

The Pseudo-Left/Lesbian Alliance Against Feminism

Some time ago, in an article entitled "The Straight Wall of China" Jill Johnston took the opportunity to move the lesbian crusade with which she follows around the Women's Liberation Movement into the international sphere.* The issue in question was an alleged "invitation" from the Chinese government to visit China received by the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, which describes itself as "an explicitly radical, anti-capitalist, feminist organization" and distributes literature advancing a strategy it calls "socialist-feminist."

The article purported to be exposing the acquiescence of the group to a request from China that "lesbian vanguardists" be excluded from the delegation it was assembling.

According to Johnston "at some point China noted the omission of representatives of the independent women's movement and requested that these be added, with the exception of representatives of the lesbian vanguardist faction of the women's movement." She is outraged at China for this exclusion of lesbian vanguardists but nowhere expresses concern about the Chicago group's initial omission of the independent feminists from the delegation it was organizing.

Johnston takes no interest in what appear to be, in her own account, Chinese efforts to broaden representation beyond its initial (socialist-feminist) character. Her concern is that by "independent women's movement," it seems, the Chinese did not mean lesbian-vanguardists. Her only beef with the Union is that they did not fill the new opening in their delegation made by the Chinese with lesbian vanguardists.

Before we discuss Johnston and the Chicago group's relation to the independent women's movement, this question of an invitation to China should be clarified.

Contrary to the impression sometimes generated by visitors themselves and/or accounts in the press, it is the general policy of the government of the People's Republic of China not to invite anyone to visit China except on certain, special inter-government sponsored exchanges. A number of Americans have been making political hay over alleged invitations to China when in fact, in the case of the great majority of Americans now going to China, the initiative for the delegation has come from the Americans involved, not the Chinese. Check it out.

This follows from the Chinese policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of radical movements in other countries, a policy which seeks to avoid the very kind of confusion generated in the Women's Liberation Movement and elsewhere by stories such as Johnston's. It also follows, it would seem, from a long history of Chinese experience with an outside revolutionary government throwing its weight around in the Chinese radical movement. (What is now known as the Sino-Soviet dispute.)

In other words, Shirley MacLaine's and Susan Sontag's trips to China do not indicate that they are China's preferred women activists. And the trips organized by the radical newsweekly the *Guardian* are no evidence that the *Guardian* is China's hot line to the North American Left. Accounts in the newspapers and talks with people involved indicate how far the use of the word invitation has gotten stretched by Americans describing their trips to China. These also show that the Chinese prefer groups to come rather than individuals, more broadly based groups, it seems, than the Americans themselves are interested in, and also that the Chinese are responsive to stands that Americans may take over the composition of the delegations.

So the question of which way the various requests and invitations really went is one we should like to see clarified by the Chicago group—the burden of clarity is on them, not the Chinese, who as hosts would only be embarrassed by having to answer one way or another. (Our inquiries sent to the Chicago group were never answered.) The Chicago group already has a somewhat opportunistic reputation—going back to the very beginning of the WLM and the conflicts between the "feminists" and "politicos" among radical women—for trying to make feminism and women its constituency for wheeling and dealing on the male left. Along with this has been the male-dominated left's tendency to make pronouncements on the WLM, often now with the appearance of backing from the Chinese.

If everything Johnston reported were true, however—the initial invitation to the socialist feminists of the Union, the later request for representatives of the "independent women's movement", and the stipulation that "lesbian vanguardists" were not what was meant—it would have indicated a remarkably subtle understanding of the American Women's Liberation Movement on the part of the Chinese and demonstrated that the Chinese have more of a sense of authenticity in a movement than does most of the U.S. left.

*THE VILLAGE VOICE, "The Straight Wall of China," Jill Johnston, 7/26/73.

But the more important issue here is not what China did or did not do, fascinating and encouraging though that might be, it is first what the "socialist-feminists" of the C.W.L.U. and now the "lesbian-feminists" like Johnston are trying to do to the Women's Liberation Movement, this time with China as a political football.

What happened in this case would appear to resemble a by now familiar pattern in the WLM. This sequence of events has recurred with the rise of each new feminist issue, as well as with the rise of feminism overall. The "lesbians" follow the "socialists" all going after the feminists, with such regularity, and the enemies of feminism tolerate the other two so much more readily than they do the real radicals of feminism, that we have to come to observe a rather remarkable phenomenon in which all combine, to make their play for the territory forged by "the independent women's movement," by Women's Liberation. It is a phenomenon for which we can find no better label at this time than "the pseudo-left/lesbian alliance against feminism."

Both these groups have followed the Women's Liberation Movement around claiming to be its leaders, but they have been followers in any chronological sense of the word and the word, after all, does have a chronological sense.

