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**WOMEN, INDUSTRIALISATION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT \***

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to provoke discussion, rather than to provide extensive empirical data on the situation of women in relation to industrialisation in developing countries. It is argued that a discussion of industrialisation per se does not contribute anything much to understanding unless it is set in a context. National policies of individual countries in regard to industry must be seen in relation to other sectors of the economy - most importantly, to agriculture - both by researchers and by government planners themselves. Of course, the development of industry creates options in relation to mechanisation (and the raising of productivity generally) in agriculture, as in other spheres. This involves a consideration of the questions of 'technology transfer' and 'appropriate technology'. This is one aspect of the inter-relationship between different sectors of the economy. Another is the subsidy that the agricultural sector provides for industry, in terms of the creation of surplus and the production of a supply of labour.

In relation to the question of women, the argument for such an integrated approach is even more telling. In order to analyse and to anticipate the effects of industrialisation on women, it is necessary to discover the determinants of the sexual division of labour in the society and economy as a whole. Because industrialisation produces profound and often rapid change, such an analysis

must be dynamic: historical changes in the nature of the sexual division of labour and its implications for women must be the object of analysis.

It is common, particularly in United Nations circles, to speak of the "integration of women" in the national economy. "The integration of women" has now become a catch-phrase, and yet as a concept it has no specific meaning other than to express the rhetorical idea that the situation of women should be improved. The expression can safely be used by any party precisely because it is rhetorical, conveys no analysis and no prescriptions for action: those who oppose the advancement of women, or who have no genuine interest in it (which is probably more common) can express the wish to "integrate women" and then do nothing significant about it. This is one reason why people concerned to emancipate women would do well to avoid the use of this expression.

A more important, and perhaps more subtle reason for rejecting the term, is that it actually constitutes a mystification of the question of women. The term suggests that women have somehow been 'left out' or 'left behind' by the development process (so called), and that the question is how to bring them in - to "integrate" them with the wider, "modern" economy. While an adequate critique of such ideas cannot be developed here, one of the contentions of this paper is that women - specifically, women's labour - are, and must necessarily be, an integral part of any economy. The problem is therefore not how to integrate women, but to discover how they have been, and are being, integrated, and to change the basis of that process so as

to lessen the burdens on women, and ultimately to emancipate them entirely from their position of inequality.

This question is not a semantic nicety but is fundamental to any attempt to understand and thereby to change the conditions of women's work and lives. This poses the following questions, which must be continually kept in mind, even if they cannot yet be adequately answered:

- \* What is the sexual division of labour in different sectors of an economy, and how are the sectors related to each other in terms of the division of labour by sex?
- \* What functions does this sexual division of labour serve, and what determines it?
- \* What, therefore, are the implications (political, social, economic) of attempts to change the division of labour?

In the light of this approach, strategies to improve the position of women can be assessed, and alternatives could be put: the criterion being how far such strategies actually address the root causes of the oppression of women. Strategies which do not affect the basis of women's social condition will not fundamentally alter it.

## II. INDUSTRIALISATION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Any discussion of the process and nature of industrialisation in developing countries will involve assumptions about the causes of "underdevelopment". Strategies to promote industrialisation will reflect these assumptions, on the part of government, planners and aid agencies. Currently, the concept of a New International Economic Order

is the subject of much discussion in international organisations. The 'new order' challenges the hold that the highly industrialised countries have over the world market, the terms of trade, and relations of dependency. Nevertheless, no consensus exists about the causes of dependency. It must therefore be appreciated that the question of women and industrialisation cannot be divorced from these broader considerations, and that strategies for the improvement of women's position will equally reflect other underlying assumptions. In other words, the consensus over the desire to "integrate women" does not represent any real consensus over the causes of women's oppression or the strategies to end it. The point here is merely that these problems must be recognised consciously in international arenas concerning the woman question, if these discussions are to produce any significant clarification of the issues at stake.

A point to be borne in mind is that in discussing women and industrialisation, one is not referring to a universal, historically uniform process. The conditions of industrialisation in the advanced capitalist countries - Western Europe, the U.S.A., the British dominions, Japan - will not and cannot be duplicated in the countries of the Third World, for many reasons: the most obvious being that the former countries are now economically dominant in the international system. The capital and technology that they export to the developing countries, and their dominance in determining terms of trade, partly determines the process of industrialisation in the latter. Similarly, the existence of industrialised countries in the socialist

bloc also affects patterns of industrialisation - as in the export of capital and technology from the U.S.S.R. to China, Cuba and elsewhere. (The process of industrialisation in the U.S.S.R. itself, without assistance from another socialist country, was therefore unique in some respects).

Accordingly, in discussing women and industrialisation in the developing countries, one is for the most part referring to countries which are the recipients of investment by large, foreign, multinational corporations, and which are normally not able to generate sufficient surplus to industrialise from their own economic resources. In discussing the effects of industrialisation on women in this particular context, therefore, the terms of the discussion embrace not merely national economics and governments, but an international system and an international division of labour. This consideration is particularly important in the constraints it places on governmental strategies and policies.

Given this situation, it is clear that the trajectory of the development of the female labour force in the Third World is different from that of women in the West. For that reason, it is mystifying to refer to the effects of "modernisation" on women, as is commonly done. The naive assumption is often made that industrialisation has brought many beneficial effects for women in the West - from electric vacuum cleaners to less tangible phenomena - and that such beneficial results will also accrue to women in the developing countries eventually, as they proceed along the same path. Modernisation, whatever it means, is consequently seen as a "good thing" and as beneficial to women. As has been shown, this trajectory does not actually exist in the way assumed by such a view.



It is immediately evident that another flaw in that view is that it is precisely in these advanced capitalist countries that the struggle against women's oppression has become most vocal and most acute. The achievement of the vote, and more recently of legislation on sex discrimination, has not produced the emancipation of Western women. This experience when absorbed by those struggling for the emancipation of women in the Third World, will open up new strategies and objectives of struggle.

Additionally, it is now well known that economic change in the developing countries has in many respects had dire consequences for women. In some cases their position has deteriorated, and in nearly all cases their relative position to men has worsened: i.e., the differentials have increased. In agriculture and food processing, women have often lost what control they previously had over the process of production and the distribution of the product. Cash-cropping is increasingly dominated by men, who have access to agricultural extension services, credit facilities etc., which are not extended to women. On plantations, female labour is even more intensely exploited than male labour, and women are increasingly relegated to more labour-intensive and less remunerative tasks.

