

사회주의 시절 남예멘 여성권리에 대해 쓴 논문 찾았다.

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student organizations. These mass organizations are controlled by the Party through the Secretary for Mass Organizations, who sits on the Central Committee and directs mass organization policy. A similar process operates in each Governorate. Hence, while the membership of the Women's Union elect their governing committee and discuss policy, this is within the limits laid down by the Central Committee.

Members of the Women's Union are represented in the leading bodies of party and state. There is at least one member of the Women's Union at every level of the party structure. Similarly, the Women's Union has the right to nominate a quota of members to the legislative bodies—the Local Councils in each Governorate, and the Supreme People's Council, the highest legislative body. Women also stand in their own right for election to these bodies. In practice, the candidates for election and the policies discussed in these Councils are also under the control of the Party, and hence a high degree of integration of party and state is maintained.

As in all such socialist countries, it is often extremely difficult to discern what is really happening behind the official claims, and a degree of defensive evasiveness characterizes the responses to even sympathetic western investigators. Yet in the PDRY as in Cuba, Vietnam and China, it is evident both that there have been substantial changes in the position of women as a result of the revolution, and that there are major areas which state policy has left untouched, and where the conception of women's emancipation being implemented is, by western feminist-socialist criteria, a partial one. Yet whilst it is possible and necessary to criticize the Yemeni process for being incomplete, such criticisms must be made within a framework of what is, and what is not, possible in these very poor and beleaguered countries.





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#### Women and Revolution in the PDRY



The position of women in the PDRY cannot fairly be judged by comparing it with that of women in the West; moreover, the obstacles confronting women there take different forms and require different strategies to overcome them. Rather than comparing Yemen with Britain or the USA, a more useful exercise would be to compare the progress of the PDRY with that of another country at a *similar* level of development and of a similar cultural background, so that some indication of the relative progress made may be gained. If, for example South Yemen is compared with North Yemen, it is clear that in the latter's case, despite the influx of large amounts of money from Saudi Arabia and a pro-western political orientation, women remain thoroughly subjected to traditional Islamic and customary forms of discrimination, and the government has made no attempt to alter their legal, social or economic position. Thus in terms of this comparison, and indeed by comparison with most Muslim and many third world countries, women in South Yemen have made considerable progress. When evaluating this material it is therefore important to recognize the dangers of unconsciously transporting the assumptions and expectations of the western women's movement to a very different society, and thereby underestimating many of the real gains that have been made and the many real difficulties which are being faced.

As far as the official analysis of women's subordination in the PDRY is concerned the clearest statement on this is contained in a speech by Salem Robaya Ali, the country's former President, delivered at the First Congress of the Women's Union in 1974. This begins by deploring the more extreme forms of 'humiliation, degradation, oppression and exploitation' to which women were subjected under 'colonial and reactionary rule'. In addition, women were 'deprived of their right to work... and of their right of equality with man. (Women) were also despised and considered worthless things... treated by grievous beating and painful words... by fathers, brothers and husbands.' The speech went on to denounce the exploitation and oppression of women in the home, the practice of arranged marriages, and the custom (*derived from Islam* *MM*) of considering women to be worth half a man in law, property rights and employment. Selling women 'like sheep' through the brideprice was also condemned and so too, by extension was the complicity of the religious judges, the

*Kadi*, in these transactions. Women's freedom was, however, now possible under socialism and lay 'in education and in inculcating new traditions that lie in the secret of their love of work and production'.

Since 1967, the State has intervened in a number of ways to confront the more oppressive traditional and religious practices at the same time as the juridical powers of religious leaders have been transferred to the state. In 1974 a new Family Code was passed which, among other things, abolished divorce by repudiation, limited polygamy to exceptional circumstances, gave divorced women



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custody rights over children, and outlawed both early marriages and marriages arranged without the consent of both parties. This law, like the earlier Tunisian law that to some extent influenced it, aimed substantially to *revise* Islamic legal and customary practices and is part of a general attempt to reinterpret Islamic doctrine in such a way as to emphasize some of the more egalitarian ideas contained within it.

