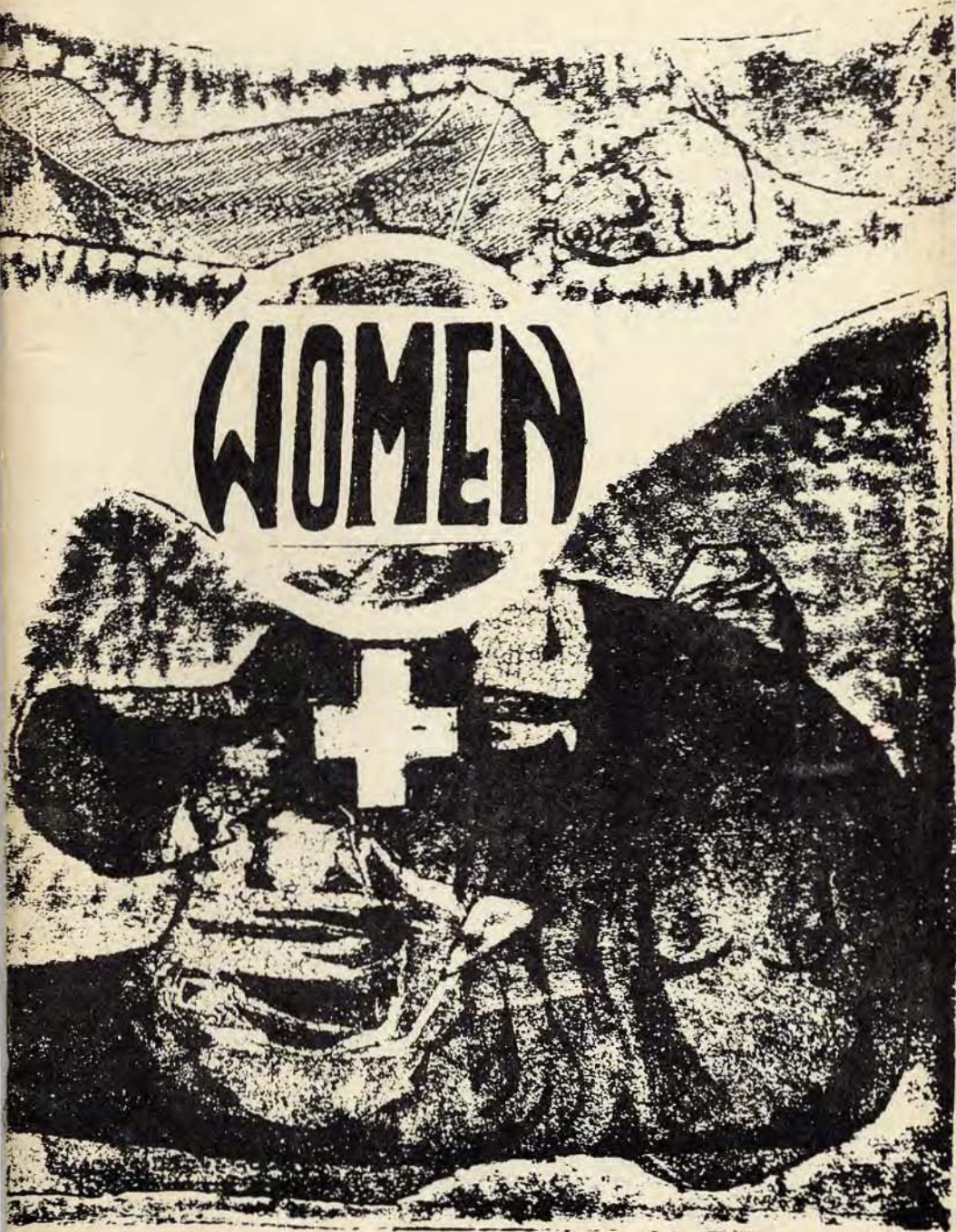


RADICAL AMERICA

75 ¢

WOMEN

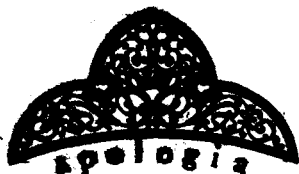


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THIS ISSUE was edited by Edith Hoshino Altbach. Special thanks go to Philip Altbach, Ann Gordon, and the Madison staff for editorial aid and layout, to Don McKelvey for typesetting, to Nancy E. Margulies for artwork (including the cover) and to the Black & Red gang for printing.





Needless to say, this issue does not presume to be the definitive statement on women's liberation. Nor does it represent one particular ideological position. Practically speaking, how could one pretend to remain ideologically pristine and still collect enough articles on women's liberation to fill up the pages? Moreover, one of the strongest points women's liberation has made is to view critically any attempt to 'lay down the line' to us, from any source. This does not mean chaos or nihilism but a willingness to do our own groundwork, remembering that no academic discipline, no intellectual framework and no organizational blueprint has produced up to now either the complete theory or the praxis where women are concerned. The hardest work lies ahead. This critical attitude is probably the strongest uniting characteristic of the women in this issue - the community organizers, mothers, graduate and undergraduate students - women whose divergent ideological positions and life styles would in any other context make organizational solidarity an unlikely thing. Errors of omission are inevitable in a catch-as-catch-can enterprise such as this; one can only hope that long before the next Radical America issue on women's liberation the articles missing here (black women in the movement, Southern women, women and political economy, etc.) will have been written and published.

-Edith Hoshino Altbach

## THE AMERICAN FAMILY : DECAY & REBIRTH

### Introduction

The following essay was written in 1956 to be part of a book on American civilization. The book was never completed and the essay remains in draft. The work was initiated by a small Marxist organization, Correspondence (now, Facing Reality). We took as one of our tasks the chronicling of the process of overthrow and rebirth of American society. We encouraged those who were oppressed by that society to speak for themselves, and we began with our own rank and file. That is why this essay is not in form or content academic.

We had already published a pamphlet by a working class woman, A Woman's Place, and there was a column of the same name in our newspaper which, looking back, dealt with beauty contests, open housing, women in the factory, the wives of miners in West Virginia, women in the French Revolution. But we were an organization. The Women's Liberation Movement has considerably deepened and broadened some of our concerns then. Our advantage was that we viewed from below, from the working class up, and the vista from that depth is more penetrating though in some ways limited. This essay was an attempt, on the basis of this previous work, to reintegrate the oppression of working class and all women in the home with the total chaos of American society and particularly those areas which reinforce this oppression: education, housing, the relation of the aged to production and to the family.

Much has changed in the last fourteen years. The most obvious change is the Women's Liberation Movement, already affecting even women (and men) who have not yet understood it. But in a recent return to the States after fifteen years, it was individual women -- the head of the Panthers in Southern California, who is pregnant, the 22-year-old draft counsellor in Chicago, who is raising two children, one of whom she adopted when she was 16, the school custodian in Los Angeles who runs the principal -- who were most striking. They are not in Women's Liberation; they are women's liberation, and it is from their impetus - and millions like them - that the movement springs. These women cannot any longer function within the framework of this society. In their personalities, their needs and aspirations, they have already cast the shadow of a new society on the old.

The political consciousness of women is, in these terms, irrelevant. What unites them is their self-consciousness, their awareness of who they are, and what are their needs, and their insistence on these needs being met. Where life was unacceptable in 1956, today, for women, it is intolerable. Socialism becomes not an ideal but a practical necessity for the continuing and inevitable expansion of the new personality. The essay is a modest groping for description of this historical process.

S.J.

The family is the whole civilization in embryo. There the social practices, aims and ideals of the civilization are not merely taught but practiced under those conditions and between individuals where human (and in all probability biological) affections are inseparably intertwined with the social disciplines of the society. It is in the family that are laid the foundations of attitudes to the world, the form and content of relations to the sexes and to one's fellow human beings. There is not, and can never be, any substitute for it. It is a fundamental form of human existence and for that very reason it changes, must change, according to fundamental changes in the forms and conditions of society itself. The Hindoo patriarchal family, a community in itself; the family of the mediaeval peasant and artisan, an economic unit, where the father ruled despotically because he was responsible for the economic life of the family; the family of the frontier where the woman handled the rifle as easily as the cradle and gained status in consequence; the middle-class family of Victorian times, built on order and authority in a social climate where prosperity was threatened by obvious dangers -- all these are examples of the family which corresponded to the

needs of a particular society and various classes in that particular society. But different as were all of these, they had this in common, that they were founded on an authority which inculcated the authoritarian character of society as a whole, and that authority found its immediate and most obvious expression in the authority of the man over the woman. It is that authority which, as we have seen in economic relations, is being challenged from one end of modern society to the other. And the American woman, brought up in the democratic and social freedoms of the United States, has challenged it as it has been challenged in no modern country. The battle she is waging, with all its victories and defeats, is a part of the general struggle for complete democracy, in the plant as well as in the home. (The above paragraph was written by C. L. R. James.)

## ¶ The American Woman & the Family\*

We intend to give, first, as close a picture as possible of the women of the American middle class, for society does not consist exclusively or mainly of workers. No fundamental change in society can take place at all unless large sections of the middle class actively support it, or at any rate are in sympathy with it. And they will do this only because they feel that it opens a way out for them to rid themselves of burdens which are crushing them as members of the middle classes. More important, an examination of the situation of these women, free of oppressive laws, with enough money to rid them of economic cares, shows very precisely the stupidity of 'the higher standard of living' philosophy and its uselessness as a means of understanding the crisis in society.

The young woman of the middle class has fought for and achieved in the United States the reputation and the actual status of great social, legal and political equality. Not only has she had the vote for years, but divorce in many states takes six weeks on the grounds of mental cruelty or any other superficial grounds. Birth control is commonly accepted and easy to obtain. Some states award not only the children, but half the property to a divorced woman. Eighteen is the legal age of consent but it is not strictly enforced and in fact is not enforceable except in case of a scandal. She is born into a milieu and tradition which ensures her personal freedom and constant and uninhibited association with men. She goes to the university, often co-educational, to study what she is interested in. She is, as soon as she reaches maturity, her own mistress, travelling where and when she wants to travel and making her own way in the world. She decides on who will be her boy friends and practices her own code of morals, which for her most often means sexual freedom.

Her wealth of experiences in social life and education lead her to believe that the future belongs to her. Aspirations of marriage and a family are for her new worlds and situations to conquer, to manage, and to control successfully. Nothing can conquer, manage or control her, for her restraints are either self-imposed or do not exist at all. All new relations are for her relations to be modernized, tailor-made, to suit herself. She, with the co-operation of some modern young man, is going to create a modern relationship based on equality of the sexes and no compromise of that principle will ever be tolerated.

\* excerpts of the original essay

In marriage, the middle class woman had to face for the first time that, although she and her husband came from the same backgrounds, had gone to the same kind of university, had worn the same blue jeans, had stayed out until the same late hours of the night; although she had had almost as many sleeping partners before marriage as he, had been as independent, yet the desire for her equality, the feeling of the necessity for her personal development which came so natural to her, was not at all natural to him. As a matter of fact, what came natural and most easy to him was for her to assume the traditional role of home, children and subordination to his needs and whims.

Until this division which creates a man of a certain type, formed for dominance in society and in personal relations, until these educational practices are abolished, women will find that all the formal and legal and abstract equality which they may win, will constantly find them up against this particular type of masculine personality which is the product of past societies and has no relation with modern social conditions.

But though it is a relic of the past, it is re-enforced by some of the most powerful forces in modern life. To take only one: the advertising industry in the United States, within comparatively recent times, has launched upon the American people and the world a conception of 'voluptuous woman' as the indispensable encouragement to buying everything from toilet bowls to cheap editions of the classics. Morning, noon and night, from every newspaper, every hoarding, there is hammered into the masculine head, juvenile, adult and child, the message that life consists of first business, and afterwards woman, woman, woman, presented in as many varieties of physical charms as the ingenuity of the artist and the layout man can devise. It is at the same time cause and effect of the diseased relationship of the sexes in modern life. Its particular and pervading viciousness is that it is in direct opposition to the struggle of women to establish in the minds of men a concept of themselves as fundamentally human beings seeking to establish social relations of equal freedom and equal responsibility and not as houris in some harem of the Arabian Nights.

It is clear that we are dealing with fundamental problems, which are not to be solved by slogans, by Congress, or under the leadership of Communist or Socialist parties. What we point out is that these are the problems which make or break a social order and that vast millions of people are involved in it to the point of desperation, in their most intimate personal lives. And in this case, the American middle class, there is no question of a low standard of living. We concentrate here on the women, but it is easy to see that the matter is as vital for the men as for the woman.

