

HECATE

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Journal*



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Paula Ringuerra

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EDITORIAL

An inherent difficulty in being women activists in a capitalist society is the multi-layered nature of our situation. How do we begin to attack the dead-weight of oppression which presses so heavily upon us? Do we form or join political groups working for the overthrow of sexism and capitalism in our society? Do we delve into women's history, literature and art, so that we attain self-identity and situate ourselves within *human* culture? Do we set up women's shelters, housing and health services, rape crisis centres, employment and legal aid? Or task forces in education, and women's centres? Or express ourselves creatively? Or concentrate on liberating our sexuality? It is imperative that women be involved in all these areas, and many more. Unfortunately, there are physical, mental and emotional limits to how much any one woman can be committed. It is a choice we all must make. We are inclined to be overwhelmed by the enormity of such a task and feel guilty at our incapacity to tackle more than a small portion. But surely this diversity has been one of the more positive aspects of the women's movement, in that it has enabled us to make a many-pronged attack on sexist society.

To develop strategy is the major problem confronting the women's movement today. Over the past two years, the Labor Government has made many gestures towards the demands of women, such as women's advisors, funding for women's centres, and so on. However, they give with one hand and take away with the other (witness the *debacle* over pre-schools), as is the function of any bourgeois democratic government.

The manner in which credit for the gains women have made for themselves can be arrogated by the Labor Government indicates how the women's movement can be used for political advantage. Recent publicity has been given to the dissatisfaction felt within the women's movement regarding the workings of International Women's Year Committee and its programmes. Government funding can be of great assistance, but it can also be used to contain radical demands. Welfare-Stateism and 'band-aidism' can be used to deflect or depressurize areas of conflict: the NEAT scheme will not abolish female unemployment any more than International Women's Year will remove sexism from schools. It is necessary, therefore, that while women are involved in these activities which are of the utmost importance in improving the actual situations of women, that political considerations be basic. Conversely, what woman engaged in active struggles in setting up rape crisis centres, publishing newspapers or journals, lobbying for abortion law repeal does not practically encounter the limits of an oppressive patriarchal structure? Practice without theory is hazardous, and theory without practice is sterile and futile.

As feminists and socialists, we view this journal as a means of providing a forum for discussing, at a fairly theoretical level, issues relating to

the liberation of women. There is just too little known about the position of women, past and present, to situate ourselves in capitalist society and develop effective strategies. We need to know who and what we are, and how we have contributed to our present state to be able to continue with our struggle for liberation. We need consciousness, not just of the kind which enables us to recognize sexism in ourselves and our society, but the consciousness that comes from having a solid base in theory—of history, literature, art, all aspects of culture— which explains and gives us the personal, moral and ideological strength to take part in revolutionary struggles, let alone change ourselves. Ignorance of our history (as a part of *human* history) leaves women in the position of “rootlessness”, and permits an idealization of women and other oppressed people (the working-class, migrants, blacks, momosexuals) Concomitant with this idealization is the patronage that many sisters bestow on members of these and other groups.

A growing demand to discover knowledge about ourselves and to learn from each other must surely develop into a critique of educational structures, their authority, how they serve capitalist society and how they must be broken down to be controlled by and serve the interests of the students and workers who constitute the actual institutions. At present, knowledge is not only compartmentalised but is passed on in a closed, distorted and hierarchical way. Certain areas of knowledge, even entire methodologies, are often fenced out of serious academic study. Hopefully, *HECATE* will perform a function of interdisciplinary crossfertilization, of a sharing of knowledge and adding to the tiny but ever-growing resources and information on women, as well as providing another avenue for the creative expressions of a new consciousness.

We decided after much discussion to opt for an editorial board structure for *HECATE*. This was because we knew from past experiences with editorial collectives that almost invariably a couple of members of the group end up doing most of the hard work. The problems that usually occur in collectives have not happened and all members, assisted by others, have been able to participate fully in all aspects of producing the journal. The board is an open group, and hopefully will alter and extend to other parts of Australia and overseas.

The Great Goddess Hecate is anathema to those who worship Western father gods, governing as she does the aspects of strong women who demand the exercise of choice and individuality. Hesiod, no admirer of women, wrote that she was "almost the chief of all the gods"; typically, this statement has been either dismissed, misunderstood or regarded as an unfortunate error by male classicists. If anything, Hesiod was too cautious. Hecate is the ruler of life and death, fertility and infertility, medicine and poison, the kindly assistant of women in childbirth or the compassionate goddess who relieved the burden of unwanted pregnancies. To women she has good intent but she can be 'destructive' to men. In other words, she was the Goddess invoked by women who desired freedom from male tyranny.

Magic, inspiration and understanding are her gifts; she governs the creative, unconscious mind; she can grant women the power of awakening or dampening male desire; she has the power to curse conquerors or unjust rulers and 'Zeus himself honours Hecate so greatly that he never denies her the ancient power which she has always enjoyed; of bestowing on mortals, or withholding from them, any desired gift.' (Robert Graves.) Hecate was around long before the father gods appeared on the scene and one whose powers were so great and so basic that they could only be obscured, never eroded.

Hecate was too fearful (to men) to be allotted a spouse and so she escaped the dreary fate of most other matriarchal goddesses. She represents the cycle of the seasons; a triple goddess. Persephone is her maiden aspect, Demeter her life-giving maternal role and as Herself she is the dark moon, the goddess of the underworld. But the seed must be buried (Hecate) before it sprouts (Persephone) and bears fruits (Demeter). Hecate is at once crone and virgin, as Persephone is virgin and mother, and Demeter is mother and post-menopausal woman, Hecate is Everywoman.

Hecate has been traduced as the goddess of evil, the queen of hell, the ruler of succubae, ghouls and vampires. Such a powerful Goddess who could not be tamed could only be vilified lest by worshipping Her, women could learn to control their fertility and invoke a power superior to that of the quarrelsome, silly, rape-prone and vainglorious 'deities' worshipped by the Hellenes, or the vindictive father god of Christianity.

Despite the arrogant sexism of the Greeks and Romans, Hecate was accorded a frightened respect. The life-denying misogyny of the Christian Church Fathers' terror of female sexuality exceeded even that of their predecessors so that Hecate became a demoness, an embodiment of everything gruesome and perverted. The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to birth control, abortion and autonomy for women is well known, but in previous centuries such forbidden practices were apt to end in one being tortured and burnt alive if one were caught or even suspected of 'witchcraft'. In the middle ages rebellious women worshipped Hecate as Diana or Aradia, the Queen of Elfin or Faerie, the Goddess of the Crossroads or the heath. She was the patroness of the midwives and the women healers whose traditional knowledge of medicine passed from woman to woman over the centuries.

Accordingly, we have named our journal 'Hecate', a symbolic gesture to all that is proud, untameable, autonomous, compassionate, angry, strong, creative, intelligent and brave in women that, although repressed and denied for thousands of years has never been crushed, and now pushes towards the light like shooting blades of barley. Hecate is mythologically represented as a bitch and as the witches would have said 'So mote it be'.