Paralleling these changes in the law, there has been a major effort to erode *purdah* restrictions and to encourage women to enter all areas of public life, including the militia, politics, the legal profession and other areas of activity formerly closed to women. The state places greatest emphasis on two processes which it considers fundamental for bringing about women's emancipation: education and the entry into social production. Since independence all educational establishments including technical training colleges have been open to women and girls, and in the mass literacy campaign of 1972-1976 women were given special encouragement to acquire literacy and then to continue their education in the schools. These changes have proved extremely difficult in a society in which women's activities are very closely supervised, and where the rules of seclusion (*purdah*) do not permit women to mix freely with men, let alone to be seen unveiled for fear of loss of family honour.

Women's entry into employment has shown considerable advances, so much so that the PDRY now has one of the highest female economic participation rates in the Arab world. This entry of women into wage work is regarded in South Yemen, following Engels, as the cornerstone of women's emancipation; but this is not just a result of a political commitment but also because it has become materially necessary for the PDRY to encourage women into the labour force; unusually among Third World countries it suffers from a labour shortage owing in part to mass male emigration to the oil states.

Despite the progress that has been made by women in these different areas there are certain limits to the process of women's emancipation being implemented in the PDRY. First, the emphasis on women participating in production is not matched by any serious attempt to redistribute the burdens of domestic labour; the problem of the 'double shift' therefore remains. Secondly, the allocation of women as they join the labour market is predominantly on the basis of a newly imposed sexual division of labour—which has the same *effects* as in the capitalist countries, that is, it distributes women to inferior and less well rewarded positions within the general division of labour. Thirdly, the General Union of Yemeni Women functions as an instrument of state and party policy. It is not permitted any degree of autonomy in programme and practice so that the degree to which it adequately represents women's interests must at least be questioned. Fourthly, there is little if any, sustained discussion of such questions as the relations between the sexes, the persistence of ideologies of women's inferiority, the problems of familial oppression, or of female sexuality. There is no interest in, or tolerance of, any forms of female sexual expression outside heterosexual monogamy; and apparently there remains a high premium on virginity for women. Moreover, the family law, while removing certain inequalities within marriage, should not be seen as undermining the family in any way. Rather, in common with legislation on the family in other socialist countries, this law was designed to *strengthen* the family, which is considered 'a basic cell of society'. There is no critique of the family along feminist lines and it is not generally seen



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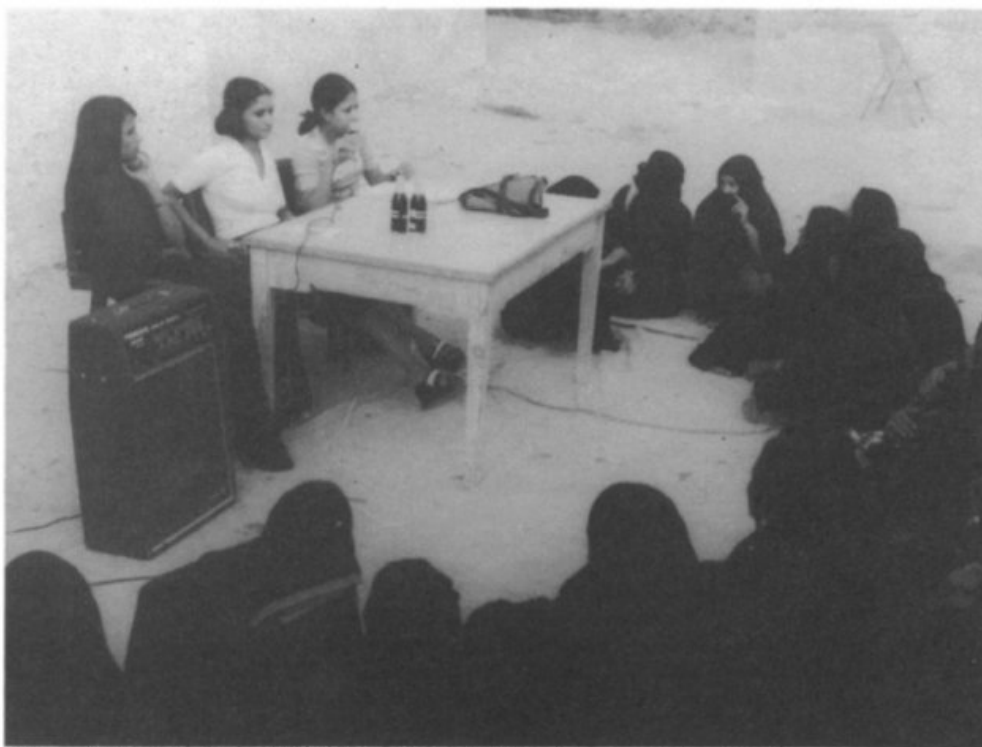
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#### Women and Revolution in the PDRY

as the site of oppressive relationships as it is in the west. A balanced evaluation of this experience in the PDRY, as of other socialist countries, must therefore take both the achievements and limitations into account. It must also recognize that in the period of socialist reconstruction amidst extreme scarcity, there may exist material and cultural obstacles to the immediate implementation of measures necessary to bring about women's emancipation.



