

# FEMINISM



**& MARXISM**

**DOROTHY BALLAN**

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**Feminism**

**And**

**Marxism**

**by Dorothy Ballan**

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## About the Author

Dorothy Ballan made her mark in the struggle for working women in the huge Cheektowaga plant (near Buffalo) of the Westinghouse Corporation, which is organized in Local 1581 of the International Union of Electrical Workers, CIO-AFL.

She worked as a punch press operator, a low-paid, unskilled job, classified as Labor Grade 3. The company had divided the work force into 10 labor grades. Although the women in the plant constituted almost half the work force, they were all concentrated in Labor Grade 1 to 3, the lowest paid, unskilled jobs. The other 7 grades were, of course, for men.

By defying the company’s discriminatory practice and mobilizing the support of union men and women, she broke the ban and won a bid for a Labor Grade 7 job — that of die-setter — on the punch press—never before performed by a woman. **It was a first in the electrical industry.** She also was a steward of a section of about 1000 workers; also an elected member of the Executive Board and one of the four top officers of Local 1581.

Earlier she had been first a volunteer organizer and then a full-time organizer for Local 292 of United Paper Workers Union, CIO, in New York City.

# THE WOMAN IN HISTORY

There is a profound revolutionary upsurge going on today that is shaking the very foundations of capitalist civilization. It can be seen in all phases of life: on the campus, on the picket line, more recently in the ranks of organized labor, above all in the Black liberation movement, and even in the church.

So it is no surprise that there is also a widespread resurgence for women's liberation despite the campaign of the ruling class to ridicule and distort it in an effort to obliterate its very progressive character.

Many young women throughout the country are beginning to inquire into the origins of present day social relations of women, particularly as applied to the family.

## *Materialist view of origin of the family*

It is really impossible to understand the origin or development of the present status of women without subjecting the question to a materialist view of history, that is, from a class point of view. If women in the leadership of this movement see the question in historical perspective, it would help a great deal to avoid suffering another decline in the movement such as happened to the suffragette movement.

There are few social institutions that are held to be as hallowed, as eternal and as unchanging in character as that of the family.

But Marxism teaches that all things in nature and society are in constant, uninterrupted and everlasting change. Nothing is eternal; everything has a beginning, goes through a period of development, growth and decadence, and ultimately a transformation into other forms. And that, of course, applies no less to the development of the family.

Marx and Engels not only discovered the laws governing capitalist society in particular, but also the driving forces of social development of humanity since its rudimentary beginnings on earth.

Frederick Engels, in his remarkable book, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,” found that the family, like any other historical phenomenon, was by no means a frozen, ossified, permanent, changeless institution based on moralistic or religious conception. Quite the contrary.

Its development and transformation flowed from the material conditions of life and was most vitally affected by profound changes in the development of production.

### *The historical epoch of mother-right*

For many hundreds of thousands of years, there was no such thing as a family as we know it today, anywhere on earth. The forms of organization that did exist were adaptations to the material needs.

To survive and develop in the struggle against nature with little or no tools, men and women lived and worked cooperatively, equally and communally, with a division of labor between the sexes that came naturally.

The period that began with the transformation of men and women from animal to human, and known as the period of mother-right, or the matriarchy, was a very long and complex period. If we were to reduce the many hundreds of thousands of years of human development to the scale of one year, the equivalent measurement would leave only a few days of historical time for the patriarchy; over 360 days of historical time belonged to the matriarchy.

### *Cooperative social basis of matriarchy*

At the dawn of humanity, production was necessarily organized on a social and cooperative basis. Contrary to Hollywood stories of cave men who dragged passive women to their caves by the hair, and whose relations with each other was one of constant aggression and destruction—there actually was a high degree of social cooperation among all the people in a group which was reflected in the division of labor between men and women.

It was the only way for humanity to survive in a hostile environment.

Not only Hollywood, but all the religious and social institutions of today, as well as some anthropologists, can only see the development of primitive society through private-property-tainted glasses. But property in primitive society was communally owned. It was only after social production was transformed into private production that the nature of the family changed

from a socially cooperative foundation as it existed under the matriarchy to the private property foundation of the patriarchy. And this transformation didn't happen until the most recent days of historical time.

### *Engels' estimate of Morgan's discoveries*

Engels based his conclusions of the origin of the family on the research of Lewis H. Morgan whom he credited with rediscovering America in his own way. Morgan spent many years studying first-hand the system of kinship prevailing among the American Indians, most particularly the Iroquois. As a result, he discovered that the form of kinship that prevailed among the Iroquois prevailed not only among all the aborigines spread over an entire continent, but also among numerous tribes in Asia, Africa and Australia, which indicated a broad historical development in many separate parts of the earth.

### *Group marriage and its role in the development of matriarchy*

From what existed in his time, Morgan was able to deduce earlier, extinct forms of group or communal marriage. Engels felt that Morgan's contribution was of such mighty importance that, in his own words, "The rediscovery of the original mother-right gens as the stage preliminary to the father-right gens of the civilized peoples has the same significance for the history of primitive society as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy."

To prove this point, it becomes necessary to trace some of the historical development, even if only in a marginal way.

At the dawn of humanity, group marriage prevailed. Paternity was not even understood, let alone determined. It required no complex scientific reasoning to determine who the mothers were. Therefore children always remained with the mother. As the gens, a unit of blood relatives descended through the mother, developed and separated into differing units, the men would leave their gens to join the gens of the women, and descent continued through the mothers.

The only way for humans to survive and develop in the struggle against nature, with first no tools and later with very primitive ones, was to work cooperatively. The natural division of labor that evolved at that time appears to have developed precisely because women are the child bearers. In most cases, the men did the hunting for big game to serve as food for the entire group. They all ate or starved together.

So dependent were they on each other, that out of this a code of morals and ethics developed where it was unthinkable for one person to eat and leave another hungry. Everything was shared. It should be mentioned in passing that occasionally, in some areas, women also became hunters and warriors.

*Home was where all the people lived*

But for the most part, women stayed in the home, took care of child rearing, food gathering or production, and housekeeping. But again, if these tasks are viewed through private—property-tinted glasses, they become impossible to really understand.



<Japanese women holding digging sticks. first developed by primitive women in the matriarchy for food gathering and land cultivation.>

Home was not the individual, removed, isolated, stultifying arena where childbearing and housekeeping became a prison for each woman individually to grapple with dirt, dishes and individual cooking, virtually removed from all other areas of intellectual and social developments except on the pettiest levels.

Home was the area where all the people of the gens lived in large buildings communally. The men left the home to hunt for food in the form of big game. Even when the men were fortunate enough to bring something back, it



was the women who learned to use fire for cooking, develop utensils for eating, storing and preserving, processing leather for warm clothing plus an infinite variety of other necessary, useful and highly creative labor.

Because the men were not always successful on the hunt, the women found other forms of food, first as a supplement to the hunt and later as a replacement. They learned to dig for potatoes, yams and other roots. Later they learned field cultivation and consciously planted a variety of foods. They first caught small bugs, lizards and animals for food and later learned to domesticate animals and breed them. This barely even touches on the enormous development they brought about in production and tools and a variety of useful labor.

### *Engels: woman first to articulate speech*

Women worked together. A development or discovery of one was a development for all. They not only learned from each other but they taught the children and the men what they learned. Engels even speculates that it was probably women who first articulated speech. It was the men who were more isolated on the hunt and had to spend much time in silence. It was the women who were constantly experimenting and exchanging experiences and teaching the children who participated in the work as soon as they were old enough.

Women were never thought of as being unable to do heavy work. It has been established that it was they who physically built the large community houses.

There appears to have been no competitiveness between the sexes. Women worked extraordinarily hard as well as remarkably creatively. Not only did this not appear to cause any loss of femininity in the eyes of the male or female, but on the contrary, earned her equal respect, and because of her childbearing capacity, greater than equal respect. And particularly the most respected members of primitive society were the old women whose advice and consideration were considered of prime importance in every significant undertaking.

### *Development of the pairing family*

Engels explains that natural selection operated to gradually reduce the circle of marriage between large groups to its last unit, one man and one woman,

known as the pairing family. Although this sounds like the modern family unit, we must remember once again not to look at primitive society through property-tinted glasses. This pairing family existed within the gens which meant that the woman was not materially dependent in any way on the man. The gens was responsible for the material subsistence of all its members, and also mother-right still prevailed.

The marriage tie was very loose and could easily be dissolved by either party. If they separated the man would go back to his own gens, (that of his mother or his sister) and could take his personal property which most likely consisted of his instruments for procuring food. The household goods, the most important property, stayed with the woman in her gens, and so did the children. There was a similar procedure if one of them died. It provided no material problem for the woman. In this way her choice was as free as the man's on whether to live with him or not.

The pairing marriage, Engels points out, placed at the side of the natural mother, the authenticated father for the first time.

**“If,”** he continues, **“no new social (his emphasis) driving forces had come into operation, there would have been no reason why a new form of the family should arise out of the pairing family. But these driving forces did commence to operate.”**

### *Development of surplus – beginning of wealth*

There came a point when the men no longer went hunting. Learning from the women to domesticate and breed animals, they applied this knowledge to the larger animals. They developed herds of horses, camels, donkeys, oxen, sheep, goats and pigs.

Such possessions required merely supervision and only elementary care. The animals could be bred in larger and larger numbers and provide much more than enough milk and meat than was needed for immediate or imminent use. Hunting was no longer a necessity. It was now only a luxury.