## The Unending Need to Decide

But not only men, women themselves are caught between the two different conceptions in the development of their personalities. Though the middle class woman is brought up in a society where women are relatively free, at every moment, in spite of personal and physical freedom, she herself is affected by the constant example of traditional feminine behavior, the product of past relations of society. She is still educated in the art of catching a man, and in the art of keeping him, using feminine wiles and tricks centuries old. This at the same time that her mind and direction are turned to revolt against any attempt to inhibit or curb her equality or to force her into a feminine mould. It is therefore

not only between herself and her man that there is a clash. The clash is inside herself, a reflection of the two societies into which she is born. Just as in the relations between people in the plant, two conceptions of society, in fact two societies, are at war, in the world of public affairs as well as in the individual personality.

From this flows a perpetual disruption of woman's personality creating a permanent problem which her mother, and most certainly her grandmother, never knew. The least demand that her husband makes upon her sets up within her the necessity of decision. If she subordinates herself to his demands and thereby gives up an ounce of her hard-won freedom, she is acting against her principles. If she refuses to subordinate herself to his demands and demonstrates to him and to herself that she can't be pushed around, she is splitting her personality deep inside of her, digging into and tearing against those aspects of her personality which are fundamental to her because they are not ideas, but absorbed assumptions and patterns of behavior from all the life around her.

The very presence of the need to decide, decide, decide, on every issue big or small, creates not only a social crisis but an internal personal crisis between what the whole of society has trained her for and held up before her as ideal femininity on the one hand, and on the other hand, what she as a modern individual needs and what society has posed for her as the ideal social status.

No matter what she decides, the very fact that any demand or request legitimate or not, calls for a principled decision, a decision for or against the cause of women's equality, has destroyed her chances for a fruitful and harmonious relationship. To find it necessary to weigh and measure, to feel no instinctive pleasure in doing for other members of the family, to feel no innate assurance that they are willing to help, for every issue to be a principled issue, is to say that the individual finds in the family itself the worst characteristics of the chaotic world just outside the door, its tensions, antagonisms and inhumanity. This dis-spirited, disunited, unsheltered haven lies just under the surface and accurately describes millions of American homes.

People need to live naturally and in harmony with the society of which they are members. They cannot constantly have to be making intellectual decisions between different systems, due to the transitional nature and antagonistic character of the life they live.

These antagonisms have been growing for decades. But here (as in labor relations) they have reached a climax. Society has got to find new foundations in which people can live instinctively and naturally without having a dozen times a day to work out problems of ethics, philosophy, moral and social behavior.

## △ Who Knows the Biological Nature of Woman?

Meanwhile, however, there are certain prejudices and illusions buttressed often by high scientific authority, which are deeply rooted in the society and which will finally be torn up only when the soil on which they have grown is re-ploughed and resettled. But it is enough to point them out, in relation to our philosophy of society, to see how superficial they really are.

For many generations it has been claimed that woman is biologically constructed for what we shall call, for want of a better word, femininity. Scientists state with a great show of evidence that women are, as far as their metabolism is concerned, unstable. Their whole structure is shaped for the bearing of children and their emotionalism, physical and psychological instability all point to a biological basis for their feminine role.

People who today in good faith repeat these things are swimming in deeper waters than they know. Just the same type of argument was used for centuries to maintain the privileges of aristocrats over serfs, of white men over Negroes, of imperialists over the Asiatic peoples. All those mighty scientific structures are now in ruins.

If woman is biologically fit only for femininity, then the whole trend of modern democratic rights and freedom for women is wrong, and tens upon tens of millions of women, ever-increasing, who see freedom and equality as imperative steps to their own sense of well-being have to be told that they are wrong. Hitler did that, in the course of his ruling Germany. Only a totalitarian state can dare to do this and its punishment will be swift, in the chaos that will result from the violent reversal of the movement towards freedom and the absolute impossibility of restoring the old relations. We do not know what the biological nature of woman is, and we all probably shall never know. All that we know is that under certain social conditions of the past, woman has been forced to play the role of femininity. As the industrial revolution has developed and to some degree has begun to free woman from economic dependence, the limitations due to her supposed biological weakness have grown less and less. If there is any remote possibility of finding out what her biological limitations are, it can only come when she is perfectly free to shape her own destiny as a social being, to have all the privileges and all the responsibilities of freedom in a free society. But even this is in all probability a purely abstract idea. All human beings today are social beings, their biological strengths and weaknesses subordinated to the powerful, dominating, irresistible shaping of human life by the vast industrial and social complexity of modern society. It seems to us impossible at any future time to abstract from this society some purely physical characteristics and call these 'the biological nature' of women. Of the same superficial character is the supposedly masculinity inherent in men. There is not the slightest biological reason why from the very beginning men and women do not share equally in the care of the infant and children, and this would strike a mortal blow at the educational processes which today condition men (and women) to a shape of personality totally unfitted for the modern world. We must have the vision of a free and equal society and only that will make sense of the remorseless struggle that goes on today in countless homes and the increasing spectre of a society where the old family relationships are disintegrating day by day and there are no new ones to take their place.

## ☞ Retreat Can Be But Temporary

As in all such titanic struggles, where millions of people are involved in relationships, many of which are intangible, victories and defeats go side by side, even though the general trend is forward.

The absence of this vision of the possibility of a different and new society, once the middle class woman had achieved all the formal and legal rights that



there were to achieve, have caused her, in recent years, to suffer a defeat. After the war, the American press and women's magazines opened up a powerful campaign to change the situation, the overwhelming antagonisms of which had become intolerable for men and frustrating for women. What could they offer to these women who had fought a ferocious battle but who had achieved only formal equality and little change in actual personal relations? Their only answer was back to the kitchen, back to being baby machines, back to the old fashioned ways. It was clear that the battle had reached its limits on the basis that it was being fought. Formal equality had been achieved. It had brought only frustration. But one great gain had been achieved. With all formal barriers dissolved, American women, believing, as all Americans, that everything can be fixed by proper management of a situation, were for the first time faced with the actual relation between what American society promises and what it actually gives. The barriers being removed, the question had come to the surface.

Many of these women, seeing for the first time the breadth of the crisis, have said that it does not pay to fight, and have capitulated once more, at least partially, to the domination of their husbands and their homes. A whole generation of middle class women have switched their courses in universities from the arts to the art of homemaking, from the sciences to child-care, and from the struggle for equality to the struggle to subordinate personality, desires and intellect to the will of their husbands. Their slogans are: look to your husband, and enjoy motherhood. Vain retreat. The family has not appreciably changed in any basic way as a result. But these women at least are no longer externally compelled to wage a never-ending war. But this defeat is only temporary. The new generation is fighting the battle all over again, and the failure of the parents is constantly brought home to them by the failures of the children.

## ☞ The Historical Perspective

Americans are looked upon as a materialistic people. De Tocqueville did not think so. And of Americans today it is totally untrue. The leaders and rulers of American society, incapable of offering to the people any serious social, cultural or spiritual values, help to create this false picture of American life by their perpetual harping on goods and gadgets, and the 'ever higher standard of living'. In reality, the American people, in its large majority, fall back on material goods in default of what they lack eternally and cannot find, some system of values to correspond to the energy and sense of power given to them by the magnificent territory, their special historical past, and their mastery of material things. They seek in vain. They will have to create one for themselves. More than that. It is being created. That is what we are writing about.

This gross materialism of the American ruling class is doomed to total defeat and one signal proof is this very experience of the well-to-do middle class woman. She has had a 'high standard of living'. Official society has turned all its forces upon her. The best of American technology is in her kitchen and her garage. Her life, her home, her family, her income have been held up as the official American ideal in movies, on the radio, on television, and above all, in the press and in advertisements. And yet what is the result? She has rejected it. Rich as the bribe has been, she has not been bribed into acceptance of the role cut out for her. She has fought for personal freedom and personal equality in the finest American tradition and if she has for the time being temporarily retreated, it is only because for the time being she sees no way out. Let the vulgarians who rule American society, set its tone (and paint the false pictures

that exist of us outside the United States), let them note and tremble how widely spread is the opposition in the United States to their 'higher standard of living' philosophy and how knit into the very structure of the American personality is the desire for a free and equal society.

And here we want to make the first vital connection between the position of women and labor relations.

Far removed as they are from each other, yet the masses of workers in American industry, plants and offices, and the women of the middle class have this in common, that in the two most important spheres of social life, production relations and family relations, they are embattled and unappeasable enemies of the principles and values of the existing social order. Both seek essentially the same thing, freedom and equality, the one in the co-operative character of the labor process, the other in family life. Both know they must have it, or life is not worth living. History begins to move when widely separated sections of society recognize that they have a common enemy and common aims.

Far-fetched? Everyone knows that before the Civil War there was a crisis in the production relations of slavery. (If the escape of thousands of slaves every year from production was not a crisis in the production relations of slavery, then what is a crisis?) It shook the whole nation, and among those shaken were middle class women who joined the Abolition Movement and raised the banner of legal equality for women. So close was the relation between the two that the first meeting for women's rights had Frederick Douglass, the great Negro Abolitionist, orator and statesman, as its chairman.

Today the social forces, needs and values have shifted. But all sections have moved. In production relations the crisis is in industry itself against bureaucratic domination which ruins the very purpose of industry. In family relations it is against personal domination in the family which ruins the very purpose of the family. These are the types of forces that alter the channels in which history has run for centuries. We do not say that all middle class women will rush to embrace a labor movement that has shown its determination to clean out the Augean stables of American capitalism. They will come in stages, the bolder ones at first, then more, usually younger ones, some who do not come will be sympathetic, some of those who retreat will be demoralized. The children and the youth will come in droves for Americans, even well-to-do ones, have little of that class consciousness and hostility to working people as such which so divides European peoples. Wealth as such does not mean so much to them because the confidence that wealth can easily be created is still very strong in the consciousness of the country as a whole. When the nation, in its vital forces, does move, the preachers on the text of the higher standard of living will preach to empty benches. As it is, few listen to them today.

A great deal of what we have said here is not new. As we said earlier, the alert middle class woman has not lacked acute observers who have analyzed her situation today with ability and penetration. The difference between them and us is that they can come to no conclusion and the best of them, after going a certain distance, stop short, and even sometimes destroy the validity of the conclusions they have arrived at because they will not, in fact they cannot, recognize that the only solutions to the problems which they analyze is the total reorganization of society on new foundations. For the problems created by a society which has come into existence during the last fifty years, they insist on seeking

solutions within the old foundations and the old framework, which are now utterly outmoded in every sphere, economic, social and political. And because of this, few of them seem to be aware that the same battle is being fought by millions of working class women, and from their very position in society, these have gone a long way, not in solving this great problem (nothing but a total reorganization of society will solve that), but towards showing the way in which it must and will ultimately be solved.

## ◆ The Working Class Woman

The movement of history towards a new social order is very complicated. A woman of the working class has mixed reactions. Listening to her ideas, aspirations and complaints, she may feel sympathy and identity with them, because she too is a woman and because the working class woman is also faced with her husband's disinterest in her, that is, in the daily problems that she faces. In the course of the conversation, that sympathy and identity are often expressed, but in the company of her 'own kind', she is apt to be more articulate and more accurate, and expresses what she instinctively feels are class divisions, at the same time that she holds to the original alliance with her sisters of whatever class. For, sympathetic or not, the working class woman has her own problems, her own aspirations, her own distinct methods of coping with her situation and, even more fundamental, her own instincts and attitudes. Though she is born into the same world and at the same time as her middle class counterpart, it is not merely income level which divides them. The instincts and attitudes arise from the different traditions of their backgrounds. The power of working class women in this struggle is due to the fact that they recognize, are compelled to recognize that the woman question for them, is rooted in the relations of production.

The working class woman is at the disposal of her household and her household is at the disposal of the needs of her husband's job. What her husband earns, that is what the family lives on. How many clothes she buys, or whether she has to make clothes by hand, whether the family lives in a crowded apartment or in a house with enough room for the family, all of these things are decided by the kind of job her husband has. The shift that he works determines her schedule. How hard he works determines how much peacemaking she will have to do, and how much help, if any, she can expect from him. Where her husband works determines what part of town they live in, and if there are no jobs in that town, then all the family and social ties have to be forgotten and she and her children go where he can find work.