They were following it around to lead it somewhere else. Both claimed to have a better way of getting to feminist goals than feminism itself. In one case, they wanted to lead it to something called "socialism." In the

The emancipation of women is a common cause of the entire people. Its success requires the joint effort and struggle of the entire people. At the same time, women's emancipation is of vital interest primarily to women themselves and must be won through their own struggle. They must not expect emancipation to be granted them as a favour, or wait for a small number of people to win it for them. Can emancipation of women be realized by enacting laws protecting women's rights? Such laws will be of some help, but without struggle by women themselves, no such laws will be formulated, and even if they are formulated, it will be difficult to put into practice.

— Li Su-wen

*Speech in Mexico City, United Nations
International Women's Year Conference
PEKING REVIEW, 7/4/75*

... When we discussed women's liberation with the Chinese women, they would ask about the militant feminists in America, whom the Chinese believed to be good soldiers and organizers.

— Shirley MacLaine

YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE, 1975

ED. NOTE— The above further confirms that revolutionary China is better on the women's liberation movement than the U.S. Left.

other case, they wanted to lead it to what they called "lesbianism."

Others said they wanted to work on connecting their ideas with feminism, in one case socialism and feminism, in the other, lesbianism and feminism, but their connection usually just consisted of hyphenating the word.

Each came on as the more radical tendency. They didn't say they wanted to *be* radical, they said they already were, and they already had this way of being radical for women.

Meanwhile there was the vital, dynamic movement around. One of its main formulations was that women's liberation was a valid and very radical, very broad and very deep issue in its own right. It didn't have to attach another issue to itself to be valid. And it was so radical, so hardhitting against the particular problems it was trying to illuminate and solve, that attaching something else was actually a way of softening the demand, undercutting it, holding it back.

In terms of strategy, the idea was that the only way the problem could be solved—in this case, the problem of male supremacist prerogative, power and tradition—the radical way the problem had to be solved—was by hitting it directly, not in a roundabout way through doing, talking about, or working on something else. Furthermore, masses of women, not just a few, would have to hit the problem in order really to take care of it. If the struggle was for women, for women to have equality with men in society, then the struggle would have to be by women. The only people who can really do for people are the people themselves. That's what self-determination is all about. This was the direct hit, radical strategy on which the movement was based.

It was from these ideas and strategy, and the practice of it, that the movement grew at an enormous rate. It grew so successfully, in fact, that the socialists and lesbians who had formerly disdained it, suddenly wanted to come in and lead it to something else.

It is important to be clear that the feminism being talked about here does not exclude socialism from its goals. The militants who started the Women's Liberation Movement were for a classless society, which is why they called themselves radicals, and feminists. Most had been active in the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements. Their difference with the rest of the left was their commitment to a Women's Liberation Movement, their activist stand against male supremacy. To them authentic radicalism included feminism.

Nor is the feminism being talked about here opposed to lesbianism, to women's personal right to be lesbians. In fact, radical feminists, starting with Simone de Beauvoir, analyzed lesbianism as one of the fundamental life patterns deriving from woman's common situation. Like all the ways women now live, it is both a form of compromise with male supremacy and a form of resistance to it.¹ The

¹ For powerful descriptions of women's lives and the strengths in all the forms of women's individual resistance to oppression, see Judy Grahn's *The Common Woman* and *Edward The Dyke and Other Poems*, The Women's Press Collective, 5251 Broadway, Oakland, California, 94618.

central radical idea of feminism was that there was a common situation of women, a political and historical situation of oppression by men, and that until male supremacy was overthrown there would be no personal solutions, only personal compromises.

What feminists did oppose, however, was the false use of socialism by anti-feminists to try to stop the Women's Liberation Movement, sometimes by simply equating socialism and feminism and thereby denying the necessity for a specific feminist attack.

And what feminists opposed was the equation of feminism with lesbianism, an equation that the opposition to feminism began to try to make as soon as the movement began. This equation amounted to an effort to deny that women as a whole wanted and needed liberation, to suggest that women's interest in a feminist movement was uncommon, even abnormal.

Oddly enough, those who made the equation between lesbianism and feminism often insisted that they had nothing against lesbianism. And, in fact, their equation of feminism and lesbianism really indicated only opposition to feminism, to a denial of feminism's claim to being representative of the common interests of women as it said it was. It amounted to a denial of feminism's existence, not to mention its necessity, the necessity for a fight against male supremacy.

In fact, in the curious historic phenomenon of the pseudo-left/lesbian alliance, many left groups have displayed more tolerance for lesbians than they have for feminists. This would explain one of the stranger manifestations of the alliance that feminists began to observe incredulously as the Women's Liberation Movement grew, and in fact was one of the first signs that there was such an alliance. Often the very same left, socialist women who had opposed militant feminism in the beginning of the movement, next became lesbians while still opposing radical feminism. In the beginning many had argued that feminism was lesbianism in order to advocate socialism instead. Later, their way of becoming "feminists" was to

A few Women's Lib types have decided that "it just doesn't make sense to form intimate emotional bonds with the (male) oppressor." They have organized themselves into such groups as the Lesbian Liberation, Radical Lesbians and Lavender Menace.

