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**The Red in the Rainbow:  
Sexuality, Socialism and LGBT Liberation**

Hannah Dee

*Bookmarks Publications*

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**Hannah Dec**

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## Introduction

The modern gay liberation movement was born out of three days of rioting in June 1969 after a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York.

At the time homosexuality was treated as a sickness and a crime and those who did the rioting were routinely abused as perverted and mentally ill. But they took inspiration from the mass anti-war, civil rights and black power movements raging in the US. Chanting “Gay power”, they called for a revolution to realise “complete sexual liberation” and started a mass movement that was to change the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people forever.

LGBT liberation has come a long way since then. In the last two decades alone we have seen a wave of legislative changes in favour of gay rights. Attitudes have shifted – a recent poll found 90 percent of people in Britain supportive of gay rights, while only 20 years ago 70 percent of the British public thought homosexuality was “always or mostly wrong”. Today LGBT people are a more visible and confident part of society. The simple act of holding hands in public would have been risked by few in the 1960s.

Despite these immense changes Britain can still be a dangerous place for LGBT people. In 2005 a young gay man, Jody Dobrowski, was beaten to death so violently that his family could not identify him. A string of other brutal murders have since taken place and in the last year there has been a shocking increase in reported homophobic attacks across a number of major cities.

Hate crimes are not the only problem. In the 1970s the

gay movement called for a challenge to the pattern of institutional oppression across all the major institutions in society: in schools, the church, the media, employment, psychiatry and mental health. Today that systematic discrimination persists. How else to characterise the pitiful 1 percent conviction rate for reported homophobic attacks? Or the refusal of the majority of schools to organise anti-bullying policies despite the abuse faced by young LGBT people, leaving them six times more likely to commit suicide than their peers?

The return of the Tories to government in 2010 – the party responsible for Section 28, a law which banned discussion of gay sexuality in our schools unless in the context of death or disease – has also generated anger and fear that the clocks could be turned back. These fears have been confirmed by a series of bigoted outbursts by Tory politicians who have supported the “rights” of B&B owners to ban gay guests, compared the “danger” of gay sex to being in the army and declared that gays are not “normal”.

So is this as good as it gets? What can we do to defend what we have? Is it still possible to fight for the kind of change the Stonewall rioters demanded – “new forms and relations...based upon brotherhood, cooperation, human love and uninhibited sexuality”?

Socialists have something important to say in response to these questions.

For too long official LGBT politics has been confined to talking about equality and organising to achieve legal reforms. This work is important. No one wants to go back to the 1960s, when sex between men was a crime, or the 1980s, when AIDS was dubbed a “gay plague” by politicians and the media, fuelling a massive increase in the persecution of LGBT people. But the persistence of oppression in all walks of life shows that despite our achievements in changing the law, it is no guarantee against discrimination.

We have seen also the commercialisation of the gay scene

and our sexual identity to the point that London Pride – once a militant demonstration in commemoration of the Stonewall riots – has become a corporate-sponsored event far removed from any challenge to the ongoing injustices we face. In 2007 it was led by the police and the Royal Navy – sections of the establishment that are implicated in the oppression of LGBT and other people here and around the world.

And herein lies the problem. LGBT oppression persists precisely because despite the gains we have made, it is rooted in the wider organisation of capitalist society. In a system driven by exploitation and competition those in power must subject every aspect of our lives – even our personal relationships – to the priorities of profit-making. This has shaped the institution of the family, which plays a vital role in regulating such relationships and is a key mechanism for reproducing both the class that rules and a workforce on the cheap. Politicians, big business and the media eulogise about family values while heaping huge burdens on ordinary people to carry out everything from childcare to looking after the sick and the elderly in the home, for free. Meanwhile LGBT people are seen as a problem because we undermine and disrupt the relationships and roles that the traditional family rests on. To allow us to express our sexuality or gender identity freely would be to question the whole basis of the family and begin to undermine some of the prejudices and divisions that are used to keep the system going.

That is why, if we are going to achieve a genuine and lasting liberation, we need to be part of a wider struggle to change the world.

The experience of LGBT struggles bears this out. The gay liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s was able to win so much because it was part of a larger revolt against the system. In country after country the oppressed and exploited rose up to challenge the ruling class; mass strikes shut down whole economies, governments were brought to their knees,

and another world seemed possible. In the end that world was not born, but the scale of resistance forced those in power to concede reforms, and lasting gains for LGBT people and other oppressed groups were won.

