

man ~

on her way to equality

powerless position is determined by their inability to take an active role in capitalist production. Women have little control over the conditions that govern their lives, and their economic dependence on men is reflected in emotional dependence, passivity, and other "typical" female personality traits. Thus women tend to be conservative, fearful, and supportive of the status quo.

Benston indicates that society has to take responsibility for the work which is currently done "privately" by housewives. Housework must be integrated into the public economy, through the setting up of day-care centres, communal eating places, and public laundries. As Benston says,



"when such work is moved into the public sector, then the material basis for discrimination against women will be gone."

Benston's theory, which to a great extent derives from Engels, has been the starting point for a great debate in the women's movement. History seems to show that although socialism carries with it vast improvements in women's position, it has not yet managed to establish full equality of the sexes in any country. China is a case in point. There, discrimination against women continues to exist, in practice if not in theory, in spite of massive gains since 1949.

Half of China's doctors are women, and women comprise more than half the work force in the textile industry. All highly mechanized tasks are done by both men and women.

Most jobs in heavy industry are performed by men. A small percentage of women are employed in heavy industry, but their tasks are usually confined to painting the finished machines or working in the day-care centres.

Most nursery and elementary school teachers are women. While women are

beginning to work alongside men, doing equal and similar tasks, many men are still reluctant to do what they consider to be "women's work." And work such as teaching small children is still viewed as "women's work."

Even when men are employed at the primary school level, they tend to teach specialized courses, such as factory skills, physical education, and music. Going up the educational ladder, the percentage of female teachers decreases, until male teachers are in the majority at the university level. The most prestigious and highly paid jobs are still heavily male.

The area of the working world least accessible to women is the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Whereas women are not barred from the PLA, those who have membership with it do mainly tasks such as logistics, medicine, and clerical work. This seems to be a rather serious contradiction, given the important role played by the PLA in education and in promoting the study of Mao Tsetung thought. By not encouraging women to play a significant role in the PLA, the government effectively bars them from complete equality in leadership roles in China.

Wage differentials between men and women also exist, but these result mostly from the fact that women are not found in certain jobs. Nurses, for example, are paid less than doctors, and are almost always women. Pay on the communes is determined by "work points", which are accumulated and paid in cash at the end of the year. The number of points a worker receives used to depend entirely on his or her strength, skill and training, years of previous work, and political attitudes. The criterion of physical strength meant that average pay for women on communes would probably never equal that of men, unless agriculture were mechanized to a point at which physical strength would no longer be required. But work points are now being allocated on a rather different basis, as a result of the changes made during the cultural revolution. Political work is now emphasized more than before, and women can now potentially equal men in work points earned.

Men seem to dominate leadership roles in the People's Republic. This domination extends outside the political realm, to factories and primary schools, even where a large majority of workers are female.

In rural areas, changes are even slower to come. Whereas women's leadership roles vary from commune to commune, where female leadership does exist it is mainly in the realm of leading and educating other women, and is confined to women's affairs (organizing women to enter the work force, raising the political level of the women, providing birth control information, and promoting the increased mechanization of housework).

There are several areas in which China's policies on "the women question" are clearly in advance of North America. Family planning is encouraged by the

government at all levels. Couples learn about birth control through local clinics, study groups, and at their places of employment. Women can have an abortion on demand and are assured of a safe and easy operation. Birth control devices are freely available to both men and women.

Women get a leave of 50 to 60 days from work before and after they gave birth, with continued pay and no loss of job or seniority.

Day care facilities are plentiful in China, and care is provided for infants after the mother's maternity leave terminates, until the child reaches school age. Infants are kept in "feeding stations" located at the mother's place of work. Older children go to nurseries, either at the father's place of work or in the neighbourhood of the family. However families are not forced to use these facilities, and can make their own arrangements, with live-in relatives, for example. Fees for child care services range from about \$4 to \$4.40 a month: this includes three hot meals a day, or four if the child stays longer. Overnight facilities are also available, for use by parents who attend evening meetings, or if one parent works the night shift in a factory.

Although divorce is allowed, it is discouraged, as it is felt that incompatibilities can be tolerated in a marriage because marriage is only one aspect of life for the woman as well as for the man. Since women now view their new, active role in society and the labour force as the real priority in their lives, marriage (seldom a romantic, positive experience in the past) is not the only satisfaction which women look for in life.

Divorce occurs at the rate of about thirty or forty a year. A couple who are both in agreement on wanting one will be granted a divorce, provided that adequate provision is made for the protection of the children. When only one party wants a divorce, a hearing is held where both parties present their cases.

In Felix Greene's A Divorce Trial in China, the judge reprimands the husband in question for thinking himself culturally superior to his wife, and points out that it is the husband's responsibility to help his wife raise her cultural level. Understanding the old tradition in which husbands were frequently cruel in their behaviour towards their mothers, the judge is sympathetic toward the husband in question. "Our whole country is in the process of changing from one set of values to another. That is a very difficult task. Changes of attitude can only come when we consciously become aware of the old values which have to be eradicated. We understand the difficulties, and we ask you to do your best."

The following article is based on a conversation with a Montreal woman who went to China last summer with a group of students and workers, sponsored by McGill's Centre for East Asian Studies. These were a few of her impressions of what life is like for women in China.

Women walk around holding hands in China — if they're good friends, they just naturally hold hands. The first thing when we arrived, and they came to greet us at the airport — they had never met us before, they had no idea who we were — and they came up to us, very uninhibited, and started shaking our hands, and the women took our hands and started walking with us. They began telling us about their life and asking

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