

# The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969–79

## Abstract

The history of the Women's Liberation Movement has been told in a very particular way. Often written by those directly involved, it depicts a rapid rise of the movement, followed by an equally dramatic decline, caused in part by lack of structure. Historians also divide the movement into two polarized sides, socialist and radical, seeing radical feminists as instigating the movement's fall. Through a detailed study of a Women's Liberation Movement organization—the London Women's Liberation Workshop—this article challenges this picture. Focusing on the broad range of issues discussed, and the diversity and vibrancy of debate, it shows that the movement always had a form of structure, which was constantly evolving, and it was never clearly divided into two opposing sides. Instead, we see a movement which was very far from defunct by the end of the 1970s, for the changes and challenges it went through were a part of its development, not its demise.

In the middle of 1969 the anger many women felt over the discrimination they faced within British society mustered once more into an organized form. Some began to meet in small groups, through involvement in community and children's play centres. Others, who were members of socialist or protest groups, voiced their discontent, for they found that despite revolutionary promises women were treated no differently within these organizations. By the end of 1969 groups had come together across

the country, and a coordinated Women's Liberation Movement was growing. Even a national conference was being planned. In London, due to the size of the city, coordination became a pressing need earlier than elsewhere, and a city-wide organization—the London Women's Liberation Workshop (LWLW)—was constructed as the groups themselves started up. The early foundations and size of the London Workshop make it an important feature in Women's Liberation Movement history.

One of the ironies of the history of feminism is that while it has put female scholarship on the map, through the establishment of women's studies and women's history, the scholarship on the movement itself has presented a unilinear picture, which often confirms popular stereotypes of feminists. Representations of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s often centre upon the binary division of socialist and radical feminism. Radical feminism is described, in opposition to socialist feminism, as extremist, with a concentration on sexuality and lifestyle, naming men as the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Socialist feminism is implicitly defined as more reasonable, recognizing other forms of oppression, such as class and race.<sup>2</sup> Within this, most movement historians describe a pattern of feminist ascendancy followed by downfall over the 1970s. Anna Coote and Bea Campbell, both heavily involved at this time, assert that by the mid-1970s within the LWLW:

The radical feminists held out for exclusion and won a tactical victory. Thereafter, the Workshop became an increasingly separatist enclave . . .<sup>3</sup>

David Bouchier dates the beginnings of the death of the LWLW even earlier, peaking in 1971, when there were seventy small groups, then declining.<sup>4</sup> But this picture of rise and fall is too simple. It fails to consider that change in the Workshop might have represented growth, not demise. The latter is the central theme in this article.

Much of the scholarship on feminism tends to concentrate on major texts published in the 1970s, such as the American Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Meehan, 'British Feminism from the 1960s to the 1980s', in Harold L. Smith (ed.), *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990), 191; Maggie Himm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, 2nd edn (New York, 1995), 233; David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London, 1983), 75; Paul Byrne, 'The Politics of the Women's Movement', in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris (eds), *Women in Politics* (Oxford, 1996), 63.

<sup>2</sup> John Charvet, *Feminism* (London, 1982), 130. See also Anna Coote and Bea Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1987), 23; Lynne Segal, 'Slow Change or No Change?: Feminism, Socialism and the Problem of Men', *Feminist Review*, no. 31 (Spring 1989), 5–21.

<sup>3</sup> Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 242; Beatrix Campbell, 'A Feminist Sexual Politics: Now You See It, Now You Don't', *Feminist Review*, no. 5 (1980), 1–18.

<sup>4</sup> Bouchier, *Challenge*, 59. See also Meehan, 'British Feminism', 194; cf. Barbara Caine, *English Feminism: 1780–1980* (Oxford, 1997), 266.

(first published in Britain in London, 1971) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London, 1970). This has led to an emphasis on the intellectual legacy; there are many more books on feminist theory than on the Women's Liberation Movement itself. The focus is ironic given the significance placed in the movement on the relationship between practice and theory. The slogan 'the personal is political', for instance, was one of the movement's principal ideas, and shows how women's personal and practical experiences were to be used as the basis for their political theories. Despite the copious literature on feminism, no one has made a detailed study of these grass-roots activities that were equally as important as, if not more important than, major texts.<sup>5</sup> Even when grass-roots sources are used, it is in a limited way. In the case of the Workshop, Bouchier extrapolates from *Shrew*, arguing that this magazine was influential in the early years.<sup>6</sup> *Shrew* was the Workshop's monthly journal, each issue produced by a different group.<sup>7</sup> It included articles on women's experiences and movement events, but was identified as the publication that would represent Women's Liberation ideas to women outside the movement. Because of this external focus, looking solely at this journal plays down the heterogeneity of the organization, a heterogeneity which undermines the simplified schema of rise and fall, of radical versus socialist. Moreover, it ignores the importance of a publication which long outlasted *Shrew*, *The LWLW Newsletter*. The newsletter and the minutes of Workshop meetings are examined here.

After meetings, newsletters were the principal channels of communication and hundreds of them survive. Although they did not detail the minutiae of group relationships, they were nearer to grass-roots activities than published theoretical texts and reveal just how complex the organization was. Minutes from meetings represented the Workshop's modes of operation in even more detail, but organizational questions were heavily present in both sources. Given the accentuation of personal politics in the movement, the way the organization was constructed was never a matter of indifference. This is acknowledged in most histories which discuss the importance of small group meetings and the lack of hierarchy in Women's Liberation organizations. Nonetheless, the LWLW evidence reveals not only that many other debates were critical, but also that all these elements

<sup>5</sup> Bouchier, *Challenge*, 1; Caine, *English Feminism*, 255; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 16; cf. E. M. Ettore, *Lesbians, Women and Society* (London, 1980); E. M. Ettore, 'Women, Urban Social Movements and the Lesbian Ghetto', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2 (1978), 499–520; Jill Radford, 'History of Women's Liberation Movements in Britain: A Reflective Personal History', in Gabrielle Griffin, Marianne Hester, Shirin Rai, and Sasha Roseneil, *Stirring It: Challenges for Feminism* (London, 1994), 40–58.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>7</sup> *Shrew* (September 1970), 18; *London Women's Liberation Workshop Newsletter* [subsequently *LWLWnl*] 6, 29 October 1970.

were more complicated. A study of the structural fabric of the Workshop is significant precisely because it emphasizes the multi-faceted nature of the Women's Liberation Movement, its coherence, as well as its differences. Such divisions were not simply a part of the organization; they underpinned its structure.