The self-employment of women in petty trading, home brewing, and handicraft production is increasingly marginalised by the growth of large-scale enterprise. Thus with the development of a cash economy, women have far less access to monetarised employment, and frequently lose the income and status they formerly had in other forms of economic

activity. This process has been described as the relegation of women to the 'private sphere' while men are increasingly drawn into the public sphere. Domestic labour, in the realm of the family, remains unmonetarised and becomes private, while men are drawn into waged employment and other forms of contact with the wider world beyond the family. However, many countervailing tendencies also exist which will be referred to below. In general though, the increasing privatization of the sphere of the family is a characteristic of the expansion of the cash economy.

In the urban areas, where most of the employment in industry is found, women's position is even less secure than that of men. It is generally more difficult for them to find jobs, and their rates of pay are lower. Their responsibility for feeding and caring for children weighs heavily in conditions of bad housing and overcrowding, bad sanitation and so on. The tendency away from the extended family system in the towns means that mothers are deprived of help in child-care that they formerly received from female relatives, while the conditions of waged employment are generally incompatible with the care of babies and children. Moreover, the social disruptions caused by urbanisation and economic change frequently mean that mothers are left to support children on their own, with little or no assistance from the father.

In all of these senses, then, "modernisation" cannot be seen as an unmixed blessing for women. If industrialisation is to produce substantially better conditions of life for women, this will only come about when women demand

and receive equal conditions of work, including wages, with men, and when domestic labour, including child-care, is either socialised or shared equally between the sexes. This again can only come about in a context of full employment. Unemployment and underemployment are severe problems in developing countries, and therefore the intention to ameliorate women's position will remain hollow unless measures can be taken to increase remunerative employment for the population as a whole and women in particular.

### III. WOMEN AND INDUSTRIALISATION IN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES.

In order to understand the position of women in the economy as a whole in developing countries, where capitalist relations of production are being imposed in industry as in other sectors (mainly through the agency of foreign capital), it is necessary to analyse the economy in terms of the articulation of different modes of production. The oft-employed notion of the 'dual economy', incorporating a 'backward', 'traditional' rural sector, and an 'urban, industrial, 'modern' sector is misleading, in the same sense as the notion of the 'integration' of women is misleading.

There are not two economies existing side by side, with the modern sector gradually replacing the traditional sector, but one economy, in which the relations of production in the dominant, capitalist sphere dominate and distort the previously existing pre-capitalist relations of production. The division in any case is not a clear rural/urban dichotomy since large scale capitalist agriculture is on the increase in the rural areas, while an 'informal' sector of petty production is found in urban areas.

Moreover, this framework is particularly pertinent in relation to women's labour, which serves particular functions across these divisions.

In this context, the most germane component of women's labour is the unremunerated, 'private' labour of the reproduction of labour power. This function of women's labour, expressed in the institution of the family, is found throughout the world. For analytical purposes, this function within particular modes of production must be comprehended.

In the rural areas, when there is heavy male migration to towns, to foreign countries, or in seasonal agricultural labour in other areas, women are left to provide for the family by maintaining subsistence production. The sphere of subsistence production also depresses the male wage by the subsidy it provides (or is supposed to provide). Women's labour here produces labour power for the future in the form of the rearing of children, and it helps to reproduce the labour power of the male wage-earner by providing food and services especially in periods of unemployment. By absorbing the aged, the sick and the infirm, women's labour in the subsistence sector saves the employer and/or the state from providing social services or adequate remuneration to cover the costs of the reproduction of labour. In this sense, the industrial sector in the national economy and in foreign countries (in the case of labour migration abroad) directly exploits the labour of women in subsistence production.

On small-holder farms engaged in commercial production, female and child labour helps to produce for the market, in labour-intensive and unremunerated work. The surplus is

work is distributed within and outside the family by the man, while the woman is again responsible for the cultivation of food crops (and sometimes the rearing of livestock) for consumption by the family. Again, this work, and allied jobs - the collection of water and fuel, the processing and preparation of food, the care of children, etc., - reproduces the labour power which produces crops for internal and external markets, and which services and produces surplus for the development of industry. Women also frequently work as hired rural labour on farms and plantations while performing some of these other functions as well, or form part of the rural landless proletariat. In the latter case their situation resembles that of the female urban proletariat, in that they are paid even lower wages than men while having to perform domestic labour within the family as well.

In the urban areas, women's role in the reproduction of labour-power is equally arduous and unrewarded. They perform the essential economic function of producing the labourers of the future, their children, usually with no support at all from employers or from the state, and often with little or no support from the children's father. They are frequently actually penalised for this work they perform by employers - both private and public - who sack them when they become pregnant. While the role of women in the family, as reproducers of labour power, has common features the world over, its nature is determined by specific conditions in each economy and by the relationship between different sectors in the same economy.

Because of the central economic role performed by women's domestic labour, it is a cardinal error to relegate

the woman question to a ghetto in terms of research, planning and policies. The tendency to do so reflects the tokenism of much current discussion of women's position, in the United Nations as in other fora. It also reveals the failure to comprehend the totality of economic systems in which women's labour both remunerated and unremunerated, necessarily plays an integral and crucial role. The fact is that without an understanding of the role of women, there is no real understanding of the processes of development and underdevelopment. It is necessary therefore to grasp the determinants and the functions of the sexual division of labour in a society, not only to understand (and to change) the position of women, but in order to predict and to plan the patterns of overall economic development.

#### IV IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN OF THE PATTERNS OF INDUSTRIALISATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

##### 1. The degree and nature of industrialisation

Because of the concentration of industry in urban areas, the phenomena of industrialisation and urbanisation are closely related. In examination of the implications of these processes for women, data on both employment and demographic change are required. Unfortunately such data are not readily available, and are often partial or unreliable. The paucity of this kind of documentation is a reflection of underdevelopment itself, since developing countries do not have the resources to carry out extensive surveys and censuses; also the patterns of demographic change are such that conditions often make adequate collection of data difficult or impossible. Many cities, for instance, have large areas of 'shanty towns' or their equivalent, and urban dwellers and workers often have no fixed residence or employment.