This link between LGBT struggle and wider social revolt runs through the history of our fight for sexual liberation like the red in the rainbow. Socialists and the working class movement have been central to that history.

So when governments were first introducing laws to criminalise gay men in the late 19th century it was individuals and movements connected to working class and socialist organisations that fought back. In England the gay rights pioneer Edward Carpenter spent his life agitating inside the working class movement for a socialist society which would see “love’s coming of age” at a time when a huge moral panic was being mobilised against men of the “Oscar Wilde sort”. In Germany the largest working class party in the world, the German Social Democratic Party, played a central role in the campaign against anti-gay laws, and was the only party to oppose them in the German parliament. A revolution in Russia saw a new workers’ democracy abolish anti-gay laws and introduce a raft of reforms aimed at liberating people’s lives and sexual relationships from the old ways. The age of consent was abolished, divorce on demand was introduced, abortion legalised and “the absolute non-involvement of state and society in sexual relations” declared.

One reason why this radical history is largely hidden is because many of those early movements were defeated. In Russia the hopes of building a new society that would achieve liberation for all were defeated by the rise of Stalin. In Germany the vibrant gay movement and subculture was brutally crushed by the rise of Hitler and the Nazis. Millions were murdered: gays, Jews, trade unionists, socialists, and along with them the memory of workers’ resistance and revolution as the “festival of the oppressed”.



But it is a tradition that has continued to prove central in resisting attacks against LGBT people and winning the gains we enjoy today. When Thatcher and the Tories attempted to roll back LGBT rights in the 1980s, widespread support in the trade union movement – from the miners who led Gay Pride in 1985 to the teachers who marched against Section 28 – was crucial to stopping them. In the following decade a mass movement in South Africa overthrew the racist apartheid regime and it became the first country to enshrine LGBT rights in its constitution.

It is time to renew this radical struggle for a sexual liberation where we are free to express who we are, and love who we want, without fear, legal persecution or commercial exploitation. It is time to rediscover the red in the rainbow.

The fight for sexual liberation has always involved a struggle by the oppressed to develop a language that asserts our sexuality or gender identity with pride against a society which not only discriminates against us, but denigrates us with abusive words. During the 1960s, for example, the slogans “Gay is good” and “Gay and proud” were an important element in a wider struggle against a society which attacked us for being “queers” and “perverts”. Because this book is a history of such struggles, the terms used will change at different points – from homosexual, to gay and lesbian, to LGBT – to reflect the language most commonly used at the particular historical period being discussed, by those doing the oppressing, and those fighting back. When it comes to looking at current day society and struggle I will use LGBT to refer collectively to all those oppressed because of their gender identity or sexuality as the most common political term used by those involved in resisting oppression since the early 1990s. Some people claim this term still leaves out groups of people who are oppressed and prefer to opt for the terms Queer or LGBTQ. While I share the desire to build a struggle which can bring together the widest possible numbers of people in a common cause against sexual and gender oppression, I also think the word Queer can be a barrier to such a project since for the vast majority of people it remains a cruel term of abuse. I hope, however, we can continue to debate these questions in the movement as we unite to fight for a future world that embraces everyone regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. For more discussion of language and Queer politics see pages 129-135.

# 1: A history of the “beautiful love”

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One of the biggest questions confronting anyone involved in the struggle to win a world where we can all be free, regardless of our sexuality or gender identity, is where does LGBT oppression come from? Why is it that people are persecuted and discriminated against because of who they desire or love, or because of how they choose to define their gender? Where do these categories of gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual and trans come from? And why do we have to use them to label our most intimate desires and emotions as if they are facts to be categorised not things to be felt, explored and expressed freely?

Of course it is important that in a world where sexual oppression exists growing numbers of people are choosing to come out and assert they are L, G, B or T with pride. This is a small act of resistance that can be a step towards challenging prejudices, standing up to discrimination and demanding we are treated with respect. But it doesn't end the oppression we will face, perhaps for the rest of our lives, and this is why many people will choose to stay in the closet fearing a range of consequences from family rejection to physical attack. So how has it come to this?

The bigots' answer is simple – LGBT people are trying to go against the natural order of things. Heterosexuality is normal, the argument goes, because it can lead to the reproduction of children; homosexuality is not. But most straight people depend on some form of contraception to have pleasurable sex lives, and human sexuality is far too varied and complex to be divided into two boxes.

