

AN ENDING...

I want to conclude with a few thoughts.

1. Some people might find it hard to believe me when I say that I feel virtually no possibility of ever being sexually jealous again. Perhaps I am fooling myself, but really I doubt it. The point is, I think, that I am basically a political animal. After all I have been through, I feel political to the very marrow of my bones. Ann may have fought me and defeated me sexually, yet in doing so she has given me political self-confidence and strength such as I have never experienced previously. I feel that even my love-life has been politicized, and that I have gained politically far, far more than anything which I may have lost in terms of sexual "rights".

2. But there is really more to it than that. For I just cannot see that I have lost anything sexually either. It is not simply that Ann gives me far more than she ever did when I possessed her exclusively. There is also the fact that I now feel sexually liberated myself. No-one has come along and seduced me yet, but it's still nice to think that they might, and that nowadays — unlike previously — I probably wouldn't get too frightened or struggle too hard to get away!

3. What I am trying to say is that it feels as if Ann and I are in a new social structure altogether. Our network of friends and comrades certainly doesn't as yet form a political movement or culture in and of itself, but we do feel the promise of it there all around us. There is the promise of a political community which would make sexual jealousy unnecessary. If all of us who were friends and comrades felt committed to each other and loved each other strongly enough, then the question of exactly who was having a sexual relationship with whom at any particular moment shouldn't be of earth-shattering significance to anyone.

4. In kinship-based societies, to the extent that the principles of kinship-solidarity prevail, love is not something which is privatized and restricted to within the intimacy of relationships based on sex. On the contrary, love ("kinship-solidarity") and sex are in a real sense polar opposites, even though both are forms of reciprocity, intimacy and social enjoyment. Love/solidarity is public and collective, as in the solidarity of hundreds of "brothers" and "sisters" in a matrilineal clan. Sex is personal, intimate, private. And the two are rigorously disengaged. Everyone is loved, regardless of whether he or she is having a sexual relationship or not. Everyone's emotional needs are in a sense guaranteed, merely by the fact that everyone has his or her kin to fall back on at all times. The non-correspondence between kinship-solidarity and sex *fre*es sexual intimacy from the kinds of power-political entanglements with which it is bound up in bourgeois society.

People's emotional needs being guaranteed in any case by their clans or kinship networks, sex becomes just an important aspect of social enjoyment — nothing more. If your recent sexual partner happens to go off with someone else, it is not the end of the world. You are still loved, your kinsfolk are still all around you, their children are your children, their meals are your meals — and you have little to worry about in terms of emotional security. Sexual relations being relatively unimportant politically, marriages tend to be loose and sexual relations relatively fluid and easy for anyone to find.

5. Obviously, we can't re-establish the actual institutions of traditional cultures for ourselves today. We can't bring back matrilineal clans, for example! But the underlying structural principles can definitely be re-established in another form. The important thing is to re-establish that "non-correspondence" between love and sexual privacy which kinship-solidarity entailed. Emotional commitment and dependence ("love") must be released from its present tight correspondence with and confinement within the privacy of the sexual sphere. In my view, sex will always be something intimate and private — this is a necessary structural feature of human culture as such and cannot be changed without this threatening the dissolution of culture. But as far as the "love" side of things is concerned, there is no reason at all why our marital bonds shouldn't be collectivized. I think marriage can only be abolished if this is achieved.

6. In kinship-based societies, to the extent that kinship-solidarity is powerful, individual marital bonds are weak. But people are in a sense "married" — without sex — to their clans or kinsfolk. This is a collective form of "marriage", which I am calling "marriage" only because it fulfils roughly the same emotional-security requirements that marriage is supposed to fulfil in our social system. This is where people get their love. In kinship-based societies there are also powerful sexual and economic exchange relationships — the other side of "marriage" — existing between clans or groups of kinsfolk. These relationships are in one sense collective: clan is allied to clan, extended family to extended family. But these collective relationships are forged through the fact that individuals on the two sides have their own relationships of sexual intimacy and privacy with each other. Marriage has always been a public, political and — in a sense — collective relationship; sex has never been. One of the most important distinguishing features between humans and animals is the fact that animals copulate publicly and "shamelessly" whereas humans in normal circumstances don't.

7. The collective, political, public nature of marriage has got to be re-discovered, brought out and immeasurably strengthened by the revolutionary

movement. This in itself will *enable* sex to be more "free", more non-political, more intimate and personal. Marriage and sex are in reality polar opposites which have been violently conjoined by the political pressures and contradictions of our own, bourgeois, culture. They have got to be separated out again.

