WOMEN
AND THE FAMILY
IN THATCHER'S BRITAIN

Moral panics and Victorian values

AIDS and herpes, surrogate mothers and test-tube babies, football hooligans and picket-line militants – these are just some of the issues seized on by the pundits and journalists who serve the British establishment. The common theme is the promotion of family life, parental responsibility and respect for law and order.

At a time of mass unemployment and insecurity the new Victorian morality stirs up prejudices and reinforces fears. It aims to encourage the family as a force for social stability. The Tories want to build up the family to compensate for the destruction of the welfare state.

The main victims of the new morality are women. Women have to carry the increased burden of work in the home. The attack on contraception and abortion rights restricts women's participation in society. The aim of this pamphlet is to reply to the new moralists, to expose their hypocrisy and to outline a working class approach to questions of sex and family life.

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1.
VICTORIAN VALUES

One symptom of Britain's decline as a major power is the establishment's desperate drive to revive a morality it calls Victorian. The chief merit of Victorian morality is not its code of values relating to the family, women or the poor. On these issues conventional morality has changed little. The British establishment has always cherished the family, patronised women and blamed poverty on the poor. The chief merit of the revival of Victorian values is that it turns hypocrisy into a virtue and endows prejudice with the status of common sense.

To judge by the media the British way of life is under threat from surrogate mothers, teenagers on the pill, carriers of AIDS, drug addicts and football hooligans. The list of demons can easily be extended to include women having abortions, social workers who allow parents to batter their babies to death, violent criminals, foreign terrorists and picket-line militants. The common themes running through all the moral panics are the elevation of the family, parental responsibility and respect for law and order and the authority of the state.

At a time of mass unemployment, falling living standards and disintegrating social services, the new morality provides a vital service for the British establishment. Fears about strange and nasty diseases (AIDS, herpes, cervical cancer), menacing scientific

developments (embryo experimentation and *in-vitro* fertilisation) and the dangers of mindless violence and terrorism reinforce the insecurities generated by economic crisis. The success of the moral campaigners means that the evils resulting from the capitalist system are blamed on nature, not the way society is run. It is easier to target gays or Millwall supporters or Libyan terrorists than to identify the hidden hand of capitalist market forces that condemns millions to a life of hopelessness.

Hard cash morality

The deeper the crisis facing the British establishment becomes, the more its political leaders and hack journalists are enlisted to proclaim the virtues of family life. The Tories and the press promote the new morality because they recognise that the family can play a key role in maintaining social stability. Family values provide a conservative alternative to collective action. In any major strike the media praise workers who refuse to come out or go back to work and put their responsibility to their family before their commitment to their union or their class. A nation of families is a collection of private individuals. As atomised individuals workers are not a threat to the system. The establishment aims to make the family a mechanism for the self-control of the working class.

It was Labour leader James Callaghan who first raised the banner of the family during the 1979 election campaign. But Margaret Thatcher has made the issue her own over the past five years. After her election victory Thatcher set up a special 'Family Policy Group' to promote family values. The aim was to strengthen individual identity and break down the influence of class politics. The Tories were particularly keen to encourage individual responsibility to compensate for the cuts they planned in public services.

In September 1982 the Family Policy Group circulated a 'programme of action'. It declared that the objective of the group was 'to seek ways of counteracting those factors which tend to undermine, or even prohibit, the exercise of personal responsibility and a sense of individual self-respect'. The solution put forward to help 'the exercise of personal responsibility' was to dismantle the existing system of welfare services. These were some of the family think tank's suggestions:

- **encourage mothers to stay at home**
- **introduce an education voucher system**

- **encourage schools with 'a clear moral base'**
- **encourage private provision for social needs**
- **extend home ownership**
- **privatise sections of the personal social services**
- **make parents responsible for the anti-social behaviour of their children**
- **encourage self-help and respect among the unemployed.**

Thatcher's top advisers outlined a programme for destroying the social services in the guise of a drive to promote individual self-respect and responsibility. In the three years since these recommendations were revealed to the astonishment of the liberal press, many have been acted upon. Norman Fowler's proposed restructuring of the social security system shows that the drive to shift the burden of public provision back into the privacy of the family is gathering momentum.

The new morality is good business. The Tories have saved billions by making the individual rather than society responsible for looking after children and the sick, and caring for the elderly, the mentally ill and the handicapped. The responsible family carries the burden for cuts in the health service, social security, education and local authority services.

The new morality has encouraged attacks on homosexuals and restrictions on doctors prescribing the pill and researching into embryos. It has created a climate in which conformity is acceptable and experimentation a crime. Censorship has been extended to cover sex education and even medical research.

Prejudice as common sense

The sense of instability and fear of the future that permeates British society has given a new lease of life to the philosophers of doom and reaction and the purveyors of superstition and prejudice. The two million signatories to the recent petition against experiments on embryos show that the right-wing pundits are not without influence. What is their case?

Ferdinand Mount, the man behind Thatcher's Family Policy Group, believes that the family is the most important bulwark of the existing order of society. In his influential book, *The subversive family,* Mount argues that the family is the true source of individual freedom. He believes, therefore, that the family should be nurtured at the expense of institutions like trade unions which can help to

hold individuals together against the atomising forces that Mount wants to encourage. The philosophers of the right denounce any deviation from the Christian norms of family life. Hence they devote much of their energies to attacking what they call the permissive society and the sexual revolution.

Digby Anderson, the director of the Social Affairs Unit, specialises in invoking the wrath of God in his crusade against the sexual revolution. He has detected a conspiracy of Marxists and feminists who are out to destroy the Church. As a true Christian he scorns those who want to debate their 'dangerous ideas' and argues that readers of *The Times* 'urgently need an injection of intolerance' (*The Times,* 24 October 1984). He makes his own sexual obsessions clear in his vivid depiction of the dangers facing society:

'AIDS, linked to promiscuous homosexuality; herpes and gonorrhoea both connected with increased promiscuity; breast and cervical cancer possibly caused by long-term use of the contraceptive pill, the latter also possibly linked with early sexual activity; and the growing problem highlighted recently by the NSPCC of the sexual abuse of children.'(*The Times,* 5 December 1984)

Anderson sets little store by facts and logic. He believes that the sexual abuse of children which was a speciality of the Victorian period is linked to the modern contraceptive pill. He reduces the decline of British civilisation to the promiscuity of its people.

Anderson regards logical argument and critical thinking as perverse. He sings the praises of ignorance and prejudice:

'The old wisdom, displaced by progressive gospel, no longer looks quite so passe. Its adherents did not question everything but followed religious and social conventions even when these appeared arbitrary and senseless....Desires were repressed by inculcated habit and deterrence. Repression was not then viewed as a bad thing. And a necessary corollary of the rules was the guilt, fear, scandal and stigma so denounced and decided by "rational" progressives. They do not appear so obviously ridiculous today.' *(The Times,* 5 December)

Anderson's defence of irrationality is strongly supported by Ronald Butt, a leading columnist on *The Times.* Over the years Butt has developed a reputation for presenting old-fashioned superstitions as original insights. Hence he is a fervent supporter of Victoria Gillick, the Catholic campaigner against the prescription of the pill

to teenagers. He is a leading campaigner against surrogate motherhood, the pill and sex education. But at least Butt makes no claims to be a coherent thinker. The same cannot be said for his colleague Roger Scruton.

Scruton is the leading philosopher of the right. He is worried that contraception has 'effectively severed the sexual act from its generative tendency'. He opposes anything that separates sexual activity from the object of procreation. He shares right-wing prejudices against abortion, contraception and the enjoyment of sex. But he reserves his main attack for embryo experimentation and surrogate motherhood. He is opposed to scientific advances because they can only undermine backward prejudices about sex, motherhood and the family:

'In surrogate motherhood the relation between mother and child ceases to issue from the very body of the mother and is severed from the experience of incarnation. The bond between mother and child is demystified, made clear, intelligible, scientific — and also provisional.' (*The Times,* 5 February 1985)

Scruton prefers the myths of motherhood to scientific clarity. He understands that science 'demystifies' what religion and reaction want to put beyond the bounds of human understanding. Behind Scruton's worship of myth-making is a fear that once family relationships become 'clear, intelligible, scientific', human beings will want even more clarity and might set about changing the order of things.

Scruton knows that his case cannot be sustained by logic or argument, so he is forced to take refuge behind St Augustine and the concept of original sin. He concludes with a pathetic plea that 'we should never lose sight of the fundamental truth that some uses of the body are sinful, and none more so than those which enable us to escape the obligation which the body itself imposes'. The 'fundamental truth' is that Scruton feels uncomfortable with his body and therefore tries to convince his readers that to feel otherwise would be sinful.

Their morals and ours

The new moralists are not particularly coherent or convincing. So why bother to take up the issues raised by the moral rearmers? It is essential to challenge them because we are living through a period in

which reactionary ideas can gain widespread influence. The ruling class needs drastic measures to resolve the crisis of its system. Unless the new morality is challenged it can have a divisive and demoralising effect throughout society.

There are already indications that the new morality is gaining acceptance — and in the most unlikely quarters. Even sections of the women's movement have adopted many of the assumptions of the new morality. It has become fashionable in feminist circles to denounce promiscuity and extol the virtues of motherhood. The confused response of the women's movement and the left to legislative attempts to restrict embryo experimentation shows the tightening grip of ruling class morality over society. The aim of this pamphlet is to reply to the issues raised by the new moralists, to demystify them and to put forward a working class approach on questions of women's rights, sex and the family.



Chris Black (reflex)

Embryos don't have rights: women march against Powell

2. FAMILY VALUES

When Sara Keays was found to be pregnant with Cecil Parkinson's baby it did nothing for the Tories' image as the party of the family. The revelation was embarrassing for the party chairman and the prime minister. Following the birth of baby Flora, Cecil repented for his adultery and agreed to fork out some maintenance. He then held hands with his wife in a country setting so that television cameras could observe his renewed commitment to marriage.

For the rich and famous the family is important. The sanctity of the marriage contract, as well as its legal status, restricts access to the wife's sexual and reproductive functions to the husband alone. The rules of monogamy guarantee that the children of the marriage belong to the husband. They bear his name and inherit his worldly goods. This arrangement ensures that the propertied classes, to which Parkinson belongs, survive generation after generation. Wealth after death is guaranteed through keeping it in the family.

Mrs Parkinson's function is to produce children. They appeared on television together with the house, the car, and the dog. Mr Parkinson's function is to father children (an activity for which he has a special talent) and provide for the upkeep of the whole family. But as an up and coming cabinet minister Cecil also had to have his bit on the side. Sara Keays supplied sex to the government minister who did not get what he wanted at home. She also supplied what

was not required — a little bastard. Flora could not become heiress to the Parkinson estate because she was not a legitimate child. Cecil promised a monthly cheque to help 'maintain' the child. But he was not obliged to guarantee her a bourgeois future. That promise was restricted to his legitimate issue. Once Sara was busy babysitting Cecil began to spend more time with his new secretary and so the whole show goes on.

Mrs Thatcher stood by her disgraced senior minister. She considered that Parkinson behaved 'honourably' and he remains a Tory with considerable influence in the party. However, his hopes of an early return to the front bench have been set back by *Private Eye*'s recent revelations about an affair with his new secretary. Millions of people followed the Parkinson saga with interest, greatly relishing the discomfiture of the Tory leadership. Indeed gossip and scandal about media celebrities and personalities are the mainstay of the popular press. Many tabloids neglect the news and supply little else apart from saucy stories about the indiscretions of the stars. Readers particularly enjoy anything that exposes the hypocrisy and double standards of the rich and famous. When the Queen's sister formally separated from her husband after years of living apart, and took up with second-rate jet-setter Roddy Llewellyn, it was clear that even royalty sins. Princess Margaret's recent trip to hospital for surgery resulting from her chain-smoking habit revealed that Britain's top family is prone to the same vices as the rest of us.

