

# WOMENS' OPPRESSION NO2

In our previous issue we dealt with black working women's oppression and exploitation. In this issue we take a look at the biological and historical aspects of women's oppression. In our forthcoming issues we shall focus on: The Nuclear Family and capitalist society, women's liberation movements, women activists and middle class women.

In this article we attempt to answer the question: Does women's oppression stem from a biological difference with men or from the historical development of society?

## BIOLOGICAL ASPECT

Women's physical weakness' has never prevented her from performing work as such. The volume of work performed by women has always been considerable. Far from women's physical weakness removing her from productive work, in most cases her weak social position has made her the slave of it.

It is also suggested that biological differences such as the greater physical strength of men and the fact that women bear children lead to social roles out of sheer practicality. However, the sexual division of labour (wife and mother versus father and breadwinner) in western society is not universal. In some societies biology appears to have had little or no influence on women's roles. For example, the Mbuti pygmies in the Congo rain forest, a hunting and gathering society, where there are no specific rules for

the division of labour, both men and women hunt together. In some Asian and Latin American countries, a quarter of the labour force in mines is female.

## HISTORICAL ASPECT

During primitive times men and women were occupied as full-time hunters and warriors. Women developed most of the basic tools, skills and techniques at the base of social advancement. Out of the variety of crafts they practised pot-making, leather-making, house-building, etc.

Women were thus the producers of new life and and the material necessities of life. They were able to accomplish this because they worked together as a collective community of producers. This explains why the earliest societies were matriarchal, with women occupying the central place of the clan. Hence we have a refutation of the myth that women have always been the inferior sex and that her place has always been in the home.



HOW THEN DID THIS DRASTIC REVERSAL COME ABOUT?

It began with changes in the structure of society. The appearance of private property led to the downfall of women. The disintegration of communal societies began 6 to 8 thousand years ago, with agriculture and cattle farming being practiced on a large scale. This in turn brought about material surpluses required for an efficient economy and a new way of life.

The old sprawling tribal communes began to break down; first into separate clans then into separate families and finally into the nuclear family. In the new society men became the principle producers and proprietors of private property and of women. Women were relegated to the home and her family. Only in a socialist society will the discrimination against women and the exploitation of workers, both men and women, end.

Next issue:  
The Nuclear family and the Capitalist Society.