

5 Rothwell Street,
London, N.W.1.

25th Sept 1969

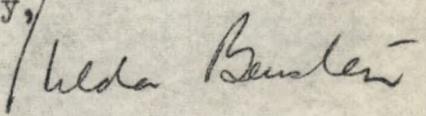
BBC

Sirs,

A considerable number of women must find, as I do, that 'Petticoat Line' is positively offensive in its studied denigration of anything 'intellectual' in women, and in the unanimous desire of the participants to reduce everything to the level of feminine trivia.

Isn't it about time that ~~xxxxxxx~~ some of the conformist and often archaic ideas expressed were countered by at least one member of the panel selected for independence of thought and originality, rather than for the delightful little actressy noises that come from the others?

Yours truly,



Hilda Bernstein.

5 Rothwell Street,
London, N.W.1. SYH.

'If You Think You Have Problems...' 8 July 71.
BBC
Broadcast House,
London W1A 1AA

Dear Programme-Producer,

While some of the advice given to 'Mrs X', the woman who wants to study against family opposition, was helpful (surprisingly, the males were better than the females on your panel), I feel that only once or twice did they touch on the heart of the problem, which is common to every woman with a family who desires some life for herself.

I am not denigrating those women who are totally ~~fulfilled~~ fulfilled and content in their pre-made role of housewife; I know there are large numbers of them, just as there are even more who are not wholly content, but unaware of the nature of their problem. Many seek sub-conscious refuge in a hundred different ploys, from poor health to false eye-lashes or intricate cake-decoration - so little confidence do they have in their own ~~abilities~~ abilities to achieve anything lasting.

But there are millions more, like Mrs X, who desire not simply to study, or an outside career or fulfilling hobby, but who desire to have some area of their lives that is not totally devoured by their family. All families, if permitted, make increasingly voracious and greedy demands on the mother, desiring that she be utterly, completely at their service. The children's motives are simple and clear, the husband's more complex but often just as clear.

The average woman is totally eaten up by her family, and her problem is how, as a wife and mother, she can preserve for herself some part of her life, some area of activity, which is hers and hers alone. A real privacy, more than the simple privacy which every mother of young children lacks (she can't even go to the lavatory undisturbed.)

If she is aware of this deep basic need, which many women only feel in an entirely negative fashion as a sense of dissatisfaction, she has to struggle continuously, even with an enlightened husband, for the right to this area of her life. The family want to take it all. Most women, defeated before they even begin, compensate for their loss is emphasising their femininity in physical and often degrading ways, or by excelling in purely domestic pursuits. It is no good saying that to be a mother and housewife is a noble job, the best job in the world, etc. At the actual point of operation it consists in physically and mentally debilitating repetitive tasks of indescribable dreariness, whatever the long-term 'noble' results in rearing the next generation.

My first book should have borne the dedication: 'To my dearly-loved family, without whom this book would have been finished in a quarter of the time.' Yet I have a cooperative husband who has given me every possible assistance, domestic and otherwise, in doing anything I really want to do. And two of my four children were really adult when I started writing. I believe they were totally unaware of what they were doing. There were just streams of things that needed my personal attention every time I sat down at the typewriter.

Women are pre-cast in their role, and for biological reasons many aspects of it must still be theirs. But millions of us are not, and can never be, fulfilled with housework and looking after children. Why should we be? And why should men who might like to do domestic work, be made to feel this is a humiliating role for them? Isn't this attitude a clue to what we women feel? Don't tell us, what's wrong with being a housewife, it's a noble role, etc.....Being simply a housewife is to be completely subservient to the needs of the family. Some of us want to feel we exist just as ourselves, in addition to being an appendage of a family.

My advice to Mts X is that she must be hard, selfish and completely determined in doing what she desires. She must set aside for herself a certain amount of time, and let nothing at all interfere with it. She can, of course, do this with the least possible inconvenience to her family. She must simply refuse to do things for daughters or sons that they can as well do for themselves, or for the whole family. They will sulk at first, she will have to fight and fight for herself. They will batter at her, they will even show hate. In the end they will not only become accustomed to her needs, but love her and be proud of her a great deal more than before. This is not easy advice and there will be terrible feelings of guilt. The contradictions between their demands and her needs will remain. The guilt will remain, but it will become less important. The very best and nicest children and adults I know come from families where mother has been more than mere mother and where of necessity the children have had to shoulder a larger share of domestic duties; they develop a real respect for individual personalities, and work as a team in the home.

As for the devastating question she asked: Should I remain the same as he, or should I try to be a better person?...perhaps it should be posed differently. Should I remain what he wants me to be, or should I seek my own self-fulfilment? The answer is obvious, though it will be a difficult road. Perhaps in the end her husband will also be stimulated in some new activity or self-education, the opportunities for which are so great in this country.

As for your panel's advice, I thought Olga Franklin's advice as Victorian and contemptuous. Mrs X should NEVER dissimulate. Her whole object is to be something more than she is; to hide or deceive would leave her exactly where she is, in spite of

any certificates she may obtain. And to tell Mrs X that the reason for her anxiety is not because she wants to get certificates but because basically she does not like housework, is also unhelpful. Her reason is because she wants to be a whole human being, because she wants the full growth of her own personality. Only such women as these can release their grip on their children when it is time for them to go, can give them not only care as babies and children but the freedom to be themselves, in turn. Between such mothers and their families are forged, in the end, the finest possible relationships, because each gives of themselves, each flowers and grows. And this giving - which must be not only from the mother - is the essence of real happiness, the essence of love.

Yours sincerely,

Hilda Bernstein.

