

Document 6

*Irish Women's Liberation Movement, *Irishwomen: Chains or Change*, Dublin, 1971 (N.A.I. D/T 2002/8/60).

Even as the traditional branches of the women's movement were gaining unprecedented official recognition, a more radical group of women was mobilising and recruiting in tandem. The *Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) began in 1970 with a meeting in Bewley's café on Westmoreland Street, Dublin. Inspired by the autonomous direct action used by radicals in the American's women's movement, the methods of protest adopted by the IWLM were highly controversial and attractive to the media. In 1971 the IWLM's manifesto *Chains or Change* was published. The pamphlet outlined only five demands: equal pay, equality before the law, equal education, contraception and justice for deserted wives, unmarried mothers and widows. It suggested that the condition of single women was far better than those who were married. It also drew attention to the advantages of 'living in sin'. The detailed spelling out of the extent of discrimination in the pamphlet was deeply shocking to many Irish women who had hitherto remained aloof from the liberation movement.

Equal Rights for Irish Women!

- Do you think its just that for every 26p (5s 3d) that a woman earns, her male counterpart gets 47p (9s 6d)?
- Do you think its just that The Civil Service and all State Bodies, including Radio Telefis Eireann, sack women upon marriage?
- Do you think its just that The tax structure actively works against women.
- Do you know that a mother is not permitted to sign a children's allowance receipt without her husband's permission?
- Do you know that a wife's official domicile is wherever her husband is, no matter where she actually is.
- Do you know that A man is not legally bound to reveal his earnings to his wife though she is bound to reveal hers to his.
- Do you know that A woman must have a male guarantor to open most credit accounts or HP arrangements.
- Do you know that A wife may not take out a passport for herself and her children without her husband's permission, though he may do so without her permission.
- Do you care that Irish women are not called upon for jury service, therefore you may not be judged by your peers.
- Do you care that a husband does not have to give his wife any allowance above and beyond what he considers as the bare necessity.
- Do you care that a deserted wife must prove to the authorities that her husband has not sent her any money before she can get welfare.

Do you care that girls do better at secondary school, but have fewer places in universities and less than one per cent of people in the higher professions are women.

Do you care that when a woman pensioner dies, her dependents may not inherit benefits, while in the same situation, a man's dependents may.

Irishwomen Are Cheap Labour!

Strike Now For Equal Pay and Civil Rights!

Five Good Reasons why it is better to live in sin

No. 1 You can keep your job. If you're in the Civil Service or semi-state body employment, working for the trade unions or the banks, you'll go without further debate. This is not to say you won't necessarily be re-hired. In some places, you will be on temporary, week-to-week basis as the company needs you. This is true in many semi-state bodies. You'll also probably be re-hired for less pay and in a lower grade than what you enjoy, if that's the word, now. If you're in the Civil Service, you and the man you decided not to marry can have two children and you'll still be able to keep your job; you will have a maternity leave of several months. We make the point not to criticise the Civil Service for its responsible treatment of unmarried mothers, only to ask you why they feel less responsible toward married women even before they have children. To marry is to accept compulsory retirement until an age when your children are old enough so that you can try to find part-time work. So that 15 years from now, you'll find yourself back in the labour force, probably not in a trade union, and therefore unable to fight dismissal, low pay, poor conditions. Many of the skills you may have required by this time will be lost by then and you'll probably have to take unskilled work or less pay.

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No. 2 If you decide not to marry, you won't have to pay more income tax on your earnings than you pay now. As a single women, you are allowed only £7.2.0 of what you earn tax free; the rest is taxed at 5/3 in the pound. A married women is allowed only £2.0.0. tax free. So if your wage is now £15.2.0 a week, you pay £2.0.0 in tax; once you've gone through an official ceremony, you'll pay £3.7.0. in tax. It is true that your husband will gain something in tax-free allowance, usually moving from £7.2.0 to £25 or thereabouts. Once your combined earnings go over £2,000 however – which they will if he's earning £26 a week – you'll pay 7/ in the pound in tax Essentially the situations is that two singly people with a combined income of £41 a week pay roughly £7.4.6 in tax. As soon as they're married they'll pay about £9.14.6.

No. 3 reason is that by staying single you'll keep whatever business identity you now have. Once you marry, you will be unable to open a charge account without your husband's signature, even if you have a job or a checking account. Most hire-purchase arrangements will be closed to you without your husband's approval.

Many motor insurance companies insist on your husband's signature, even if the car is yours. You will have difficulty transacting any business arrangement which is one reason why a good number of housewives have to resort to illegal money lenders. A married woman cannot even apply for the children's allowance, which is legally her husband's. And her husband's signature is also required in certain hospitals for gynaecological operations. If her friends or children get in trouble with the law, a married woman will be denied the right to stand bail unless her home is owned in her own name.

Just to make sure your status as a married woman is that of a total dependent the law sees to it that a wife has no statutory right to force her husband to give her any money at all, no matter how much he earns or how much he feeds.

The first three reasons for living in sin are sound practical ones. Anyone on the brink of marriage isn't likely to consider reasons four and five too closely, because she doesn't think too deeply about the possibility of the relationship going sour. Marriages have turned out badly for many people though. A woman who's only living in sin can remember reason **Number Four**: you can leave when things have finally become unbearable, merely by walking out the door. A married woman who leaves her husband is presumed to have deserted him, and has no right to his house, furniture or income.

Which brings us to **Number Five**: if you live in sin you don't submit to the insult that society offers woman who marry, the status of property. An adult and equal relationship is something two people forge together. The institution of marriage is something invented to preserve male superiority and a system of female chattels.

Analysis Questions

- Are the demands of the IWLM stated in a confrontational manner? Would you consider *Chains or Change* to be an effective political manifesto?
- How do you account for the success of *Chains or Change* in shocking public opinion into an awareness of discrimination?
- To what extent are the issues raised in *Chains or Change* similar to the concerns addressed in the memorandum from the ad hoc committee on the status of women (document 5)?
- How does the language of *Chains or Change* differ from that employed by traditional and reformist women's organisations in earlier documents?
- How would you summarise the pamphlet's stance on 'living in sin'?
- Did the Irish women's movement of the early 1970s advocate a radical overhaul of society? How interested was the movement in generating a greater awareness of individual discrimination?