Mediascapes journal 21/2023

The Dual Allegiance: Dialectical Communication in British Socialist Feminist Periodicals 1972–84

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The burgeoning Women's Liberation Movement in 1970s Britain introduced a shift of political consciousness for socialist women active in the organised labour movement. Male-dominated organisations like the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and the International Socialists (IS), later Socialist Workers Party (SWP), were slow in reacting to the rapid surge of women becoming politicised through consciousness-raising groups and developing a political understanding of personal and sexual power dynamics between men and women. Increasingly, socialist women became dissatisfied with the replication of patriarchal structures on the political Left and embraced frameworks of feminist collectivity. And yet, their commitment to a class-based feminist analysis also resulted in an uneasy relationship with the separatist tendency of the Women's Liberation Movement which exhibited hostility towards any ideas associated with the male left. As such, many socialist feminists found themselves placed between two competing political ideals, referred to as the problem of "dual allegiance." In an effort to resolve this tension, independent socialist feminist periodicals such as Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation and Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement emerged to be used as forums of debate. Recognising the popularity these publications generated among women, the CPGB and the IS/SWP initiated the production of their own women's periodicals, namely Link: Communist Party Women's Journal and Women's Voice, respectively. By applying the framework of feminist dialectics in Gracie Lyon's 1976 handbook Constructive Criticism, this paper reveals how the material form of the periodical, particularly the letter-to-the-editor pages, enabled good-faith negotiations about the socialist feminist dual allegiance. While Red Rag and Scarlet Women more readily embraced feminist dialectic principles of difference and criticism, Link and Women's Voice were more editorially limited to their respective party-line. This paper concludes with observations about how the serialised, kaleidoscopic form of the periodical enabled varying degrees of feminist dialectical correspondence according to the editorial and political backgrounds of those producing the publications.

Keywords: The Dual Allegiance, Socialist Feminism, Feminist Periodicals, Feminist Dialectic

 ISSN: 2282-2542

Introduction

The British Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in 1970s Britain had split into increasingly ideologically divided factions on the topic of the political Left. While the socialist-aligned women were inclined to formulate their feminist analysis "in terms of capital and economic relations," (Rees, 2010, p. 348) radical and revolutionary feminists understood male violence as a more fundamental framework for analysing the status of women. Over the course of the 1970s, several socialist feminist periodicals emerged in Britain in attempts to negotiate the political differences of socialists and feminists, focusing on the overarching premise that "there will be no women's liberation without revolution, [and] there will be no revolution without women's liberation."[1] By using the framework of feminist dialectics to analyse the editorials, reports and letters published in these periodicals, I reveal how divergent editorial strategies produced an array of theoretical and practical problems for socialist feminists. As sociologist and feminist historian Benita Roth argues, "looking at grassroots journals and underground publications is essential for understanding how feminists viewed things on the ground" (Roth, 2004, p. 18). Moreover, by examining both independent socialist feminist periodicals (*Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation* and *Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement*) and party-specific women's journals (*Link: Communist Party Women's Journal* and *Women's Voice*), the delineation of which is explained further below, a variety of observations can be made about how women attempted to resolve their "dual allegiance" through the dialectic possibilities of the periodical form.

The Dual Allegiance

Women on the political Left were increasingly pushing back against the problem of socialist and Marxist political parties such as the International Socialists (IS), renamed Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1977, and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) often replicating patriarchal family structures that resulted in an "unspoken sexual division of labour in the party" (Andrews, 2004, p. 60). Both the IS/SWP and the CPGB "saw the autonomous women's movement as a 'bourgeois diversion'" (Bruley, 2020, p. 263) from class struggle and committed themselves to "a 'class before gender' position" (Andrews, 2004, p. 60), believing that women's subjugation is a characteristic of capitalist society and that therefore socialist revolution was its sole countermeasure. Although the WLM had a "ready-made affinity for socialism," the dismissive and sexist treatment of women within male-dominated socialist organisations led feminists to the realisation that the status of women could not be improved without an autonomous, all-female political movement (Bouchier, 1983, p. 67).

[1] This quote is from a poster made by the International Marxist Group in 1980.

However, many women remained loyal to parties like IS/SWP and CPGB as they also believed that the struggle for women's liberation was situated within the struggle for socialism. Their central position was that Marxist socialism was already successfully analysing the conditions for revolution and could therefore be supplemented to include an understanding of women's oppression. This contrasted with the more autonomous and radical tendencies of the WLM which understood patriarchy as the primary site of women's oppression and argued that a socialist revolution would not guarantee any form of sexual liberation for women. Consequently, many socialist feminists fell in between these positions and described this as the problem of "dual allegiance" to both socialism and feminism. Though they adopted a class-based view of feminism, socialist feminists also perceived that the traditional male-dominated Marxists analysis was insufficient in considering sexual politics.

In an attempt to capture this complex constellation, feminist writer and campaigner Amanda Sebestyen produced a "Tendencies in the Women's Liberation Movement" chart which described seven varieties of socialist feminism and six varieties of radical feminism, first printed in the 1979 pamphlet *Feminist Practice: Notes from the Tenth Year (Theoretically Speaking)*. Ranging from "Equal Rights" to "Female Supremacist" varieties of feminism, Sebestyen's chart captured the diversity in political difference within the WLM and its relation to the political Left. She argued that because political alignments were "inextricably mixed up with separate friendship and sexual networks," it was crucial to better understand fundamental political differences between feminists in order to avoid "becom[ing] ignorant armies clashing by night" (Sebestyen, 1979, p. 16).