B3.5

5 Rathwell Street,
London, N.W.1.

10th March 69

Dear Pendennis,

I am putting the kindest possible construction on your remark that 'we haven't met a woman yet who felt 'oppressed' by simply being a woman' when I say of course, you were just being knowingly provocative. If not, where have you been all your life?

A considerable proportion of women suffer keenly all their lives from the oppression of being a woman, and many more suffer from it without being able to express what is wrong.

Because the struggle for equal rights for women (votes, education, jobs, pay) was the practical expression of the need to free themselves from this oppression, these things took over ~~the~~ as ultimate aims - they are not, they are only symptoms, and only partial symptoms at that.

Women suffer from a deprivation that seems to become more acute in more developed societies, and has not approached solution in socialist societies (and I am a convinced socialist.) This is the need to preserve for themselves an area of their lives, some portion of themselves that is theirs, and theirs alone. Once they become aware of this need (so many do not actually know what is wrong - only that something is wrong) it becomes a lifelong battle to obtain it.

I am writing of the average woman who married and becomes a mother. Being a subjective person, I cite myself. I wanted children - I wanted a large family but due to various circumstances settled for four - and I have led a life of political involvement and public activity, therefore it can be said that I am not the typical deprived housewife. Yet I, like so many women, have been consumed by my family, by the demands which they make, loving and caring for them as I have done, wanting them all as I did, I have yet known the bitter resentment that I feel as a woman because of what they have taken of my life.

I could write a book about this - I will do it, too, one day - so I'll leave it at that, but just re-iterate, so that there is no mistake: women are the largest section of oppressed people in the world today and we do feel oppression, resentment, hidden violence and terrible pain through the paralysis created by a male society.

Yours truly,

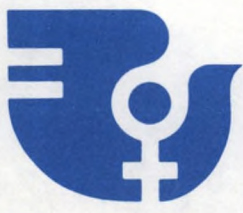
(Mrs) H. Bernstein.

23rd How pass laws affect women

B3.5

Area: City Hotel. Pederstramsgade 24

PLANNING COMMITTEE: NGO ACTIVITIES AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UN DECADE FOR WOMEN



NGO FORUM, JULY 14-24 COPENHAGEN, 1980

Room 574
600 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022

2/0/ Tel: (212) 751-6850

May 6, 1980

Ms. Hilda Bernstein
5 Rothwell Street
London NW1, ENGLAND

Dear Ms. Bernstein:

As you know, an NGO Forum will be held concurrently with the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women this July in Copenhagen. It gives me great pleasure to extend an invitation to you to participate in this event.

The main themes for the Forum will be the themes of the Decade for Women: Equality, Development, Peace; the sub-themes for the Conference: Health, Education and Employment; Racism/Sexism including "Apartheid," Migrants and Refugees and The Family. These issues will be introduced by panels of persons from different perspectives and parts of the world. These panels will serve to pose questions to stimulate further discussion on various aspects of the issue concerned. We are enclosing general information on the Forum.

The Planning Committee, because of your great contribution in exposing and working for the elimination of "Apartheid," would like to invite you to take part in the introductory panel session on Racism including "Apartheid," on July 15th from 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon and also the introductory panel session on Racism/Sexism on July 16th from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. We should also like you to lead workshop panels arising out of both of these sessions.

When we know that you are able to accept this invitation, we will write in greater detail about the arrangements and answer any questions that might arise during your preparations for the meeting.

The Planning Committee will be responsible for your travel and living expenses and all arrangements will be made through our office. We would ask you to be in Copenhagen by July 14th and not leave earlier than July 18th. Since time for completing arrangements is so short, we hope that you can indicate acceptance of our invitation by cable or telex, as well as by returning to us the enclosed reply form.

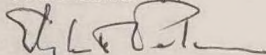
Ms. Hilda Bernstein

-2-

5/6/80

We look forward to your favorable reply and to seeing you in Copenhagen.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Palmer
Convenor

EP/mr
encl.

Cable address: Palmer UNGOFORUM NEWYORK

Telex No. 604804 (NRDC NYK)

Op 15 rarer o special kind

PLANNING COMMITTEE: NGO ACTIVITIES AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UN DECADE FOR WOMEN



NGO FORUM, JULY 14-24
COPENHAGEN, 1980

Room 574
600 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10022
Tel: (212) 751-6850

June 20, 1980

Ms. Hilda Bernstein
5 Rothwell Street
London NW1, England

Dear Ms. Bernstein:

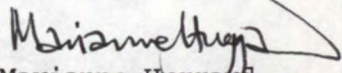
We are happy to hear that you will be able to participate in the introductory panel session on Racism including "Apartheid: and Racism/Sexism on July 15 from 10 AM to 12 noon and July 16 from 3:30 to 5:30 PM.

These panel sessions are designed to introduce the major themes of the Forum to the participants. As such, we hope that they will raise issues and stimulate discussion for the smaller workshops and panels to be held during the Forum. In the case of the panel on Racism including "Apartheid", we would like you to focus your presentation on "Apartheid" - the ultimate racism and the effects of apartheid on women in Southern Africa. The following people have accepted to be on the panel to date: Dorothy Height (USA) and Lelia Gonzalez (Brazil). We have also invited Nkosasana Dlamini and are waiting to hear from her. Regarding the panel session on Racism/Sexism, we would like you to give an opening presentation for the discussion by defining the concepts of racism and sexism: similarities and differences. The other panelists will include Donna Awatere (a Maori) and Dr. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (a Native American). Since the time for the panel session is limited to two hours and we are anxious to give the maximum amount of time for discussion and questions from the floor, we are asking that each panelist confine her remarks to ten minutes.

