

Roscoe Talk - Women, Love and Anarchism: The Rise of British Second Wave Feminism

– introduce myself – based on article ‘Women, Love and Anarchism: Anarcho-Sexism and The Rise of British Second Wave Feminism’ due to be published in Institute of Anarchist Studies Newsletter

1. The Resurgence of Anarcho-Sexism

NICOLA LANE: From a girl’s point of view the important thing to remember about the 60s is that it was totally male dominated. A lot of girls just rolled joints – it was what you did while you sat quietly in the corner, nodding your head. You were not really encouraged to be a thinker. You were there really for fucks and domesticity. The ‘old lady’ syndrome. ‘My lady’. So Guinevere-y. It was quite a difficult time for a girl.¹

Britain belonged in the 1960s to the young. It belonged to a generation that knew nothing of the shackles of war time austerity experienced by their parents, leaving them free to express their most radical social, political and sexual desires. Both men and women were brought together in pursuit of their new worlds producing a flourishing countercultural movement that was inspired by the New Left ideology of Maoism, Trotskyism and anarchism.

However, in reality the years 1960-1969 were not quite as simple as the above statements would suggest as despite the fact that men and women were both involved in striving for a new social order, their relationships were still far from equal. The liberalism of the 1960s did create a huge increase in opportunities for women, but modified little in terms of the attitudes of their male counterparts. As Arthur Marwick explains:

the intense pressures, the almost compulsory promiscuity, could be bearing down excessively on women, depriving them of genuinely free choices and forcing them into activities which they did not enjoy, and perhaps even found unpleasant; or at any rate left them feeling oppressed, used, exploited, treated without humanity except as expressed through the sexual interest of a male lover.²

Therefore, it is important to not fall prey to the stereotype of the ‘Swinging Sixties’ and to look beyond its legacy of free love to its reality of sexual exploitation.

The permissive society of the 1960s meant that sex was everywhere. This was not only due to changes in obscenity law, with the Obscene Publications Acts of 1959 and 1964, but also due to the new meanings attached with sex: as Gerard DeGroot explains ‘in the Sixties, obscenity was an expression of freedom’³. The end of the *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* ban in 1963 heralded the beginning of a sexual revolution in Britain, and not just for Philip Larkin. But a sexualised Britain was a double-edged

¹ J. Green, *Days in the Life: Voices from the English underground, 1961-1971*, (London, 1988), p. 401.

² Marwick, *The Sixties*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 680.

³ G. DeGroot, *The 60s Unplugged: A kaleidoscopic history of a disorderly decade*, (London, 2008), p. 437.

sword for its female occupants – for some, it meant the opportunity to an unprecedented level of sexual expression, whereas for others it was exposure to new forms of pressures and exploitations. Larkin's third stanza states:

Everyone felt the same,
And every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game.⁴

This represents a very typical male opinion of sexual relations during the 1960s: the assumption that women were enjoying it just as much as men but the reality was often very different. Nowhere was this conflict more apparent than in the world of pornography, as Marcus Collins explains:

It spoke their language of women's sexual emancipation and shared something of their hope that the sexes were coming closer upon the basis of mutual desire. Within these magazines appeared a utopian vision of a sexualised society populated by two sexes undergoing parallel emancipations [...] Yet, [...] pornographers found mutuality easier to imagine than to achieve.⁵

Climactic heights were reached with the advent of Women's Liberation at the end of the decade, which sharply separated the genders in their quests for sexual liberation and created an anti-pornographic tirade from feminists. Pornography magazines responded in tones that were at worst anti-feminist and misogynist, and at best regressive and old-fashioned providing 'escapist fantasies of emancipated-but-not-liberated girls to counterbalance a hatred of autonomous women'⁶. Of course this was solely restricted to the society created by pornographic magazines, and can not be taken as truly representative of every male attitude in the 1960s, especially not of those who were considered to be part of the counterculture; the pornography enthusiasts⁷ that frequented Soho's Walker's Court were in sharp contrast to the marijuana smoking hippies and anarchists that hung out in Gandalf's Garden and Mushroom Books. However, the pervasive nature of the pornography industry in the 1960s meant that it was difficult for any sector of the media to ignore it entirely. *King*, the *Pirelli Calendar*, *Penthouse* and *Mayfair* were all launched in this decade creating a conspicuous presence within British society. The publications of the underground press were strongly infiltrated by this epidemic of erotica, meaning they were often of an extremely graphic and explicit nature.

The most infamous purveyors of countercultural pornography were *Oz* and *IT*. As publications of the underground they were certainly influenced by anarchist theory, and would in turn have been read by anarchists. Indeed, Geoff Ingarfield's article about *Oz* published in *Zero* in 1977 claims that 'for anarchists, *Oz* was important

⁴ P. Larkin, 'Annus Mirabilis' in P. Larkin, *High Windows*, (London, 1974).

⁵ M. Collins, *Modern Love: an intimate history of men and women in twentieth-century Britain*, (London, 2003), p. 135.

⁶ M. Collins 'The Pornography of Permissiveness: men's sexuality and women's emancipation in mid twentieth-century Britain' *History Workshop Journal*, (Spring, 1999), 47, p. 117.