Recently, because of greater concern about the question of women and the introduction of new legislation affecting women in employment (and in other fields), the more industrialised countries have researched and published data on women workers and related subjects. Most of the developing countries have not been able to match this, and so there is little information on which to base a comparison between the more and the less industrialised countries in regard to the employment of women. A comparison between developing countries in this respect might be even more instructive but is hampered for the same reasons. The problems of paucity of data on women workers in the Third World may be gleaned from publications of the International Labour Office.<sup>(1)</sup>

Unfortunately it is also the case that many governments in the developing countries do not perceive the need to collect such information, since the question of women is not accorded priority or even much significance. And yet without this information, it is impossible to establish what the present position is, let alone to assess the rate of progress in the implementation of what policies there are to ameliorate women's situation.

Information on the following subjects in the developing countries is required:

- a) The age and sex structures of the industrial labour force (and other sections of the labour force). This will enable comparisons between countries, and assessments of changes over time - e.g. in the 'feminisation' or defeminisation of certain sectors of employment.

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(1) See, for instance, "Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for women workers".

- b) The age and sex structures of urban populations. This will facilitate an understanding of the nature of demographic movement, and of family structures (which affect women especially). In comparison with a), it should show the relative and absolute level of female employment and unemployment in towns.
- c) The relative labour conditions for women in comparison with men. This would include wage levels and income, hours of work and other conditions of employment. It should enable an assessment of the effectiveness of any labour legislation affecting women. Data on the absolute and relative level of unionisation of women workers should also be collected.

Some broad generalisations can be made on the basis of existing evidence. Firstly, in many developing countries with a low level of industrialisation, urban populations are predominantly male and have fewer very young or old people than do cities in the more industrialised countries. This reflects the fairly recent large-scale migration to towns of male work seekers, who are unmarried or whose families remain in rural areas. The low number of children reflects the relative absence of women. In these conditions, the industrial labour force shows an even heavier preponderance of young men than the urban population profile itself. This pattern is common in Africa. The women who came to town in this context are sometimes joining their husbands, but often they come to find new opportunities for themselves. Few employment opportunities are open to them, and they are often self-employed: in petty trading, beer-brewing, food preparation and sales, prostitution and the like. Marital stability is low and casual liaisons,



... children largely provided for by the mother, are common.

In Latin America the proportion of women in towns has tended to be much higher than in Africa. This reflects the different role of women in agricultural production, and a slightly different history of industrialisation, which offered more employment openings to women. However the trend appears to be changing, and the rate of female labour force participation has levelled out, or - especially in industry - is even in decline. (2)

A number of features are notable. In most parts of the Third World, there is a high rate of migration to urban areas from the countryside, often coupled with a high overall rate of population growth. The causation of this phenomenon is complex, but the changing pattern of land ownership and land use are important factors; i.e., the trend towards concentration of land-holdings and the development of large-scale farming and plantations, often employing capital-intensive techniques of production. These processes push people off the land; some find employment as a landless rural proletariat, while others flood to the cities to seek work.

Because of the low level of industrialisation in most Third World countries, job opportunities in the cities are scarce: competition for work is fierce, and the less advantaged suffer - particularly women, but also people with poor health or disabilities, and older people. Amenities are poor, particularly social benefits - unemployment benefit, sick leave, maternity leave, medical care and so on. (These factors directly contribute to the relative exclusion of the disadvantaged groups

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(2) Contrast Boserup on women in Latin America, p.187, with Safa, pp 130-131 in Latin American Perspectives, Issue 15.

from employment). Wages for women are almost invariably lower than for men - often very markedly so. Women, then, usually have either a very low income or none at all, and often cannot rely on a male breadwinner; in these conditions, they must care for children and other dependents - the aged, sick and infirm. Poor sanitary conditions, the relative absence of cheap fuel and of many other facilities, hit women hardest of all and force them to spend many hours a day in taxing domestic labour.

A feature of this process of industrialisation is the changing age and sex composition of the labour force. It is well known, especially from early Victorian England, that large-scale, brutal exploitation of female and child labour took place in many sectors of employment. This gradually changed - partly as a result of the activities of social reformers, but more importantly as a result of the changing labour needs of modern industry (just as the abolition of the slave trade reflected changing economic conditions). Child labour was largely abolished, while some sectors of employment became 'masculinised'. Women were pushed into service industries and distribution, and into low-paid professions - as nurses, clerks, secretaries and teachers. However, some sectors of industry were 'feminised' - often involving work traditionally associated with female labour, such as textiles, garment making, food processing and the like. The ideology of men working for wages to support a family, while women worked for "pin-money" (even though it usually did not reflect the reality), became entrenched.

This ideology contributed to the paying of lower wages to women, but low wages also reflected the fact that women were - and are - a vulnerable section of the labour force. It is well known that it is not always the most exploited or brutalised section of the working-class that is the most

militant - indeed, the reverse is rather the case. Women work in industries that are largely ununionised, and where it is particularly difficult to organise; where job security is low, work is relatively unskilled, and labour turnover is relatively high. Often they do "out-work", i.e. they perform part or all of the labour process in their own homes; this reinforces the privatisation of women's work, and militates against unionisation (to fight for better wages and labour conditions). Additionally, women's familial responsibilities allow them less time and opportunity for union organisation.

Because of the inability of the advanced capitalist countries to provide full employment, and because of the vulnerability of women, female labour functions as a 'labour reservoir' in these countries (and probably does so, to greater or lesser extent, throughout the world). It is well known that the international capitalist system passes through cycles of booms and depressions (e.g. the depression of the 1930s, followed by the post-war boom, followed by the contemporary recession) - in periods of economic growth, female labour is taken on, while it is cast off in periods of recession. This applies to the labour force as a whole, of course, but the most vulnerable sectors - who are least able to resist, and least likely to provoke political unrest - experience it the most acutely: viz. women, as also immigrant workers. Immigration can be controlled by the state, while women are supposed to be 'reabsorbed' into the family and domestic labour, relying on the male head of the household (if there is one) for support.

The phenomenon of the female labour reservoir is most clearly illustrated by the labour force participation of women during and after the second World War. In England, for instance,

a campaign was launched for women to support the national economy by maintaining production levels in industry and agriculture while the male workers were away at the front. Female labour ran the economy and produced munitions. Incentives for this patriotic duty were provided, in the form of child care and other supports to working women. After the war, men were re-hired and many of the nurseries were closed. This reflected a similar process during the First World War, after which women were given the vote as a palliative.

