

I have been secretary and coordinator of the editorial collective of Radical Philosophy since 1973. In September last year I decided to resign, though I hope to continue to work as an ordinary member of the collective. With some misgivings, the editors have allowed me to offer some reflections on the magazine's past and its prospects, as a kind of farewell performance.

Judged in terms of sheer size, Radical Philosophy is an extraordinary success. The scale of the undertaking would have appalled the half dozen people who tentatively decided to start the magazine back in 1971. We now print 4000 copies of each of our three issues a year; in the same period we handle thousands of pounds and process hundreds of articles and reviews. All the administration, distribution, pasting-up, and so on is done in our spare time, and the magazine is financed entirely by income from sales. The editorial collective has never been closed, and now has about thirty-five members.

In spite of the success the magazine has not, I think, faced up to the question of what our enterprise in amateur, collective, 'alternative' self-publishing is supposed to do that commercial magazines or academic journals could not achieve as well - a question not so much of policy as of the terrain on which policy ought to be defined. It was my disappointment at our failure to confront these issues - combined with a feeling that the work has devoured enough of my life already - that produced my resignation.

Radical Philosophy is constantly faced with a dilemma between two lines - two conceptions of its field of action, two models of what it means to produce a dissident magazine. The first line emphasises theoretical excellence, originality and modernity; the second, effectiveness in the formation of a vital counter-culture. The first prizes the production of alternatives to the empiricisms, ignorances and evasions of British theory; the second values campaigns aimed at shoving British culture out of its circle of discreet and repetitious complacencies. The first is anxious to avoid vagueness and theoretical deviation; the second fears, above all, ghetto-isation and abstruseness. The first dismisses the second as eclectic; the second criticises the first for being elitist.

It is simple to show that each of the two lines is indispensable; a second-liner, who wants to build up an effective and durable counter-culture, must obviously make sure it is guided by sound ideas, and not just by diffuse good-will. And a first-liner is bound to admit that there is no point in putting forward good ideas if no one is going to take any notice. But in practice, the two lines can conflict. There can be a choice, for example, between an original but difficult article which editors might feel proud to publish, and another article which, though less original or less true, might be more useful, even inspiring, for readers.

My worry (sometimes despair) about Radical Philosophy is that the first line has increasingly overshadowed the second. The first line gets an unfair advantage in the argument, because it occupies a high clear ground, where familiar academic criteria of excellence and originality can

be relied upon; the second line, meanwhile, leads a fugitive, outlawed existence in the valleys, trying to operate with awkward criteria about effective cultural action. The first line has been obliterating the second, not because of any take-over or deliberate re-orientation - for none has occurred - but as a result of an insidious dialectic which seems to be at work within us all.

The process I am talking about can be traced in many of the magazines, movements, lives and personalities that came out of the student movement. With the possible exception of the women's and the gay movements, enthusiasms have ebbed or been diverted into mysticism or macrobiotics; socialist activities have become more professional and more institutionalised, and our reading, writing, speaking and publishing have come to mirror the intellectual disorientation exemplified by the organisation of orthodox knowledge into specialised academic disciplines.

No doubt there have been some intellectual gains. In particular, marxism has been transformed from an object of mostly rather empty ethical gestures into a framework for positive investigation of society. But this has been achieved under cover of a particularly reactionary ideology of intellectual activity, of reading and writing - an ideology which revolves around pious pomposities about 'the autonomy of theory' or the 'political' character of 'theoretical interventions'. These slogans derive their plausibility from a contrast with a bogey of reductionism, which would dismiss all theoretical activity as self-indulgence; but they take their toll elsewhere - in the obliteration of the 'second line' - of the perception that reading and writing, or for that matter studying, striving for academic qualification, and teaching, have dimensions of which those concerned only with the advancement of 'theory' know nothing.

I often wish that people who work on left-wing publications would study some of the efforts of their predecessors - would read, for example, some old volumes of Plebs, The Communist, or Labour Monthly; the Reasoner, the New Reasoner or New Left Review. Admittedly, these magazines differ from most of those started since 1968 in that they were not aimed at a largely academic audience; but there are still lessons to be learnt from them. In the 20s and 30s, for instance, the contributors to Plebs, Labour Monthly, and The Communist invested most of their energy and anger in the lines they adopted on particular political questions, or on theoretical debates about the relevance of Dietzgen to marxism, or the importance of the latest Russian pronouncements on dialectical materialism; and so forth. But the real significance of the magazines lay in dimensions of their activity of which most of the participants were unaware. Their different ways of writing, or laying out their magazines, and of presenting controversies or contributions from readers, made each of them represent, propagate and support different ideas of how marxist culture ought to develop and grow in Britain. Labour Monthly, for example - dominated by the edicts of Palme Dutt, backed by the political and philosophical authority of Lenin and Stalin - promoted a bossy and dogmatic style of thought and discussion.

whilst Plebs stood for an amiable and trusting diffusion of revolutionary ideas amongst all who wished the labour movement well.

