

## NOTES ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In July I travelled out west, and by pre-arrangement with women's centres, I stopped in a number of cities to hold meetings on wages for housework. When I planned my trip, I had only a day or so in each city, so I had to rely totally on the women's centres to organize the meetings. Obviously that's putting all the eggs in one basket by relying on their connections with other women's groups and the community at large, but in this case it was unavoidable. Another drawback of such a fleeting trip was not only that I was unable to meet different groups of women (such as welfare groups, native women's groups etc.) but I also had no time to seek out individual women who might be interested in wfh. However, I was able to form some impressions of the state of the Women's Movement in Canada today, that may be useful in discussing ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the relationship of wages for housework to it.

1. It was striking how isolated the centres were from one another. There is little apparent communication between them even though for the most part they are into the same kinds of work.

2. Each centre was run by a different stratum of women. In Brandon the women were mostly full-time ~~h~~ housewives married to professional men; in Saskatoon many of the women running the centre were ~~h~~ high school students; in Nelson, all the women were devoting their lives to their reproduction by living on farms (some without running water and electricity). But regardless of their particular situations, they were all totally isolated from every other woman in their community. The centres have become a more or less "cultural" reference point for the women who run them, providing many of their social needs, but meeting few of the needs of other women.

3. All the centres were ~~xx~~ service centres. They provided services ~~xxxxxx~~ ranging from natural childbirth classes to legal

referrals to daycare reform groups. In most x cities all the services emanated from the one centre, while in the bigger cities like Vancouver and Toronto the services are decentralized. None of the centres I visited sponsored anything like the feminist educationals the Women's Liberation Movement used to run, and most of them surprisingly enough, did not have consciousness-raising groups. One often got the feeling that feminism is no longer a struggle against our situation as women, but rather has been translated into a "celebration" of women. This x was particularly evident in the more rural areas where there is a prominent ' "back to the land" movement. In the interior of B.C. the women's centre I spoke at had just finished x sponsoring a women's festival that, with the exception of a lesbian workshop, focused entirely on learning farm skills that previously had been defined as "men's work".

4. The slogan "self-help" more than any other typifies the direction of the women's movement. While few would deny that sexism is integral to capitalism, the dominant current of the WM says that if we only get it together we will be able to overcome all the barriers and integrate ourselves xtotally into <sup>And so they provide</sup> capitalist society. Services that are intended to make our lives more tolerable, and yet/are in effect used by capital to aid their plans.

5. For self-help is just another form of the ideology of work -- that more work is going to lead to our liberation. There is a thin line between saying that by joining the paid labour force we will locate ourselves at "the point of production" from whence flows all revolutionary consciousness, and saying that women's liberation will be when all doors of capitalism are open to us -- whether we want to be a truck driver or executive. While self-help is often talked about in terms of independence from capitalist institutions, it is in no way subversive. Instead of building our power so that we can force the state to give us what we need on our terms, it is an expression of our powerlessness -- as if we have lost the fight against x capitalism for our liberation, and now we are picking up the crumbs off the table.

5. This doesn't mean that ordinary women don't use their services. The medical clinics all appeared to be functioning, and the referral lines were ringing. But it was clear that the political direction the centres were providing was being ignored. Just as one ~~man~~ doesn't have to like the Salvation Army to buy clothes at their thrift stores, women seldom find the ideology of self-help is meeting their interests, and so use the services and run.

6. What this all has meant is almost total isolation from the mass of women. Most women are profoundly alienated by the ideology of "~~the~~ self-help" and "work" that the women's movement is putting down. This was most remarkable by the ~~the~~ homogeneity of women I ~~found~~ found in each centre. It was clear that none had been able to relate to women from different stratum. Not only were they dismembering women's lives by refusing to see the connection between different aspects of them by isolating needs into single issues, e.g. seeing the relationship between the kind of paid jobs available to women and their wageless work in the home; the state's labour force needs as reflected in its immigration and population control (i.e. abortion and b.c.) legislation etc. etc. But in the way it deals with its issues is to basically fight them in the interests of the most powerful stratum of women. So that the struggle for abortion is fought for white Canadians at the expense of native women; the unions are being allowed to demand daycare for women with paid jobs only and so on.

Another way this isolation manifested itself was that very few if any women from the community came to the wfh meetings I held, even though in a couple of cases the meetings were advertised in the press and on radio. Because the response in other situations has always been more favourable, my only conclusion can be that the fact that the women's centres were sponsoring the ~~the~~ meetings frightened otherwise interested women off.

7. For the most part, the response from the women in the women's centres I talked to about wfh was negative. The objections they raised are not worth going into -- we've all heard them before, only they used to come from the male-dominated left. What came across was their disbelief that we could actually win wfh -- or anything that challenged capital's plans. Even the fight the women's movement made for universal access to birth control and liberalized abortion laws was thought by many to be won because of the "good will" of the government rather than our power. Women were seen as the victims of capitalism, rather than the protagonists in the ~~xxxx~~ class struggle. And if one doesn't understand the process of class struggle, it leads to all the bogeys of "wages institutionalizing housework".

Part of the reason for their views of the futility of struggle was the thing I noted before -- the isolation the WM suffers from most women. This isolation was universally attributed to women's "lack of consciousness". There was no question in their minds that the WM bears the correct perspective and should be the focus for all women, and it is women's backwardness or ignorance that prevents them from recognizing this. ~~ixix~~ In Toronto we thought Laura Sabia who is the Chairwoman of the Ont. Council on the Status of Women spoke only for the "state feminists" when she said that many of women's problems were brought upon themselves. In fact I found that to be a pervasive sentiment in the WM.

I am speaking about what I saw of the WM in general. In every city there were individual women who were excited by wfh. They saw how it spoke more totally to their lives and could do other women as well. But generally my feeling is that the organized women's movement, with its ideology of self-help and hard work, is irrelevant to most women, and women have shown that by ignoring them. I think that Wages for Housework has rightly identified its roots in the women's movement, but that doesn't mean we should continue to identify it.

In Priscilla Allen's Preface to "In Defence of Feminism" written some months ago she says of the WM, "It is true that we are in a period of disarray, of internal conflict, of some alienation from the mass of women". I disagree. Wages for housework is the first articulate, organized perspective that understands capital's plans for women and has a strategy to fight them. Wages for housework is not alienated from the mass of women, but the rest of the WM is. To continue to ~~identify~~ identify with the WM is to go down with a sinking ship.

IN Defence of Feminism" distinguishes between the male-dominated left and feminists. While that was an important distinction in Canada for a long time, we now see that the women's movement and the left are coming closer and closer ideologically. The perspective of the left on "the woman question" is now the perspective of the WM. We made an attack on the left because it was organizing for the state. Now it is time to attack the Women's Movement for exactly the same reason. If we have any dues to pay to the WM, we have long since paid them.