In Third World countries, many of these broad patterns are reflected, but economic and other conditions are very different. This is due, in large part, to the imposition of new economic relations from the metropolitan countries onto the colonies and post-colonial countries. The legacy of colonial employment practices and ideology combines with the export of capital, under conditions controlled by the investors (often with the active collaboration of host governments) to the Third World countries. These investors, as is well known, have often exported the 'dirty industries', in which their own labour force is less willing to work, and also so as to escape pollution controls and safety standards which reduce profits. The attractions of the new production locations include cheap, relatively passive labour, and financial incentives such as low taxation (these factors are often actively advertised by the governments concerned, in order to attract foreign capital).

However, it is not only labour-intensive industry which is exported - indeed, the trend is towards higher and higher levels of capital-intensity (therefore creating fewer job opportunities). It is common now for a relatively labour-intensive section of the labour process to be exported, in an

industry which is highly capital-intensive. Car and vehicle assembly is a case in point. An example which applies significantly to women is in electronics - transistor assembly. Often, where the industrial labour force shows an unusually large proportion of women, one will find the existence of an industry such as this: it is very noticeable in Malaysia and Singapore, where women constitute the majority of those in wage employment in some urban areas.

Electronics is one of those industries which shows a predilection for female labour. Such industries should be thoroughly researched for what they can reveal about the patterns of exploitation of female labour, and the reasons for it. (3) Employers maintain that women show an "aptitude" for this work, which requires high levels of manual dexterity. However, the work also has other features which make a passive and vulnerable labour force desirable, such as highly repetitive, relatively unskilled labour, and low pay.

In general, the relegation of sectors of employment to either sex passes through phases. Under colonialism, many jobs which were first dominated by men, later increasingly passed to women: from domestic service to all kinds of relatively low-status professions: nursing, teaching, secretarial and clerical jobs. Machines such as typewriters and sewing machines were often utilised mainly by men (contemporary instances are still widely found). Such jobs were feminised as new, usually better remunerated jobs became available to men; while the better-paid jobs in those fields, requiring higher levels of education and training, were increasingly taken over by 'middle class' women (who, amongst other things, are able to employ domestic

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(3) See the fascinating, though shocking, study by Linda Lim (unpublished).

servants - usually female : - to lighten their household duties).

In industrial employment proper, the feminisation of certain sectors is probably very complex in terms of causation. It reflects the predilection of employers - such as in electronics, already mentioned, or in textiles (the majority of workers in Shanghai or Hankow in China in the 1920s being **mainly** female textile-workers, for instance),<sup>(4)</sup> but also cultural factors regarding wage employment of women; additionally, it will reflect economic changes pushing either sex more than the other into wage employment. All these factors themselves will relate to changes in labour needs, and patterns of foreign investment, in the metropolitan economies.

## 2. Labour migration and subsistence production

The role of women in subsistence production in the context of labour migration has been briefly discussed above (Section III, fourth paragraph). It provides a particularly clear example of the relegation of women to unremunerated work, and to the role of reproduction of labour power. The migration of labour - whether cyclical or semi-permanent - is experienced throughout the Third World, but it is particularly widespread in some regions. Cases in point are the migration of labourers from Mexico to the plantations of Southern California,<sup>(5)</sup> the immigration of foreign, low-paid workers to Kuwait, and labour migration from North and West Africa to Europe, (particularly to France). In Africa, there are often high rates of migration between (as well as within) countries. South Africa is the

(4) See Suzette Leith, "Chinese Women in the Early Communist Movement", p.57, in Marilyn B. Young (Ed.)

(5) See the interesting article by Burawoy which compares Southern Africa and the U.S., and provides a theoretical discussion of the nature and function of migrant labour in general.

best known, drawing on hundreds of thousands of workers from neighbouring countries as well as from the "Bantustans". The Ivory Coast, however, probably employs even more foreign migrant labour than South Africa does - as many as two million workers, mainly in commercial agriculture, who come from the most underdeveloped countries of West Africa (amongst the poorest countries in the world).

With certain exceptions, this migrant labour is predominantly male; women and children remain behind, mainly in rural areas, where they engage in subsistence production. Often, the nutritional needs of the family cannot be met from "subsistence" production - as in South Africa's Bantustans, or in the Senegal River valley (in Senegal, Mali and Mauritania) which has also been affected by many years of drought. Nevertheless, this sector is expected to subsidise the low wages paid to migrant workers - a subsidy provided largely by women's labour. Naturally enough, such a system produces declining productivity in the subsistence sector, and aggravates problems of malnutrition, poor health, and even famine.

Given these problems, as well as an unmanageable rate of urban influx, and the fact that many Third World countries import staple foods, a project for economic development and industrialisation must involve a strategy for land use and food production which will mitigate, and hopefully overcome, these obstacles. (It should be borne in mind that some countries, such as India actually export staple cereals, while still suffering from problems of underemployment and malnutrition). Such a strategy can only succeed by dealing with the structural causes of the problems, which are beyond the scope of this paper. Let it be said, however, that the remuneration of

women's labour should receive priority in any schemes, as well as the consideration of ensuring an equal role for women in administration of projects and decision-making. In such projects, this is practically never the case. (6)

3. The development of a cash economy and the impact on the family

Relative familial instability is a characteristic of the penetration of the cash economy in underdeveloped countries. Migrant labour is an important factor; but more generally, as has already been said, there is a tendency for the extended family system to break down, especially in urban areas. At the same time (again, particularly in cities) extra-marital relations become more frequent, and marital stability is lessened. Couples may establish 'common-law', i.e. unofficial, marriages; these are often temporary liaisons. Men, therefore, are not always present as heads of families and as the main 'breadwinner'. These phenomena are reflected in the high rates of 'female-headed' households found in census returns in some Third World areas; this is well-known in the Caribbean. It is revealing that this is also found amongst under-privileged groups in the advanced capitalist countries - e.g. in the black community in the United States. (7)

In these conditions, the responsibility of maintaining children and other dependents weighs very heavily on women. It is vital, therefore, that women are assured adequate incomes and that public provision is made for child-care and other

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(6) For some useful insights on the alleviation of women's burden of labour in the rural economy, see Razavi and Farvar.