Half a century later, these differences of presentation, language, and sense-of-audience seem far more important than the theoretical debates which they conveyed. The lesson this suggests is that it doesn't matter too much if Radical Philosophy propounds precisely true or original positions in theory - whether it is guilty of 'idealist deviations', for instance, or of 'vulgar materialism', of humanistic vapourings or of anti-humanist murders: the real stakes are different, and the important struggles, for a magazine like Radical Philosophy, are on a different terrain: amongst the valleys of cultural action, rather than the peaks of theoretical excellence.

In practical terms, the centre of our field of action has to be defined in terms of the intersection of two groups of people - on the one hand, leftists (aligned and unaligned), and on the other hand, readers and writers of philosophy (professional and amateur). This immediately suggests the outlines of a programme for Radical Philosophy: namely, to engineer a confrontation between leftism and philosophy - to disturb the dusty etiquettes of philosophy by left-wing criticism, to find exits from its coy precisions, its self-indulgent conceits, and its tedious repetitions; perhaps, also, to use philosophy to disrupt the smug conventions of leftist thought and language. At any rate, to create a space where individuals may discover or devise ways of speaking and writing in which both philosophical awareness and political anger, political awareness and philosophical anger, can be

developed.

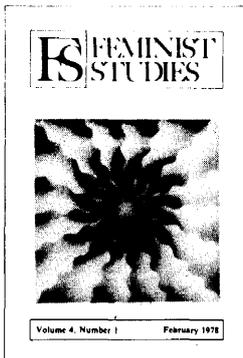
I would suggest that Radical Philosophy ought to consider carefully its relationship to philosophy, as an institutionalised intellectual tradition which is securely emplaced in British culture. For, in company with other movements on the new intellectual left, Radical Philosophy has moved away from dialogue with particular bourgeois disciplines towards the elaboration of generalised and self-referring marxist theory. However, British philosophy still exists, and is in some ways rather healthier than it was a few years ago. Unfortunately, Radical Philosophy relates to it decreasingly: it is uninterested; and the feeling is mutual.

'Unfortunately' because it could be valuable to inject the philosophical ideals of clarity and explicitness into marxist culture as it exists in Britain today - particularly in view of the fact that all the varieties of modern marxism (whether veteran communist, middle-aged humanist, or up-and-coming anti-humanist) centre on philosophical slogans ('dialectical materialism', 'human praxis', or 'the death-of-the-subject') which are simply lifted from mainstream, orthodox philosophical discourse. And because it would be crazy to yield the weapons of philosophical criticism to the right.

At the moment Radical Philosophy is a decent magazine with a few interesting articles. But any effectiveness it may have in shifting the deadweight of British culture is purely coincidental. If the magazine continues to drift in this direction (but there are signs that the movement is being reversed), it will become little more than a mirror in which marxists gaze at their own reflections, while the rest of the world goes about its business, unperturbed.

16 April 1978

# FS FEMINIST STUDIES



## VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1: CONTENTS

Kristin Booth Glen, Abortion in the Courts: A Laywoman's Guide to the Disaster Area. Judith Lowder Newton, Pride and Prejudice: Power, Fantasy, and Subversion in Jane Austen. Wini Breines, Margaret Cerulla, and Judith Stacey, Social Biology, Family Studies, and Anti-Feminist Backlash. Jane Marcus, Art and Anger. Berenice Carroll, "To Crush Him in Our Own Country": The Political Thought of Virginia Woolf. Nancy Choderow, Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration. Annis Pratt, Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: Notes Towards a Preliminary History of Women's Archetypes. Mary Elizabeth Perry, "Lost Women" in Early Modern Seville: The Politics of Prostitution. POETRY by Frances Jaffer, Alexandre Grilikhes. ART by Judy Chicago.

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 2:  
SPECIAL ISSUE: Towards a Feminist Theory of Motherhood

## IN FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Anarchist Feminism • Conversations with Feminist Activists • Retrospects and Prospects of the Contemporary Women's Movement • Feminism in the Working Class  
Also—"Women and Power": Papers from the International Conference in Women's History

## Subscriptions

Three issues annually  
Individuals—\$10  
Libraries and institutions—\$16  
(includes U.S. postage)

Additional postage for delivery outside the United States:  
Canada and Mexico—\$1.50  
Airmail overseas—\$7

## Mail orders to:

Managing Editor,  
FEMINIST STUDIES  
Women's Studies Program  
University of Maryland  
College Park, MD 20742

# LEFT CURVE

Magazine published by artists on the role of culture in the struggle for liberation.

Issue #7 includes:

- \* analysis of mural movement
- \* photography of Lester Balog
- \* history of Artist's International
- \* Italy today including photos of daily life
- \* (Provisional) Art & Language: Auckland 1976
- \* contemporary appalachian poetry
- \* practice of architecture - from positivism to dialectics
- \* video on the left: a critique
- \* critique of Harvey Swados
- \* Teamsters Graphic Group
- \* Radical Elders Oral History Project
- \* plus reviews, documents, letters, etc.

\$2.50/copy Subs. \$7 (3 issues)  
\$10 Institutions

1230 Grant Ave. Box 302  
San Francisco, Ca. 94133

art & revolution