It is suggested that in Britain around 6 percent<sup>1</sup> of the population define themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, yet

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numerous polls show that up to twice that proportion have experienced either desire for, or sexual intimacy with, someone of the same sex.<sup>2</sup> A similar poll in New Zealand found that 20 percent of people reported having experienced some “homosexual” feelings but only 2 to 3 percent defined themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.<sup>3</sup> The prevalence of same-sex activity and desires among the population at large, including those who define themselves as heterosexual, has been confirmed by numerous studies since the famous “Kinsey Reports” of 1948 and 1953 – the first major research into sexuality carried out by Alfred Kinsey, the founder of the American Institute for Sexual Studies. These showed that 50 percent of men and 28 percent of women who took part in the research had experienced sexual desire for members of their own sex, and 37 percent of men and 13 percent of women had experienced gay or lesbian sex.<sup>4</sup> Kinsey concluded that “such activity would appear in the histories of a much larger proportion of the population if there were no social restraints”<sup>5</sup> and that:

Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeonholes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour, the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex.<sup>6</sup>

Kinsey’s research dealt with sexual behaviour. But we must also consider people’s desires, how they think of themselves and how others think of them. The connections between these different aspects of people’s lives can be complex, and are shaped by the wider social context in which people live. As Colin Wilson argues:

Being gay or straight is not just about having sex with men or women or both, but about the whole circumstances of one’s

life. For example, many men who go “cottaging” – looking for sex in public toilets – are married. Are such men gay? What if such a man lives with his wife and children? What if everyone thinks of him as straight? What if he thinks of himself as straight? What about a woman who leaves her husband to live with another woman? Has she really been a lesbian all along, even if she has never been attracted to women before? The idea that people divide up simply between gay and straight is far too simplistic.<sup>7</sup>

This is not to say that no one is exclusively heterosexual or gay or lesbian or that everybody is bisexual. (Kinsey, for example, proposed a scale ranging from 0 to 6 to describe people’s sexual behaviour and histories, where 0 is exclusively heterosexual and 6 exclusively homosexual.) But it does mean that the simple categories of gay and straight do not accurately describe the complexity of many people’s lives, and that the oppression and persecution of LGBT people acts to constrain the freedom all people have to express their sexuality.

We cannot know what human sexuality might look like in a society that doesn’t seek to cage our relationships in a narrow set of prejudices, conventions and taboos. But we can look at what has come before.

Same-sex love, desire and relationships, as well as gender variance, are as old as humanity itself. They have occurred throughout human history, across large parts of the world, within a wide range of different societies and cultures. But the labels and ideas we attach to them today are little over 100 years old. The term “homosexual” was first coined in 1869 and those of lesbian, bisexual, trans and heterosexual followed later. Prior to this people enjoyed same-sex relations and close emotional relationships without ever thinking of themselves as a separate category of person and without being named as such.

There is also no evidence that the systematic oppression of LGBT people existed until very recently. Certain forms of sexual activity have been restricted and punished in some societies, but it was the acts which were criminalised, not a category of people. This is not to take away from the pain and sometimes horror inflicted on people “caught in the act”, but the punishment of a wide range of sexual acts is of quite a different order to the uniform and systematic persecution of what society has come to distinguish as a type of person, be it gay, lesbian or bisexual.

So across the huge span of different human societies we can find many examples of same-sex relations being accepted and integrated into everyday life and in some cases revered and celebrated. In the earliest human societies, for example, cross-gender transfer was common among the indigenous people of the Americas. A man or woman who showed a preference for the activities of the opposite sex could be initiated into that gender. They would then carry out economic and social duties according to their acquired gender, including sexual relations and marriage with members of the same sex. European colonialists observed in North America “a man who was married to another...[man who was] clothed and attired like a woman, and perform[ing] the office of a woman”,<sup>8</sup> and noted that such people were highly valued in their communities. Referred to today as “two spirit” people, similar practices existed among the pre-colonial civilisations of Latin America – the Aztecs, Mayans, Quechuas, Moches, Zapotecas and Tupinamba. They have also been found across a wide range of African societies including the Iteso people in Kenya and Uganda, the Konso of Ethiopia and the Ashanti of West Africa.<sup>9</sup>

