they spring. Sexual liberalism as a feminine ideology often appears among students, professionals, and middle-class women. It is less frequent in the working class and the rural population. When it survives under socialism, it is a vehicle of individualism and the poor relation of cultural neo-colonialism.

b) *Housewives' economism*. In consumer society, the tendency is to mold women for buying and not for producing. Women, mainly housewives, buy a very large proportion of consumer goods. This gives rise to a policy and ideology of selling, a system of advertising, which tends to stress the original division of labour and the sex roles which arose from it. The importance of beauty, of the maternal function of the housewife, and of the competition between families to achieve an accepted social status, are exaggerated out of all proportion. The social existence of the housewife, isolated in the tiny sweatshop where she produces labour power, determines her fundamentally individualistic character.

Competition between housewives has its concrete symbols. To reach the social status recommended by the mass media, one must acquire certain objects, commodities. The fetishism of the consumer good becomes a religion whose observances permit the shortening of the turn-over cycle of commodities. The acceleration of these cycles depends on the creation of a social consciousness specific to women, by which they are obliged to consume a variety of goods which are totally unnecessary for a healthy life, from vanishing creams and electrical appliances (which don't do away with the second shift), to cultural-ideological goods such as women's magazines and films aimed at keeping them tightly chained to the formidable mythology of sex. When the ideology of housewives' economism survives the struggle for national and social liberation, it may become an invisible enemy of proletarian consciousness. In the economic field, it can put pressure on socialist planning, demanding a deformed development of light industry, submitting it to the collective whim, requiring the production of unnecessary consumer goods and the attempt to emulate consumer society.

It can also pressure for the perpetuation of the individual home as the economic cell of society. And, by the same token, maternal overprotection and an upbringing in the semi-isolation of the home would continue to affect children adversely.

Thus, if the creation of a specifically feminine social consciousness is a condition of survival for neo-capitalism, in socialism its radical extinction is an unavoidable necessity for the development of the proletarian economy and ideology.

The oppression of women is a key element in the division of labour for private enrichment. The destruction of capitalism is therefore an indispensable first step towards women's liberation. It would be utopia to expect it any other way.

But it would be no less utopian to expect full women's liberation as an immediate and automatic result of the working class's rise to power. Only in the building of a classless society can women achieve full liberation, and that liberation is an *absolutely indispensable condition* of the elimination of the class mode of production.

## ROADS TO LIBERATION

If women think their situation in society is an optimum situation . . . if women think their revolutionary function in society has been fulfilled, they would be making a grave mistake. It seems to us that women have to reinforce themselves a lot to reach the place they should really hold in society.

Fidel Castro, *Speech to Plenary of the Federation of Cuban Women*, December 1966.

Man is the bourgeois in the family, the woman represents the proletariat. But in the industrial world the specific character of the economic oppression weighing on the proletariat appears in its sharpest outlines only after all the legal privileges of the capitalist class have been abolished, and the full capacity of both classes is juridically established. The democratic republic does not suppress the antagonism between these two classes; on the contrary it provides the battleground on which the struggle to resolve this antagonism can be fought out. In the same way the particular character of man's rule over woman in the modern family, the necessity and the way to achieve real social equality between the two, will not become absolutely clear until men and women enjoy complete legal equality. It will then be seen that the emancipation of women is primarily depen-

dent on the reincorporation of the whole female sex into the public industries. To accomplish this the individual family must cease to be the economic unit of society.

Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

When a socialist revolution comes to power, a sudden levelling-out takes place among all the members of society. The equalling process between men and women under these circumstances has a completely different content from the miserable gains obtained under capitalism. For the first time in history women attain full legal equality. Discrimination is eliminated from wages. Discrimination is eliminated from education. Prostitution and dual sex morality are suppressed. Birth control is facilitated. Everything possible is done to increase social services and incorporate women into social production. To take the USSR and the United States as an example: in the US only 7% of doctors are women, 1% of engineers, and 3% of lawyers; while in the Soviet Union women constitute 79%, 32% and 37% respectively of these professions.