8. Marriage should be made our *political* comradeship, our "clan-solidarity" our indestructible emotional commitment to each other. My commitment to the *Chartist* group (of whom Ann is one) is, as I have said before, a kind of "marriage". It is even a form of "group marriage": marriage in an openly collectivized form. Sex has got nothing to do with it. I believe that, to the extent that in our *different* revolutionary organizations we can begin to develop our joint action and ultimate commitment to each other, a cultural revolution could be gradually won. We could make our emotional commitments to each other throughout the revolutionary movement strong enough for sex not to matter in the way it matters today.

9. Our basic need is to be loved. This is recognized by all child-psychologists, but tends to be forgotten when people start talking about adults. Why, it's hard to know. I suppose people feel such need for competitiveness and "hardness" that they try to deny their real emotional needs. In the bourgeois system, winning love is an extremely competitive business. This is so for brothers and sisters within the nuclear family, and it remains true throughout adult life. For much of the time, we feel we are losing out. During adolescence, we leave the security of our parents' families and start to drift around. We are looking for emotional security and love — and looking for a *sexual* partner to give it to us. Eventually, usually, we find such a partner, at least for a time. Each individual one of us then invests our all — the totality of our hopes for a meaningful existence on this planet — in the single partner we have found. This partner is then expected to provide everything which, in a kinship-based society, an entire world of kinsfolk and affines would be expected to provide. In the bourgeois system, *one person* is expected to provide the lot. He or she is expected to provide a social life of love, children, sex, relaxation, entertainment and so on to the exclusion of most of the real social world outside. No wonder we love our chosen partners so much! But the demands are just impossible for single individuals to meet. To the extent that a person's social partner is really detached from social life in general, he or she becomes gradually more empty, less interesting or talkative, less and less capable of providing the *social life* which everyone demands. But the really dreadful thing is that each partner feels that he or she has nothing else — no-where else to go. Each feels that if the other were to go off and have *sexual* relations with someone else, then everything — all love, all solidarity, all sense of belonging and all meaning in life — would be lost. The power of sexual jealousy is rooted in this terrifying fear of loss.

10. We need, within the revolutionary communist movement, a real emotional commitment to each other which will make such fears seem ludicrous. And, consequently, we need a commitment to a new, feminist, emotionally-fulfilling, complete form of

revolutionary communist politics. It is not a question of abolishing marital commitment, pair-bond relationships or the family. Quite the contrary. It is a question of *strengthening* these commitments. It is a question of abolishing, not the family, but the insecurities and divisions *between* couples and *between* families.

Once an emotional relationship — say, between a man and a woman — has become sufficiently strong and sufficiently politicized, it need no longer depend for its own self-preservation on the mechanisms of sexual jealousy or fear of ultimate loss. It can transcend these things. Once, in the revolutionary communist culture, we have won a certain threshold level of real commitment to each other, this should be possible. We should be able to forget about sex, in the sense that we should be able to free sex from its entanglements with exclusive bonds of emotional dependence or "love". Again, it's not a question of telling people what to do. This is what happens in our culture: people are dictated to in their sexual lives when they shouldn't be. It's a question, for us, of letting sex follow its own course under the control only of personal sentiments and intimate feelings between individuals. If two people want to have sex relations only with each other, remaining exclusively together throughout life, then they will do so and no-one will criticise or interfere. It's none of our business to interfere. If some people want no sex at all for periods, then again they won't have any and that will be their right. As long as we have a collective political-emotional commitment to each other, then it just shouldn't matter whether we have sex with this person or with that person, whether we have it gay or have it straight, whether we have it often or not so often. People will do what they like. But this won't be because there aren't any rules. On the contrary, it will be because the few simple rules of reciprocity and solidarity on which all really human life has always been based will be enforced more strongly and collectively than ever before.

11. Sexual jealousy is a poison as dangerous as racialism, with which it has much in common. Both jealousy and racialism are expressions of social impotence and insecurity. In some ways, sexual jealousy is even harder to eradicate than racialism — perhaps partly because it is not so widely recognized as a problem. It is a problem. It lies at the root of all bourgeois ideology — of all concepts and prejudices concerning the "right" to private property as a means of exploiting others. We've got to eradicate it from ourselves if we are to be strong enough to change the world.

12. Real solidarity between men depends upon one basic precondition. This is that women do not allow themselves to be fought over or competed over by rival males. For men to have intimate solidarity between themselves, women must put their own sexual solidarity first. They must make it quite clear that their bodies belong first to themselves and to each other, and only secondly and conditionally to the sexual partners they may choose. Admittedly, men have got to change themselves — it would be wrong to say that all the responsibility for change rested with women. But, for men to be able to change themselves, the structure of dominance in which they find themselves has got to be smashed from below. It is women who must take the initiative and take the power.