The ruling class is enthusiastic about promoting family values but less keen on living by them. It keeps up the facade because of the continued importance of inheriting titles and property. It is important for the British establishment that Prince Charles' bride was a virgin and that Edward and Harry can be guaranteed to have not only blue blood but the right genes to equip them to rule the United Kingdom in their turn. But as long as the succession to the throne and the inheritance of property is safeguarded, the idle rich have little concern about the standards of family life that they proclaim as the ideal for others.

The recent biography of Lord Mountbatten, a close friend of the royal family, reveals that Dickie and Edwina's approach to marriage had more in common with that of bohemian freelovers than with the idyllic Charles and Di monogamous image of the colour supplements. The intruder who broke into the Queen's bedroom shocked the nation with the revelation that its top couple do not even sleep in the same room. People had long been used to

the fact that the royal parents had nothing to do with rearing the royal brats — this was left to an army of nannies and governesses and retainers. Princess Anne does not go on holiday with Mark Phillips while who Princess Margaret goes on holiday with is anybody's guess. The closer you look at the royal family, the less it looks like a family at all. And as for Margaret and Denis...

Working class people have little choice about family life. Try getting separate bedrooms in a council flat! We have nothing to pass to our children in a will, but we have no alternative way of looking after them and bringing them up other than in the family. The family provides workers with a place to eat and sleep, some rest and recreation from the grind of working life, and some support in times of illness, disability and old age. Unlike the upper crust, the working class has nowhere else to turn. It is not surprising that marriage and family life remain immensely popular.

Right, left and centre

There is a remarkable consensus of support for the family in British society. At election time politicians of all parties proclaim the virtues of their programme from the point of view of the average British family. Candidates declare their marital status and their reproductive achievements alongside their policies as though they were a parallel claim on the allegiance of the electorate. Wives (usually) adorn the platforms of all parties and kissing babies remains the sort of pro-family gesture expected of every serious electoral campaigner. When the British Medical Association circulated a pamphlet to be distributed in all doctors' surgeries promoting the virtues of family life to the captive waiting room audience, it was natural to invite a contribution from each of the major parties' leaders and their wives.

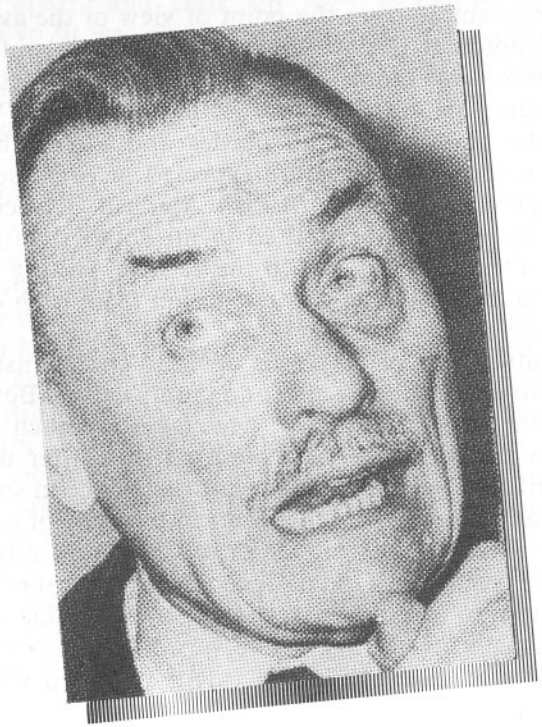
Yet there are differences of emphasis between the mainstream right and left approaches to the family and family values. Both are pro-family, but the prevailing Tory view takes a much more aggressive line on the measures now required to bolster up the family and proscribe potential threats to its crucial role in society.

In the Conservative view family life is given by a law of nature, ordained by God. As the right-wing Order of Christian Unity puts it, 'the family is the group that God designed for us'. For the Tories the family is essential to bring the sexes together in a stable union. The family tames men's greedy, aggressive, power-seeking instincts and controls their raw sexual urges. It provides women who are

vulnerable to unattached men outside the family with safety and security. Inside the family they nurture the young and are in turn supported by the husband. The authority of the man over his wife in the family provides the foundation of social stability. Conservatives believe that the family should look after itself and reject most forms of state intervention.

Right-wing groups project the modern nuclear family back into antiquity and forward into the distant future. They claim to object to anything which threatens family life. But their concern about family life is highly selective. Unemployment, low pay, bad housing and immigration laws are all responsible for breaking up thousands of families every year. But the moralists are not concerned about the real problems facing working class people. Their aim is to reinforce the family by restricting the alternative options, not by relieving the burdens and the strains that make family life a misery for many ordinary people. The right wingers' biggest hang-up is about sex. Their object is as far as possible to stamp out sexual activity outside marriage. This is the main object of their campaigns.

The sex obsession of the right-wing moralists is apparent from a glance at their current campaigns.



Pro-family, anti-women, Enoch Powell



Anti-pill crusader Victoria Gillick

- **anti-abortion — Life, Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, Order of Christian Unity**
- **against contraception for under-16s — Victoria Gillick, Responsible Society**
- **for censorship of video nasties, porn, sex on television — Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association, Care**
- **to restrict divorce — Care, OCU**
- **against *in-vitro* fertilisation and surrogate motherhood — Life, Spuc, OCU**
- **to restrict homosexuality — Care, Whitehouse**
- **to stop sex education in schools — Care, Whitehouse, OCU, Responsible Society**
- **to close sex shops — Whitehouse.**

For the right, non-marital sex is a challenge to the family. If men's sexual urges are not constrained by marriage the result will be the end of society as we know it.

The mainstream *Guardian*-reading radicals and left wingers also support the family, also claiming that it is, after all, only natural. For them marriage is based on love and the family provides a satisfactory way of raising children. They see the marriage contract

as fair and equal, and they put more emphasis on love and less on legal restraint. They approve of divorce, abortion and contraception. They can see no point in couples staying together if they no longer love one another, and no purpose in having unwanted children.

Liberals often support NHS contraception for the young and the poor to cut down on the proliferation of 'inadequate' families. They tolerate deviations such as one-parent families and discreet homosexuality, but regard the family itself as uncontroversial. Liberals accept that society should take some responsibility for looking after the old, the poor and the socially inadequate. They regard social workers, probation officers and old people's homes as necessary to mop up the mess because not everybody conforms to the ideal.

We are opposed to both the Conservative and the liberal view and to the family institution as it exists today. The role of the family in modern society is to provide a framework for maintaining and reproducing the working class, day in day out, week in week out, year after year, and generation after generation. Women carry the main burden of family life, as the child-bearers and chief child-rearers, cooks, cleaners, nurses and providers of general household services. The capitalist class gets these essential services free of charge. This is why it is state policy to encourage marriage and having children, and why contraception and abortion are restricted. The family restricts women's freedom and confines relationships between people to those which are acceptable to the capitalist system.

The legal and moral codes of capitalist society arise out of the requirements of the capitalist system of production. Laws and mores exist, not because of absolute truths or values or even because of common sense, but because the capitalist system could not exist without the family's productive and stabilising functions. Capitalism defines alternatives to family life as illegal, immoral, or uneconomic.

The legal code

The many laws that regulate people's relationships and personal behaviour are proof that the family is not a natural phenomenon but a social institution. Nature governs when the tide comes in, but it does not dictate that we should set up a family. Nobody has to appear on television to convince us that the tide must come in, but

the media constantly force the family down our throats. Looking at the extensive framework of laws protecting the family you would think it was an endangered species.

It is easy to get married. Three days' notice, £18 and two witnesses are all you need. Getting out of a marriage is much more difficult. You have to stick it out for a year before you can even begin to think about splitting up. A divorce takes at least nine months when there are no children and much longer when there are. There is no administrative justification for this long procedure. The point of the one year's grace and lengthy court wrangles is simply to give the pair time to 'work at it'. Prior to 1983 couples had to work at it for three years. Even so the one-year rule was not universally popular. A survey in *Options* magazine in October 1982 concluded that the liberalisation of the law since 1949 had already made it much too easy for people to escape from wedlock:

'Readers believe that there was a dramatic increase in divorce because it became socially acceptable and that since the laws were easier many couples had quite simply given up too easily.'

The Church of England Board for Social Responsibility opposed the 1983 Bill because 'newly married couples need time to establish their relationships':

'It is difficult to see how a marriage can be "irretrievably broken down" after only one year of its life.'

Why shouldn't people 'give up' on marriage? For the Church of England marriages are made in heaven and blessed by God. Because it is the Almighty — not a computer dating agency — that brings us together no man has the right to separate us. The state is more pragmatic. Most of us know within 12 months if we've made a terrible mistake. The only reason why anybody bothers to get a divorce is because you can't remarry without one. The wife living apart from her husband has as much right to maintenance, social security and tax benefits as the wife who gets a divorce. Divorce is merely the transitional stage to a second marriage.

Getting married is easy, getting pregnant is even easier. Women can get pregnant without getting anybody's permission or paying anything. Having a baby involves serious physical, emotional and economic changes in any woman's life. But she can go ahead and do it. Getting unpregnant is even more difficult than getting

unmarried. To get an abortion a woman needs the permission of two doctors and about £100 to pay for it. If she's under 16 she needs parental consent (she even needs this to get contraception and avoid pregnancy). Having an abortion involves one disrupted night in hospital. But it is nearly as hard to get as a heart transplant. It is the only operation for which the majority of patients are forced to pay.

The divorce and abortion laws, although they were liberalised in the sixties, serve to restrict people's choices and encourage family life. Marriage and children are almost unavoidable for the vast majority of women. Other laws protecting the family include:

- **The ban on homosexuality before 21.** This gives a young man five years in which he can legally experiment with women before he can try men. In that time he may easily get a girl pregnant or marry.
- **The non-existence of rape in marriage.** The marriage contract means constant consent to sex. This law shows that marriage has nothing to do with equality, partnership and love. It is about sex and procreation.
- **The virtual impossibility of getting sterilised until the age of 40 or after having at least two children.** Single and childless people are denied access to these operations on the grounds that they will soon change their minds.

Moral codes

Moral blackmail backs up the law. From early childhood we are taught that love means marriage and sex means children. Spinsters, homosexuals and bachelors are pitied and ridiculed. Men who have not produced children — such as Clive Ponting, Ken Livingstone or Edward Heath — are not real men. The revelation of Ponting's childless marriage confirmed *The Sun*'s prejudice that he had no backbone. Women who have more than one abortion — such as Billy Jean King — are labelled heartless and selfish. When the top woman tennis player admitted that she was a lesbian it only confirmed every mother's prejudice that she wasn't a real woman. Jokes about the pattering of tiny feet start at the wedding reception and continue until the family is judged complete (at least two children and one of each sex).

There are alternatives to getting married and having children: homosexuality, single parenthood, lesbianism, celibacy, promiscuity, abortion and contraception. People who select these options have always had a hard time. Apart from celibates, who are

either religious extremists or too weird to relate to another person, these people are denounced as dangerous deviants.