We enclose a round trip airline ticket from London to Copenhagen. Arrangements have been made for you to stay at the Hotel Dan, Kastruplundgade 15, DK 2770 Copenhagen, Denmark, telephone (01) 51 14 00. If you would prefer accommodation in a private home, please cable/telex us immediately. For further information regarding your hotel and other arrangements, please see the enclosed memorandum.

We look forward to seeing you in Copenhagen.

Yours sincerely,


Marianne Huggard
Co-coordinator

MH/ca
Encls.

Cable address: Palmer UNGOFORUM NEWYORK
Telex No. 604804 (call back NRDC NYK)

THE GUARDIAN

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5 June 1981

Ms Hilda Bernstein,
5 Rothwell Street,
London
NW1 8YH

Dear Hilda Bernstein,

Many thanks for your very interesting letter. I will probe along the lines you mention and I particularly take your point about nuclear war, though that of course rather rules out the "physical" strength argument except as extended through weapons. Violence "in the head" rather.

Best wishes,

Jill Tweedie .

Jill Tweedie

Mad or sane, it's men who are violent and women who are victims



Jill Tweedie

THE LEGALISTIC NUB of the Yorkshire Ripper case is relatively straightforward. Is Peter Sutcliffe sane or insane? Was he mad or bad? Inside the Old Bailey, within the confined framework of the law, these two distinctions are all that matter.

Outside the Old Bailey, in the real world, rather less

limited distinctions apply. I, for instance, am over-ridingly aware of one thing — whether or not Peter Sutcliffe was egged on by his God or acted of his own free will and enjoyed himself, what he did was kill *women*. The Sutcliffe God said he wished Sutcliffe to rid the West Riding of the pestilence of prostitution but Sutcliffe did not kill even one man in following out this order. No male pimps fell, no male customers were decimated, no male entrepreneurs of any kind were disarranged. Evidently, the Sutcliffe God understood very little about the pestilence of prostitution and the organisation involved.

Peter Sutcliffe gets his star billing only for excess. Thirteen instead of one or two. Countless numbers of men have come up on trial over countless years for killing women out of anger, hatred, boredom or a desire for sexual kicks and, though they may still horrify society, they do not astonish. We have, apparently, accepted that

there will always be men who, sane or insane, will inflict pain, humiliation, terror, injury and death upon women. It is the way of things. All we need decide is whether they are nutters or not.

Personally, speaking as a woman, I don't give a monkey's. Speaking as a woman, I don't feel I am in any position to tell the difference. Divine male voices, if any, seem to say much the same thing as secular male voices — up, lads, and at her. If sanity instructs a man to beat me to the ground as effectively as insanity, how can they expect me to distinguish between the two? Normal or abnormal, mad as a hatter or sane as can be: outside the Law Courts, bleeding on the ground, all I can know is that, one way or the other, it's men who are handing it out and women who are getting it.

Pause for a moment's detachment. When, in the past, I have attacked male violence against women, some

male readers react strongly. They write to the effect that all men should not be tarred with the same brush. "I," they say, "would not hurt a fly, never mind lay a finger on a woman and I resent being lined up alongside monsters with whom I share nothing but my gender." A justifiable resentment. I, as a woman, do not feel I have anything in common with Irma Grese, German concentration camp guard. But compared to male monsters, female monsters are few and far between. If I opened my newspaper and, day after day, read of acts of violence perpetrated by women against men, I do not believe I would remain as sanguine. I hope I would be writing nervous articles on the subject. Why is this happening? What can women do about it? What is *wrong* with women?

Men, however, do not seem so concerned. Men seem only interested in pointing out that *they* (Horatio P. Hornblower, G. Armstrong-Hen-

pecked) have never raised a hand in anger against a woman. None seem intent on taking any sort of general responsibility for, or action against, these others of their sex. A few men, it is true, march with women in protest, on the streets, but the rest arouse themselves only to defend their personal virtue. Yet, very often, these are the same men who are admirably willing to campaign against other sins they have not, themselves, committed. *Mea culpa*, they shout, about anything you choose from the Middle East conflict or famine in the Third World to the plight of whales. But about violence against women, they remain mute, inactive, detached.

And yet one of the major problems of our time (or any time) is this: *why* do so many men get pleasure from abusing women? *Why* do so many obviously hate women, consciously or unconsciously? The problem may not reveal a ready solution but nor do many problems that are at

least set on the road to solutions by public concern, education, research, action and the necessary allocated funds. Far less pervasive problems are instantly given the status of Royal Commissions, Government Inquiries and Quangos — this one, it appears, requires no more than punishment after the deed. It is almost as if the world were saying, with a cynical shrug, "boys will be boys."

A few years ago, there was a certain amount of controversy about sex education in schools. Should we tell our children everything or nothing or what? Today, those children who get sex education are mostly instructed upon contraceptive methods and the basic facts of impregnation, pregnancy and birth. Raised voices protested that nothing was said of love. No raised voices protested that nothing was said of hate, violence, abuse, rape by men against women. No one, to the best of my know-

ledge, has even suggested attacking that male violence as near its roots as possible, by discussing the subject in schools and homes. No-one draws to young boys' attention their attitudes to the opposite sex, no-one talks of the possible reasons why boys might grow up to rape or to batter, no-one gives adolescent boys any clues to help them identify such destructive emotions nor any guidance as to what to do about them, now or in later life.

