

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

- (1) The Direct Action Movement is a working class organisation.
- (2) Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
- (3) We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need not profit.
- (4) In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
- (5) We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is for independent organisation in the workplace and community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers' organisations must be controlled by the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers' movement. Any and all delegates and representatives of such workers' organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
- (6) We are opposed to all States and State institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is world-wide and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all States do not exist to protect the workers of those States, they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
- (7) We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and the environment.

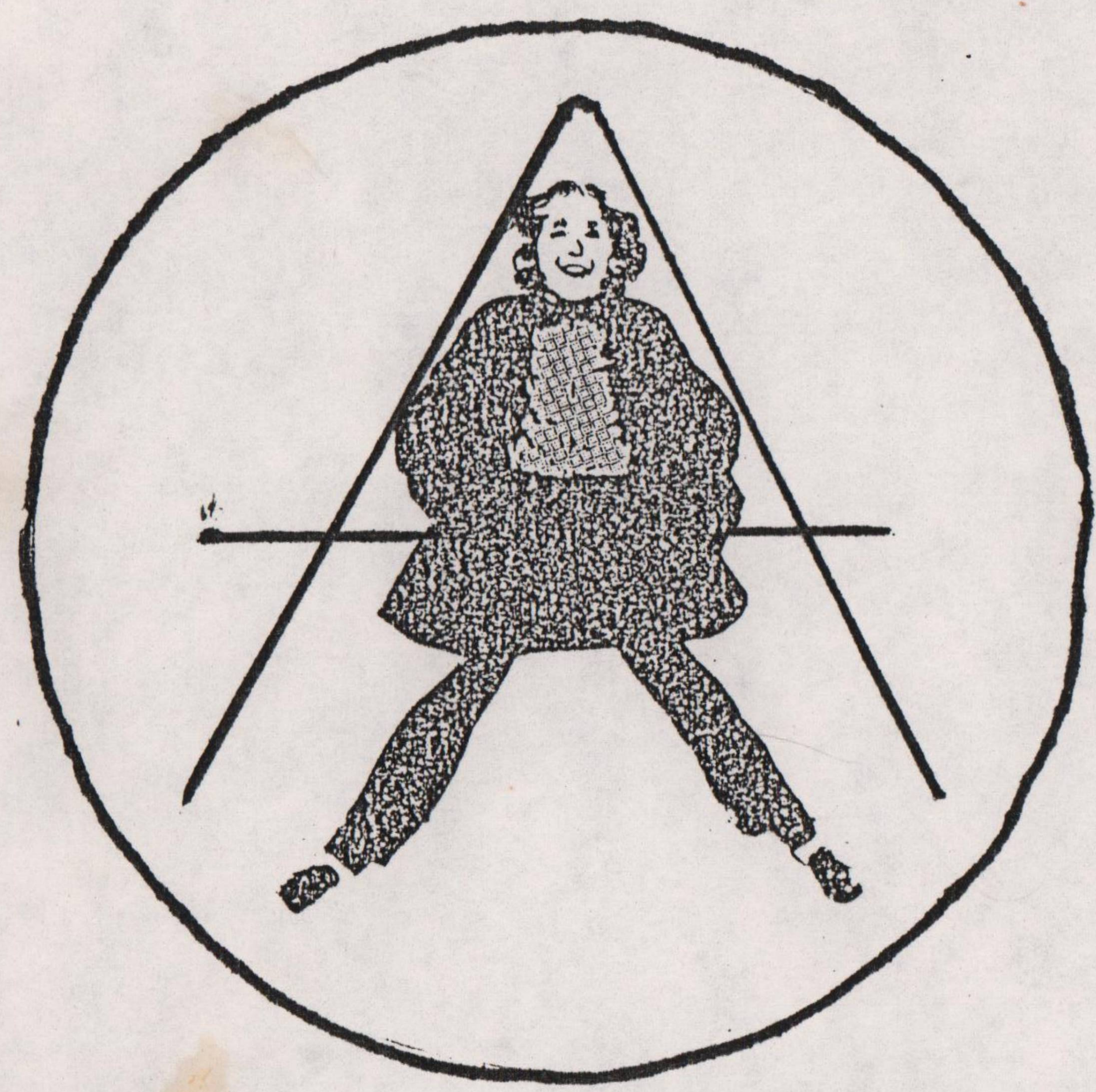
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# A NARCHISM AND FEMINISM