Morality affects those who conform as well as those who don't. Contraception, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and unsatisfactory sex are not normally the subject of polite conversation. Adverts for the pill are sent to doctors only, and adverts for specific products are banned on television. Even general advertising by the Health Education Council and the Family Planning Association can be found only rarely in libraries and doctors' surgeries and never in launderettes, works canteens and schools. Family Planning Clinics are the only places where literature is readily available and if you're there you probably already know what contraception is. The FPA has recently withdrawn material aimed specifically at young people as a result of the Gillick ruling. Few people talk openly about their abortions, herpes or impotent husbands. Everybody sees their individual problems as a personal tragedy — and often as a penance for the sins of the flesh.

If all else fails economic realism will push people into families. Few women's wages will keep one woman, never mind one woman and two children. Few women with children can work full-time. Average part-time wages are less than £50 a week. Few single fathers can afford to employ a daily babysitter so it makes sense to find a new wife. Social security is little help. Nursery provision is rare, inadequate and expensive. Single, childless people have little choice about how they live. They can stay with their parents or move out. Private accommodation is very expensive and council housing is out of the question. The Tories are making it impossible for young unemployed people to leave home by denying them housing benefit. Homosexual couples do not have the same access to council housing as heterosexual couples. Harrogate council recently evicted a lesbian after her lover died.

The family has the law, morality and economic common sense on its side. It is hardly surprising that under these conditions most people opt for the ideal. But capitalism makes its ideal as impossible to achieve as the alternatives. Our expectations are never met. Young people are criticised for wanting too much. Romance is promised but the reality is depressing. After the honeymoon comes the mortgage, the screaming kids, the boredom, the isolation, the sexual problems and the breakdown.

Of course family life is not all bad and most people make the best of it. Very few people kill themselves and even fewer kill their

partners. Only three in every 10 women have an affair. Only one in 10 women has a steady bloke on the side. And although 80 per cent of women surveyed by *Woman* magazine expressed disappointment with their sex lives, they put up with it. Half of all women put the decline in their sex lives down to having a baby. Two out of three women with children under the age of three admit that they are too tired for sex. Yet few nurseries will take children under the age of three, and none will look after children in the evenings or through the night. It is surprising that so few children are killed by their parents each year. Most people tolerate or even enjoy their marriage and family. But then it's the only way to survive.



The perfect couple: Charles and Di set an example to the nation

3. THE PERMISSIVE SOCIETY

'Porn is one example', wrote Lord Longford in 1972, 'of a general challenge to the basic values of our society.' In the book that marked the beginning of the end of the permissive society and made him famous as 'Lord Porn', the former Labour cabinet minister called for an end to displays of nudity and sexuality in the media:

'In the age-long argument over pornography a new watershed was reached in this country when, in the summer of 1971, *Oh Calcutta!* was staged with impunity in London. Somewhere about that time large numbers of people hitherto unconcerned, or positively favourable to greater freedom of expression, began to share the anxieties expressed for many years by other citizens. All sorts of people, not only those with a religious standpoint, began to say for the first time "things have gone too far".' *(Pornography: the Longford report,* 1972)

For most people the biggest problem about the play was trying to work out what all the hi-jinks on stage had to do with Calcutta.

A growing band of moralists identified the relaxation of censorship as the cutting edge of the permissive society. They blamed pornography for sapping the moral fibre of the nation and made it the central focus of their campaigns. Lord Longford

launched the Festival of Light in 1970 and Mary Whitehouse established the National Viewers and Listeners Association the following year. She embarked on a series of highly publicised obscenity prosecutions. These included cases against popular radical publications such as *The little red schoolbook* (1971) and the schoolkids' issue of *Oz* (1972). When the *Oz* conviction was quashed on appeal Whitehouse launched the Nationwide Petition for Public Decency, which stirred up prejudices even further.

The growing clamour for censorship in the early seventies marked a dramatic reversal of the trends of the previous decade. The sixties opened with the sensational failure of the prosecution against Penguin Books under the 1959 Obscene Publications Act for publishing DH Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's lover.* 'Would you allow your servant to read this book?' the prosecuting counsel asked the jury. The presumed reply of the jury in delivering its 'not guilty' verdict set the tone for the decade. Yes, the establishment would allow its servants to read books it had previously suppressed. And it would also allow them more freedom in other areas too.

Throughout the sixties the state was reluctant to use the Obscene Publications Act to restrict publishing. Attempts to impose censorship through legal action generally failed. Even when prosecutions were successful, as in the case of the novel *Last exit to Brooklyn,* the authorities made no effort to enforce the ruling and prevent the distribution of the book. The retreat from state censorship was summed up in the abolition in 1968 of the power of the Lord Chamberlain to censor theatrical productions. The media featured sex more explicitly than ever before. *The Sun* newspaper appeared in 1969 and soon made 'page three' synonymous with pictures of naked women. Other papers and magazines followed suit and opened their feature pages to wider areas of sexual controversy. 'Four letter words' were heard in TV dramas and 'full frontal' nudity became acceptable on television and the cinema screen.

The relaxation of censorship allowed the pornography industry to flourish. Technical improvements in printing and production brought a wide range of sexually explicit glossy magazines into most high street newsagents. For many people this was the most tangible expression of the new morality of the decade. For others the main sign of the new times was the proliferation of sex education in schools.

In the new climate of license the establishment moved to ease legal controls over sexual behaviour and moral matters. Three



One big happy family: sixties sex idols at wedding get together

important new laws were introduced in 1967, the high water mark of permissive legislation. The Abortion Act allowed easier access to abortion. The Sexual Offences Act amended the law to decriminalise some homosexual behaviour. The National Health Service (Family Planning) Act allowed health authorities to provide family planning advice and contraception on the NHS. Two years later the Divorce Reform Act, described as 'the Casanova's charter', made 'irretrievable breakdown' of a marriage good grounds for divorce.

The relaxation of social controls on sexual behaviour made the sixties the decade of the permissive society. These were the years of swinging London and San Francisco, mini-skirts and the pill, feminism and gay pride. But what was really behind the sexual revolution and what sort of liberation did it bring?

The morals of the market

The permissive society was a product of the economic expansion and rising living standards in the two decades following the Second World War. Average real wages in Britain increased by 25 per cent between 1938 and 1958. And, unlike previous booms, this one was

sustained. Between 1955 and 1969 average weekly earnings rose by 88 per cent and prices by 63 per cent. Higher real earnings meant greater spending power and greater independence.

Higher productivity meant that the prices of many goods previously out of reach of most workers fell dramatically. The spread of car ownership was one sign of the times. Car ownership in Britain rose from 2.3 million in 1950 to almost 12 million by 1970. The most rapid growth was in the early sixties when the number of cars on the roads rose from 5.6m in 1960 to 9.1m in 1965. Household goods showed a similar trend. In 1956 only eight per cent of households had refrigerators. By 1962 the proportion had risen to a third. By the end of the decade it had reached 70 per cent. Television sets which had been a rarity in the early fifties became a standard feature of working class living rooms in the sixties. In 1961 75 per cent of families owned a set, by 1971 the figure was 91 per cent. Washing machines and a range of other domestic 'labour-saving devices' became part of the furniture of working class households.

Going away on holiday was another experience which became commonplace for the working class for the first time. The number of people taking holidays away from home rose from 27 million in 1951 to reach a peak of 49 million in 1973. Reasonably priced foreign package holidays were a post-war innovation. In 1961 four million people took holidays abroad, by 1971 the number had reached seven million. When Tory prime minister Harold MacMillan told people in 1959 that they had 'never had it so good', many were ready to believe him.

Workers had more money in their pockets and more choice about how to spend it. The proportion of income spent on necessities such as food and clothing fell consistently throughout the sixties. Workers could now make a wide range of choices about their lifestyles and indulge in different patterns of consumption. People could use their greater economic independence to express their individuality. But their expression of individuality was confined within the limits of what the market offered. Two sections of society which were particularly affected by greater economic freedom were young people and women.

The emergence of a 'youth identity' from the fifties onwards was one of the clearest expressions of the growth of working class spending power. The word 'teenager' was a fifties innovation. In circumstances of full employment and labour shortages, wages for young workers rose even faster than those for adults. Between 1938 and 1958 wage rates for young workers increased twice as fast as



Escape: the boom pushed women out of the home and into work

rates for older workers. Young workers' wages were still much lower than those for adults, but they still had more to spend than ever before.

Teenagers' spending was concentrated in areas which gave youth a much higher public profile. People between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for only about five per cent of all spending on consumer durables. Yet they were the biggest buyers of records and record players (42 per cent), cosmetics (29 per cent) and cinema tickets (28 per cent). Manufacturers and retailers made sure that their products appealed to the burgeoning youth market. Because films and popular music are public forms of entertainment the influence of youth in these areas made an unmistakable impact on the wider society. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Who personified the new 'youth culture' and reinforced the establishment notion of a growing 'generation gap'. Greater economic freedom allowed young people to become a distinct group in society. But their distinctiveness was defined by their patterns of consumption. Their identity as youth depended on liking certain kinds of film stars and

popular music, wearing certain kinds of clothes and attending certain coffee bars, clubs and dance halls.

Economic expansion pushed women out of the home into the labour force. Although women's wages remained low, sometimes little more than half of a man's wage even for full-time work, their income made an important contribution to raising working class living standards. Earning wages gave women greater economic independence. It gave married women more say in how the couple spent their income and what sort of lifestyle they led. It gave women who wanted it greater scope to live independently of parents, boyfriends or husbands. The scope for wage-earning and living in a shared flat or bed-sit opened up a space between the parental home and the husband's home through which some women could find at least a temporary escape.

Improvements in contraceptive techniques helped to relax the grip of family life on women. The pill and the coil both came into widespread use in the sixties. The direct effect of these developments on sexual behaviour was limited. As late as 1970 a survey showed that less than 20 per cent of married women under 45 used the pill. Almost 40 per cent used no contraception at all. The introduction of relatively safe and effective contraceptive methods did not change the sex lives of working class women. Most of the liberating impact of these methods was on middle class women. However, the availability of contraception did loosen the link between sex and procreation. It helped to free women from the burden of child-bearing or the alternative of unsatisfactory methods of contraception.

Higher living standards and greater economic independence did not undermine the institution of marriage. Indeed it became more popular. People married younger — at 25 for men and 23 for women in the late sixties, compared with 27 and 25 in the late forties. And more people got married. In 1911 just over half of the women between the age of 21 and 39 were married. By the mid-sixties 96 per cent of women had married by the age of 45. Yet there were important changes, reflecting women's capacity to earn money and control their own fertility.

As family size declined child-rearing receded in importance. It was no longer the central justification for marriage and the major preoccupation of a married couple. The relationship between the couple, who had to live together both before children arrived and probably for a long time after they had departed, became a more central focus. Love and sex in marriage became a matter of public

interest. By the end of the fifties the boom in sex manuals for married couples was well underway. The notion that marriage was an equal partnership replaced older ideas about wifely deference and obedience.