While Sebestyen's chart offers crucial insight into the variety of feminist political differences, it would be a mistake to conclude that such positionalities were immovable or static. Indeed, the introduction of the pamphlet itself emphasises that "no tendency in the WLM has *a* set, agreed rigid line (there are no cadres)" (Introductory Paper, 1979, p. 2). Although many negotiations between feminists took place in person at conferences and meetings, they were also sustained through letter-writing within the feminist periodical network. The WLM in Britain produced enduring documentary evidence in the form of hundreds of feminist magazines, journals and newsletters which constitute an invaluable source for historians on which to base inquiries into the discursive networks of feminist correspondence.[2] The material form of the periodical was particularly well suited to accommodating political difference as it inherently occupies a position of contradiction: on the one hand, a periodical needs to repeat certain qualities over time–what the feminist writer and cultural history teacher Margaret Beetham calls "a recognizable position in successive numbers"–to maintain a loyal readership; on the other hand, a periodical also needs to be fluid and responsive to change in order to stay relevant (Beetham, 1989, p. 99). As such, letters-to-the-editor in second wave feminist periodicals form the basis on which I

[2] For more detailed research on the second wave feminist periodical network in Britain, see Wonders, B. (2021). *'Please Say More': Mediating Conflict Through Letter-Writing in British Second Wave Feminist Periodicals, 1970-1990.* Ph.D. Glasgow School of Art.

examine the role of feminist dialectics in women trying to work out the dual allegiance of socialism and feminism.

Feminist Dialectics

This paper uses the principles of what I refer to as "feminist dialectics" to assess the significance of and extent to which socialist feminist periodicals managed to facilitate political negotiations and disagreement. Dialectics broadly refers to the process of bringing together opposing arguments which then results in moving closer to some sort of truth or resolution. This process has its origins in ancient Greek philosophical tradition and re-appears in German idealist philosophy. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were hugely influenced by the dialectical tradition and gave it an entirely new application within the field of material and economic production in society. This adaptation is largely referred to as "dialectical materialism" and became more widely circulated as a Marxist method of analysis. Dialectical materialism attempts to make sense of social change through a historical lens and asserts that material conflicts, such as class conflict, lead to struggles and ultimately to changes in the arrangement of material conditions through social revolution. Significantly for the purposes of this paper, the progression of dialectics from ancient Greece to early 20th century socialist revolution resulted then in another distinct shift when, during the Women's Liberation Movement, dialectic principles of contradiction and change became integrated within feminist organising principles.

As feminists began to convene around the small group process of consciousness-raising in the late 1960s, the domain of personal experience was being emphasised as a key foundation from which to extrapolate political knowledge and theory. In other words, "the personal is political,"[3] a sentiment which not only made sense of how power relations between men and women manifest through subjective experience, but crucially also extended into re-thinking the politics of process and what the embodiment of feminist principles might look like in practical terms. Within the Women's Liberation Movement, feminists embraced the collective and horizontal configuration of working groups, so much so that between 1968-1973 collectives were multiplying "at an alarming rate" (Bordt, 1997, p. 140). Feminists deliberately favoured a radical kind of participatory democracy over "traditional masculine structures and values" (Vanderpyl, 1998, 10) such as hierarchy and leadership associated with the organised Labour movement. Central to this egalitarian model was the ideal of consensus decision-making and as such the re-distribution of authority away from any one individual and into the hands of the collective.

However, for many second wave feminist collectives, the ideals of unity and commonality often ended up producing "homogeneity and, at times, an oppressive politics of sameness" (Vanderpyl, 1998, 8). In 1972, Jo Freeman remarked on this dynamic in an article titled "The

[3] "The personal is political" is a phrase popularised by feminist Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay of the same title, though Hanish claims that it was in fact editors of the publication *Notes from the Second Year*, Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, who first coined the phrase.

Tyranny of Structurelessness," arguing that aspirations of non-hierarchy–that is, the principles disavowal of *formalised* working structures–does not prevent the formation of *informal* structures which become "a way of masking power" and decision-making is "curtailed to those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal" (Freeman, 1972, p. 20). As a solution to overcoming the problem of informal formalisation, some groups adopted conflict resolution guidelines from a 1976 pamphlet titled *Constructive Criticism* by Gracie Lyons (Thomas, 1999, p.104).

Constructive Criticism was a small-press bestseller aimed at providing tools for honest and productive disagreement, based on the premise that criticism is necessary for any political movement to enact fundamental change. 'Gracie Lyons' is a pseudonym of educator and social justice activist Vicki Legion who, in the early 1970s worked with psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, the then would-be author of the bestselling book *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Informed by Rosenberg's background in psychology, Legion combined his principles of conflict resolution with dialectical materialism, or as she described it, "the guiding philosophy of most revolutionary movements" (Lyons, 1976, p. 4). She describes how, within social movements, internal struggle is necessary to advance any political project and that it exists in a dialectical relationship with the ideals of unity: "Unless we develop and strengthen our unity by struggling through our disagreements and doubts, […] then we quickly find that [our unity] is too superficial to allow us to function together when the chips are down" (Lyons, 1976, p. 21). Legion argues that within political groups "the first mistake is to emphasize unity at all costs," suggesting that the refusal to engage in struggle "arises from narrow self-interest" (Lyons, 1976, p. 22).