Representatives of the Women's Union Headquarters in Aden address a gathering of rural women.

The first of the interviews which follow covers the pre-independence period and is with Aida Yafai. The daughter of an Adeni shop owner, now in her mid-thirties, she was elected to the General Command of the NLF at its Fourth Congress in 1968 and in 1971 became a member of the Supreme People's Council, the national assembly. Until 1972 a leading official of the GUYW, she is now a member of the Central Committee and Director of the Secretary General's office. She is married and has no children. The second interview is with Aisha Mohsen. Now in her late twenties she is the daughter of a Yemeni migrant worker in Britain, and was elected first President of the GUYW at its 1974 Congress. She held this post until the end of June 1978 when she was dismissed, and along with several others was also expelled from the Central Committee following a failed coup attempt by the then President of the PDRY, Salem Robea Ali. Noor Ba'abad, the third woman interviewed, is on the Executive Committee of the GUYW and occupies the post of Head of Cultural and Information Affairs. She is married and is also in her late twenties. These interviews were all carried out via a male interpreter and this should be borne in mind when

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reading them. However, the women themselves did know enough English to understand both the questions and the interpreter's translation, so that nothing they publicly disagreed with is recorded here. As the interviews were carried out prior to the October 1978 change of name from National Liberation Front to Yemeni Socialist Party, the earlier term – NLF – is used throughout.

### Interview with Aida Yafai: the Liberation Struggle

**MM.** Could we begin with the pre-independence period (pre-1967). How active were women politically? What kind of women's organizations existed?

**AY.** The different stages of the women's struggle in our country were linked to the different stages of the revolutionary process itself. Women's organizations defined themselves in relation to the main political currents of the time and the debates and divisions within women's organizations reflected those of the wider society. For example, the first women's clubs were set up by the British in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Their place was later taken (in Aden at least) by a right wing *Aden Women's Club* run by rich Arab women from merchant families; and eventually in the later 1950s the *Arab Women's Society* was founded. It was closely identified with the nationalist movement that developed in the build-up to the Suez crisis in 1956. As with all our women's organizations this too was primarily a *political* organization rather than a *women's* organization.

**MM.** Were any of these societies active on feminist issues?

**AY.** Feminist – is that how you say it? – demands only appeared after the revolution started. The early societies were just social clubs which carried out some charitable activities, helping women, and teaching them to sew, for instance. The *Arab Women's Society* was more progressive compared with the other but no feminist demands were raised within it. It was really a front for the political parties then operating, such as the Ba'ath party or later the NLF. After the armed struggle started in 1963 the *Arab Women's Society* split down the middle, a right and a left group forming, although both kept the original name of the organization. The division was over whether to support the armed struggle. Frankly this society helped us, it was useful in our struggle. When you looked at it from the outside it seemed to be just a social club but inside there were political activities going on – meetings, printing clandestine leaflets, and so on. It was very important for getting women active in the political work of the NLF. It was a good recruiting ground.

**MM.** I understand that at one time you were a member of the *Arab Women's Society*. Can you tell me something about the class background of this organization's members and whether at any time it considered disengaging from the tutelage of the Arab nationalist movements to become an independent organization?

**AY.** No, never. It wasn't possible because most of the members were also members of political parties. As for the social background of the members – they were all bourgeois. The leaders were big and middle bourgeois, the membership middle and petit bourgeois. The head of the organization was from a powerful Adenese family which owned many houses, shops and hotels. These were the leading elements – all housewives, between the ages of thirty and forty. The membership was younger, so they were more easily influenced.

