Man's claim to supremacy on the basis of superior athletic prowess is outdated in an age when the athlete is purely ornamental, the hunter an anachronism, the unskilled labourer a poor substitute for a machine, and the warrior an unmitigated pest. Moreover, tertiary sex differences are mostly a matter of averages rather than absolutes: some men are better fitted for some kinds of "women's work" than most women, and vice versa. In an era when the very survival of our species is menaced by our command of forces of nature threatening to outstrip our ability to manage them intelligently, we dare not waste any kind of intellectual ability because it comes in the same package as the "wrong" sex, pigmentation, accent or what have you.

In short, equality does not mean identity or egalitarianism, but equal opportunity for all, whether male or female, black or white, highbrow or lowbrow, to find the niche in life best suited to their abilities and ambitions. This can only be fully realised in a society freed of all exploitation, oppression and discrimination; but, in working for the maximum possible degree of women's liberation within existing society, we can help to burst its bonds and build a new and free world.

ARTHUR W. RUDKIN

PATERNALISM ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION

IT IS WITH REGRET that I cross swords with my old Queensland comrade, Ted Bacon, who, I am certain, over many years has given sterling service to the Communist Party Women’s Committee in that state. However, in seeking to refute charges of paternalism in the work and attitudes of the C.P. (Judy Gillett and Betty Fisher, ALR No. 28), Ted exudes paternalism in almost every paragraph. Further, having charged Gillett and Fisher with a failure to carry out a concrete analysis of the position, he himself commits that very crime in the next two paragraphs.

To assert that "apparently only women (and selected women at that) are regarded as competent to speak about a major revolutionary task concerning both men and women, though some men may perhaps qualify if, like Marx and Engels, they are dead or if they are non-Communist", is a travesty of reality. The days of "selected" women were in the past, and current practices are putting an end to this, as the very well-attended discussions among women held over the past six months in Sydney and elsewhere will testify. Many of these women, like me, have not had such opportunity for years to participate in discussion and policy-making as is currently available to us, and to the men in at least two of the discussion I have attended. And did men in fact speak up very much in the Good Old Days on this subject? Peruse the files of the Communist Review Ted, and you'll find the same old things being said, at the appropriate times, by much the same people, nearly all women.

The other feature of the current situation which is exhilarating to large numbers of party women is that today new and truly revolutionary things are being said. Perhaps they are often said in crude, abrupt, one-sided ways, but they are just as often mature, considered and scientific. At all events, the emphasis is on a Marxist approach, and in the tremendous upheaval going on at present in the thinking of women, for the first time in my experience (and I read Origin of the Family 30 years ago), we are getting deeper than lip-service. We have rejected the paternalism which said that women are half
the population and no revolution can take place without them, and then neglected to make a concrete analysis of the sources of their exploitation.

Perhaps you think the Party did make this analysis? "The exploitation of women is a class question". "Women must fight alongside men for the liberation of all." "Women have special problems and need special organisations". "Women must and do participate in the struggles around the major issues facing the working class as a whole". All these statements may be true, but they avoid the fundamental question of the role of women in society, and particularly the fact that women are exploited not only as part of the working class, but also are oppressed as a sex, and to ignore this goes a long way towards preserving a very comfortable status quo as far as the relative positions of men and women in the party are concerned.

Of course there have always been male CPA members who have given a lot of theoretical and practical attention to the problems of women, but they have operated within the confines of the old concepts, which in practice were not revolutionary, and led the women's movement generally into a Reformist position (see Mavis Robertson's article, ALR 28). They therefore fell short of Women's Liberation. And the fact that the constitution of the CP explicitly accords equal rights to all members ranks with the fact that the Constitution of the Soviet Union guarantees equal rights to men and women in the Soviet State. You can put it on paper, my friend, but we still have to fight for it.

To claim that Paternalism is not the only barrier to the realisation of full rights for women in the party, and that women's own acceptance of inferior status is a tremendous obstacle, is begging the question, apart from the fact that Gillett and Fisher in their article also stated this to be so. To me this ranks alongside the one put forward so often by Communist Trade Union Officials to justify lack of equal pay in militant Trade Union offices, namely, that when Clerks as a whole have won it, then girls in Trade Union offices will get it too. (In itself not always true, by the way, as the action of one such office in Sydney in“absorbing” a pay-rise testifies.) In other words, "we know these are injustices, but it's not our place to take the initiative in correcting them". The sentiment rather belies the previous claim in Ted's article that CPA male members pay solicitous attention to female rights — or wrongs.

It is unfair on the basis of their article for Ted to suggest that Judy Gillett and Betty Fisher think the situation can be overcome by rhetoric. Even if it were a valid assessment of their position, which it is not, a footnote to their article states that these two are activists in the Women's Movement in S.A., and presumably not seasoned communist leaders, so it is scarcely encouraging to up-and-coming talent for a member of the CPA national committee and long-time party leader to wag a paternal finger at them.