⁷ Frank Mort identifies the visitors to Walker's Court as being 'European and American tourists and London businessmen', Mort, *Capital Affairs*, (London, 2010), p. 243.

because it raised issues scarcely recognised by the rest of the left'⁸. Considering the extensive readership of these magazines it is likely that the pornography printed in *Oz* and *IT* would have had a significant degree of influence upon the attitudes of sexuality within the anarchist milieu at this time, and can therefore be seen as promoters of a resurgence of anarcho-sexism that was evident in the 1960s and 1970s. *Oz* was arguably the most notorious, but numerous front covers of *IT* displayed naked women⁹ with the occasional '*IT* girl' gracing the centre pages¹⁰. Issue four contains a handy article written by Ray Durnat entitled, 'Strippers: A Guide to Soho Clubs', which describes 'an almost intellectual moment when two girls, one behind the other, started shimmying violently'¹¹.

Oz largely gained its notoriety due to the hugely controversial 'Schoolkids Issue' of May 1970, which was compiled following an advert in *Oz* 26 stating:

Some of us are feeling old and boring, we invite our readers who are under 18 to come and edit the April issue. We will choose one person, several or accept collective applications from a group of friends.¹²

As a result, a group of around twenty 'kids' aged fifteen to eighteen met in 'a dimly lit and exotically furnished basement flat in Palace Gardens Terrace'¹³, home to *Oz* editor Richard Neville and *Oz* 28 was born two months later. Huge controversy ensued, centering around its highly explicit content, which resulted in the longest obscenity trial in British legal history at that time. For six weeks in the summer of 1971 the three editors of *Oz*: Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis, were forced to defend themselves against 'conspiracy to corrupt public morals'¹⁴ and were eventually sentenced to imprisonment. Neville received fifteen months, whereas Anderson and Dennis both received nine months, although these were set aside following appeal.

To many, the trial was seen as something far deeper than just a question of morality in one particular publication. It was symbolic of the chasm between the old and new order, between the establishment and the anti-establishment, between culture and counterculture.

And so it was that the sixties became sandwiched between two landmark trials: those of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Oz*, representing a Britain that clearly was not prepared for the sexual liberation with which it was flooded in those ten short years. The *Chatterley* episode apparently signalled an age of relaxation on censorship, whereas the *Oz* trial offered an antidote, a regression to more oppressive and less

⁸ Ingarfield, 'OZ', p. 9.

⁹ See, for example, *IT* (April 21-28, 1967) No. 11, p. 1; *IT* (January 17-30, 1969), No.48, p. 1; *IT* (March 14-27, 1969), No. 52, p. 1; *IT* (March 27, 1970) No. 76, p. 1.

¹⁰ See *IT* (June 30 – July 14, 1967) No. 16, pp. 8-9; *IT* (May 2-15, 1968), No. 29, p. 6.

¹¹ R. Durnat, 'Strippers: A Guide to Soho Clubs', in *IT* (28 September, 1966), No. 4, p. 11.

¹² C. S. Murray, 'I was an Oz Schoolkid', *The Guardian* (2nd August 2001) from guardian.co.uk, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2001/aug/02/pressandpublishing.g2> (accessed 12/09/10).

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Gerry & Mark. 'The Rupert Bear Controversy: Defence and Reactions to the Cartoon in the *Oz* Obscenity Trial', <http://pers-www.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/rupage.html> (accessed 12/09/10).

expressive times leaving those involved wondering whether anything had ever really changed.

But the critics of *Oz* were not just the old-fashioned prudes of the Establishment. The publication's apparently light-hearted exhibitions of naked women and explicit pornography held much deeper repercussions than just the courtroom drama. Marsha Rowe was the secretary of *Oz* in Sydney. She was hired as a 'heartmelting teenager' for her 'dark eyes flashing under a halo of wavy brown hair'¹⁵ and was soon put to work by Neville: 'Richie had her typing his copy and I had her making the tea'¹⁶. In 1972 Rowe launched *Spare Rib*, the longest running British feminist magazine, an action she largely attributes to the messages portrayed by *Oz*:

During the trial, the prosecuting barrister accused the community of which the magazine was a part of being without love. Richard Neville responded that, on the contrary, *Oz* was against the guilt and obsession of repressed sexuality and that '*Oz* was trying to redefine love, to broaden it, extend it and revitalise it, so it could be a force of release and not one of entrapment'.

The irony of this was that, while this may have been true for men, it was rarely the case for women. The underground press used sex-objectifying images which had been developed from being fairly romantic to stridently sadistic. The women who worked on its magazines and newspapers served the men and did the office and production work rather than any editorial work.¹⁷

Spare Rib became 'a product of the counterculture and a reaction against it'¹⁸. It was not the graphic content of *Oz* that was the most shocking; it was its objectification of women. David Caute explains that 'male chauvinism was often decked out as 'sexual liberation', involving a gallop into pornography'¹⁹. Flick through the 'School Kids' issue, and the Rupert Bear cartoon seems no less disturbing than the reduction of 'small dark, fragile and very beautiful'²⁰ Berti aged fifteen on page nine to 'Jail Bait of the Month'²¹.