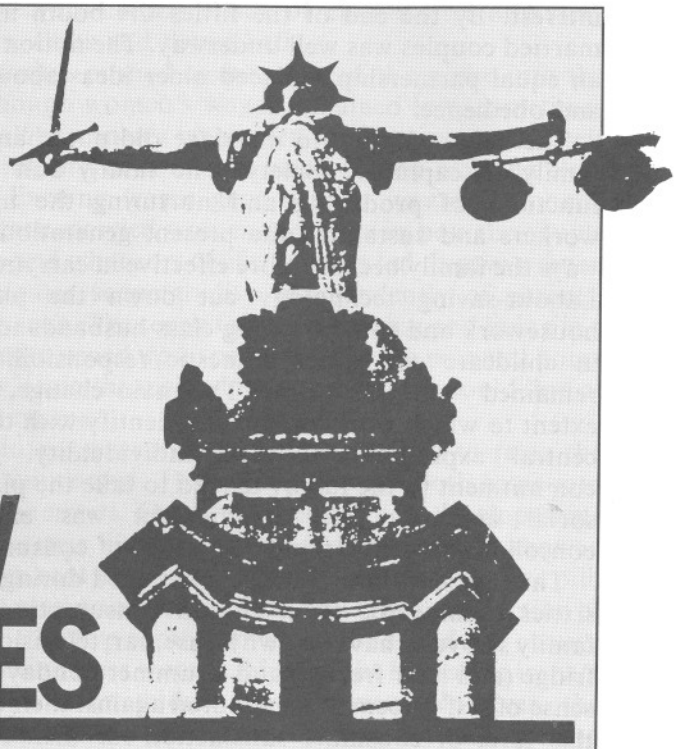
The new approach to marriage did not change the role of the family in capitalist society. The family still served its central functions of producing and nurturing the next generation of workers and sustaining the present generation. Indeed in many ways the family became more effective in carrying out its functions. Labour-saving technology cut down the physical burden of housework and some working class husbands took a greater share in childcare and other domestic responsibilities, though these remained 'women's work'. The main change, however, was the extent to which workers came to identify with their families as the central expression of their individuality. Workers' private commitment to the family tended to take the place of more public social activity. This development was encouraged by the consolidation of the family as a unit of consumption.

The 'nuclear' family which developed during the late fifties and sixties became the main unit of consumption in society. Every family strove to have its own house, car, television (and later video), fridge (and later freezer) and a summer holiday in Spain. Workers' sense of self-esteem was measured against their capacity to provide this level of consumer satisfaction for their families. Husbands expected their wives not only to look after the children and the kitchen, but also to provide them with emotional and sexual fulfilment within the bedroom. Workers' sense of personal identity became closely identified with sexual satisfaction and personal relationships within the family.

Liberal legislation

The continuing role of the family in reproducing the working class and its increasing significance in providing personal fulfilment through consumption helps to explain the liberalising impulse behind legislation in the sixties.

The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 was an attempt to provide the appropriate legal framework for the new form of family. When the family was closely tied to the task of child-bearing, sterility was sufficient grounds for divorce. In the sixties the greater emphasis on love in marriage led to the state accepting the absence of love between a married couple as grounds for divorce. The new freedom



THE NEW RULES

Sexual Offences Act 1957

- prostitution as such decriminalised, but increased penalties for soliciting in public
- prostitutes cleared off streets, stiffer penalties for call girl agencies

Sexual Offences Act 1967

- homosexual relations between men over 21, in private, decriminalised
- punishments for offences reduced — for summary convictions
- option of trial by jury or trial in magistrates court — increased convictions and prosecutions

National Health Service (Family Planning) Act 1967

- allowed district health authorities to provide family planning advice on the NHS
- allowed contraception to be supplied on prescription to married women — later extended to unmarried women

Abortion Act 1967

- abortion no longer an offence if two registered doctors agreed that the continuation of pregnancy would be more injurious to the mental or physical health of a woman or her existing children than termination, or if there was a substantial risk that the baby would be mentally or physically handicapped

Divorce Law Reform Act 1969

- abolished 'matrimonial offence' as sole grounds for divorce
- made 'irretrievable breakdown' grounds for divorce
- allowed divorce after a separation of three years where both partners agreed
- divorce permissible after five years where one partner disagreed

Matrimonial Property Act 1970

- recognised women's rights to a share of family property on divorce

Matrimonial Causes Act 1973

- reformed registry ceremony in line with changes of previous 10 years, taking out the word 'obey' from the woman's vows.

Divorce Law Reform Act 1983

- reduced terms of 'irretrievable breakdown' to one year's separation.

to end a loveless marriage did not lead to the end of marriage as an institution. Indeed the frequency with which divorced men and women remarried testified to the continuing vitality of the institution.

Changes in the abortion law were influenced by two factors. The first was that in the sixties women were in demand as workers rather than child-bearers. The state was not averse to removing legal restrictions on abortion. The old laws had the effect of condemning women to unwanted pregnancies and consequent child-rearing activities which tied them to the home. The second factor was the replacement of child-bearing by inter-personal relationships as the main legitimation of the family. Once emotional involvement became the main justification for family life, then abortion could be regarded as simply another way of controlling family size. Like the new contraceptive methods, easier abortion confirmed the new rationalisation of the family. The new abortion law reinforced the labour market-related, consumption-oriented nuclear family.

The 1967 Abortion Act did not introduce free abortion on demand. It gave doctors the power to decide whether a woman could have an abortion. It included provision for women to get an abortion on the grounds of social circumstances. This meant that it now became possible for women to get a legal abortion on the national health service. In practice most abortions continued to be



Chris Black (reflex)

No abortion on demand: the 1967 Act provided limited access to abortion

performed in the private sector for a substantial fee. The number of abortions carried out on the national health service increased, but inadequate facilities, doctors' prejudices and long waiting lists ensured that the private sector flourished.

The 'legalisation' of homosexuality in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act was restricted in a similar way to abortion. Since the publication of the Wolfenden committee's report on prostitution and homosexuality in 1957 the police had eased off harassment of gays and society as a whole became more tolerant of homosexuality. Indeed the police had largely abandoned prosecutions in the mid-sixties because they found it impossible to get juries to convict. The 1967 Act aimed to re-draw the boundaries of what was acceptable sexual behaviour. It did not aim to liberate gay men (the law never recognised lesbianism in the first place) but to proscribe public displays of homosexuality by tolerating it 'between consenting adults in private'.

In his speech in parliament in support of the new law Leo Abse, the driving force behind the legislation, made its aim explicit:

'The paramount reason for the introduction of this Bill is that it may at last move our community away from being riveted to the question of punishment of homosexuals....Surely, what we should be preoccupied with is the question of how we can, if possible, reduce the number of faulty males in the community.'

Lord Arran, supporting the Bill in the Lords, made the point even more forcefully:

'I ask those who have, as it were, been in bondage and for whom the prison doors are now open to show their thanks by comporting themselves quietly and with dignity.'

Gays were still regarded by the establishment as diseased deviants. But in a society in which reproduction had become less important their existence could be tolerated as long as they behaved themselves.

The 1967 Act merely decriminalised homosexual behaviour in certain circumstances. It maintained discrimination against homosexual men by retaining a higher age of consent than for heterosexuals (21 rather than 16) and by imposing stringent conditions of privacy on homosexual relations. Gays might not reproduce, but they did consume. The expansion of the market

catering for gay men was a striking feature of the general expansion of consumption. As single men, gays had a higher proportion of their income to spend on personal consumption than married men or women. Most of the liberation that gays experienced was the life-style that could be purchased in the fairly discreet social space of gay pubs and clubs.

No liberation

There were significant changes in family life and sexual behaviour in the era of the permissive society. But permissiveness fell far short of liberating either women or gays from the oppressive structures of family life and its associated prejudices. The new moral climate was closely related to the expansion of the consumer market. This encouraged the development of individuality, but usually at the expense of the individual's relationship with the wider society. The apparent relaxation of family ties was a consequence of the strengthening of ideas of individual fulfilment within the family and the new emphasis on sexual satisfaction as part of the marriage contract.

As atomised consumers workers had a degree of freedom unparalleled in history. As individuals they could spend their money on a wider range of goods than ever before. They could satisfy physical and social needs they had never before even dared express. As individuals they were free to experiment with lifestyles built around consumption. As long as liberalisation was predicated on individual consumption it represented no threat to the capitalist system. The family and sexual relations assumed new forms, but the functions the family performed for capital continued.

The liberalisation of the sixties depended on economic expansion. The recession of the eighties has begun to expose the limitations of the permissive society. Freedom of choice defined by the market withers away as the market shrinks. The new forms of sexual relations of the sixties are still with us, but they are now being shown up as the straitjackets of the eighties.

4. THE MORALISTS STRIKE BACK

If in the early seventies Lord Porn was held up to public ridicule, today the joke is on the liberal reformers of the past. Now the moralists are in the ascendant and campaigners once dismissed as cranks have built up a popular consensus around their reactionary views. A decade ago Enoch Powell was widely regarded as an eccentric bigot who could only survive on the diehard Ulster Unionist fringes of British politics. In 1985 Powell won support from across the political spectrum for his proposed legislation to ban embryo experimentation.

Mary Whitehouse was once such a figure of fun that a pornographic magazine was named after her. Yet in May 1976 the Queen and the prime minister backed her campaign to prevent a Danish porn movie producer from making *The sex life of Jesus Christ* in Britain. In 1980 Whitehouse was awarded the CBE. By 1983 Thatcher had identified herself publicly with Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association and its stand against the decline in moral standards. The following year she presented the NVLA award (to the BBC for *Yes minister).*

'Think about the family' Thatcher told the cabinet in 1982. In the eighties the ideas of the Festival of Light and the Responsible Society are often heard at cabinet meetings. It has become commonplace for ministers to assert the virtues of family life as a

solution to the pressing economic and social problems of the day. The media now celebrate motherhood and family values, while fostering scare campaigns against promiscuity (held to be responsible for VD, cervical cancer and infertility) and homosexuality (which can lead to AIDS). While the pop stars of the past flaunted their sexuality, in the eighties androgyny is in and Morrissey of The Smiths presents celibacy as his claim to fame.

The wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981 launched the decade of the family. The subsequent births of Princes William and Harry and every public appearance of the royal babies have been greeted with a fresh outpouring of pro-family sentiment. Press and television have celebrated improvements in reproductive technology — 'fertility drugs' and 'test-tube babies' — as major achievements in allowing every woman to achieve fulfilment through childbirth. Motherhood is held up as every woman's aim in life and infertile couples are among the most deserving recipients of public sympathy.

The establishment has launched a series of restrictive measures and propaganda campaigns to proscribe deviations from the norms of family life.

● *Censorship*

In May 1984, after almost a year of hysterical newspaper reports about the corrupting effects of video nasties on the nation's children, Graham Bright's Bill to impose censorship on video recordings became law. Bright's measure was actively supported by the prime minister, the home secretary and by influential Labour MPs. In early 1985 the press leapt on the suggestion that the behaviour of the 'Oxford rapist', who was convicted for a series of violent sex offences, had been inspired by watching pornographic videos.

All the media furore about pornography has helped to create a climate in which the police can play a more active role in deciding what people can view or read. In the Soho area of central London the police have backed a campaign by local residents to drive pornography retailers out of the area. In April 1984 customs officials swooped on London's Gay's the Word bookshop and confiscated large numbers of books and other material. The shop's staff and directors now face conspiracy charges at the Old Bailey.

● *Prostitution*

As the recession has driven more women to prostitution to support themselves and their children, the establishment has taken steps to ensure that they are kept under strict control. Local campaigns against 'red light' areas have given the police a free rein to harass and intimidate prostitutes and their clients. Police claim a 50 per cent drop in prosecutions for prostitution in the Kings Cross area of London after a two-year campaign to drive them off the streets.

Prostitutes have moved out of traditional 'red light' areas to avoid continual aggravation. Yet wherever they go trouble follows. The influx of prostitutes into the Balham area led to the local Labour MP Tony Cox being summoned to a public meeting with his constituents who demanded to know what he was going to do about it. His response was to sponsor Tory MP Janet Fookes' private members' Bill to give the police greater powers to arrest 'kerb crawlers' and other men who approach women in the streets.