The housewife, though she is not dominated by any direct boss or time clock, knows that she is dominated by what has to be done in relation to her husband's job. This is the type of profound knowledge of social realities which no academic education can give. She is learning that there is no solution to her problems as a woman unless there is a total change in the conditions under which her husband works. This knowledge makes her the leader of her well-to-do sister in the struggle for the emancipation of women in distinction from the struggle for legal equality which in its time was led by middle class women.

Let us get some idea of her life, the things that matter, whether she has voted Democratic or Republican. Popular magazines and able journalists do not spend much time on her.

Since being a housewife allows no creative expression outside the home, women often try to put all that they have as human beings into the management and decoration of their homes. And for most working class women, it does take all that they have to make some of the places they live in liveable, let alone attractive, on one insufficient paycheck. It is a witness to the narrow lives they lead that women spend so much time, thought and energy on their homes, for they have had in the past no other direction for their creative social instincts, except their homes and families. Today she cannot continue to be so cramped.

Yet one of the fundamental standards of the working class community is the importance of the unity of the family, not only wife and husband, but sisters and brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins. Though the family unit has broken up and physically separated, this tradition still remains. It is this standard which emerges in all that a working class woman does for her home. She is not only doing for the expression of her own personality. She is doing for 'my family'.

For the working class, and the woman as a part of it, it is foreign to make intellectual decisions on personal matters. Their lives are spent making the best of a bad situation, trying to squeeze out all the personal happiness that they can from an inhuman setup, which is constantly threatening to subordinate and drain them completely in the work that they do. In that world, people tend to do what is easiest, not tying themselves up in the knot of rigid principles, but attempting to lead spontaneous lives to the extreme that this is possible. Her aim is to pool resources where the family is concerned, each adult giving freely for the good of the whole, and children trained to do the same. The contribution of the man is the paycheck. In that world, it is not only foreign, but a destructive imposition for a woman to figure how much she is owed and how much is owed to her, to constantly measure her share in the distribution of income or equality. The problems are too urgent.

This has been so for a long time. What is new is that, with this background, women of the working class are waging a ferocious battle to break down the traditional spheres of man's work and women's. She wages bitter war for help in the house from her husband and her children. This battle is not a struggle to be arithmetically equal. It is first of all to lighten her burden, something which she never believed before she was entitled to do. It is to include the family in the home so that she does not spend her life in the kitchen and they don't spend their lives out of it. It is the struggle for the entire family to take responsibility for work and thought on where they live and the woman, mothers and wives, they live with. It is to break the isolation and boredom of housework by being able to do things with her family. It is to raise her from the level of a house servant, a personal attendant on the breadwinner, who is old and drained at forty, to the level of a full member of the family. Thus her personal rebellion takes the profoundly important form of a struggle for the creation of the family on a new basis.

The battle is at times sporadic, breaking out over incidental things like why the dishes weren't done by some member of the family, or why clothes were not put away



"I gorry, I'm tired!"

"There you go! YOU'RE tired! Here I be standin' over a hot stove all day, an' you workin' in a nice cool shop!"

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The battle is at times sporadic, breaking out over incidental things like why the dishes weren't done by some member of the family, or why clothes were not put where they belonged, instead of waiting on the woman of the house to do it. At times, it is done campaign style. A woman sets her mind to the fact that one sphere, dish-washing, a night out, big shopping, or certain parts of the meals, will be done by the husband or the kids. But no matter what the issue, the basic cause for what men call the complaint is almost always the same. It is to break the traditional division of labor between men and women which has no place in the modern world. Built on this traditional division of labor are the traditional privileges of men and the traditional subordination of women to these privileges.

This woman, in her battle to involve her family in a new kind of family life, is immediately confronted with the facts which come to her on all sides, from her husband, from the papers, and from her own experience in the working class, that her husband is being drained daily and hourly by his work in the factory. This fact is his constant weapon in refusing further responsibility for the home and in retaining the privileges that society has given him. Though she lives outside the plant her life is shaped by the angers, bitternesses, frustrations and spiritual exhaustions we have described in Section II.

A man working eight, nine, or ten hours a day has little time or energy to spend with his children, little time to know even where their clothes are kept, and little time to maintain a personal life with his wife. He hasn't the money to offer her the compensations the well-to-do can offer. So that very often, a worker militantly progressive in industrial and political life in sheer self-defense, falls back in his personal life to the most reactionary prejudices of the society he is fighting outside. Thus, here it is the woman who in her personal struggles fights a social cause.

The working class woman must not only fight the prejudices of her husband which tell him it is feminine to wash dishes or to walk the baby. Much of that prejudice in the last few years she has totally routed. In struggling for a greater

participation in the home by her husband, she is fighting the entire pattern of her life and his.

For this woman, the family is the thing above all that she instinctively wishes to preserve. The great conflict which is placed before her is that every time she demands a family which is in harmony with modern society, which is genuinely cooperative, the framework of the old family crumbles from the shock. In order to preserve the family, it must be totally changed. And in order for it to be totally changed, a woman finds herself the instrument of destruction of an institution which all her instincts and training wish to preserve, but for which she sees no immediate substitute.

This is the old society confronting the new, head-on. No one dares to openly claim that women are not entitled to play a full role in every sphere of society. To do so would sound too much like Hitler's fascist conceptions. But some claim that women are destroying the family and there is no other family in view. But only the 'higher standard of living' philosophers can fail to see that the ir-repressible determination to negate the old is an inseparable part of the creation of the new. Woman cannot single-handedly create a new family. They are, however, paving the way for it. They are attacking, proving false, destroying all habits, psychological, social and political, which are the basis of the old family. They are solely responsible for the mistrust of the family which permeates all levels of society. But they have not dug the grave for the modern family in any conscious attempt to do so. They have done so because they have found it no longer tolerable. These are the new forces, passions, ideals which grow up within an old society, and finally, in combination with other new forces and needs, shatter the old shell to pieces.

And yet the need for the family is so apparent, so deeply rooted in human feeling, that, uncertain of the future, and in the face of the barrage of propaganda attacking women for not knowing what they want, working women at times falter in the struggle. But here, too, the faltering and hesitancy is, by the very nature of the conflict, temporary. Every advance creates the basis for a new family, a new society, and a clarification of women's role in it. Neglected as they are by liberal writers, abused by reactionary ones, working women are finding out who and what they are, and where they belong in relation to the whole world. They are so enmeshed in the fundamental relations and basic movement of society that their vision is shaped by the great concrete realities. These do not flatter but they do not deceive. Nowhere, not in divorce statistics or in progressive legislation favoring women, have their lives moved forward dynamically more than with the exit of women from their home for eight or nine hours a day to enter modern industry.

## ► Women in Industry

The pull by women of the man into the home and away from a life which centers outside of it has been accompanied by the pull of women away from a life totally lived inside their homes. Women went to work during the war and they remained at work after. It has brought a great transformation in the minds, the relations and the actual status of women, and the conflict of women and modern society which takes the form of a conflict with men, has reached a new intensity, yet bringing at the same time greater confidence and wider perspectives.

It was during the war, when the government needed women in industry, that a campaign was opened in the public press and in magazines showing the natural abilities of women for industrial work. With the end of the government's need for women in industry, the campaign ended. The need now was for women to return to their homes, and a new campaign to that end began. As usual, these campaigns, pro and con, were not concerned with people but with industry. This time, however, as so often in these transitional days, they had bitten off more than they could chew.

Women before had been told that they needed the protection of their homes, that they could not manage without it. In industry they managed their own affairs and their relations with men and other women. They became familiar with an aspect of life which their husbands had always clouded in secrecy and mystery, something which women could not understand and were better off not understanding in any case. The ignorance of women of the world outside could no longer be held as a weapon against them. Now they knew what their husbands were doing and a basis for understanding was opened up between them.

The reason women went out to work during the war was that their families would be broken up for the duration. They were putting some money aside for the new post-war life and keeping themselves busy during the long wait. But they stayed in industry and in offices because they had tasted too much independence to return again to the isolation and boredom of the home. A whole new world of social life and material things which could be gotten if a woman worked was opened to them. They could buy without financial crisis not only what was necessary, but at times more important, what was not absolutely necessary. The second paycheck relieved the tension of the budget, and this tension had been just another of the women's jobs to cope with. The second paycheck made it easier to demand joint decisions in the house between husband and wife: 'we' instead of 'he'. When it was the man's paycheck, it was the man's right to give orders and he was entitled to special consideration. The economic basis of the subordination of women is now cracked wide open, and the economic foundation for total equality is laid. Once this has happened, actual equality is merely a matter of time.

Now that the woman was working, men found that they not only had to share the responsibility of the shopping and cleaning, but when they came home they had to take care of themselves. Some men couldn't take it. Women in plants will tell stories which amount to heroism of how they took on the jobs of working in and working out despite a continuous sabotage campaign on the part of their husbands to wear them down and demoralize them in order to get them back into the home for good.

For some men, it was not that they did not want their wives to have freedom. It was that they knew for each bit of freedom she gained, they would have to lose special consideration. But other men, with some prodding, began to understand that their wives were going to work and that they had to help to make it easier for them. After a few years of women working, when the country had settled down to the tendency having become a fact with big figures, men talked continuously about women working, one always taking the point of view that everything was better before women worked and others taking the point of view that housework does get tiring and boring. They knew, because since their wives

had been working, they had done quite a bit of it, they began to understand and they were sympathetic. The task is not by any means easy, even for the woman who gets the cooperation of her husband. They cut corners and managed unmanageable schedules. Those people, however, who were surprised and expressed amazement at the skill, thought, resource that women showed to this new and difficult burden, were not only underestimating women. They were underestimating the human capacity, at its height in modern people, to cope with any new situation and come triumphantly through it.

Women proved themselves in industry, and jobs are permanently open to them. Except for the very highly organized industries where men and women work side by side, women are paid much less than men. They are by and large, restricted to industries, such as television, radio and dressmaking, where they are banded together, harem-style, in industries where unions are weak.

It is only in these industries where companies have the nerve to segregate women that they also have the nerve to pay them less than men in equivalent jobs. For they would find it impossible to pay a woman doing one job as much as fifty cents less an hour than a man who is right next to her doing the same job. But, characteristic of all modern workers, the fight in these plants, big and small, is not primarily for equal pay with men. It is for control of the production, so as to ensure necessities which women feel it is their privilege to have: to go to the restroom more often, to refuse overtime work on the grounds that they have family duties, to lie down for an hour when they suffer from menstrual cramps, to work where their clothes will not be rapidly made filthy. Though many women are totally dependent on their jobs for the support of their families, yet they continually make clear to management that for them, their families, not their jobs, come first. Companies have replied by taking women from the line and putting them in supervisory jobs, not top management but just one step above the rest of the women. These women are the working class counterparts of the exceptional women of the middle class. Women have embarrassed foremen in plants to the point where they could not come out of their offices. They cannot do the same with foreladies.

But with their entry into industry and their segregation in certain industries, the problem of the modern family has been taken right into the plant.

There is no doubt that women are in industry to stay. They are part of what the statistics call the labor force. What can statistics tell of these vast social changes where new patterns of family life are being worked out? New women are constantly coming into industry and women who have not worked for some time are coming back to it, while others are dropping away for a while. Statistics cannot report that the very number of women who work gives new encouragement to those who do not. These, seeing their neighbors and friends in the swim, say to themselves: if they can do it, I can too. Statistics cannot deal with the new social status which has come of age in the US, the status of the housewife who works. She does not work all the time, and remains basically a housewife. But for a few months out of every year, or a year out of every two or three, this housewife goes to work. The very fact that she can go out to work is sometimes enough to keep her going in the periods of isolation at home. And even for the woman who has never worked, there is the threat that if relations in the home become unbearable she will join the 'labor force' and realize herself in a new social milieu.



That women can go out to work, and that for some periods in their lives so many women have worked, has created in women a new awareness of themselves, and expanded their own conceptions of their capacities. Whence arise new problems of a totally unexpected kind. Women have become boldly aggressive and personal force has been added to their instinctive knowledge of how to deal with personal relations, the job for which they have been trained for centuries. Men, however, have been trained to be masters to docile women. In the face of this new aggressiveness and confidence on the part of women, neither men nor women know how to act to each other. Masculinity has in the past been identified with domination, femininity with subordination. These categories are no longer valid. Men, particularly young men, who have been trained to exercise domination, but have had little opportunity to do so, find themselves lost in their relations with these new women. They know no other expression for their masculinity other than domination, and they can no longer dominate. They don't know who they are any more and the place of men is as much in question as the place of women.