Though they are having trouble with landlords, the times seem to be on their side. *Legalization of homosexual marriages has recently been urged by Mrs. Rita E. Hauser, the U.S. representative to the UN Human Rights Commission, as a means of preventing overpopulation.* (emphasis added)

Most of the movement women still choose to marry men and have children. But they have fewer babies and more unconventional ideas about the duties of a husband and wife.

—Christina Kirk
DAILY NEWS, 8/21/70

become lesbians, still essentially arguing that feminism was lesbianism. (At the same time, much of the left, as much of the media, began to lump women's liberation and "gay liberation" together, often as the same issue.) They were using socialism and then lesbianism, and often both together, to replace feminism, or eliminate it, or else chip away at it, dilute it.

The opposition, therefore, was not to socialism or lesbianism, but only to feminism, and it was what can be termed the "left" opposition to feminism, or actually, the pseudo-left opposition, since genuine radicalism must support women's liberation, not oppose it. We call it the "left" opposition because it came from groups which called themselves more radical than feminism. Rather than attacking the Women's Liberation Movement for being too radical, these groups argued that feminism should be eliminated and replaced by allegedly more radical forces—socialism or lesbianism.

WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON

It may seem strange in light of the official disfavor both socialists and lesbians appear to face in American Society, and the interest that feminist ideas have aroused, that these "left" alternatives to feminism have received more support from the Establishment than the original feminist militants ever did. But this is just what is happening—financially through the worlds of academia, the hip media and the big foundations with their grants for "art" and "research."

The regular access to the pages of the *Village Voice* with which Jill Johnston pursues her high camp "political art" mockery of the Women's Liberation Movement in the name of "lesbian-feminism" is a perfect example. Another is the chapter of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (whose trip to China is under discussion here) which produced the original paper "Socialist Feminism." Susan Davis, for instance, one of six members and authors of the paper, is editor of the widely promoted and publicized monthly newsletter the *Spokeswoman* (which itself has given considerable coverage and support to the growth of lesbian feminism). Davis launched this newsletter with financial backing by the Urban Research Corporation of Chicago, of which she is currently a director. This Research Corporation sponsors many \$275 ticket symposiums on "affirmative hiring practices" (for women, black people, etc.) "managed growth," and "corporate responsibility" to name a few programs. So far, an odd approach to either socialism or feminism.

So why do such groups get subsidized by corporate America, while the just plain, non-hyphenated, radical feminist activists are cut off from access to the media and work at regular jobs and go begging for funds, scaring up dues and personal contributions? Because, despite their claims to being more radical than feminism, the socialist-feminists and lesbian-feminists pose no real threat to the Establishment and are even useful to it.

These two apparently disparate groups have an amazingly similar analysis of women's situation, treat the independent Women's Liberation Movement in much the same

way and, despite their claims to radicalism, share an approach to politics in general which is essentially liberal.

Apparently the subsidy will go to any "advanced" form of thought that confuses rather than clarifies or shocks rather than arouses the masses of people. To those in this alliance, "mass appeal" itself is seen as a bad thing since the masses of people are contemptuously viewed as responding only to backward ideas. What this amounts to is well-financed embarrassment to both socialism and feminism in the eyes of the people.

Monopolizing the money and the publicity, the socialist-feminists and lesbian-feminists have created a false buffer zone between the original, radical feminists who are the source of the dynamic new ideas and the great numbers of people they are electrifying. The repercussions are that the American people are prevented from making contact with feminism and socialism by being presented instead with the confusion, distortion and dilution of all revolutionary ideas in which they show an initial interest.

Both base their theory and strategy for women's liberation, socialist and lesbian, respectively, on alleged evidence of ancient matriarchies (Engels' lost primitive, communist matriarchy and Elizabeth Gould Davis's lost civilization).² Both depend on pre-history to prove women's capabilities whereas feminists deduce this from provable (recorded) history and the present situation of women.

Both indicate contempt for real women as they now are—looking to the golden age in the past, building up super-women, and substituting psychic escapism for a commitment to absolute truth and change. For both, this is a diversion from tackling and understanding the present.

Both deny the importance of sex itself in the dynamic of women's oppression, that sexual exploitation is an essential ingredient in the situation of women—as important and necessary and difficult an issue in human life to resolve as the work issue, and in some ways, in fact, part of the labor question. Lesbian-feminists deny that men and women have sexual needs, needs for each other, needs that have led to political ramifications. The left, somewhat similarly, treats sexual discrimination as simply a caste division within the working class, promoted by the ruling class, unrelated to sex itself, as color divisions are unrelated to color.

Both portray themselves as above relations with men, above wanting entry into the man's world. They say, "We don't want to be part of the present society men have created." They criticize feminists for lowering themselves to the same level as men. (For both, even present day matriarchal fantasies substitute for feminism).