L I Z V E R R A N



MEDWAY DAM-IWA



## FEMINISM\*

Feminism stands for, and fights/campaigns for, equal rights for women as for men, the full realisation of female potential, women's financial independence, women's right to education and fulfilling work; in short, the self-realisation of women. Feminism resists all stereotypes: woman as sex object, man as rational; woman as virgin or whore, man as macho; woman as sweet and passive, man as active and strong; compulsory heterosexuality. Women discover they can be strong and self-assertive and fulfill their own dreams. They find other women like themselves, questioning values and discovering their true nature, and unite with them in a bonding of understanding, called sisterhood. As women become aware of their oppression they also think about other oppressions, such as class, race, age and sexual orientation. Most make the connections and look to a future in which everyone is equal, ie Socialism. However, they disagree (as men do too) on how to get there. Until they realise that authority is, by its very nature, unequal they will not become anarchy-feminists.

Women are so disillusioned with male power structures, however, that radical women's groups have adopted anarchist methods of organisation - rejecting hierarchies and centralised control. The right for control of their own bodies (the reproductive rights campaign, lesbian freedom) is a call for autonomy and anti-state, which prepares women for an understanding of anarchism. A woman is not simply a child-producing machine or a commodity (as advertising would have it) but she demands her participation in a man's world (sic) and hopes to change it to a people's world. ANARCHISM offers such an opportunity. Feminism is the collective fightback against limited and/or degrading roles for women, by women and is their defence against male violence, eg rape, wife-battering etc, (including the police, male-dominated,

\* See Glossary



who make rape victims feel guilty and refuse protection to battered wives in a "domestic matter"). Women can turn to women for help in Rape Crisis Centres and Women's Aid refuges (where they exist which is mainly in the affluent West). In opposing degradation, from violent porn to advertising, they demand the respect that goes with opportunities for achievement, recognition of their abilities and the respect due every human being, human dignity.

Some feminists only oppose male chauvinism and support capitalism, others think they will approach socialism through the Labour Party or even "revolutionary" parties. The first do not realise that capitalism needs to keep women servile to maintain profit, parliamentarians are kidding themselves that the system will let itself be overthrown and anyway women will be sold out for votes. The Trotskyites understand both the above but their elitism goes right against the call for equality, sacrificed to the Party.

#### THE ANARCHIST MOVEMENT

All anarchists in theory should automatically support anarcha-feminism, male or female (though certainly not all anarchists do). Maybe not all anarchist women see anarcha-feminism as vital to their anarchism. They may prefer other areas of activism - or indeed, even today, some still see feminism as a secondary struggle to the "main" struggle. So, although anarchism and feminism are synonymous to an anarcha-feminist, that unfortunately is not the whole story.

In theory, anarchism is the liberation of all humanity, which necessarily includes the liberation of women, ie feminism. Yet, unless it is commonly agreed by anarchists of both sexes that these two great struggles are really one, anarchist women can expect women's liberation to be seen by many anarchists (especially men) as a "side issue".

#### WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT\*

Though true anarchists are necessarily anarcha-feminists, it cannot be said that feminists are necessarily anarchists. Although the organisation of the women's liberation movement has generally been anarchistic in nature, some feminists pursue reformist demands which are contrary to anarchism, eg tough laws and longer sentences for rapists; women's pressure groups to influence the Labour Party. (Thus, anarcha-feminists sometimes can only give limited support to certain campaigns, whilst trying to encourage changes in aims, methods and overall direction which are far more revolutionary.)

Feminism embraces many political views although Radical Feminism\* has anarchistic tendencies implicit in most of its beliefs: under patriarchy, freedom from male control requires freedom from the State (which embodies male values). However, because anarchism has had such a bad press, many of these women do not know on how much the two agree. Women have had such bad experiences of male control and leadership that they have instinctively learned to organise with controls against autocracy - rotation of tasks, decentralisation etc.