To whom did this new wealth belong? Undoubtedly, says Engels, to the gens. At the time of the first available written literature, the Bible itself, as well as other literature and art, it becomes clear that everywhere herds were already the separate property of the family chiefs.

After the herds developed, more people were needed to tend the cattle. And

as field cultivation developed, more people were needed to care for the fields. The development of production had led to the development of a surplus of the means of subsistence. For the first time in history, they produced more than what it cost to maintain themselves.

And so slavery was invented. In earlier times, when wars broke out among tribes (a multiple grouping of gens) the vanquished were either killed or adopted with their wives and children into the victorious tribe. Slavery was unheard of.



<Chinese textile mill>



<New York garment factory>

### *Origin of private property -- destruction of mother-right*

Near the end of the development of primitive society, people found that not only were slaves useful to tend cattle and fields, but they could be bred like cattle.

The accumulation of riches, “once they had passed into the private possession of families and there rapidly multiplied, struck a powerful blow to a society founded on pairing marriage and mother-right gens. The old social system could no longer accommodate the new forces of production” (Engels).

This accumulation of wealth increased the importance of the status of the man. But as long as mother-right prevailed, he could never bequeath his wealth to his children. It went instead to his sister and her children.

### *Development of father-right*

This became intolerable and as we know all too well, mother-right was overthrown and replaced by father-right.

Engels' superb formulation on the passing of mother-right is one of the great gems of Marxist analysis.

“The overthrow of mother-right,” he says, “was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man seized the reins in the house also; the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children. This lowered position of women . . . has become gradually embellished and . . . clothed in milder form, but by no means abolished.”

### *Inheritance*

And so as property was transformed from public to private, and descent through the male was instituted to authenticate the heirs for purposes of bequeathing the property, the institution of the family was established.

Despite all the protestations of state and church to the contrary, the origin of the family is rooted in material conditions and the development of private property—and not in religious or spiritual conceptions.

The origin of the word “family” meant slave, and the family included a man, his wife, children and slaves. The women were acquired into this economic unit for the purpose of procreating heirs to whom to bequeath private property—and as such, the family served the interests of the possessing class.

This was the real origin of the family. When social production became transformed into private production, the nature of the family changed from a socially cooperative foundation as it existed under the matriarchy to the private foundations of the patriarchy. This does not mean that human nature was more humane under the matriarchy. The material conditions required productive cooperation for survival, which was then reflected in the social relations.

### *How private property made slavery*

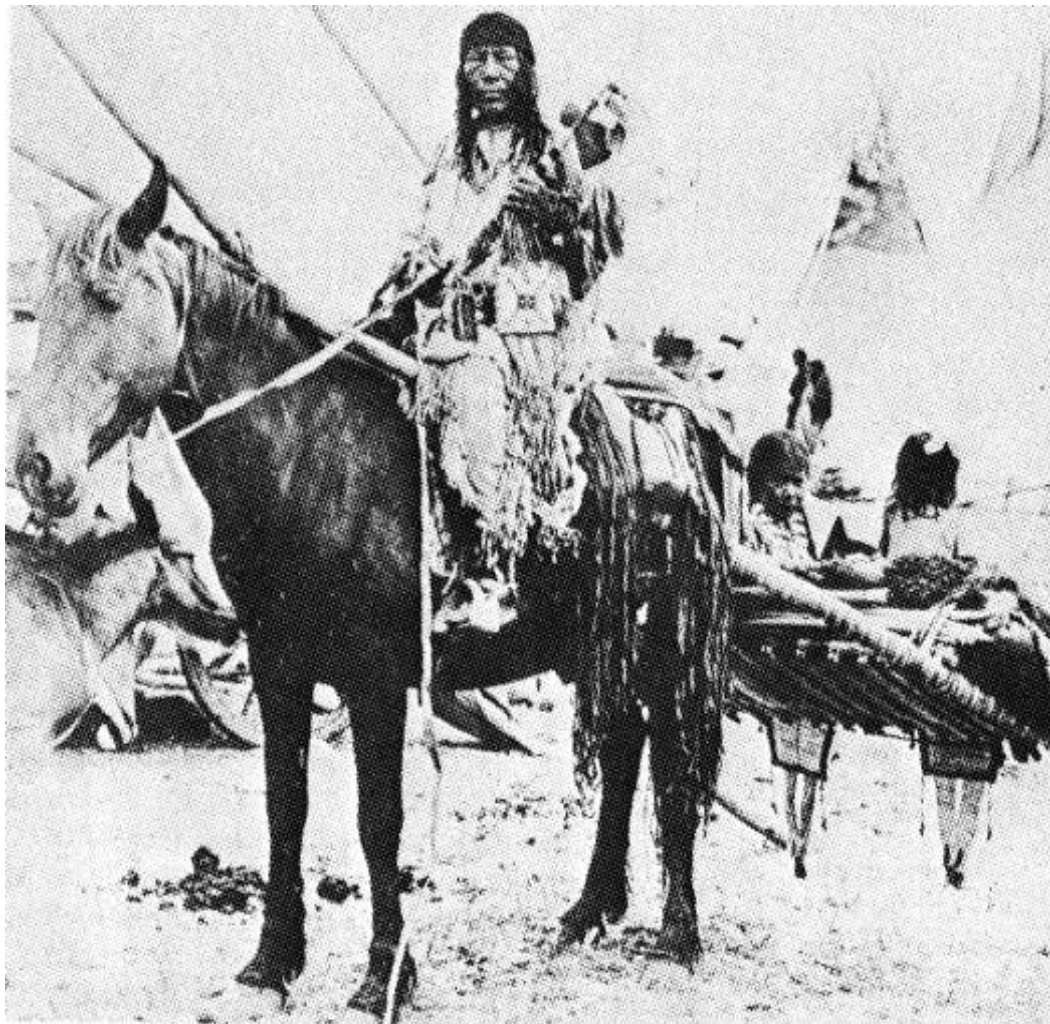
The conversion of social property to private property eventually meant even the conversion of humans to private ownership.

For primitive women, childbearing not only provided a greater impetus for her to participate in social production, but was virtually a form of social

production itself. The husband had no authority over her, and she was never dependent upon him economically or materially.

This became transformed into its opposite, with marriage and childbearing isolating and insulating women from social production, making her totally dependent on her husband, and reducing her to the role of procreation for inheritance, and to the role of servant for husband.

Only if one understands the historical conditions which brought about the condition of servitude of women, will we be able to find the road to complete liberation. We expect to pursue this question in a subsequent article.



<Woman on a horse drawing a travois loaded with two children and belongings.>

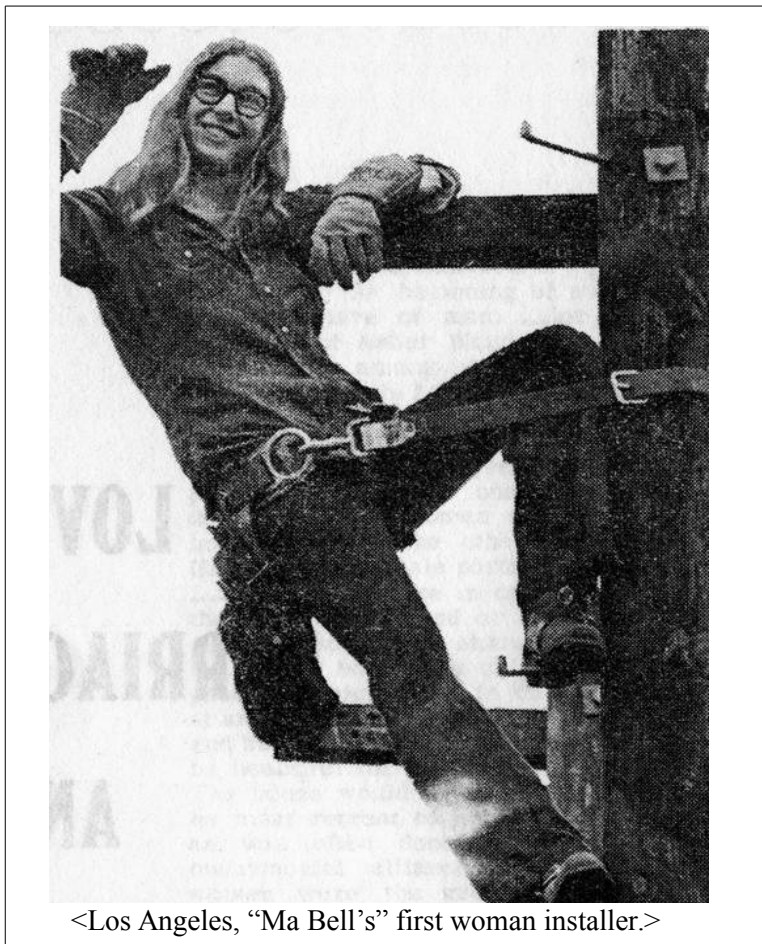
**LOVE,  
MARRIAGE  
AND  
MONOGAMY**

One of the most absurd notions taken over from eighteenth-century enlightenment is that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man. ...let us hear the evidence of Ashur Wright, for many years missionary among the Iroquois Senecas: (quoted by Lewis Morgan)

“As to their family system, when occupying the old long-houses (communistic households comprising several families), it is probable that some one clan (gens) predominated, the women taking in husbands, however, from the other class (gentes),... Usually, the female portion ruled the house. ...The stores were in common; but woe to the luckless husband or lover who was too shiftless to do his share of the providing. No matter how many children, or whatever goods he might have in the house, he might at any time be ordered to pick up his blanket and budge; and after such orders it would not be healthful for him to attempt to disobey. The house would be too hot for him; and... he must retreat to his own clan (gens); or as was often done, go and start a new matrimonial alliance in some other. The women were the great power among the clans (gentes), as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, ‘ to knock off the horns, ’ as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of the warriors.”