### *The London Workshop*

When the LWLW first started in 1969 it had only four groups, based in different areas across London.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the 1970s more than 300 had been formed, and the Workshop had undergone immense changes. Over the decade it operated as an umbrella organization for local, study and campaign groups; as an office for information and contacts; as a bookshop; as a meeting and social centre; and as a place for producing the newsletter. It held files on women with skills, lists of speakers, and an archive of material on the history of the Women's Liberation Movement.<sup>9</sup> One of the major problems the Workshop faced was finding and keeping a permanent office.<sup>10</sup> Initially there was no office, and meetings rotated around members' homes. In June 1970 the Workshop was offered space on Lower Marsh, near Waterloo station, which it took for a few months until it proved too expensive. When it moved back into two individuals' home, problems over opening times, capacity, and ownership arose.<sup>11</sup> As the LWLW grew, the need for a permanent central office became pressing.<sup>12</sup> Various buildings in London were occupied throughout the 1970s, each move disrupting continuity, communication, and accessibility.<sup>13</sup> By 1973 the search for premises was complicated by the size and range of functions of the Workshop, as well as by its financial limitations. Despite difficulties, it managed to secure a tenancy in central London, at 38 Earlam Street, near Covent Garden, which it held for just over four years.

Even when the Workshop had premises it frequently struggled with poor spaces and landlords who did not support the women's activities. It twice faced the prospect of legal proceedings and women perpetually battled with impermanence. This resulted in a cycle of insecurity, pro-

<sup>8</sup> Tufnell Park, Belsize Lane, W11 (Ladbroke Road) and Peckham Rye. *Shrew*, no. 6 (October 1969); Lois Graessle and Sue O'Sullivan, in Michelene Wandor (ed.), *Once a Feminist: Stories of a Generation* (London, 1990), 129, 218.

<sup>9</sup> *LWLWnl* 117, 25 April 1979.

<sup>10</sup> *LWLWnl* 73, 5 March 1972; 74, 12 March 1974; 53, 22 December 1976; 67, 2 June 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes, 23 August 1970; *LWLWnl* 11, 29 November 1970. All LWLW minutes are in The Feminist Library, London [subsequently FemL] and The Lesbian Archive, Glasgow.

<sup>12</sup> *Shrew*, no. 6 (October 1969), 2; 'Some Working Suggestions', *Shrew* (November/December 1969), 10, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *LWLWnl* 56, 15 March 1978; 91, 13 October 1978; Minutes, 21 March 1978, 6 June 1978, 5 December 1978.

ducing a sense of optimism when seemingly secure space was found, only to be followed by upheaval and temporary accommodation. The impermanence was significant, for it meant that the LWLW was always fighting off crises, rather than having the security to focus on more fundamental issues. The sense of instability was echoed in arguments made for buying a building; the dream of having permanent premises reflected the feeling that a stable physical space would make the movement feel more established. A premises fund was set up as early as 1972 and pleas for money were frequently repeated.<sup>14</sup>

The Workshop's federal structure created the need for an office. At first the groups had no 'organization meetings', but when an office was established, meetings to run it—Office Collectives—became essential.<sup>15</sup> Office Collectives were made up of local group representatives and met at regular intervals to deal with Workshop business. Both the meetings and the body of people were given the same title. The frameworks never solidified, however, and the Office Collective system and its constitutional rights were always evolving alongside other types of meeting—General Meetings, One-day Workshops, and Biannuals—as well as a range of different Collectives for finance, producing the newsletter, and running the bookshop.<sup>16</sup> At all of these structure was debated. In November 1975 the basic structure of the Workshop was altered dramatically. Women acknowledged that it could no longer function as an umbrella organization for a thriving number of local and thematic groups.<sup>17</sup> Instead it would become simply a women's centre among others in London. The name of the organization was altered to reflect the change. It became WINS—the Women's Information and Newsletter Service.<sup>18</sup> After the move to 42 Earlham Street at the beginning of February 1977 the name was changed to A Woman's Place, stressing once more its function as a centre for women. The standing of its newsletter altered too. From 1975 it was no longer a mouthpiece of the organization and defined itself as an independent body constituted purely by those who produced and contributed to it. In 1978 the name *The London Women's Liberation Newsletter* was adopted, marking the change.

From very early on the Workshop had paid workers, though there was

<sup>14</sup> *LWLWnl* 76, 26 March 1972; 19, 7 July 1977; 61, 21 April 1978; Minutes, 27 February 1972, 10 January 1978.

<sup>15</sup> 'Announcements/Calendar', *Shrew* (April 1970), 5.

<sup>16</sup> *LWLWnl* 132, 6 May 1973; Minutes, 18 February 1973. See also *LWLWnl* 9, September 1973; Minutes of the Working Party Report, 1 and 15 November 1971, 31 January 1978.

<sup>17</sup> 'Minutes of Biannual Meeting November 1974', *LWLWnl* 72, 4 December 1974; Alison Fell and Sue O'Sullivan, 'The Workshop—a Continuing Saga', and Sally Alexander and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Sisterhood Under Stress', *Red Rag* [subsequently RR], no. 8 (February 1975), 16–20.

<sup>18</sup> *LWLWnl*, 28 January 1976; 18 February 1976; 45, 4 January 1978.

a struggle to keep up payments of their wages.<sup>19</sup> In line with an ethos of democratic control, it was felt that there should be a caucus of women who would be willing to support these employees to a greater extent than Office Collectives could, and from June 1971 the Working Party was established. This body of volunteers was intended to stand in for paid workers when they were sick, make decisions between Collective meetings, and bring more women into the organization.<sup>20</sup> Working Party members were to be rotated every 3–6 months to prevent any individual from assuming power.<sup>21</sup> This was difficult since the system required large numbers of people to be fully committed to intense involvement at any one time. In 1975, along with the constitutional change, the worker/Working Party system was simplified to include voluntary workers only.<sup>22</sup> At this point the Office Collective became the principal managing body, composed of volunteers who chose to participate, and who met on a weekly basis. Problems of attendance nonetheless continued and throughout the decade there were similar difficulties with newsletter production. Complaints were voiced about asking women to work voluntarily, as it was considered by some to be exploitative, a point which summed up the tension between ideals and practicalities which was an ever-present reality.<sup>23</sup>

Money was a persistent stumbling block as well. The constant variations in structure also represented an attempt to produce systems that would be affordable for all, while maintaining the Workshop's viability. From 1970 there were two schemes—a £1 annual fee and a weekly newsletter subscription.<sup>24</sup> But not enough money was raised. The organization came to depend on book sales and donations, jumble sales, benefits, and sponsored events.<sup>25</sup> By 1974 the Workshop's finances were in crisis, adding to the imperative for change, for when the LWLW 'folded' in 1975, there were debts of £6,000.<sup>26</sup> From this date financial details were listed in the minutes, once again due to the desire to open the organization to as many women as possible. The financial problems, however, did not recede. The decade

<sup>19</sup> *Shrew* (February/March 1970), 1; *LWLWnl* 59, 4 September 1974; Minutes, 15 August 1971, 3 September 1974. See also *WIRES* collective, *LWLWnl* 124, December 1975.

<sup>20</sup> *LWLWnl* 80, 5 February 1975; Minutes, 6 June 1971, 19 September 1971.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes, 6 October 1973.

<sup>22</sup> *LWLWnl* 51, July 1974; 95, 21 May 1975; 124, December 1975; Minutes, 12 June 1974, 19 August 1975, 16 September 1975, 12 November 1975.