Both claim that men are irrelevant and suggest that they can and must talk about women without talking about men. They then attack feminists for talking about, worrying about, and making public demands on men and the man's world. In fact what they are doing is denying that male supremacy is the problem, and while their refusal to even talk about men, much less deal with them, might seem to some a militant expression of contempt for men and very radical indeed, in fact what it represents is a

lowering of demands on men, if not letting them off the hook completely.

The main thing is that neither takes the oppression of women seriously; neither believes in or supports a direct attack on male supremacy, neither has much respect for women. When they were leftists, they would trace the oppression of women to monogamy (Engels)³ or "the nuclear family," instead of male supremacy. When they next became lesbians, the family problem became heterosexuality. Both times they managed to avoid talking about male supremacy, the real institution to blame. Either it was socialism that would solve women's problems, making a direct confrontation with men unnecessary now, or it was lesbianism. They denied that a specific, political challenge to male supremacy was necessary and, therefore, that women's problems needed political solutions—thus denying feminism.

Both emphasize personal, self-development solutions to women's problems and set up personal "models" either abroad (in foreign revolutions) or in the past. This suggests women need only stand up for themselves and set models for each other. Since they called for personal change, often they discounted the need for a feminist movement and used themselves as examples of a special vanguard who, as socialists or as lesbians, broke with "sex roles" personally and challenged the idea of women's inequality before there was a feminist movement. In fact this is the basis on which they claim to be the leadership of the feminist movement. They had solved their problems as women themselves, they said, and were feminists before there was a feminist movement.

But so were most of the radical women who started the Women's Liberation Movement already feminists in an individual sense, and they didn't conclude that a feminist movement wasn't necessary. In fact they concluded just the opposite. All their individual struggles hadn't changed things for women as a whole at all. Even their own personal successes hadn't been so successful. There was always a price for them to pay as women. And male supremacy was still around.

Opposing male supremacy was the radical goal women's liberation saw the need to organize women around as women. Socialists and lesbians however, posing as more radical, actually wish to avoid opposition to male supremacy and to avoid confronting men. The conventional women (presumably feminists) Johnston condescendingly reports in another *Voice* article "still relate to the oppressors by opposing them" (4/28/75). Lesbians are above opposing men—which is probably why the left embraces them more readily than feminists. The socialist-feminists will even go to the lengths of setting up separate women's groups to deflect some of women's anger against men, "Otherwise, feeling our ineffectiveness, we will focus solely on attacking chauvinism in organizations in more and more personalized form."

The original formulation for separatist organizing was as a political base for militant confrontation with male supremacy, not as a means of avoiding confrontation with men. But since to the lesbians and socialists both, the purpose and need for feminism is primarily psychological

²See postscript at the end of this article.

³See postscript.

and to bring women "a new strength," the purpose of separatism becomes to "identify our needs and strengths" so that "women can come together on the basis of self-respect." They use "sisterhood to challenge our own weakness" whereas radical feminists said sisterhood was powerful. They go under the assumption that women until now have been weak psychologically—"losers," what radical feminists analyzed in political terms as being oppressed.

Avoiding the politics of male supremacy and feminism while stressing personal strength, their solutions are often either psychological or military. (Hence the U.S. left's images of Third World women thousands of miles away with guns and the lesbian images of Amazons with battle-axes as the way to women's liberation.) Neither provides any real solutions or only the most short-lived and incomplete ones for women. After the revolution, the women with guns but without radical, feminist politics tend to go back in their place. Again they stress personal "strength" and rugged individualism, leaving out the political aspect of the problem.

THE TOLERANCE SEEKERS

This alliance of socialist-feminists and lesbian-feminists finds unity under the grand liberal aegis of "intellectual tolerance." Virtually anything goes, anything, that is, except critique. This again helps to explain the Establishment support they have received. When groups lose their tolerance for the Establishment, the Establishment loses its tolerance for them. Socialist-feminists oppose criticism in general calling it "competitive" or "sectarian" or "purist," while lesbian-feminists oppose it only in regard to themselves.

The socialist-feminists' appeal is to everyone. They want to alienate no one so that they will be right whatever side wins. In the more aggressive "umbrella" aspect of opportunism, they want to encompass everyone, move into everything and represent it, uniting everything with hyphens. Since their point of view includes yours as well as every other possible position (they call this a "multi-level approach to women's liberation") there is no reason for you to exist. In one paper, sometimes even one paragraph or even one sentence, they will string together every single possible point of view and assert them as their own—however contradictory. Thus sexism is "based on the domination of men over women" but "at times, sexism oppresses men." Thus consciousness-raising is a process by which women "come to understand the nature of reality so that they may change it" but also leads to "the specter of endless problems without apparent solutions."

This is how they can make a claim for radicalism and against criticism at the same time. This is how the Chicago socialist-feminists in the beginning of their paper can say "we do not . . . before we organize . . . need to develop a complete theory or find the prime contradiction" and then later in the paper say "what makes us attractive is that we see the roots. That is the meaning of the word radical." They say they see the roots—without seeing the prime contradiction—but it is a major job to ascertain what they think the roots are. They call for revolution and also say a revolution is "not possible now." Their major goal is to

cover themselves from any possible criticism or from any attempt to fathom their position—to win every which way. This is the major characteristic of liberal opportunism—in the name of radicalism.