Women, on the other hand, with this combination of old instinct and new strength, have destroyed the position of men in relation to them. But when they have done so they find around them men who are defeated and do not assert themselves as men. They go from the extreme of the complete defeat of the man they live with to the extreme of once more trying to make him feel that he is 'ruling the roost', in order to give him back some of his old self-confidence in relation to women. In fact, the cry of many women today is for some men. They say there are no real men around. They do not want men who will dominate them, but men who will have strength without domination, who will not collapse in the face of the new strength of women, but who will not try to tell them what to do.

Chaos? Only on the surface. Now that so many women are able to hold their own in every sphere of life, fundamental questions have been raised that only a normal society can answer, namely, what exactly is masculine and what is feminine. But that masculinity means domination and femininity subordination, that conception has been shattered.

There are losses. Even those women who do not work and may never work have given up women's trade, housewifery, as it was once known -- a skill which took a lifetime to learn and which came easily to women. Women still have the knack in the kitchens, but they use the bakeries, the laundries, they buy food in cans and cook the easy way. The can opener cooks will always tell you how it is cheaper to buy cakes than to make them, how it is cheaper to buy clothes than make them, and then they will add, 'It's cheaper, it's faster, but it's a shame, isn't it?' They are referring to the fact that nothing bought is as good as something home made, and they are also referring to the fact that they are sorry the housewife's motives and her pleasure of doing by hand and creating and using skills has virtually disappeared from the home. They are on the one hand regretfully given up, but on the other cast willingly aside. And until a new family is created where the incentive for these skills will once again rise, they will remain buried, with regret, but buried deeply nevertheless.

## Conclusions

These, then, are our conclusions.

The general outline of new family relations is sufficiently clear to destroy any illusion that the old society can satisfy the demands.

It cannot satisfy the new requirements because the new family cannot possibly be established except on the basis of the creation of entirely new relations in production itself. Working class women in their millions know that the man will never be fit for the profoundly serious responsibilities of modern family life until he has, in his place of work, such human relations as satisfy and develop his needs as a modern human being. All talk of preservation of the family without this prior change is absolute ignorance, or absolute nonsense.

The present society cannot satisfy the new requirements because production is organized for the sake of production and not for human needs. A primary aim of a production organized by workers themselves will be to recognize the joint responsibility of men and women for the family and the household, and to organize itself accordingly. Women today in the home are fighting a battle which is essentially a battle against the existing mode of production, and the battle will gain in intensity until that mode of production is destroyed and replaced. Now, with their experience in the plant they are ideally fitted to carry out their share of that great constructive task which so far only a very few of the great economists have ever envisaged. The 'higher standard of living' economists see society as improving (if it can improve) by means of greater increases in consumption, and for this they are prepared to drive people crazy in production. But the great masses of the people, taught by experience, are learning that a rational society begins in the process of production itself and they all share the sublime American confidence that once the relations of production are made human, and with them family relations, then the problems of consumption will be a joy and an adventure.

Such a reorganization of production will not only give the woman her rightful place in production and the man his rightful place in the home. It must inevitably draw with it an altered place for the children, both in the home and in production. If the man and woman share equally in the responsibilities and privileges of production relations, and of family relations, it will inevitably follow that the lives of the children will be shaped accordingly and there will arise for the first time the possibility of correcting one of the most dangerous abuses of modern civilization -- the indescribable confusion as to aims, purposes, and methods which masquerade under the title of 'modern education'.

We stated it earlier, abstractly, but now we are able to repeat it concretely. No schools, no state control or intervention can substitute for the education of children by their parents. There is no reason why kindergartens and even elementary school cannot be carried on cooperatively within the community by both men and women, and there is every reason for it. For the first time children will begin to get a balanced view of the sexes and an end will be put to the one-sided femininity which they must now endure for all of their early years.

This is not only for the education of the children, but for the education of the parents, particularly the father who for the first time for generations will begin to know and understand his children. Strong biological ties will not be in conflict with social relationships, but strengthened by them, and the personality of the younger generation will be molded to fit the needs of modern social relations. It is then for the first time for many years that the family will fulfill its role in society, that of the educator, the preparer of the younger generation and the perpetuator of the standards, morals, attitudes and behavior of a society, but a new society. The physical structure of social life, the building pattern of the factory, the building patterns of the home, their distance from each other, transportation, times of work and shifts, merely to list them is to see how brutal, how inhuman, and how totally destructive to the modern personality and therefore to production itself, are the present arrangements under which people are forced to constrict and mutilate themselves to fit into a mode of life which places rock-like obstacles in the realization of themselves as producers and as builders of a family life. Is it any wonder that growth of productivity is measured in pitiable units per year? Only when the lives of the producers correspond to what they want, as they want it, will the productivity of labor leap forward year by year, corresponding to the powers that a truly human life will unleash.

What we are moving towards is a community of labor in the factory, a community of labor in the home, a community established between both, and children growing up in that community. Already in many working class areas neighborhood families combine together for the proper care of the children, at work and at play. There is a beginning of community life, in the best sense of that splendid word, but only a beginning. The total reorganization of the lives of millions can come from no social worker blueprint. It is there already, all around us, being worked out every day.

There is not the slightest element of Utopianism in this. It is what millions and millions of American working women want, the result of the continuing experiences of their daily lives. The Utopianism rather lies with those who believe that somehow or other the present system can continue, or with the Socialists, Communists, and others who, recognizing that the old-fashioned family is obsolete, propose to abolish the family altogether and organize personal relations under that treacherous trap known as 'planned economy'. For regimentation chaotic, they propose to substitute regimentation planned. The muddled chaos of Russian society among the plans, the planned and the planners have taught them nothing. In reality it is this movement towards the integration of production relations and family relations on a new basis, and not any bureaucratic plan, which alone can bring into being that mastery of all social conditions which will rescue modern society from decay and lift it on to a new basis.

## •• What Can We Do?

And here it is legitimate to ask: What can those of us who are not workers do? There is one thing that all of us can do, and that is to think correctly about these problems. For serious and rewarding thinking, the first requirement is to see what the great millions are aiming at in their day to day living, to see the future already existent in the turbulent present. The second requirement is to recognize that this is coming, and can only come, from below. The third, and

this is the function of all worker ideologists and politicians who see clearly what the people are doing, is to record what is happening and rid themselves of the mental limitations which the existing society has placed upon such conceptions as production, the family, the community, to help the people by clearing away the accumulated intellectual rubbish of centuries. We shall give here one or two examples. Together they will indicate the possible outlines of the society of tomorrow.

People write reams about the 'modern' family. In truth, the typical modern family is no family at all. The implication of all those who defend the existing society is that modern people want to live this way because they are modern. Neither they nor anyone else knows any such thing.

In practically all previous societies, the family consisted of grandparents, uncles and aunts, parents and children. The expanded family unit meant, along with the subjugation of the woman, a certain freedom for her. It gave her a community. There were aunts and cousins to look after the children and help to raise them. There were two or three generations of women to help in the house, and all household functions, though more physically tiring without the use of washing machines and electric stoves, were communal affairs. Today a woman is isolated and alone in her little kitchen or kitchenette, using her vacuum cleaner or washing machine, if she can afford one, in a silence and loneliness which is only broken by the noise of the machine itself, the ringing of the telephone, salesmen at the door, or the daytime soap operas.

So that in all our perspectives for the future and our examination of the present (they are one and the same thing), we must cast aside the statistical forecasts and envisage a genuine return to the communal family, but a communal family based on new relations. In time we shall learn to look with astonishment at the impertinence of the common view that a woman having to bear and rear a child, or three or four children, lessens her opportunities in her competition for equality with men in the affairs of the outside world. What kind of work does any man do and what is the sense of this competitiveness in comparison with the bearing of children? The whole conception is a monstrous stupidity which still moves around, first because it has been around for so many generations. And, secondly, because it can serve the purpose of those reactionary elements who wish to maintain things as they are. It is not impossible that the large family not only in the sense of the actual children in the household, but a family based on numerous relations, may so enlarge the family until it is expanded to a new social, educational and productive unit, the special contribution of modern technology to the long and changing history of the family in the development of society. At one stroke, individually and collectively, such family units could rid society of the monstrous bureaucratic growths which now strangle society.

All this is mere dreaming (or dangerously subversive doctrines) to the bleaters of a 'higher standard of living'. They have no conception that it is their organization of society which has forced millions of people into the contemporary mold. The list of their crimes is long, but not yet complete. Only the freedom which is being fought for will tell us whether these burdens and limitations which modern people have borne were not in direct contradiction not merely to the social, but the very biological needs of human beings.

— SELMA JAMES

# Women's Liberation

## and the

# *Cultural Revolution*

Over the past two or three years we have witnessed the development of a significant Women's Liberation movement. It is my belief that the movement emanated from women involved in radical politics and that the changes which have taken place over the past decade in radical politics hastened the development of Women's Liberation as an organized movement. While the impact of Women's Liberation on the Left as a whole is important, it is the subject for a totally different article from this one. In the course of this article I will also try to sketch how we as radicals might relate to Women's Liberation to help it fulfill its revolutionary potential.



Historically, the Left is said to be divided into two distinctive phases: old and new. When the New Left was in its early stages of formation, those who called themselves New Leftists considered the Old Leftists too ideological, too sectarian, and too Marxist (or at least too orthodox in their Marxism). But these things do not distinguish the Old from the New Left; the fractionalizing of SDS recently showed that the New Left itself had become highly ideological, very sectarian, and in part very Marxist. But this is not to say that there is no difference between the Left of the late fifties and the late sixties. The theory prevalent throughout the Left in the late fifties was that the role of the movement was to reach as many people as possible and involve them in challenging and questioning American capitalism on all counts. For the most part we did not care if we controlled groups like the Committee to Abolish HUAC, the Student Peace Union, various civil rights organizations, etc.; what mattered was how many people we could reach within the groups and move around to our way of thinking. While we had our fantasies about seeing revolution in the near future, our smallness lead us to act as if the revolution could not occur in our lifetime no matter what we did. We might prepare for revolution, but we would not live the revolution in any sense. In retrospect, our view was rather limited. But it was this limitation of view which was responsible for our optimism. We saw growth as the key factor -- we were not really gauging our effectiveness by our ability to bring immediate changes either in the society or in the way we lived.

There are many other differences between the Old and New Left, but perhaps what has been discussed so far can serve as a basis for understanding why there was no Women's Liberation movement until recently. There were many women involved in 'old' left-wing politics. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to

say that about 30 to 40 per cent of those involved in the Left were female. Our position within the Left ten years ago was much the same as it is today. Women were active, but the roles within the movement open to them were those of typists, office managers, liaisons with women's groups, and the like. Male chauvinism was not absent, it was present in goodly proportion, just evidenced by our male comrades' openness about horizontal recruitment. The ideologues were, for the most part, male, and the leadership of our groups were male, not female. There were notable exceptions to this; some women were field organizers, some were national secretaries, some were leaders, but many more were not: there were nowhere near 30 per cent of all leadership positions filled by women. However, women did not believe that male chauvinism defined their role in the movement. Nor did women in the Left appear to feel that the society was oppressing them any more than it oppressed anyone else. Perhaps the lack of consciousness on the part of women then can explain why there was no real thought given as late as the early sixties to forming a group specifically to deal with the liberation of women. This, however, does not account for why there was no consciousness on the part of women in the movement of their oppression as women. Probably part of this explanation lies in the ideology of the Left at that time. Except in the case of a few anarchists and Catholic Workers, the Left as a whole conceived of revolution as a change in institutions. Capitalism was essentially the root-all of oppression, and if it and its institutional arrangements were changed, then oppression would end in all its manifestations.

Perhaps this attitude of not dealing with individual instances of oppression in a real way outside of total revolution can explain why the Left could not really relate to the oppressed -- in particular to the black man and the worker. After all, it is little solace to be told that there is no hope for freedom until the revolution comes. Given this kind of thought which did permeate what considered itself to be the revolutionary Left, women involved within it were not likely to form a Women's Liberation movement. It would have been totally alien for us even to dream that after the revolution had taken place women might not yet be free.