<sup>23</sup> For the office see *LWLWnl* 8, November 1970; 32, 27 February 1974; 14 January 1976; 114, 4 April 1979; Minutes, 22 August 1978. For the newsletter see *LWLWnl* 9, 15 November 1970; E2, 19 July 1973; 31 March 1976; 42, 14 December 1977; 90, 27 September 1978; Minutes, 12 June 1974.

<sup>24</sup> *LWLWnl* 12, 6 December 1970; 109, 26 November 1972; 29, 6 February 1974; 5 May 1976; Minutes, 27 February 1972, 4 February 1975, 4 January 1977; *Shrew* (February/March 1970), 1; *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 4 (May 1971), 14.

<sup>25</sup> LWLW Working Party Report, 1 and 15 September 1971; Minutes, 23 July 1972, 13 July 1976, 25 July 1978; *LWLWnl* 55, 7 August 1974; 122, 29 May 1979.

<sup>26</sup> *LWLWnl* 55, 7 August 1974; 45, 4 January 1978; Minutes, 22 February 1974.

was marked by constant attempts to create systems which would enable the Workshop to survive in a way consistent with the theories behind its existence.

### *Structure*

One of the standard 'mythologies' about the women's movement is that because it rejected traditional structures, it was structureless. Bouchier, for instance, insists that a 'remarkable feature of the women's movement in these early years was the way it grew and expanded without formal structures'.<sup>27</sup> Yet the Women's Liberation Movement was never without structure, as the LWLW shows. In 1971 the relationships and commitments of local groups to the central Workshop were described and an introductory pamphlet detailed the basic conditions that defined a group. The function and commitments of the Working Party and the involvement required in order to run the office were also delineated.<sup>28</sup> Although Office Collective meetings were principally focused on running the Workshop—co-ordinating jobs and organizing decorating—the amount of time spent on ideological and structural issues illustrates how pervasive such matters were. In 1974, for instance, one Office Collective meeting had two agendas drawn up, one dealing with practical issues and the other, after two paid workers had resigned, questioning the purpose of the Workshop itself.<sup>29</sup> But definitions of Workshop structures were mutable. The original manifesto, adopted in December 1970, outlined the structure and intentions of the organization; to bring women to full awareness of their oppression through their involvement in autonomous small groups which excluded men. In June 1971 a revised version was mooted to fit changing needs.<sup>30</sup> After the constitutional change in 1975, the Workshop Collective attempted to redefine itself. By laying bare these structures, women tried to create a transparent, flexible, yet stable organization which ensured fair representation.<sup>31</sup> Such an edifice depended on the existence of a structure.<sup>32</sup> As frameworks were established, changes were incorporated, and these in turn produced new needs and new ideas. Structure and theory were

<sup>27</sup> Bouchier, *Challenge*, 95. See also Meehan, 'British Feminism', 194; Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes, 9 May 1971, 6 June 1971, 24 October 1971; Working Party Report, 1 and 15 November 1971, 21 November 1971; *LWLWnl* 54, 17 October 1971; FemL, LWLW, 'An Introduction to the Women's Liberation Workshop' (n.d.), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes, 22 February 1974. See also *LWLWnl*, 1 August 1971; Minutes, 15 February 1977.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes, 6 June 1971. This was not produced.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes, 4 April 1971, 22 February 1974; Ettore, 'Urban Social Movements', 506. See also *Radical Feminists* 28, 'Moving On: Notes from the US', *RR*, no. 5 (n.d.), 9–11.

<sup>32</sup> *LWLWnl* 45, 4 January 1978; 144, 7 November 1979; Minutes, 8 January 1977. See also 'Ourselves: Keeping Together', *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 3 (April 1971), 10; The *RR* Collective, 'Editorial', *RR*, no. 6 (n.d.), 2.

integral to each other and despite the trope of the 'tyranny of structurelessness', the Workshop was never without a defined, if constantly changing, structure.<sup>33</sup>

Because of the way in which the organization developed, *every* issue concerning the Workshop was a subject for extended debate, at both a practical and theoretical level. Financial concerns illustrated this most effectively. Before 1975, women discussed why the Workshop required money and whether workers should be paid, as well as practical ways of raising funds. The questions focused on the power relationships between the different Collectives and workers, and tensions between those who were paid and those who chose to volunteer. These issues demonstrated that nothing was to be taken for granted when structures were being built within the context of movement ideas.<sup>34</sup> The financial precariousness of the Workshop also created a dilemma over the number of necessary workers and who should receive their full wages when finances could not be sufficiently stretched. The latter focused on issues of need and discrimination.<sup>35</sup> Many other matters, which were apparently unproblematic, were also analysed for their political implications. In one case, a conversation about whether to move the book and reading rooms around turned into an extended argument about power of the workers and the use of space; painstaking theorizing was a part of the physical fabric of the Workshop.<sup>36</sup>

Since increasing numbers of women joined the LWLW, the need to accommodate them precipitated organizational development as well. By 1970 there were 279 *Shrew* subscriptions, 150 bulk orders, and seventy-one memberships paid, and there were forty-five general and eight special subject or study groups as early as March 1971.<sup>37</sup> As numbers expanded, the question of how to introduce women to the organization became imperative. How did groups preserve commitment to open structures, yet stay small enough to work? They needed to balance the participation of as many women as possible with unimpeded personal development, trust and friendship among existing activists.<sup>38</sup> The reluctant solution was the closed group, which new women would not be able to join after an agreed number had been reached. But once groups were closed there was no automatic way of inducting women. Booklets were produced, such as

<sup>33</sup> Radical Feminists, 'Moving On', 9–11. See also Sheila Jeffreys, 'Pseudonyms', *Rev/Rad nl*, no. 4 (n.d.), 14–16.

<sup>34</sup> *LWLWnl* 12, 6 December 1970; 109, 29 February 1979.

<sup>35</sup> *LWLWnl* 52, 17 July 1974; 112, September 1975; Minutes of the Working Party Report, 1 and 15 November 1971, 16 September 1975.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes, 16 September 1975, 16 December 1975; *LWLWnl* 112, September 1975; 114, 1 October 1975; The RR Collective, 'Editorial', 2.

<sup>37</sup> *LWLWnl* 5, 16 October 1970; 23, 7 March 1971; Minutes, 8 January 1977.

<sup>38</sup> *Shrew*, no. 6 (October 1969), 1; 'Tufnell Park Opening Meeting—New Groups', *Shrew* (April 1970), 5–6; 'Editorial' and 'Discussion', *Shrew* (October 1969), 1, 4; *Shrew* (February/March 1970), 1–2; 'Organising Ourselves' *Shrew* vol. 3, no. 2 (March 1971), 2–3.

Tufnell Park's New Group Booklet and 'Women's Liberation—an Introduction', but these were designed to augment experiences of Women's Liberation, not replace them.<sup>39</sup> The benefit of meeting face-to-face in small groups, as opposed to leafleting, was aired as early as 1969, while in August 1970 there was a lengthy exchange about how new members could be absorbed through a 'New Members Collective'.<sup>40</sup> The difficulties endured as the movement grew. The change in 1975, from federation to women's centre, was an acknowledgement that the LWLW could no longer adequately represent so many different needs.