(7) Female-headed families were blamed by the Moynihan Report for the prevalence of crime amongst black Americans. For a critique, see Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1967.



forms of social welfare. Instead, the dominant view appears to be that of a puritan reaction to "sexual promiscuity", familial breakdown, etc., and female-headed households are regarded as "deviant". Women are thereby punished, and further victimised, by a system for which they are not to blame; whereas the only responsible response would be for the society as a whole to recognise women's vulnerability and attempt to ameliorate it. This will not be achieved by a puritanist scare about "immorality" and by attempting to reinstate patriarchal control, but rather by ensuring women economic security (and thereby lessening their economic dependence on men). It should be obvious that crime and delinquency, as well as ill-health (mental and physical) and a whole host of problems, are basically caused by poverty and stress - not by women, who are in fact the main victims.

## V. PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

### 1. Education and Training

The question of adequate education and training for women is a vital factor in promoting female status in the labour market. The effective, if not always intentional, discrimination against girls and women in this field is a particularly glaring example of sexual inequality. The problems are well known, and a mere outline is given here.

The end result of systems throughout the world (though important differences exist) is that men as a group end up better qualified than women, and that many jobs and professions end up sex-specialised, with "women's jobs" always occupying the lower end of the scale either in terms of pay or of status, and usually both. Women, when they are trained at all, are

usually trained in the "caring" professions: teaching, nursing, child-care, social work, etc.; or else in low status/low pay technical jobs: laboratory assistants, radiography, etc. Men dominate the rest: the top levels of medicine, engineering, architecture, and so on ad nauseam. In manual labour in industry, the picture is the same. Hardly any apprentice training schemes include girls or women.

In education, as in all forms of sex-role specialisation, the problem starts at the beginning. Little boys are treated as future men; girls as women; with all that that entails: in the family and the home, on the street, and in the school. In poor families in the Third World, parents often find the education of their children an immediate economic cost: even where it is "free", schooling removes children from performing household and productive labour. Parents usually make the simple economic calculation that the education of boys is a better investment in terms of opportunity cost; girls also are needed by their mothers to lighten the burden of the housework that men cannot or will not share. These questions are partly to do with ideology, but not wholly: only a total economic and social transformation would fundamentally alter them, and they cannot be tackled at the level of attitudes alone.

Governments and educational institutions could do much, although on the whole they do not. Policy could be revised so as to counter-act educational sex-role specialisation, at every level. At the very least, however, women should not be unnecessarily disadvantaged (as they are being): for instance, agricultural extension services should be directed at women where women are partly or mainly responsible for cultivation; instead such services are actually being directed at men. Ultimately, however, such educational reforms would be futile if women could not take up the employment for which they were qualified: either because of domestic responsibilities, or because of unavailability of job opportunities. In a situation of less than full employment, that is not merely likely, but inescapable.

## 2. Legal reform and industrial legislation

All manner of legal reforms and innovations affecting women's status are being introduced in Third World countries, covering marriage and divorce in particular. The most important in protecting women are provisions for mothers to claim child support from the children's father, whether or not the parents are officially married (i.e. including the recognition of illegitimate children); the ability of women to sue for divorce, and to receive protection from male desertion and/or the arrogation of rights to children, protection from assault or battery by male kin; and the right to inherit, own, and pass on property. These reforms should be seen as essential minima. Other rights are less widely accepted, though equally basic, such as the right of women to control their own biological reproductive process, through access to contraception and abortion (see below). The position varies greatly from region to region in the Third World,

according to accepted notions of women's status; in fact in some countries the legal position of women is in certain respects more favourable than it is in the West. The main task is to extend the reforms to new areas in some countries and in all directions in other countries, so as to standardise practice up to the highest level.

The area of industrial legislation is fraught with problems. Most legislation in this field is borrowed from the practice in the highly industrialised countries, usually through the agency of international fora such as the I.L.O. There has been considerable disagreement over whether the extension of some of these provisions to Third World women has actually served the latter's interests, and indeed whether some of them are still appropriate at all. This applies particularly to the vexed question of protective legislation for women workers. A sore point of a different kind is equal pay, on which some have taken the position that equal pay should not apply to developing countries where there is a very high rate of male unemployment, since job competition between the sexes might cause some families to suffer having no breadwinner at all (or some variation on this theme). \*

On the question of equal pay (for male and female workers, for work of equal value) there is a basic question of principle involved. To make concessions, on the grounds that particular circumstances are adverse or whatever else, is to deny even the attempt to give women a measure of equality, and is therefore

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\* One illogicality of this position is that many women are in fact the sole breadwinners for their families. This is even more common in many parts of the Third World than elsewhere, because of the high number of female-headed households.

an inadmissible position in any forum which is genuinely seeking to emancipate women. There are further grounds, well established within the international labour movement, for rejecting such a position: namely, that the existence of any group of disadvantaged, lower-paid workers undermines the position of the working-class as a whole. It enables employers to play off the disadvantaged group against the others, and thereby to threaten the fundamental interests of all working people.

Beyond this, however, there are severe difficulties in the implementation of the rather abstract notion of equal pay, deriving mainly from the difficulty of evaluating jobs - i.e. of deciding what "equal value" means. The fact that women are often employed in labour ghettos in 'feminised' labour sectors, means that there may not be a male 'standard' against which to measure a woman's wage, in order to demonstrate that she is being relatively underpaid. Moreover, women are usually absolutely underpaid - i.e. their jobs have low status, which means that it is necessary to compare work that women do with different jobs that men do, in terms of rather intangible criteria such as skill, intensity of work, social value (usefulness), etc. These questions are not essentially resolvable by legal methods, and must depend upon the social evaluation of work and the purposes of work, as well as the ability of such evaluation to find expression in order to change employment practices.

It is already well established in the industrialised countries where the principle of equal pay was introduced some time ago, that legislation has not tackled the basic problems - since women still earn far less than men. The small

improvements that have been made will be greatly enhanced when, and if, female labour ghetto-isation is ended, which in turn hinges upon the ending of sex-role specialisation in employment. It will be seen, therefore, that legislation of itself cannot produce the required change - although of course it is a necessary prerequisite and should by no means be ignored.