Ted makes a generous, and I think accurate estimate of one side of the role that women have played in party organisations. However, his statement that Judy and Betty present women as spineless and unintelligent for the most part, did not appear to me to be justified from their article. Ted misses the whole point of what they (and Mavis Robertson in her article) are saying. The fact is, not that they are spineless or unintelligent, but that both they and the men are conditioned to unquestioning acceptance of their role in society. The "battle of the sexes" is liberally scattered with one-upmanship sayings e.g. "Women can't understand mathematics". "Men are basically brutal". "Women
can't think logically". "Nothing matches the pain of childbirth". "Ever had a kick in the balls?" Among all this nonsense is one truth, namely, that you can't really appreciate discrimination unless you're on the receiving end of it. Many Australians fall into the complacent and self-congratulatory position that there is no real racial discrimination against Aborigines here, on the part of ordinary people. But if you have a coloured skin, you won't share this benign (paternal) view.

Similarly, you don't really appreciate sexual discrimination unless you're a woman. When I recently said that every day brings to me at least one humiliation purely because I'm a woman, my 20-year-old son was frankly sceptical (not so my 16-year-old daughter), he having a picture of me as a highly-paid career woman and liberated female. Ted is similarly unknowledgeable, and, inevitably, naive.

It is true that some women have played a major political — not menial — role in the Party, and absolutely true that many women have of necessity displayed more stamina than men, both physically and politically. CPA insistence on the equality of men and women may have attracted women to the Party, but judging by the discussions I have recently attended, they have all too often found the reality considerably less than the written word. A number of questions come to mind in this regard, viz: — Have you really recorded the number of menial tasks performed by party women, or do you just not notice them in their familiarity? What do you call menial tasks? Do you classify endless clerical work for example as necessary and honoured work? Do you assume on any committee (as was done on the recent Anti-War Conference Committee) that this work will automatically be done by the women, one of whom in this case was a member of the CPA National Executive? What yardstick do you use to determine whether those women who do "make it" into political leadership have opportunities to reach their true peak of development and contribution to the revolutionary movement? How do you determine how many more have never had the opportunity to "make it", or do you just assume they're not good enough? At what cost is this participation achieved in terms of physical and mental exhaustion, emotional problems and strained or broken relationships, guilt feelings and disturbed relationships with children?

Obviously what Ted says is true to some extent, and I think Judy and Betty over emphasise at times, but they nevertheless present what women experience most of the time. I have been a fellow-member of Ted's on State and District committees 20 years ago, and I more than once incurred the wrath of some of the other women on these committees by insisting that there was no discrimination against women, and that their contention that it did exist was sheer feminism on their part. What I failed to appreciate but learned later, and what Ted still does not understand, is that even today a woman can achieve real equality with men in the CP only if she can live like a man, and work like a man with his relative freedom from day-to-day responsibility for the running of the family. Even then, she usually has to be twice as good to be considered anywhere near equal.

By this I don't mean the obligation of being the breadwinner, (and even here women are more and more having to assume a share of this responsibility), but I'm speaking of the mundane things most men treat with blithe disregard if there's a meeting to go to, like has everyone got clean clothes for school
tomorrow, will you get the washing dry on a wet week-end, who’s going to mind the kids at night, has the 6-year-old got his costume for the school play on Monday, how is the 9-year-old going to get to soccer on Saturday, and when am I going to get time to do the shopping and clean the house if I go to my meeting? I don’t deny men are paying some attention these days to these sorts of jobs, but how often do they shrug them off again if something “more important” comes up, in the manner society holds proper for the male but not the female?

Ted enunciates a whole number of truisms about the needs of work around the problems confronting women in order to reject the need for serious consideration of the basic charges of lack of creative thought by the CPA about the role of women in society. I find this different only in degree from the bewilderment and nervousness of many male branch members today, whose confusion and dismay is revealed in current comments like “You want to watch out for these liberationists. They’ll eat you”, or even more helpless, “What do they want? What are they after?” Ted reveals his affinity with many male party members in the patronising remark that “he has been happy to work and study under the leadership of women members”. Some of my best friends are women!

His final paragraph does grave injustice to the present National Committee of the Party, under whose vigorous and imaginative leadership the ever-widening discussions about a revolutionary programme for women are taking place. The question is not whether real effort will be made to involve the whole party. It is that major steps have already been taken in this regard, and I am happy to see that the National Committee is more concerned with encouraging women to say what has been on their minds for a long time, than it is with asserting the creditable performance they have put up in the past.

Kathleen Olive

AUTHOR COMMENTS

NOT ONLY does Mary Murnane’s review of my book *A New Britannia* enter into the debate at an informed and important level it also extends the range of some of the points I made. So that further development can occur I would like to make the following six points.

1. Murnane says ‘the central impulse of the book is to locate the Labor Movement in the materialistic, acquisitive perspectives of Australian society as a whole.’ This is very close to my intention which was to write a history of the ALP. I realised that if I wrote an Australian equivalent of Ralph Miliband’s *Parliamentary Socialism* I would not have located the sources of Labor’s central malaise because I would have written an organisational history. That is why I followed Gramsci who demanded that the history of a party be the history of a society from a monographic point of view. Thus every section of *A New Britannia* was conceived of as part of a history of the ALP. This applies to the convicts and the invaders just as much if not more than to the Socialists and the Unionists. By this marxist means I hoped to show that the ALP is irrevocably committed to capitalism and that it was not just a matter of personalities or contingencies. Any real critique of *A New Britannia* has to begin by recognising it as a history of the ALP.