Excerpt from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* by Frederick Engels.

Despite all its exploitation and brutality, the capitalist system, more than any of the preceding social systems, is dependent on constantly revolutionizing the productive forces, even where this flies in the face of its most cherished religious and moral prejudices. Capitalism constantly perfects its technology, not in the interest of social progress, but rather of super-profit.



The development of the contraceptive pill, like many previous inventions and discoveries, has brought about a virtual revolution in the social relations of many women, particularly as it affects the younger generation.

*The Pill – weapon against involuntary procreation*

The fact that the Pill may not yet be fully perfected and may subject the user to hazards is another matter. The significant fact is that its simplicity of use has enabled the woman to control to a large degree her procreative function, and with little or no effort or discomfort.

It is in fact, for her, a technically revolutionary development in her centuries-old struggle to achieve release from the slavery imposed upon her by her inability to control this vital body function.

Despite the fact that this country is steeped in ancient prejudice and warped by what Marx called the “malignant furies” of private material interests, a wide variety of statistics show how fully and quickly women understood and welcomed the Pill.

It is interesting that a substantial number of young women in particular have taken this new opportunity to venture forth into the world and participate in



all phases of life with the same freedom from unwanted pregnancy as men.

The development of this simple contraceptive has enabled many more women to break through the overgrowth of prejudice and hypocrisy and gain greater freedom in sex relations, more nearly equal to that of men.

For women, the accessibility of the Pill is in the nature of winning a civil right in the struggle for the rights of women. It obviously does not end oppression and discrimination against women, nor does it put an end to the ideology of male supremacy, but it helps clear some of the ground for the further development of the struggle.

*"Free-love" vs. freedom to set love free*

Much of the attack by bourgeois elements on the use of the Pill centers on the alleged fear of the growth of promiscuity, as well as the fear that it will injure the "sanctity" of the bourgeois family. Substantially the same arguments were used in earlier controversies on what they called "free love."

It is easy for most women to see that what is for the most part being attacked is the possible promiscuity of women. Promiscuity for men has existed as part and parcel of the monogamous family since its inception and has never been considered as affecting the so-called sanctity of the bourgeois family to any substantial degree. What enrages the bourgeoisie about "free love" is nothing more than the ability of women to participate in sex, and like men, without fear of pregnancy. This bourgeois hypocrisy is rooted materially in ancient tradition, as we will show.

On the question of love, Marxists seek to focus not on "free love" but on how to set love free, that is, to emancipate love from the outmoded, artificial, social restraints which are the heritage of social systems based on class domination and class oppression.

The Pill may provide a relaxation in sex relations. But love, which implies full freedom in human relations—whether with a marriage contract or not—cannot be the result of a mere relaxation of sex relations. Sex relations will always remain distorted as long as class oppression throttles human relations in general and relations between the sexes in particular.

As Simone de Beauvoir says in her well-known book, *The Second Sex*, "The fact is that today neither men nor women are satisfied with each other. But the question is to know whether there is an original curse that condemns them to rend each other or whether the conflicts in which they are opposed

merely mark a transitional moment in human history.

“The battle of the sexes is not immediately implied in the anatomy of man and woman.

“Society, being codified by man (i.e. ruling class man—D.B.), decrees that woman is inferior. . . . This condition has been imposed upon her. All oppression creates a state of war. And this is no exception.”

Under capitalism, freedom in sex no more emancipates love than freedom to work for wages emancipates the worker.

### *Transformation of the primitive communal home*

The modern bourgeois family can best be understood in the light of its historical development. In an analysis of this question, it is of great importance to know that in primitive times the family was the community; that is, everything was organized and produced cooperatively, communistically—quite the opposite of the capitalist world.

With the development of wealth and subsequent transformation into private ownership, the home declined as the center of social, public production which it had been in primitive, matriarchal times. Women as childbearers and rearers were forced by nature to remain in the home. Out of virtual necessity it was the men who were in the better position to pursue the new drive to accumulate wealth and further develop the means of production. And these did develop with accelerating speed.

The home became more private, more insulated from social life. The wealth—in many cases consisting of large herds—was developed by the men. Because the men developed this wealth, they became more dominant and eventually became the private owners. As women became more isolated, they became more dependent for survival on men.

The very dependency itself created an entirely new relation between husband and wife. No longer did they mutually cooperate as independent beings. The woman now needed the man for economic survival. And so, as Engels said, the final transformation of mother-right to father-right (descent through the father rather than the mother) marked the world historic overthrow of the female sex.

## *The origin of bequeathing wealth to heirs*

This now powerful father was stimulated to bequeath his wealth to his heirs. To ascertain his heirs, he demanded complete fidelity of the wife under pain of death, while he pursued his own polygamous and adulterous adventures unendingly.

And so the primitive pairing family of communal social relations under the matriarchy became transformed into the individual, monogamous family under the patriarchy. This development was the beginning of a new social and economic unit in the history of humanity.

Marx said that this family unit contained in embryo form not only slavery, but serfdom also, since from the very beginning it is connected with agricultural services. It contains within itself in miniature all the antagonisms which later develop on a wide scale within society and its state.

In his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels traced the origins of, and analyzed the concrete conditions of the ancient Greek family, supposedly the most civilized and highly developed people of antiquity. He said this study showed monogamy “was not in any way the fruit of individual sex-love with which it had absolutely nothing in common, for the marriages remained marriages of convenience as before. . . . The rule of the man in the family, the procreation of children who could only be his, destined to be the heirs of his wealth—these alone were frankly avowed by the Greeks as the exclusive aims of monogamy. For the rest, it was a burden. . . .

“Thus monogamy does not by any means make its appearance in history as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such a reconciliation. On the contrary, it appears as the subjection of one sex by the other, as the proclamation of a conflict between the sexes entirely unknown hitherto in prehistoric times.”

Engels says that from an unpublished manuscript by Marx and himself he found the following: “The first division of labor is that between man and woman for child breeding.”



<Three generations of Palestine refugees.>

He then adds: “The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.”

### *Monogamy as a historical advance*

“Monogamy,” says Engels, “was a great historical advance, but at the same time it inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch lasting until today, in which every advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the well-being and development of one group is obtained by the misery and repression of the other. It is the cellular form of civilized society, in which we can already study the nature of the antagonisms and contradictions which develop fully in the latter.”

Thus we can see that the modern family today is not what it is preached to be—a unit of sex-love, marriage and fidelity. Rather it is the bourgeois outgrowth of what Engels describes about Greek antiquity.

The modern monogamous family, like the ancient one, contains within it all

of the class contradictions and class antagonisms which are characteristic of class society as a whole. It is in no way divorced from the incubus of private property in the epoch of imperialist decay. On the contrary, all the contradictions rampant in capitalist society are projected into the family relationship.

### *Transformation of the family*

The family has of course undergone changes, and these changes are concomitant with the stages of development of class society. Just as class society has been transformed from slave society to feudal society, and then to capitalist society, each stage demarcated by a qualitative advance in the development of the means of production, so it is that the family, as an economic unit of private property, has also changed.

Initially women were purchased by men for the purpose of procreating heirs to inherit the wealth of the owners of property. For the ruling class today, for the bourgeoisie, this basic purpose has not changed. Few indeed are the rich who marry outside their class.

For the workers, however, the situation is different. They do not have the problem of procreating heirs, since they do not own the great sources of wealth. But their marriage relations nevertheless conform to the norms of bourgeois society, as very often do their aspirations. Marx explained that the ideas of any epoch reflect the ideas of the ruling class. And the norms of bourgeois society are based upon the private ownership of the means of production.

Just as slave labor eventually was transformed into the “free” labor-contract (modern union contract) between the capitalist and the wage-laborer, so the bride who used to be literally purchased has now become transformed into a “free” partner to the marriage contract in the system of capitalist society.

### *Sex-love develops outside of monogamous family*

For those who delude themselves that sex-love in marriage and monogamy is an eternal verity from time immemorial to the current bourgeois marriage, Engels makes the interesting observation that although monogamy began about 5,000 years ago, all indications point to the fact that sex-love, as we understand it today, didn't arise until the Middle Ages (considerably less than 1,000 years ago), and at that time it arose outside the monogamous

family, not within it.

This can be seen, according to Engels, from the abundance of literature of the period dealing with the passionate loves of knights and ladies, always having amorous love affairs with someone else's husband or wife. It is extremely difficult to find a story of love within the marriage.

In this country, we might assume, that when two people marry who are not of the ruling class, they do so because they love each other, and so they become parties to the bourgeois marriage contract. (They get a license and marry under the law.)

### *Legal and actual relations between the sexes*

Engels points out that under the most advanced bourgeois law, for a marriage to be legal, "it must be a contract freely entered into by both partners, and secondly, that also in the married state, both partners must stand on a common footing of equal rights and duties." If both these demands are met, the law has been complied with, and presumably women have all they can ask.