Introducing women, both to the movement and to consciousness-raising—the principal activity in local groups—remained essential because consciousness-raising was never simply the 'contemplation of one's navel'. It was the bedrock of the women's movement. In consciousness-raising groups women would discuss prearranged subjects, each woman being given the space to have her say. Out of their collected experiences they would create collective explanations.<sup>41</sup> An article in *Shrew* in 1971 confirmed that sisterhood was about both understanding oppression and relating to and acting with other women, the central tenets of consciousness-raising.<sup>42</sup> But the process was often problematic, disturbing, and painful.<sup>43</sup> The disruption consciousness-raising caused explains not only why some groups were closed, but why it was necessary to provide information and companionship for women embarking on it.<sup>44</sup> Such feelings continued throughout the decade; a report-back from a lesbian group in 1979 revealed that different viewpoints on the purposes of consciousness-raising and the need to accommodate them were still germane.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the large number of groups which formed well into the 1970s shows that, difficult though they could be, consciousness-raising remained a successful working format.

The issue of introduction was exacerbated when some of the original

<sup>39</sup> *LWLWnl* 52, 3 October 1971; 53, 24 July 1974; Minutes, 19 September 1971, 10 January 1978. See also Graessle and Amanda Seabyen, in Wandor, *Once*, 135, 138–9.

<sup>40</sup> *LWLWnl* 1, 22 August 1970. See also *LWLWnl* 23, 7 March 1971; 146, 22 November 1979; 'Tufnell Park Open Meeting', 5; *Shrew*, no. 6 (October 1969), 3.

<sup>41</sup> Dale Spender, *Man Made Language* (London, 1980), 134.

<sup>42</sup> 'Sisterhood is . . .', *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 6 (July 1971), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Sue Bruley, *Women Awake: the Experience of Consciousness Raising* (self-published, 1976); Radford, 'History', 46; FemL, 'A Guide to Consciousness Raising', *Ms* (n.d.); LWLW, 'Introduction', 1; 'An Existential Statement of Personal Commitment' and 'Subsequent Statement on the Above Article', *Shrew* (November/December 1969), 13–14; 'Consciousness-raising and Collective Paranoia', *Shrew*, vol. 4, no. 1 (n.d.), 3; 'Organising Ourselves', 3; Roberta Henderson, ' . . . Where and How: Consolidating Consciousness', *RR*, no. 11 (Autumn 1976), 9; Socialist Feminist Consciousness-raising Group, 'Homing In', *RR* (1978), 38–9; Gill Philpott, Ruth Wallsgrave, Rose Baldwin, and Debby Gregory, 'Consciousness Raising: Back to Basics', *Spare Rib*, no. 92 (March 1980), 49–54.

<sup>44</sup> Marleen Packwood, *LWLWnl* 28, 31 August 1977.

<sup>45</sup> *LWLWnl* 127, 5 July 1979; 131, 8 August 1979.

consciousness-raising groups ceased meeting.<sup>46</sup> As early as 1972, Ursula Bachtold raised a question about women involved in the Workshop outside of local groups, suggesting that more and more women were no longer involved in consciousness-raising.<sup>47</sup> Barbara Caine interprets this cessation as a rejection by socialist feminists of consciousness-raising as a political activity; instead, study groups read Marx or Althusser in the hopes of finding 'the theoretical apparatus that would properly enable them to understand the nature of women's oppression'. Radical feminists, she suggests, thus felt that socialists set themselves up as an elite.<sup>48</sup> Rather than just a division between radical and socialist, however, what was signified was a progression of women through consciousness-raising groups to thematic, activity, or campaign groups.<sup>49</sup> The changing balance should not be overemphasized since topic-focused meetings—for example, around anti-discrimination legislation—were in existence in the early 1970s and consciousness-raising groups were still being founded at the end of the decade.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the *focus* shifted as participants matured in consciousness-raising terms. The concept itself incorporated progression; as a woman's consciousness was raised, and she changed in a personal and political sense, so she would move on to different forms of action.

This pattern of activity not only applied to participation in consciousness-raising, but it affected the LWLW at its centre. Having an open Collective structure meant that the Workshop's existence, in organizational as well as financial terms, depended on many women being involved. Throughout the decade there was a pattern of intense involvement for certain individuals over a period of time, followed by their absence. This was because, just as in consciousness-raising, participation in running the Workshop fulfilled needs at different stages in women's development. Given the intensity of involvement that the Workshop inspired, as women changed it was probably very hard for them to continue to work actively within an organization which no longer matched their priorities.<sup>51</sup> Non-

<sup>46</sup> Minutes, 4 April 1971, 9 May 1971; *LWLWnl* 120, 11 February 1973; Sue Cowley, 'Rambling Notes', *Shrew* (June 1970), 1–3; E.C., 'Getting Our Message Across', *Shrew* (October 1970), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Minutes, 27 February 1972.

<sup>48</sup> Caine, *English Feminism*, 266.

<sup>49</sup> *LWLWnl* 15, 10 January 1971; 115, 8 October 1975; 11, 27 March 1977; FemL, 'A Woman's Place, WIRES, WRRC, 'Introduction', (n.d.) 1–2; '... It Should Be an Action Workshop', *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 9 (December 1971), 9.

<sup>50</sup> *LWLWnl* 31, March 1976; Packwood, *LWLWnl* 28, 31 August 1977; 123, 5 June 1979; FemL, Special Collection [subsequently SC]2, Box 2, Carol Lee, 'Consciousness Raising and the Small Group Process' (Leeds 1979); Spender, *Man Made*, 108–37; 'Tufnell Park Open Meeting', 1–5; Aspen, 'Consciousness-raising', *Rev/Radnl*, no. 2 (August 1979), 24–5; Henderson, '... Where and How', 9–10; cf. Bruley, *Awake*, 16; *LWLWnl* 91, 23 April 1975.

<sup>51</sup> They rallied in times of crisis: Minutes of the Working Party Report, 1 and 15 September 1971; *LWLWnl* 53, 24 July 1974; 113, 25 September 1975.

involvement, especially after a period of intense activity, did not signify disillusionment or a lack of concern. For while the rotation of people made it hard to find enough volunteers and disrupted continuity, it was integral to both personal development and the strength of the Workshop.<sup>52</sup>

In the context of such concentrated participation the relationships between workers, the Collectives and the women using the Workshop were especially pertinent. In October 1973 the relationship between the LWLW and its workers was raised at a decision-taking meeting, at which women deliberated on the power of the workers and how to prevent domination by individuals. The solution chosen was to deliberately rotate jobs, further exacerbating problems of continuity.<sup>53</sup> Given the ideology that 'the personal is political', being a worker was a matter of personal commitment, not just professional concern. This too had an impact on relations between women. Sisterhood was advocated, yet not necessarily easy to engender. When a worker resigned in 1974, personal and political antagonisms were exposed, which ultimately precipitated the dissolution of the paid worker system. At the November 1974 Biannual meeting the situation came to a head, and the powers and tasks of the workers were again examined in the context of the purpose and openness of the Workshop.<sup>54</sup> These debates displayed the difficult relationships that existed between women but also that these relationships were knitted into organizational issues.