I suspect, however, that none of us in the old Left were as conscious of the system bearing down heavily upon us personally as are those involved in the Left today -- we did not necessarily see capitalism threatening our survival as human beings. Perhaps we were all too conscious of being middle class and privileged. While we felt oppressed, it seemed that other groups within the society were more threatened, more oppressed than we -- the working class, the black, the poor. Looking back, it could have been that we had a limited consciousness of oppressed -- and revolution. It would be an understatement to say that the Left today has more of an activist orientation and conceives of itself more as an instigator of revolution than did the Left of ten years ago. No one today is sitting back and waiting for the revolutionary labor movement to form itself and bring capitalism down. If lip-service is paid to this hold-over from the 'old days', the Left, white and middle-class as it still is, sees itself as providing the catalyst for the revolution.

All of this is not to say that there were no women's groups somewhere around the Left. There was the WILPF and the Women's Strike for Peace. But no one could claim that either of these, especially the Women's Strike for Peace, represented an awareness on the part of women that they were oppressed as women. Those in the Women's Strike for Peace identified as mothers and as housewives. Their demands were couched in terms of their roles as mothers and wives. Their plea for an end to nuclear testing was based on the fact that fallout polluted the milk of their children. They wanted peace so that their chil-

dren would have a chance to survive -- survive perhaps in much the same way that their mothers had.

From the early sixties on, the Left received a strong infusion of activists. This activism did not begin in the Left; rather, it began with a few people who were upset at their own oppression. The sit-ins, the freedom rides, and the anti-Vietnam demonstrations all brought to the Left people who thought that changes could be made which would ameliorate people's lives, that progress could be made in destroying the system by demanding that it modify to meet reasonable demands. And capitalism appeared to bend to meet some of the demands -- atmospheric nuclear testing was banned, federal marshals appeared to be enforcing an illusory school desegregation, even the Kennedys were contributing to SNCC. There was a general exhilaration on the Left as a whole: finally there was a role that white middle class students could play in making revolution. Some of us convinced ourselves that students could be the vanguard of the revolution and therefore that their role was central. Others did not particularly fabricate dreams like this, but were merely happy in that a role for students had been found. I suspect that a lot of this kind of feeling was behind the initiation of some of the SDS anti-poverty actions such as JOIN and the Newark project. I do not mean to knock this kind of activity. I think that this was one of the healthiest turns for the Left. For the first time since the thirties, the Left seemed to be relating to American problems and to be building a specific program for this country. While the approach was basically good, it had some unfortunate effects. Somehow people really did begin to believe that they were going to make revolution in the near future, that a war on poverty or a left-wing version of community development (like the SCEF and SCLC projects) would make demands on the system that would cause it to fall. We all fantasized this, but the fact that all this activity brought about no change caused a great deal of bitterness. People began emotionally to feel the need for revolution and emotionally to believe that it would come soon. The unbelievable brutality and senseless horror of the United States in Vietnam probably contributed more than anything to the growing awareness of the corruption of American capitalism and to the belief that anything that was remotely related to working within, near, around or with the tools of the system which created the Vietnamese war was in itself tainting. Not wishing to be 'good Germans', the only alternative was to withdraw from participation within the system. Withdrawal can take many forms. Jack Newfield, in a perceptive article which appeared in the Village Voice in 1966, thought that politics had become impossible for revolutionaries -- that is, change was impossible under Johnson and that it was corrupting to try to change the system from within. Even to express one's aversion to capitalism was futile. Thus, Newfield prophesized that instead of organizing for revolution, the Left would turn to Leary's apolitical syndrome of drugs and withdrawal. Here I think that Newfield was wrong. The Left did not withdraw in the sense that it no longer tried to make revolution; rather it began to look to creating not only alternative institutions, but alternative life-styles. If one lived the revolution, then the revolution would come. This was a very political and revolutionary step for the Left to take. After all, the revolution not only means a change in economic relationships, ultimately it means changing social relationships. The implications of the life-style revolution (cultural revolution) are that each individual within the Left is to begin to recognize, be conscious of, and deal with oppression on an individual basis. This means concentrating not only on institutional relationships, but relationships between individuals. Thus, the focus of radicals shifted from trying to communicate with middle-class Americans,

workers, liberals, and whoever else would listen, to living the revolution as individuals and as a movement. In short, the movement became more introspective in an attempt to begin to define what a revolutionary lifestyle would entail.

In this context, it is not surprising that left-wing women would begin to notice the oppression inherent in traditional relationships between men and women. Also, a movement for the liberation of women would by its very nature serve as a means for defining as well as disseminating the lifestyle revolution. That radical women would quickly become more conscious of their oppression resulted from an attempt to define revolutionary relationships between people.

One other change in the radical movement which strongly influenced the formation of Women's Liberation was the development of the militant black movement. The fact that a group exclusively made up of blacks was necessary for dealing with the oppression of blacks -- that a generalized movement for revolution and justice was not viable to fight the oppression of the black man as a black man -- led to the realization that there were different kinds of oppression which were specific to individual groupings within the society and that perhaps something could be done to relieve some of that oppression short of total revolution. Moreover, people began to believe that maybe the only chance for revolution was through dealing with specific kinds of oppression. If it was necessary for the blacks to deal with their problems separately, then it was not only legitimate, but also mandatory that women do the same.

Much discussion has taken place among radical women about their perspectives on Women's Liberation. There are many variations on the theoretical theme that Women's Liberation is intrinsically revolutionary. One position sees the genesis of all oppression within a society as the enslavement of women and thereby maintain that the only way to revolution is through the liberation of women. This might well explain the emphasis on participation in Women's Liberation to the exclusion of other revolutionary groups such as SDS. Others claim that capitalism is so based upon the exploitation of women that any attempt to redefine the role of women on an equal basis with men would of necessity bring down capitalism, thereby bringing liberation to all. From this perspective, women's liberation is perceived as the straw that will break capitalism's back and that Women's Liberation therefore is the instrument of revolution. Other leftists might well see participation in Women's Liberation as a way to radicalize women who are just becoming conscious of the type of oppression which is specific to women in this society. In other words, they see Women's Liberation as the means for bringing home to large groups of non-revolutionary women the nature of oppression not only which they undergo as women, but that all people undergo in a repressive society. Such a perspective might not necessarily view Women's Liberation per se as a part of a larger revolutionary movement, but rather as a means of building a revolutionary movement among another constituency.

The types of activities which are part of Women's Liberation might shed some light on the potential problems the movement must face. One of the major efforts of Women's Liberation in most areas has been support groups. These groups serve to raise their participants' consciousness of their own hang-ups and of the problems which confront women in day-to-day life. The women receive support in their encounters with the world at large; this extends to work situations, to family situations, to male chauvinism within the left, to all forms





liberation of a few while the rest are in chains. If we do consider ourselves liberated, then we seem to be saying that we do not find the enslavement of others oppressive. The point which I wish to make here is that we radical women in Women's Liberation do have a problem translating our changes in lifestyles into changes in institutions and in capitalism. If we fail to define liberation in all of these facets, we essentially give up our radicalism in its fullest sense -- in the sense of understanding the necessity of destroying oppressive institutions as well as oppressive attitudes which are at the root of oppressive relationships between people.

It is important for us to understand that Women's Liberation does have a potential for being revolutionary only if we as radicals begin to perceive of it in terms of building revolutionary consciousness and of making revolutionary demands. We cannot be deluded into separating the liberation of women from the liberation of others and our role in Women's Liberation is in making this clear to others. But the problems inherent in a group like Women's Liberation relate to the problems of the entire Left today and what the Left is trying to do. The concept of lifestyle revolution can become very limited if we allow ourselves to get caught up in our own sub-culture and, as a result, delude ourselves into thinking that a change in the way we live is going to drastically affect anyone but ourselves. We may well run the risk of ignoring the problems of others, more oppressed in reality than ourselves, who are caught up in the drudgery of earning a living and struggling to survive physically. We must move out, beyond our subculture to organizing and speaking to the needs of people who are not yet even conscious of what is the basis of their oppression or that anything can be done to alleviate and change their lives. In great part this involves activities and work which have little to do with cultural revolution... asking a working class woman to give up her makeup and telling her that that is what oppresses her is absurd. Her oppression is of a more basic and more institutional nature: capitalism in its broadest and ugliest sense. We must also begin to emphasize minimal - or god forbid, reformist-type - demands, if we ever want to reach others who need to be reached. What I mean here is demands which in and of themselves will not bring down the power structure, but do speak to alleviating other people's suffering. It is our task then to take these demands and expand them into revolutionary demands.

This article has not meant to question the intrinsic value of Women's Liberation as a movement; rather it has tried to explain radical women's participation within that movement. I do not wish to be misunderstood -- Women's Liberation is one of the best things that has happened in a long time. It provides a real potential for helping women cope with problems intrinsic to being a woman in a basically male-chauvinist capitalist society. However, the focus of women's liberation on introspection can serve as a means for revolution only if we go beyond developing a consciousness of individual oppression and individual ways of coping with it. It is here that I become critical of the movement and critical of the role that left-wing women have played in it. For, too much like the Left as a whole today, we have gotten so bogged down in the way that we live that we lose the possibility of becoming relevant to the ways others live, so much so that we lose all ability to communicate with them. Some of the 'more revolutionary than thou' attitudes on the Left could well be responsible for the demise of the movement -- for we get more interested in being right than relevant. We seem

to think that the way that a few thousand live is going to make a difference. Sometimes we don't seem to separate living a revolution from making it. If my criticisms of Women's Liberation are a bit harsh, it is because at this point in the history of the Left, it holds the greatest possibility of developing a revolutionary consciousness and of threatening institutions within American society which are oppressive and which affect all people who happen to be women. At the same time, Women's Liberation, more than any other group, has been building alternative institutions as well as lifestyles -- something which revolutionaries in this country have long been unable or unwilling to do.

Gail Paradise Kelly



### NOT QUITE SPRING

Baby you know I get high  
on you, come back with me  
whispering in her ear  
it was all she could do to say  
no, spring leaves budding,  
his hand on her breast  
crocus smell and  
everything unfolding  
she gasping I want, I  
would but instead hurrying  
back to the windowless room  
where she locks the heavy door.  
Lemons are rotting on her pillow,  
she studies her nipples,  
nyloned crotch in mirror  
then hugs her huge body to sleep.

✦ Lyn Lifshin

# On Women's Liberation

## i

### Psychology hides as ideology

The first national gathering of militant women's groups since Seneca Falls met during Thanksgiving 1968 at a YMCA summer camp outside Chicago. The conference began in an atmosphere of organizational chaos. The clash of political interests, groups vying for ideological influence, proselytizing for one or the other's vision of truth and the overriding suspicion of 'heavies' and 'elitists' marked it as a Movement gathering. The ideology of sisterly unity was often invoked verbally but one saw little of it in practice. As the conference continued, however, the surface resemblance to a typical conference began to show itself illusory.

What marked the significant conference workshops was not the rhetoric, but the intensity of the participants, the electric current of anger and outrage that coursed beneath the surface of the driest discussions of 'women and capitalism' or 'marriage and new life-styles'. As the conference progressed, old rhetoric gave way to originality in language and politics. The charismatic quality of the WITCH group with its wild and inspired poetic imagery of Kings and Fairies, Witches and Powers invoked a litany of oppression and rebellion. There was also the impassioned messianic prophecy of the New York women committed to 'consciousness raising', a form of organizing that calls upon women to recognize at the deepest emotional level their own contained resentment flowing from frustrated aspirations, their loneliness as the givers of understanding who are themselves not understood. Many of the consciousness-raising groups drew upon women's suppressed rage, refusing to utter the ritualistic 'we don't hate men', preferring to proclaim that they not only hated men, but that the oppressors of women should be hated.

The character of Women's Liberation as a powerful and politically original movement appeared in workshops, while the defensive, Movement-trained quality of women's liberation dominated plenary sessions. The workshops often left one elated, while the plenary sessions left one depressed. The conference ended in the atmosphere in which it had begun: suspicion, envy, arrogance bred from the sure knowledge that one's consciousness raising or one's socialist ideology was the single truth. No national organization, no journal or newsletter, no communication network, nothing of the structural framework for a movement did or

could have emerged from the Chicago conference. What many participants had learned was the nature and condition of the national radical women's movement. One left the conference with a sense of strengths and weaknesses, as well as the future promise, of rebellious American women.

The strength of the women's movement is rooted in the real oppression of women, while its future potentiality as a mass movement clearly depends upon the quality of the consciousness that women develop. Both the socialist and the consciousness-raising groups were in this sense correct. Ultimately, the strength of the movement will rest upon the depth of women's understanding of the nature and origins of their oppression and upon the honesty with which they are able to face the psychological terrors of open rebellion. It is a fearful thing for a woman to be a rebel, as much for the Movement 'wife' as for the average housewife.