Women begin to be considered as human beings for the first time in history. It's from this moment that women take the hard road towards total liberation, massively and no longer in isolated groups.

Engels foresaw that circumstances like these would bring an intense awakening of women to the antagonism between the sexes which exists in class society. In the transition period a violent ideological struggle is unleashed within the mass of the people of the underdeveloped countries, where male supremacy had been most harsh and where, with a few exceptions, such as Vietnam, there had been no massive integration of women into the liberation movement, into armed struggle, and into political leadership.

The family becomes the focus of tremendous tensions.

The basis of this conflict and the road to its solution were pointed out by Engels in 1884:

We are now approaching a social revolution in which the present economic foundations of monogamy will disappear as surely as those of its complement, prostitution . . . the situation will be very much altered for men, but also that of women, *of all women*, will be completely changed. With the transformation of the means of production into collective property the individual family will cease to be the economic unit of society. The private house-

hold will become a social industry. The care and education of children will become a public matter.

Future generations, Engels continued, who have not known the fear and the economic obligations which have always characterized family life, will decide for themselves on the way to normalise the relations between the sexes, independently of our criteria or what we may anticipate.

Socialist practice demonstrates today that marriage based on equality is only possible when the proletariat takes power. It will continue to be an intense social necessity until competitive individualism, inherited from earlier historic systems, disappears. Its effective attainment is one of the most beautiful ideals of the socialist man and woman who together are fighting for communism.

Lenin, in 1919, confirmed Engels' analysis, pointing out that the first victories of socialism reveal the true nature of the economic exploitation of women:

. . . We actually razed to the ground the infamous laws placing women in a position of inequality, restricting divorce and surrounding it with disgusting formalities, denying recognition to children born out of wedlock, enforcing a search for their fathers, etc., laws numerous survivals of which, to the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, are to be found in all civilised countries. We have a thousand times the right to be proud of what we have done in this field. But the more *thoroughly* we clear the ground of the lumber of the old, bourgeois laws and institutions, the more we realise that we have only cleared the ground to build on, but are not yet building.

Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a *domestic slave*, because *petty housework* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real *emancipation of women*, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its *wholesale transformation* into a large-scale socialist economy begins.

(from the article *A Great Beginning*, July 1919)

Unfortunately, revolutionary theory on woman and her situation in the family structure has been little developed since. Not much attention has been paid to Engels' and Lenin's insistence on the role of the family in class society. This theoretical inertia has left a breach in left movements, on the one

hand for a romantic conception of the traditional family as a positive element in the construction of socialism and, on the other, for its total negation, and a would-be theory of the abolition of the family. These conservative or utopian conclusions stem from the lack of analysis of the activities taking place behind the facade of the family, that is:

- a) biological reproduction,
- b) education and care of children, the sick and the old,
- c) replacement of the labour power used up each day.

This contradiction is not just economic but ideological as well. It's not the relationship of solidarity between two people with its positive psychological features which enters into contradiction with the building of a classless society, but the private-economy aspect, the miserable sweatshop through which the woman's labour power is confiscated.

People tend to forget that the individual family, insofar as its economic functions have not been collectivised, continues to be the 'economic unit of society', and that unit is simply *a tiny private sweatshop for the production of labour power*. This private economic unit comes into conflict with the social economy under revolutionary transformation, where private property and commodity relations no longer predominate.

It might be said that this contradiction in production relations is one of the characteristic features of the transition period.

The root causes of women's oppression may be summed up as follows:

- a) The original economic necessity for the private replacement of labour power,
- b) the division of labour between the sexes which obliges women to shoulder the responsibility of invisible labour,
- c) the consequent development of a hidden sex ideology which deforms our ideas of what men and women should do in life.

The lack of deep-going analysis of these questions has led on the one hand to things being left undone and, on the other hand, to the attempt to apply utopian measures — with their consequent partial failures — in the struggle against the heritage of the past.