Since the LWLW depended on the commitment of large numbers of people, accessibility and openness were fundamental. But it faced practical hurdles in maintaining this.<sup>55</sup> The constant discussions on structure might have alienated women not already familiar with the issues. The close networks women formed, based on the emotional commitment they put into the movement, may have looked like 'cliques' to those outside:

. . . I was afraid that the Workshop women would expose my ignorance and uncertainties about the women's movement, and I expected to feel like an outsider. Whereas the women would possess knowledge, commitment and a sense of solidarity, I would feel powerless, uncommitted and isolated.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Minutes, 15 February 1977, 23 May 1978, 3 October 1978, 7 November 1978; *LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, 6 October 1973. See also *LWLWnl* 25, 28 March 1971; 30, February 1974; 79, 29 January 1975.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes, 11 January 1974, 13 March 1974, 30 September 1975; *LWLWnl* 113, 25 September 1975; Lynne Hutton-Williams, *LWLWnl* 33, 6 March 1974; *LWLWnl* 35, 20 March 1974. See also *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 6 (July 1971); *LWLWnl* 26, 4 April 1971; Rosie, *LWLWnl* 44, 22 May 1974; *LWLWnl* 121, 19 November 1975; Minutes, 29 November 1977; Minutes of Biannual, 23 November 1974.

<sup>55</sup> 'Women's Places', *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 8 (September 1971), 1; Laurel-Jane Marks, *LWLWnl*, 28 April 1976; Angela Phillips, *LWLWnl* 66, 16 January 1972; Astra and Catherine, *LWLWnl* 106, 6 August 1975; Julia, *LWLWnl* 107, 13 August 1975; Lynne Keys, *LWLWnl* 112, September 1975; 'Thoughts about Women's Liberation—2', *Shrew* (January 1970), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Arlene McLaren, 'Knock, Knock, Who's There?', *RR*, no. 8 (February 1975), 14. See also

Hence the attempts to explain the systems to new women, to prevent elitism.<sup>57</sup> A reason given for the change from paid workers to volunteers was that a voluntary Collective would include more women. Likewise, the Collective minutes were published in the newsletter so that management decisions were visible.<sup>58</sup> It could be argued that fluidity and accessibility conflicted with the handling of practical details. The large numbers of groups asking for women's time and money—such as building appeals and defence funds for women on trial—pitted the desire for open and varied systems against the need to make them sustainable. Systems had to be created to enable the office to function—bank accounts set up, log books kept up to date, accounting and filing systems constructed. These, by their nature, might have curtailed access. But the same principles of openness were rigorously applied here too. All volunteers had to be able to understand how the systems operated, so they were built to facilitate this.<sup>59</sup> Structures were always being challenged and modified precisely because the Workshop was focused on opening not just its doors, but its forms of organization.

Even the meanings of 'inclusivity' were dissected; was the LWLW about reaching out to women, since the Workshop was a main route into Women's Liberation for many, or about concentrating on those already involved?<sup>60</sup> In 1977 there was an extended dispute over the use of the women's liberation symbol on posters which had not been officially recognized. It was seen by many as a question of who was 'in' and who was 'out', and who was authorized to use the symbol. Yet, the Collective thought that they were maintaining fairness by not allowing any one person to design *the* poster which represented the movement.<sup>61</sup> Similar discussions took place over whether the Workshop newsletter and other journals, such as the national publication *WIRES*, were for internal consumption or were external 'feelers'. Concern about the sale of *WIRES* in alternative book-

'Post-Mortem', *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 3 (April 1971), 14; Flora, *LWLWnl* 36, 27 March 1974; Catherine and Flora, *LWLWnl* 37, 3 April 1974; 82, 19 February 1975; Minutes, 26 April 1977, 21 March 1978; Anna Coote and Polly Pattullo, *Power and Prejudice: Women and Politics* (London, 1990), 95.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes, 4 April 1971, 13 May 1973; Sophie, *LWLWnl* 41, 1 May 1974.

<sup>58</sup> *LWLWnl*, 14 January 1976; Minutes, 27 March 1977, 1 November 1977.

<sup>59</sup> Minutes, 21 March 1971, 6 June 1971, 22 December 1975, 6 January 1976, 10 January 1978; *LWLWnl* 5, 16 October 1970; 30, 2 May 1971; 30, 21 September 1977; 144, 7 November 1979. The theft of the files in April 1977 led to a restructuring of information: Minutes, 26 April 1977, 10 January 1978. See also Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 27–8.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, 6 October 1973, 17 February 1976, 1 March 1977, 19 February 1978; Mandy Merck, *LWLWnl* 35, 20 March 1974; Astra, *LWLWnl* 56, 19 January 1977. See also Wendy Collins, Al Garthwaite, and Maria Sellacy, 'Working for the Women's Liberation Movement: Starting WIRES', *Trouble and Strife*, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 49.

<sup>61</sup> *LWLWnl* 23, 3 August 1977; Isobel Irvine, *LWLWnl* 24, 10 August 1977; *LWLWnl* 26, 17 August 1977; Sandy Martin, *LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977; Julia Wright, *LWLWnl* 43, 21 December 1977; Minutes, 2 August 1977, 13 September 1977, 29 November 1977.

shops sparked questions about the definition of an internal newsletter, for LWLW material was included in *WIRES*.<sup>62</sup> Such arguments spread into the Workshop Collective after 1975. The Collective was defined as open in three ways; any committed woman could join, women who wanted to use the premises could come to meetings, and it was open to women's opinions and ideas.<sup>63</sup> Despite this inclusivity, members wanted their political views to be reflected in the work they did. Inclusivity was imperative, for the Workshop was based around the principles of access, communication, and knowledge, yet exclusivity was recognized as a continuing problem.<sup>64</sup>

These questions of representation permeated the newsletter.<sup>65</sup> Even when the LWLW and the newsletter were intimately connected, responsibility for statements was contested and the Workshop had to continually stress that the opinions in the newsletter were those of individuals, not of the organization. After the mid-1970s efforts were made to emphasize that the Workshop and the newsletter were not the same body.<sup>66</sup> When *A Woman's Place* was in danger of losing its Earlham Street office, the Newsletter Collective had its own meeting to discuss where it could go, separating itself further.<sup>67</sup> However, many contributors refused to recognize this distinction, and continued to refer to it as '*A Woman's Place Newsletter*'.<sup>68</sup> There was also controversy over the control that some readers thought women who produced the newsletter wielded, through censoring other women's writing. As a result, in 1977, a group of women took over newsletter production in protest at the omission of the opinion section from previous editions.<sup>69</sup> At a subsequent meeting, arranged to discuss who should compile the newsletter, the Collective insisted that it should not be the burden only of those who were currently doing it—a plea which nonetheless met with little response.<sup>70</sup> Organizational systems had to allow for disagreements because the ethos of the organization was that every woman should have the right to speak.