**MM.** There was also a women's section of the NLF. Can you tell me about its activities and how many members it had?

**AY.** Unfortunately there are no figures. Women joined up if their family was involved in the NLF, maybe because of the influence of their men. There were



more supporters than actual members, but in all there were probably around 200-300 women active in the liberation struggle. The women's section of the NLF was founded immediately after the revolution started in 1963. There was no particular leader, it was organized collectively under the NLF leadership. But political work for women was difficult. We had two fronts of struggle, one against the family and tradition, the other to wage the armed struggle against the British colonialists. The Imams of the mosque here in Aden used to make speeches against women leaving their houses and breaking *purdah* rules. We women went to the mosques and tried to argue with them. We also tried to convince our own families that it was right for us to struggle. They wouldn't accept that their daughters came home at midnight after political meetings and they would lock us out if we came home too late.

**MM.** Were the political meetings that were organized by the nationalist parties segregated?

**AY.** The political meetings of the female section of the NLF were for women only, but joint meetings were also held.

**MM.** What political work did women do in the NLF?

**AY.** It differed depending on whether it was in Aden or in the countryside. Here in the city it was more political than military. For example women led demonstrations, they were active in support of the trade union movement, or in campaigns against British bias in the school curricula. We also smuggled documents, leaflets and arms, especially hand grenades, because at first we weren't searched. But in Aden women were not involved in the armed struggle itself. In the country, though, they did participate in the fighting, which was natural given the social conditions of women there. Unlike the women of the towns, they don't wear the veil or the black covering known as the *sheidor* so they are more free and they are used to hard work in the fields. Even though traditionally women didn't have guns, they took them up during the revolutionary struggle and many were killed in the fighting. Women often carried food to their guerilla husbands and when fighting broke out they were caught up in it, so they took up the guns and fought back. There was even a famous woman leader called Daara, and another called Hadiga al Haushabi. Daara came from Radfan (*where the first guerilla base was established MM*); she's still alive, but Hadiga was killed.

**MM.** How was the question of women's emancipation viewed by the NLF women?

**AY.** All the documents of the revolution, the National Charter of 1965 for instance, speak of the need to emancipate women from tradition and to make them the equal of men. One of the first concrete steps to be taken by the party was to work against women's illiteracy. But this was secondary to the main aim which was to fight against the British, and there was very little discussion of women as such. We had the Arab Women's Society's name changed to the General Union of Yemeni Women in November 1967.

The main changes have occurred since Independence. At first the proposals put forward by the Women's Union were blocked by the right wing of the government. In March 1968 the right tried to oust the left and some women were imprisoned along with our comrades until the Corrective Move of 22 June 1969 installed the left in power. Then the situation of the women was strengthened. Remember that because of this, our achievements of ten years are really only eight years old.

**MM.** What do you regard as being the main achievements of the revolution with respect to the position of women?



**AY.** There are many! Our first achievement was the New Constitution of 1970 which gave women equal rights in the law, education and the family, and also gave them a place in the 101 member Supreme People's Council, the highest legislative body of the State. This now has four women members plus two candidate members. The Central Committee also has four women members of whom one is a full member and three are candidates. There are about seventy members of the Central Committee altogether, and whilst women are still only a small proportion you must remember that in our country women have never participated in politics before.

Many progressive laws relating to the position of women have also been passed, the most important of which is the 1974 Family Law, but there are also provisions for women in the Labour Code such as the principle of equal wages and the rulings on maternity rights. Women in our country are entitled to a minimum of fifty days and a maximum of seventy days paid maternity leave. In addition to this we have struggled against illiteracy, tried to establish nurseries and have improved the position of rural women through land redistribution and the setting up of co-operatives. All these are initial steps, but we are committed to changing women's situation because we believe that if you want to know the level of progress in a society you look at the position of women.

**MM.** These reforms, especially those contained in the Family Law, will erode many key areas of privilege for men; have you encountered much opposition to them?

**AY.** All over the world men have resisted this. Women's oppression has a historical origin. It began with private ownership of the means of production. Before this women were the heads of their families, but then men took over. Men have also been favoured by education and have had the opportunity to work outside their homes and their country and to learn by this experience. But we are against the idea that there is a contradiction between men and women. We're against bourgeois slogans which claim this, or say that women must struggle separately because their struggle is isolated from men or is against them. We might think that men are the cause of women's situation; but men are *not* the cause because they are governed by the feudal and tribal social relations of the society itself. When we declare that we want to be equal to men, we want to be equal in rights but we don't want to be equal if men are trapped in underdeveloped thoughts. In an underdeveloped society men have underdeveloped ideas and we don't want equality in this. We have to fight with men to eradicate these backward social relations. And these relations are very complicated. We can't demand that men change their spots overnight. They have inherited the way they are from thousands of years of backwardness and this is why they reject any demands for equality between men and women. Now we look at life with a new attitude and in a different way—unlike most Arab and African countries. We believe that there will be no real equality with men until the whole economic situation changes; at the same time there must be a complete educational process for both men and women.