He then proceeds to blast this kind of argument and says that bourgeois jurists consider the contract freely entered into as soon as it is entered on paper. He cites the labor-contract (i.e. union contract) entered into between the bosses and the workers and shows that "the power conferred on the one party by the difference of class position, the pressure thereby brought to bear on the other party—the real economic position of both—that is not the law's business." In other words, equality before the law on paper does not provide equality in life.

"In regard to marriage, the law, even the most advanced," says Engels, "is fully satisfied as soon as the partners have formally recorded that they are entering into the marriage of their own free consent. As regards the legal equality of husband and wife in marriage, the position is no better."

The legal inequality of the two partners need not be written on paper because it is bequeathed to us from earlier social conditions. This original inequality did not come about because it was written into law. On the contrary, the early laws flowed from the actual economic oppression of women. Now, as the bourgeois state is wont to do, the laws on marriage have proclaimed equality, but the heritage of the monogamous marriage under capitalism bequeaths the oppression of women.

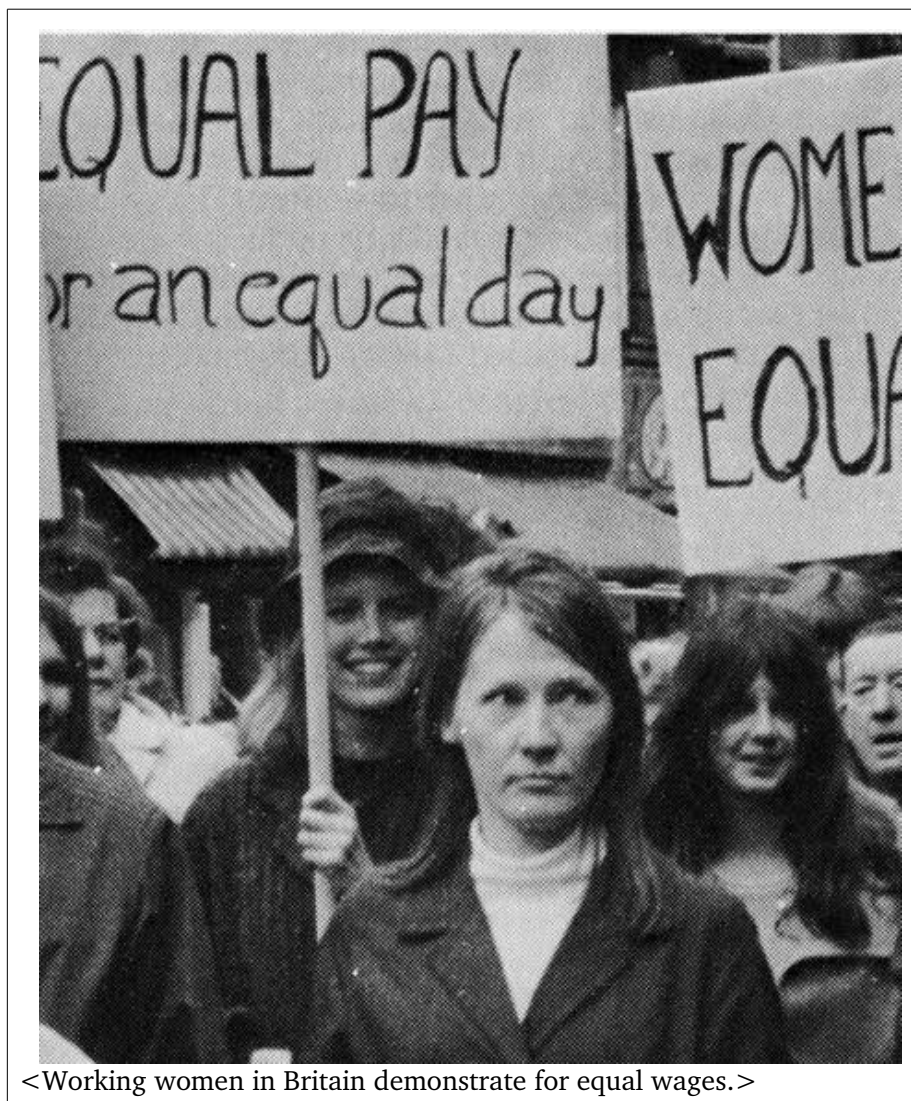
Engels reminds us that when the monogamous family household lost its public character, it no longer concerned society. It became a private service, and the wife became the head servant excluded from all social production. Only large-scale industry has opened social production to the proletarian wife.

“But,” he says, “it was opened in such a manner that if she carries out her duties in the private service for her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn; and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties. The wife’s position in the factory is similar to the position of women in all branches of business right up to medicine and the law. The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules.”

*Lenin: Woman – a domestic slave*

On this very question, Lenin, after the Russian revolution, had this to say: “Notwithstanding all the liberating laws that have been passed, woman continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor on **barbarously unproductive** (our emphasis), petty, nerve wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women . . . will begin only when a mass struggle is started against this petty domestic economy, or rather when it is transformed on a mass scale into large-scale socialist economy.”

Does what has been said heretofore mean that we ought to raise the slogan calling for the abolition of the family? Some students of the question point out that Marx in the Communist Manifesto did just that. Yes, Marx did call for the abolition of the family in the Communist Manifesto. But the call made in the Manifesto was made on the same level as the call for the abolition of wage-labor.



<Working women in Britain demonstrate for equal wages.>

*On the slogan of abolition of the family*

The slogan calling for the abolition of wage-labor is a call for the overthrow of the capitalist system. Marx could not possibly have meant the abolition of wage-labor without overthrowing the capitalist system. Any other form of the abolition of wage-labor would either be meaningless or a throwback to feudalism.

The abolition of the family can only be accomplished by the abolition of private property. The abolition of wage-labor is merely the negative side of the question. It implies its replacement—the socialization of labor, as well as the means of production, and its centralization in the hands of the former wage-working class.

The abolition of the capitalist family—the nuclear family—similarly implies a new and higher form to replace it. Engels explains it as follows: “with the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is



transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not.”

### *The coming transformation of monogamy*

On the question of monogamy, he says, “the impending social revolution, by transforming at least the far greater part of permanent inheritable wealth—the means of production—into social property, will reduce all this anxiety about inheritance to a minimum. Since monogamy arose from economic causes, will it disappear when these causes disappear?”

To the question, he provides his own answer. “One might not unjustly answer: far from disappearing, it will only begin to be completely realized. For with the conversion of the means of production into social property, wage-labour, the proletariat disappears, and therewith, also, the necessity for a certain statistically calculable number of women to surrender themselves for money. Prostitution disappears; monogamy, instead of declining, finally becomes a reality—for men as well.”

Monogamy will then be finally purged of its antediluvian and anti-social encumbrances. Women will once again, as in primitive times, be able to freely participate in all phases of public life including industry of every kind. But this time it will be on the basis of a new highly organized cooperative social system. For the first time in history, monogamy will really come into its own without its previous heritage.

As de Beauvoir points out, “when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that it implies, then the ‘division’ of humanity will reveal its genuine significance, and the human couple will find its true form.”

Since it is not possible to do away with wage-labor and consequently the bourgeois family without overthrowing the capitalist system, does this imply a renunciation of the struggle to ameliorate the conditions of wage-labor or to improve the lot of the mass of the people who live in bourgeois family units as presently constituted? To pose the question is to answer it.

### *Relation of immediate demands to ultimate liberation of women*

We must fight in every way possible to improve the conditions of the

workers, knowing full well that this in no way changes the fundamental character of the capitalist exploitation of wage-labor. In the same way, we fight for the right of every man and woman to earn a living to maintain the family, and we resist the brutal attempt to dissolve the family by crushing poverty, political and social repression, and the ravages of imperialist war and galloping inflation.

This is part of the struggle for immediate demands under the capitalist system. Hand in hand with these are the many demands that must be raised for women's liberation—and raised particularly by women—despite the fact that women will never be really free as long as capitalism exists.

Such struggles as the right to free divorce, the right to free, full-time day care centers for children—particularly for working mothers, the right of free abortion, the right of equal pay to women for equal work with men, the struggle against the ideology and practice of male supremacy—all these demands and many more are part of the struggle for women's liberation.

And as Lenin said in this connection when calling for the right of free divorce, “Only those who are totally incapable of thinking, only those who are entirely unfamiliar with Marxism will conclude that . . . freedom of divorce is of no use, that democracy is of no use, that self-determination of nations is of no use. Marxists know . . . that the more complete freedom of divorce is, the clearer will it be to the woman that the source of her ‘domestic slavery’ is not the lack of rights, but, capitalism. The more democratic the system of government is, the clearer it will be to the workers that the root of evil is not the lack of rights, but capitalism.

“ ‘Democracy’ is nothing but the proclaiming and exercising of rights that are very little and very conventionally exercised under capitalism. But unless these rights are proclaimed, unless a struggle for immediate rights is waged, unless the masses are educated in the spirit of such a struggle, socialism is impossible.”

# **TWO LINES**

## **ON**

### **WOMEN'S**

#### **LIBERATION**

“Since the advent of civilization, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation. The time will come, nevertheless, when human intelligence will rise to the mastery over property, and define the relations of the state to the property it protects, as well as the obligations and the limits of the rights of its owners. The interests of society are paramount to individual interests, and the two must be brought into just and harmonious relations. A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past.

The time which has passed away since civilization began is but a fragment of the past duration of man's existence; and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.”