It is not just the 'School Kids' issue that is guilty of such sexism; a huge amount of *Oz*'s content was dedicated to portraying the women of the counterculture as little more than sexual playthings. The front cover of issue 25 of *Oz* depicts a couple having sex, a man injecting himself and a woman smoking a joint while a baby looks on with the caption 'Hippie Atrocities'²². The woman smoking is Louise Ferrier, Richard Neville's girlfriend, and a discussion between the couple about the cover is printed in Neville's autobiography:

'I look like a junkie tart.'
'That was the idea,' I said.²³

¹⁵ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, p. 50

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁷ M. Rowe, 'Introduction' in ed. M. Rowe, *Spare Rib Reader* (Middlesex, 1982), p. 15.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁹ D. Caute, *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades*, (London, 1988), p. 235.

²⁰ *Oz* (May 1970), No. 28, p. 4.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²² *Oz* (December 1969), No. 25, p. 1.

²³ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, p. 180.

Although the cover was supposed to be satirical, a comment on the criticisms made of *Oz* by 'mounting media paranoia'²⁴, it is significant of Neville's attitude towards women that he was willing to make his own girlfriend look like a 'junkie tart' in order to sell magazines. Louise had also appeared naked on a previous cover of *Oz* with Jenny Kee, following a series of sexual relations between Neville, Ferrier and Kee²⁵. Neville clearly enjoyed publicly sharing his private relationships, and he expected his readers to do the same²⁶.

Indeed it was this element of participation that made the pornography in *Oz* different from the pornography in magazines such as *Penthouse* and *Playboy*. *Oz* used women from the underground, women that the contributors to the magazine knew well, making them famous within the 'scene'. These women set the precedent to how the remaining female population within British counterculture, including the anarchist movement, were supposed to behave, as Nicola Lane recalls:

You had to fill so many roles: you had to be pretty and you had to be 'a good fuck', that seemed to be very important [...] It was paradise for men in their late twenties: all these willing girls. But the trouble with the willing girls was that a lot of the time they were willing not because they particularly fancied the people concerned but because they felt they ought to. There was a huge pressure to conform to non-conformity.²⁷

In contrast, the women featured in magazines such as *Penthouse* and *Playboy* were strictly unattainable and offered 'escapist fantasies'²⁸ to its readers. The consumers of mainstream pornography were therefore realistic, and able to clearly distinguish between fantasy and reality. Those indulging in the pornography of the underground, however, were led to believe that the worlds of fantasy and reality were converging, that a quick stroll down King's Road would allow them to attain the sexually liberal woman of their dreams. The underground press not only made pornography acceptable, but it made it fully accessible and, to an extent, interactive.

The fantastical sexually liberated world created in the underground press regularly filtered into countercultural and therefore anarchist society, which massively affected the ways in which men viewed their female comrades. Unrealistic sexual expectations often piled unwanted pressures onto women, as has been demonstrated in previous testimonials from Marsha Rowe and Nicola Lane, and it can be seen in countless other examples. These attitudes even permeated campaign material, as a letter printed in *Freedom* in 1964 demonstrates. It is written by Maria Fyfe, an anarchist from Glasgow, complaining about a leaflet published by the Bristol Anarchists as part of their anti-conscription campaign entitled "Do You Sleep With Your Girlfriend?" which she labels 'a childish piece of attention-mongering'. To Fyfe, the leaflet portrays women as being 'for sleeping with only'; whereas she had previously found that the anarchist males 'treated you as a whole human being, not

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *Oz* (December 1968), No. 17, p. 1.

²⁶ Although he did originally object to Louise's first topless cover for issue eight of *Oz* as recounted by photographer Keith Morris: 'Richard actually didn't like all this; Richard tried to stop it on the grounds of morality, i.e.: my girlfriend is not baring her tits all over this magazine [...] Louise didn't give a stuff and so the deal in the end was that it was cropped at the waist.' Green, *Days in the Life*, p. 423.

²⁷ Green, *Days in the Life*, p. 418.

²⁸ Collins 'The Pornography of Permissiveness', p. 117.

only as a prospective bedmate'. She closes the letter by stating: 'the attitude in this leaflet, comrades, of male superiority is nothing but shocking in a movement supposed to be egalitarian'²⁹.

The sexual liberation constructed by the publications of the underground also had a significant impact upon the manner in which many conducted their personal relationships, as the idea of 'free love' often proved to be far more attractive in theory than in practice. The relationship between Richard Neville and Louise Ferrier was full of jealous spats over infidelities, culminating in self-doubt and confusion on Neville's part following his discovery of Ferrier sleeping with fellow *Oz* editor Felix Dennis: 'I was angry and hurt, but I was so ashamed of this pain – which contradicted the theories of *Playpower* – that I shut my mouth.'³⁰ Like Frankenstein's monster, Neville's sexually liberal world had turned to harm its master demonstrating that it was not just women that fell victim to the Swinging Sixties.