In underdeveloped countries the economic resources are insufficient for the socialization of domestic labour on a grand scale. But that doesn't prevent the creation of a new morality, the man sharing housework, making it possible for his wife to hold a job outside the home. There are countless possibilities for partial solutions by co-operation among neighbours, and which don't require large-scale state investment. All these possibilities require a radical change in people's 'common sense', which has been heavily impregnated with male supremacy and individualism.

Among the basic difficulties which women's liberation faces at this stage is the resistance which not only men but women themselves offer to revolutionary changes in their situation. Still bound to a culture formed through thousands of years of discrimination, women unconsciously tend to cling to 'traditional feminine values', that is, the hidden sex ideology. In these circumstances, unless vigorous Party action intervenes, women's first rise to consciousness tends to channel itself towards partial forms of liberation; in this narrowness there is a danger of crystallization and reversion towards a sectarian ideology, reactionary in its content.

The overestimation of sexual freedom as the sole objective of female rebellion arises from the actual growth of consumer society, and brings with it strong individualistic tensions. In practice it distracts women's attention from problems as fundamental as the struggle to collectivise the second shift, to suppress the sexual division of labour, to achieve the full integration of women into the proletarian power structure and the army. It frequently appears among intellectuals and students who reach a position of relative prestige and who find it easier to solve their domestic problems than most women. It appears with great force in cultural milieux in which some individualistic features still exist. Eulogising the morals of individuality, it goes against the necessary homogenisation of social values which is essential in proletarian ethics. Paradoxically, the women who reveal this ideological trait, while demanding women's rights, in practice give fodder to the old dual morality by perpetuating the classic role of the mistress, with all the deceit that this involves.

The resurgence of housewives' economism in socialist society tends to reinforce the traditional division of labour between the sexes, to perpetuate



the home as the economic unit of society, and is strongly analogous to private artisanry in its individualising effect on the social consciousness. Housewives' economism clings to the traditional status symbols, putting pressure on light industry to produce unnecessary objects. In periods of shortage it feeds the black market and provides a magnificent avenue for the infiltration of imperialist values in social consciousness, by easily absorbing all echoes of fashion and middle-class ways of life through films, TV, books and other vehicles of the consumer society. Eternal womanhood (beauty, canons of behaviour) is sanctified as a concept *outside the social class*, instead of pointing out that it is precisely the product of the division of labour and class interests. A special province is created, untouchable, a sort of sanctuary whose desecration would bring never-ending evils onto humanity, and in which the germs of private property and competitive individualism survive, bud and multiply.

When housewives' economism is reinstated despite the advance of proletarian culture, woman takes advantage of her increase in buying power and the newly created services, not to transform herself in a revolutionary way, working to her full capacity and being politically active, but to obtain a social standing similar to that of a housewife in consumer society. She tends to use the services for individual benefit, getting swept back into the rat-race of consumption.

Maternal over-protection, another well-known feature of housewives' economism, is very detrimental to the healthy development of the young.

The consciousness that the revolutionary process demands of women, and especially of women leaders, is similar to that proposed by the Guinean revolutionary Amilcar Cabral for the petty bourgeoisie (which in Africa tends to lead the way to independence): *it must commit suicide as a social class, through struggle, merging with the proletariat*. Small producers, including housewives, are marginal classes, secondary ones, which lack the authority necessary to lead the country. The revolutionary process requires their assimilation into the basic working classes which are the only ones capable of standing up to Imperialism. The housewives' transformation into proletariat, their class suicide, requires the destruction of the main features of their social consciousness under capitalism.

The full incorporation of women of all sectors

of society into production, is no guarantee in itself of their total liberation.

To the extent that housewives become completely proletarian, we shall witness a revolutionary current in women's social consciousness; but insofar as they maintain in part the ideological features characteristic of class society, a reformist current will develop, the best possible culture medium for economic and political revisionism.

Socialism is a transitional stage between capitalism and a classless society. Such a society cannot be achieved without resolving the contradiction between the persisting need for household labour and the need to incorporate the overlooked half of humanity into productive labour and political life.