Indeed, much of what passed for 'ideological struggle' at the women's conference was in fact a disguised struggle between totally rebellious 'independent' women and radical women who work primarily within women's caucuses. The tension that surrounded the unspoken fears of women concerning the consequences of open rebellion often took the form that women, and other oppressed groups, are most familiar with; turning upon each other. Much of the pathology of the conference, particularly in terms of personal animosity and suspicion, could be directly traced to the degree to which each woman was still dependent upon men for her evaluation of herself. The boldest and most fearless women were clearly those who had bolted from, or never belonged to, established leftist organizations; they were followed by those women still in such organizations, but active in women's auxiliaries. The unattached and curious women, newcomers to the movement, were the most timid and confused.

The defensiveness that characterized the workshops and plenary sessions was the expression of an overriding anxiety about being able to justify the existence of a women's movement. The Invisible Audience present at the Chicago conference were the very 'male heavies' who had done so much to bring about the existence of a radical women's female liberation movement. The radical women had a prior history engraved upon their foreheads; Ruby Doris Smith Robinson presenting *The Position of Women in SNCC (1964)* provoking Stokely Carmichael's famous reply: 'The only position for women in SNCC is prone'; Casey Hayden and Mary King rousing a storm of controversy for their articles in *Studies on the Left and Liberation*; and the December 1965 SDS conference greeting a discussion and floor demonstration on the issue of women with cat-calls, storms of ridicule and verbal abuse, 'She just needs a good screw', or (the all-time favorite) 'She's a castrating female'.

Women had learned from 1964 to 1968 that to fight for or even to sympathize with women's liberation was to pay a terrible price; what little credit a woman might have earned in one of the Left organizations was wiped out in a storm of contempt and personal abuse.

The strategy that the leftist women had adopted for the Chicago conference was to develop a 'politics' with sufficient analytical merit to force the men to recognize the legitimacy of the women's movement, a tactic which has paid off in the Movement by 1969. Socialism, Revolution, Capitalism were thick in discussion. WITCH, Consciousness Raising and Radicals met head-on in debate, amid

many hard feelings. The trouble was that none of these analyses, and this unfortunately especially applied to radical women, seriously linked theory and practice in such a way as to lead to strategies for action. For instance, the radical women had not yet begun to push for day care centers in working class organizing, although when they at last found an action, they were to become as fanatical and sectarian in rejecting all those whose minds remained unblasted by Truth as the non-Movement women.

The 'ideology' of the radical women was, by and large, an academic exercise in the art of the 'intellectual male heavy' in the Movement. The radical women were decimated by the invisible male audience. Thus, the real split among the women hinged upon the significant audience that women addressed; other women, or Movement men. The audience determined not only ideology, but the role women took in workshops and debate. Also, most crucially, the choice of audience determined the ability of one woman to understand another. Yet, irrespective of the origin of stressing political analysis above all other elements of the women's movement, or even the rather vulgar Marxist-Leninist character of early attempts, the long range effect has had tremendous importance to furthering the intellectual maturity of the women's movement.

At the conference, and in later controversies, the basic division between women is usually referred to as 'consciousness raising' vs. 'radical' or 'bourgeois' vs. 'revolutionary'. The names are very misleading for understanding the division, but highly indicative of the nature of the misunderstanding between women.



Women are trained to nuances, to listening for the subtle cues which carry the message hidden under the words. It is part of that special skill called 'intuition' or 'empathy' which all female children must learn if they are to be successful in manipulating others to get what they want and to be successful in providing 'sympathy and understanding' to their husbands and lovers. The skill is so central to communication between women and all others - women to women, women to men, women to children - that it is not surprising to note that intuition is also central to political communication among women. There are no words for communication which occurs on many complex levels, so that it is quite possible to have two complete communication processes going on at once -- the articulated and the implicit levels. At the women's conference the overt process was all in a man's vocabulary of political rhetoric and analysis, while the covert level was altogether different.

The 'wildcat' women - those who had bolted leftist movements or never belonged to them - were communicating that their chief point of honor was militance on behalf of women and their complete contempt for women incapable of dismissing the 'invisible' audience. They were also picking up the defensive vibrations of the 'intellectual' movement women, for the wildcat women knew, although they did not overtly articulate it, that the invisible male audience was always present. Their recognition of this reality led them, in the name of militance as they understood it, i.e. for independent women and women's liberation as first priority, to scorn movement women as 'unliberated', and permitted them to express their suspicion and resentment in the form of a rampant anti-intellectualism.

The Movement women, in turn, picked up the hostile and contemptuous vibrations of the wildcat women with equal clarity. More damaging, the very recklessness and originality of the wildcats terrified Movement women who were observing the very woman-ness (irrationality, expressiveness, emotionality, anti-intellectualism) that the leftists knew provoked the most brutal reactions from the Movement men they would have to live and work with in the future. The Movement women counter-attacked by rejecting 'consciousness-raising' as 'bourgeois counter-revolutionism' and even less flattering descriptions.

Thus the battle was waged in a political vocabulary, but the issues had really to do with basic orientations toward women. The wildcat groups took woman (as mystical, rebellious, expressive and mysterious, or as enraged) as their ideal, while the leftist women were using leader-intellectual (the role from which all rewards flow in the Movement) as theirs. The tragedy of this misunderstanding was that political polarization - needless polarization - was the result. The wildcat women, many of whom hate the movement bitterly because of the chauvinism they experienced in it, dismissed the leftists as unliberated spokeswomen for the submersion of the women's struggle in the 'revolutionary struggle'; while the leftist women dismissed the wildcats as hopelessly a-political and counter-revolutionary. That each might have learned from the other, that all shared real conditions of oppression, was obscured.

**A**nother battle was waged on the level of sentiments, in the suspicion of leaders. The resentment against women who seemed in charge (such as experienced by Marilyn Webb and others who had worked hard, and thanklessly, to bring the conference about) was real, a product of all of the participants' experience with established organizations. Women had suffered so much from the oppression of 'male heavies', whether from a boss on the job or a boss in the movement or the boss at home, suffered from being forced to be camp followers, ignored in decision making and treated generally with contempt for their intellectual and moral qualities. Their resentment, therefore, of any woman who even appeared to be playing a typical male leadership role, whether true or not, bordered on the pathological.

The women's movement, like the black movement before it (and most rebellious movements in their early stages of development), is torn by suspicion and rivalry: everyone wants to be a leader, or to be in a position to achieve recognition for which they are starved. But no one wants to admit it. Years of second class citizenship breeds in people an enormous hunger to be recognized. If one's hunger is to be once again frustrated, then, damn it!, no one else is going to enjoy the pleasures of recognition either. The result was that 'leaders' 'led' by virtue of doing hard, ugly work and then bent over backwards trying to appear to be 'non-leaders'. This, of course, fooled no one. The long nurtured, secret hunger for recognition has been hidden for so long it had taken on a magical, fearful meaning -- no one could talk about it. It remained, at the conference, unexpressed and sour, a slow acid eating at the women's movement, guaranteeing that it will remain segmentalized, split into tiny groups in every major city and region, unaware of its potential size and power. Thus the issue of leadership, of democratizing the structure of the movement, of fighting against the manifold corruptions of elitism is not only a major problem in political theory for women, it is the practical problem which must be solved before the movement can reach its maturity. The alternative is death through factionalism and disintegration.

## A Case Study in Useless Virulence

Hostility and misunderstanding have only grown more acute with time, and hostility and misunderstanding mean that women spend more energy fighting each other, or merely fighting male chauvinism, than they do organizing the Movement. The possibilities of the situation were made depressingly clear at the Black Panther Party's recent United Front Against Fascism conference held in Oakland. A brief account of events will serve to set the stage: the Panthers had arranged a woman's panel for the first evening's meeting, to follow upon key-note speeches by the conference leadership. Security precautions and other difficulties had necessitated the conference getting off to a late start. As a result, there was, among many of the women, a flurry of rumors that the women's panel would be cancelled at the last moment. The atmosphere among the women was one of suspicion and a sense of determination that the women should have their opportunity to participate along with the men. A spontaneous floor demonstration during the lengthy speech by Herbert Aptheker was sparked by calls from the audience to 'let the women speak', and a large number of women stood up to protest silently the cancellation of the woman's panel. The Panthers, concerned about provocateurs, police, federals, SDS-PL confrontations and all the other machinery of ruthless repression, denounced the demonstration as the action of 'pig-provocateurs', issuing threats if the disruptive demonstration were continued. It was unclear whether the Panther leadership understood that the demonstration of the women was for the women's panel, and not against either the Panthers or Herbert Aptheker. In any event, the women's panel was held. It was true that there had been discussion of the possibility of cancellation, but the women did get to participate. It is also crucially important that the majority of the women present who engaged in the floor demonstration were long-term supporters of the Panthers and were some of the best radical women in the country. It may be regrettable that long-repressed frustration was spontaneously expressed at a Panther conference, but at the same time respect must be given to those who had decided to fight oppression wherever they found it.

All might have been smoothed over, as the Panthers attempted to spread oil on the waters of female discontent and the women to make clear that they had no desire whatsoever to disrupt or in any way 'take over' the Panther conference. However, on the following day a group of women, identified with various leftist sects, came to defend the Panthers. Their idea of defense was to attack the other women as counter-revolutionary lackeys of Capitalism, objectively racist, etc. etc., and to insist that there had never been any intention of cancelling the women's panel. The women under attack became in turn enraged, for they were being accused, misrepresented, and generally subjected to absurd abuse. What on the surface was represented as a 'class' battle between the 'baddies' - all women who had taken part in the demonstration - and the 'goodies', was in fact a battle between women who were primarily committed to a struggle for women and those who were primarily committed to whatever line was dominant in their sect at the time. The confrontation, surely one of the ugliest exchanges between women to date, brought near disaster, for the non-sectarian women were so enraged that they considered denouncing male chauvinism at the conference.



An evening meeting followed the afternoon confrontation, which had been broken up by the sectarian women chanting HO HO HO CHI MINH (the irony of that I leave to the reader). Here, Berkeley women, socialist women from Seattle, anarchist women from Boston, radical women from New York and other equally seasoned and politically wise women's liberation types debated all of the issues that had been raised, and voted overwhelmingly to let the issue of male chauvinism at UFAF drop (denunciations were circulated, but they were not prepared nor endorsed by Women's Liberation).

The bungling interference of the sectarian leftist women not only provoked a far more serious threat to UFAF than had been represented by the floor demonstration, but also served to bring into being a deeper rift between leftist women, intensifying an increasing atmosphere of suspicion and distrust between those who were still members of established organizations rather than independent, radical women's liberation groups. It was tragic that the arrogance and ignorance of the sectarian women had created such hostility. The vote not to create additional problems for the Panthers, who needed support and not contention, was interpreted by some, needlessly, as a failure of nerve and a sell-out of women's liberation.

### iii

#### Bourgeois Male Supremacy is Counter-Revolutionary

The underlying issue was not in fact the Panthers. It was the confrontation between sectarian women and other radical women. The sectarian women apparently had approached the meeting with a stereotype so grotesque, and so typically male, that communication was impossible. Charges of being 'petty bourgeois', 'men-haters', 'objectively racist', and so on, contained all of the men's invective against the women's movement. The non-sectarian women reacted defensively, over-reacted in fact, to their attackers. There was little if any truth in the accusations, but the women were pushed almost to a frenzy by the fact that other women were using the men's line to attack them. Rather than being able to dismiss the attack as nonsensical (and since communication with the sectarian women was unfortunately hopeless), they felt great struggle had to be engaged before they could once again feel secure in their own Movement and their socialist or revolutionary commitments.

The root of such confrontations as occurred at UFAF remains the presence of the Invisible Audience and all the defensiveness and insecurity it generates. Equally, such confrontations grow out of the fact that increasingly for one segment of the women's movement, the significant audience remains movement men, while for another the significant audience is militant women. The consequences of this division are very serious, for potentially the lack of recognition of the real causes of such confrontations can destroy the infant movement. A brief example from a much maligned student struggle serves to make the point.