The question of protective legislation is even more intractable since here no consensus has been reached on the principle, let alone the practice. Protective legislation exists in order to protect women in their function as biological reproducers, but more than this, it "protects" them in their domestic role of reproduction in a wider sense: e.g., by prohibitions on night work. The assumption is that women should not be exposed to occupational health hazards during pregnancy and nursing, but also that they should be enabled to carry out "normal" domestic labour by not being allowed to work "unsocial" hours. This immediately reveals that some aspects of protective legislation actually reinforce women's role in the family, thereby preventing them from achieving equality with men; of course it also means that they can be discriminated against in hiring practices, as well as having less opportunity to earn a higher income. Moreover, it is entirely paternalistic in that it ordains women's position and does not allow women any choice, or the opportunity to take responsible decisions affecting their own lives.

However, since women in fact do still have to do two jobs, in waged employment (if they can get it) and in the home, would not the removal of protective legislation promote their greater exploitation? On another tack, arguing that all workers (not just women) should be protected from hazards to their health or from unsocial work hours, should not one fight to retain

protective legislation but to extend it to all workers? The correct strategy in particular circumstances can only be decided by women's and workers' organisations.<sup>R</sup> In the meantime, it must be acknowledged that the existence of protective legislation is in fact a reflection of women's oppression, even if it is thought to be an undesirable necessity. Women workers in the Third World, who have specific problems of their own should be guided by their own interests as they perceive them - especially since there are no clear guide-lines for action.

While there are biological differences between men and women in terms of physical structure, hormones and so on, these are not the main determinants of sex-role employment specialisation. For one thing, if strength was such a factor, then strong people would do jobs requiring strength and vice-versa - given that there are greater differences within each sex than there are between the sexes as a whole. It is also easy enough to demonstrate that many women do, or have done, work that is extremely taxing physically. Moreover, with industrialisation and the introduction of more sophisticated techniques of production, brute strength becomes less and less important in the process of production. Therefore, the only significant biological difference is that women alone bear, give birth to, and nurse children. (This itself is modified by the fact that with increasing levels of industrialisation, women tend to have fewer children, and it is possible - though it may not necessarily be desirable - to replace breast-feeding with bottle-feeding).

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<sup>R</sup> Unfortunately, though, workers' organisations are almost invariably male-dominated, and they do not liaise with women's organisations. Women workers' problems derive from their general position as women not just their position as workers; forms of organisation will have to be built in order to reflect this.

In the discussion of protective legislation, we saw that the biological function of women in reproduction is socially recognised by this legislation; but also that the effect of the legal provisions may be to penalise women in important respects. Evidently, given a desire to emancipate women, we should move towards the social recognition of women's contribution to society through biological reproduction, without their being penalised for it. This involves making the production and rearing of children a less private, more social, process. It should be something that men take responsibility for in addition to women, and that society as a whole takes responsibility for, in order to allow adults, male and female, to discharge their roles adequately both as parents and as producers. Ultimately, this poses many questions about the nature of the family and its future as an institution - but these are questions capable of many different resolutions, which the people of the future will decide if and when they are eventually free to do so.

In the immediate future, the most pressing question is that of provision of social facilities for child-care, for it is the burden of child-care that chiefly prevents women from entering the labour market on equal terms with men. Recognition of this social need means: avoiding treating women workers as a 'special case' - it means regarding children as the children of all workers, not just women; it means a social responsibility for the children of today, who are the society of the future. In fact, however, employers, the state, and most social institutions regard children as the mother's responsibility.\*

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\* This blinkered view can take on quite astonishing proportions. From the author's own experience, an English employer (when pressed by trade unionists in his employ to open a creche at the place of work) was heard to say: "How do I know that the creche will only be used by my employees, and not by the men's wives' children as well . . . ."



and make motherhood a liability for women - instead of compensating women for a biological process (let alone the social processes) that they undergo on behalf of society in general.

Public facilities for child-care cost money. They are abysmally inadequate in most of the advanced capitalist countries, though they are much better in the socialist industrialised countries. This reflects the fact that more has been done to emancipate women in the latter; it is also probably quite significant that women's labour is more in demand there (we saw that public facilities were provided for women in the West when they were needed in the labour force). Who, then, will pay the cost of providing the facilities? From the employers' point of view, it normally represents merely an unwelcome cost which eats into profits. Governments, in narrow economic terms, will only see a benefit if they require the economic contribution of women's (waged) labour, i.e. if there is a labour shortage.

This shows us two things quite clearly. Firstly, there is a close correlation between provision of child-care facilities and full employment. Secondly, the social merits of the question will only be taken up to the extent that popular pressure for them exists, and is capable of reflection in Governmental policy. Popular pressure itself will only exist when women are cognisant of the origin of their problems, organised to express them, and capable of moving society as a whole towards the recognition of the wide social questions involved in the emancipation of women.

Concretely, though, what are the options for policy-makers in the developing countries? It must be acknowledged that the provision of facilities by the state constitutes a cost, in

terms of immediate outlay, which it is difficult for the poorer countries to meet. However, there are a number of considerations which mitigate, or even negate, that cost. Firstly, it need not involve a very big capital outlay. In warm climates there is not the same need for large, heated buildings and so the 'educational toys' can be simple - playing with sand and water and sticks can provide as much stimulation and amusement as any technological gimmick can. The training of child-minders need not be costly, and would constitute a tremendously valuable asset to the society - not only in terms of providing employment to the people concerned. Moreover, pre-school education is only now beginning to be accorded the importance it deserves - in theory, that is - in the industrialised countries, and the developing countries have much to gain from this new knowledge.

Experience has shown that by the time children come to school at five or six years old (perhaps older in the Third World), their ability to respond to stimulation in the outside world has already largely been formed. This means that children from backgrounds which are deprived in terms of positive learning experiences, are at an enormous disadvantage which the large majority of them never overcome, however many years they spend in formal education. Much of the money which is put into education, therefore, could be better spent on providing more and better nurseries: a conclusion whose importance should not be lost in parts of the Third World where the costs of education are felt so acutely. In the Third World, therefore, many opportunities exist to avoid the errors that have been made historically in the industrialised countries.

The education of pre-school children may not be seen as a priority now, when the rate of industrialisation is low, and the extended family often still exists to care for children; but clearly it is sound policy to plan according to the trends, rather than attempt to undo the harm when it has happened. This applies as much to health as to education. The creation of properly supervised nurseries, as of adequate pre- and post-natal care for mothers, offers perhaps the best opportunity there is to improve the general health of the population; since disease and malnutrition in early life also largely forms the health of the adult.