Legion outlines eight guidelines for engaging in constructive criticism, divided into "How to Do Criticism" and "How to Receive Criticism." Most importantly, she stresses that before implementing any of these guidelines, it is crucial that clear areas or principles of agreement are defined within a group. This ensures that any criticism is grounded in a basis of unity which acts as a reference point for giving criticisms purpose and direction. The first guideline is titled "Getting Your Head Together, or the Importance of Having Good Intentions," and is intended to ensure that whoever wants to deliver a criticism, first queries their own motivations. In other words, the intention must be to advance the group dynamics as a whole, not to punish or coerce a particular individual. This is crucial to the process of constructive criticism, as without a sincere commitment to the strengthening of the group dynamic, it would simply not work. The remaining guidelines for giving criticism include the importance of being concrete, describing feelings, stating wants and explaining the purpose, which Legion summarises in the following equation: "When you do A (observation), I feel B (emotion), and I want you to do C (action-want), because of D (purpose)" (Lyons, 1976, p. 78). The guidelines for how to receive criticism include the necessity for paraphrasing which assures the clarity of the criticism, empathizing for the purpose of encouraging mutual listening, and preventing and handling defensiveness so that it is a supportive, rather than fearful, process.

In the context of the Women's Liberation Movement, I consider the application of Legion's guidelines an attempt to act out the ideals of collectivity and pluralism and therefore refer to it as feminist dialectics. The flexible and kaleidoscopic nature of feminist periodicals have in

themselves become enduring archives of the plurality of voices involved in political negotiations, particularly within the socialist feminist tendency. In searching for feminist dialectics in both independent and party-specific socialist feminist periodicals, conflicts and criticisms can be understood as evidence of a diverse, self-critical and vibrant political movement held together by a woman-controlled communications infrastructure.

The Periodicals

The examples in this paper broadly fit into two distinct but sometimes overlapping categories of periodicals: independent feminist periodicals and party-loyal women's periodicals. *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* both fit into the first category while *Link* and *Women's Voice* fit into the second. The difference largely involves whether or not the publication acted as a mouthpiece for a specific political organisation and was therefore tied to its political party-line and organising structure. Although *Red Rag* ran into some difficulties with its association to the CPGB, as detailed below, both it and *Scarlet Women* were committed to acting as discursive forums in which feminist dialectics could unfold for the purpose of resolving the socialist feminist dual allegiance. *Link* and *Women's Voice*, on the other hand, were women's publications tied to the CPGB and the IS/SWP respectively and therefore more limited in their abilities to accommodate any non-party-line criticisms or reflections. Organisations like the CPGB and the IS/SWP considered women as "politically backward" and conceived of women's periodicals as political propaganda tools for the purpose of "recruit[ing] women to class consciousness and the revolutionary party" (Bruley, 2020, p. 263). The independent feminist publications, on the other hand, were primarily used as internal movement communications channels outside of the "good old boys' network."[4] However, as the examples below demonstrate, this delineation is unreliable as all publications facilitated dialogue among their readerships, exhibiting how the material format of the periodical–and particularly the inclusion of letter-to-the-editor pages–produces a polyvocal exchange of ideas.

I adopt a holistic methodological framework for reading these periodicals which resembles the sociology professor Penny Tinkler's strategy in her 2016 chapter "Fragmentation and Inclusivity: Methods for Working with Girls' and Women's Magazines." Tinkler proposes three main features for a holistic reading of, in this case, magazines specifically: "tracing the threads in themes; reflecting on the impression created by magazine content; attending to the different 'voices' that emerge" (Tinkler, 2016, p. 32). Additionally, she argues for an "inclusive" rather than a "fragmentary" methodological approach to reading magazines, the latter of which isolates individual titles "from the larger field of periodicals within which it has been shaped" (Tinkler, 2016, p. 26)

[4] Under the entry for "networking" in the 2000 *Routledge International Encyclopaedia of Women,* Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender define the "good old boys' network" as an exclusive patriarchal network that "has been in effect for most of humans' literate history because men have controlled most of the public communications and information technology" (Kramarae, 2000, p. 1445).

While Tinkler argues that an inclusive and holistic methodology should take text, image and design features into account, my own approach does engage in what she terms the fragmentary practice of "'cherry picking' to illustrate a point" in the sense that I exclusively focus on communication–particularly dialectical and difficult correspondences–in socialist feminist periodicals (Tinkler, 2016, p. 37). However, I maintain that this still constitutes a holistic approach, as my intention is to identify common mediating functions of feminist periodicals in relation to discussing the dual allegiance of socialism and feminism. I analyse the letter-to-the-editor pages and editorials of the entire print run of each publication and focus on continuous and self-reflexive debate which spanned over several issues in order to demonstrate the serialised nature of periodical communication. In this sense, I work against the isolation of individual titles from the political context in which they functioned and instead, I consider each individual letter and editorial as part of the broader feminist communications network.

Red Rag: A Magazine of Women's Liberation (1972–80)

Red Rag was founded in 1972 by several feminist members of the CPGB who wanted to create an independent, non-affiliated publication. The production of *Red Rag* was initially kept confidential from the CPGB in order to maintain its editorial independence, but once the CPGB had been alerted about the magazine's existence, the party leadership "insisted that *Red Rag* must be shut down" (Delmar, 2020), a demand which was swiftly ignored by *Red Rag*'s founders. The first editorial, which also functioned as the magazine's declaration of intent, shows that there was a duality of concern in *Red Rag*'s central aim to "help build an alliance between women liberators and the working class movement" (Editorial, 1972a, p. 2). The editorial contended that for the women's movement to succeed, it would be essential that women organise themselves within trade unions. And yet, the editorial also acknowledged that there was a prevailing silence within the working class and trade union movement about the discrimination against women, as well as a general notion within the organised labour movement that there need not be a separate political women's movement in the first place.