There is a wealth of literature and cultural artefacts from ancient Greece and Rome that are testament to a celebration of love between members of the male sex. The philosopher Plato refers to male love in his philosophical text *Symposium*

as “the beautiful love” and “heavenly love” as opposed to “common love” between men and women. An anonymous poet in ancient Rome observed, “One person likes one, another likes the other, I like both”.<sup>10</sup>

Similar sentiments are to be found in Islamic art, literature, folk tales and poetry, reflecting a situation in which same-sex desire was a common part of life across large areas of the Middle East and North Africa before colonisation. There are numerous references to it in *One Thousand and One Nights*, a tapestry of stories drawn from the region between the 8th and 15th centuries. When Europeans encountered these practices in the countries they occupied in the 19th century they were quick to condemn them in word and law. At the same time many individual Europeans were only too happy to escape the more repressive environments of their own countries. As the French novelist Gustave Flaubert put it while travelling in Egypt, “Here it’s quite well accepted. One admits one’s sodomy and talks about it at the dinner table.”

This historical and cultural evidence of variation in sexual practices, relationships and attitudes is important because it shows that LGBT oppression is not an inevitable, timeless feature of human society.

It also goes some way towards challenging the common-sense notions about where this oppression comes from. The claim that LGBT oppression is a result of human nature or natural prejudice, for example, cannot explain the fact that a wide range of human societies have embraced same-sex relationships or gender variance in the past. The suggestion that religion is the cause is similarly undermined by the widespread acceptance of love between men in the work of respected Islamic scholars, poets and writers spanning centuries in the Middle East.<sup>11</sup> There is also evidence of a more complex set of attitudes towards male and female relationships in Christianity than one might expect. There is, for

example, the survival of religious tombs dating from the Middle Ages in which two men, and sometimes two women, are buried together as if man and wife. Documentation from the same period also refers to ceremonies which formally recognised intimate emotional relationships between men in the same period.<sup>12</sup>

Neither can the view that human sexuality is reducible to a set of given biological facts, determined by “gay brains” or “gay genes”, explain the widespread existence of different kinds of relationships, both same-sex and between opposite sexes.

This does not mean that people in such societies enjoyed complete sexual freedom. Often there were strict rules and regulations about what was permissible and certain sexual acts were heavily persecuted.

Greece and Rome were built on slavery and were extremely oppressive towards women, which is why we know very little about erotic relationships between women in those societies. In the ancient Greek city of Athens male sex with teenage boys was acceptable, but only if it did not challenge the gender roles and hierarchies on which that society was based. There had to be a suitable age gap between the “active” man and “passive” boy, for example, with any reversal of such roles being considered obscene. In Imperial Rome it was acceptable to rape slaves, because they were considered the property of “freemen”, yet it was not permissible for the freeman to willingly consent to a slave. As one lawyer put it, “Sexual service is an offence for the freeborn, a necessity for the slave and a duty for the freedman”.<sup>13</sup>

How then do we make sense of the wide range of sexual practices and attitudes towards sexuality? What shapes, and who makes, the seemingly arbitrary rules about what is or is not acceptable? And why at a certain point in history did that lead to a new set of categories for people with a particular sexual orientation, followed by the systematic oppression



of LGBT people?

For Marxists the key to understanding how people's attitudes to sexuality, gender and sex are formed, and how they decide what is "normal" in a given society, lies in our understanding of the family as an institution rooted in class societies – both capitalist and earlier forms.

Today those who attack gay sexuality often do so on the basis that our choices and relationships threaten the "traditional family", ie men and women getting together, settling down and having children. Of course a lot of people, not just LGBT people, choose not to live in this way while some lesbians and gays choose to form families of their own. But the "traditional family" remains a very powerful institution that structures our lives and the ideology of our society. It is continually promoted and reinforced through laws, by politicians, in the media and across a range of institutions in a way that systematically undermines and marginalises LGBT people. A recent pilot of a school book, *And Tango Makes Three*, about two male penguins who fall in love, hatch a baby penguin from an egg and raise the chick as their own, was met with outrage by some people precisely because it would suggest to young children that same-sex couples could be compared to traditional family relationships.

The family has played an important role in shaping and enforcing sexual conformity and gender roles across a range of societies. In order to understand how and why this happens it is necessary to look at its roots in the development of class society and the role it has played in maintaining class power.