Similarly, the lesbian-feminists call for the connections between feminism and lesbianism to be acknowledged, for what they term a radical critique of feminism from a lesbian point of view. And yet, even as they call for connections, like the socialist-feminists, at the very same time they oppose critique.

For example, Jill Johnston is repeatedly calling for the connections between lesbianism and feminism to be acknowledged. It is doubtful, however, if Johnston would make this call so readily were she demanding that any and all connections first be examined and then acknowledged. Certainly any radical would want to see a deep examination into the connections between the oppression of women and religion, the oppression of women and class divisions. There must be a radical feminist critique on all these questions.

But to Johnston and the other lesbian-feminists, the only kind of critique tolerable is a critique made by lesbian-feminists . . . since lesbians must speak for themselves, and any lesbian who opposes the connection between lesbianism and feminism is either anti-feminist or a traitor to lesbians; and feminists can't speak for themselves because they aren't really themselves, they're really lesbians who are denying it; and, anyway, the issues can't really be separated. These guidelines, of course, amount to ruling out critique.

If the issues really are interconnected, then the lesbians have no special right to defining the connections. Johnston cannot claim then, as she does, that it is "presumptuous" for the Chicago group or any other women's group to try "to define this or that in regard to lesbianism."

In fact, these women have devised one of the cleverest, win-either-way lines we have ever run into. Starting with the commonly held premise that "lesbians are something special," with its ambiguously attractive or unattractive implications, what it amounts to is that lesbians are both the most oppressed and most liberated among women. And, as a result of both or either, they should have special consideration.

The emotional kingpin for the special claims—the basis for the guilt, awe, or fear manipulation leading to special privileges within the movement through special sympathy and/or special respect or special tolerance—has been the definition of homosexuals as an oppressed group "like women, like blacks" and the general imitation, takeover, and revision by homosexuals of the rhetoric of the liberation movements of blacks and women.

Take the homosexuals' redefinition of the women's liberation term "sexism," for instance. Sexism, as it was originally coined and then taken up and promoted by feminists within the Women's Liberation Movement, meant discrimination based on a person's sex—and specifically discrimination against women, since it is women who are the oppressed sex. Homosexuals have revised the term sexism to mean not discrimination based on sex, but discrimination based on "sexual preference," thereby meaning discrimination against homosexuals.

"Gay liberationists" (gay and oppression are in themselves an odd contradiction) have messed with the ideas of oppression, feminism and many other radical movement words and ideas, as they have messed with the definition of sexism. There is really no way that the problems homosexuals face can be called oppression in the same sense as sexism or racism or class oppression. Gay liberationists deny—rightly so, we think—that their sexual preference is a biological condition. Yet at the same time they try to define homosexuals as an oppressed group similar to blacks and women—groups who are oppressed because of what they were born. There is a fundamental difference between necessity and style, between facing certain consequences because of who one unalterably is: female, black, old, young, working-class—and facing certain consequences because of a certain style of life one adopts, even if one feels "compelled" toward it.

There is no equating the oppression of women and blacks and the exploitation of the working class with the situation of homosexuals. Women are oppressed because of something they unalterably are—there are no choices to be made. Homosexuality is open to choice—and the rightness or wrongness, sanity or insanity, sense or nonsense of being a homosexual is as open to debate, evaluation and critical attack as any other choice. Being female or black is not open for debate and cannot be responsive to critical attack, even if a woman or black wants it to be—not unless there's a revolution in biological science. (The dreams of such a "revolution," if Hitler's one attempt at biological manipulation is any indication, would better be called a scientific *counter-revolution*, in any case. Face lifting, corsets, skin whitening, nose jobs, and sex changes could be said to be individual efforts to manipulate people—oneself or others—within impossible, anti-truth, anti-human reality terms of criticism.)

To the extent that feminism remains true, to the extent that it is a defense of actual females against attack on the basis of being female, it, also cannot be open for debate. It can be criticized only when it strays from the living reality of women and genuine feminism demands such criticism, does not shirk from it. Of course, truth and reality—human beings themselves—are the tests of all critiques.

Homosexuality, like religion, may if anything, be seen as an effort to escape from what people are. At best it is an effort to escape the conditions of oppression. At worst, it reveals contempt for living humanity—humanity as it is—and works along with powerful political and cultural institutions promoting that contempt. Even as an attempt to escape from oppression, however, homosexuality must face evaluation, and not just evaluation by the people who have escaped, but also by those among the oppressed whose hopes for full human liberties and respect the escape does not in the least fulfill.

"Discrimination" based on birth is oppression; whereas discrimination based on political analysis, personal behavior, facts, etc. is just that: discrimination, evaluation, analysis—open to judgment, hopefully always getting sharper. Homosexuals can expect to have civil rights, but their worldview cannot escape judgment. Judgment by birth is the antithesis of democracy and freedom, whereas judgment by action is

necessary for democracy and freedom.