**MM.** So you don't rely on women's entry into production to bring about their emancipation? My impression of State and party policy here is that you place a great deal of emphasis on women's entry into production to bring about their emancipation. Is this the case?

**AY.** Yes, but from our experience it's not simply that when women work they are the equal of men. That might help a woman in her life but that doesn't mean that there is a change in her beliefs and thoughts. The educational element is

therefore very important in economic life. The real point is to participate in the country's development—of the economy, of society and of people's consciousness; when that is achieved all of the other aims will be achieved. We are against the slogans raised in some Arab countries against the veil or demanding women's suffrage on their own. These are secondary. Women's emancipation needs the existence of a progressive revolutionary regime, and as such a regime exists here, we will be able to achieve more in fewer years than the women's movements in the rest of the Arab world.

**MM.** How do you see women contributing to further the revolutionary process?

**AY.** They contribute in all ways. The same as men.

**MM.** It seems to me that women here are caught in a contradictory role by your population policies. On the one hand you are urging them to enter employment, on the other you encourage large families to fulfil your population target.

**AY.** This is very important and one of our greatest difficulties. One of our most important problems is childcare when women are working. We believe that this achievement of getting women to work will not be guaranteed unless a big struggle for kindergartens and canteens, both inside and outside the workplace, is waged. There are now some seventeen kindergartens in the PDRY, some of them outside Aden, but these are not enough; and canteens are just beginning to be established in factories.

**MM.** Would you say that women's role in production or reproduction is the priority at present?

**AY.** Production is very important, but reproduction also, . . . I would say *more* important. But we want to try to reconcile the two.

### Interview with Aisha Mohsen: the Women's Union

**MM.** Could you first tell me what the main objectives of the GUYW are?

**AM.** The Union is trying to help the state in encouraging women to participate in economic production. The Union tries to get women, especially housewives, involved in these activities, for example by training them so that they acquire skills. In this way both the women and society can benefit.

**MM.** What is the political status of the GUYW?

**AM.** The GUYW is a mass organization of the NLF and directed by its Central Committee. As such, its work consists in mobilising support for the aims of the Party and the State. The mass organizations elect representatives to the Supreme People's Council, our Parliament. We now have six delegates there. In general the Union acts according to Party directives; the Family Law for example, although relating to the interests of women, was promoted initially by the Party in accordance with the wishes of women. But of course we in the Union are consulted about legal matters concerning women. All mass organizations have the right to suggest laws and modifications in the law. For instance the Women's Union and the Minister of Housing have realised that there are some problems with the Family Law, and our legal consultants are pressing for modifications. The final decisions as to whether to change a law or not are taken by the Supreme Council.

**MM.** Could you give me a brief account of the history of the GUYW?

**AM.** Well, although the Union was founded in 1968, its activities as a national organization really date from the Conference held in the town of Seyun in 1974. This gave the Union a proper organizational structure and official representation in all six Governorates.

**MM.** So what was the Union doing in the period before 1974?

**AM.** From 1968 onwards we were involved in the literacy campaigns and in dis-



Literary class.

cussions concerning the Family Law. As you know this was very widely debated in public meetings all over the country, so that people's opinions could be taken into account. The women were always more extreme—more radical—than the men, by the way! But there was no real leadership then and only three branches of the Women's Union were in existence—in Aden, in Lahej and in the fifth Governorate (*the Hadramaut region MM*). We used to try and hold open meetings with women, although not many came because of *purdah*. But with the revolutionary changes in the countryside after 1971 more women became active. **MM.** So what is the organizational structure of the Union now?

**AM.** At the Seyun Conference where delegates from all over the country were present, we were able to elect a thirty-five member Central Council. From these thirty-five we then elected a seven member General Secretariat of the Union. Each of these members heads a committee with specific responsibilities; the seven members comprise the Head of the Union, the Secretary for Internal relations; the Secretary for External Affairs, the Information and Cultural Secretary, the Social Secretary, the Financial and Administrative Secretary, and then lastly, the Economic Secretary. This structure forms the model for Committees at lower levels of the Union, for example at regional and district level. It is only this year that we have been able to develop the structure at the local level and we now have 193 committees all over the Republic, thirty-two of which are in the First Governorate (*Aden area MM*).

