

▶ and realised because they reflect the needs and wishes of the majority of women involved.

We need to learn from the experiences of other movements and other struggles. We turn for inspiration not to the 'great traditions' of the official labour movement — slow routine and cumbersome 'procedure', ways of deciding and organising that exclude and confine to passivity not only the majority of women, but also the majority of the male membership. We need to look to those situations when the movement has broken out of the well-worn channels of official routine and swelled to mass involvement: strikes, occupations, mass pickets, general strikes, insurrections: and to the ways of organising that have been thrown up spontaneously by these struggles — strike committees accountable to mass meetings, factory and neighbourhood councils as in Portugal, councils of action, soviets, popular militias. We can learn from these struggles.

One of the things the women's movement prides itself on is its openness, the ability of different currents and points of view to coexist without the movement tearing itself apart. This, again, is both a strength and a weakness. A strength because we need to be open to trying different ways, testing them out in practice, rejecting some, accepting others.

It becomes a weakness when confusion is elevated to a point of principle. Failure to follow through an analysis to its conclusion, the coexistence of contradictory ideas held by a single person, are justified as 'open-mindedness'; theoretical consistency is dismissed as 'dogma'. At the worst, a kind of guilty anti-intellectualism is propounded on the grounds that logic, abstraction and objectivity are 'male' modes of thought, and that women should rely on their own experience and not on theories coming from outside themselves.

We would argue that there is no such thing as 'pure' experience, outside of an interpretation of what that experience means; different people experience the same objective situation differently depending on their existing ideas or prejudices, predispositions, previous experiences; and one thing the women's movement should have taught us all is that we all to some degree conspire in our own oppression, internalising the self-limiting destructive values of society. What we need, to break out of this, is not to wallow in subjectivism (which only reinforces the grip of these unconscious and semi-conscious ideas) but a much more rigorous attempt to become conscious of where our ideas have come from, whether they relate to our real situation, whether they



**Fightback at the TUC conference**

can take us forward.

The rejection of 'a theory' also has its dishonest side: first of all because this stance itself is the expression of a 'theory'; second, because it is not actually a call to reject all theory but a special pleading for one particular theory and an especial intolerance for another.

Moreover, instead of ideas being appraised on their own merit, they are accepted or rejected according to their source: specifically, ideas put forward by women defined as members of 'male-dominated' left groups are often rejected out of hand and certainly viewed with deep suspicion. Actually, it narrows down even further, because Labour Party women are OK, and even those from the Communist Party (and you can't get more authoritarian than that!) In the end it is those women who are in an organised revolutionary left group who are most vilified and distrusted.



**Fightback at Blackpool Labour Party conference**

Since the women's movement is so constructed as to prevent its being taken over by a minority capturing some leading position, one is bound to ask: if there isn't that sort of danger, isn't it a very anti-democratic suppression of *ideas* that is being practised?

No, it might be objected, it's not the ideas we object to, it's the fact that you're 'putting the line' that's been worked out in advance together with men, abusing the spontaneous working out of ideas that is the hallmark of the movement. But this is disingenuous. While there undoubtedly is a lot of fumbling around for ideas, most of the major theories we meet with in the movement have been worked out by closed little cliques; nor are any of them especially pure or new or particular to the women's movement.

## Radical Feminism or Marxism

RADICAL FEMINISM sees the fundamental divide in society as a sexual one, rooted in the opposed biological natures of men and women. All societies have been based on a male monopoly of violence arising from the inherently aggressive nature of male sexuality. The more spectacular instances of male violence (rape, wife-battering) are only the overt manifestations of the systematic degradation of women by men which is the basis of all social organisation. Culture, always male-dominated, provides the spurious justification for women's oppression by over-valuation of male virtues — strength, power, competition, objectivity, abstract logic, technology — and underplaying women's contribution to society: compassion, cooperation, caring, intuitive understanding.

The solutions radical feminists propose to women's oppression range from cultural re-emphasis on 'female' values and withdrawal from male society (especially from personal relationships with men) and development of an alternative female culture, to outright 'destruction of men as a sex-class'. They all, however, reject work alongside men for common goals as collaboration with the enemy; however 'nice', non-sexist, or sympathetic individual men may be, they are all members of the oppressing sex-class. In this they see the central focus for women's liberation being directed against men, rather than as a struggle alongside men of the oppressed and exploited class against the class system which perpetuates their oppression.

At a fundamental level radical feminism is a concession to reactionary ideas on women. It accepts the 'natural division' of the sexes, the ascription of innate qualities to both sexes, the unchangeability of human nature whether the male or female half. It downplays both men and women as social beings, formed by their experiences and circumstances but also capable of changing those conditions and, in that, changing themselves, and relies instead on a rigid biological determinism. Because of this, it is fundamentally pessimistic for the prospects of women's liberation; if women's oppression is rooted in unchanging biological reality, then the prospects for breaking out of it are reduced either to doomed utopian schemes or genocide.

Marxism and radical feminism stand at opposite ends of the women's movement. Conscious adherents of either pos-