Has a single male teacher, I wonder, sat down with his boys in any British school and tried to analyse what might have led to Peter Sutcliffe's actions, what ingredients of those actions stem from male attitudes as a whole? And, because of that singular vacuum — almost everything else is discussed under some heading like Current Affairs or Social Awareness — is it any wonder that so many boys grow up under the distinct impression that the world accepts male violence against women as endemic and,

therefore, normal enough. I have no Polly-Annaish illusion that school discussions will eliminate in embryo all such as Peter Sutcliffe. I do believe, however, that if even one boy in each year in each school was encouraged to think about his feelings towards the opposite sex and given some hint of guidance when he is disturbed by those feelings (and how to know disturbance from normality, without an outside criterion?) we could make a start at straightening some twisted roots. Neglecting to make even so small an attempt, we are simply making obvious that, as a society, we are resigned to the proposition that being born male means an inevitable risk of hereditary illness, like haemophilia, about which nothing can be done. Judging by the majority's inertia, men themselves appear to have accepted that this is so. As a woman, and a woman with sons, I cannot afford such resignation.

5 Rothwell Street
London, NW1 8YH
27/5/81

Dear Jill Tweedie

This is not intended as a 'newspaper' letter, but as a letter written to you personally.

I usually agree wholeheartedly with what you write, which is why, I suppose, I consider you to be such a good journalist. If your views respond to my attitudes, obviously you must be perceptive, intelligent and so on.

Your column that appeared last Thursday (May 21st) was like a strong blow to me. I have for a long time been pondering over precisely these questions. You wrote from the starting point of an issue very much in the news, and developed your argument in the context of today's society. But I have been considering the question of male violence from the point of view of the whole development of male-dominated societies.

I have tried very hard to understand why patriarchy - or whatever we like to call it - became so universal, usually from the earliest times (there are, of course, exceptions.) Engels gives some clues, I accept his analysis of the role of private property and so on; but a great area remains unanswered (I once thought Marxism had the answer to everything - I still think it has lots of explanations.) I read Evelyn Reed on the development of women from an anthropological point of view; Elizabeth Gould Davies and many of the US feminist writers, de Beauvoir and all the usual ones. All of them supplied enriching insights, but none the ultimate answer.

Gradually I have been coming to the conclusion that there is only one coherent, universal reason for women's oppression, and that is simply male violence exercised through male physical superiority. This, of course, does not explain why that violence has been so universally exercised, and there the answer cannot be so simplistic but must take us along multiple paths of economic, social, psychological and other areas. But this seems to me the single universal factor that made male-dominated societies possible and keeps them that way. Division of labour, the question of child-bearing, and so on, all helped to develop societies along certain roads, but in themselves cannot explain world-wide male domination.

Now that the whole question of violence, while remaining still potent in the personal field (viz Sutcliffe) has actually also moved onto a new, qualitative level with the question of nuclear weapons, it seems to me it is time that women who have access to the media should start researching and probing the

2 Notwell Street
London, W11 6NY
27/5/71

nuclear war threat from this point of view. Perhaps the campaigners will say there isn't time now, that we have to act, march, demonstrate, etc, to stop the finger pressing the button. But one area of activity does not rule out the other. And a deeper understanding of the 'whys' may direct the activists into more fruitful methods.

I do hope that you will use your column, which I am sure is influential at least in making people start to think along new lines, to explore this over-riding issue again. And keep writing!

Sincerely,

Hilda Bernstein

I have tried very hard to understand why patriarchy - or whatever we like to call it - became so universal, usually from the earliest times (there are, of course, exceptions). Engels gives some clues, I accept his analysis of the role of private property and so on; but a great area remains unanswered (I once thought Marx had the answer to every-thing - I still think it has lots of explanations). I read Evelyn Red on the development of women from an anthropological point of view; Elizabeth Gould Davis and many of the 20th century feminist writers, de Beauvoir and all the usual ones. All of them supplied exciting insights, but none the ultimate answer.

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Now that the whole question of violence, while remaining still potent in the personal field (via 'outlets' which are effectively also moved onto a new, qualitative level with the invention of nuclear weapons, it seems to me that it is time to look down the road to the end of the 20th century and beyond.

30 Woodlea Rd.

N16

15/ii/1983

Dear Hilda,

The days just seem to evaporate at present & I'm not sure I'll be able to come to pick up the articles before the weekend. In the meanwhile here is the interview transcript. Please mark any passages you definitely want dropped. Could I have it back by the end of the month?

All the best

Elaine

5 Rothwell Street
London, NW1 8YH

17th ~~Jan~~ February 83

Dear Elaine,

I now understand why all those politicians want to change Hansard-speech is so different from writing.

All sorts of things occurred to me while reading the transcript of the interview, but of course the idea is not to start all over again. So I've just put some added thoughts on various aspects, and enclose them to use as you wish.

I think my latent hostility to Helen creeps in - you must have been aware of it. She is a woman to be highly admired, she has tremendous courage and determination, splendid organising abilities, loyalty, stamina. Her work among the banished, the trip she undertook, all these demonstrate her great qualities. She was (maybe isn't now she is older) also an extraordinarily difficult woman to work with. She had to have total control. She was 100 per cent behind the ANC and resented or opposed any initiative that did not come directly from ANC leadership. I'm just mentioning this to explain my mixed feelings towards someone who is regarded as the very embodiment of our principles. What I really wanted to say is that I would not like any latent hostility on my part to come through the interview. I would rather my feelings about her were unsaid, except in private.