In an attempt to shift this duality of concern into a more succinct political position, the magazine called for open participation by its readers, asking them to send in letters and articles in order to help expand on *Red Rag*'s main objective of offering a "Marxist explanation of why women are oppressed and how that oppression can be fought and overcome" (Editorial, 1972a, p. 2). The intended readership was specified as "all working women–inside and outside the liberation movement–to Marxists and non-Marxists, to the political and non-political" (Editorial, 1972a, p. 2). However, it is not immediately clear whether *Red Rag* was intended for the development of a Marxist feminist analysis within the Women's Liberation Movement, or attempting to give more traction to the feminist cause within the organised labour movement, or perhaps attempting to do both.

Red Rag's political positionality continued to be questioned by its readership. A letter sent in by Ann Pettitt stated "I'm not quite sure who you're aiming at. Are you trying to solidify the 'political' wing of Women's Lib?" (Pettitt, 1972, p. 23). Pettitt's letter also signals the self-reflexive ways in which socialist feminists were trying to work out their own positionality through printed communication. She herself characterised her own letter as "unconstructive criticism," and yet because the alternative she wished to see is not "in the world yet," Pettitt posited that her feedback could not be expressed in a constructive way (Pettitt, 1972, p. 23). As such, her intention was not to punish the magazine, but to offer a criticism in the hope of contributing to an improvement of the feminist political project.

The difficulties of the "dual allegiance" is apparent in issue 6 in which the editorial described the complications of feminist collective working and collective decision-making. It began by openly stating that alongside the positive aspects of working together, the collective was acutely aware of the obstacles in developing a collective practice from having experienced "a number of upheavals, ongoing disagreements and problems" (Editorial, 1974, p. 2). The collective admitted that while it did not "pretend to have solved these problems," it was aiming to work towards mutual accountability and that it was "through a dialogue between Red Rag and the movement and through our experience of producing the magazine that our practice can be refined and corrected" (Editorial, 1974, p. 2). In other words, ongoing communication facilitated by the format of the magazine was seen as essential in order to clarify not only the Marxist feminist political position, but also the working tasks and functions which make such a dialogue possible in the first place.

The editorial of issue 6 of *Red Rag* also signalled a desire for more open exchange by calling for more support and communication from other women, as well as with a statement of hope that other magazines in the women's movement would emerge and cover similar issues: "the more the better" (Editorial, 1974, p. 2). Such sentiment relates to how Laurel Forster describes how second wave feminist periodicals would "exude a sense that contributions were welcome from all comers" in order to convey "their democratic and inclusive impulse" (Forster, 2015, p. 215). This kind of appeal for pluralism also testifies to *Red Rag*'s understanding of their purpose in facilitating feminist dialectics for the good of the movement, rather than simply claiming to be the authoritative socialist feminist magazine as might happen a solely competitive capitalist market.

What stands out about *Red Rag* is its function as a formative device for developing both a political theory of Marxist feminism as well as internal feminist collective working practices through communication in editorials, articles and letters. While attempting to define the Marxist feminist political position, a lack of transparency about the *Red Rag* collective members and their individual political alliances to the CPGB emerged which resulted in what one collective member, Sue O'Sullivan, described as the "dullness, compromise and liberalism" of *Red Rag* (O'Sullivan, 1976, p. 28). The collective was simultaneously navigating the development of its own political positionality using the magazine as a means for articulating new ideas, in addition to traversing the complexities of feminist collective working. Moreover, by publishing much of these internal difficulties in the magazine's letter-the-editor pages and thus inviting readership engagement, *Red Rag* enacted the central principle of feminist dialectics that "conflicts should not be a clash of one personal interest

against another, but a cooperative effort to discover the revolution that will advance the whole" (Lyons, 1976, p. 28).

Link: Communist Party Women's Journal (1973–84)

After the CPGB learned of the unauthorised production of *Red Rag* and the magazine's initial success in gaining "the respect and support of a number of the most active non-Party Marxists within women's liberation" (Delmar, 2020), the Party decided to publish its own version of a feminist magazine, namely *Link: Communist Party Women's Journal* (1973-84). The first issue of *Link* began with an editorial written by the CPGB's full-time women's organiser and journalist Rosemary Small. The editorial positioned *Link* as "a magazine of women's liberation produced by the Communist Party" and promised to cover "campaigns of the Labour movement as well as issues and campaigns of special concern to women as women" (Small, 1973, p. 2). Notably, though the editorial characterised these two areas as a "dual struggle," it did not suggest that there may exist any tensions between the organised labour movement and women's liberation. On the contrary, it emphasised the need for a "united movement of men and women" (Small, 1973, p. 2), presumably a conscious attempt to re-direct attention towards commonality and unity. This is in contrast to *Red Rag*'s first editorial, which declared that part of the magazine's intention is to scrutinise how "the trade union movement is virtually silent about the discrimination which excludes women from many jobs" (Editorial, 1972a, p. 2). As an official output from the CPGB, it is perhaps understandable that *Link* was far less able or willing to deliberately highlight any internal Party problems. Indeed, *Link*'s editorial positioning signalled a strong alliance to the CPGB by emphasising that it was the "only political party with a planned programme" of how to achieve equality and freedom (Small, 1973, p. 2). That being said, the editorial also positioned *Link* as "a forum on ideological questions" and inviteed "argument and controversy" from its readers, indicating that despite its political allegiance and insistence on unity, the journal appeared to offer a space for disagreement (Small, 1973, p. 2).