Moreover, the government need not foot the bill alone - private employers can and should be made to pay for facilities for their workers. Legislation can be introduced to oblige them to do so. Here it is important that women do not become further discriminated against in employment, by making it "uneconomic" for employers to hire them - i.e. all enterprises which employ more than a certain number of workers (male or female) should be obliged to provide for a certain number of creche places. The staff to run the creche could then be provided by the state, in conjunction with the trade unions or workers' organisations - who should be encouraged to take responsibility themselves. This will help to involve men, and people collectively, in the care of children.

These creches must provide facilities for the care of infants as well as children, so that women with young babies need not leave work to care for them, and also so that the babies can be breast-fed during work hours. Breast-feeding is not only much better for the child's health - vitally important in underdeveloped countries - but is the only sensible thing when people, or the country as a whole, cannot afford substitutes.

With these conditions established, it can now safely be made illegal for employers to sack married or pregnant women (which they often do). Obviously, though, it will be more difficult for individual countries to institute such provisions on their own; there must be efforts to concert such policies. In this as in all other respects, Third World countries can do much to influence the operations of foreign capital if they act together - so as to lessen the chances of being victimised by the withdrawal of foreign investment.

There is no reason for the developing countries to accept the tutelage of the industrialised countries in the field of child-care. Obviously, all opportunities should be sought, and accepted, to study the methods used abroad, or to receive economic and technical assistance; but a healthy scepticism should be adopted towards other practices. Even in the socialist countries, where the provision is relatively good, wrong notions persist or emerge anew - for instance, sex-role indoctrination of young children is often strong, and surprisingly the idea remains that child-care is a woman's job. Third World women must decide their own pace of change, but there is no reason to start off unknowingly on the wrong foot.

### 3. Development Projects

Aid agencies, as well as government policy-makers, are starting to devote more attention to women's specific problems. There is currently a welter of good intentions, with relatively little clear strategy behind them. Most volunteer projects appear to adopt a liberal, rather paternalist approach, and to move very cautiously for fear of upsetting the 'establishment' - governments, local planners, village authorities, local elders

and patriarchs, etc. Since most of the agencies are rather unclear about their interventionist role in foreign countries in any case, this is hardly surprising. The dilemma of the agencies on the question of women reveals a more basic dilemma about their purposes in general - reveals it rather clearly in fact.

What projects do they in fact engage in? Much attention is devoted to lightening the burden of women's domestic labour - the procuring of water and fuel, and the processing of cereals. This probably does little harm and might do quite a bit of good. Other projects relate to the creation of income-earning handicrafts industries for women; this is more problematic. Firstly, it runs the considerable risk of creating new employment ghettos for women. Secondly, these projects are frequently tied to a luxury or exotic export market. The women are paid low wages, the marketing is controlled by foreign middle-men, and in general one could say that such production has little use-value and serves to tighten the links of dependence on the metropolises, not to loosen them. Where the handicrafts are not exported they are usually bought by the consumerist middle-class in the country of origin; little is gained except for some pocket-money for the women workers, who really have no prospects other than that. They do not achieve any real economic independence as a result.

Other schemes are directed at 'home-economics' - teaching women more sophisticated techniques of nutrition, cooking, and home medicine. This is very popular with 'do-gooders' in the countries concerned as well, and it is probably the most dangerous trend of all. As a result of such projects, women are more entrenched than ever in the roles of wife, mother, nurturer and provider; they are additionally mystified by the imposition

of Western bourgeois cultural values. Of course questions of nutrition and home medicine, for instance, are very important; and one cannot evade the fact that women are the people most closely affected. The point, though, must always be to help women, and the society as a whole, to progress, without creating new problems or exacerbating existing ones: knowledge must serve to liberate us, not to enslave us.

Hardly any aid projects concern themselves with women workers in the urban areas, although this is an area in which the need is great as also the opportunities for useful work. Aid agencies could help to finance and administer nurseries, and to assist women workers to form trade unions and women's organisations. In general, the most useful thing that volunteers could do would be to help women to find the self-confidence and determination to understand and to act upon their situation. This is done through encouragement, through the provision of organisational skills, and above all through bringing to women wherever they are the history and the experience of the international struggle of women. Knowledge and confidence, however bleak their situation, will do more than anything else to provide women with the courage to fight and secure their rights.

#### 4. Population Control

The right of women to control their own reproductive process is a fundamental right which is basic to the emancipation of women. The objective should be for all women everywhere to have the right to free abortion and contraception on demand, however great the obstacles in the way and however slow the progress. This principle does not involve any coercion of any kind - on the contrary, the objective is to allow women

the maximum choice, and freedom to control their own lives. Those who have objections on religious or cultural grounds should be free to observe their own objections, but not to impose them on women who do not share these views.

Naturally, in most developing countries the conditions for the implementation of the principle do not exist - apart from the many cultural obstacles (which also exist elsewhere), the medical infrastructure is usually inadequate. But this does not alter the fact that anything else forces women to be the victim of their own bodily functions in a way that fundamentally affects their lives, including their health; they may bear children they do not want at all, or do not want at the particular time; they may die unnecessarily in child-birth or through the complications of self-induced abortions. Such suffering is commonplace for millions of women every day.

'Population control' is another matter. It does not address itself at all to the rights or the sufferings of women: it is about control. The way that this control has been exercised by governments and international agencies has frequently operated not only against the interests of women, but against the interests of the Third World as a whole. The topic cannot be adequately covered here, but it is raised since it is a vital question for women and for economic development itself. The population scare constitutes one of the worst mystifications and manipulations that agencies from the Western World have imposed on the developing countries.

These agencies have blamed poverty and underdevelopment on the myth of over-population - a simple problem with a brutally simple solution, or so it would appear: Women in developing countries have frequently been sterilised without their knowledge or their consent. The methods of contraception which are exported are often experimental, and drugs which have not been passed by administrations in Western countries are 'donated' free of charge to Third World countries. The women there are effectively used as guinea pigs, having no knowledge of any dangers to which they are exposed, and no medical back-up to protect them.

In the Western countries themselves, it was not mass campaigns of sterilisation, abortions and contraception which brought down the population growth rate to its present level: it was industrialisation and economic growth. Accordingly, in the Third World it is not a high population growth which has produced poverty, but the other way round. It is widely noted that with economic development, the birth rate falls: richer countries have a lower rate than poorer countries, upper classes have a lower rate than lower classes, etc. However, with increasingly capital-intensive techniques of production, there is a tendency for the increasing creation of 'surplus population' i.e. of the unemployed, and it is the extension of this process



to the Third World which is largely responsible for what are known as "population" problems.