In the name of "politics," the lesbian vanguardists have been an anti-political (personal solutionist) group that, with its demands, threats, actions and rhetoric have been keeping the political feminist movement from moving ahead in its fight for the liberation of women.

The meaning of "lesbianism" for women, personally, politically, and historically, remains to be adequately analyzed, as does the meaning of "socialism" for women and women's liberation. So far, the theories that have tried to link one to another have been so incomplete and contradictory—so slurred—as to appear to be primarily opportunist, with women too quick to call themselves "lesbian-feminists" and "socialist-feminists." They seem to be reaping special benefits for doing so—putting themselves in some kind of immediately favorable position with respect to men, proving themselves to a very different audience from the audience of women. The women who think they already have these things worked out can't have it both ways. They can't be both the feminists who are still searching—and fighting—and the lesbians or socialists who feel that they already have the solution to "the woman question."

Lesbianism or socialism is not the test of what is radical. Radicalism—revolutionary truth and effectiveness—is the test against which lesbianism and socialism must stand. So far, as feminism has encountered lesbianism-feminism and socialist-feminism, they have not only failed to meet the test, they have been actively engaged in an attack on feminism. Their premature and opportunistic connections are being used to prevent—to stop—the radical solutions from being found. They are being used to make feminism go away—disappear—become invisible—by revising and defining feminism out of existence.

Feminism and the independent women's movement—as an interest in its own right—would seem to hold no interest or commitment at all for either the socialist-feminists of Chicago or the lesbian-feminists who jumped into the fray. It seems from Johnston's account that the Chicago group, when left to its own devices, originally indicated no interest at all in feminists—as distinguished from socialist-feminists—coming along on the China trip. In the same vein, the angry lesbian-feminists never criticized the Chicago group for omitting "independents" just for leaving out themselves. The independents, the feminists, did seem of interest to the Chinese, however.

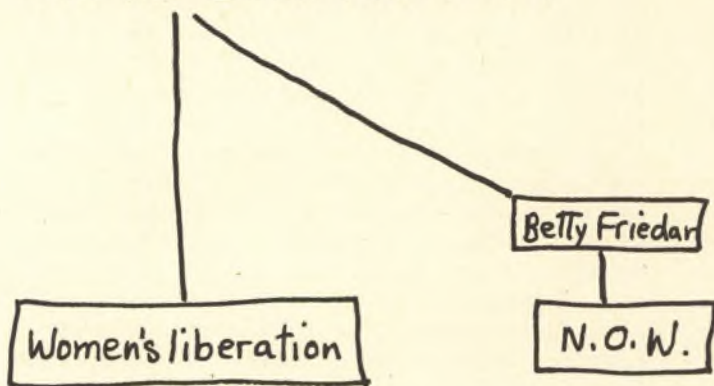
If Johnston's report is correct, both about the original invitation for the trip and the nature of alleged Chinese interference, Socialist China's interference turned out to be interference on behalf of the independent women's movement which the socialist-feminists had failed to define into its original proposal.

Interestingly enough, both the independent women's movement and the People's Republic of China become the victims of this socialist-feminist and lesbian-feminist opportunism. Independent feminism gets left out of the picture by both; alleged Chinese "restrictions" and "dictates" are invented as the essential problem by both. Even when liberals fight, it seems, their main loyalties are still to each other. Although the dispute over the trip to China

looks like a break in the pseudo-left/lesbian alliance, it isn't really. The lesbian-feminists go pretty easy on the Chicago group. China is the chief target of their attack. The Chicago group does everything it can to go to China and still not take an absolutely clear stand against what it calls lesbian vanguardism. "If we had turned down the offer because of possible anti-lesbian bias, they would have asked someone else who would comply." Even as both fight over the definition of the independent women's movement which neither really considers themselves a part of, neither really attacks the other and so the threads of the alliance remain.

Actually the liberal left groups in the U.S. have been running into a problem with the attitude of the new revolutionary countries—like Cuba, and now China—toward "gays" for some time. Much to the dismay of the male-dominated, white-dominated pseudo-left which lumps "gay liberation" with black liberation and women's liberation, the Communist countries refuse to allow this in visiting delegations. It would seem that despite the disagreements with feminism that their leaders may have, they are at least taking feminism and the oppression of women far more seriously than their alleged admirers on the U.S. left.

The Second Sex
and the Black Movement



Engels + The First Sex
simple primitive matriarchy | ornate glorious matriarchy

Pseudo-left/lesbian alliance

POSTSCRIPT, 1976: IS ENGELS A REVISIONIST?

The works of Frederick Engels and Elizabeth Gould Davis referred to in this article are, respectively, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and *The First Sex* (1971). Engels developed his theories "in light of the researches of Henry Lewis Morgan," the 19th-century American anthropologist whose book *Ancient Society* extrapolated from the author's studies of the Iroquois Indians. Davis relies more on archaeology and mythology, although both draw from the 19th-century Swiss anthropologist Bachofen's *Mother Right*.