As for the rest, I suppose I stand by it. The unwritten code of conduct in the ANC is that you must keep such criticisms (against men, for instance) within the organisation, put up a united face to the public. I was almost ex-communicated after coming back from Copenhagen in 1980 because I gave a report in which I said I'd encountered more sexism in the ANC than racism - this was heresy. I wouldn't go out of my way to make public criticisms of ANC attitudes on women; in many ways they can be better than in most organisations. But I don't see why we - ANC and AAM women - can't discuss these things.

Love to you and little Joseph

INTERNATIONALISM

If you've read Cherryl Walker's book, you will see that both Ray Simons and myself were strongly motivated by our internationalism when deciding to get women organised on a proper basis.

The internationalism sprang directly from our communism, from our understanding of Marxist theory. But the response an individual makes to work-choices within an organisation reveals your personal preferences. I gravitated towards peace organisations, women, both of which are very much international. I was secretary of the Transvaal Peace Council, then later of the SA Peace Council, but banned from it soon after (Incidentally, ~~XXXXXX~~ the reason Ray and I disappear from the history of the Fed (in the book) so soon after it was formed is because we were both banned, and our participation continued, but was illegal, and therefore not recorded.)

I feel today even more strongly that these three things: women's movement, peace movement, internationalism, are the primary issues of our world, that they are totally related, and one of the things that we (women in the ANC & AAM) should discuss is the relation of these three, because it ties up totally with apartheid.

Your interview reminded me of a discussion I had once with a Soviet woman - too long to write about. Remind me to tell you when we meet.

It also reminded me of how I first became conscious of Lilian Ngoyi. She was appointed by the Tvl ANC as their representative on the Peace Council (which was made up of representatives of other organisations.) This was before she was so well-known. She came dutifully to our committee meetings, but never said a word. Then later we organised the fantastic trip that she & Dora Tamana made overseas. In Germany she was taken to visit Auschwitz, shown lampshades made from human skin, etc. When she came back, she told me: 'I never really knew what you were speaking about. I used to go to the Peace Council meetings, but inside myself I was saying, How can I have peace in my head when I have war in my stomach? (Such a typical Lilian saying.) But now I do understand, she told me, and she meant it.

TOWNSHIP WOMEN

Your question re the social composition of the Fed - or Women's League. I do still have a strong sense of the way women in the townships formed together in community organisations, most frequently church-based, but not necessarily for religious purposes. There was a strong sense of hierarchy among the women - you could offend them deeply by not letting them speak in the correct order. And there were always women with splendid personalities - Mary Moodley was the outstanding example - lacking any formal education, who drew around themselves the whole community in which they lived; who were always there; whose homes sheltered waifs and strays; to whom people turned with every problem and in any crisis. ~~I~~ I can't think of any men who ever occupied a comparable position at grass-roots level in their own communities.

1960 STATE OF EMERGENCY

We didn't discuss this at all, but it was in jail during the emergency that I really came to love women. We were more than 20 'high-powered' women (Hannah Stanton's description) held in close proximity, thrust, as it were, on top of each other. It could have been devastating, but it wasn't. I'd always cared deeply about women's rights but this ~~wasn't~~ hadn't meant that I cared for women. I know when I was young in the 'movement' I was contemptuous of my male comrades' non-active wives - didn't ever appreciate why they were like that. But there we were, in some ways quite ill-assorted, yet we all felt a most tremendous bond, acted together and were deeply supportive of each other. I was released (through my brother-in-law's efforts) before many of others - it was, as it transpired, only a few days, but I didn't know that. I cried and said I didn't want to go, that I couldn't go and leave the others. I loved them all. The (white) men were much more riven by political differences and hesitations than we women. It was true sisterhood.

1958 PASS PROTESTS

I think now that there are a number of strands that have become interwoven in this case, and that we cannot ever arrive at a clear conclusion.

It was not a 'spontaneous' campaign, in the sense that it arose from the rank and file. When the issue of passes to women in Johannesburg - left to the last for obvious reasons - was becoming a reality. The women - in the FED, or ANCWL, or both - were determined to resist taking the passes - the leadership couldn't tell them to damp it down. They had begun to organise, we were doing what we had done for years - helping to organise resistance, propagating, speaking, meeting, etc.

The men's opposition stemmed from different sources. Yes, they resented the militant resistance of the women where they themselves had no part to play, were already, as it were, defeated; yes, they wanted their wives back in their homes. But there may have been sound political grounds for the (male) ANC leadership's demanding that the women call off the campaign. I don't think that now you can state firmly that they were right to do so, or were wrong to do so. As for motives - that's even more entangled; the final judgements must be made on the basis of the results of an action, not on the motives that inspired it.

INDIAN WOMEN

During the period I was on the City Council I did quite a lot of visiting and speaking to groups of Indian women. This was among 'backward' women, not the educated and liberated ones who took part in the leadership of the Passive Resistance Campaign, nor trade union leaders. They were the obscure wives and aunts and sisters tucked away behind the scenes all along the Reef - Krugersdorp, Springs, Benoni, etc. The Indian men were very deferential to authority, and being a 'City Councillor' gave me great prestige. Some of the men in the Tvl Indian Congress felt themselves handicapped by their wives, which was why I was invited to speak to them.

It was the war period, and I think I spoke mostly about women in the Soviet Union, and how free and equal they were (a highly idealised and probably hopelessly inaccurate assessment), but ~~with~~ with the intention of making them feel they themselves had powers and abilities, and that they must use them. I can remember speaking to a group of women through an interpreter - the only male allowed in the room - they wouldn't sit down in the same room as men - and watching the faces of the women as I spoke. And there were always women, often quite old women, from whom I drew a visible response: the nodding head, the expression of attention, the light in their ~~x~~ eyes. It reinforced all my feelings about women's wasted lives, and why we had to work to change them.