The same issues were evident in relation to the content of the newsletter.

<sup>62</sup> Catherine, *LWLWnl*, 19 May 1976; Helen Berenger, *LWLWnl* 104, January 1979; Pam Isherwood, *LWLWnl* 105, February 1979; Minutes, 27 April 1976.

<sup>63</sup> *LWLWnl* 45, 4 January 1978; Minutes, 30 November 1976, 4 January 1977; Deborah, Maria, Mary, Dusty, Vicky, Chris, Marlene, Ria, Rosemary, Sue, Jackie, Nicky, *LWLWnl*, 23 August 1977; cf. Celia Shalom, *LWLWnl* 68, 9 June 1978; Henderson, '... Where and How', 9.

<sup>64</sup> Delilah Campbell, 'Barking Back', *Trouble and Strife*, no. 31 (Summer 1995), 67.

<sup>65</sup> *Catcall* Collective, '*Catcall—Looking Back*', *Catcall* no. 5 (March 1977), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, 27 September 1977.

<sup>67</sup> *LWLWnl* 56, 15 March 1978; Minutes, 22 October 1978.

<sup>68</sup> Liz Cooper, *LWLWnl* 48, 17 November 1976.

<sup>69</sup> Separate pages of opinion were compiled criticizing the censorship of Jean Whitfield's purportedly racist article on rape and of Isobel Irvine's posters, *LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977. See also Minutes, 1 March 1977, 8 March 1977; Whitfield, *LWLWnl* 5, 9 March 1977; Berenger, *LWLWnl* 35, 11 August 1976; Ethel Findley, *LWLWnl* 45, 4 January 1978; Wright, *LWLWnl* 46, 11 January 1978; Cathy and Ann, *LWLWnl* 50, 1 February 1978.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes, 6 September 1977; Newsletter Meeting Statement, 11 September 1977.

This came to the fore most dramatically in 1974 with the publication of the 'CLIT Statement'. The 'Statement' was a set of American articles which advocated separatism, the idea that women should live completely apart from men and have no dealings with them in any part of their lives. The 'CLIT Statement' argued for separatism in a particularly extreme manner, condemning heterosexual women as collaborators. Its inclusion was critical for it represented the most overt description of separatism that had so far been produced. It is also one of the features on which historians have hung their picture of the movement's demise. Some of these historians maintain that it fostered no sustained rebuttal, intimating that radical separatist feminists (for radical and separatist are most often equated) had taken over the organization:

British radical feminists remained silent. Even in the mainstream of the movement, there was little open retaliation. Perhaps it seemed too difficult to sustain a political and personal critique of heterosexuality alongside a political and personal commitment to it.

The effect was to drive heterosexual women (a large majority among feminists, as among all women) on to the defensive . . . Groups began to disaffiliate from the London Workshop; women stopped taking its newsletter.<sup>71</sup>

But this claim can be challenged. At least six specific complaints and a number of more general ones were printed, a reasonable number for any issue discussed in the newsletter. Angela Hamblin, for example, protested that twenty-two pages of the American material had been typed, while other women who had submitted long articles were being turned away.<sup>72</sup> Janet Dixon, who was involved in its publication, later asserted that it had not been intended to close debate:

We thought that if women wanted to know about separatism they could read this, and then leave us in peace. It didn't work, and by about the third instalment *the outcry was such that we abandoned it*.<sup>73</sup> [my emphasis]

More important than the specific numbers of women who complained

<sup>71</sup> Coote and Campbell, *Sweet Freedom*, 242–5. See also Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan, 'Upsetting an Applecourt: Difference, Desire and Lesbian Sadomasochism', *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (Summer 1986), 37; Campbell, 'Sexual Politics', 14–15; Caine, *English Feminism*, 267.

<sup>72</sup> *LWLWnl* 69, 13 November 1974. See also *LWLWnl* 58, August 1974; 68, 6 November 1974; Astra and Joan Scott, *LWLWnl* 66, October 1974; Catherine, *LWLWnl* 68, 6 November 1974; Angela Hamblin, *LWLWnl* 70, 20 November 1974; Ruth Hall, *LWLWnl* 72, 4 December 1974; Joan Miller, Judith Kazantzis, and Caroline Natzler, *LWLWnl* 61, September 1974; Arsenal Group, *LWLWnl* 62, September 1974; Mari, *LWLWnl* 63, 2 October 1974.

<sup>73</sup> Janet Dixon, 'Separatism: a Look Back at Anger', in Bob Cant and Susan Hemmings (eds), *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History, 1957–1987* (London, 1988), 80. There were at least seven instalments. See also Monika Jaekel, 'Feminist Catch-as-Catch-Can', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1985), 5–8; Carolee, Biannual Minutes, *LWLWnl* 72, 4 December 1974; Janet Dixon, *LWLWnl* 73, 11 December 1974.

though, was that it sparked more general concerns over the control and representativeness of newsletter content and, by implication, of the Women's Liberation Movement. And despite the impression given in histories, the 'CLIT Statement' was far from the only controversial piece. Women put their opinions on many different subjects into the newsletter to have them debated.<sup>74</sup> Concentration in the historiography on this single entry, important though it was, glosses over the more subtle shadings and complex organizational history which framed the Workshop.

As the 'CLIT' controversy indicates, newsletter policy was in constant development. Over the decade a number of prohibitions were instituted—on censorship, personal attacks, and length of entries, the latter being rescinded when it was thought to be oppressive. After this rescission, disgruntled workers complained about having to type long scripts, but to expect women to resource the typing of these themselves was also seen as discriminatory.<sup>75</sup> Censorship, in all its forms, was of great concern as it left power in the hands of a few.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, some things were seen as unsuitable content. In 1975 it was decided that workers would preface controversial material and no notices would be included if they contravened the Demands. These Demands outlined the basic principles of the Women's Liberation Movement and just as the LWLW changed over time, so did they. The initial four, adopted for the first Women's Day rally in 1971, called for equal pay, education, and job opportunities, 24-hour childcare, and free abortion and contraception on demand. The final three, adopted and adapted at the 1974 and 1978 national conferences amid much controversy, demanded legal and financial independence, an end to discrimination on the grounds of sexuality, specifically against lesbians, and an end to violence against women.<sup>77</sup> Anonymity and the use of pseudonyms and jargon were likewise contentious in the newsletter.<sup>78</sup> Were they forms of elitism or was the naming of women oppressive? Some argued that anonymity was cowardly, that women should stand by their views, while for others it offered protection.<sup>79</sup> Such discussions underlined the

<sup>74</sup> *LWLWnl* 106, 6 August 1975; 36, 17 August 1976.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes, 3 December 1974, 10 February 1976; Newsletter Collective, 27 May 1974; *LWLWnl* 46, 5 June 1974; 72, 4 December 1974; 75, 1 January 1975; Zadie and Amanda Sebestyen, *LWLWnl* 25, 26 May 1976; Rosie, *LWLWnl* 7, 23 March 1977; Berenger, *LWLWnl* 97, 15 November 1978.