28.6.1979.

POSTSCRIPT

"You can't abolish the family", wrote Leon Trotsky in *Revolution Betrayed*, "you have to replace it." But what do we replace it with? And when and how do we begin?

As this pamphlet goes to press, the steel strike is gaining momentum from day to day. It seems clear that the steelworkers will win, and that Thatcher's Government will be partly crippled from now on. It will totter on (vicious in its desperation) until swept aside in a landslide election victory for Labour – on a hard-line left-wing programme – in a few years' time. The task of conquering full state power will face us then.

But perhaps we can say that the process – the process of conquering bastions of power *within* the framework of the present system – has already begun. Our class-opponents regard us as dangerously strong. We smashed the fascists in Lewisham in 1977 and they are more or less annihilated as a political threat now. And after several years of retreat and defeat in industrial struggles since 1974, we are suddenly recovering our old strength on this level, too. In the Labour Party, it is clearly those of us on the "hard left" who are most rapidly gaining ground. And as we gain in strength, our consciousness of strength grows as well.

The ruling class seem almost petrified. Their recent hysterical shrieks in the mass-media against one of the currents through which our strength is expressed – the *Militant* tendency – is only one particular reflection of their fear of all of us. Their ability to rule us is being steadily undermined.

This is the context in which the present document should be seen. It is not arguing that we can change our family lives *in advance* of the transition to socialism. On the contrary, one of its most basic assumptions is precisely that our personal and sexual conflicts are *expressions* of our social impotence, *expressions* of our collective weakness and inability to control our own lives. When we are weak, we feel weak, and our "ideas" – in this context as in others – are the ideas of our weakness, of our impotence. To the extent that we feel impotent and insecure, we look to the security of an "ideal marriage", a "perfect husband", an "ideal wife" to solve at least some of our problems. Women in particular get married because they have to. Given their oppression, their isolation from each other, their inability to discover their own collective strength, the *only* answer (for most women) is for each to surrender herself to a husband who will provide the necessary money, emotional security and the rest. It is only women who can sense their own solidarity and strength, and whose class-loyalties don't conflict with their sexual demands, who can begin to break all this down. And it is only under conditions of mounting class-struggle – in which the

state's *power* to isolate women is being undermined – that women can discover the strength and solidarity which all of us need.

This document is therefore *not* saying: "Don't bother about the struggle for power – you can solve your sex problems now!" It is saying that only the struggle for *political* power can form the basis on which the struggle for new forms of family solidarity can arise. In the case of the overwhelming majority of women – and working class women particularly – the struggle for political power comes up immediately against the problem of the family. Even women who work and are active trade unionists are still forced to "put the children first", to "put the home first" and therefore to surrender much of the power which class-solidarity can provide. And if it is asked: "What is stopping women from looking after each other's children?", or: "Why can't women unite and force their husbands to help?" – the answer is clear. The husbands have certain real powers and privileges to protect. They don't like women getting together too much. Apart from anything else, certain sexual anxieties are involved. The *privatization* of housework is intimately linked with the *privatization* of sexual bonds themselves. Certainly, the collectivization of housework, child-care and so on would be utterly incompatible with anything remotely resembling the prevailing sexual morality.

What do we do, then? There are those who say to men: "Nothing can be done until we have socialism. In the meantime, you have no alternative but to keep on exploiting and oppressing your wives. Your political effectiveness probably depends on it." No-one puts it quite like that, of course, but the message is clear. Millions of women, however, are getting other ideas. As the class-struggle unfolds, they are beginning to demand power for themselves. And this is confronting men with a choice: either fight *with* the women, or *against* them. In the final analysis, there is no middle way.

What I am saying in this document is that one place within which we can begin to conquer certain bastions of power even under the present system is within the family itself. This is not separate from the struggle for political power. It *is* the struggle for power – certainly and obviously as far as women are concerned, but indirectly (as I argue here) for men as well. I am not saying there is an immediate or easy solution. What I am saying is that we have really no choice but to do our best, starting now. *If* it is at all true that we can begin to conquer our family and sexual problems even today – if we find that we can – then it can only be for reasons which have to do with our wider strength as revolutionaries, as a movement and as a class. What force us into our crippling, exclusive family units are our insecurities. If we find that we are less insecure, it can only mean that we are collectively more strong.

Chris Knight,
24.1.1980.