COMMUNIST PARTY

I think what i've said about being selected to stand for the Council is basically correct, but without being too generous to the male CP members, it must be said that CP theory ~~was~~ on women was clearly in accord with my own feelings, and that in theory the CP leadership believed in equal rights and opportunities for women, and understood at least in part the nature of female oppression. This did not stop a lot of them being mpc's in their own way, and all the little jokes and put-down expressions were current in the CP as well. But it was the Party that gave opprotunities to women like myself and Ray Simons to develop our potential, we had the backing and support of a disciplined organisation - this was a great advantage to us. (And others, like Josie Palmer).

BACKGROUND TO THE FEDERATION

The 40s lay the basis for the development of the Fed in the 50s. I dont remember in what year the Transvaal All-Women's Union was founded, but this was a child of Josie Palmer and myself and the fore-runner of the Fed. I don't remember what we did. We had a committee, obviously with the objectives of involving and educating women more in politics. I did run classe*s for women, in political theory - very Marxist. Some of the African women who are today (outside SA) in leading positions in the ANC attended those classes.

The 40s also witnessed very big mass campaigns that developed out of the conclusion of the war, and the ideas that were spread, as a result of the defeat of Hitler and racism in Germany. I dont remember any that were specific to women, but we should remember that the participation of the women in huge rallies, demonstrations and marche*s was part of the educating process for the 50s.

30 Woodlea Road
London N16 0TH
25 February 1983

Dear Hilda,

Thanks for the transcripts back and the additional comments. I wonder if I was clear about the publication. The bulletin Women in South African History is a semi-academic journal that the study project on women in South African history, of which Judy and I are members, puts out. I think I never spelled this out to you. It is there we want to publish the interview. Although some AAM women subscribe the circulation is larger than just that group. Bearing this in mind are you still happy we publish everything bar the comments on Helen Joseph? I'm enclosing the transcript so that you can check. Sorry about the muddle.

Hope to see you at International Women's Day.

All the best

Elaine

257.9808

Lepelchik a Urdang
Oppression & Resistance
The Struggle of Women in South Africa

26/2/83
300 people
including 47 children
Bth quarters sleep in
open

P.10.

P.12

Ambivalent attitude. In the past I do remember men like Walter Scanlon in the leadership of the ANC were very proud of the women's initiative in + a-p Camp. They didn't, I don't see themselves as being patronising & chauvanistic, but there are social attitudes, part of a whole process of conditioning from babyhood, & this applies to our women as well as the men. I'm sure ~~some~~ ^{part of it is their own fear of} this is why some of our women react so fiercely against concepts of ~~Western~~ ^{the term} feminism. We were in the 1940s & 50s & never afraid to say so

in the past

hope to see you at International Women's Day.

so that you can check, partly about the books, the committee on Helen Joseph. I'm enclosing the transcript of the discussion I led after I had just finished everything but didn't see the transcript. Although some men were expected I never recalled this but to you. It is interesting to me history, of which study and I also remember, lots of. I think journals, these are study projects on women in South African universities. I wonder if I see clear about the publication. The

Dear Hilary,

Thanks for the transcript's price and the additional

22 February 1989
 Gordon J. G. G.H.
 W. Rhodes Road

Dear Elaine,

It gets rather complicated. If I were to re-do too much it takes away the flavour of spontaneous recollections (or lack of them), but I do see areas that are not clarified enough.

I think it's necessary to remove the personal remarks that I'm obviously prone to make, about Sachs, about Helen, and about Oliver. He can't change his life-style now, and he can't be blamed too much. . . all his generation thought as he did, but he has shown the ability to change.

I began pencilling-in some comments, but in a couple of later passages this became too difficult.

On the second side of the tape, page 9, to clarify the position about MK. All of us who were still in the 'liberation movement' through underground organisations took part in the discussions on its formation and were given the opportunity to volunteer. The person I mention, who I remember discussing it with, and myself, decided not to join because we felt that we might be a liability and not an asset to this type of organisation. But we were in support of it, and there were connections between work that we did and MK did.

On page 10. In answer to the question about the role women play in the underground movement changing their status: Only if women achieve positions of leadership in the underground (as elsewhere) and don't find themselves forever doing the 'supportive' tasks. I think that the fact that women can join the military training groups of MK is fundamental - when women carry arms they will inevitably win the respect of men, and men will see them differently.

Page 12 and 13. This is where problems arise. I'd like to put it all more clearly. Starting with my answer 'I think they've got now....' After the first sentence, something like this:

In the past I do remember men like Walter Sisulu in the leadership of the ANC were very proud of the women's initiative in the anti-pass campaigns, and expressed that pride.

As a whole the men do not see themselves as being patronising and chauvinistic, but these are cultural attitudes, part of a process of conditioning that starts in babyhood, and they run very deep; and this applies to women as well as to men. We have an awful lot to learn. But attitudes are changing all the time; We had unfortunate meetings in the women's section in the past when men intervened too much. But then the ANC has appointed two women to two of its most important external missions - the UK and Scandinavia - that alone sets a whole process of change going. At the same time, year after year, at public meetings we are still confronted with the phalanx of men - Ruth, as chief rep., has become the 'token' woman.

I don't think you can ignore the derogatory remarks and attitudes to the women's section; when things go wrong, there's a lot of criticism that is spiteful to women, gender-based. But at the same time, the women's section is making a very positive contribution. We have to concentrate on those positive aspects - some people will never change, but they will be left behind. Mostly attitudes can, and must change.