**MM.** You said that the Union's main objective is to encourage women to enter social production—how exactly do you do this?

**AM.** In the first instance by training them to acquire some technical expertise. As part of International Women's Year we set up technical training centres in all the Governorates to train women to be mechanics for cars, tractors, refrigerators, air-conditioners, televisions, radios etc. We also trained women to type and to use sewing-machines. In 1975 there were some 1,500 women involved in training centres and most of these women have taken up jobs in the same projects in which they were trained. The centres were residential and the courses would run for periods of up to a year. The training would generally take place in the mornings; the afternoons would be given over to activities such as military training,

**Women and Revolution in the PDRY**

literacy classes, music, handicrafts, political education, cultural circles and the like. This experiment still continues.

**MM.** I understand there was some opposition to women going to these centres?

**AM.** Yes, they had to be suspended in some Governorates this year because of traditional obstacles. Some families forced the Centres in two of the Governorates to close,—in the fourth and sixth. We have tried to get them reopened but conditions are very difficult there, because of illiteracy and ignorance . . . and people spreading gossip about the women in the Centres. Anyway, this is one of our projects. In addition the Union puts up part of the capital, i.e. 10%, to run two factories in Aden—the perfume factory at Maala and the foam rubber factory at Sheikh Othman. But we are not entrepreneurs! Our aim is to try and influence policy in these two projects and to make women's employment easier. Most of the employees of the perfume factory are women. The state owns part of the capital, the Union owns some and there is also a private share. The state owns about 50%, and 40% is private in each factory. Participating in these projects helps to strengthen our own budget too; but it won't be a long-term involvement because we don't want to be capitalists.

**MM.** Apart from this where does the funding for the Union come from?

**AM.** We get some state subsidy and some income from the membership, but the state should not continue giving us this subsidy because we are a mass organization and should depend on ourselves. Our aim is to be financially independent but at the moment most of our income comes from the state and from the Party.

**MM.** What is the subscription from members?

**AM.** A worker pays 100 fils a month (about 15 pence) and a housewife 50 fils.

**MM.** What is the membership of the GUYW?

**AM.** 14,296.

**MM.** How do these break down according to social classes?

**AM.** There are 915 women workers employed in factories, workshops and so on; 528 agricultural workers, members of co-ops and state farms; 253 are employees of different government Ministries, some graduates from universities and







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secondary schools, and the rest are housewives and older students, mostly from secondary schools i.e. fourteen to sixteen year olds.

**MM.** So are most of your members younger women?

**AM.** The majority are between twenty and thirty years old. Hardly any are over thirty. It's very difficult to change an old woman.

**MM.** Thirty-one is old?

**AM.** Our hopes lie with the children of the revolution, the ones we have given the benefits of education.

**MM.** And how do you recruit your members?

**AM.** Membership is on the basis of residence; women come to the offices of the Popular Defence Councils which have been established in each residential area, to discuss their problems, participate in campaigns and so on. There is always a representative of the Women's Union there, usually she is the Social Secretary, so she naturally comes into contact with women. She helps on questions of divorce, marriage, bad neighbours, social problems.

**MM.** Is she really a social worker?

**AM.** Exactly, a social worker.

**MM.** So you don't have representatives and recruiting campaigns at the workplace?

**AM.** No, we leave that area to the trades unions and the Party.

**MM.** Of over 100 women industrial workers I have interviewed only a handful were in the Women's Union, and active participation of women in the trades unions and in the party is very low indeed. So how are women's interests in the workplace guaranteed?

**AM.** We are trying to encourage more women to enter these organizations. This will be easier now that there is the example of women standing for elections and women being able to vote for the first time ever. Before women were completely excluded from political life, so it is very new for them. But even so, of the ten women who stood in the Aden area for the recent Local People's Council elections, eight of them were elected, which is very good.

**MM.** Were they members of the GUYW?

**AM.** Yes.

**MM.** What are the main campaigns of the Women's Union?

**AM.** The two most important were, first the campaign to gain support for the Family Law and the second was the campaign against illiteracy.