<sup>76</sup> See Judy Greenway, 'Censorship and Self Oppression', *Catcall*, no. 4 (September/October 1976), 2–6.

<sup>77</sup> Minutes, 1 April 1975, 29 April 1975. Controversial issues were lonely hearts and au pair ads, *LWLWnl* 77, 15 January 1975; Minutes, 22 February 1974. For the exact wording of the Demands see Appendix.

<sup>78</sup> Lorraine Davis, *LWLWnl* 63, 5 May 1978.

<sup>79</sup> *LWLWnl* 74, 18 December 1974; 77, 15 January 1975; 86, 19 March 1975; Angela Hamblin, *LWLWnl* 75, 1 January 1975; Sandy Martin and Astra, *LWLWnl* 77, 15 January 1975; Wright,

attempt to align developing thought and practice, as well as raising issues of power and access to communication.

### *Workshop Divisions*

Within histories of the movement a reason given for its failure in the second half of the decade—after disorganization—is bitter division, especially that between socialist and radical feminists. As already indicated, this does not do justice to the diversity of the movement or the extent to which division and its open expression was integral to it. Dispute was often fierce and experienced painfully in many cases. But divisions should not be seen in a purely negative light.<sup>80</sup> They were a sign of vitality, a factor recognized by Dale Spender in her work on language and feminism:

The pluralism of the movement is itself both a source and a manifestation of the ability to function in a multidimensional frame of reference. There are numerous 'truths' available within feminism and it is falling into male defined (and false) patterns to try and insist that only one is correct. . . .<sup>81</sup>

As we have seen, the Women's Liberation Movement was centred in lived politics, not abstract thought, producing feminist ideas and structure through experience.<sup>82</sup> This fostered diversity since women's experiences were themselves varied. Strongly held opinions were concomitant with the intense commitment that women had to the movement: a movement without controversy would have been both inconceivable and undesirable, for such diversity enabled women to challenge ways of thinking, both outside and within.

The psychological dimensions—what argument and division *felt* like—were openly discussed.<sup>83</sup> The June 1970 *Shrew* disclosed the tensions and difficulties that being involved in a consciousness-raising group could produce, while a 1971 issue was devoted to the effects of confrontation between women.<sup>84</sup> In a 1976 newsletter a correspondent claimed that she was depressed by attacks in the publication and asked what had happened

*LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977; Newsletter Collective, *LWLWnl* 64, 12 May 1978; Sandra McNeill, *LWLWnl* 65, 19 May 1978. See also FemL, SC2, Box 2, Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 'Stars, Leaders and Pseudonyms' (Leeds 1979); Becki Ross, 'The House that Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976–1980', *Feminist Review*, 35 (Summer 1990), 77–8.

<sup>80</sup> Sarah Green, 'Urban Amazons', *Trouble and Strife*, no. 35 (Summer 1997), 52–60.

<sup>81</sup> Spender, *Man Made*, 102–3.

<sup>82</sup> *LWLWnl* 81, 6 September 1978.

<sup>83</sup> Minutes, 23 August 1970; *LWLWnl* 28, 18 January 1971; 38, 27 June 1971; 144, 7 November 1979.

<sup>84</sup> *Shrew*, vol. 3, no. 3 (April 1971); Sue Cowley, 'Rambling Notes' and 'Bringing the Revolution Back Home', *Shrew* (June 1970), 2–3, 24.

to the joy women had discovered when they first came together.<sup>85</sup> There was overt discussion on the difficult nature of dispute and how it needed to be made explicit. Some women did assert that they felt alienated by existing divisions, but believed that the developing movement was about trying to face these differences.<sup>86</sup> And the Workshop aimed to provide structures in which they could be accommodated.<sup>87</sup> When the problem of office organization flared up in the middle of 1974, a worker declared that they should be working towards functioning together, otherwise it would mean giving in to a sexism which had always made women conform to rigid stereotypes. Another correspondent declared that polarity between groups was mythical and played on women's socially conditioned suspicion of each other.<sup>88</sup>

Within these divisions the unified and polarized identities of radical and socialist feminism, more particularly the equation of radical and separatist which has such prominence in the histories, were not always clear. Challenges to the picture of these homogenous group identities were numerous. While a 1973 issue of *Shrew* was produced by radical feminists, the Collective list labelled this group as the 'separatist radical feminists', implying that there were other forms of radical feminism besides.<sup>89</sup> One woman asked in the newsletter how she fitted in as a radical feminist who did not agree with separatism, while others questioned why women were quick to label each other when no single label would fit or argued that labels were too static.<sup>90</sup> The development of Revolutionary Feminism out of radical feminism in 1977 also disrupts any simplistic definition of the latter. Revolutionary Feminists were vehement separatists who declared war on men. Yet the terms 'Revolutionary' and 'radical' are often used interchangeably in current writings on feminism. More than this, in a 1979 article in *Catcall*, another feminist journal, the Workshop separatists who had published the 'CLIT Statement' and Revolutionary Feminists were defined as divergent groups with different ideological roots. Workshop

<sup>85</sup> *LWLWnl* 42, 25 July 1971; 36, 17 August 1976. See also Janet Good, *LWLWnl* 87, 25 June 1972; Marie, *LWLWnl* 86, 19 March 1975; Lynne Keys, *LWLWnl* 112, 9 June 1975; Nic and Kerry, *LWLWnl* 83, 20 September 1978; Berenger and Kerry, *LWLWnl* 90, 27 September 1978; Minutes of Reorganizing Weekend, 4–5 February 1978.

<sup>86</sup> Arsenal, *LWLWnl* 62, September 1974; Zadie, *LWLWnl* 26, 8 June 1976.

<sup>87</sup> Flora, *LWLWnl* 7, 23 March 1977. See also FemL, Betty Underwood, 'Consciousness Raising and Campaigning' (Bristol, 1973).

<sup>88</sup> Deborah Hart, *LWLWnl* 20, March 1974; Kate, *LWLWnl* 60, September 1974; Marlene, *LWLWnl* 24, 10 August 1977; Sue Hilton, *LWLWnl* 105, February 1979; Naomi Hanny and Christine Lemster, *LWLWnl* 70, 20 November 1974; Pauline, *LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977; *LWLWnl* 52, 15 February 1978.

<sup>89</sup> *Shrew*, vol. 5, no. 2 (April 1973).