Similarly to *Red Rag*, there was much discussion in *Link*'s letter-to-the-editor pages about who the journal was actually for. A letter by Jean Feldmar suggested that the articles written in *Link* were saturated with party jargon, sociology jargon and condensation, making it (in her view) impossible to sell the journal to women and that, instead, "popular language" would be better suited to the "general reader" (Feldmar, 1973, p. 14). While also complimenting the efforts involved in producing a women's journal, Feldmar insisted that more consideration should be given to the question of whom the journal was attempting to reach, as in her view those women "who would find this sort of writing intelligible have read it all before anyway" (Feldmar, 1973, p. 14). Feldmar also offered advice by highlighting a re-printed extract from the Scottish suffragette Helen Crawfurd's unpublished autobiography in issue 2 of *Link* as an example of writing which is "equally interesting to the well-informed and the ignorant" (Feldmar, 1973, p. 15). In doing so, Feldmar was performing part C of the constructive criticism equation, explained above, which requires the criticiser to state her

concrete wants. This compels the criticiser to think proactively about alternatives while also enabling the criticised to respond to the criticism through action, thus enabling a feminist dialectical process and outcome.

Issue 5 of *Link* featured a letter by Trisha Jaffe who, in response to Feldmar's claim that she was unable to sell the journal, contrastingly claimed that *Link* was easy to sell to "comrades, both male and female" (Jaffe, 1974, p. 15). Moreover, while Jaffe did admit that "there was some degree of confusion" about *Link* when it first appeared, its reception had been "excellent, with many [readers] commenting on the gap which it fills" (Jaffe, 1974, p. 15). Jaffe also stressed that she envisions a women's journal should make space for the discussion and questioning of all areas that affect women and not merely be a medium for repeating arguments that are already understood by readers. Here the journal is conceived of as a networked forum of debate which Jaffe frames as a productive and desirable function.

Several years later, in 1981, issue 35 of *Link* features an introspective editorial titled "LINK–Where Now?" in which the editorial board offered some reflections on the difficulties involved in defining the political standpoint of the journal. It was explained that the name "Link" was meant to allude to the journal's function as a link between the Women's Liberation Movement, the CPGB and the working class. However, as the editorial reflected, connecting such movements was "no easy task" because their relationship was "much more confused and tangled" than the editorial board had originally imagined (Editorial, 1981, p. 2). The editorial here functions "along the lines of an open confessional" through which the editorial board can enter into a dialectical conversation with its readership (Waters, 2016, p. 456). The confusion alluded to is understood in the context of the broader political predicaments that all socialist feminists face in attempting to "live out their dual allegiance to their sexual politics and socialist beliefs" (Editorial, 1981, p. 2). As such, the editorial sought to "start a lively debate among *Link* readers" in order to clarify how the journal could occupy a space distinct from the other contemporaneous socialist feminist periodicals *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women* (Editorial, 1981, p. 2). Several questions were offered for the consideration of *Link*'s readership, such as whether the journal's editorial focus should prioritise a broader audience and if men should be involved in reading or writing for the journal. In this case the readership is being invited to engage in dialectical communication with the expectation that this will result in formulating a more concrete basis of unity for the journal.

Notably, the editorial signalled a potential shift in *Link*'s internal operations that seems to introduce the adoption of a collective working model associated with other feminist periodicals of the time. The editorial stated that "we would like to break down the barriers between 'us' (editorial board and writers) and 'you' (consumers), by creating in *Link* a more collectively planned product" (Editorial, 1981, p. 2). Referring to the readers as "consumers," however, is not a characterisation used by either *Red Rag* or *Scarlet Women* wherein readers were largely understood as collaborators and contributors. The editorial also introduced plans for *Link* to become less London-centric by announcing a new segment called "Round the Regions" (possibly inspired by *Scarlet Women*'s regular "News from the Regions" feature), as well as plans to include more coverage on racism and make the journal more interesting to young women. In doing so, and in soliciting more engagement from its

readership, the editorial board hoped to transform *Link* into "a more lively, controversial and enjoyable" publication, seemingly embracing the principle of dialectical struggle (Editorial, 1981, p. 2).

Several responses were featured in subsequent issues of *Link*, such as a letter by Zelda Curtis in issue 36. Curtis thanked the editorial board for the opening up of discussion, anticipating that "many different voices" would respond (Curtis, 1982, p. 17). She was also quick to remind the editorial board that debating and exploring views necessarily involves "consciously seeking out and featuring controversy from all sections of the socialist feminist movement," perhaps implying that a more active outreach is required by the journal to solicit diverse opinions (Curtis, 1982, p. 17). Another responding letter, written by Kathleen Jones, argued that the main reason for *Link*'s confused political identity is that it was not published frequently enough. She compared *Link* to *Women's Voice* and asked "if the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] can bring out a women's paper monthly, why cannot the CP [Communist Party] do so?" (Jones, 1982, p. 17). The problem of infrequent publishing was also echoed in the editorial of issue 40 wherein the editorial board agreed that "one of the major problems of *Link* is that as it only comes out four times a year, it is very difficult to follow discussion through or conduct debates" (Editorial, 1984, p. 2).

