

FA, cartella 1, 18

(Nov. 1971)

Selma & Mariarosa -

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Section on children is terrific. Wish you would write more on this. By the way, Selma, you know next year Ralph's History Workshop is on Children's Liberation - think you should talk to him about it and about contributing to it. As far as I can see the only creative thinking about children is coming from (1) children and (2) the women's movement. We should be represented at the workshop.

"Where women are concerned their labour appeared to be a personal service ~~wanted~~ outside of capital". Wow. Right on. I think that is the story of the women I'm studying. But they all know about their slavery. And because it is seen as a personal service by the men, they were always expected to carry on, provide all the domestic services, even when the men were "unproductive" - unemployed or on strike. Any connection between the women's productivity (provision of services in the home) and the men's productivity (work in the mines) was denied - the woman must continue to produce these services regardless of what the man is doing - because he is always there. You go on with this (p.8) very well - stressing the women's ~~an~~ informal organisation, etc.

But what I wonder about in connection with this is your emphasis on how women are denied the experience of social revolt. Certainly I agree the formal experience, e.g., of ~~women~~ industrial struggle is limited - and certainly the isolation of women in the home makes it difficult for them to formally organise and plan struggles - and difficult for their contributions to class struggles to be recognised and acknowledged. But the informal network of women and children sustains, individuals, families and the community during times of crisis. I think women are aware of ~~their~~ this capacity. I think too it is a form of revolt - of a kind of struggle that sustains, perhaps in fact creates, class pride - "those bastards aren't going to break us" - well the bastards do in a sense, but it takes them longer, and costs them more energy, time, and resources than they originally expected. On p.12 you talk of women sustaining men during crisis in terms of restraining the man from becoming more disruptive - that is true, but I think this other aspect is important as well - that the women during crisis directly experience ~~their~~ their own capacities - and that they contribute to this class pride - (what happens to disruptive hordes anyway? They get shot or imprisoned. I don't know how deliberate is your choice of the word "horde" - but it certainly does not suggest to me a political movement with either the consciousness or the means for revolution).

What hurts the women most though is that this capacity and class service is unrecognised by men - this further means that lots of women ignore their own experience of their capacity and accept the definitions of those men.

In connection with all this, I think we need to further explore the positive

potential that comes from lack of formal organising. One thing is that women are probably less easily seduced into party politics - and more adaptable to survival and continuous challenges to capital - that is, I think women are less rigid and more creative (potentially at least) when it comes to political action. The man's workplace, the factory, limits and defines certain possibilities as a matter of course. He can go slow, strike, sabotage, occupy, etc., his workplace. The women to engage in action list first leave the workplace, the home - and once outside their possibilities are greater.

P.6. Don't understand comment on "oppression as opposed to exploitation". Is one supposed to be preferable? or more of a "private~~x~~ rather than a social problem"?

Section pps.20-23 on "criticism of women for lacking class unity. You examine the criticisms in terms of reinterpreting their meaning and/or discussing how these acts or attitudes of women reflect the housewives' slavery. But you don't question the basic assumptions - no.1 is OK. Of course women buy for the home. That is their job. If they didn't, who would. So what. no.2 and 3 bother me more, e.g. rivalry. What is it; where is it? I am reminded of the difference of women losing virginity and men gaining manhood. So women are rivals and men are competitors? I really don't understand the importance of this or the supposed extent of it - especially after you have mentioned how the informal organisation of women sustains the community during crisis - this is obviously a cooperative network among women too. I am not convinced that women are so much at each other's throats - tell me more. And on no.3. I again want to know more. How much do women undercut strikes - and increasingly we are learning of ~~xxx~~ important struggles women have waged politically and industrially. ^{And} A lot of mythology has been fed to us, both by the ruling class and males in all classes. You are right on to say that as the "stronger" sectors of the class ignore the "weaker", they ("stronger") must accept responsibility for lack of solidarity. (By the way, does "stronger" mean white, male, over 30, factory worker? the slave who owns a slave? The formally organised? I mean I know who you are talking about. I'm just curious as to what you define as their strength). But I also want to question the extent to which the assumption that women lack class unity holds up historically? I think it is important to have more information on this. For one thing, I think there is a heavy tendency for the "stronger" to blame their own failures on the "weaker" - (In this sense, one measure of strength is the ability to make definitions of others and "the women broke up the strike" can signify the man's strength to define it that way, and hide their own failure to win their own industrial struggle. After all, the men strike without asking the women first, and so when they go back in defeat - having defined it originally as a man's issue and a man's struggle - why should they get away with saying it is a defeat caused by the women ?)

Note: Also accusations that women don't support struggles cannot be treated in such a blanket way. Closer investigation may show that ~~wxxxxxxx~~ women will support A but not support B - for very good reasons. Why should we be expected to always support the man in a sheep-like fashion? (particularly when never consulted in the first place). I can't accept these assumptions and cannot judge the ways women support or lack class unity in this general fashion.

Also - we know women have given more support to struggles the men have started than men have given to struggles the women have started.

I think in this section you are being a bit apologetic for women - and I think you have accepted these assumptions without seriously questioning them enough.

(This is also true on p.15 - "women cannot look beyond their own four walls" - seems a bit extreme to me - and a very male statement. I don't think working in isolation means you cannot know there is ~~an~~ an outside - and alternatives. And women continually are trying to break outx- fighting to get the vote, going xto work in factories, going "insane", committing suicide, nagging husbands, writing papers - I think our history is the history of trying to knock down walls.)

I'm sure you are delighted to read so much without a reference to lesbianism. Sorry - here it comes.

I repeat - the statement "we do not necessarily prefer women to men..." isn't enough. We do prefer women to men because, in part, we can have more complete relationships with women than with men. You've heard all this.

Beyond that - the whole paper I think shows the importance for straight women to have more dialogues with lesbians. In terms of your paper - a lesbian is a woman (who also has domestic duties - I mean, she lives somewhere and must take care of that place - and eat - and all that) who does not live in a family - who has neither that oppression or exploitation nor that protection. Lesbians who are political (I'm not talking about political lesbians who I think are women who go to bed with women but refuse to admit they like it) have a lot to teach other women in the movement about the possibilities of action outside the home - 'cause that is where they are now.

(from Mary)

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They get nothing from it. Not "unrecognised" in the psychological sense.

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P.6. Don't understand comment on "oppression as opposed to exploitation". Is one supposed to be preferable? or more of a "private" rather than a social problem? *oppression as "injustice" - exploitation as the way a society is organised.*

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