

RITUALS OF THE 8th OF MARCH BETWEEN IMPRESSIONS AND PRESSURES⁽¹⁾

The above is the title of a publication containing a critical study of the press of the 8th of March (Woman's Day), 1981, in Algeria. The articles as a whole permit a panoramic and systematic reading, pointing out the lines of strength into which ideas are constituted as an ideology.

The first part of the document condenses a number of informative articles and reports about women, such as the day nurseries project (*crèches*); the exhibit of women painters' works; the presentation of a film on women; a report on Algerian women pilots; another of women in politics (whose role is still insignificant).

The second part, "Women's Voices", gives women the chance to speak. It reproduces and comments on four articles written by women, published in "Algerie Actualités", explaining what the 8th of March means to a deputy, an actress, a journalist and a teacher.

Deputy Baya El-Hashemi reveals a conservative attitude when she emphasizes the female condition and the role for which a woman should be prepared. "She will always depend on a father, a brother and, later, on a husband. It is our duty to help and defend those women who have chosen a double mission, that of housewife and worker. We should also defend the condition of those who stay at home."

This article is violently criticized by the editors of the document because the writer takes for granted the dictates of society to the detriment of women's needs. Rachid Bendib responds by asking: What is a woman's condition? He condemns the fatalist attitude of the Deputy and argues that what people consider to be "Woman's Condition" is rather a product of history and society, not of nature. Hence it can be transcended. He adopts a socialist point of view when he confirms the necessity of change and the belief in the possibility of solving all our problems, but he ignores the problem of women's work and that despite the large number of women working outside their homes.

Nadia Talbi, an actress, tells of the difficulties

encountered by an actress in a hostile environment. Contrary to social norms which impose confinement on women, an actress claims and attracts public attention. The critical comment which follows protests against Talbi's statement that an actress executes her profession in defiance of woman's natural bent to remain unnoticed. Is the desire to remain in the shade a natural or an acquired trait? At the end of her article Nadia Talbi expresses, somewhat timidly, her own revolt against man-made laws for women and against her familial heritage. She states that she is a "plural woman", a description approved by the commentator.

Djazia Tualbi, journalist, says that she was brought up in a world of shadows where she was told that the only thing for her was to keep silent. "For me," she adds, "work has been the only way of imposing my presence". Yet male voices rise from everywhere to attack woman's involvement in outside activities. In order to tolerate her presence, they require her to work in silence. "Journalism, which is my profession, is just the opposite. I have struggled to impose myself as a speaker. I am thankful to my male colleagues who have helped me achieve self-realization. To me, woman's submission belongs to a former stage. Now I am on the right path."

To the writer of "critical note", Djazia Tualbi's article, though daring and optimistic in tone, has its limitations. Individual success in work has little significance when women workers form only 2.5% of the labor force. Its effect is also a matter of doubt when the struggle for success is presented as a male-female relationship. For it is a fact that conservative men are most suspicious of the feminine element, which seems to be the conspicuous revolutionary element in to-day's society.

Anissa Bahloul, a teacher, complains that, as a woman, she is deprived of the opportunity to travel and enjoy the cultural benefits of contacting worlds other than her own. She deplores the fact that her brother has the privilege of enjoying this enriching experience, away from the monotonous life she is leading, far from her narrow environment.

A rhetorical speech, says the critical note, a vehement denunciation of the Algerian law which forbids women to travel unless they are accompanied by a chaperon. It is an attack on the tradition which restricts women's world to the home and place of work, denying them the right to move around by themselves. Her rhetorical article is a genuine cry for liberation.

⁽¹⁾ Condensed from a collective document prepared by the "Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes Algériennes", C.D.S.H. **Document de Travail, no. 10**, University of Wahran, March 1981.

(Continued from page 5)

2. Limited effects of family-planning. Considered to be an aid against poverty, family-planning achieves little success because of ignorance and mistrust on the part of the users.
3. Heavy responsibilities of the husband. In addition to the financial burden represented by his family, a man is also responsible for disabled or minor relatives: a disabled father or mother, a dead brother's children, a divorced sister, etc.

4. Troubles caused by an inefficient bureaucracy affect mainly the poor who have to use bribery or other forms of corruption so as to obtain their rights under a corrupt régime.

Programmes of action must be designed "so that the individual will adopt solutions which will also have a positive effect on society as a whole, in order that one man's success will not spell the other man's failure". No easy solutions should be tried. Cooperation between government, society and the poor themselves is necessary.