In particular, Engels' work is important because the theory it works from—that primitive society everywhere was at a certain stage a communist matriarchy—has long been regarded as basic to the Marxist revolutionary's view on "the woman question." People who call themselves Marxists espouse it everywhere from China to Russia, from the militants to the revisionists, from the "Stalinists" to the "Trotskyists." Within the range of its adherents, in fact, are those called the pseudo-lefts here and those taking a more truly radical position on women.

It is this notion of an era before class struggle and the oppression of women began (and that male supremacy

came in with the development of private property) that has been the starting point for all the main lines of the "socialist" attack on a militant feminist stance and an independent women's liberation movement. (From it, for instance, the left has argued that the source of women's oppression is not men's domination and women's situation—their capacity for and incapacity due to childbearing—in primitive conditions, but "class society." Women, therefore, need not criticize men nor organize themselves politically, but simply join with men in overthrowing "class society.")

Beginning with Engels' introduction of the false argument of "matriarchy" into what is a just demand for equality (actually a frequent tactic feminists encounter in those evading the woman question), radical women otherwise sympathetic to socialism or Marxism have criticized Engels' theory for being "pseudo-left" in the general, basic sense of being liberal, insufficient and false with respect to the issues of women's situation. (There is, in fact, a growing body of radical feminist criticism of it. See, for instance, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Roxanne Dunbar's "Slavery" in *A Journal of Female Liberation*, No. 1, and Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*.) But it now appears that what radical feminists regarded as a deviation of Marxism from genuine

radicalism when it comes to the situation of women may well have been a deviation from Marxism.

Since we first published our observations of the pseudo-left/lesbian symbiosis, we have realized that the very notion of a period of primitive communism on which the matriarchy theory was based represented a departure from earlier Marxist theory. It required, in fact, a toning down of one of the most basic points in *The Communist Manifesto* which Marx and Engels co-authored in 1848. The *Manifesto* opens with the powerful statement "The history of all hitherto existing society is a history of class struggles." In 1888, however, with the publication of the fourth English edition of the *Manifesto*, which has since become standard worldwide, Engels added a footnote qualifying this epiphanal line. In the footnote of 1888, which began "That is, all *written* history" (emphasis in the original), Engels exempted what he termed "pre-history" from the class struggle. (This footnote was added five years after Marx's death. Although Engels claimed that he had written *The Origin of the Family*, on which the change was based, at Marx's bequest, we have been unable to find written evidence by Marx himself—only Engels' word—that Marx changed his mind about the history of class struggle. In fact, there is much to indicate otherwise. Nevertheless, it is possible that Marx revised himself.)

In what would appear to be the classic pattern of those revising Marxism, Engels cited new information that had come to light, and claimed that at the time Marx and he had written the *Manifesto* they had virtually no knowledge of primitive society. (A look at some of their earlier work belies that statement.)

Radical feminists have argued against the thesis of ancient matriarchy (see *The Second Sex*, for a starter) on the basis that Morgan's work was shown to be incorrect by later anthropological study (not to mention on the basis of our own personal experience with all the "evidence" of matriarchy dragged out for our own society which we know firsthand is not true). To this, Engels' supporters have frequently replied that the later scholarship and research was biased because the anthropologists were all bourgeois with an ax to grind against communism. And yet Engels is ready to outdate an important line in *The Communist Manifesto* itself on the basis of a string of bourgeois scholars, from Morgan to the reactionary feudal and Prussian Minister of State August Haxthausen, whose studies of the Russian village commune fueled the Pan Slavist doctrine of the 19th century.

Since in Marxist theory, "class struggle is the immediate driving power of history," removing it from primitive society was quite a serious change. If class struggle is the dialectical source of advance, eliminating class struggle from primitive society eliminates its source of forward motion. With Engels' introduction of the period of primitive communism into Marxist theory, communism was now not only something all of human society was inevitably moving toward because of increasing knowledge, control of nature and productive ability, but was something to which human society looked backward.

Ironically, without Engels' revision, the line about the history of class struggle in the *Manifesto* would read as

radical feminist Shulamith Firestone suggests it should read in her book *The Dialectic of Sex*. In critiquing Engels, and trying to synthesize feminism and Marxism, Firestone revises Engels' version of the line in "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific," from which she quotes, back to what it should have been. Radical feminists were putting class struggle back into primitive society and unknowingly revising *The Communist Manifesto* back to its original.