-- from Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*

One of the very significant aspects of the Women's Liberation Movement is its ever-growing number of students who are seriously searching for the social and historical roots of women's oppression. The literature of outrage, protest and exposure is gradually being complemented by a much more thoughtful and profound literature which goes beyond surface manifestations and seeks fundamental causes of women's enslavement.

Nevertheless, the principal theoretical current in the Women's Liberation Movement is still the one which holds that the fundamental contradiction in society is that between male and female, and that all other social contradictions either flow from this primary relationship or are in any case

subordinate to it.

It follows from this thesis that the main thrust for Women's Liberation lies in the struggle not merely against the social institutions that oppress women but against men in general, who, by and large, operate and control these institutions.

Nowhere is this school of thought made more evident than in the book by Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*, Doubleday & Co., 1970).

Her book has received wide publicity. It has been acclaimed as a classic by some and has been the object of spurious criticism by others. However, nowhere has it been given the attention it merits on the issue of her general theory, which is the theme of her book.

Of course, for those to whom the entire issue of Women's Liberation is new, and who have not previously thought about it, the book has a great deal to offer in the way of a systematic exposure of the multitude of ways and means by which the dominance of man has been perpetuated for many untold centuries.

Millett's use of the medium of literary criticism of such contemporary novelists as Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and D. H. Laurence is particularly illuminating. She carefully exposes all the deep male prejudices in a way which makes the book highly readable and educational. At the same time, it constitutes a scathing indictment of the entire social structure which continually breeds and fortifies the most deep-seated and ingrained male prejudices. By way of contrast, she applauds Jean Genet who exposes male dominance and sexual oppression from the angle of homosexuality.

Millett is at her very best when she exposes the social patterns of male domination in all of its intricate and devious forms.

### *Exposure of male supremacy marred by false theory*

However, the Women's Liberation Movement has grown and has undergone a remarkable development even in the last year or two. The women in it are keenly aware of the character of male supremacy, and in daily struggle have been fighting its manifestations on all fronts, be they in the home, the schools, in the shops—anywhere and everywhere.

Had Millett just confined herself to presenting a lucid exposition of the role of male supremacy and women's oppression, it would have served a very

useful purpose.

But by projecting a comprehensive theory which she calls a “theory of sexual politics” she considerably diminished, if not wholly damaged, those aspects of the book which are otherwise excellent and helpful to the movement.

Her theory is succinctly summed up in the very first sentence of the jacket of her book: “The relationship between the sexes is and always has been a political one—a continuing power struggle in which women are sometimes idolized, other times patronized, always exploited.”

Now, the relationship between the sexes has not always been a continuing power struggle, nor has it always been one based on exploitation of women. In fact, as any serious student of history knows, human relations, i.e. relations between man and woman are much older than politics or exploitation. There has been a very, very protracted period of human history which did not know of any exploitation of either man by man or of woman by man, known as the matriarchy.

The supremacy of one sex over the other began with the patriarchy. Consequently ‘matriarchy’ is not analogous to ‘patriarchy’ particularly as used by Lewis Morgan and Engels. It does not mean female supremacy. The period referred to as the matriarchy is characterized by the absence of male supremacy and a line of descent established through the female, not the male.



<Vietnamese Women>

This period is known as primitive communism, or the matriarchal phase of social development. The question of the social origins of society, the question of whether a matriarchal order of society preceded the patriarchal social order is a crucial one. It is of particular interest to women, especially at a time when more and more women are showing the keenest interest in rediscovering our own past. This longest chapter in the history of human society, which is characterized by the absence of male supremacy, should be of special concern, if for no other reason than to show our oppression has not been eternal.

Millett is not unmindful of the fact that there has been a long struggle among anthropologists precisely on the priority in the social order of matriarchy and patriarchy. In fact, she gives considerable space to a discussion of the subject. Unfortunately what emerges is a muddled picture where clarity of exposition should have been the case.

*Matriarchal vs. patriarchal theory*

To the question, which order of society developed first, matriarchy or patriarchy, Millett says that the question “appears at the moment to be unanswerable.” And she adds, “it is also probably irrelevant to contemporary patriarchy.”

Further on, she says that “conjecture about origins is always frustrated,” and she blames it all on a lack of “. . . certain evidence. Speculation about pre-history, which of necessity this must be, remains nothing but speculation.”

Elsewhere she says, “the information from pre-history which might settle it is inaccessible.” The problem, she concludes, “appears to be incapable of resolution.”

On the contrary, the information and evidence of pre-history are abundant and becoming more so daily, and are easily accessible. The fact of the matter is that Millett is deliberately straddling the fence on this crucial question and is in reality taking a centrist position.

Anthropology is by no means a physical science like chemistry, physics or even archeology. It is a social science, and in a social science, the political approach (i.e. class approach) is of supreme importance. Moreover, the question of anthropology involves not only class bias, but as she well knows, bias toward women.

The fact that there has been a century-old struggle over the matriarchal vs. patriarchal social origins is due in only a small degree to a supposed lack of historical evidence. The very bitterness and acrimony with which the struggle is conducted should in and of itself make clear that much more than mere historical evidence is involved in the controversy.

### *Historical materialist vs. bourgeois schools of thought*

What is involved here is whether to accept the revolutionary teachings of the historical materialist school of thought as expounded by Engels (and in part based on the research of Lewis H. Morgan) or whether to take the bourgeois anti-evolutionist position, which has dominated anthropology in this country for many decades. The latter aims as one of its principal objectives to discredit, disqualify and destroy the monumental contributions of Morgan and Engels.

Millett's attempt to set herself up as an arbitrator between the two viewpoints gives backhanded support to the patriarchal theory of social origins. This certainly makes her eligible for an accolade from the bourgeois

establishment.

More than anything else, the ruling class hates a consistent and irreconcilable view of social evolution. The reason for this lies precisely in the fact that social evolution shows that capitalism, too, is merely a transitional stage of social development, merely another link in the chain of evolution of humanity from lower to higher stages—which incidentally includes the doom of their own dear free enterprise (capitalist) system.

### *Emergence of private property*

Why does Millett so mutilate the historical view of the matriarchy? Certainly not because of any bias against women. The answer lies in the fact that her sexual theory is in stark contradiction to the historical evolution of private property.

The emergence of private property is a turning point of world historic significance because it marks the transition from the formerly cooperative relationship between man and woman, based upon communal ownership of property, into one of the subjection of woman to man based upon private ownership of property.

Therein lies the motivation for the false theory assiduously and tirelessly propagated by the apologists of private property, that the origin of woman's oppression lies in man himself. But historical development proves that it was the emergence of private property which brought about the subjection of woman by man and introduced exploitation of man by man as well.

### *How Millett distorts Engels*

According to Millett, "Engels believed he had found the origins of property in the subjection and ownership of women upon which patriarchy was founded."

Also she writes, "Engels' contention that women constituted the first property is probably true."

Engels never made either of these contentions which she attributes to him. As a matter of fact, it is exactly the reverse of Engels' teaching. He never said the origin of property lay in the ownership of women. On the contrary, he showed it was the development of private property in the means of production which finally resulted in the subjection of woman by man, which



was the first class oppression in human history.

Engels never spoke of woman being the first property of man. The first (private) properties of men (and women) were in things like tools and utensils and much, much later, cattle.



<Puerto Rican women — Women's Graphics Collective/LNS>

Millett evades a clear statement that not only was the matriarchal social order an early stage in human history, but that it was characterized by a total absence of exploitation either of man by man or of woman by man, and by the absence of institutions of private property; that all property was communally owned; and that this epoch has importance in that it shows that men and women could live without domination of one by the other, precisely because of the absence of private property.



<August 26, 1970, Fifth Avenue, New York City.>

### *Why ruling class opposes consistent view of social evolution*

The failure to present this significant epoch in true historical perspective in the development of humanity lies in the deep prejudice ingrained by the indoctrination centers of imperialist learning, those great universities of America that are great only in the sense of the great sums of money with which the ruling class endows them.

To present a consistent, uncompromising view of the social evolution of humanity from lower to higher phases is detrimental to capitalism.

And this is not at all surprising. It directly infringes on private property. It is for that reason that their apologists so diligently cultivate, maintain and systematically inculcate the patriarchal (i.e. the private property) theory of the social origins of development.

An inescapable corollary of this theory is that patriarchy, private property and consequent subjugation of women are contemporaneous phenomena—all originating simultaneously in the distant past—and, having survived all these millenniums, are eternal everlasting categories. A more ingenious self-serving theory for the ruling class could scarcely be devised.

One may be tempted to say that perhaps Millett's centrist and evasive position on the matriarchal vs. the patriarchal theory is merely a difference of opinion on a remote epoch in human development, and not central to her main historical methodology in approaching the development of woman's oppression. On the contrary, her vulgar, anti-evolutionist approach to the matriarchy vs. patriarchy theory runs like a red thread throughout her entire

book, and as said previously, is representative of current trends in the women's movement today, some of which are merely different versions of the same theory.

*On "human consciousness" and "human institutions"*

In her book, Millett says: "It must be clearly understood that the arena of sexual revolution is **within human consciousness** even more preeminently than it is **within human institutions**. (Our emphasis, D.B.) So deeply embedded is patriarchy that the character structure it creates in both sexes is perhaps even more a habit of mind, and a way of life than a political system."