● *Abortion*

The anti-abortion organisations Spuc and Life have stepped up their campaigns to restrict access to abortions. Since the failure of a series of attempts to amend the 1967 Act, through private members' Bills introduced by White, Benyon and Corrie, they have adopted a more indirect approach. Enoch Powell's Bill against embryo experimentation is one example of this approach. The Bill does not mention abortion, but by dignifying the fetus with the status of an 'unborn child', it opens the way for further questioning of abortion rights.

The anti-abortionists' friends in Fleet Street have made their contribution to the attacks on abortion. In the summer of 1984 a series of shock stories appeared in the popular press telling of fetuses crying out on abortionists' draining boards. The aim of the reports was to put pressure on the medical establishment to lower the upper time limit for carrying out abortions from 28 to 24 weeks. In February 1985 Tory MP Edward Leigh argued for a reduction in the time limit for abortion to 24 weeks or less and opposed abortion 'on demand'.

● *Contraception/sex education*

The moral rearmers have also set about trying to limit access to contraception and advice and information about contraceptive

methods. In December 1984 the court of appeal upheld Catholic activist Victoria Gillick's complaint against the department of health and social security. The department had issued a statement to doctors in 1975 advising them that they could, in certain exceptional circumstances, prescribe contraceptives to girls under 16 without their parents' consent. The appeal court agreed with Gillick that this was an infringement of parents' rights. As the law now stands doctors are denied the right to provide contraceptive advice or services to under-16 year olds without the written consent of their parents.

The moralists have always hated sex education. In their view even the inadequate information provided to children in state schools ends adolescent ignorance too early. In 1984 the health department, under pressure from the moralists, ordered the Family Planning Association to remove from its shelves copies of *Make it happy,* a sex education book aimed at teenagers.

In the eighties the moralists have already scored many successes. Appearing on television in January 1985 after her court victory, Gillick gave notice that 'this is only the beginning'. The moralists are crusaders whose object is to impose their particular version of Victorian values on the rest of us. Conformity and chastity are the ideals of the eighties. Whatever happened to the permissive society?

Why they need the family now

Just as the boom produced the permissive society, the recession has destroyed it. Two factors have been decisive in the revival of pro-family propaganda and the demise of the liberal approach to women's rights and sexuality that prevailed in the sixties and early seventies. The first is the crisis of public expenditure, which has led to cuts in welfare facilities and the transfer of many 'caring' functions from the state into 'the community'. For 'community' read women in the home. The second is the growth of conflict and instability in society. This has encouraged the authorities to promote the family as a stabilising and controlling influence in society. Let's look at each of these issues in turn.

The first cuts in public spending took place in 1976 and the squeeze has tightened in virtually every area of welfare provision ever since. Economies in the health service and in local authority services and education have had a direct impact on the position of women in society.

Even though the overall level of spending on the health service has increased it has not kept pace with the level of need. The stagnation of funding has encouraged a climate of austerity at all levels. The authorities have cut costs in ways which may appear to be insignificant, but which all add up to produce an insidious erosion of services. One measure of the slowdown of the hospital sector is the extension of the waiting list for surgery.

The number of people waiting for operations rose from 722 000 in 1976 to 894 000 in 1982. Another sign of the penny-pinching mentality that now prevails in the hospitals is the early discharge of patients after operations. The average length of stay in hospital dropped from 12.1 days in 1976 to 9.9 days in 1982. For maternity patients the length of stay fell from seven days to 5.3 days and for surgical cases from 9.1 to 7.6 days *(Social Trends* 1985). Who looks after people who languish on the waiting lists for operations on their hernias or varicose veins or who are sent home prematurely before their stitches have been removed?

Women in the home

The fashionable concept of 'community care' disguises an attempt to save money in the public services by discharging patients from various institutions to be looked after 'in the community', a euphemism for 'in the home'. Successive governments have been enthusiastic about the supposed advantages of returning the old, the mentally ill and the mentally and physically handicapped to the community. In 1982 fewer than 50 000 beds in hospitals were occupied by the mentally handicapped — a drop of almost 10 000 from 1976. Figures for the physically handicapped tell the same story. Between 1976 and 1983 the number of physically handicapped people under 65 in local authority homes fell from 6200 to 5200. Residential accommodation for the elderly also stagnated in this period.

Nurseries are another casualty of the cuts. Provision for the under-fives has remained grossly inadequate and facilities for under-threes have become virtually non-existent. Parents, especially mothers, are increasingly obliged to look after their own children or make expensive child-minding arrangements. Expenditure on education in general has dropped sharply over the last decade, producing a deterioration in standards and a greater onus on parents to teach their own children how to read and write.

For those who can afford it the private sector has grown to compensate for the cuts in public provision. Private and voluntary

homes for the elderly took in an extra 11 000 people between 1981 and 1983. Between 1976 and 1983 the number of physically handicapped people in private and voluntary homes rose by 3000 while state places fell. Private hospitals and private nurseries have mushroomed in response to the decay of the state system, but the cost puts them out of reach of most working class women. The burden of declining state services has had to be shouldered by dutiful daughters, mothers and sisters.

The changing patterns of women's work correspond to the requirements of the system for a more flexible workforce and for the greater availability of women to work in the home. Over the past decade the main change in women's working patterns has been the growth of part-time working. Between 1972 and 1984 the number of part-time workers, the vast majority of them women, increased by 1.3 million. This increase has partly disguised the fact that since 1979 women's full-time jobs have disappeared at twice the rate of men's and the total number of working women is now below 1964 levels. Women are now 42 per cent of the workforce, but they remain largely in low-paid insecure employment. The 10 worst paid jobs are mainly done by women and whereas 12 per cent of full-time adult men fall below the low-pay threshold, more than half of full-time adult women get below poverty-line wages.

Part-time low-paid work is the ideal form of adjustment of women to the needs of the recession economy. Women make up a pool of low-paid workers who can be drawn into the labour market or excluded according to temporary fluctuations in demand. This form of working makes them available to look after young children and relatives who are acutely ill or chronically sick or disabled. The new celebration of the virtues of family life seeks to legitimise the form of family that is appropriate to Thatcher's Britain.

The second aspect of the revival of the family is its function as a bulwark of order and stability in a society in which mass unemployment, deprivation and oppression may provoke a serious threat to the existing order. The potential danger has already become apparent in Britain in the inner-city riots in 1981 and the violent conflicts between the police and striking miners on the picket lines in 1984. The Tory government's panic about football hooliganism in early 1985, when a riot at a Luton-Millwall match led the government to transfer the England-Scotland game from Wembley to Hampden Park, revealed the extent of establishment fears about the breakdown of respect for law and order. The authorities are alarmed at the threat from the mass of young people

who have nothing to look forward to but a life on the dole. They are particularly wary of young blacks who have no prospects in modern Britain.

In conditions of growing social conflict the family can act as an agency for social control for the ruling class. The government has gone to great lengths to promote the notion of parental responsibility for the behaviour of their offspring. The government has tightened up the treatment of unemployed school-leavers to reinforce parental control. Young people's right to benefit is curtailed for some months after they leave school, enforcing their dependence on the family. They are now obliged to accept 'training' on the Youth Training Scheme if they cannot find work themselves. Recent changes in the regulations restrict the rights of young people to move away from home by cutting their entitlement to housing benefit.

The media also promote the family by giving family responsibilities a higher priority than wider social relationships. This approach comes to the fore during strikes when the media single out for praise scabs who put their commitments to their wives and families (and the mortgage) before their loyalty to their workmates, their union and their class. Throughout the 1984-85 miners' strike news reports emphasised the difficulties facing miners' families while the men were out on strike. While strikers were depicted as heartless zealots, those who put their families first and went back to work were treated as courageous heroes. For the ruling class the family can play a useful role in atomising the working class and undermining solidarity. The miners' strike showed that collective organisation can limit the effectiveness of this weapon, but it would be foolish to underestimate its wider significance.

The recession itself creates a problem for the promoters of the joys of family life. The pressures on the working class family resulting from unemployment, declining incomes and deteriorating services intensify the stresses and strains of family life. The result is more rows, more domestic violence, more family breakdowns and higher rates of divorce and single parenthood. In the recession the establishment ideal of a harmonious and happy family is further and further removed from the reality of family life for most working class people. To counter the forces tending to break up the family the propagandists of the ruling class have to go to even greater lengths to prop up family values. They are prepared to stir up all sorts of traditional prejudices to keep the family going.

Notions that would have been ridiculed 10 years ago are now regularly churned out in the popular press. Take the ideas of the Order of Christian Unity which has won a widespread audience for its reactionary family values:

'God designed the family to take care of people from the cradle to the grave. The state is no substitute.'

How convenient that God's designs should fit in so well with Thatcher's! Whether the Tories believe in God or not they welcome any support they can get for their drive to enforce women's subordination in the home. It is in this context that Lord Longford and Mary Whitehouse and Enoch Powell and all the other upper class bigots have grown in influence and social standing over the past five years.

Restrictions on sexual behaviour play an important role in legitimising the family and upholding the virtues of marriage and motherhood. Establishment figures have launched a series of moral panics to deter people from sexual activity and experimentation outside the limits of marriage. Scares about diseases spread through sexual contact — herpes and AIDS — have recurred at regular intervals. The pill has been blamed for encouraging promiscuity and, on the flimsiest evidence, for causing breast and cervical cancer. Promiscuity (and the coil) are also blamed for causing infertility, itself a major focus of public concern as a barrier to women's ultimate fulfilment.

The ruling class leaps on mumbo jumbo academic studies which show that careless parents allowing children to watch video nasties are the source of conflict in society. New studies that purport to show that working mothers are bad for young children or that children suffer permanent damage if their parents' divorce are now lauded in establishment circles. The more capitalism in decay destroys working class family life, the more aggressively will it be forced to promote the family as the last bulwark of its rotten system.

5. EMBRYOS AND TEST-TUBE BABIES

Louise Brown, the world's first test-tube baby, was greeted as a great achievement back in July 1978, but she was a real threat to the establishment. Louise Brown was sweet, she smiled and her human qualities shone through. Despite her abnormal conception she was born a healthy human child. Yet the lovely Louise spelt trouble for the guardians of morality.

Contraception had long separated sex from child-bearing. The new reproductive technology now separated child-bearing from sex. Artificial insemination, *in-vitro* fertilisation and surrogate motherhood opened up the possibility of any woman having any man's baby. A lesbian could have a baby by artificial insemination by donor without having anything to do with men. A gay man could impregnate a surrogate mother without having sex with her. The links between sex and marriage, and marriage and child-bearing had been severed by science. These scientific advances threatened the whole basis of family life.

'Against this background of public excitement and concern', the Warnock commission was set up in 1982 to inquire into the new reproductive techniques, surrogacy and embryology. Warnock's object was to work out a way that the new technology could be used to enhance rather than undermine the family. The committee published its report in July 1984. It recommended that the

techniques should be used to overcome problems of infertility. But the moral message was clear: 'It is better for children to be born into a two parent family, with both a father and a mother'. For lesbians and single parents, test-tube babies were out. The state would regulate the new techniques so that they posed no threat to family life.

The development of artificial insemination techniques 40 years ago caused a similar furore. In 1948 the Archbishop of Canterbury demanded that the use of sperm from a donor should be made into a criminal offence. Just over a decade later the Faversham committee ruled that artificial insemination by a donor was an 'undesirable practice'. It was not until 1968 that donor insemination was made available on the health service, but the service was still highly restricted. In 1971 the British Medical Association failed to persuade the government to license donor agencies. But by the time Warnock reported it was generally recognised that 'artificial insemination by a donor with the consent of the husband is a mark of stability in a marriage while an act of adultery may well be the opposite'.