Marxist theory had existed for forty years, during its first flowering, without the need for this notion of an earlier period of communism to prove socialism possible. And the major ground-breaking achievements of the 19th-century woman's rights movement were made before ancient matriarchy was "discovered" to prove women's emancipation possible. They were made during the period when it was thought that *all* of existing history had been a history of class struggle. The *Declaration of Sentiments* of the first woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton puts forth the same theory for the history of women that *The Communist Manifesto*, written in the same year, advanced for the working classes: "The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." But by the end of her life, Stanton, too, was writing about the ancient "Matriarchate" (see her speech reprinted in *Up From the Pedestal*, Aileen Kraditor, editor) based on the same researches of Henry Lewis Morgan that Engels cites. What Engels called the era of primitive communism, Stanton, like Morgan, called "ancient democracy." Both pioneers of communism and feminism, in their later years and the doldrums of both movements, revised their earlier, forward-propelling theses and manifestos and began looking backward.

All feminists who have had to deal with the prehistorians and their dreamy theories of prehistoric peace between the sexes—even matriarchy—would do well to recall the original, unvarnished Marx and Engels who wrote in their critique of a certain school of German socialism:

... Here we recognize immediately the spiritual ancestry of the great historical wisdom of the Germans, who, when they run out of positive material and when they can serve up neither theological nor political nor literary rubbish, do not write history at all but invent the "pre-historic era." They do not, however, enlighten us to how we proceed from this nonsensical "pre-history" to history proper; although, on the other hand, in their historical speculation they seize upon this "prehistory" with especial eagerness because they imagine themselves safe there from interference on the part of "crude facts," and, at the same time, because they can give full rein to their speculative impulse and set up and knock down hypotheses by the thousand."

—THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY, 1846

It's as true as ever that nothing can really be proved about "pre-history." (Someone a thousand years from now digging up the remains of New York City and finding the Statue of Liberty, not to mention all the nude ikons of women could deduce—incorrectly—that women ruled.)

Genuine Marxism—which should be one and the same thing as genuine radicalism—bases itself on the realities of history that can be known. As Marx and Engels put it, again in *The German Ideology*: “Since we are dealing with the Germans, who do not postulate anything, we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history.’” The circumstances “which, from the very first enter into historical development . . . three aspects of social activity (survival, satisfaction of new needs, and procreation—eds.) are not of course to be taken as three different stages, but just, as I have said, as three aspects, or, to make it clear to the Germans, three ‘moments,’ which have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and still assert themselves in history today.” To the original Marx and Engels, the knowledge of history essentially comes from knowledge of life itself and the laws of “prehistory” cannot be different from the laws of history.

THE MONOGAMY CONNECTION

Related to Engels's argument in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that private property causes male supremacy was the idea that monogamy developed as a way that men—controlling women's sexual activity—could insure that their property went to their own children. This led to the popular interpretations of Engels among a wide assortment of left groups in the 1960's that “the monogamous family” (or simply “monogamy”) was the cause of women's oppression. As Engels put it in *The Origin*, “The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage.”

The number of women who have been abandoned with three kids to support and enjoined by their “revolutionary”

men not to complain because “monogamy is at the root of their oppression” is only one of the problems the assorted interpretations of Engels' book has to have caused women.

The earlier Marxism—and radical feminism—had the class struggle (the basic definition of private property itself) going on from the beginning of human time and originating in the natural division of labor in the sexual act—the biological family—with women and children in the first property (See *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels, 1846). But Engels postpones the development of class struggle and private property to a later period.

In Engels' theory, the earlier period of primitive communism was characterized by unrestricted sexual freedom for women and men, and the accompanying matriarchy was the result of this. Lack of knowledge of paternity (and women's collective working arrangements in the house) Engels interprets as the basis of power for women. The downfall of both primitive communism and “the world historic defeat of the female sex,” as Engels puts it, came with the development of private property and the introduction of monogamy for women only.

Among other problems, Engels' theory linking establishing knowledge of paternity with private property was based on the faulty assumption that the development of private property would be the only reason for humans to want to know who the fathers as well as mothers of children are. (Off hand, we can think of any number of others, from the rudimentary human scientific quest for knowledge to more clearly practical reasons like preventing incest or pressuring fathers to take some responsibility for offspring). Engels' book itself is flagrantly contradictory on these points. By his own account, it is clear not only that a double standard existed in primitive society in the favor of men long before the introduction of monogamy, but also that the first demand for monogamy—“pairing marriage”—was actually initiated by females.

But in truth that Golden Age of Woman is only a myth. To say that woman was the *Other* is to say that there did not exist between the sexes a reciprocal relation: Earth, Mother, Goddess—she was no fellow creature in man's eyes; it was *beyond* the human realm that her power was affirmed, and she was therefore *outside of* that realm. Society has always been male; political power has always been in the hands of men. “Public or simply social authority always belongs to men,” declares Levi-Strauss at the end of his study of primitive societies.

—Simone de Beauvoir
THE SECOND SEX, 1949

In every known human society, the male's need for achievement can be recognized. Men may cook, or weave or dress dolls or hunt hummingbirds, but if such activities are appropriate occupations of men, then the whole society, men and women alike, votes them as important. When the same occupations are performed by women, they are regarded as less important.

—Margaret Mead
MALE AND FEMALE, 1949