Richard Neville's sister, Jill Neville, wrote a novel about the personal relationships between the members of the counterculture, documenting the personal lives of four young revolutionaries living in Paris in 1968: Polly, Giorgio, Anna and Jane. *The Love Germ* was a fictional account, but its events and characters bore striking resemblance to those involved with the relationship between Jill and Angelo Quattrocchi, a flamboyant Italian anarchist with whom she eventually 'parted in a flurry of jealousy and distress'³¹. Polly and Giorgio's relationship clearly demonstrates the differences between sexual liberation and sexual emancipation: Polly is expected to sleep with Giorgio, yet still pick up his dirty socks. He is the master of a horde of commands - "'Scrub my back – don't look at the pimples'"³² – yet failure to comply leaves Polly feeling unreasonable, 'a harpy, a shrew, her soft hair turned to snakes of aggression'³³. It is a tale about the servitude to which women of the counterculture were subjected through the false promises of the liberal lifestyle.

However, if the author of the 1998 edition of *The Love Germ's* preface, Fay Wheldon, is to be believed, the novel stands at the cusp of a second, more dramatic, sexual revolution and can be seen as a beacon of hope, rather than a cry for help. This revolution was concerned with questions of gender rather than of sexual relationships, and the counterculture would never be the same again:

The day was about to dawn when they would no longer be prepared to make coffee, fetch the wine, wash the shirts, scrub the back, fill the bed, pay the rent and in general be seen as bit-part players in the male drama of art, thought and politics.³⁴

For the main consequence of the overwhelming resurgence of anarcho-sexism in the Sixties was not one of sexually servile women performing every bidding of their male masters, it was actually that women learnt from their male counterparts how to find

²⁹ M. Fyfe, 'Bristol Bourgeois?', *Freedom*, (30th May, 1964), p. 4.

³⁰ Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, p. 177.

³¹ F. Wheldon, 'Preface' in J. Neville, *The Love Germ*, (London, 1998), p. ix.

³² Neville, *The Love Germ*, p. 10.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁴ Wheldon, 'Preface', p. viii.

their voice. They were shown how to demand the revolution, and they quickly started demanding it for themselves. As a result, British feminism at its birth was not an entirely new strand of political thought: it was hugely influenced by the anarchist theories that were so prominent within the underground of the Sixties.

Oz published its final issue in 1973, completely owing its discontinuation to its failure to address the issues of Women's Liberation:

What finally knackered the underground was its complete inability to deal with women's liberation. For the underside of the underground's romantic revolt is its treatment of women. Men defined themselves as rebels against society in ways limited to their own sex, excluding women except as loyal companions or mother-figures.³⁵

With cap in hand, the men of the counterculture were forced to accept the dawn of a new revolution rising from the ashes of their own failed experiments.

I. The Anarchy of British Feminism

I could acknowledge that the common deadpan response from men when I or another woman spoke *might* be because we had said something foolish. On the other hand, this was not how they behaved with men. If they disagreed with one another, they engaged and argued. Our remarks seemed, in contrast, to just fall into oblivion.³⁶

In 1967 Sheila Rowbotham met Henry Wortis at the East London Vietnam Solidarity Committee. Wortis, from Boston, was involved in Stop It: a group composed of Americans opposing the Vietnam War. While giving Rowbotham a lift home he introduced her to a new concept: male chauvinism:

People were always telling me I talked too much and men in left meetings often made me feel as if I was being unruly, which made me more defiantly unruly. But, Henry went on, it was because I was a woman.³⁷

The problem had finally been verbalised. It no longer 'lay buried [and] unspoken', but was identified and out in the open: women were being treated unequally, and it was time to do something about it.³⁸

The main obstacle was that the women's positions within the left wing organisations were completely subjective to the whim of their male counterparts, who were often far too busy bickering amongst themselves to take any great notice of the female members. Both sexes were massively hindered by the dearth of mature communication that existed between the genders within the left wing groups, but it was the women who particularly suffered as a result.

It would appear that both men and women within the New Left groups were struggling to relate to each other on an intellectual level, so instead they reverted to communicating with each other through sexual means. Rowbotham recalls her sexual encounters with men of left wing groups almost as though they were

³⁵ D. Widgery, 'What Went Wrong', *Oz* (Winter 1973), No. 48, p. 3.

³⁶ Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, pp. 161-2.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁸ B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York, 1963), p. 13.

opportunities for women to finally assert dominance over the men, although this in turn led to even greater gender separation:

I knew that in some of my encounters with men sexually I could be as detached and controlled as they sometimes were with me. I was, I thought, 'using' them sexually for physical satisfaction. I interpreted this as an inversion of the traditional male approach to sex and thus a dead end which simply reproduced relations of estrangement.³⁹

But while it may have been empowering in the short term, the long-term effects of being sexually active had a rather damaging impact upon the image of women in the political underground, and therefore upon the progress of the achievement of gender equality within the movement, as it largely resulted in confused opinions over the correct way for a woman to behave. Roz Baxandall explains the situation in America:

If she doesn't want to sleep with men, a woman is 'hung up'. If she does, she's known as someone's wife or girlfriend. And men still look down on women who have gone through lots of men in the movement. The reverse, of course, is not true.⁴⁰

Through attempting to take control of their own bodies, the women of the New Left were instead perpetuating the male-defined image of themselves as little more than sexual playthings. It was becoming apparent that new modes of expression were required, and these had to be on solely female terms. It was an issue that was actively revived by second wave feminism, but the idea of the concept of 'woman' as being a male-defined object had already been discussed over twenty years ago. Simone de Beauvoir notably declared in 1949 that 'the concept of femininity is artificially shaped by custom and fashion, it is imposed upon each woman from without'⁴¹, whereas Rowbotham recalls an occasion in her memoirs where she jotted down some notes about the male-defined concept of 'woman' at an early Women's Liberation meeting in 1969:

While women were accepted in an abstract way in an intellectual or academic milieu, men appeared to find it 'difficult' – I wrote impossible at first, but crossed this out as too pessimistic – to permit women also to be sexual. You were expected to be one thing or the other: 'Bed/intell' I called this split in my own shorthand. The notes ended grumpily with an obvious borrowing from Black Power: 'Men's job not to tell us what we're like, which they do all the time. Start to explore what they are like in relation to us'.⁴²

If the women within the revolutionary left wing organisations truly wanted to escape the chauvinism of their male comrades, then a 'new configuration of politics' was required, in which they could become something other than 'Bed/intell.' This, however, was almost impossible: all of the significant underground publications were firmly rooted within the old political configuration of the New Left as they were all edited by men, meaning that there were often a million other topics deemed to be of higher importance than Women's Liberation. It was necessary for the women to break away and begin their own publications, although this was hindered by a lack

³⁹ Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 160.

⁴⁰ R. Baxandall, 'Marry Or Die', quoted in P. Doggett, *There's a Riot Going On: revolutionaries, rock stars and the rise and fall of '60s counter-culture*, (London, 2008), p. 279.

⁴¹ S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (London, 1984), p. 692.

⁴² Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 224.

of finances and support. During its origins the Women's Liberation movement in Britain found great difficulty in attempting to convince a great number of women, and men, that theirs was a cause worth fighting for, as many were tied up with other social concerns and struggled to reconcile their left wing beliefs with their feminist desires: class emancipation was generally perceived as being far more vital than female emancipation⁴³. As a result, before the 1970s and the launch of *Spare Rib*, the majority of noteworthy British second wave feminist writings were to be found within the pages of the left wing press.

Arguably, the most significant British feminist contribution to the socialist press before the close of the 1960s was the new year issue of *Black Dwarf* in 1969, with its front page headline asking: '1969: Year of the Militant Woman?'⁴⁴ The issue was published following the addition of Sheila Rowbotham to the *Black Dwarf* editorial board in December 1968 to 'be in charge of women coverage', which 'doubled the representation of women' as she joined a seventeen year old secretary, Ann Scott⁴⁵. However, publication of the issue was almost scuppered due to some extremely insensitive illustrations by *Black Dwarf's* new designer, a 'young hippy' who normally worked for *Oz*⁴⁶. He was clearly very strongly influenced by the likes of Richard Neville and co., as the proposed layout had images of naked women scattered everywhere. Rowbotham's manifesto in the centrefold was printed over 'a naked woman with the most enormous pair of breasts imaginable' with the result 'that the key denunciations of male chauvinism were imprinted on the two breasts'⁴⁷. To Rowbotham it was a shameless exhibition of 'the seedy side of the underground: arrogant, ignorant and prejudiced', it was blatant ridicule of the concept of Women's Liberation and was nothing short of 'sabotage'⁴⁸. Ali lessened the political implications of the incident, claiming that it 'was obvious that it was neither the dialectic that was at work here or an ultra-subtle deconstruction, but ignorance', but he did ensure that all offensive images were removed and replaced at considerable cost to *Black Dwarf* before the issue was sent to print⁴⁹. Unfortunately one 'nasty little personal ad' which was inserted by the designer at the last minute was overlooked, meaning the following found its way into the final copy:

DWARF DESIGNER SEEKS GIRL: Head girl type to make tea, organise paper, me. Free food, smoke space. Suit American Negress.⁵⁰

⁴³ Rowbotham, writing in 1979, questions why there was this 'resistance to women's liberation' in the early 1970s from left wing organisations, particularly in the International Socialism group, of which she was a member, and believes it was partly due to 'the bias of a male-dominated leadership' and 'a dismissal of women's liberation as middle class'. (S. Rowbotham, 'The Women's Movement and Organising for Socialism' in S. Rowbotham, L. Segal and H. Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: feminism and the making of socialism*, (London, 1979) pp. 34-5).

⁴⁴ '1969: Year of the Militant Woman?', *Black Dwarf*, (10th January 1969), 13, 9, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 208; T. Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties*, (New York, 1991), p. 231.

⁴⁶ Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, p. 234.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 210.

⁴⁹ Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, p. 234.

⁵⁰ Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*, p. 210.

The chauvinistic mind-sets dominating the political underground had managed to permeate a publication that had intended to herald a dawning of new attitudes, but had instead been impeded by the petty and immature actions of one 'young hippy'.

The issue itself however did make extremely positive efforts at creating an acceptable theoretical model that successfully combined both feminist and socialist thought, with notable articles contributed from Sheila Rowbotham, Audrey Wise, Fred Halliday and Ann Scott. The design of Rowbotham's centrefold manifesto was rescued with a striking image of a Mexican women guerrilla from Zapata's army, and bore the emotive headline: 'Women: the struggle for freedom...'⁵¹. It is a highly personal and emotional article, with original and rebellious tones that heralded a new dawn in the way British feminists were to publicly discuss their problems; the personal had become political, and a revolution 'made about little things' was fast approaching:

THEY tell us what we should be.

