Reflections on Militarism and Feminism continued

Great Depression were setting the stage for a socialist revolution. They were not prepared theoretically or practically for what was to come. Neither was anyone else.

The Sources of Nazism

If the history of the Weimar period demonstrates anything, it is that worsening social conditions do not automatically make people more revolutionary. The desire for change and the longing for improved social conditions can be channeled in a reactionary direction by the ruling class if it can appeal to the emotional needs of the masses whose craving for security and fear of freedom provide the social-psychological basis of fascism. In Germany, the latent hostility and rebelliousness towards the social order was successfully deflected downwards through the hierarchies of power and externalized towards the excluded races, national groupings, and ideological opponents of the regime. The German middle classes cried out for law and order and strong leadership. Nazi regimentation and uniformity was the end result.

Numerous interpretations of the rise of fascism have emphasized the economic dimension: fascism is an exceptional response of the reactionary fractions of the ruling class (finance capital, agrarian capital, big industrial capital) to the economic crisis and the threat (real or imagined) of a workers' revolution. Other interpretations have placed fascism under the conceptual umbrella of imperialism: German and Italian expansionism would provide both material and status benefits to the middle and upper classes and the respective state apparatuses (particularly the military and police sectors).

Although both of these explanations contain a good deal of the truth, they neglect to account for Hitler's popularity with the German masses and their willingness to embrace the Nazi mythology of race, blood, soil, and fatherland. They do not explain how fascist ideology linked pride in one's nation and pride in one's family to the all powerful father figure of the Fuhrer. They neglected the essentially patriarchal and anti-feminist dimension of the counter-revolution, the very dimension needed to explain the sado-masochistic authoritarian character found to be so prevalent among the National Socialists.

Nazis, the Family and the Role of Women

A constant theme of Nazi propaganda was the restoration of the family and the return of women and men to their proper roles of "mother" and "father." In Hitler's words: "Our first task is to help the development of family ties. . . . It is the smallest, but most important unit in the building of the whole State . . ." On Mother's Day in 1933, Goebbels elaborated on the theme that women could best serve the nation by being good mothers: "Nowhere else does the mother have such importance as in the new Germany. She is the guarantor and guardian of family life of a kind which produces the strength which drives our people on. The German mother alone bears the spirit of the German people." By emphasizing the reproductive and socializing functions of women, the Nazis knew that they were insuring the future military and economic strength of the Reich. They realized that the system of society which they envisioned depended for its survival on the strengthening of parental authority.

The Nazis were not satisfied with just promoting the family as a sacred institution. They deliberately attacked the women's movement by linking it to Marxist and liberal decadence. Thus, in his speech to the National Socialist Women's Congress in 1935, Hitler said, "The so called granting of equal rights to women, which Marxism demands, in reality does not grant equal rights but constitutes a deprivation of rights, since it draws the woman into an area in which she will necessarily be inferior." Alfred Rosenberg, another major architect of Nazi ideology wrote in 1938: "Emancipation of woman from the women's emancipation movement is the first demand of a generation of women which would like to save the *Volk* and the race, the Eternal-Unconscious, the foundation of all culture, from decline and fall."

The National Socialists considered women to be an inferior sex, and it was consistent with their sado-masochism that they should evidence contempt for

women. It became common practice for them to use adjectives like "feminine" and "woman-like" as a means of insulting and degrading their enemies (e.g. "effeminate intellectuals"). This was linked to their desire to create "a healthy manly race" (Hitler) and their mystical adulation of male strength, vigor, and capacity for domination.

Is it possible that the militarization of society and the mobilization of masculine aggressiveness is intrinsically related to the domination of women? Is the extreme case of National Socialism a mere exception, or does it reflect a tendency in the very foundations of Western civilization itself? Is there something in the very nature of counter-revolutionary movements which lead them to reduce women to their reproductive and sexual functions? Is it just possible that modern day feminism is correct in its claim that the liberation of women from male domination will also lead to the liberation of men from the cultural and social identification of masculinity with institutionalized violence, aggression, and war?