Anarchism can offer feminism a view of the ideal society we should be working to achieve and methods of how to get there: the need to end all forms of authoritarianism. The Women's Liberation Movement can offer anarchism the political method of consciousness-raising to form theory. Contrary to what it sounds like, this is not group therapy where women get rid of the patriarchal values in their own heads, it is a way of re-examining the evidence on which theory is built. His-story is written by male members of the ruling class and reflects their values. If we are to make sense of what has happened and where to go next, we need to find out what less-privileged people think, want and are. This is achieved by believing what they say about themselves rather

\* See Glossary



than what is written about them by "experts". Thus women talk about what they have experienced on an issue and find common threads which show them what is really going on. Blacks, workers, gays and the disabled can and should do the same, to debunk what the sociologists have written and said about them. Hence the expression: the personal is political. (It is, of course, a pleasant side-effect of consciousness-raising that women discover that what they thought was an individual problem is shared by the majority of their friends and is something to blame society and not themselves for but if this realisation does not then become the basis for collective action it is merely reformist.)

#### ANARCHIST MEN NEED TO CONFRONT THEIR OWN SEXISM

Anarchist women have a personal reason to think about sexism but it is a problem for them if anarchist men do not do the same. Admittedly, they will not see things from a woman's point of view, but it is vital to the work of liberation that men stop and think about their own behaviour and assumptions. Anarchist men would be well-advised to consider forming anti-sexist men's groups and/or reading anarcha-feminist books, to think about the ways in which their conditioning oppresses women and gays and limits their own choice of behaviour.

There is room for women-only, men-only and mixed groups to consider sexism within the anarchist movement. In the separate sex groups, there is likely to be a greater degree of honesty and shared views, whereas in the mixed groups there is the opportunity for each sex to learn more about each others' opinions. There needs to be space to consider where the language and cartoons used in our publications alienate women and also whether whole areas of life are being ignored because of the "male as norm" view of society - eg state control of reproduction, state values in enforcing the family norm on benefits.

There can be no valid anarchism where anyone expects to dominate or take precedence over another, limit someone else's potential or assume privilege because of their gender. Unfortunately most of the time this is done unconsciously and is accepted unnoticed. Women and men need to watch for sexist behaviour in themselves and others. Even then the problem will not go away because when two free individuals are engaged in the same activity, one of each sex, the man in the street (see what I mean!) will assume the superiority of the male. Anarchy, where women are not as free as men, is rank hypocrisy and any supposed anarchist, who does not wholeheartedly support the freedom of women and fight for it, is a hypocrite and not an anarchist. It is only when women and men can work together in a spirit of solidarity that we can hope to build or participate in a real revolution. There is no true change created solely by men. If those men had no wish to exclude women, if they were non-sexist, they would actively seek to include women. It is not real revolution that excludes the majority of the population - "revolution" made by men on behalf of women - acting as "vanguard of the proletariat" no doubt!

Equally, there can be no real revolution made entirely by women either, even though women have realised that revolution can no longer mean the seizure of power or the domination of one group by another. Domination itself must be abolished and anarchist men should understand this too.

#### PROPAGANDA

We need to spread these ideas to all: male and female anarchists, feminists, anti-sexist men, other socialists, the working class and society at large. When we support actions, such as in trade unions, and explain our political differences, the need to respect women's rights is one of the issues that could be raised. We can initiate mixed meetings on sexism in the media, reproductive rights etc and show ourselves different from the Labour Party by pursuing these issues for their own sake and



not to gain converts to the "party".

As anarcha-feminists we do have an easy method of explaining anarchism to other feminists: they may well be familiar with anarchistic methods of organising. Feminism is non-hierarchical - a starting point. As Peggy Kornegger says in 'Quiet Rumours': "The women's groups or projects which have been the most successful are those which experimented with various fluid structures: the rotation of tasks and chairpersons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolised decision making and time slots for discussion of group dynamics, this (last) structural element is important because it involves a continued effort on the part of group members to watch for 'creeping power politics'."

Anarcha-feminists cannot support the rise of bourgeois feminists to positions of privilege and/or power but then nor do Radical Feminists who do not want to get to the top of a man's world but to change the system entirely. Similarly it is only Socialist Feminists\* who seek political power or set themselves up as leaders of the women's movement - we would oppose this. In D A M, as anarcho-syndicalists, we cannot support the rise of women in the trade union bureaucracy beyond the position of shop steward (which is D A M policy) but we long to see more women active at rank-and-file level or better still, forming anarcho-syndicalist free unions, which represent those outside paid work too. We do not support entryism of political parties nor will we be put on one side - as D A M's Women's Section - like the Trotskyite women, who are shunted neatly aside by their parties: we participate fully in the D A M. There is no disparity or unbridgeable gap between feminism and anarcho-syndicalism, quoting Peggy Kornegger, "The structure of women's groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarcho-syndicalists' unions in Spain, France and many other

\* See Glossary

countries."