The Warnock committee recommended a ban on experiments on embryos after 14 days, a ban on commercial surrogacy and a new definition of parental rights. But its attempt to establish principles only exposed the hypocrisy of conventional morality.

The sanctity of life

Warnock claimed that 'a society which had no inhibiting limits, especially in the areas with which we have been concerned, questions of birth and death, of the setting up of families, and the valuing of human life, would be a society without moral scruples'. It is strange to suggest that capitalist society is organised around a moral code. In fact, social considerations are what really determine whether we live or die.

It sometimes seems that the only sort of life that is sacred to the British establishment is that of embryos in test-tubes. The power of the British ruling class is based on its success in liquidating millions of lives in its wars of conquest and exploitation around the world. Today its moral scruples are easily suspended when it comes to the sailors in the *Belgrano* or teenage joy-riders in West Belfast. The thousands of human lives wrecked every year through industrial accidents merit not a fraction of the concern given to a few microscopic cells. A glance at recent history is sufficient to make

clear that nobody's life is sacred if they stand in the way of the ruling class. The establishment proclaims the sanctity of embryo life only to deny rights to women.

Embryo rights

The Warnock committee had long discussions on the fraught question of 'when does life begin?' It concluded that 'although the question of when life or personhood begin appear to be questions of fact susceptible to straightforward answers, we hold that the answers to such questions in fact are amalgams of factual and moral judgements'. The hardline moralists believe that life begins at the moment of conception, but the pragmatists on the Warnock committee settled on the arbitrary 14-day limit.

In practice different considerations govern who is deemed to be a person. Many people who uphold the rights of the embryo concede that abortion is justified on the grounds of rape or if severe congenital abnormality is diagnosed early in pregnancy. It is common practice for babies born with abnormalities that would lead to them being mentally retarded, incontinent and unable to walk, to be allowed to die. In other words, social, not metaphysical or scientific factors, really decide who lives and who dies.

It is absurd to talk of the rights of the embryo. Rights only have any meaning for individuals in society. Human life as we know it can only begin at birth, a fact acknowledged in practice, if not in theory, by all but the most fundamentalist theologians. It makes no sense to prevent experiments on embryos after 14 days and yet allow abortion up to 28 weeks. Even 28 weeks is arbitrary. A premature baby born at this stage weighs about one kilo and often dies even if it gets the most advanced medical care. In Third World countries premature babies inevitably die because they do not have access to Western technology. Full-term children only survive if they are hardier than average.

Social and economic considerations, not philosophical considerations, really determine whether any individual has the right to life. The only point in endowing the embryo with rights is to deny the rights of the woman in whom this clot of cells is located. She is prevented from dislodging it by any means — including the morning after pill, the coil, or an abortion. This indeed is the whole object of the debate about embryo rights.

The dignity of women

According to Warnock, 'it is inconsistent with human dignity that a woman should use her uterus for financial profit and treat it as an incubator for someone else's child'. The report considers it 'liable to moral objection' that 'people should treat others as a means to their own ends', and that this 'becomes positively exploitative when financial interests are involved'. If this principle were followed the whole capitalist system of exploitation would collapse. Warnock's moral code has no bearing on how the system works in practice.

An employer does not look upon a worker as another person, but as a 'means to his own end', the end of increasing his profits. The relationship is 'positively exploitative'. Nothing *but* financial interests are involved. The worker does not work for the capitalist for free, but to get the wages he needs to survive. The employer does not offer the worker a job out of the goodness of his heart, but out of his craving to increase his profits. Under capitalism everything and everybody has its price — including women and their wombs.

Warnock is perturbed at the idea of a woman's womb being used as an incubator for somebody else's child. But is this not the experience of working class women? One of the main functions of women in capitalist society is to produce a new generation of workers who can be exploited for financial gain. One of the main functions of marriage and the working class family is that the woman's uterus should be put to the service of the system, in the same way as the rest of her anatomy.

Warnock's happy families

The overriding concern of the Warnock committee was to come up with some legislative proposals that would keep the family safe against the new advances in medical science.

The committee sanctioned experiments on embryos within a 14-day time limit for the strict purpose of research into infertility problems. While claiming that 'many people feel an instinctive opposition to research', the report reminds us that advances in the treatment of infertility 'could not have taken place without such research and continued research is essential if advances in treatment and medical knowledge are to continue'. The Warnock report accepts that embryos have rights and 'should be afforded some protection in law'. But it argues the case for limited experimentation in the interests of the greater good. The greater good is providing

THE NEW TECHNIQUES

Artificial insemination by husband (AIH). **Sperm is gathered from the husband and injected into the woman's womb at the time in her menstrual cycle when she is most likely to conceive.**

Artificial insemination by donor (AID). **The same technique is used except that in this case the sperm comes from a man other than the woman's husband.**

In-vitro fertilisation (IVF). In-vitro **means literally 'in glass'. One, or usually several, eggs are taken from a woman's ovary through a fine tube inserted through the abdominal wall under anaesthetic at the precise stage of the month when they are 'ripe' for release. They are brought together with sperm — not in a test-tube — but in a shallow glass dish called a petri dish. Once fertilisation has taken place the resulting embryo is inserted in the woman's womb where it must attach itself to the lining before a pregnancy will take place. The chances against this are still quite high so usually several eggs are fertilised at one time and the resulting embryos all put in a woman's womb at one time.**

Egg donation. In vitro **fertilisation means that it is possible for a woman to donate eggs to be fertilised and placed in the womb of another woman.**

Embryo donation. **Because the techniques of *in-vitro* fertilisation involve the production of several embryos it is possible that some of the 'spare' embryos could be placed in another woman for her to achieve pregnancy.**

Freezing and thawing. **It is already possible to freeze both sperm and embryos for later use. It will soon be possible to freeze eggs as well. This makes it possible to keep eggs, sperm and already cultured embryos to be used to impregnate a woman later.**

babies for the infertile couples who are denied the joy of a full family life.

Warnock recommended a ban on American-style commercial surrogacy agencies. Until Baby Cotton was born in January 1985 and splashed all over the front pages of the *Daily Star* surrogate motherhood was not an issue. Housewife Kim Cotton's decision to lease her womb to a rich American businessman changed all that. 'The family is mocked,' declared Ronald Butt in *The Times.* Kim Cotton's willingness to part with the baby she had conceived and carried for nine months was denounced as a violation of the sacred concept of motherhood. Days after the delivery, however, Baby Cotton was handed over to her new parents after the High Court had discovered that they were a decent middle class couple with two homes. Even Mary Warnock could not disagree with Mr Justice Latey's criteria for his decision:

'They have a very nice home in the country and another in town. Materially they can give the baby a very good upbringing. But far more importantly, they are both excellently equipped to meet the baby's emotional needs. Mr and Mrs A are warm, caring sensible people and highly intelligent.'

The establishment began with outspoken condemnations of Kim Cotton's surrogacy contract as an insult to motherhood and a threat to family values. They ended up justifying the exchange on the grounds that, in this particular case, it would fulfil an otherwise perfect partnership and lead to a fuller family life. The government's proposed legislation outlawing commercial surrogacy will attempt to prevent a repeat of the Kim Cotton affair and keep the practice under state control.

The Warnock committee's third project was to resolve the key issue of legitimacy when it comes to artificial insemination. Legitimacy is a matter of great concern to the establishment because it involves the inheritance of property. Much of the parliamentary debate on the issue so far has been concerned with inheritance, proving once again that parliament is a rich man's club. The powers that be always want to know 'who is the father?' After all, this is the pivot of the bourgeois family.

In medicine and in law there is a distinction between children who are the product of artificial insemination by a donor (AID) and those who are the result of artificial insemination by the husband (AIH). The AID baby is illegitimate, the AIH child is not. Artificial

insemination separates sex and pregnancy and demystifies the whole business of procreation. Warnock noted that some people oppose it on the grounds that it is unnatural:

'Opposition to AIH is founded on the view that it represents an unwarranted deviation from the natural process of intercourse. Those who hold this view argue also that the unitive and procreative aspects of sexual intercourse should not be separated. And it is argued that it involves the practice of masturbation which is held to be wrong.'

AID is more complicated because it involves having another man's child, without committing adultery. By separating the 'unitive and procreative aspects' of sex, science has abolished the technical basis for the family. The business man's weekly, *The Economist,* recoiled in fear at the realisation that it had also abolished the technical basis for the distinction between men and women:

'Above all, it (humanity) should decide how best to make such tinkering with unborn human organisms meet moral standards that do not undo what being man and woman stand for.'

The function of the Warnock report was to resolve the problems caused by the intrusion of science into the realm of sexual relations. It was an impossible task. The morality which justifies the present organisation of society depends on mystifying social relationships. Yet the advance of science constantly strips away this mystification and reveals the reality. The Warnock report attempted to continue the mystery in the face of the scientific assault. It tried to preserve a sphere of irrationality and darkness where prejudice could flourish hidden from the light of science. The opening pages of the report declared its intention of drawing the veil over the mysteries laid bare by science:

'We have necessarily been mindful of the truth that matters of ultimate value are not susceptible of proof.'

Warnock argued that just because science has removed the connection between having sex and having a baby this does not mean that there is no connection. Parliament chose a philosopher to chair the committee to endow the mystique of marriage with the status of rationality.

Enter Enoch

Enoch Powell's Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, which got its second reading in February 1985, was an attempt to pre-empt Warnock. It called for a ban on 'pure' embryo research and proposed that all doctors carrying out *in-vitro* fertilisation must get the written permission of the secretary of state before implanting a named woman with an embryo. Powell's Bill aimed to give rights to embryos from conception, with the implication that post-coital contraception and abortion could be deemed illegal.

Although it won a huge majority on its second reading, there was never much chance of it becoming law. Its role was to stir up prejudices about evil scientists cloning embryos or creating hybrids or otherwise tampering with the species. Powell's appeal to backward fears about science and technology had the desired effect. Two million people signed a petition to parliament backing his Bill.

The Powell Bill's main purpose was to create a climate to clear the way for new legislation along the lines recommended by Warnock. The whole debate is a threat to women's rights because it celebrates women's role in the family. Those who support Powell's position do so in the name of motherhood and the family. Most of his opponents uphold embryo experimentation on the grounds that it will overcome problems of infertility and allow all women the fulfilment of childbirth. The only effective counter to Warnock, Powell and the whole debate is to fight for women's rights to contraception and free abortion on demand, to free them from the tyranny of family life.



'Fulfilment': Dr Ian Craft with his 'family' of test-tube children

6. THE RADICAL RETREAT

Gillick and Powell are spearheading the latest attack on women's rights. Even if Gillick and Powell fail in their latest attempts to make the law even more restrictive than it already is the establishment's more rational representatives are waiting in the wings to ensure young women only get contraception if a doctor agrees, and that embryos will be given rights after 14 days. The difference between the two wings of the establishment is only a matter of degree.

In the face of this direct attack on women's rights where is the movement for women's rights? When Powell's Bill went through parliament only revolutionary communists demonstrated. Feminists sat in the public gallery and listened passively. When Gillick scored her victory in the courts the National Abortion Campaign and the Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign did nothing. Nac admitted to being 'very concerned' and the reproductive rights campaign proposed that feminists should buy condoms and sponges for teenagers. The lack of a decisive response from the women's movement, even that section which is specially concerned with reproductive issues, was not surprising. The right-wing offensive has sent the women's movement into a state of defensiveness and disarray.