**MM.** What about the veil and the *sheidor*? Are you campaigning against these?

**AM.** The veil and *sheidor* have started to disappear with social development, by themselves. The veil is not an obstacle in the way of the women's struggle, because before, during the struggle against the British and against feudalism, women struggled even though they were wearing *sheidors*.

**MM.** Is there any specific campaign mounted by the Union or by the State directed at men to encourage them to change their attitudes vis-a-vis women? After all these can't have changed automatically?

**AM.** Yes, in the Party there is. The existence of women in the Party and in the Supreme Council and in the Local Councils is proof of the high esteem in which women are held in the PDRY. There is a campaign in the Party to reform attitudes. Then there is also a campaign at the mass level *through* the Party.

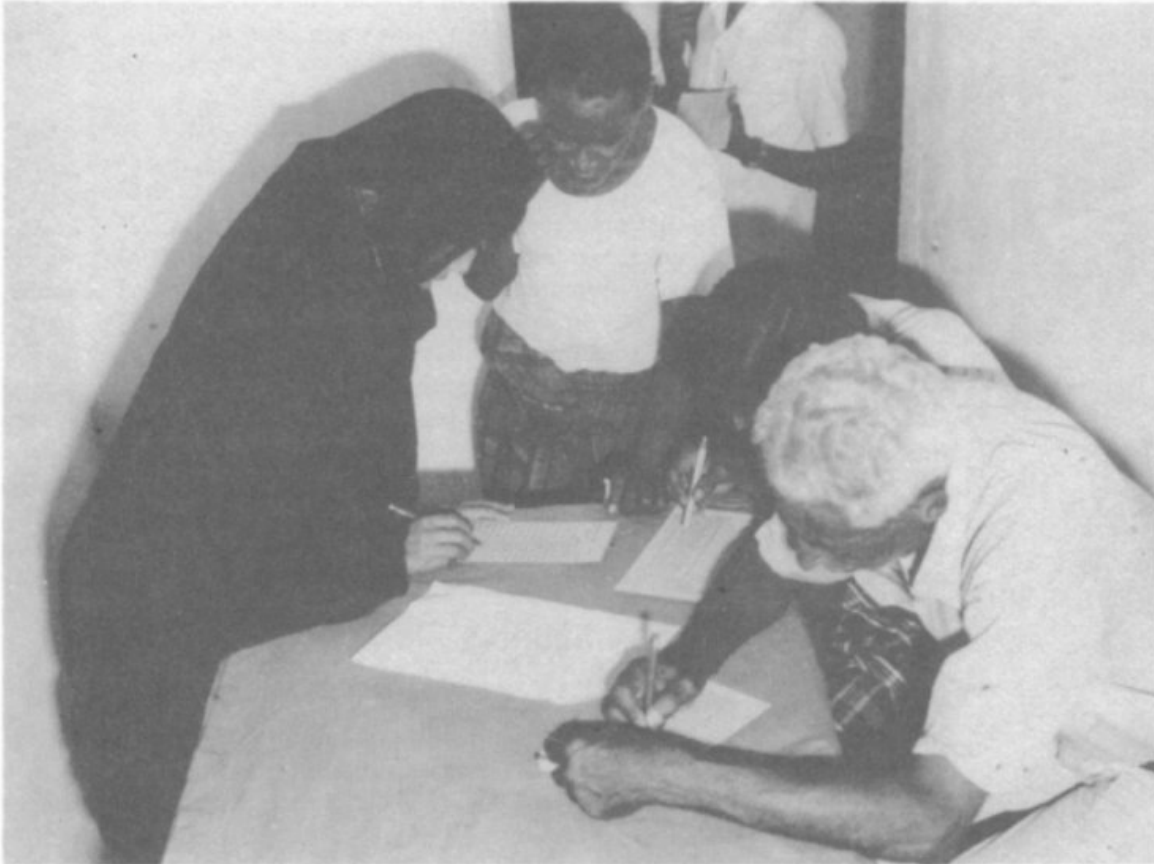
**MM.** Do you have any views on the women's liberation movement in the west?

**AM.** I'm not sure what you mean.

**MM.** It might be said that generally speaking, the women's movement in the west is identified with two principles which are at variance with those of the Yemen Women's Union; a large degree of autonomy from existing political or-

ganizations, and some commitment to the belief that men collude in and benefit from, the oppression of women.