Much of the communication in second wave feminist periodicals was aided by the much slower publishing and distribution cycle that allowed for deep reading, reflection and theory-building (Megarry, 2020, p. 211). However in this case, the quarterly publication schedule hindered a timely flow of dialogue as well as timely engagement with current affair topics. While *Link* had plans for becoming a bimonthly publication, these ultimately went unfulfilled as the journal only produced two more issues, ceasing publication altogether in 1984.

Scarlet Women: Newsletter of the Socialist Current in the Women's Liberation Movement (1976–82)

The first issue of *Scarlet Women* was published by a collective of women who were members of the consciousness-raising group Tyneside Coast Women (TCW), largely based in in the north of England.[5] One of the collective members, Penny Remfry, recalls how they felt frustrated that men in organisations on the Left ignored the discrimination against women: "Wait til after the revolution, we were told, then we'll sort out the Woman Question, as it was called" (Remfry, 2019). At the 1976 National Women's Liberation conference in Newcastle, TCW organised a workshop in order to address the issue of "wearing two hats," that is, the hats of socialism and feminism (Remfry, 2019). Out of this workshop came the agreement to set up a newsletter which would develop the understanding of women's oppression under capitalism by facilitating the articulation of thoughts and sharing of information about campaigns and activities. It was co-ordinated by TCW who also set up regional contacts and an editorial group in order to share and circulate the newsletter across the UK.

[5] Tyneside Coast Women was also known as the Coast Women's Group.

Scarlet Women candidly drew attention to the tensions between socialist and radical feminists from its inception, describing five major problems that had arisen within group discussions which were intended to act as catalysts to generate further communication in the newsletter. These problems encompassed the following: how to conceive of the overall role of a socialist feminist group, how to incorporate feminism into socialist activities, how consciousness-raising can be integrated into women's groups, how the women's movement can offer new ways of dealing with relationships, marriage and childcare, and whether the Women's Liberation Movement should develop into a mass movement with the possibility of involving men (and women) who do not understand themselves as feminists. The editorial of the subsequent issue detailed how a lot of letters were received in response to issue 1 saying that these problems "were also experienced by other sisters involved in feminist and socialist activities and campaigns" (Editorial, 1976, p. 1). The editorial went on to recognise the comforting effect these letters had in contextualising such problems as having some objective basis in the women's movement rather than simply being "the result of personal ineptitude and lack of organisation" (Editorial, 1976, p. 1). Such recognition reveals the consciousness-raising effects of dialectical communication. In other words, by drawing attention to internal problems that were hoped to generate pluralistic dialogue, a kind of political awareness was generated among both the readership and the editorial collective that such problems did not just belong to personal experience but were encountered more broadly as a political phenomenon.

TCW took the approach that differences between women "can be healthy given the right framework and approach" and concluded that "the only real solution to this problem lay in the setting up of a socialist feminist network" in order to continue discussions beyond the official conference proceedings (Tyneside Coast Women, 1976, p. 3). Specifically, the newsletter would "provide a forum for discussion" and share information about activities and campaigns across the UK (Editorial, 1976, p. 1). In issue 3 it stated that:

> The newsletter will not lay down the 'correct' line–it will rather pin-point and isolate problem areas in the development of our perspective. In publishing contributions and regional reports, it will raise issues that could be taken up for further discussion at regional meetings (Editorial, 1977, p. 2).

This commitment to not laying down the "correct" line is important because it simultaneously enabled the newsletter to be responsive to wide areas of political concern while also signalling to the reader that a variety of opinions would be welcomed (Wonders, 2021, p. 126). It is clear that *Scarlet Women*'s intention from the very beginning was to accommodate and encourage feminist dialectics, conceiving of disagreement and criticism not as a bad thing, but as fundamental to advancing the whole women's movement.

Throughout its publishing lifespan, *Scarlet Women* prioritised the development of a communication network through regional and international contacts, allowing for extensive coverage on the situation facing women in Northern Ireland (Wonders, 2021, p. 126). Several Irish socialist feminist groups submitted articles and wrote letters to *Scarlet Women,* including the Northern Ireland Socialist Women's Group (SWG), the Women and Ireland Group (WIG), the Belfast Women's Collective (BWC) and Women Against Imperialism

(WAI). Much of the discussion and dialogue between these groups involved disagreements about whether to support the anti-imperialist (and male-dominated) Republican movement, or whether to focus more specifically on the women's liberation struggle. In 1980, issue 11 of *Scarlet Women* was put together by the BWC as a special issue on women in Northern Ireland. The BWC wrote a brief article in this issue about how their focus was shifting away from an anti-imperialist position and towards the women's movement. The article illustrates increasing feelings of frustration and exhaustion developed within the BWC, having stated that "we always felt the need to justify our anomalous position, to 'prove' ourselves as feminists and as socialists" against groups like Women Against Imperialism WAI who deemed the BWC "a bourgeois women's group (Belfast Women's Collective, 1980, p. 7). This hostility levelled against the BWC meant that there was increased pressure for the group to remain united, leading to a reluctance to voice the "divergences of opinion within the group" (Belfast Women's Collective, 1980, p. 8). Eventually the collective dissolved, days before issue 11 of *Scarlet Women* was published, though they note that upon reflection it had less to do with internal group dynamics and more to do with how "politically, there [was] precious little common ground on which feminists and socialists can meet" and so the BWC fell victim to the attempts of developing an "ideological critique of nationalism that was imbued with feminism" (Belfast Women's Collective, 1980, p. 8).