Private replacement of labour power continues to be a cruel and unavoidable necessity under socialism. Official recognition of the tangible existence of the second shift is important, but its socialization through the expansion of services, the growth of social wages, is much more a function of economic development than of official policy. While invisible labour persists, and its justification in sex ideology is not fiercely fought against, the same old prejudices will survive: opposing models for the two sexes, passive-authoritarian; housewives' economism and biological arguments to justify the division of work in social labour.

It's not easy to differentiate between reformist and revolutionary ideas on the woman question, among other things because they lack systematic formulation. This is all the more reason to try. One thing seems clear: reformist ideas reflect the tendency to perpetuate invisible labour; revolutionary ones reflect the need to fully and definitively incorporate women into the building of a classless society.

## REFORMIST IDEAS

It's relatively easy to say 'men and women are equal'. It's difficult to put it into practice in revolutionizing underdeveloped countries, when faced with the problem of incorporating millions of women into social production and political activity. Semi-literate women, limited by thousands of years of discrimination and abuse, prepared by class culture exclusively to replace labour power in the home, they've been made to consider themselves sexual objects, commodities designed exclusively for marriage. The housewife's ideological

weight may seem limited, but it can easily steer the course of State in some respects. Housewives' economism pressures against the incorporation of women into jobs where physical effort is at all great or where distance from the family is required. Thus women themselves sanction the prolongation into socialism of the sexual division of labour that had taken shape in capitalism as a projection of their servile obligations in the home.

Pseudo-scientific theories of discrimination appear, prohibiting women's access to traditionally 'male' jobs. This tendency has its practical base in the second shift. It is difficult for a woman who does a hard and exhausting job in production to meet the hours of invisible labour and invisible work, tending to sanction the second shift as a permanent and necessary phenomenon.

An example of this is the idea of reducing the workday of married women. The anti-economic content of this measure is immediately evident. Its reactionary content is not so obvious, but it's worth noting that it would lead to:

- 1) Building up of individual wages as against social wages.
- 2) Weakening of the position of equality reached by women through the revolution, conferring on them a different legal status from men, which sanctions the 'biological fatality', obliging women to continue in the role of serfs, replacing labour power.
- 3) Strengthening of petty bourgeois individualism. If the individual family was the economic cell of class society, any return to that through the consolidation of invisible labour will necessarily shore up the vestiges of private property in social consciousness.

Segregated from heavy or dangerous tasks, alienated from their creative potential by the division of labour, and returning gradually to invisible work, women are not fully transformed. They are detained and crystallized in transitional patterns containing features of the past and of the future.

Their integration into the proletariat is incomplete even though they may be working as lathe-operators. It's a well-known fact in the history of socialist revolutions that the mass of small private producers continually generates elements of capitalism. It's easy to imagine the corrupting effect of vast number of invisible artisans, part proletarian and part serf, whose social existence prevents their ideological transformation and their full proletarianization.

As long as the labour force continues to be pro-

duced in millions of domestic sweatshops, the influence of private property will never be eradicated from social consciousness, and the attempt to build a classless society and a new man will necessarily remain incomplete.

In this context, the correctness of Lenin's statement is even more evident:

THE PROLETARIAT CANNOT REACH FULL LIBERATION UNTIL WOMAN IS COMPLETELY LIBERATED.

## REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS

Revolutionary currents come to the fore when the Party concentrates on re-educating women (and men), understanding that the abolition of private property, the incorporation of women into social production and the extension of services are necessary but *not sufficient* conditions for liberation. Women's lot is inextricably tied to the intense class struggle waged by the Party against the vices and the culture of private property.

Revolutionary action by the masses of women seems to have gained the upper hand most easily where the social transformations of capitalism had not been completed, particularly in the vast peasant regions of Asia, where the patriarchal regime was so brutal that women were still bought and sold like cattle. They had no 'equal rights'; romantic love didn't exist for them, nor did any notion of the values of consumer society. On the other hand, individualism had not achieved the refined subtlety characteristic of developed capitalism. Some collectivist features persisted in social consciousness. The Marxist leadership saw the impossibility of a reformist solution. In order to incorporate women into production and defence they were obliged to attempt the complete destruction of the patriarchal ideological superstructure.