As we grow up, especially from puberty, we are under intensive pressure to be 'acceptable' – not to put ourselves outside the safety net of marriage.

From small girls we are taught that failure means not being selected by men – the shame of being a wallflower. The sign of intelligence and subtlety is a contractual bargain as we hand over our virginity for a marriage document, a ring, and the obligation of financial support.

Orgasm is a matter of merchandise. And remember THEY don't like us to be too clever. Well she might go to University but men want someone who can cook.⁵²

The tone of bitterness is shocking, and the repetitions of 'THEY' and 'us' explicitly creates an image of female victims subservient to male domination with words appearing to gush from years of mistreatment and externally enforced beliefs of inferiority, which successfully induce feelings of both pity and empathy.

The article also discusses extensively the prescribed image of women and the male-defined role that many women found themselves playing, and Rowbotham's influences are evident throughout. Simone de Beauvoir and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* - a film which was released in 1966 about an unwell actress and nurse reflecting upon their own identities and female roles – are inspirations which she alludes to throughout her memoirs and manifest in such comments as:

THEY tell us what we are.

The image is constantly reaffirmed. The books she reads and the films she sees are almost invariably by men. The women characters created by them, however sympathetically and with whatever intuitive understanding, must of necessity be the projection of their responses towards women. One is simply not conscious of men writers or men film makers. They are just writers, just film makers. The reflected image for women they create will be taken straight by women themselves. These characters 'are' women.⁵³

⁵¹ S. Rowbotham, 'Women: the struggle for freedom...', *Black Dwarf*, (10th January 1969), 13, 9, pp. 6-7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

The very nature of female identity is placed under questioning, and Rowbotham asserts a necessity throughout the article for women to redefine themselves before any solid attempts at liberation are made:

They have to decolonise themselves. Then they can liberate the colonisers.⁵⁴

She clearly is not asking for a revolution without men, but is requesting that women rediscover themselves before the genders build their new world together.

Fred Halliday's article, 'Women, Sex and the Abolition of the Family', discusses such issues as the franchise, equal pay, marriage and the paternal and capitalist nature of the family. He refers frequently to the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and it is doubtless that the main theoretical basis of the article is an attempt of an amalgamation of feminism and Marxism, as Halliday sees the main key to relieve female oppression is to abolish the family, with a desire for 'the end of the family as a tool of capitalist society', just as Engels demanded in 1884 with *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State*⁵⁵. However, a vast amount of Halliday's article contains strong anarcho-feminist sentiments and appears to be particularly influenced by the works of Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre and Charlotte Wilson. For example, the following statement looks as though Goldman herself could have written it:

What needs to be attacked is the very insistence on marriage itself. There is no rationality in forcing people to formalise their relations by registering them in a church or a town hall. The very institution of a legalised, permanent relationship is one that must be criticised, as unnecessary and in many cases evil.⁵⁶

In 'Marriage and Love', a piece written by Goldman in 1911, she labels marriage a 'poor little State and Church-begotten weed', whereas Voltairine de Cleyre in 'They Who Marry Do Ill' calls religious marriage 'an unwarranted interference on the part of the priest with the affairs of individuals', and Wilson stated in 1885 that 'it is an intolerable impertinence that Church or State or society in any official form should venture to interfere with lovers'⁵⁷. These statements bear striking similarity to those made by Halliday in 'Women, Sex and the Abolition of the Family', which would suggest that the article is not solely a demonstration of Marxist-feminist thought, but can instead be seen as an example of the strong presence of anarcho-feminist theory within the British second wave feminist movement.

While 1969 was the year in which socialist women discovered feminism, for anarchist women it was 1970 that proved to be the year in which they finally found

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ F. Halliday, 'Women, Sex and the Abolition of the Family', *Black Dwarf*, (10th January 1969), 13, 9, p. 2.; F. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State*, (1884).

⁵⁶ Halliday, 'Women, Sex and the Abolition of the Family'.

⁵⁷ E. Goldman, 'Marriage and Love', in E. Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, (New York, 1911, 2nd edn.), p. 233; V. de Cleyre, 'They Who Marry Do Ill' (1907), from *Voltairine de Cleyre Archive*, (Accessed 13/11/08),

http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/cleyre/theywhomarry.html; Wilson to Pearson, (8th August 1885), in Greenway, "Together we will make a new world", p. 1.

their voices⁵⁸. Throughout the summer of 1970 the letter pages of *Freedom* were dominated with accusations of ignorance and oppression from female anarchists, highlighting a need for anarchism to start considering feminist issues. In an issue dated 25th July 1970 *Freedom* printed a letter written by Judith Weymant, which opened with the following statement:

It has surprised me that a paper like *Freedom* has ignored half the population, women. There has been little or no mention of Women's Liberation groups which have formed in this country in the past six months. Is this because of lack of interest or lack of information?⁵⁹