As anarcha-feminists and anarcho-syndicalists, we support the struggles of women who are low-paid workers in industry and those seeking to unionise in catering, domestic service or home work; the struggle to recognise the monetary value of housework and child-rearing, though not to be paid by the State if that means the State controlling the "quality" of work produced. Women are part of the industrial struggle and will not stand idly by watching their wages cut and their jobs given to men (as the powerful trade unions do). The whole working class suffers when women under-sell themselves or are sold out by male trade unionists. We particularly support women's strikes and women's support groups for male strikers (where they are not there to make tea).

Although we can and do show solidarity with struggles for better laws (eg on abortion and sexual harassment at work), we leaflet such demonstrations pointing out how futile and servile it is to appeal to the State or expect social change through legislation. We create our own social changes as far as is possible under oppression until we are free of government, which means direct action. Laws are not just, immutable expressions of what is right but are tools to uphold the status quo, protect private property and the ruling class. Any woman who has appealed for police help when being battered by her husband knows the limits of law. As Carol Ehrlich writes, "Developing alternative forms of organisation means building self-help clinics instead of fighting to get one radical on a hospital's board of directors; it means women's video groups and newspapers, instead of commercial television and newspapers; living collectives, instead of isolated nuclear families; rape crisis centres; food co-ops; parent-controlled day-car centres; free schools; printing co-ops; alternative radio groups and so on."

Thus, on pornography we do not plead for government



censorship (and play into their hands as they censor gay films and sex education which is free of the nuclear family) instead we do it ourselves by destroying pornographic material and campaigning against the attitudes it expresses. We do not campaign for tough sentences for rapists (knowing that judges will then be less likely to prosecute) but get together late-night transport for women, learn self-defence, take reprisals against known rapists and encourage women to watch for each other's safety.

### REJECTING CAPITALISM

Anarchism and feminism have always had the basics in common, such as taking control of one's own life. However, some women only seem to want to be independent of their husbands, whilst others seek to be independent all the way, free of the State. We can support the formation of women workers' co-operatives but not the setting up of a women's corporation. To quote 'Quiet Rumours' again, "Feminist capitalism is a contradiction in terms. When we establish women's credit unions, restaurants, bookstores etc, we must be clear that we are doing so for our own survival, for the purpose of creating a counter-system whose processes contradict and challenge competition, profit-making and all forms of economic oppression. We must be committed to 'living on the boundaries', to anti-capitalist, non-consumption values."

In advocating direct action, we are advocating tactics/Strategy that goes further towards the goal of anarchy, ie towards a goal that is more radical than any other "socialism", to guarantee, or try to, autonomy both to the individual and to the collective, ie the anarchist federation of groups, groups that remain on a "human scale"; that practice community more - removing all authoritarian institutions, all centralisation, bureaucracy, militarism and false divisions (by class, race, sex, age and sexual orientation). It is only when we have full control of our own lives that we are free: free of government, armies, police, prisons, officialdom, elitism, privilege, prejudice. In the abolition of the nation-state, we shall also

abolish war - but only if the revolutionaries are non-sexist, non-racist and include a fair proportion of all groups.

### OTHER STRUGGLES

As internationalists, we support the struggles of black women against racism and imperialism. Also their struggles against the sexist practices of their own cultures, whether as members of multi-racial societies like Britain/Western Europe or in their own States.

We also support lesbians and gay men in their struggle against heterosexism. Although its direct relevance to the industrial struggle may only be apparent to heterosexuals where they (gays) are sacked because they work with children, their oppression is part of the State's enforcement of a heterosexual, family norm which is a restriction on all our freedoms. Heterosexuals only appear to be in the vast majority in our society because many gays prefer to remain in the closet and we assume people are heterosexual until we are sure that they are not. The heterosexual norm is a violation of human rights and contributes to the moralistic way laws are drawn up and enforced in our society.

There is no practical anarchy without mutual aid; what sort of mutual aid can there be, while dominance-submission games continue and what is mutual aid without equality? Equality of sexes and races, not of classes since there will only be one. If sexism is allowed to continue, anarchy would be a joke, authority would be enshrined in possession of a penis!