### *Engels – revolutionising the way we see the world*

One of the most important books on this subject is Frederick Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. It was written in 1880s Victorian Britain – the same decade that new laws were introduced

which criminalised homosexual men for the first time. These laws were part of a wider drive by the British capitalist class to consolidate its power at home and extend it to other parts of the world. At home authority was shored up by strengthening the family and promoting an ideology that naturalised women's place in the home and attacked any sexual variation outside the family. The colonisation of other countries was supported through racism. Gender, race and sexuality, even the poor, became categories ordered into hierarchies to justify oppression and exploitation as the natural order of things.

Engels completely challenged this view of the world. He drew on anthropological studies of societies from America to the Mediterranean to show that the systematic oppression of women, the existence of the nuclear family and even nation-states were relatively recent developments. He not only attacked the sacred institutions of Victorian society, he called for a revolution to overthrow them – a “festival of the oppressed” which would end the rule of one class over another, and liberate women and sexuality.

Engels's work remains highly valuable in providing us with a framework for locating the roots of sexual oppression in the wider organisation of society. As Engels put it:

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life...on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for production; on the other side the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite epoch and definite country live are conditioned by both types of production.<sup>14</sup>

The core argument laid out in *The Origin of the Family*,

*Private Property and the State* has been supported by many other studies since. There are, however, details in his account that reflect the weaknesses of some of his sources at the time and contain some speculation which cannot be proved either way.

Our knowledge about previous societies will always be partial and its interpretation shaped by modern prejudices. Some of our major sources of information about the earliest human societies, for example, come from colonialists and missionaries whose accounts are clearly distorted by their own assumptions and narrow-mindedness. The existence of women's oppression means that we have much less information about same-sex relationships between women than we do about men, and in both cases it is the sexual lives of the wealthy classes that we know the most about.

Nevertheless, there is plenty of evidence to show that human beings have lived in a large variety of ways, and that class society has existed for only a tiny proportion, perhaps 7-8,000 of the 100,000 years or so that biologically modern humans have inhabited the planet. We also know that the corollary of more equal economic relationships that existed before class divisions arose was much freer relationships between men and women with fewer restrictions on sexuality.

In hunter-gatherer societies, for example, where the "two spirits" were known, people lived a nomadic existence, moving around at regular intervals in search of new sources of food. People were dependent on each other – they feasted or starved together – and the values of sharing, solidarity, equality and generosity flowed from this.

The lack of any surplus food or wealth meant that there was no material basis for a ruling class or authority. Missionaries writing in the 1600s about the Montagnais-Naskapi of Canada, who they were attempting to "civilise", complained:

Alas if someone could stop the wanderings of the savages and give authority to one of them, we could see them converted and civilised in a short time...they have neither political organisation, nor office, nor dignities...as they are contented with a mere living, not one of them gives himself to the Devil to acquire wealth.<sup>15</sup>

There was a sexual division of labour in which, by and large, the women did the gathering and the men did the hunting. This was mainly because it was not easy to combine pregnancy and breastfeeding young children with activities such as hunting. But there was no hierarchy or value judgement attached to these roles. Hunting could bring the most highly prized food, but gathering was the most reliable and regular source of food. So among the Montagnais, the women were said to "have great power" and "in nearly every instance...the choice of undertakings of journeys and winterings" lay in their hands.

Women's role in reproduction did not stop them from playing a full role in the tribe, nor was childcare seen as the main responsibility of women. A missionary preaching about the sexual independence of Montagnais women, for example, records the riposte he received from one of the tribesmen:

I told him that it was not honourable for a woman to love anyone else except her husband and that this evil, being among them, he himself was not sure that his son, who was there present, was his son... The man replied thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children, but we love all the children of our tribe.<sup>16</sup>

So children were seen as a collective responsibility, rather than the personal responsibilities or even properties of particular women or families. Because people were linked

together through relationships of mutual interdependence it made no sense for people to divide up into separate nuclear families with individualised duties. As a consequence, men and women also enjoyed a high level of sexual autonomy in which sexual relationships were not tied into immediate family responsibilities or moral obligations. It was reported:

The young people among the Montagnais do not think they can persevere in the state of matrimony with a bad wife or a bad husband... They wish to be free and to be able to divorce the consort if they do not love each other. The inconstancy of marriages and the frequency with which they divorce each other, are a great obstacle to the Faith of Jesus Christ. We do not dare baptise the young people because experience teaches us that the custom of abandoning a disagreeable wife or husband has a strong hold on them.<sup>17</sup>

The absence of any systematic classification of people on the basis of their gender, or restrictive moral codes regarding sexual relationships, perhaps explains the acceptance of two-spirit people within some hunter-gatherer societies. If the economic contribution of men and women is equally valued, and there exist no fixed ideas about the sexual or social behaviour or characteristics attributed to the gender of a person, then crossing between genders presents no problems.

