

# A WORKING CLASS WOMAN'S VIEW

No matter what views I may hold about it, on each occasion I have attended the Big Flame Summer School, it has made quite a dramatic impact on my own life both politically and personally. If any individual doesn't come away with many questions and contradictions buzzing around in their heads, then a glimpse, or rather a bloody great look at their personal politics may be in order.

As a working class older woman coming very late into the left I was particularly interested in the theme of this year's summer school: **Class and Sexism**. The development and recent emphasis given to sexism, sexuality and violence against women is of major importance to me, as a youth worker working with young working class women, and is essential to the development of a socialist feminist perspective. My sex, age and class have added to my oppression within the left and this feeling has been reinforced by other working class women who agree that because of their political position they have felt isolated and alienated. Isolated from one's own class because of one's consciousness and alienated from the usual middle class 'trendy lefty' because of difficulty in understanding and expressing one's own gut political feelings on a purely theoretical level. Of course, working class women also see the world differently from middle class women.

## WHOSE LANGUAGE?

Out of the problems of trying to understand each other and what we were trying to say to one another at the Summer School came the question 'Well, how can men possibly understand us if there is a difficulty between ourselves due to class differences?' It may be OK having the correct phraseology and faultless theories, which some men and

perhaps some middle class women think they have but if these are another person's insults or oppression then surely, they should be looked at more critically.

One speaker suggested that 'no one was born with words' and that there should be no excuse for women not to educate themselves and be as verbally verbose as men. Any working class person especially women would suggest that this statement is a nonsense as well as being condescending and patronising as it is a class biased comment. I don't think for one moment that it was meant like that but it illustrates how our own basic personal politics are so important to our own development and also for a more realistic view of the way forward in the future.

## CHILDREN + SOCIALISM

Looking at the contradictions between theory and practice I question the behaviour of adults who impose unacceptable restrictions on children by the use of the obvious dominant power relationship which exists between child and adult. Young people have a very strong sense of fair play and unless they are being brought up as 'young socialists' (very dubious, in a capitalist society, anyway) it is very difficult to grasp what is going on at a BF Summer School. Most children are not used to making their own decisions, speaking their minds, having their demands met just because they are right or just dem-

ands. As adults we cannot expect 'instant socialism' from young people just because that's our theory of how a socialist society should work. If in fact we are trying to sell them socialism let's have the courage of our own convictions and at least let them trust us as adults.

## CAN MEN UNDERSTAND WOMEN?

One of the most salient points which came from the week, and it was said over and over again, was



that the men did not understand what the women were trying to say to them. Do they only understand when women write or speak in a male language with male theories as guidelines and using a man made frame of reference where knowledge is concerned? Perhaps that is why the images of women include those of women as being either thick or dumb. Men say 'I don't understand you' but are they labelled in the same derisive terms as wom-

en in the same situation?

Feminism and its literature and theories must be taken seriously for a female culture to emerge and function, lip service isn't good enough. Men have asked 'what can we do?' I believe that they should take time out and listen and question, listen and question, again and again. Each small comment made by a woman may be a tip of an iceberg. It may have in it the deep rooted feelings of women's fears, anxieties

and frustrations and above all her ideas of how her world view and her own reality is formed. Men, our world is different from yours. We have to understand you in order to understand our oppression, so how can it be too difficult for you to understand us? Where would the Women's Movement be if they took the attitude that because it's difficult it's best left alone?

Another idea to think about is

the idea that women are more perceptive to what is happening around them, why is this? Could it be that we have to take in more of what is happening purely from a point of view of survival?

I would be very sad if the Summer School did not run as usual in the future; it's the only opportunity, for me anyway, to have space to develop my ideas in a mixed setting and to view how I feel about my position as a working class woman within that setting. The Summer Schools are revolutionary because of the ideas which emerge from them, which show the way forward for BF as an organisation and also the individual, this must be so or the women in BF would never have taken the floor this year at Beechwood. (That made me feel very proud - am I allowed to use that phrase as a socialist?) Thank you for an enlightening week and I am only sorry I cannot convey the whole of the emotion which I felt. I especially enjoyed the closeness found in the company of the women who let me be a part of them and I found the women's sauna and massage night an experience of caring and sharing besides fun and laughter.

My first summer school taught me not to be afraid or ashamed of being a woman, mother and an anti-heterosexual feminist. I don't quite know what this is but I'm sure feminists involved in a heterosexual relationship will understand! Be glad that there is criticism, out of criticism comes struggle and from struggle, change.

Pat