The women's liberation movement of the seventies has been deserted by many of its leaders and even more of its followers. Many

big names — Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, Mary Kenny and Erin Pizzey — have gone over to the other side. Women's groups have largely disintegrated. The women's movement has lost any political coherence it once had. It has fragmented into new groups of women who experience different kinds of oppression — Irish women, Asian women, disabled women, lesbians. Many activists feel that the movement has lost its direction and momentum. In January 1985 *Spare Rib* published numerous accounts of the demoralisation of the movement.

'We feel that the women's movement is in a state of change, with the realisation that being women together is not enough and that the differences between us have to be taken account of,' wrote Shirley, Wendy and Pat. Journalist Anna Raeburn conceded gloomily that, 'feminism bloomed briefly and now, too many of us are back to lying fallow, struggling under the enormous social pressures recession has brought in its wake'. By common agreement, sisterhood is dead.

Why has the women's movement become so ineffectual? The answer lies in the individualistic preoccupations which took over the movement in the seventies. Unable to win their early demands, feminists turned inwards to look for individual solutions. This led to a redefinition of women's politics as an attempt by every individual woman to work out her own survival within the system. This was a radical departure from the movement's earlier conception of a collective struggle to make the world a better place for all women to live in.

The slogan of the early women's movement was 'no women's liberation without socialism — no socialism without women's liberation'. There was general support for the view that collective organisation against the capitalist system was the way to achieve women's liberation. But gradually individual concerns came more to the fore. Politics was redefined as people's actions in the privacy of their own homes rather than in society. Women got involved in autonomous and consciousness raising groups and devoted their energies to altering their personal lives. The slogan 'the personal is political' captured the new preoccupations of the women's movement. Feminist activists sought relief from the problems of oppression in intensively self-conscious personal relationships with other women and with men. They disparaged wider political activity as dependent on 'male' forms of organisation and politics.

How did this happen? The women's liberation movement's founding demands — for free abortion on demand, free and safe

contraception, for equal job and educational opportunities and for free 24-hour nurseries — pointed to the struggle for a new society as the way forward for women's liberation. But it is not easy to make a revolution. To carry it through it needs the backing of a working class movement. Neither the women's movement nor the socialist movement was able to make the connections and follow it through. Without adequate nurseries women were forced to make their own arrangements. Without proper abortion facilities women were forced to pay through the nose for a private operation or got stuck with children they did not want.

Survival in this society forces everybody to find their own ways of making ends meet and sustaining important relationships. Women know this better than men. But there is no purpose in elevating ways of getting by into a political strategy for women's liberation. This can easily become a fatalistic acceptance and even a celebration of the limited escape routes allowed by the present system of society. The women's movement of the seventies became incapable of distinguishing between fighting for women's rights and personal survival strategies. In fact it is quite possible to be married and fight to abolish the family, to spend a lot of time with your children and believe in socialised childcare, or be a man and fight for women's liberation.

The individualistic preoccupations of the women's movement led to its fragmentation according to different individual experiences. Women were oppressed by men, so alliances with male workers were out. Black women were oppressed by white people who could not comprehend what it was like to be black. Lesbians were oppressed by heterosexuals who could not speak for them. Disabled women found that able bodied women discriminated against them and formed their own movement. Radical feminism expressed the individualistic outlook most coherently and became the dominant outlook in the women's movement. It encouraged maximum fragmentation and its ascendancy coincided with the disintegration of the movement. Socialist feminists conducted a feeble rearguard action, but because they accepted the radicals' individualistic premises they were easily marginalised.

By the end of the seventies being a feminist did not entail a definite outlook or any particular political involvement. It was more a state of mind and an attachment to a loose federation. Some feminists drifted into the Labour Party, an organisation dominated by chauvinist policies and chauvinist leaders at every level. Yet the feminist refugees were satisfied by some token gestures and the

common hope of the left that it might some day be different. For the rest of the movement all talk of socialism and the working class was dropped. The ascendancy of individualism meant that the movement adapted to the pressures of the recession as the eighties approached. The cuts, unemployment and the ideological effect of the recession meant that advance was made increasingly difficult. Even defensive struggles became hard to win. Consequently the emphasis on lifestyle politics had less and less scope. The concerns of the women's movement became increasingly limited and led to the emergence of an approach which had more in common with conventional views of women.

Behind the fragments

A look at some of the issues taken up by the remnants of the women's movement in the eighties shows how the outlook of the seventies has undermined its resistance to the right.

● 'Uniquely female' roles

The early women's liberation movement wanted women to be able to participate in society on equal terms with men. It argued for women's right to education and jobs on the basis of equality. It rejected conventional notions of women being 'equal but different'. The movement also rejected notions that women were naturally caring and passive, and argued women were held back by their traditional roles. In recent years the peace camp at Greenham Common has become the central focus of the women's movement in Britain. The central theme of the peace women is the celebration of traditional caring, passive feminine values. Men are excluded from the camp because of their supposedly natural violent tendencies. At Greenham the women's movement has promoted a philosophy of passive resignation to state repression. It has even recommended the adoption of these defeatist tactics to other people — such as the miners' wives in 1984 — who face police terror. But it is the emphasis on traditional feminine values that is the most distinctive feature of Greenham, and the most striking departure from the early traditions of the women's liberation movement. In 1983 the Greenham campers called on women to come from all over Britain to pin family snapshots, children's toys and nappies on the fence of the missile base, in an open celebration of the 'uniquely female' roles that the women's liberation movement was founded to challenge.

● Motherhood and the family

In the seventies many feminists consciously rejected motherhood because they saw it as limiting their potential. They campaigned for easier access to abortion and contraception and demanded more sexual experimentation. The same approach dictated their attitude to nursery provision. Having children was alright, but who would look after them if women were participating equally in jobs, education and society? Ten years on many feminists admit that their ideas have changed. One woman explained that when it all began she had been a daughter, now she was a mother and saw things differently. Motherhood and childcare is a new experiment, but it is clearly one in keeping with the way things are going. A shortage of jobs, nurseries and positive alternatives has led even radical women to contemplate motherhood as a way of life.

Feminist author Betty Friedan, who first discovered the existence of women's oppression in suburban America in the sixties, has now come around to seeing the value of the family for women:

'Family is not just a buzz word for reactionaries; for women as for men it is the symbol of the last area where one has any hope of control over one's destiny, of meeting one's most basic human needs.' (*The second stage,* 1981)

British socialist feminist journalists Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell have also discovered that 'there are ways in which the family can be a source of care, attention , strength and security' *(Sweet freedom,* 1982). There are also ways in which the family can be a source of misery, pain, isolation and drudgery. At a time when every right-wing hack is emphasising the positive side of family life, those who want to defend women's rights should take every opportunity to point out its limitations for working class women.

● The pill and abortion

Germaine Greer's *Female eunuch* was one of the most influential feminist books of the seventies. In 1983 she marked her departure from the feminist cause with the publication of her latest book, *Sex and destiny.* Her main discovery was that promiscuity was not liberation and that in fact contraceptives like the pill had made it impossible for women to say no. She recommended withdrawal as an alternative. But many socialist feminists thought she had got a point. Jane Woddis is a prominent feminist in the old Communist Party who also has doubts about the pill:

'There is also concern at the possible exploitation of girls by their boyfriends — it is not unusual for girls to feel pressured into having sex when they may not be sure they want to.'

At a time when Victoria Gillick is on the rampage to prevent girls from getting the pill, this sort of argument amounts to a capitulation to the right.

In October 1983 the National Abortion Campaign split over the abortion issue. The debate reflected the women's movement's shift towards a more sympathetic line on family life. Many women wanted to get away from the 'negativity' of the 'pro-abortion' demand. Some argued that the right to have a baby was of equal status to the right to have an abortion. The prevailing social climate in Britain today is strongly in favour of women having babies and increasingly hostile to any measures to prevent births. There is no need to defend women's 'right' to have babies when that is being promoted from every political platform, pulpit and newspaper in the country. The only restrictions on childbirth are technical (in the case of infertility) and financial (for the working class). There are no political or ideological barriers.

Today it is women's right *not* to have babies that is under threat. When feminists assert women's right to choose to have babies they are swimming with the tide of reaction and copping out from the real battle against restrictions on women's rights to contraception and abortion.

● Responses to Powell and Warnock

The thrust of the National Abortion Campaign's criticism of Powell is that his proposal will make it more difficult for infertile women to conceive. As a leading Nac representative puts it 'we oppose the Bill because it damages an important technique that has brought hope to many childless people'. Yet the real aim of the whole embryo debate is not to deter pregnancies but to create a whole climate of opinion in which it will become increasingly difficult to avoid or terminate them.

In its desire to please all its diverse supporters, Nac continually misses the central point. Nac emphasises that the Bill's provisions constitute 'an invasion of privacy and doctor-patient confidentiality' and reprimands Powell for his 'attempt to pre-empt any sensible and rational discussion' of the Warnock recommendations. Our point is that we are not interested in any discussions of any recommendations that can only result in further

restrictions on women's already limited access to contraception and abortion.

The Women's Reproductive Rights Campaign — whose supporters split from Nac in 1983 — makes even more concessions to reactionary prejudices. It objects to men doing research on embryos on the grounds that it is 'based on a deep-seated "womb envy" '. It is worried about mad scientists playing 'laboratory games' with embryos:

'The kind of mind it takes to even think of mixing male human sperm and a hamster egg is beyond our comprehension.'

This may well be true, but this simple test does indicate whether the sperm in question is able to penetrate a human egg. It is amazing how far the modern women's movement has gone in echoing right-wing anti-scientific bigotry.

Right on the rampage

The capitulation of the women's movement has not gone unnoticed by the right. Valerie Riches, the British secretary of the Responsible Society, has gleefully welcomed feminist converts to the cause of reaction:

'Certainly some women's liberationists are beginning to realise...that they have been used as female guinea pigs for the pharmaceutical industry. Some are protesting angrily at the degeneration and violation of women at the hands of the pornographers. As *Cosmopolitan,* praise be, has bravely thrown up its trend-setting liberated arms in despair at the increasing evidence of herpes genitalis , all incurable, recurrent and highly contagious sexually transmitted diseases.'

As Greer and Friedan have come to accept women's destiny under capitalism, Riches and her pals can rub their hands and say 'we told you so':

'Social traditions borne of experience and wisdom over centuries are sometimes necessary for social order, and even, help women and their children in the long run.'

Riches' delight is understandable. The women's movement has lost

its radical momentum and virtually surrendered to the new morality. The movement's narrow individualism and its toleration of anti-working class views has paved the way for old-fashioned right-wing women's politics. Australian feminist Robyn Rowland recently compiled a series of articles by feminist and anti-feminist women. She argues in her preface that many feminists 'may find it more difficult than they thought to condemn the women along with the ideas'. She concedes that 'the "goodies" and "baddies" according to each "side" are not always so clearly identifiable'.

Rowlands indicates the broad areas of agreement between women who 10 years ago would have been in sharp conflict:

'All the women are pro-family, pro-choice and pro-women, but differ in their definitions and ways of achieving the related ends.

'All agree that 'women's' values are superior and should be cultivated. They loathe the dominance of violent, aggressive male values and stress their strong, caring conservationist elements.' (Robyn Rowland, *Women who do and women who don't,* 1984)

When right-wing women are described as pro-women and left-wing women as pro-men it becomes apparent how far the women's movement has degenerated. The retreat of middle class feminism to suburban family life is now well underway. Individualistic preoccupations do not merely unite the right and the left of the women's movement. They confuse and paralyse the remnants of the movement in face of the wave of right-wing reaction that threatens serious setbacks to women's rights.