Woman is the most deformed human product of class society. The mass of women in underdeveloped countries can and do perform feats of unlimited heroism and sacrifice in their fight against imperialism. But in internal struggles to change their servile condition, they must overcome a deeply instilled ideological cowardice.

The revolutionary Party faces an extremely delicate task in fighting women's feelings of inferiority, for when women spontaneously break with their traditional lack of security they run the risk of radicalist deviations that later peter out, something like what happened to slave and peasant revolts in the past. It is therefore of fundamental importance that the revolutionary organisations

take the leadership of women's rebellion, provoking it and channeling it instead of choking it off or allowing it to lead to female revanchism. Successful examples can be found where, under slogans like 'women discriminate themselves', 'women should fight against their self-discrimination', the incorporation of even the most backward sectors is achieved as well as what would seem to be a thorough ideological proletarianization.

Revolutionary ideas show that there is no fatal condition which imposes physical inferiority on women; this is a result of the division of labour. There is a fight to incorporate women into traditionally 'male' jobs, realizing that far from damaging her health they develop her physically and psychologically. Domestic slavery is denounced, and a new social morality instituted whereby husbands share equally in household chores. These are collectivized wherever possible. In practice, the revolutionary ideas destroy the inhibiting conditioned reflexes of exploited women. With the realization that peace is conditional, the tendency is to prepare all women for defence, drawing them into the Armed Forces.

There is a tendency to impose a strict sexual code, whose long term validity may be arguable but which aims to eliminate the double standard of morality which has stimulated in man what it brutally repressed in women. All the feminine symbols of sexual reification are destroyed, among them class ideals of beauty, uprooting from the mass media the image of the woman-commodity. Ideals of beauty in women are adjusted to their qualities as workers, political leaders and fighters.

The massive incorporation of women into Peoples' War is one of the most important gains on the ideological front, and its most effective measure for the total proletarianization of women, with all it means for the breaking up of the ancient 'feminine' taboos.

The highest example is South Vietnam, where the sexual division of labour for production and war seems to be limited to a minimum. The great female incorporation into People's War would not have been possible if it were not for the incessant activity of the NLG, which carries on a resolute struggle against the discrimination of women in Vietnam and the world.

The military is the armed force of the class in power. Exclusion from it on sexual grounds — with the corresponding repressive implications for women's social consciousness — is logical in an op-

pressive society which systematically excludes women from positions of authority. But it is out of place in revolutionary armed forces which represent the interests of the entire people.

An exceptional case is that of Cuba, where there has been a progressive opening of officer training schools to women, without a war situation making it necessary. This helps to destroy the remnants of male supremacy inherited from Spain, of plantation slavery and North American neo-colonialism. It thus constitutes an example of direct struggle against the discrimination of women in the first years of revolutionary transformation.

It would be idealistic to hope for the complete ideological proletarianization of women and their situation thus far in the transition period. This process can only be carried out through a long and conscious struggle. It is precisely for this reason that the lack of interest in the woman question on the part of Marxist and neo-Marxist theoreticians is a cause for concern. The non-existence of a scientific theory of women's liberation at the present time, given its outstanding importance for the making of a classless society, leaves the way open for the rebirth of reformism. If the situation of women remains invisible it could, in the wrong circumstances, determine the stagnation of a revolutionary ideology.

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## NOTES

- (1) See especially passage quoted above from *The German Ideology* and Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, chapter on The Family.
- (2) The draft of this essay was written and first circulated in the early months of 1969, under the title *Towards a Scientific Feminism*. Since then Margaret Benston's article *The Political Economy of Women's Liberation* has appeared (Monthly Review, September 1969) and requires a brief comment here as the only serious attempt we know of to explore the economic implications of the housewife's labour under capitalism. While generally in agreement, we still think that without going beyond the concepts of classical political economy, especially to Marx's concepts of labour power and surplus-value, it's impossible to lay completely bare the housewife's role in the economics of class society, and its full political implications.

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