As if to emphasize her bourgeois point of view as against a historical materialist point of view, Millett says: ". . . the primary social and political distinctions are not even those based on wealth or rank but those based on sex. For the most pertinent and fundamental consideration one can bestow upon our culture is to recognize its basis in patriarchy."

What Millett does here is to resort to the time-honored device of confusing fundamental cause with effect. The most elementary proposition of Marxism is that consciousness flows from being. The material conditions of life determine human consciousness. As the reader can see, Millett's theory reverses this.

Marx taught that existence determines consciousness, and that social existence determines social consciousness. This is the fundamental dividing line between Marxism and all the varieties of bourgeois ideology such as Millett's which is nothing but a warmed-over variety of bourgeois idealism.

There could be no greater discrepancy between the two schools of thought than that between those who seek the development of human institutions in the mind rather than that the mind reflects the development of social and political institutions.

One is literally staggered by her prescription for bringing about the "sexual revolution" which she proclaims and champions.

The change will come about, she says, and be "accomplished by human growth and true re-education rather than those arrived at through the theatrics of armed struggle — even though the latter become inevitable."

And a little further on she says, "When one surveys the spontaneous mass

movements taking place all over the world, one is led to hope that human understanding itself has grown ripe for change.”

More than 250 rebellions in this country by Black people in the last several years do not seem to have changed the “human growth and understanding” in the imperialist establishment on this question.

### *On the accidental omission of social revolution*

Nowhere is her class bias and the bankruptcy of her methodological approach to women’s oppression shown more clearly than in her treatment of women in the socialist countries. By an omission too glaring to be regarded as accidental, the status of women in socialist countries such as Cuba, North Vietnam or North Korea is not even mentioned. China, with its 750 million people, at least half of whom we must assume are women, is honored by a single line footnote to the effect that China is the only country where there is no prostitution.

When we consider that she claims her book is a “comprehensive overview of the entire system of patriarchy” beginning with pre-historic times up to and including contemporary society, one wonders how such a huge portion of our sex, enough to cover a continent in itself, is accorded such shabby treatment.

The answer, of course, is not that Millett is unaware of this. It is her inability to admit clearly and without equivocation that it was socialist revolutions—and tremendous ones at that—which profoundly altered the position of women even though these revolutions are in no way regarded as complete, and men and women are still working at it, without benefit of her doctoral dissertation.

The expropriation of the landlords, capitalists and exploiters generally, and the transformation of women’s position was an integral, very significant and indispensable part of these revolutions.

These facts of life speak volumes against the theory that the fundamental contradiction in society is that between male and female, and that the class contradictions between the principal economic classes in society are subordinate and are merely the effect of the relations between the sexes, i.e. patriarchy.

According to Millett, as we remember, “the primary social and political distinctions are not even those based on wealth or rank, but those based on

sex.” Had Mao Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro or Ho Chi Minh taken that as their principal premise, both the men and women in those parts of the world would still be suffering the most abject slavery of the landlords and imperialism.

Again we must remember what the corollary of her fundamental theory is, and we must repeat, that in one form or another, it is the central thesis of various groupings in the women’s movement today.

*What is the basis of “Fundamental concepts of power”?*

As one can see, according to Millett and to the current theory in vogue, it is sexual domination, domination of woman by man, which “provides the most fundamental concept of power.” It is, then, not the ownership of the means of production, it is not ownership of the mines, mills, factories, banks; it is not the surplus value extracted from millions of workers and the super-exploitation of untold millions of oppressed peoples around the globe which provides “the most fundamental concept of power” – but sexual domination.

Is it any wonder that this thesis is entirely acceptable to the bourgeois establishment? From such a thesis it follows that the fundamental direction of the struggle—the direction taken on a world scale by all of the oppressed, of resolute and irreconcilable struggle against imperialism—is to be made a subordinate aspect in the struggle for women’s liberation.

*Is women’s struggle subordinate to class struggle?*

Followers of this theory conjure up the notion that to claim the class struggle is primary means that the women’s struggle will be subordinated to it. This, however, is nothing but a caricature of Marxism.

Part of the struggle for the success of the revolution for socialism is an imperative necessity of swiftly raising the level of women to equal participation in the struggle and obliterating all manifestations of male chauvinism and male supremacy in that struggle.

The women’s struggle is not subordinate to the class struggle. It is itself a form of class struggle, especially if consciously conducted against the bourgeoisie. The struggle against male supremacy and women’s oppression is a crucially important political struggle, and all manifestations of chauvinism in an organization, and most importantly in a revolutionary

organization, are a reflection of the ideology of the bourgeoisie and must be fought as part and parcel of the revolutionary struggle.

What's involved here is the confusion of the primacy of the overall, historical character of the class struggle with the supremacy of any particular political struggle against the bourgeoisie. Marx said that every political struggle is a class struggle.

A great deal of harm is done in the radical movement in the name of Marxism by those who in reality do subordinate the struggle for women's liberation and do practice male supremacy.

But this should no more disqualify the Marxist, materialist interpretation of historical phenomena than the presence of a multitude of fraudulent medical quacks should disqualify the theory and practice of medicine.

### *“Cultural” and “innate” characteristics*

“The most formidable task,” writes Millett, “of reactionary opinion (in sexual matters—D.B.) is to blur the distinction in status (of women—DB.) while emphasizing sexual differences in personality by implying that they are **innate** (our emphasis—D.B.) rather than cultural.”

We would find ourselves in agreement with this statement were it not for the way that Millett interprets “cultural.”

Surely the steady emphasis of differences in sexual personality is a prop for male supremacy. However, the way she goes about defining what is meant by “cultural,” she defeats her purpose. She actually brings us back to “innate” characteristics as the only alternative. The following is what she says about the Nazi state.

“The male supremacist character of the Nazi state seems to be temperamental rather than political or economic.”

### *The psychic structure*

And a little further on she continues:

“Again, one is forced to conclude that sexual politics, while connected to economics and other tangibles . . . is . . . a way of life, with influence over every other psychological and emotional facet of existence. It has created, therefore, a psychic structure, deeply embedded in our past, capable of

intensification or attenuation, but one which, as yet, no people have succeeded in eliminating.”

Her definition of what is “cultural” is a mixed bag, which stripped of its rhetoric, brings us right back to “innate” – “the psychic” – characteristics, which presumably she’s trying to expose in the first place.

### *Sexism as a commodity*

It is perfectly obvious that in contemporary bourgeois society, sexism pervades practically all areas of life. Indeed, sexism has become the predominant feature of bourgeois culture in America, and becomes more so every day. Volumes could be written on this alone.

But after all is said about it, we are still left with the question. Is sexism the motor force of our social, cultural and political life or is it the product of the economic system, a system based upon the antagonistic class structure of society founded on private ownership of the means of production?

Included, lest we forget, are the capitalist media—radio, press, pulpit, television—and everything and anything the ruling class can bring within the orbit of market relations and reap a huge harvest of extortionate profits.

Is it not plain, even to the most naive, that sexism is a “commodity” in a general system of commodity production based on exchange where profit is the very essence of all that exists?



<Cuban women on a work brigade.>

Did not Marx, with Engels, already see this more than 125 years ago, when he said that the bourgeoisie reduces the most “hallowed relations to naked cash”?

What Millett is really saying here is that sex determines culture—and not that sex is an element in any given society which is derived from the economic anatomy of the class structure of society. She in effect, arrives at an ambiguous middle of the road position between a consistent, materialist position and outright bourgeois idealism. Therefore, in the final analysis, she falls back on the old “psyche structure” theory. She thus builds a bridge to Freud, whom she calls the number one counter-revolutionary.

Freud’s methodology led him to deduce, or rather rationalize the “passive” and “submissive” role of women in society on the basis of his special theory of psychoanalysis.

But what does Millett do? She deduces the general historical oppression of women, not from the general economic and social evolution of society, but rather from the “deeply embedded psyche structure.” Doesn’t this opposite deduction flow from the same theory?

Both of these deductions flow from an idealist approach which is prevalent in bourgeois thinking. It leads to nothing but a blind alley in seeking a solution to end the oppression.

Freud’s prescription is for women to adjust themselves to the mores of bourgeois society. Millett proclaims rebellion—against what, whom? Against the psyche structure, she says.