Weymant is clearly attempting to make feminism an anarchist issue, as she believes 'the left wing as a whole' should be held accountable for driving women to form their own groups in the first place after being 'ignored'⁶⁰. Indeed, Women's Liberation was certainly becoming very difficult for anarchists to ignore, and suggestions to resolve the gender imbalance within the anarchist movement were made upon the *Freedom* letter pages. A letter from 'E.C.' published in *Freedom* in October 1970 calls for female anarchists to write into the newspaper to 'contribute to the Violence/Nonviolence debate' which was raging at that time⁶¹. However, a response from Liz Willis instead claims that the lack of female contribution is not a 'result of a tendency in anarchist males to dominate (oppress?)', but is due to 'the fact that many contributors to *Freedom* write not as 'females' or 'males' but as anarchists'⁶². It is the persistence of unenlightened attitudes that leads to 'the tendency to assume masculine authorship' of contributions into *Freedom*, suggesting that it is not the level of female participation within the anarchist movement that needs to change, but the narrow-minded nature of some of its members⁶³. It is interesting that, while Rowbotham called for an awakening of female attitudes in the socialist press, the focus of contributions in *Freedom*, an anarchist publication, instead largely summoned changes in male attitudes. It is possible to suggest, therefore, that anarchist males were bigger chauvinists than their socialist counterparts. From the anarcho-sexism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, to the rampant male chauvinism in Richard Neville's anarchist counterculture, throughout history men have managed to twist the principles of anarchist theory in order to prolong their sexual domination, which has led Peggy Kornegger to claim that 'anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjection of women'⁶⁴. An article with the provocative title of 'Screwed-up kids and Women's Liberation' was published in *Freedom* in April 1970 and solely identified the key obstacle to female

⁵⁸ Although, according to an article in *Freedom* written by Liz Willis, 'one of the 'predictions for 1971' circulating around the media has been that this will be the year of Women's Liberation – of the movement, that is, not of course in actuality.' Clearly the media was relatively slow at taking Women's Liberation seriously as a movement. (L. Willis, 'Now, about those Women...', *Freedom*, (16th January 1971), 32, 2, p. 3.)

⁵⁹ J. Weymant, 'Women's Liberation', *Freedom*, (25th July 1970), 31, 23, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ 'E. C.', 'Women's Liberation', *Freedom*, (24th October 1970), 31, 33, p. 2.

⁶² 'E. C.', 'Women's Liberation'; L. Willis, 'Female Anarchists', *Freedom*, (14th November 1970), 31, 35, p. 2.

⁶³ Willis, 'Female Anarchists'.

⁶⁴ P. Kornegger, 'Anarchism: The Feminist Connection', *Second Wave*, (Spring 1975), p. 18.

emancipation as male chauvinistic attitudes and the resulting paternalistic social system:

If your relationships (communication and intercourse) with women are fashioned by an assumed superiority, tinged with a benevolent or crudely patronising paternalism, shaped by a supposed innate inequality; up yours brother. What chance the revolution whilst women remain incarcerated within the traditional abnormal authority of men?⁶⁵

As the anarchist movement struggled to satisfy its female members, the British feminist movement was finding organisational inspiration from anarchism. The emphasis on anti-oppression within the movement meant that much of its structure lacked a hierarchy; the focus was on absolute equality, making it perhaps more anarchist than the anarchist movement itself. A *Freedom* correspondent reporting on the 1970 Women's Liberation conference in Ruskin College, Oxford, asserts that the nature of the organisation of discussion groups gave 'the impression [...] of creative anarchy'⁶⁶. Ann Taylor Allen in *Women in Twentieth-Century Europe* emphasises the movement's 'individualist and anti-hierarchical spirit' as 'the young women rejected hierarchical structures and proclaimed that all groups were free to develop their own agendas'; whereas Martin Pugh similarly states that

with their democratic and cooperative approach and absence of formal leadership, these [feminist] groups sometimes verged on anarchism.⁶⁷

They were also, unlike their suffragette predecessors, 'more inclined to by-pass the entire political system', which implies an anarchist desire to operate without political governance⁶⁸. To Pugh, the rejection of an official political system was symbolic of the feminists' rejection of male-created systems, as he claims that 'the hallmark of women's liberation consisted in avoiding the formal, hierarchical structures typical of male politics' by which women had commonly been 'marginalised'⁶⁹. Indeed, Peggy Kornegger, a prominent American feminist writing in 1975, affirms that:

In rebellion against the competitive power games, impersonal hierarchy, and mass organisation tactics of male politics, women broke off into small, leaderless, consciousness-raising groups, which dealt with personal issues in our daily lives [...] The structure of women's groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries. Yet, we had not called ourselves anarchists and consciously organised around anarchist principles.⁷⁰

From its earliest stages members of the Women's Liberation Movement were calling for a complete overhaul of society, the achievement of liberation through changes in relationships and attitudes, not economic structures. They were not interested in legal reforms, as changes in laws would only make them legally equal in a society that was built on unjust foundations. Without realising it, these women were anarchists, and it is undeniable that British second wave feminism had a strong

⁶⁵ D. Cunliffe, 'Screwed-up kids and Women's Liberation', *Freedom*, (25th April 1970), 31, 13, p. 3.

⁶⁶ 'Our Correspondent', 'Conference of Women's Liberation', *Freedom*, (9th March 1970), 31, 8, p. 4.