In many Third World countries, the labour-power of the population is almost the only valuable resource. And in many of these countries - particularly in Africa - the population levels are actually very low. The only sense in which such countries could be said to be 'over-populated' is that the economics are incapable of supporting even a small population: over-population is of course a relative, not an absolute, phenomenon. This begs the question of why Third world countries are economically backward (if one rejects the notion that it is due to "over-population"). Some suggestions are implied in the argument of this paper; but for present purposes let it merely be said that the objective must be to increase production in these countries through the full deployment of the labour force, the equitable distribution of wealth, and judicious investment of the surplus.

When economic growth takes place on this basis, the development of industry can be controlled and planned; medical facilities can be expanded and extended to all, and the women whose economic options are improved in the process will tend to have fewer children - partly because they will know that the children they do have are now likely to survive their infancy.

#### VI Conclusion

Many of the propositions that have been put forward in this paper might be thought to be unrealistic, or extreme. But it is not argued that the objectives are all capable of immediate implementation. Also, the problem of women's oppression goes very, very deep: there is no superficial or rapid solution to it. The arguments of the paper, therefore are based on an

analysis at a radical level - which yields radical solutions. It is not intended to leave the impression that the problems are intractable: on the contrary, many things can be done and should be done as soon as possible. The plea is merely that, in any short-term project for women, the long-term goals should be kept clearly in mind - however far away they seem. In so doing, short-term policies which actually counter-act the ultimate objectives can be avoided. The point is to define the direction, and then to adhere to it.

In conferences on economic development, discussion of immediate issues can easily lose touch with wider fundamental questions; also, the voices of the weak or politically disadvantaged may not be heard at all. One important group in the latter category is women; another is children. Let us remind ourselves, therefore, of two very basic and very telling things. Firstly, that the surest index of the physical health of a population, as well as of its economic well-being, is its rate of infant mortality.<sup>(8)</sup> The second point is not unconnected with the first, though it is less tangible: namely, that the surest index of the degree of development or advancement of a country is the relative emancipation of its women.

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(8) It has been neatly - if brutally - demonstrated for two cities in Brazil that the infant mortality rate correlates directly with the level of the real minimum wage. See Charles H. Wood, "Infant Mortality Trends and Capitalist Development in Brazil: the Case of Sao Paulo and Belo Horizonte," in Latin American Perspectives, Issue 15.

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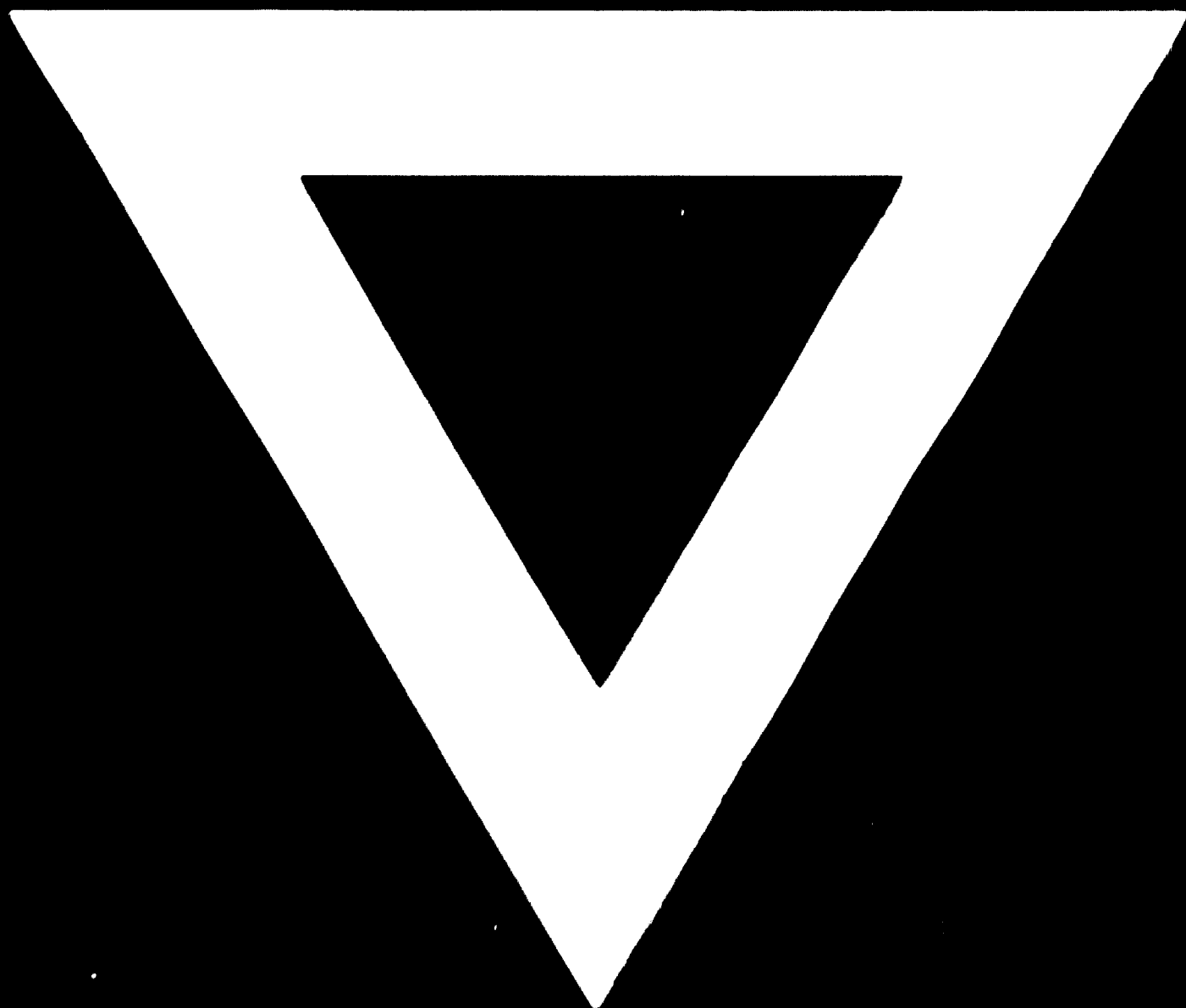
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