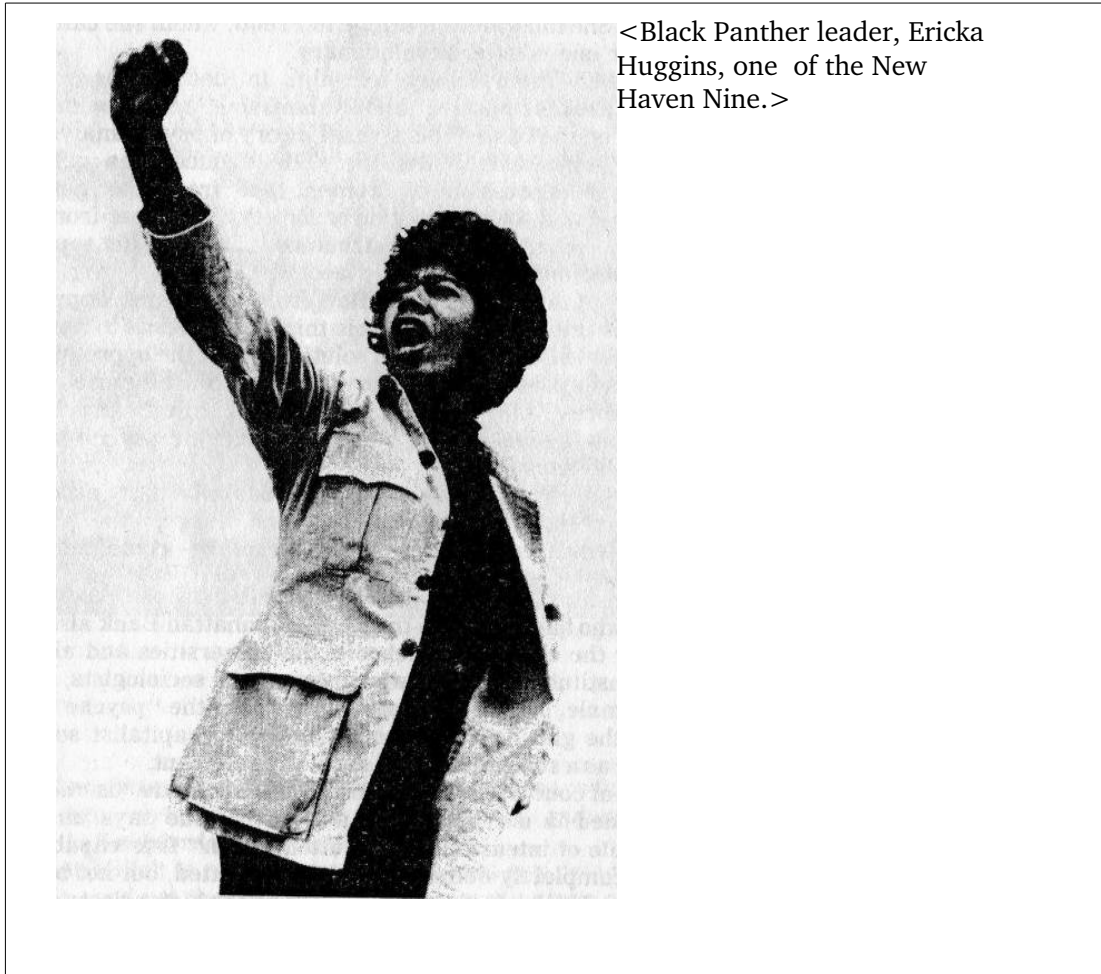
The psyche structure certainly needs to be daily attacked and exposed, but this formulation leaves the ruling class—which creates the psyche structure—completely off the hook.

He who has the key to the Chase Manhattan Bank also has one for the church, the schools, the universities and all the other institutions. It is he who instructs the sociologists, male and female, on how to relate “culture” to the “psyche” and make the glaring class contradictions of capitalist society appear as a subordinate and derivative element.

It is of course true that “the psychic structure” is “deeply embedded in our past,” but it is not as she says, merely “capable of intensification or attenuation.” It is capable of being completely demolished and obliterated, but not by the formula which has long been pushed by the high priests of big industry and finance for all oppressed.



Women's liberation will never be won by "more re-education" or "human understanding" and the practice of "non-violence" as she proposes. No wonder her thesis is so acceptable to the ruling class.



Such formulas have been advanced for untold centuries to ease the fear of the ruling class, and to redirect the struggle of the oppressed into harmless channels. Her cultural determinist view on women's liberation is akin to religion as the opium of the people. In practice her theory amounts to a cop-out in the struggle.

### *The Black woman and the white woman*

After a careful examination of her general theory of women's oppression—and particularly the treatment, or rather the absence of treatment of the status of women in some of the socialist countries—the reader can very well guess that her references to the liberation of the Black woman in relation to the white woman is not only meager but of marginal interest. Something in the nature of an enlarged footnote would probably be more accurate.

Her view of the Black woman does not flow from the fundamental consideration of an oppressed Black nation as against an oppressor white nation in a system of imperialist relationships based on monopoly capitalism and the ownership of the means of production by the ruling class whites. On this score it should be said that a whole series of groupings in the Women's Liberation Movement see the specific problem of the Black woman even less than Millett does.

It has become the source of endless confusion and bitter acrimony, and has even resulted in a scandalous attack by at least one group against the Black Panthers in particular for alleged male chauvinism, going so far as to characterize the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in September as "enemy territory."

*Same ultimate objectives – problems vastly different*

The white woman and the Black woman have a common cause in this struggle for full equality, social, economic, as well as political in the struggle against the capitalist establishment. The Black woman and the white woman are both concerned with the struggle against male supremacy. However, the Black woman faces an overriding problem which far exceeds in importance and significance the problem of male supremacy. That of course is the problem of white supremacy.

In this latter struggle she sees the need to unite with Black men to struggle for Black Liberation for their very survival. This problem arises, as we said, because the whites—both women and men, constitute an oppressing nation in the system of imperialism. And the Black men and women are in an oppressed nation.

Unless this is very clearly understood by the white woman, any type of relationship between the white woman and the Black woman will be of an extremely superficial and tenuous character and will lead in the long run to mutual hostility. This is a very crucial point, and the Women's Liberation Movement, at the present time, largely white and middle class in character cannot hope to have any meaningful alliance with Black women without first taking this into account.

The road to any alliance between Black and white women, lies first in the recognition that the alliance must be based principally on a struggle against racist imperialism. That is central to the liberation of Black women as well as Black men from racist oppression.

## *Male chauvinism and class solidarity against racist imperialism*

In the struggle against male supremacy, the Black and the white woman have a common ultimate objective of equality between the sexes. But they face vastly different problems. If the Black woman, who has to work as a domestic in white middle class suburbia, then comes home to her children, and a husband who cannot find work, not because of male supremacy, but because of white supremacy, she obviously has vastly different problems from the woman whose house she just left.

The white woman for whom she works may have the problem of being dependent financially on her husband, she may be exploited as a sex object by her husband, her main occupation may be no more than that of semi-servant in the family, but she does not have the problem of white chauvinism.

As a Black woman explained at the August 26th rally of women in Bryant Park in NYC, that while some white women seem to be quarreling with their husbands about who will take out the garbage (which has importance to this white woman), Black women have no garbage because their families do not have enough to eat.

Even if this is regarded as an oversimplification, it nevertheless makes the basic point of differentiation. This is the problem.

Of course, solidarity between Black and white women is urgently necessary in the struggle against capitalism (i.e. for higher wages and better conditions at work, against the war, for better housing, etc.) and also on issues such as day-care, paid maternity leaves, free health care and many others.

But on the question of male chauvinism, there is a vast gulf between the two. Many white women arrogate to themselves the right to struggle against male chauvinism in all areas be it in white suburbia or Black Harlem.

The Black woman holds such a view suspect. It may be a veiled form of white chauvinism. For that reason it is more in accord with their mutual interests to focus a joint struggle against racist imperialism which engenders both white supremacy and male chauvinism.

The white woman must conduct a struggle against male chauvinism in the

white community. This does not mean that there is no issue of male chauvinism in the Black community, but that is an issue for the Black women. For the white women to arrogate to themselves the struggle against male chauvinism in the Black community is presumptuous and may validly be interpreted as an assertion of white supremacy.



The Women's Liberation Movement in a large measure takes its inspiration from the Black Liberation Movement. It is also to be noted that the momentous developments of liberation movements the world over have also had an influence on it.

*Revolution in the minds of women – harbinger of socialist revolution*

The millennium of women's oppression began, as Engels said, when women were excluded from participation in public life, industry and economic life generally, and were reduced to the pettiness and drudgery of individual private work.

Today, in the space age, the last vestiges of the crude division of labor, whereby the woman is relegated to the semi-slavery of household chores and

the man participates and dominates all other phases of social life, are crumbling.

Forty-five per cent of the work force is composed of women. This figure speaks volumes. It is the key to the coming change. And this is just one example among many that the position of women in capitalist society is undergoing a profound change. The social relations of contemporary society no longer conform to the production relations—least of all in present day America.

As Marx said, when the production relations of a given society are no longer compatible with the social relations, which really belong to a previous epoch, “the social relations burst asunder”—then comes a period of revolution, first of all in the consciousness of the oppressed.

There is a virtual revolution going on in the minds of women. It is a harbinger of the general socialist revolution and at the same time is an indispensable ingredient for its success.

**THE BOLSHEVIKS  
AND  
THE SEXUAL  
REVOLUTION**



<Petrograd during the Russian Revolution.>

Although the Bolshevik Revolution is more than half a century old and has been succeeded by later socialist revolutions, such as the Chinese, the Cuban, the North Korean and the Vietnamese, its rich experience in the initial stages of the revolution still offers some of the most illuminating insights on what the starting point of the sexual revolution is, and how it was conceived by its leaders as part of the great socialist transformation of humanity.

The fact that all of the expectations of the Bolshevik Revolution have not been realized, and that a profound regression has taken place in every sphere of social and political life in the Soviet Union, does not alter this fundamental fact. Just as in the field of technology the first airplane flown by the Wright Brothers was nothing like today's jets, it was nevertheless a qualitative breakthrough. Even today the status of women in the Soviet Union, and this is what Kate Millett entirely omits from her book, "Sexual Politics," is far ahead of every capitalist country, including the United States, and is eloquent testimony to the socialist foundations laid by the October Revolution.

It is therefore virtually impossible for any serious book concerning the historical development of the women's movement to be written without considering the phenomenon of the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath.

Let us see what Millett says about the Bolsheviks before we examine what she says about the so-called counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, which incidentally is the only country she cites along with Nazi Germany in her chapter titled "the Counter-revolution."