⁶⁷ A. T. Allen, *Women in Twentieth-Century Europe*, (New York, 2008), pp. 116-121; M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, (London, 2nd edn., 2000), p. 318.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Kornegger, 'Anarchism', p. 19.

anarchist influence. Kornegger writes about an almost spiritual anarchist subconscious within many second wave feminists, which assisted them in striving for their new society:

Before the women's movement was more than a handful of isolated groups groping in the dark toward answers, anarchism as an unspecified ideal existed in our minds. I believe that this puts women in the unique position of being the bearers of a subsurface anarchist consciousness which, if articulated and concretized can take us further than any previous group toward the achievement of total revolution. Women's intuitive anarchism, if sharpened and clarified, is an incredible leap forward (or beyond) in the struggle for human liberation.⁷¹

However, not all British women carried their anarchy-feminism as an 'unspecified ideal', as many began to form anarchy-feminist groups, accompanied by their own publications.

Anarchy-feminism was present in America from 1971, but in Britain it became a recognisable force in June 1977 when the first significant anarchy-feminist magazine, *Zero*, was published in London by the Zero Collective who described themselves as 'a group of anarchists and anarchist feminists'⁷². Their first issue included a double-page spread containing their manifesto demanding 'full sexual-social revolution'⁷³. Many of the ideas discussed within the manifesto were not new ones; they were echoes of the words written on the pages of *The Black Dwarf* by Rowbotham:

As women we are sex-role typed from birth into a subordinate social position. We are taught passivity and domesticity – anything that will crush our real selves and turn us into wives and mothers.⁷⁴

Highlighting how easily the ideas of the early Women's Liberation Movement could be translated into an anarchy-feminist context. Moreover, there are even similarities to the Marxist-feminist theories expressed by Halliday:

[The] nuclear family is the economic basis for capitalism. Each isolated family having its individual house, car, Hoover, mixer, television, adds up to create the false consumption of superfluous commodities.⁷⁵

The complaints made about male chauvinism and anarchy-sexism within the manifesto appear to be lifted straight out of the letter pages of *Freedom*, and demonstrate exactly where the members of the Zero Collective began their political education:

Even on becoming involved in left groups we are frequently reacted to as potential sex rather than potential activists and friends.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Kornegger, 'Anarchism', pp. 19-20.

⁷² 'Zero Collective', 'Anarchism / Feminism', *Zero*, (June 1977), 1, p. 6.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

It is evident that the women of *Zero*, finding themselves disillusioned and marginalised within the left wing, turned to feminism, which eventually evolved into anarcho-feminism, meaning anarcho-feminism can therefore be seen as an indirect product of anarcho-sexism. This evolution is explained within the manifesto, making it seem a logical and inevitable step with the claim that 'it is in organisation and action that women have spontaneously come closest to anarchism'⁷⁷. To *Zero*, 'the revolutionary feminist perspective is essentially anarchist [...] because feminism is anarchist in both its theory and its practice'⁷⁸.

The two main aims to emerge from this manifesto are of complete 'sexual-social revolution' and also of reform of the existing anarchist movement⁷⁹. It would appear that the Zero Collective did not intend to stay autonomous forever, as there are repeated calls within the article for anarchism to recognise feminism. As was witnessed in *Freedom*, the blame lies solely with the attitudes of the male anarchists, who are labelled 'resiliently sexist' in *Zero*⁸⁰. There are demands to cease ignoring Women's Liberation 'because anarchism is people's liberation', as

Anarchist practice contradicts its own theory by not being actively feminist. Anarchism must recognise in feminism a radical extension of its own politic, beyond its critique of capital and state to include patriarchal oppression, and must base all future practice on this recognition.⁸¹

This call was repeated throughout successive issues of *Zero*, as an article published in the magazine in August 1978 stated that

anarchism is reduced to hypocrisy if we recognise and struggle against hierarchy and domination of capitalism and the state, whilst dismissing the importance of dealing with it in our personal lives.⁸²

This suggests that calls in the first issue of *Zero* went unanswered as the male-dominated anarchist movement continued to ignore demands for Women's Liberation.

Despite apparently failing in its attempts at adding consideration of feminist ideology to the doctrine of the anarchist movement, *Zero* was successful in helping to create a progressive British anarcho-feminist movement. It was essential in formulating a cohesive theory of anarcho-feminism, and although it only lasted for two years its ideas remained relevant for decades. The manifesto of the anarcho-feminist paper *Harpy*, published in the late 1980s, was strikingly similar to the one in the pages of *Zero*, suggesting that its influence lasted far longer than its print run:

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² C. Doree, 'Personal Politics and Freedom', *Zero*, (August/September 1978), 7, p. 11.

Feminism and the 'equality' of women and men is the first principle of anarchism. If these power structures that we live in and are asked to obey are to be destroyed to liberate us from control, anarchism, through the direct challenge to these structures must be the way forward [sic.]. Anarchism is the politics of feminism.⁸³

It is evident, however, that the longevity of anarcha-feminism is significant of a lasting inability of cooperation between the sexes within the anarchist movement, suggesting a severe resilience to the existence of anarcho-sexism. As anarcha-feminism has seen a resurgence in recent years, perhaps there is some hope that there is still chance for equality between the sexes to be achieved through the use of anarchist theory.

⁸³ 'Anarchism and Feminism', *Harpy*, p. 2.