On the Luanda Conference

From all reports, this was a great success. I thought Oliver's speech was a good one, and I think what he said should be discussed and studied. He berated both men and women:

"The oppressor has, at best, a lesser duty to liberate the oppressed than the oppressed himself (This should be herself.) The struggle to conquer oppression in our country is the weaker for the traditionalist, conservative and primitive restraints imposed on women by man-dominated structures within our movement, as also because of the ~~æ~~equally traditionalist attitudes of surrender and submission on the part of the women."

But there were also some decisions at Luanda with which I can't agree, but I think many of our women share this view and want to eliminate old-fshioned attitudes.

Comment from Hilda to Elaine: Dont you think Oliver was rather good? He has obviously thought about the women's movement.

Added comment:

Somewhere, maybe on page 15 where I've put an A:

Some of our women react very fiercely against the term 'feminism' and want no part of it. We were proud to call ourselves feminists in the ~~1040s~~ 1040s and the 1950s, and I ~~am~~ remain a feminist, even though I ~~reje ct~~ reject some aspects of Western feminism.

Or maybe at the end of that para.

There seemed to be a final page missing from the interview, but I've probably done enough meddling around. If you want to discuss or suggest any changes, do ring me

2nd January 1989

Editor, Sputnik.

Hilda Bernstein
Old House Farm
Dorstone
Herefordshire
England. HR3 6EL.

Dear Editor,

I do not read your magazine regularly, but was looking at it in a friend's house, when I read the articles on women written by Afanasyev and Simakova. This brought on such a violent reaction that I felt compelled to put my work aside and write to you. The enclosed article is the result.

I see Afanasyev's article is actually reprinted from another journal, Tekhnika I Nauka. Perhaps they should be the recipients of my protest, but I do not know them.

I realise that what I have written is fairly long. I could have written ten times as much, but restrained myself.

Please let me know if you feel you can print my article, or use it in any way. I would be very pleased to hear from you.

With good wishes,

Hilda Bernstein

Hilda Bernstein
Old House Farm
Dorstone,
Herefordshire, HR3 6BL
England

To: The Editor,
Sputnik
Moscow
Goroholsky Pereulok D 30

2nd January, 1989.

A friend showed me a copy of your magazine Sputnik with two articles in it on the position of women.

On reading Anatoli Afanasyev's article A Personal View, I thought at first it was meant as a satire, a sort of joke; because it was incredible to me that anyone in the Soviet Union who is able to think enough to become a writer would put such views before the public with serious intent.

Then I read the next article, and a pattern emerged from both of them. I had to take them seriously. I would have preferred not to do so.

The history of patriarchy, of male domination, is bound to biologicistic theories. Just listen to this quotation:

"Her world is her husband, her family, her children, her home. But where would the greater world be if no one cared to tend the smaller world? . . . We do not find it right when woman presses into the world of man . . . The man upholds the nation as the woman upholds the family. The equal rights of women consist in the fact that in the realm of life determined by her nature she experiences the highest esteem that is her due" (My emphasis.)

Is not this exactly what Afanasyev means when he writes that involving women in industrial production has led to their developing notions alien to their biological features and proper interests? And echoes by Nina Simakova when she says: "There should be a more intensive orientation of girls to the women's behavioural stereotype - marriage, giving birth and raising children, and concern for the husband and home. A woman should be prepared for a marriage-and-family life."

But the paragraph quote above is a statement by Adolf Hitler - how closely it parallels your two contributors! This should not surprise; the ideology of fascism, of racism and of sexism are closely linked, related. It was the Nazis who most forcefully set out the role for women that your contributors propose: Children, Church, the Kitchen (in German, the three Ks) Sexism and racism are analogous ideological phenomena, casting people into negative stereotypes with genetic features - the Jews, the blacks, Slavs are made to assume, under racist theories, permanent attributes that the racists claim to be biological. As do your sexist writers who assume the right to bestow their reactionary view of women's role in society on the basis of their biological interpretations.

The connection between sexist and racist stereotypes appear everywhere. but in only one country did it lead to consequences wherein people deemed 'biologically' inferior were exterminated, while women were degraded to child-bearing robots. Examine these theories against Afanasyev's own pronouncements: of the failure of women to find happiness in social labour because "they have too little time to look after their children and husbands properly" and that we must help women to "get back to the environment appropriate to their biology where they can be fulfilled." I dare to suggest that the family is where women are most likely to find real happiness." (I dare to suggest that the family is where the majority of women find most unhappiness). These concepts spring from the same ideological basis as Hitler's.

Women do not belong to men, women do not belong to their families. They belong to themselves. Most marriages, even in the USSR today - (although I do not write from first-hand experience, but from distant observation) - result in practical subordination to men. Certainly Afanasyev's assertions imply this very strongly. He wants women to seek happiness and fulfilment in looking after their husbands.

their husbands properly - what a great destiny for half of the whole human race! The Soviet women's greatest ambition, he says, would be to be able to lie idly on the shores of the Adriatic surrounded by well-tended children.

And this is how your Socialist society will advance!

The emancipation of women requires that she, and her society, refuses to confine her to the stereotype relations she has learned from societies dominated by men. Biology, nature, cannot dictate moral choices to women. Biology will influence a large majority of women to produce children - but it cannot dictate the use of her intelligence, her aspirations, her role in society. To demand that for women the children, the family- not to forget caring for the man - must be their supreme aim - (for half of humanity, don't forget) - is to transform ideas of society and human relationships into the slogans of soap powder advertisements in the Western world.