7. THEIR MORALS AND OURS

The individual and the family are the central preoccupations of the new moralists. The aim of their ideology is to encourage everybody to put their personal concerns and family commitments before their wider social responsibilities.

The Victorian values of rugged individualism correspond to the outlook of the ruling class. Elevating the individual over society is a notion that appears natural to a capitalist. A factory owner can close down his factory at will. Newspaper tycoons like Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell can decide what millions of people will read in the popular press. But what does individualism mean to the working class?

Take Jean Clements, an unemployed single mother in Hackney, whose story is told by journalist Paul Harrison in *Inside the inner city:*

'Jean Clements has eleven years' experience of the system. She has the quiet melancholic manner of a person for whom life has few pleasures. The grey car jacket and flat heeled shoes she wears are her only ones, and her crumpled pink skirt is one of two in her meagre wardrobe. At 18 she married a twenty-year-old labourer who was forever in and out of work, and had two girls and a boy, all now in their teens. After six years of terrible rows, flaring up whenever there was no

money for the rent or for the baby's milk, she got divorced. She's now 35, and lives with her three children on the gaunt Bannister House Estate. All the rooms lead off a long draughty corridor, so the place costs a lot to heat.'

For Jean Clements the virtues of individualism and family life are difficult to discover as she tries desperately to make ends meet on the subsistence benefits provided by the state.

The establishment even denies women like Jean Clements the right to make friends or to try to find a lover. The authorities have employed an army of snoopers to check up on the personal lives of claimants like Jean. If they find she has a lover her benefit rights may be cut. She may be charged with fraud if they decide she is 'co-habiting' with a man. For Jean Clements and thousands more in her position personal relations may be a criminal offence.

The real enemy of individuality is the capitalist system. Capitalist factories turn workers into production line robots. Capitalist housing estates provide exterior landscapes and interior decor of mind-numbing uniformity. The capitalist market provides people with cars and clothes that all look the same and the fast food industry — one of the most dynamic sectors of the modern economy — provides people with a wide variety of food that all tastes the same. Capitalist welfare services make sure that everybody apart from the rich gets the same shoddy treatment. Keith Joseph has plans to make sure that all children receive an even more standardised education. Yet the apologists for this system accuse communists of seeking to destroy individuality!

Communists recognise that the only way working class people can defend and advance their individuality is through getting together and organising against the system that destroys individuals and distorts relationships inside and outside the family. The personal potential of workers can only be realised in the struggle to get rid of the rotten system that frustrates individual expression and turns workers against one another.

Happy families

A glance at *The Sun* or any other tabloid newspaper reveals that the new morality is quite consistent with an obsession with sex. The popular press is full of pictures of naked women offering themselves for the sexual satisfaction of men on their way to work in the morning. The papers are full of features which encourage a

preoccupation with sexual experience and performance. There are gossip columns about the sex-lives of the stars, problem pages about the sex-lives of ordinary people, lengthy reports of trials of sex offenders and endless silly surveys. The message that comes through every prurient page is that the road to personal fulfilment lies through having a successful sex life.

Yet *The Sun* and the other tabloids often carry a front page story and other major features promoting the latest moral panic. The page three nude goes with the page one attack on promiscuity. The combined message is that sex is good — but only if it is pursued within the approved framework of marriage and the family. The aim of all the titillation and trivialisation of sex is to reinforce conventional morality. Another illustration of this sort of salacious hypocrisy is the latest international pop star sex symbol, the appropriately named Madonna. Her two greatest hits so far are entitled 'Like a virgin' and 'Material girl'. The first celebrates a lover who made her feel like every bourgeois bride is supposed to, and the second makes clear that no suitor without appropriate bourgeois property qualifications would be considered worthy of the favours of this pouting adolescent.

The aim of the establishment's narrow obsession with sexuality is to channel everybody's desire for sexual and emotional fulfilment into a commitment to marriage and the family. But at the same time the ruling class is determined to turn the family into an agency for the care of children, the sick, the elderly and all the other casualties of the system. The authorities and their hacks are also determined to restrict women's scope to escape from the restrictions of family life by limiting access to abortion and contraception facilities. The result is that the institution into which people are encouraged to direct all their energies and hopes is becoming less and less capable of providing any real fulfilment for working class people.

The stresses and strains imposed on the family when the aspirations and expectations hyped up by the media confront the realities of financial stringency, welfare cuts and personal weaknesses often turn the family into an enclosed sphere of frustration and despair. This burden, like all the burdens of family life, falls heaviest on women. It often leads to conflict and violence against women and children. The impact of Thatcher's Britain on the family is expressed in the rising rate of family breakdown and divorce. Yet the more the ruling class destroys ordinary families, the more loudly its politicians and journalists proclaim the virtues of family life.

The capitalists claim that the family is natural because it is natural that they should want work done in the home to be done for nothing. Communists aim to end a form of society in which the economic interests of the bosses deform the sexual and emotional lives of workers. We aim to do away with the economic role of the family to allow the full development of emotional attachments between individuals. Far from seeking to separate sex and love, communists want to destroy the economic interests of a system which stand between sex and love.

The gay life

The establishment's determination to defend the naturalness of the sexual relations which are most conducive to its exploitative system is clearest in the brutal treatment it dishes out to those who step outside its conception of nature. The ruling class turns gay men into criminals because their sex lives do not square with the family framework which plays such a central role in the exploitation of the working class. More than 2000 men are arrested every year for the 'sex crimes' of homosexual behaviour.

Even the sight of two men kissing in the street can inspire acts of savagery by the guardians of ruling class morality. Diabetic Jimi Christmas and his friend were arrested in London's Oxford Street in February 1984 after police saw them kissing. Christmas was knocked unconscious when the police banged his head repeatedly on the side of their van. He was kicked in the back, aggravating an old spinal disorder. His earring was wrenched out of his ear and his trousers ripped as they tried to pull them off 'to search him for drugs'.

The ruling class takes advantage of incidents like the murder of an eight year old boy in Brighton in 1983 to mount a campaign of press hostility against gays. In recent months gays have been identified by *The Sun* as 'walking time bombs', carrying the killer disease AIDS. Scare stories about 'gay plagues' or 'sexual deviants who prey on children' stir up prejudice within the working class against gay men. In the wake of the AIDS scare, gangs of thugs appeared outside Heaven, a gay disco in central London, and beat up men as they were leaving.

AIDS provides a convenient pretext for the establishment drive to identify gays as a problem in society. The victims of the disease are blamed for causing it, and the biggest fear promoted by the establishment is that the 'gay plague' might extend to the

heterosexual population. The difference between the public response to the mysterious and often fatal Legionnaires' disease was striking. Legionnaires' disease was called after the American Legion, an organisation of retired US soldiers among whom it first appeared in the late seventies. Yet this discovery did not lead to a spate of stories linking the disease to its victims' strange habit of dressing up in full military uniforms and attending right-wing conferences.

In fomenting prejudice against gays, the ruling class and its allies try to turn workers' frustrations at the poverty of their emotional and sexual lives away from the real cause. They are turned against another section of workers. The real cause of workers' sexual frustrations is the capitalist system. The way forward towards a fuller sex life for all lies through resistance to reactionary attempts to divide and weaken the working class movement by turning heterosexual people against gays and the fight for a system which can allow the fullest expression of sexual inclinations.

Tenderness of the wolves

The establishment feels that it is on safe ground when it takes up the issue of sex. The reactionaries know that by denouncing 'queers' and 'perverts' they can appeal to deep-seated prejudices. By pitching important political questions at this personal level, the ruling class can make all problems appear to be individual — with individual solutions. Because our individuality under capitalism is so bound up with our sexuality the personal sphere is vulnerable to manipulation by the ruling class.

Individuality and possibilities for personal expression are constantly identified with sex and the search for love. 'Love', according to the pundits, 'conquers all.' It is certainly supposed to compensate for a great deal. Love has the big job of making up for all the frustrations of life under capitalism — unemployment, insufficient money, insecurity, poor housing. It is not surprising that it often fails to deliver on its promise.

Yet capitalism has created the conditions for a new world in which love will be possible. For all its barbarism it has paved the way to a society in which human beings will be able to choose to have sexual relationships and lasting emotional attachments freed from the dictates of the economy. The crisis of sexuality under capitalism is the product of a system which cannot guarantee those who live under it a secure future and tries to focus this insecurity on

our personal relationships.

Communists aim to overthrow this system and bring the production of things we need for a decent life under the control of the whole of society. Then we can do away with the economic interests which disfigure our lives. This is the precondition for making choices that are really choices because they are not forced on us by economic circumstances. Human beings can be really free to develop their individuality and enter into personal relationships that are really fulfilling. The possibility of falling in love will be realised without the constant intervention of material considerations.

If we are going to free that potential and enjoy it we are going to have to fight for it. Many workers are attached to their families and to their personal lives and the ruling class seeks to manipulate these feelings to scare workers away from fighting. But the charge that revolutionaries will do away with the family is rather like telling prisoners that they will be robbed of the sight of the sky through the skylight when the prison walls are torn down.

What will life be like under communism? What kinds of sexual relationships will occur? The answers to these questions cannot be given now. All we can say is that things will be better because we will be free from the chains of material deprivation.

Perhaps the best view of the future of sex and personal relations was given by Frederick Engels, one of the founders of communism, in the nineteenth century:

'But what will there be new? That will be answered when a new generation has grown up: a generation of men who never in their lives have known what it is to buy a woman's surrender with money or any other instrument of power; a generation of women who have never known what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love, or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences. When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their own public opinion about the practice of each individual — and that will be the end of it.' (F Engels, *Origins of the family, private property and the* state)



Moral panics and women's rights

Day conference at Polytechnic of Central London, New Cavendish Street, London WC1 (Goodge Street ~~O~~). Saturday 1 June 10am-5pm

The holy trinity: the family, the individual and the state Frank Richards

Workshops

The politics of medicine Dr Jenny Graham

Tory family policy John Johnson

Morality - the liberal approach Ann Burton

Conclusion

Communists and the family Kate Marshall

Creche available
Social in the evening
Food and bookstall all day
£2 waged, £1 unwaged
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Cheques/POs payable to RCP Association

PREPARING FOR POWER

Preparing for Power is the Revolutionary Communist Party's annual summer school. This year it takes place in London from 19 to 26 July. It will include several discussions on 'Moral panics and Victorian values' as well as extra sessions on

The royal family

Sex and the ruling class

The moral majority in the USA

Football hooligans and YTS

Every year we have a 'specialist course' on women. This year's course covers the following topics

Sunday

Marx on women

Monday

Patriarchy

Tuesday

Women and the unions

Wednesday

Prostitution

Thursday

Feminism and Marxism

Speakers include:
Kate Marshall, Jenny Morgan, Anne Burton, Carolyn Price, Frank Richards, Joan Phillips, Dr Jenny Graham and Helen Swift.

Preparing for Power also offers women
- an excellent creche
- use of swimming pool, gym and jacuzzi
- good, cheap food
- courses run by women on Marxism, the Russian Revolution, Ireland, the Third World, etc
- dancing, debates or films every night
- free accommodation
- a friendly atmosphere — and no sexist jokes.

If you would like to come please contact Carol Taggart on 01-729 0414.
It costs £15 waged/£12 unwaged.
Send for your ticket now to BM RCP, London WC1N 3XX. Full programme, maps and reading list will be sent on receipt. Make cheques payable to RCP Association.



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