<sup>90</sup> Rose, *LWLWnl* 78, 22 January 1975; Julie, *LWLWnl* 106, 6 August 1975; Diana Sampey, *LWLWnl* 38, 1974.

separatists were seen as women-focused, while Revolutionary Feminists were confrontational and concentrated on destroying men, the enemy.<sup>91</sup> Not only was the alignment of radical feminism and separatism never uncritically accepted, but separatism itself was never a unified ideology.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, there is evidence for the existence of a prominence of separatists in the Workshop by the mid-1970s, rather than simply a division between radical and socialist. The Workshop newsletter itself was a 'women-only' publication and, from 1973, the office was a 'women-only' space. From before the middle of the decade articles and letters began to cover issues associated with separatist feminism. The 'CLIT Statement' is the most obvious illustration, but there were others. An article in one of the earliest issues of *Shrew* criticized women who made excuses for men, while in a November 1974 newsletter a woman complained about the negative attitudes that she felt many had towards male children and their mothers.<sup>92</sup> Separatism was discussed at length at the Biannual in November 1974, which was reported on in the newsletter.<sup>93</sup> And the argument that there had been a separatist take-over was made in the socialist feminist journal, *Red Rag*:

Violent statements against men have regularly appeared in the Newsletter unsigned; women with boy children have been turned away from the Kingsgate women's centre; women in the office have refused to speak to men over the phone, when the men's requests are in genuine solidarity with feminism, or made on behalf of a feminist.<sup>94</sup>

But the image of separatist take-over did not go unchallenged. Notices for both socialist and radical meetings continued to be published in the newsletter throughout the 1970s.<sup>95</sup> The conversion to a 'women-only' space was heavily disputed and many women voted against it. Correspondents complained of the over-exposure separatists were getting in relation to their numbers and, as we have seen, there were protests against the 'CLIT

<sup>91</sup> Carol Lee, 'Radical Feminism, Revolutionary Feminism and the Left', *Catcall*, no. 10 (July 1979), 24–30. See also Sue, Brighton Women and Science Group, 'On Biologism', and Claws, 'News From the Provinces', *Rev/Radnl*, no. 2 (August 1979), 3, 9, 27; Frankie Rickford, 'War and Peace', *RR* (1978), 29.

<sup>92</sup> h.e., 'The Slave Complex', *Shrew*, no. 6 (October 1969), 6; Margaret Bayleaf, *LWLWnl* 69, 13 November 1974; Lynne Hutton-Williams, *LWLWnl* 35, 20 March 1974; *LWLWnl* 30, 21 September 1977; 54, 1 March 1978; Deirdre English, Amber Hollibaugh and Gayle Rubin, 'Talking Sex: A Conversation on Sexuality and Feminism', *Feminist Review*, no. 11 (Summer, 1982), 42–3.

<sup>93</sup> Biannual Minutes, *LWLWnl* 72, 4 December 1974.

<sup>94</sup> Fell and O'Sullivan, 'Saga', and Alexander and O'Sullivan, 'Stress', 16–20. See also Nell Myers, Annie Mitchell, Adah Kay, and Valerie Charlton, 'Four Sisters', *RR*, no. 11 (Autumn 1976), 3.

<sup>95</sup> *LWLWnl* 55, 26 September 1973; 25, 9 January 1974; 12 January 1977; 17, 15 June 1977; 20, 13 July 1977; 48, 18 January 1978; 111, 14 March 1979; 145, 15 November 1979.

Statement'.<sup>96</sup> Even at this early date any unified definition of separatism was also being rejected:

The danger in analysing Separatism as a 'political tendency' is that it makes it all misleadingly definite. It is oversimplifying, lumping together the reasons and motives of differently growing women. Separatism as a coherent 'tendency' exists only to its opponents.<sup>97</sup>

That the issue was discussed in the socialist feminist *Red Rag*, where this letter was published, shows that there were connections between women involved in *Red Rag* and in the Workshop. Indeed, many socialist feminists had long supported the policy of organizational separatism—keeping women's groups for women only. This clouded the categorization of the LWLW as a purely 'radical' feminist concern. It is also possible that a visible dominance of separatists was due more to the prominence of particular individuals, as the comments on exaggerated influence imply, rather than structural change. The workers were necessarily always a limited number of people and the Workshop was never defined purely around them. A preponderance of separatist workers need not have implied a constitutional shift. That there was an apparent dominance by one group makes clear that the system was not flawless. But these sorts of developments contributed to the perpetual adaptation of organizational structures.

Even if we accept that separatist or radical feminists dominated the Workshop by the mid-1970s, and this is at least debatable, we should not assume that it had no relevance for anyone who did not define themselves in these terms. To do this overlooks the large number of viewpoints expressed and implicitly defines radical feminists as women who came in from outside and took over the organization. Both radical and socialist feminisms, in their broadest terms, were components 'internal' to the movement. Division was a central element in the Workshop and played an essential role in the formation of feminist theory. It was a part of the way women reacted to each other, and the Workshop was deliberately constructed as a space in which they could examine difficult relationships and ideas.

### *Conclusion*

A detailed study of evidence from the LWLW, as one of the central organizations of the Women's Liberation Movement, challenges existing histories which depict a structureless movement, crushed in the mid-1970s by deep and polarizing divisions. There was huge change in the Workshop

<sup>96</sup> Rose, *LWLWnl* 78, 22 January 1975; Rosie, *LWLWnl* 103, 16 July 1975; Astra, *LWLWnl* 105, 30 July 1975; Julia, *LWLWnl* 107, 13 August 1975; Packwood, *LWLWnl* 111, 14 March 1979.

<sup>97</sup> Rosie, letter, *RR*, no. 9 (June 1975), 32.

over the decade, the organization was in continual flux and there were debates about radical and separatist feminist take over. Divisions undoubtedly caused some women to leave and were very painful. But continuous alterations were not a sign of weakness and structurelessness, but an indicator of a strong and flexible organization. Both practices and ideas within the movement were changed to meet different women's needs at different times. The process itself was a central part of the knitting together of lived experience and theory that was fundamental to Women's Liberation. Divisions within the LWLW can also be reinterpreted in a positive light, as a part of its structure rather than the cause of its demise. Heterogeneity was written into the Workshop even from its earliest years, in its 1971 manifesto. And divisions were never as polarized as the historiography suggests. Spread out between the poles of vehemently separatist and staunchly Marxist were many different types of radical and socialist feminisms. Most of all, the LWLW shows us how important it is to look beyond the much vaunted texts to the activities of the many women at the grass roots. They were a part of an organization which was very different in 1979, from that in 1969, but which had certainly not been destroyed.

#### *Appendix*

##### *The Seven Demands*

- 
1. Equal pay now
  2. Equal education and job opportunities
  3. Free 24-hour childcare
  4. Free contraception and abortion on demand
  5. Legal and financial independence for women
  6. The right to our own self-defined sexuality and an end to discrimination against lesbians
  7. Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status, and an end to all laws, assumptions, and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women
- 

The first four demands were adopted in 1970 in preparation for the Women's Day march in March 1971. The fifth demand was adopted at the 1974 national conference in Edinburgh. The sixth demand was also adopted at the 1974 national conference. It was split at the 1978 national conference in Birmingham, when the demand itself was altered to 'An end to all discrimination against lesbians'. The first section was reworded to 'The Women's Liberation Movement asserts a woman's right to define her own sexuality', and was placed as a preface to all the other demands. The final demand was adopted at the 1978 national conference in Birmingham.