Marriage for men is regarded as a state, for women as a vocation, the proper and fitting aim of their whole existence. The belief that the family and parenthood are the special, almost the exclusive, concern of women is rooted in the idea that the individual exists for the sake of the species. Biologically, of course, this is true, but it is equally true of women and men, of male and female. Civilised societies no longer see men in this light; but women, who have not been able to the same extent to assert the right to live for themselves have become victims of this one-sided idea that the future of the race depends solely on them, that man's responsibility ceases with the lossing of his sperm.

The claims made on women because of the existence of their biological function should be respected and certainly taken into consideration, as Simakova states in one part of her article, in regulating the structures of society to accomodate woman's reproductive period; but not for the purpose of reducing her status to that of 'glorious wife and motherhood'. The adulation given to motherhood descends into sentimental slush inna society that denies women the right to determine their own role. Gold medals awarded to women who can reproduce as often as cows are bestowed on them by men. The whole male insistence on their right to proclaim and lay down the rules for women is concealed behind a false facade of devotion, of idealising women, to exploit their humanity and compassion, to freeze their identities, their social roles.

Thus women's vital energies are displaced as they are caught in all those self-defeating trivialities of organising family life that are regarded as the women's sphere. Nurturing the young is essential in all societies - but it is not, should never be, the task relegated almost exclusively to women.

(And this, of course, ignores the fact that many women do not bear children, some through choice, some through disfunctioning of male or female components, or other reasons; ignores the fact that so many marriages end in divorce; ignores what happens when the 'ideal' of the family crumbles and the woman it is who is usually left to handle the dire consequences; and ignores the fact that child-bearing and rearing takes up a smaller and smaller proportion of a woman's life as life expectancy increases.)

Thus the social role of women - and particularly in your own advanced society - is subverted, and who is the loser? Not only the women: displacing the vital energies, gifts and intelligence of half of the total population not only has negative effects on the women themselves. More - society is deprived of the most significant contribution of half its peoples.

But behind every ideological statement lies economic realities. Women in Britain experienced this most clearly during and after World War 2. When they were needed to do the hardest, most exacting physical work in the factories, on the land, then creches and child-care centres were opened everywhere, and it was unpatriotic for women not to take an active part outside the home. Women's efforts were valued, their strength displayed, as they drove ambulances through nights of blizz horror, as they fought fires, as they dug the dead and dying from the ruins, as they themselves died on torpedoed ships But the war ended; the nurseries were closed. A new ideology permeated the postwar society - the very one that Afanasyev propounds: "the family is where women are most likely to find happiness . . . work in production is neither biologically nor physically appropriate for women." Can one divorce these statements from the problems

that confront society in the USSR concerning the replacement of people by technology to the extent that there is a surplus of workers? The ideology alters to fit the economic demands of the society. How well women in Britain recall the men's postwar cries: 'You are taking men's jobs! Your place is in the home!& (And link this sexism with racism - blacks who had emigrated to England were accused of taking 'our' jobs, as once were the Irish.)

Yes, I am aware of the wonderful and equal educational and training opportunities open to women in the USSR. I am aware that you have a higher proportion of women doctors, engineers, economists, etc, etc. But I am also aware that women are not seen proportionately in the highest posts in all professions and layers of government. I see the highest posts, the top specialists in medicine, science, in the economy, filled almost exclusively by men. I see an all-male Presidium. How is it possible to equate these contradictory features in Soviet society? To reduce this to women's biology is ridiculous, nonsensical. Women are now shown to have many physical advantages over men - greater longevity, better health, generally in fact stronger except in muscle power alone, and brains as able - often better - than men. Women like myself who have worked all my life in close association with women's problems and organisations, and confronted many times the contradictory position of women in my own organisation - the African National Congress of South Africa - we women have learned from the women of other countries. And what we have learned from the USSR is the most profound lesson of all: it is easier to change laws than it is to change social consciousness. That's why, in your society, from the mass of well-educated, intelligent, capable, energetic and ambitious women, so few reach the top. Patriarchy still reigns. Women must be twice as strong, twice as bright, to gain and hold high positions, not because of biology, not because they wish to turn their backs on child-nurturing, but because men will not relinquish power, because they cannot give up the idea that they, too, must shop, cook, clean, change napkins, that women are not placed in the world to 'care for their husbands'. Afanasyev - do not look at the problem for women; look at the problem of yourself.

I suppose what upsets me most of all is that this, and related issues, are vital ones for this time of perestroika in the USSR. How can you build a better, freer, more successful socialist society when half the population start with one hand tied behind their backs? Why do you open your pages to such backward-looking, sexist, reactionary nonsense when there are these huge questions to be debated, to be openly voiced? Why are you allowing reactionary ideas to retain their power when your society demands you look forward? Now, of all times, when you are re-evaluating your past in order to build a finer future on proper foundations, it is outrageous that you can choose such an article to re-publish.

Women: a Personal View

by Anatoli AFANASYEV, a writer

Drawing by Alexei TERTYSH

With prejudice to no one, it is my considered opinion that involving women in industrial production has led to their developing notions alien to their biological features and proper interests, notions which sociologists call "false requirements". And these, it seems, include the desire for social success and fame. The illusion that they are desperately needed in production has given rise to a feeling of disappointment amongst women. They have failed to find complete happiness in social labour, and at the same time, have distanced

themselves from the family. They simply have now too little time to look after their children and husbands properly. As a result, they are fulfilled neither at home nor at work.

I think the time has come for us men to admit that we interpret the notion of women's lib in somewhat vulgar terms. It seems not to bother us that many health-hazardous jobs have been palmed off on the female. And by thus equalizing women and men, we have undermined the moral and physical health of society.

The most important

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