**AM.** Women should not make it their most important aim to oppose men, because in capitalist countries men are also oppressed. The oppression of women cannot be ended unless oppression in the whole society is eliminated. Men and women are oppressed by the capitalist classes so they should join in their struggle against these forces.



November 1977: women vote for the first time in South Yemen.

### Interview with Noor Ba'abad: Women and Social Change

**MM.** I'm interested in the decision of the Yemeni Women's Union not to campaign actively against the veil but rather to leave it to die out by itself.

**NB.** There was a campaign against the veil in 1972. During the peasant uprising and the land occupations there was an important process of radicalization among women as well, and one of the popular demands called for the end of the veil. In fact it was one of *the most* popular slogans.

**MM.** So if it was a popular campaign why was it subsequently dropped?

**NB.** Well in those days it marked a real advance for women. The demand is still raised occasionally but there is no need to push it strongly because objective processes will destroy the veil. Through the 1972 demonstrations against the veil we achieved our aims—that is, to make it possible to overcome the veil. In our schools for example girls don't wear the veil or the *sheidor*. Khaki uniforms have



been brought in for offices and factory workers. In addition there has been a mass media campaign to reduce the effect of family opposition and to get them to accept what we are doing. Already you can see the veil is gradually being used less, and the *sheidor* is gradually being replaced by a coat.

MM. What kind of discussions, theoretical debates and political arguments are going on in the Women's Union at the moment?

NB. The main task now is achieving literacy for women and liberating them economically.

MM. Are there any particular texts on women that you read and refer to?

NB. Nothing special. Rather it is part of marxism in general. There's no special instruction for women. Of course Engels' *Origin of the Family* is very important for us.

MM. Is the question of women's subordination discussed at all at the Party School?

NB. Not as a separate subject but in general our political and ideological line is to be aware of it; in that sense it is part of the programme.

MM. In its drive to encourage women to participate in production does the Women's Union express any preference for the kind of work women should do?

NB. We don't want them to do work in heavy industry or to work as carriers of heavy loads. We are encouraging our women to have a technical training; as you know this is why we have set up the Training Centres.

MM. Female circumcision is a traditional practice in some parts of your country. Has this been abolished?

NB. This custom affects both boys and girls and the degree to which it was practised varied from Governorate to Governorate. With regard to women it was an expression of their shame; with boys the custom continues and this is excellent. But as it is a degrading custom for girls and not a proper one, it has begun to decline.

MM. But it is not *illegal* to practice cliterodectomy.

NB. There is no law against it.

MM. What about prostitution?

NB. As you know, under imperialism prostitutes could be found in the ports of Aden and Mukalla. But few Yemeni women accepted this degrading custom, less than 1% in fact. It was the imperialists who organized it. The Government has discovered the class basis of prostitution, and has arranged alternative work for these women. (*There is a tomato paste factory at Fyush, outside Aden, staffed by ex-prostitutes, and co-operatives under the aegis of the GUYM have absorbed some of them MM*)

MM. How, do you think, women can achieve their complete emancipation?

NB. We cannot speak of liberating women without making them participate in social life to convince them of their role in society. In our constitution we have included a commitment to the principle of women's liberation. It is women's right now to work in factories. By encouraging women to work in factories and to go to school we will achieve the right orientation. The state has also abolished the existence of women as a special stratum. No text in the Laws or Constitution discriminates against women. If a woman wants to work in any sphere no one will stop her.

MM. What kind of emphasis, if any, is placed on the role of ideological struggle in the effort to emancipate women?

NB. Our ideological struggle is our Party line and the Party's policy affects all strata of society. But we have our own ideological activities in the Union—information programmes, courses, radio and television, newspapers, mimeographed

Women have always worked in agriculture.



papers, posters, political and social lectures. The experience of work itself is important plus the experience of the other socialist countries, for example the Central Asian Republics or Cuba.

**MM.** Do you have any knowledge of, or views on the women's liberation movement in the west?

**NB.** Yes we know about their struggles about work, wages and children and about other things. Our society is however a backward one, but while our tactical struggles are different, our aims are the same.

## Notes

Maxine Molyneux is a Sociology Lecturer at Essex University where she specialises in Comparative Sociology. Over the last year she has participated in a workshop on the subordination of women in the third world, organized at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex. She is currently co-writing a book on the position of women in socialist societies. She is a member of the *Feminist Review* collective.



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