The way in which *Scarlet Women* used the newsletter format to facilitate a networked forum of debate exposed its readers and contributors to international socialist feminist negotiations, as well as internal conflicts and disagreements, particularly well evidenced in the coverage of feminism in Northern Ireland and international anti-imperialist struggles. Such debates resulted in the expression of several iterations of socialist feminist political tendencies which were able to co-exist within the periodical, mainly due to *Scarlet Women*'s principled acceptance and encouragement of feminist dialectics.

Women's Voice (1973–81)

Women's Voice was set up as the official women's magazine of the IS/SWP in 1972. The magazine came about after approximately thirty female members of IS attended the first national Women's Liberation Movement Conference at Ruskin College in Oxford in 1970 and subsequently produced five issues of an unofficial IS women's newsletter before it was re-launched as *Women's Voice* two years later (Bruley, 2020, p. 263). The first issue introduces itself as "a magazine for working class women who want to read something that tries to deal with their real life" and appeals to its readers to contribute their opinions (Editorial, 1972b, p. 2). *Women's Voice* also managed to generate "genuine engagement with working-class women who offered simple stories of women's working lives," in contrast to other socialist feminist periodicals of the time (Bruley, 2020, p. 266).

Around 1974–75, IS began to recognise the potential of *Women's Voice* to help recruit women in industry and injected significant resources into the magazine with the imperative to use it as an industrial organiser for women (Bruley, 2020, p. 266). However, this did not

go over well with the *Women's Voice* readership. A letter by Eunice Wormwald urged the magazine not to "forgo being the voice of the housewives" in favour of concentrating on workers (Wormwald, 1975, p. 6). This sentiment was echoed in a letter by Chris Rainger, published in the same issue, expressing disappointment "with the change of contents and style" of *Women's Voice* and argued that the focus on reaching workers runs into danger of overlooking the potential of reaching housewives as well, qualifying that she "would like to hear what other women feel" (Rainger, 1975, p. 6). The call to solicit other women's feelings evidences a keen interest by Rainger to get a sense of what other readers think, whether they agree with her assessment or not. The emphasis on feelings also reflects the way in which feminist periodicals, and particular letter-to-the-editor pages, functioned as "consciousness-raising conduit[s] to the women's movement" by accommodating the expression of dialectical emotions (Kassell, 1996, p. 202).

1975 also happened to be the year during which the National Abortion Campaign (NAC) was launched to protect the 1967 Abortion Act, coverage of which featured heavily in *Women's Voice* around that time. The NAC's saturating presence within the Women's Liberation Movement meant that male-oriented socialist groups like IS could no longer ignore the socialist feminist perspective and plans to turn *Women's Voice* into a purely industrial paper soon fell by the wayside. As such, the debate about the consideration of housewives and the definition of "work" continued into the early months of 1976. The year prior saw female unemployment rates steadily increase as the effects of a two-year economic recession induced waves of redundancies targeting primarily women workers.[6] Consequently, *Women's Voice* produced much coverage encouraging unemployed women to join the National Right to Work Campaign and even organised a *Women's Voice* rally in Manchester, attended by 600 people, to protest for the right to a job, equal pay and free abortion.

In response to an article titled "A Woman's Right to Work" in issue 25, a letter by Eunice Sharples[7] took issue with some of the language used to describe housewives in this context. In an effort to attract women to attend Right to Work marches across England, the original article stated: "And don't think: 'I'm just a housewife. I can't do anything.' You're an unemployed worker. You don't know when you'll need a job" (A Woman's Right to Work, 1976, p. 8) Sharples, a housewife herself, described this sentiment as "patronising" and explained that despite not getting paid for her work, she very much considered herself as an employed worker. Moreover, one of the biggest hurdles she faced in getting a paid job was that of raising her young son at home, ending her letter by stating that she would only fully support the Right to Work campaign if it "demands proper nursery facilities" (Sharples, 1976a, p. 6). Sharples also sent in a follow-up letter looking for clarification on whether her role as a housewife would preclude her from joining IS, as the organisation's membership

[6] In issue 24, published in December 1975, *Women's Voice* reports that between January and June of that year, "unemployment rose by 121 per cent amongst women and 48 per cent amongst men" (Editorial, 1975, p. 1).

[7] Several letters in *Women's Voice* were authored to Eunice Wormwald, Janice Wormwald and Eunice Sharples, all specifying their location as Darlington in County Durham, giving me the impression that these were all iterations of pseudonyms for the same woman. Moreover, all letters authored to these names deal with the topic of domestic work and the role of housewives.

card stipulated that "all members shall be members of an appropriate trade union" (Sharples, 1976b, p. 6). Sharples' letters make up a relatively lone voice in ensuring the implementation of *Women's Voice*'s original editorial promise to investigate "the needs and interests of women as housewives and mothers" (Editorial, 1972b, p. 2). And yet, she qualified her criticisms in good faith sentiments such as "I was very impressed by the January issue of *Women's Voice*"(74) and "this letter […] is genuinely a plea for direct help" (Sharples, 1976b, p. 6). Clearly, by offering her own plural views, incorporating both criticism and praise, Sharples is laying the groundwork for a dialectical exchange.