Anarchy works best with strong people who need no leaders: this implies strong, self-assertive women, who have rid themselves forever of negative roles and undermining self-images, with all their incumbent limitations and repressions, ie feminists.



As anarcho-syndicalists, we are aware that the economic system oppresses but, as women realise, oppression extends into every aspect of life - leisure, culture, relationships - all our lives. We also know that liberation cannot be done for people, not by a party, a union or any organisation. People must create their own groups. Women's oppression is part of the overall oppression of people by a capitalist economy but it is also caused by male supremacy, a double oppression. As Carol Ehrlich says, "Women, even more than most men, have very little power over their own lives. Gaining such autonomy and insisting that everyone have it is the major goal of anarchist feminists."

The need for anarcha-feminism was shown in Spain in the 1930s where "anarchist" men proved little better than men everywhere in their treatment of women, whose role did NOT change. I contend that any anarchism in future would breakdown if it continued to oppress women - it would have a feminist rebellion on its hands! Anarchism needs anarcha-feminists to ensure that it is a daily reality, reaching all human inter-relationships in everyday life, as it should do, for that is an area where more women in anti-politics now have more experience than most of the men (unless men learn, in the meantime, for women might need them to).

While feminists, if anarcha-feminists can encourage them to re-examine feminism and discover its close connections with anarchism, might forsake reformism or Trotskyism and become true Women's Liberationists. We have to work for a revolutionary feminism, ie an anti-authoritarian feminism. In short, to spread anarchist feminist ideas.

#### SUMMING UP

We aim for three ends in our own ways and our own groups: (1) to spread anarchism amongst feminists; (2) to spread feminism amongst anarchists and (3)

to spread both anarchism and feminism amongst our own society and around the world.

I am not advocating that in spreading our ideas we adopt a sort of evangelism, so much as live by them and let them be part of our writing, speaking and organising as well as how we socialise. Within D A M this means writing to Direct Action and the Internal Bulletin and raising issues at conferences. In feminism it means writing to Spare Rib, Outwrite and propaganda during demonstrations and actions. Beyond this, we can write to national newspapers, "women's" magazines and talk to friends and relatives. However, I do feel that the longer we think about the issues around sexism, the more they become part of ourselves and do not need conscious thought in finding ways to promote the ideas.

Finally I would recommend that you read the anarcha-feminist anthology, 'Quiet Rumours'. If the treatment of women in Spain in the 1930s seems far away, this quote from the introduction should surprise you: "The first English anarcha-feminist groups appeared in 1977 and soon grew to a national network with its own bulletins and newspaper, with two national and several regional conferences. But by 1980 the anarcha-feminist movement had to all intents and purposes ceased to function. It seems, looking back, rather short-lived. For one thing it faced opposition not only from marxist and reformist feminists but also from the traditional and male-dominated anarchist movement, which regarded anarcha-feminists as some kind of threat to its position. Partly because of all this, anarcha-feminists moved away into other areas of activity, particularly the growing anti-nuclear movement."

Anarcha-feminists in the 1980s must work to prevent the same fate befalling anarcha-feminism in Britain again (both inside and outside the D A M).



## GLOSSARY

WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT - movement of women committed to overthrowing male supremacy, which has dominated all cultures for many centuries.

FEMINISM - softer term than WLM, encompasses women who believe that change in women's status can occur within the present structures of society. It is interesting that the more radical term is used less often nowadays.

LESBIAN SEPARATISTS - identify men and heterosexuality as the cause of women's oppression and therefore have nothing to do with either men or heterosexual/bisexual women. Radical Feminists are not the same as Lesbian Separatists - see below.

POLITICAL LESBIANS - are women who are not necessarily "practising" lesbians but who prioritize women in all aspects of their lives including relationships.

RADICAL FEMINISTS - identify male supremacy as the root cause of women's oppression and work towards its overthrow (see WLM). They see the system not individuals as the problem so they are not Lesbian Separatists; in fact they object to women being put in ghettos and only support separate women's organisations as short-term expedients to gaining equal place in mixed groups. They object to compulsory heterosexuality and are from all sexual orientations themselves.

SOCIALIST FEMINISTS - are not as you might suppose committed to socialism as we understand it. They are women who continue to put themselves as secondary to other struggles - usually the Labour Party - and are often careerists (see Feminism above).