

Women and Liberation

When we turn over the pages of the numerous feminist publications received by IWSAW from various parts of the world, we immediately notice the scarcity of materials published by or about women of the Middle East, particularly women of Arab countries.

Turmoil, internal dissensions and reactionary movements, following the recently won independence in Arab and other Eastern countries, have greatly impeded interest in women's problems. Yet, the struggle for women's liberation has not subsided. It has taken new forms such as women organizing into groups and societies which formulate claims and protests against unjust laws and traditions. As an example, Algerian women's protests were able to prevent the promulgation of the regressive family code proposed in 1982. In Egypt, Nawal Saadawi continues to play a leading role in the process of women's liberation from old traditions and the new fundamentalist wave. Recently, she has succeeded, jointly with a group of men and women feminists, in founding the "Arab Women Solidarity" which is expected to bring together all Arab women.

In Lebanon, IWSAW continues to function in spite of difficulties. If Al-Raida does not appear regularly, other publications by the Institute continue to increase. Social taboos and political unrest in Lebanon and other Third World countries have induced many young women to emigrate into Europe, Australia, U.S.A. and Canada where they have the opportunity to develop their talents and participate in Western and international feminist projects. When they keep contact with their homelands, they show interest in the Palestinian problem or seem to be disturbed by the reactionary movement which has swept over the Arab and Moslem countries during the last ten years and which is being fought by emancipated women in Pakistan, Iran, Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world.

The problems that occupy Western feminists are of a different nature. While enrollments in women's studies courses continue to increase in American universities, some educators predict a decline in the next half decade. If this occurs, we should remember that women's history in America and perhaps everywhere else, tends to follow a cyclical rather than an evolutionary pattern. Periods of zeal are followed by periods of coolness. In the latter case, new stratagems must be found to revive the movement.

Another problem that occupies Western feminists is that of establishing closer communication and more cooperation between them and the feminists of developing countries. To reach this end, they have developed the publication of international bulletins such as WIN (Women's International News), INSTRAW News, published by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. Other publications are ISIS, Women of Europe, Women of the Whole World, journal of the WIDF (Women's International Democratic Federation), Women Studies Forum, IWRAW (International Women's Rights Action Watch), etc.

We may here add a third question which occupies a number of them: that of discovering and establishing their own identity: "Who am I?" "Should we as women create our own culture or should we adopt male culture?"

On the other hand feminists of the Middle East and of Third World countries in general, have to handle other questions and fight on several fronts. Besides the struggle they have to wage for their own liberation and that of their enslaved sisters, they are faced with the duty to participate in the liberation of their countries from despotic rulers and opportunist leaders, from the threat of internal dissension, poverty and war.

All these problems are handled more or less briefly in the contents of this number of Al-Raida, particularly in the report given about the Asian Women's Institute Conference of June 28-30, 1988.

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