Women's Liberation as part of the student movement achieved national notoriety during the University of Chicago sit-in of January 1969. The Women's Caucus, formed in the building by Women's Radical Action Project (the SDS caucus) had from the earliest days of the battle pushed for demands based on

the university's oppression of women. Indeed, they engaged in the first direct action, by placing a hex on Morris Janowitz. Once the students had occupied the building, women presented a statement and a set of demands to the plenary within the administration building. The women's proposals were passed without debate. The women concluded, quite rightly, that this process was a 'white liberal' response, a token answer to the moral correctness of the women's insistence on recognition of their oppressed position in society, in the university and in the Movement. As the men continued to dominate as spokesmen for the sit-in, the women demanded and got an all-women's press conference. All men with the exception of photographers were barred from the press conference, to show the support women's liberation felt for the oppression of women reporters, and while the men reporters howled about civil rights and racist women, the female reporters experienced a change of consciousness. The women's press conference brought women's liberation as a radical movement to national attention.

The women believed the next step should be to initiate a women's action. The response to the suggestion that they occupy their own building, leaving the men to hold the administration building, was that such action would be divisive -- the great rallying call to suppress women's action. The negative response to the women's idea of their own action was a classic example of the radical male supremacist response. The tactical facts were that President Levi had assumed he could outwait the students; the university had all the resources, the students none. He would simply starve and wear them out of the building. And that was precisely what he did. On the other hand, President Levi was under pressure from many senior faculty (playing their usual reactionary role), who were demanding that the police be called to deal with the situation. The women believed that if they had taken their own building, the entire student struggle might have had a very different end than the purges that followed. The women's action, by starting a whole new phase of the occupation, might have prolonged the student's battle far past sixteen days, and thus made a difference that might have forced the university to negotiate with the students.

**T**he Chicago women, irrespective of their organizing for a day-care center for workers at the university for nearly a year, were alone in actively trying to organize workers, and yet were attacked for being 'bourgeois' and 'counter-revolutionary' because their demands included proportionate representation of women in the student body and in the faculty. The sectarianism of this kind of male supremacist attack, spearheaded by an Aunt Jane, was made abundantly clear when the Billings Hospital wild-cat strike followed upon the work that women had done. No strikes, or anything other than a great deal of hot air, had been produced by those who were busy attacking the women for being 'anti-working class'.

The University of Chicago sit-in is a contemporary example of the fact that male supremacy weakens the entire Movement. History is repeating itself. From the Abolitionists to the Labor movement, women have been exploited; welcomed to the barricades when needed, sent back to the kitchen when no longer required to fight the men's battles.

Token recognition continues, with a few women selected to grace the upper echelons, in finest liberal style, while the men declare their astonished admiration for the hidden talents of the women. Yet, the issue of the oppression of women remains peripheral and well-controlled.

Exploitation of women is indeed practiced by radicals, by working and middle class men, no less than by capitalist relations of production. There remains the massive exploitation of women, producing an unorganized mass base for a social movement. Such a mass base must, if it understands correctly the nature of its exploitation, be radical. In practical terms, women who organize women know how quickly radicalization occurs, when they are appealed to in terms of their own interests and with respect to actions and organizations that address the oppression of women. Working women and trapped housewives alike are too aware of their own exploitation and oppression to be exploited in turn by the student movement, or any other movement.

## iv

### A Race Against Time

Yet the radical women, even in the face of a large, well-funded liberal or left-liberal organization such as the National Organization of Women, remain tied to a male audience, defining themselves in terms of men's organizations exclusively and continuing to regard women opportunistically, as another group to further the struggle. So long as women remain tied to the men's 'line', and blind to their own exploitation by white middle class male radicals, it will not be radical women who do the organizing. The organizing will be done by politically unsophisticated, profoundly liberal women who address women's oppression directly. Unless the radical women get themselves together, in the interests of their own oppression and the oppression of all their sisters, a mass movement dominated by an ideology of 'let us in' (and not 'set us free') will develop in the next few years.

Women must face facts. Men will never, until forced by circumstances, place first, or even urgent, priority upon a struggle against the oppression of women. Witness the fact that there is not one male dominated organization, from the left-liberal New University Conference to the radical youth movement, that has been willing to place top priority upon the women's struggle. Indeed the idea is so repugnant to many men that they cannot tolerate a woman who refuses male leadership in order to address her energies primarily to the liberation of her sisters. Men must carry the burden of 'white middle class guilt'; they cannot live with the growing recognition that in their daily lives they exploit and oppress; and so, they struggle against women and against the almost intolerable process of self-recognition women are now demanding they undergo.

For example, it is not an accident that radical women have not been organizing. The energies of radical women have too long been deflected into arguing-pleading-justifying their cause, i.e. to fighting male chauvinism, male supremacy, in the movement. There has been a profoundly a-political, personalized struggle, one devoted to personal liberation. It is ironic that radical women, so wrapped up in their sex lives and Movement careers, so obsessed with personal liberation, have been unable to see the contradiction in turning to attack (as utopian, apolitical and bourgeois) women who are doing no more than the same thing, only with more boldness, originality and courage: women refusing to marry, women setting up liberated communes, women concerned with raising children collectively, women who have tried to show the possibilities of experimentation with free lives.

Male supremacy is a man's problem, and they are either with us or part of the problem -- the solution is their responsibility. What is important is building an army that will attack the brutal inhumanity and injustice of a capitalist society at every weak point of its abusive exploitation of the powerless, that will spread the idea of liberation through all the web of contradiction and oppression that destroys human beings before they are half begun in life. The arrogance, duplicity and culpability of men who will not admit the power and authenticity of a mass movement based upon the oppression of women - all women - is to be condemned, in the name of revolutionary discipline, for they weaken and abort the liberation of a people. These men are dupes and victims of their own society, containing within themselves the image of a ruling class, for they exhibit contempt for human beings, **opposition to the freedom of human beings**, an absolute refusal to stop benefiting from the exploitation of human beings. Let them come along or get out of the way. ↓

Marlene Dixon



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## Women & the Socialist Party

The basic problems facing women under capitalism have met with little qualitative change. The mechanical innovations of a century of technological progress, while lightening the burdens of household drudgery, have contributed to the reification, or 'professionalization', of woman's role as housewife. Modern capitalism staved off the disintegration of the family, a horror predicted by the first generations who grappled with the implications of the transformation of American economy after the Civil War. The family remained as a vestige of economic production of a by-gone era, but through certain technical and social remissions, the family as the basic social unit of American society lingered, perpetuated with new rationales for woman's strapping to the institution. The protest of women against the oppression inherent in such a system are transhistorical, but the contradictions become most explicit during periods of intense social crisis, such as the linkage of the women's rights movement with ante-bellum reform.\* Similarly, as the Progressive Era marked the first social confrontation with modern corporate capitalism, tensions heightened as institutions outgrew their usefulness in industrial society. Women took active roles in the various reform movements of the turn of the century, from agitation for factory safety legislation, pure food laws, Temperance, and conservation to their long-standing demand for the right to the ballot. The entry of masses of women and girls into industrial labor once more dramatized the inequalities; as they saw the possibility of their economic independence, the standards which demanded their submission seemed to have lost their justification. The most outspoken protest against the irrationality which defined their inferior position took form in the wave of Feminism, which sought to shatter the myths of the Victorian Woman. The strengths of these activities and beliefs were combined in the most radical sector of the women's struggle, a group of women who believed not only in the necessity of absolute equality but also of the ultimate abolition of capitalism.

Socialist women in the Progressive Era reacted to the tensions in much the same way as radical women today react; they demanded day-care centers, discarded bourgeois clothes fashions, kept their maiden names or joined them to their husbands' with a hyphen, and sometimes rejected marriage entirely to carry on a career in a social movement. But the historical situation which faced them implied a different set of relationships. The Socialist Party itself occupied a unique position in the reform movements of American society. It was the only party that allowed women's participation, and before 1912 it could be said to have carried within and around it the bulk of all progressive forces in the nation. Therefore, the party naturally provided the women with the organizational experience and expertise which they could utilize in all their political activities.

Within the Socialist Party the women's interests and functions varied greatly. Especially during the party's early years, prominent women were socialists foremost and interested in the Woman Question only secondarily, if at all. The famed labor agitator Mother Jones, her younger counterpart Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, popularizer of Marxian ideas May Wood Simons and several outstanding public lecturers were notable examples. Thousands of lesser-known women served in auxiliaries in every part of the country and provided organizational aid while relinquishing political decision-making and participation to their husbands. Always present but increasingly numerous were the women of a third type, militant socialists who insisted that the struggle for sexual equality was as important as their agitation for the socialist cause, indeed, was an essential part of it.

Like the women's liberation activists of today, the militant socialist women emanated from several political sources. Some, like the tremendously popular public speaker Kate Richards O'Hare, had long been active in the party's agitational work and increasingly came to see the necessity of a self-conscious women's movement. Others took their struggle for women's liberation into the socialist movement. In many cases their lives were shaped and transformed by their political activities within the party. Josephine Conger-Kaneko devoted her life's work to the publication of the only mass-circulation radical women's magazine in American history, known for most of its seven-year span as the *Progressive Woman*. Margaret Sanger, who later became the leader of the world-wide Birth Control movement, had her political beginnings in the socialist movement and press. For many prominent woman socialists, marriage became a burden which had to be cast off. The first woman elected to the party's ruling national executive committee, Lena Morrow Lewis, revealed in 1911 that due to her lecturing she had not for fifteen years spent more than a week in one town. By 1912, she was embroiled in a National Office scandal for her relationship with the (married) National Secretary, J. Mahlon Barnes. Although a prestigious touring speaker, she was savagely attacked in much of the socialist press, above all in the *Christian Socialist*. Like many of her sister-comrades, Lena Morrow Lewis had tied her personal fate to her political beliefs.

In the study that follows, two principle categories of socialist women have been brought together chronologically. First, there were the women who formed themselves into autonomous, socialist-oriented groups. The Socialist Party was forced to recognize these separate organizations because it feared they would be drained off into reformist movements and would subsequently expose the party's failure to stand as the van-

guard of all progressive social movements. The suffrage movement which supported thousands of semi-radical women was correctly deemed a particular threat to the integrity and leadership of socialists. Second, there were women within the party who were reacting to the insurgency of the spontaneous women's groups. They often played a mediating role, organizationally successful, between the autonomous women's organizations and the party structure. For a brief period, between 1908 and 1912, the aspirations of the two categories of women were complemented by their shared functions within the party's framework. But as the tensions within the socialist movement, after 1912 and during the war, grew greater, the question of primary goals was tragically sharpened. Ultimately the women parted ranks. While the diehard socialists stayed on to fight internal party battles, the majority of militant women left the Socialist Party and sought for a new organizational form which they were never to find.



## I. BEGINNINGS, 1901-1907

At the founding convention of the Socialist Party of America, eight women served as regularly-elected delegates. The one hundred seventeen men who attended the historic unity meeting of 1901 took little note of the women and extended no special privileges, while the women participated with the usual vigor of socialist agitators, reflecting past experiences in party work which set them off from other members of their sex. The female delegates were active in formulating the policies of the new organization, but their influence was and would remain that of individuals, neither representatives of women as a group nor of other women in the Socialist Party. The convention itself offered only a formal declaration demanding 'equal civil and political rights for men and women'. Yet, the future proponents of sex equality within the Party would look back to this minor motion as an initial stimulus to women's rights in the Party framework. (1)

The women, who sensed a special need for a social organization compatible with their husbands' political aspirations, organized themselves in social clubs and discussion groups on the periphery of the party. Their associations greatly resembled non-socialist women's literary societies and church groups and drew membership from among the wives of regular party members. The women, rarely dues-paying members of the Socialist Party, provided an auxiliary or supplement to regular party activities while giving formal homage - albeit abstractly - to the great struggle for Socialism among the working peoples of the world.

The most impressive display of energy in women's activities centered around the Socialist fund-raising bazaars, where the women handled entertainment, served the ice cream, and made the craft items sold for Party benefit. Occasionally the meeting of a party local would be devoted to a special 'Women's Night' with a low-level political program. The few women concerned with politics in an on-going fashion expressed themselves outside the male-dominated meetings of the local, sharing the methods of their non-socialist 'woman's rights' sisters, described by a male member as 'pink tea-party propaganda; nice little ladylike salon meetings and scented notes to legislators begging their votes'. (2) But the majority of socialist wives clung to the traditional woman's role of providing a social auxiliary and served the party as they thought themselves best able. Perhaps their most autonomous activity was taking charge of the children's education in the Socialist Sunday Schools. For



the most aggressive women not directly agitating for socialism, the days of temperance agitation were not far behind, and their concerns continued to focus on essentially ethical questions.