Warfare and Male Supremacy

Some anthropologists and sociologists have noted a connection between militarism (a social condition which thrives on the fear of war, the social and psychological preparation for war, and the waging of war) and the cruel domination of the female sex. The argument goes something like this. Anthropological data on hunting-gathering and early horticultural societies suggests that they were relatively peaceful with a high degree of sexual egalitarianism: the impulse to control and dominate others was less important than the values of mutual aid and cooperation. As the initial sexual

division of labor (and the division of society into classes), human societies developed a surplus wealth which could become an object of conquest through war. The increased importance of warfare (due to social contradictions and demographic and ecological pressures) in turn led to an increase in male supremist social tendencies. Class formation and the development of the state did not take place through gradual and peaceful differentiation in economic and political relations, but was more likely the result of the violent conquest and subjugation of one group of armed men by another.

The wartime emphasis upon brute strength, size, and ferocity and the concomitant male monopoly over weapons required the nurturance and socialization of aggressive male personalities with a capacity and predilection for dominance and instrumental cunning. This male monopoly of the means of violence meant something else: the organization of societies around a core of fathers, brothers, and sons, and the exchange of women as sexual rewards for male aggressiveness and status. It was on this foundation that patriarchal civilization, with its organizational principles of control and domination (control of nature, control of slaves, women, and children) was built. War and periodic outbreaks of violence have been with us ever since.

It seems that there is something in the very nature of war and intergroup violence that enhances machismo and male domination. It is also clear that the sexual division of labor and the domination of women within this division contributes to the warmaking capacity of society as mothers are expected to reproduce the lives lost on the battlefield. Finally, there seems to be an intrinsic relationship between war and violence against women. This link between patriarchy and war also explains the prevalence of rape during militaristic periods—how the women of the "enemy" population are treated as "spoils of war," trophies which the victorious dominant males could display to increase their status in male society. It also explains why prostitution (the ultimate commodification of female sexuality) and the military are often found together throughout the history of Western civilization. In short, rape and prostitution, institutions in which female bodies are used and exchanged by men, seem to flourish during wartime.

History and Herstory

The separation of the sexes has created a united-divided history, a history and a herstory in which the bustling and aggressive male is the complement of the "receptive" nurturing female (women as sex objects, men as success objects). Patriarchy did not just come into existence with the creation of the world capitalist system and the state; it predated both of these. Under patriarchy, males have been—are—the world-makers of history. The general position of women has been related to her function of "mothering" and the reproduction of the species. Men have organized and dominated the world's political, economic, and cultural institutions, and it is men who have conceived of and fought the wars, died in wars. The state, based upon the monopolization of the legitimate means of violence, has remained to this day a male preserve. Patriarchy, the state, the division of society into classes, imperialism, and war, have been interconnected throughout history.

It is impossible to look through the history books without recognizing that half of the human species has been excluded. The pages are dominated by men's names, men's pictures, references to the cultural, political and economic achievements of men. It is almost as if women did not exist. It is almost as if they have been "hidden from history"—the innumerable faceless, voiceless, and powerless ones who have never been given credit for anything. Women have suffered immensely at the hands of Western Civilization which has kept them in a continual state of privation.

One of the consequences of the sexual division of labor and the reduction of women to their biological and reproductive functions (which makes a woman's body the single most defining criterion of her existence) has been the creation of a specific history (herstory) of oppression rooted in the patriarchal family. The resulting socially enforced privatization of women and their withdrawal from the public sphere (except when they are exchangeable trophies of male competition) has fed the fatal dialectic of civilization which has brought our species to the brink of extinction. The private sphere became absolutely separated from the public sphere. Male instrumentality was released to dominate the political, economic, and cultural activities, while women, the 'intimately oppressed,' were expected to keep a warm private nest to which the male warriors and world-makers could return for emotional sustenance, sexual pleasure, and the reinforcement of male identity.

It is precisely the bifurcation and division of sex roles and the domination of the female sex within this division which contributes to warfare. Males are socialized to be performance oriented, aggressive, active, and coolly analytical. As these traits are encouraged, the nurturing and receptive qualities are repressed and allowed to atrophy. Women, in turn, become the symbols of nurturance, tenderness, emotional warmth, passivity, receptivity, weakness. Male domination is the key to understanding how the history of civilization has "progressed" through organized social domination. An end to the repressive continuum of war and class domination would mean an end to the domination of women upon which it is based. It would mean the entrance of woman onto the stage of history and their appearance in public space as well as a new attitude on the part of men with reagard to nurturing activities. This is why the issue of "reproductive freedom" is considered so central to the women's movement.

continued on page 8