Yet the colonisers who came across them treated them with horror. The two-spirit people among the Karankawa Indians in Texas were described by the Spanish colonisers in the 1500s as “the most brutish and beastly custom to wit”.<sup>18</sup> When they were talked about in the colonising countries, they were referred to as “berdaches” – implying male prostitute, catamite or sodomite.

How did we get from the relative sexual freedom of the hunter-gatherers to the strict moral code and repressive attitude of the colonisers?

A crucial shift took place around 10,000 years ago with the beginning of agricultural societies, when some groups began combining hunting and gathering with the cultivation of crops and keeping animal stock. One consequence of this was the production of a surplus that could be stored and kept for hard times.

Producing a surplus gave rise to a layer of people whose primary role was to protect and administer it. A division formed between those who were directly producing and those with control over the surplus. This crystallised into a class structure in which those controlling the surplus developed methods for maintaining that structure. These were to include, crucially, the bodies of armed men which form the basis of the state and a reshaping of other institutions such as the family.

This was not some smooth, uniform process, but took place in different ways over thousands of years. The exact route through which societies developed from hunter gathering to civilisation also varied significantly. The earliest civilisations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Iran, the Indus Valley and China arose through a process of internal development but most were forced to change by military conquest, colonisation and trade including northern Europe. Nevertheless the general trends by which class divisions develop are shared across those societies.<sup>19</sup>

The rise of an exploiting class, and women's oppression, was not caused by human greed or male chauvinism but rooted in a situation of real scarcity. The developing division between those producing the resources and those controlling them was initially a way to help protect, allocate and propel

forward the overall resources in society. But it gave a small minority privileged access to those resources, undermining the egalitarian ways of living that had gone before. From this developed new structures of power and a distinct class that could exploit and divert wealth away from the majority in society.

The changes in production had a profound impact on the role of women in society. A bigger population was required to provide workers in the fields. Women who were frequently pregnant or breastfeeding could not so easily participate in the heavy labour required by new production techniques, such as the plough and the construction of irrigation systems. Gradually women's once central role in production and public life was reduced to the demands of reproduction. Men became increasingly central to the activity which produced a surplus.

This undermined the interdependent relationship between men and women that had formed the basis of equality between the sexes. As class divisions developed, men's economic role in production gave them a privileged position in the household. Societies where the children were cared for collectively had to be changed as this threatened multiple claims on the wealth of the new ruling class. They required instead a privatised family based on the strict monogamy of the woman, who was to produce children whose paternity, and therefore rights to inherit wealth, could be guaranteed. But doing this also meant that the woman, and her sexuality, had to be strictly controlled, both physically and ideologically:

Among the remains of prehistoric societies...female statuettes abound suggesting the worship of goddesses, while phallic statues are lacking. Once class societies develop the stress is increasingly on the role of gods, with the great religions which dominated from the 5th century BC onwards

across the most of Eurasia characterised by the omnipotence of a single male god. The ideology of both rulers and ruled became one of male dominance, even if female figures were sometimes allowed a subordinate role.<sup>20</sup>

Engels argued:

The overthrow of the mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children... In order to make certain the wife's fidelity and therefore the paternity of his children, she was delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights.<sup>21</sup>

So while wealth and wellbeing was increasing in society, this was at the cost of the majority of people losing control over what they produced. In this sense it was also a defeat for the majority of men.

Different class societies were to define the family and what was sexually permissible according to the demands of property relations. This process was barely concealed under the ancient Roman Empire where the family was an essential fortress for the protection of ruling class wealth. Engels pointed out:

The original meaning of the word family (*familia*) is not the compound of sentimentality and domestic strife which forms the ideal of the present-day philistine; among the Romans it did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children but only to their slaves. *Famulus* means domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man. As late as the time of Gaius, the [inheritance] was bequeathed by will. The term was invented by the Romans to



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