

Ben Roberts circulated amongst Emerald St an analysis of social movements in which he said the social movements grew in 1968-75 in opposition to Social Democratic Statism, the movements referred to were primarily that of black people and women. BR. looks primarily at the growth of ideas and I believe missed the essence of what the motivating forces were to give rise to them. To see the women's movement as a reaction to Social Democratic Statism, or to see the essence of the movement as a growth of a new set of ideas does nothing to explain why or where those ideas came from. It completely misses the point of significance.

It wasn't Statism which changed peoples consciousness - it was contraception and particularly The Pill. B.R's analysis lacks any material base, but women's oppression does have a material base. Fundamental to women's oppression has been the control of their reproduction by others, primarily the men who owned them in a property relationship. What preceded the recent women's movement was the increased availability of 'safe' contraception and in particular the pill which produced a real change in women's experience of what was possible, a growth in expectations with respect to social and economic independence - education, training and employment prospects. It also created the space to explore sexuality without fear of pregnancy - without safe contraception this could not take place. It is precisely the lack of contraception and abortion, restricted by patriarchal religious taboos, that is holding women back in so many parts of the world - inevitably, if you are constantly bound to pregnancy and childcare. It's no accident that womens common terminology for pregnancy is to say 'they have fallen'.

For women then what has been a real consciousness raiser is the gap between expectations and experience, Our second class citizenship can no longer be justified in our eyes by the notion that our natural physical bodies were created primarily for reproduction.

The material base for the growth of the recent black movement must I believe be related to the struggles against Colonial rule - the establishment of self rule and self determination nearly all over the African and Asian continents between the '50's and '60's produced the motive force for increased self confidence to take up the particular struggles against second class citizenship in the States and elsewhere.

What is interesting is that both women's movements ie. 19th Century and 20th Century were given the lead by black movements for increased representation and control over their own lives and against unequal treatment in the USA which was demonstrably out of line with their written democratic constitution. But the 20th Century movements are fundamentally different from the 19th Century because of the material changes that have taken place - birth control and a change in the power relations between white and black peoples. This is not to

say that men or white races do not still have considerable power over women and black races but their position and ability to hold onto it has been seriously undermined for ever. The international dimension of the social movements is important to keep in mind always. The movements cannot wither away as BR suggests whilst expectation and experience are locked in contradiction - for the contradictions which face the international ruling class are likely to be constantly thrown into relief. In an anticipated prolonged economic crisis of international capital the age old attempts to oppose the independence of women and black people for example, against the limited self interest of the white male labour force - are likely to be a continuous theme both within nations and between them. It is true that in one part of the world activity may decline or become co-opted as BR points out but in other parts it will grow. If contraception for example becomes unavailable or illegal in Britain we would face a serious setback as we already face with the restrictions on abortion, but not an end to the movement. Women will not with their raised expectations accept restrictions without one hell of a fight. But in any case the international bourgeois class are faced with the contradictions of population explosions that they can't cope with, they are already trying to restrict the birthrate of black people while at times trying to increase that of the white.

Another example of a social movement that has developed since the late 60's is that of disabled people. In this instance it arises out of the direct experience of material changes which demonstrate an explicit gap between expectation and experience. In this instance it has been the technological revolution which has provided the means to overcome physical limitations and obstacles and the struggle has developed internationally against the social organisation which denies access to the resources to solve the human problems. This struggle comes face to face with the oppressive power and class relations which hold back liberation.

The significant difference between the women's movement, the black movement and the movement of disabled people as compared with the labour movement is that the first three are far less likely to become restricted to economism in their struggles although economism plays a part in them. The reason being that the obstacles they come up against are deep rooted power relations within the whole culture and organisation of society and not just between economic classes. Therefore they express the divisions that exist within the oppressed class as well as between them. I believe these movements to be of great political significance as they provide the key to the exposure of the deepening contradictions within capitalism that the ruling class are incapable of solving. Their struggles can not so easily be co-opted since they are everywhere, in public and private life. But the divisions they expose within the oppressed class will without doubt be continually exploited. B.R. in his analysis makes the mistake of equating movements with organisations, looking for some institutional framework within them. It is important to be clear of the differences. A movement contains a multitude of

groups and individuals who share some common understanding and some common objectives on a fairly generalised level. The forms of organisation, types of struggle and strategies adopted will inevitably cover a wide spectrum, from reformism to revolution - reform will inevitably be the common link.

As a revolutionary organisation what then should be our relationship and input into social movements? I feel I can only reiterate what has already been repeatedly said in BF. It has to be to pursue the struggle against racism, sexism (both against women and gay people) against the exclusion of physically impaired people, against ageism etc. within each of the movements, in our own organisation and within the labour movement. We can only effectively do this if we have an actively involved relationship within the movements. Our task must also be to raise the questions of Socialism and Anti Capitalist, Anti Imperialist perspectives within the social movements. We have to become part of the struggles to develop a clearer understanding both of the oppression of different social groups as experienced by them and what an integrated socialist set of objectives would look like.

Obviously we can't all be everywhere doing everything but ~~we~~ we can attempt to struggle against all forms of oppression in a particular area of political activity, and we can by being involved in different movement politics - have an educational input into our own organisation to raise the level of struggle on all fronts. This does mean allocating movement involvement political activity to particular groups of people within BF.

It is difficult at any one time to know where the growth points in a movement are. I think we have to aim to build relationships with the sections we feel are most advanced in relation to an understanding of their own oppression and politically socialist. The two are likely to coincide but not inevitably. We also should be building links with grass root activity where people are struggling for reforms or alternative structures and at the same time struggling with a whole new set of ideas about oppression and emancipation. Within the women's movement for instance this would mean developing organic links with socialist feminist groupings within feminist struggles, it also means working with women at the workplace, in TU's on housing estates, in mother and toddler groups etc. All part of past and present practice for at least some of BF's members. It also means building links with the most advanced elements of women's movements in other countries, to build a better informed understanding of the experience of imperialism and particular experience of patriarchal oppression in different social contexts.

I think sometimes we on the left in our impatience for change, can lose sight of the time scale in which change in ideas and practical reforms take place. There has in historical terms been a very rapid growth in consciousness throughout the world over the last century and in particular the last 15 years or so. Witness the enormous growth in left wing struggles around the world and in this country the enormous growth of organised groupings working for

alternative self defence and unity building structures. It is also a fact that many socially oppressed groups have come to recognise a common experience which they now explicitly denounce as oppression. We should be encouraged by this and not so easily demoralised by temporary setbacks.

It was pointed out by a member of Emerald St. that I have said nothing about the gay movement. I have used three examples and feel I can't cover everything here. I feel the development of the gay liberation movement requires its own separate analysis and for me this would require considerably more time than I can currently give to it. I am not at all clear at present what the motive forces were that gave rise to it but maybe it has very strong connections with the women's movement.