### *A real sexual revolution*

On December 19, 1917 and October 17, 1918, "Lenin," she says, "issued two decrees which invalidated the prerogatives of males over their dependents and affirmed the complete right to economic, social and sexual self-determination in women, declaring it a matter of course that they freely choose their own domicile, name and citizenship. Every legal provision was made for political and economic equality," continues Millett. "One cannot legislate a sexual revolution by fiat, however, as Lenin was aware, and efforts were made to make the financial independence of both women and children a reality; nurseries were to be established, housekeeping was to be collectivized to spare women its drudgery, maternity leave would be granted

and women welcomed on an equal footing into the labor force, which together with education and the household were to be made collective.”

*Was "Soviet experiment a failure"?*

For Millett, the above two paragraphs, which appear to be so laudatory, are merely a foil for her fundamental thesis that the Russian Revolution was one great flop—that “the Soviet experiment failed and was abandoned” and “Marxist theory had failed,” she claims, “to supply a sufficient ideological base for a sexual revolution, and was remarkably naive as to the historical and psychological strength of patriarchy.”

The laws initiated by Lenin and the Bolsheviks were more than any capitalist government has done anywhere right up to this date. Millett fails to grasp the main and fundamental difference between what happened in this early period of the Bolshevik Revolution and the patchwork of meager reforms that characterized the entire epoch of capitalism (which to her is the women’s revolution).

In all previous social systems that rested on private property relations such as slavery, feudalism and capitalism, there was merely a change in the form of servitude, but the basic character of the patriarchal system was retained.

What was it that was really of world historic significance insofar as women were concerned that distinguished the Bolshevik Revolution from all others before it?

*A world historic turning point for women*

The Bolsheviks began a new world-historic process of dissolving the millenia of patriarchal society founded on private property, and began to construct a socialist cooperative society, free from patriarchal domination. It actually began to dismantle the patriarchy. What could be more significant for women?

The Bolshevik Revolution set in motion a chain reaction of socialist revolutions which is slowly but steadily engulfing the entire world, and in its train will continue to liberate the women of the world. And this is happening despite the regression that has taken place in the Soviet Union.

Millett writes an entire book about the evils of the patriarchy in which she



characterizes it as the “most ingenious form of interior colonization achieved . . . one which tends to be sturdier than any form of segregation, more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring.”

But when she is confronted with a real breakthrough in the age-old patriarchal order, a world historic turning point such as the Bolshevik Revolution, she not only obscures and degrades it, but links it to the counterrevolution in Nazi Germany.

It is impossible to understand by reading Millett what really happened during the Russian Revolution, or what caused the regressive steps that followed. Lenin, as early as July 1919, expressed fears of a regression. He did this in a pamphlet in 1919 at the very time of civil war, famine, imperialist encirclement and intervention.

### *Lenin on struggle for women's freedom*

“Take the position of women,” he said. “In this field not a single democratic party in the world, not even in the most advanced bourgeois republic, had done in decades so much as a hundredth part of what we did in our very first year in power.”

“We actually razed to the ground,” he continued, “the infamous laws placing women in a position of inequality, restricting divorce and surrounding it with disgusting formalities, denying recognition to children born out of wedlock, enforcing a search for their fathers, etc., laws numerous survivals of which, to the shame of the bourgeoisie and of capitalism, are to be found in all civilized countries. We have a thousand times the right to be proud of what we have done in this field.”

“But,” he persisted, “the more thoroughly we clear the ground of the lumber of the old, bourgeois laws and institutions, the more we realize that we have only cleared to build on, but we are not yet building.”

Then he goes on to make crystal clear:

“Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating women (even in the Soviet Union D.B.), she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all out

struggle begins (led by the proletariat wielding the state power) against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into a large-scale socialist economy begins.”

*Did Marxist ideology fail the sexual revolution?*

The wholesale transformation into a large-scale socialist economy to which he alludes proved to be a terribly long and difficult task in the first socialist republic, and took many years to develop.

Unfortunately by that time – after Lenin died – the political reaction set in and turned back the revolutionary socialist approach, not only in sexual matters, but in social and political life generally.

In the first place, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had relied heavily on Western European proletarian revolutions coming to the aid of the Soviet Union within a short time. Unfortunately, the proletarian revolutions that did come in Europe — in Germany, Italy and Hungary — were defeated. The Soviet Union was completely isolated.

The imperialist encirclement caused famine and hunger in the Soviet Union, not to speak of economic dislocation. The imperialists also aided the counterrevolution during the long and protracted civil war. During the intervention by the imperialists, much havoc was caused in the Soviet Union. The intervention was composed of 14 capitalist countries including the US.

It is on the basis of these negative factors that a conservative, politically regressive tendency gained ascendancy in the Soviet Union, and not because “Marxist theory had failed to supply a sufficient ideological base for a sexual revolution.”

Nevertheless, it is not true that a full-scale counterrevolution took place in the Soviet Union, as Millett asserts, particularly as concerns the status of women. How could it be a counterrevolution when the status of women is not only incomparably higher than it was in Czarist Russia, but is higher than in any capitalist country, too.

It is significant that while Millett draws this equation between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, she fails to present any current figures on the status of Soviet women today.

Although it is true that the original goals with which the Bolsheviks began to build have been set back, nevertheless fundamental gains have been retained and reinforced.

The following are just a few excerpts from articles recently printed on the status of Soviet women in the New York Post, The New York Times, and The Buffalo Evening News.

*Status of women in the Soviet Union today*

Of the doctors, 79 per cent are women, according to the Buffalo Evening News of August 12, 1970. More than 30 per cent of the engineers are women, 52 percent are head doctors or heads of health agencies; 33 percent of collective farm management jobs are held by women. All professions are open to her; women make up 47 per cent of the scientists. Half the population of the universities are women. There are also women bus drivers, subway conductors, and women are in virtually every field of work. There is equal pay for equal work. In case of pregnancy, a woman receives two months paid vacation before delivery and another two months after delivery. Working women may take advantage of widespread nurseries and kindergartens and day care centers. Abortion is legal at any age and virtually free of charge.

*Was "Nazi state...a return to tribal solidarity"?*

Even when it comes to Nazi Germany, Millett sows more confusion than one would normally expect.

**“Historians,” Millett approvingly explains, “and sociologists have described the Nazi state as a return to tribal solidarity, playing stipulated in-groups against out-groups. Beyond this, it was also probably the most deliberate attempt ever made to revive and solidify extreme patriarchal conditions. Led by their Fuhrer, tribal members themselves would play master to members of the tribal cells, the women and the children.”** (All emphasis ours – D.B.)

And earlier she said:

“Yet the overriding reason for the flagrantly patriarchal and male supremacist character of the Nazi state seems to be temperamental rather than political or economic. In its regressive tribal mood, a structure built on

the suppression of women represented the perfect vehicle of authoritarian, jingoist and militarist sentiment.”



Now, these phrases, “tribal cell,” “tribal mood,” etc., are not some slips of the pen by a teenager writing a hurried composition to earn a passing grade while watching a racist TV shoot-em-up. This is the studied phraseology of a doctoral dissertation by a literary critic.

According to her, the venality of the Nazi mind is not the monstrous product of the acute class contradictions growing out of monopoly capitalism. Rather, Millett says that the temperamental Nazi perversion is characteristic of the ancient tribal constitution of the primitive Indian people—that is, of primitive communism.

The reader will recall that Millett, in her effort to straddle the fence between the matriarchal and patriarchal schools of the origins of society, said that the controversy “was not relevant to contemporary patriarchy.”

Now she certainly makes it very relevant. But here it is for the purpose of identifying the matriarchy with Nazi totalitarianism. Thus, according to Millett, the one social order in the history of human development where men and women were on an equal footing, without any domination or expression, is akin to the “flagrantly male supremacist and patriarchal character” of the Nazis.

## *Engels on Iroquois Indians*

Engels, in describing the constitution of the Iroquois Indian Tribes in this country wrote as follows:

“And this gentile constitution is wonderful. . . . Everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kings, governors, prefects or judges; without prisons; without trials. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole body of those concerned—the gens or the tribe or the individual gentes among themselves . . . the household is run in common and communistically by a number of families, the land is tribal property, only the small gardens being temporarily assigned to the households. . . . There can be no poor and needy—the communistic household and the gens know their obligations towards the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal—including the women.”

Hitler, in his effort to divert attention from the economic havoc and catastrophe which faced Germany as a result of the ruinous imperialist war, blamed it all on the Jews rather than the capitalist class, in whose interest it was fought.



Crane Operator, Soviet Union

Millett and her school of imperialist sociologists try to divert attention from the same monopoly capitalists where the roots of Nazism and imperialism really lie.

The tribal solidarity of the Iroquois, as of all ancient primitive communist societies, was based on the solidarity of common ownership of property and the absence of domination, repression.

*Engels on "authority"*

Instead of employing the facile generalizations about authoritarianism handed down by imperialist historiographers, she might have pondered Engels' exposition of the contrast between the authority of the ancient tribal chiefs and the authority as exemplified in capitalist civilization.

"The shabbiest police servant," says Engels, "in the civilized state has more 'authority' than all the organs of gentile society put together; but the most powerful prince and the greatest statesman or general of civilization may well envy the humblest gentile chief for the uncoerced and undisputed respect that is paid to him. The one stands in the midst of society, the other is forced to attempt to represent something outside and above it."