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Issue 1

To grow and struggle successfully, all political movements have to develop both a theory and a political strategy. The women's liberation movement has been involved in the process of challenging and analysing both 'common sense' explanations of the position of women and academically organized systems of knowledge, which define women as inferior, or marginal, or simply fail to recognize our existence. Nevertheless, the development of theoretical work is for us a contentious process and raises a number of political difficulties.

There is a genuine fear that in the attempt to theorize our situation we shall lose the forcefulness of each woman's personal testimony to her experience of oppression. This fear is compounded by our experience of the ways in which theoretical and scientific 'knowledge' has been used to justify and legitimize sexual, racial and class divisions in society. Even where such theory has not actively sought to do this it has frequently been compromised by a failure to challenge these oppressive structures.

One response to this situation has been to deny theory in favour of instant politics. We reject this notion, and one that often accompanies it: that women must begin with a clean slate and ignore all previous and particularly 'male' ideas. To pretend to do this is not only to deny our specific historical experience (for we are not, and do not want to be, disembodied female essences), but also creates a political cul-de-sac where prejudice can easily masquerade as explanation. We must work towards an ability to understand our mistakes and learn from them, to plan, to widen our circle of influence, to turn gut reaction into a programme for change. We start from the position that theory and political analysis, which will necessarily draw on a variety of sources, are crucial to the struggle for women's liberation.

A journal has a role to play in this process. Ideas and information can not be developed in a vacuum. There has to be a space, which a journal can help to provide, for this work to be read, discussed and criticized. The existence of such a journal will, we hope, in itself encourage women to write and research. For this reason we feel it is important to emphasize that we welcome 'work in progress' and are not only interested in the finished and perfect artefact. Despite the richness and variety of feminist writing there is at present, we feel, no similar journal in the women's liberation movement; *Feminist Review* offers space for the development of work often found only in 'academic' journals, but is also committed to a feminist perspective. Such an approach is obviously very wide and poses the problem of selecting work for inclusion in the journal. Our

editorial policy is to give priority to work which seems to us to further the theoretical and political debates central to the women's liberation movement, but this relevance may, we should stress, be indirect rather than explicit.

We recognize that the selection of these issues involves political judgements, and it is important to state that the women on the collective would all describe themselves as feminists and socialists. We recognize that our definition of feminism might not be the same as that of a group of feminists none of whom were socialist, but we definitely do not see *Feminist Review* as a polemical vehicle for the socialist feminist tendency within the British women's liberation movement. On the contrary, we welcome contributions from any point of view within feminism, although this is not to say that we would define anything and everything about women as relevant to feminism.

We do not want in this editorial to itemize these issues, nor to describe or justify each article in this issue. We would rather the articles spoke for themselves. However, we would like to emphasize that although *Feminist Review* is necessarily rooted in the British experience of women's liberation, we feel it is crucial to develop an international perspective and to develop work which explores gender divisions and feminist campaigns in other countries. There has been an absence of feminist work on the position of women in the third world and in socialist societies, and we hope that the article on women in the South Yemen will be the first of a number of articles which attempt to understand and evaluate the achievements and limitations of socialist societies, both developed and developing, with regard to the position of women. We hope that such work will be able to avoid on the one hand a stance of indulgent piety, and on the other a polemical hostility which is divorced from an analysis of what is possible in such societies.

In choosing material for the first issue we have had considerable discussions about the accessibility of the work presented. This will always be a difficult area, since while we try to avoid jargon and unnecessarily obscure and pretentious language, some work is complex and difficult, and the development of theory must always be rigorous. This is as true of personal and political writing as it is of 'academic' writing.

We hope that articles in this journal will help to bridge the gap between academic and political work. We do not see theory as the property of academia, nor the production of a journal such as this as a flight into intellectualism. Feminist research and theory should not be locked in educational institutions but should be available as a necessary part of feminist politics.

In this context, we regard the introduction of women's studies at colleges, schools and universities as a very important and welcome development. Yet, there is a danger that if women's studies are divorced from the women's liberation movement they will invite a form of academic recuperation which defines the field as being simply 'the woman's point of view' or 'anything about women'.

The *Feminist Review* collective is made up of 19 women who came together as a result of a series of open meetings to discuss the idea of producing such a journal. We have a varied background of working in campaigns in the women's liberation movement and in women's study groups. Some of us are involved in teaching 'women's studies' courses, and in other feminist research and teaching, and all of us seek to bring our feminism into our various job experiences. We all believe in the necessity of the autonomous women's liberation movement. There is also a wider collective of women who are interested in helping in the production of the journal in some way, while being unable for various reasons to commit themselves to the same amount of work as the collective itself.

We hope that *Feminist Review* will act as a vehicle to unite research and theory with political practice, and contribute to the development of both. At present these two strands of activity have interlocked less than might have been hoped and expected, hampered by abstraction on the one side and anti-intellectualism on the other. While a journal can not resolve these difficulties, we hope that we can generate debate and make this dialogue easier and more fruitful.

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