Women's Voice faced much opposition within the IS/SWP, such as the founding member Tony Cliff disagreeing with its necessity from the beginning as he favoured concentrating on the "common interests of male and female workers" (Cliff, 2000, p. 146). In his 2000 autobiography *A World to Win: Life of a Revolutionary*, Cliff's utter disinterest in *Women's Voice* is evident in the mere fact that his reflections on the magazine were not written by himself, but by the SWP women's organiser Lindsay German, reasoning: "I cannot write about things of which I have very little knowledge" (Cliff, 2000, p. 148). German was in favour of conceiving of *Women's Voice* as the SWP's "intervention into the women's movement" and asserts that instead, it acted as "bridge out of the party rather than a means of recruitment" (Cliff, 2000, p. 149). Despite the pressures and expectations exerted onto *Women's Voice* from the party leadership, it clearly still managed to have a gravitational effect on women within IS/SWP to organise and educate themselves around issues that specifically effected women, such as abortion and equal pay. As one reader, Beryl Llewellyn, reflects in a letter: "I would like to thank you for opening my eyes. […] I'm at the beginning of the road of finding my own freedom" (Llewellyn, 1979, p. 24).

Compared to the other periodicals discussed here, discussion and dialogue within *Women's Voice*'s letter-to-the-editor pages were not as pervasive, nor did they ever spread beyond one or two issues. The magazine's operational functions were clearly impacted by IS/SWP's understanding of the Women's Liberation Movement as not much more than a site of recruitment. Though there are some examples of dialectic sentiment in its letter-to-the-editor pages, as outlined above, the focus of *Women's Voice* was less on bridging the political positions of socialism and feminism and more on functioning as an educational news bulletin and organisational tool for female IS/SWP members. As Agatha Beins identifies in *Liberation in Print*, feminist periodicals weave a "temporal and spatial fabric" within which feminism finds a presence, and such endurance allows for its readers to "anticipate a future" for feminism (Beins, 2017, pp. 55–58). In this sense, *Women's Voice* was less of a discursive or dialectical periodical in which readers attempted to resolve the socialist feminist "dual allegiance," and more of a magnetic space of belonging for women to organise around class relations and IS/SWP principles.

Conclusion

In having considered a variety of correspondence featured in both independent feminist periodicals and party-loyal women's periodicals, this paper has shown that the political objectives of each publication influenced the extent to which feminist dialectics were embraced. The independent feminist periodicals, *Red Rag* and *Scarlet Women*, embraced the use of letter-to-the-editor pages to reveal internal and political disputes relating to the question of whether it was possible to "separate the Marxist and feminist criteria for change, recombine them, and finally, in the new juxtaposition, discover a more satisfying solution?" (Weinbaum, 1978, p. 12) Because the creation of *Red Rag* was motivated by the desire of feminists within the hierarchically coordinated CPGB to produce an independent and non-affiliated publication, much of the dialogue within its pages concern difficulties of realising an alternative feminist collective working structure. In this sense, the letter-to-the-editor pages were used by both its readership and editorial collective members to examine internal working dynamics out in the open, evidencing the embodiment of the feminist dialectical principle that disagreement is worth expressing for the benefit of a whole political movement. In the case of *Scarlet Women*, feminist dialectics were foundational to the newsletter's genesis. The opening framing of the newsletter introduces it as a forum for discussion and defends the inherent political value of feminist disagreement. This is partly a consequence of *Scarlet Women* having been put together by feminists belonging to a consciousness-raising group, and therefore embedded in the view that the collective sharing of personal experience can lead to political knowledge. The collaborative and cross-regional making of the newsletter further supported the accommodation of international feminist dialectics, particularly on the topic of Northern Ireland.

Meanwhile, the party-loyal women's periodicals, *Link* and *Women's Voice*, provide more limited evidence of feminist negotiation. This is understandable given that, in part, these publications were circulated as party propaganda for the GPGB and IS/SWP, respectively, with the goal of recruiting more women members. Though not explicitly feminist, *Link* and *Women's Voice* were nevertheless important gravitational spaces for women party members to find each other and elevate issues relating to housework, abortion and equal pay. Established by the CPGB as a reaction to the unauthorised publication of *Red Rag*, *Link* decisively focused on the unity between men and women from the beginning. Only when it too ran into problems of internal political clarity, *Link* eventually adopted the open principles of feminist dialectics and called for controversial readership opinion. *Women's Voice* similarly had prohibitive ties to its political party, the IS/SWP, which attempted to turn it into a purely industrial paper. However, given that *Women's Voice* was enormously successful in soliciting news stories from working class women, it managed to network hundreds of IS/SWP women members and mobilise its readership to attend marches and rallies. Though there is some evidence of feminist dialectics and discussion in its letter-to-the-editor pages, particularly relating to the nature of work, its primary function remained as an organisational tool.

The periodicals examined in this paper evidence concerted efforts by women to resolve the "dual allegiance" to socialism and feminism that preoccupied much of the 1970s WLM in Britain. The pluralistic and kaleidoscopic nature of the periodical form allowed for the deliberate implementation of feminist dialectics in letter-to-the-editor pages that reflected the uneasy relationship between feminists and the organised labour movement. While the independently feminist publications deliberately used the periodical form as a tool to facilitate feminist dialectics, the party-loyal women's publications only adopted a similar approach when it became clear that dialectical correspondence would inspire further readership engagement. That being said, it is clear that regardless of the editorial commitment to including disagreement and conflict, the serialised and polyvocal form of the periodical necessarily produced a feminist dialectic that contributed to a lasting archive of the varying approaches involved in resolving the socialist feminist "dual allegiance."

Biographical note

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