As the Socialist Party began to organize locals across the United States, wives usually followed the example of women in New York and San Francisco, setting themselves apart in small auxiliaries of a few comrades. By 1904, the party membership had grown in three years from scarcely four thousand to over twenty thousand. Such success in recruiting was not reflected by a proportionate increase of women members in the regular party apparatus. At the national convention of 1904, the number of women delegates had not increased, and there remained neither acknowledgement of women's special needs nor any particular stress upon reaching them and enrolling them into the party. The only self-conscious activity of women at the convention was that of the German Women's Socialist Club, which extended an invitation to the delegates to attend a reception prepared for them at the Trade Union Hall. (3)



Yet despite the party's official disregard, the growth of the socialist movement and women's rights agitation had a combined effect upon the more independent-minded socialist wives and single women. While the regular delegates met in convention, a small group held several sessions in a separate hall for the purpose of organizing a Woman's National Socialist Union. The impetus for this move came from the California women, the most forward sector of the women's socialist battle and of suffrage agitation. Among women of the 'less-informed' locals the idea of a woman's national movement remained unpopular at the time and resulted in the Union's lack of influence outside of California.

Between 1904 and 1905 the Woman's National Socialist Union movement proved only precocious, for separate women's branches of the party sprang up spontaneously across the country, in every major city and in the rural areas like Kansas and Colorado where the party was growing most rapidly. As the feminist movement and above all its suffragist component began to reach beyond the middle class to a rapidly increasing body of working class women, male socialists began to recognize the social implications of masses of women entering into social and political activities. And if the Socialist Party was to speak for the most progressive forces in the nation, it could not easily stand aside as women, conscious of their new political and economic roles, were organized into non-socialist reform movements. Most embarrassing personally, perhaps, was the continual lack of interest the party members' own wives displayed toward the party organization and function. Thus the reassessment which marked the period indicated a development of intent among Socialists toward the neglected questions of women's liberty.

In defense of this belated realization, the men repeatedly referred to the nominal plank in the 1901 constitution as evidence of their prevision and idealism in the struggle for 'perfect equality of women with men in political and social matters'. One Socialist man commented, 'All of us believe that this is one of the proudest features the Socialist Party has in its program,' but admitted afterward that 'when we come to practice, we are not always in accord with this highly respectable principle of ours.' The men searched out their own contributions to the indifference of their wives. Since the women were burdened by household cares which prevented them from thinking of the questions of the day,

the men concluded that the great responsibility was on the part of the husbands to converse with them, to encourage their wives to study at home, so that the typical plight of an intelligent woman discussing her husband's socialism should not be repeated: 'In the six years in which my husband has been a socialist,' one wife related, 'he has a good deal of the time been interested in the local and in public meetings; and he has never yet asked me to attend any of them with him!' (4)

The active women in the party complained similarly of the apathy shown by the majority of wives toward political questions. The wives were even accused of willfully discouraging their husbands' devotion to his local or committee work. The women agitators pleaded, 'If we cannot lead the columns in the battle for rights, let us be good followers. If we cannot teach our men, we can learn from them, we can cheer their efforts, we can give them God.' (5) The role assigned to party wives continued to reflect socially orthodox attitudes toward family life; the woman was at the side of her Socialist husband to offer him 'courage of his spirit' in the struggles ahead. Socialism was man's struggle and women were to be educated primarily because an uneducated woman was assumed to be a naturally conservative influence. Since woman's suffrage, moreover, was considered inevitable, the Party had a responsibility to educate at least its members wives not to follow their intuitions and vote against Socialism. Thus the emphasis, while more real than before, seemed to remain primarily negative, to prevent advanced women from being siphoned off into reform groups and ordinary wives from dragging their socialist husbands into inactivity.



But the separate socialist women's organizations on the fringes of the Party continued to grow and were greatly aided by the foundation of the Socialist Woman, in July 1907, which was both a popular magazine and a coordinator of news from the various women's branches. Serving as a sounding board for national activities, the Socialist Woman made it clear to male Socialists that women engaged in their separate branches were not only housewives in search for an education in socialism but in many cases articulate spokesmen of woman's rights who seemed to draw most heavily from a volatile Feminism. These latter women, especially, saw hope for the future in the Socialist Party but believed the nominal 'equal rights' plank was insufficient 'so long as the rights stay in the program in cold, printed words and do not... manifest themselves in real pulsating life.' (6) A woman, they declared, could never gain freedom and equality as long as she was satisfied in being in the 'dishwashing contingency', even to the Socialist Party. Holding that, even under Socialism, women could not be free until they had developed the power of freedom within themselves, the organizers stressed the significance of separate women's clubs. The women identified equally with Socialism and with sex equality, recognizing their 'special needs' and combining the appeal for immediate suffrage demands with the promise of Socialism. Still they remained indifferent to their role in the structure of the Socialist Party. As the editor of the Socialist Women, Josephine C. Kaneko, wrote:

We have said, half-heartedly, that women would come to our locals in these dreary places. But they haven't cared to come in any great extent, any more than the men would have cared to meet in the women's parlors. It has been plainly a discrimination in favor of one sex above another. But it has always seemed a matter of expediency.

As we have chosen our meeting places in favor of men, we have

also directed our speeches and our published matter to mankind. His wrongs and his needs have filled our mouths and our newspaper columns, with the exceptional moment when we have given publicity to the oppression and needs of women. This, too, has seemed a matter of expediency; we have always had male audiences and male readers, and naturally have made our principal appeal to them... But that belonged to the cruder days of our movement. (7)



## ❧ II. THE WOMAN'S NATIONAL COMMITTEE ❧

In 1907 at the International Congress of Socialists at Stuttgart, the woman contingency met separately and urged a world-wide coordination of women's activities. The demands for equal suffrage in many European countries drew from a more advanced and militant movement than in the United States, and the strength of the women's influence was shown in the International's inclusion of a special woman's rights plank in their constitution. Socialist parties throughout the world were urged to make definite provisions for women in their platforms and to work more explicitly in every way in support of the suffrage movement. Confronting the difficulty of their locals easily assimilating these principles into their programs, the American delegates realized that sincere efforts would have to be made among the majority of male members, who gave only pious expression to the abstract commitment to the emancipation of women. But the most candid Socialists admitted that until special organization of women became more than theoretical, more than a resolution in favor of equal suffrage, the men in the locals would not regard it very seriously.

In February of 1908, the Party's neglect of its women became a vital topic of discussion, noteworthy because one of the most respected male spokesmen publicly shamed the organization for its failure to appeal to the sister comrades. John Spargo, writing in the leading theoretical journal, the International Socialist Review, chided the male members for their indifference. The women, he declared, had taken matters into their own hands, had correctly chosen their own methods, and despite his personal urging to remain in the party and fight for recognition from the inside, had formed their own separate organizations. Spargo urged the Party to pay more serious attention to women's stake in the movement; to provide for full cooperation and support, he proposed the establishment within the party of a National Committee of Women devoted to specialized propaganda among their sex. (8)

During the months prior to the National Convention in May 1908, both the party and the women's organizations voiced their opinions on Spargo's proposition. Spargo apparently represented a small minority among the men, the majority of whom resented both Feminism and its implications and refused to acknowledge the women's branches as a potential strength for the socialist movement. For those women who identified themselves more with their own organizations than with the party, the creation of a Woman's Committee seemed only possible if it existed as an autonomous branch. Under favorable conditions, they thought it better to have the men and women work together in every phase of the socialist movement. But they felt the masses of women were still backward, at least as any line of social progress was concerned and especially in the mat-

ter of socialism, and that it had proved difficult to induce them in any appreciable numbers to attend the sexually mixed locals, much less to join them. These women conceived of their separate organizations as a kind of preparatory school for women to learn about themselves, their history, and the tradition of their sex. They believed that unless the men in the locals were particularly aggressive in their sympathies with the 'woman question', they would be most unresponsive to the majority of women who were seeking the first steps in a socialist education. As to the locals where the men were openly hostile to any type of woman's organization, the women felt they had no choice but to go their own way. To them, it seemed a meaningless request to work in the Socialist Party -- an ideal, perhaps, but not something actually workable under the existing circumstances. Even in such places as New York City, where women's organizations had a relatively long history and were far advanced beyond an early educational stage, the New York Women's Conference in the spring of 1908 provoked only ridicule from the majority of male comrades. (9)

Even among those few women who were active in the Socialist Party, the proposal of a special Woman's Committee did not meet a consensus. But the strongest sentiment was conveyed in terms of hard realism. Such women viewed the whole question of the party's attitude toward the woman's movement as purely academic. As one able spokeswoman wrote: 'It makes very little difference whether we approve of a separate organization of Socialist women or not. We have one -- a real, live revolutionary movement, writing its own literature, managing its own newspapers, planning its own campaign.' Since these organizations were composed largely of women who were not members of the Socialist Party, the party could have no jurisdiction if the clubs did not wish to affiliate. The women who held dual memberships in women's clubs and in the party saw the only logical solution as the creation of a special National Committee composed of women to do needed propaganda work; they opposed the party's creating a separate organization which would only conflict with the functions of those groups already in existence. Such a move would divide the ranks whereas the main goal, they held, should be the attraction of women to the goals of socialism, and only secondarily into the Socialist Party. (10)

Since Spargo's proposal had been made into a formal resolution, the National Convention of May 1908 attracted many women to Chicago. But the majority of women seemed determined to settle their own problems. Responding to a call from the Chicago women's groups, they gathered for discussion during the week prior to the convention. The first joint meeting of the Woman's Branch and the Socialist Woman's League, both Chicago organizations, was held on May 12 for the purpose of effecting a national organization of Socialist women. The women agreed that it was expedient to follow the California example of 1904 and to attempt some sort of coordination among the numerous women's clubs. The following day 85 women assembled to discuss the proposition for a national organization. The first question on the agenda dealt with the role of the Socialist Party toward women. They decided to place a demand before the men at the National Convention to adopt a resolution favoring special agitation for woman's suffrage. Unless the party officially came out in favor of women's rights, any cooperation with it would be beyond discussion. The central question of this meeting was coordinating their activities. Mrs. Wilshire of Appeal to Reason said that many women had written her requesting some plan of action. After some deliberation on how to approach the study of socialism, she aided in the organization of the National Progressive League, which had then thirty-two branches

and over 300 paid members in different parts of the country. It was, Mrs. Wilshire claimed, the only national organization of women in the United States and she urged the women of the other clubs to join with her. A few of the women were willing to join the WNPL, but the rest were divided over the choice of joining a new separate organization or allying with the regular Socialist locals. Arriving at no conclusion, the women voted to form a committee to study the matter more thoroughly and to report back to them later in the week. The substance of the committee's report favored a new federation of socialist women's clubs, recommending that each club already in existence appoint a member as correspondent to a committee set up in Chicago for that purpose. (11)



During the next week, the National Convention of the Socialist Party at last came to grips with the woman question. Even those male members who were absolutely opposed to women's organizations followed the lead of the Stuttgart Congress and endorsed the equal suffrage plank, making it clear at the same time that their decision was based on their loyalty to the International rather than on the strength of the feminists in their ranks. The women delegates, who numbered nineteen at this convention, debated the issue of the National Woman's Committee resolution. The Socialist Party majority report provided for a special committee of five, devoted to work or organization among women and supported with sufficient funds to maintain a woman organizer in the field, to be supervised by the national party. But even among these women delegates there was room for a minority report which asked that 'great care... be taken not to discriminate between men and women or take any steps which would result in a waste of energy and perhaps a separate woman's movement.' After a brief debate, the majority report was adopted by the convention and the first Woman's Committee was elected with May Wood Simons as chairman. (12)



For many socialist women this historical event went by, not unnoticed, but without practical effect. The tensions between the women's clubs and the male-dominated locals continued to reinforce their basic assumption that under then-current conditions women's interests were not and could not be identified with those of men. During the summer months of 1908, the women's branches were still searching for a central organization, a special federation to furnish information, arrange national conventions, and increase socialist propaganda among working women and housewives. They felt that women all over the country wanted to learn organization, learn socialism, and learn economics; they wanted to be part of the movement, and they didn't want 'to be bossed and put into the background by a lot of men still moved by instinctive capitalistic impulses of domination.' (13) The growing wave of suffrage agitation increased their vigor to spread the propaganda of socialism among those women who were just awakening to a new political consciousness. As the National Women's Committee became a functioning entity, the women in the various organizations were provided with pamphlets, leaflets, reading lists -- the tools they wanted for education that a funded organization could afford. The Federation of Socialist Women Clubs, which finally adopted a constitution and by-laws in September 1908, promised this service. But in effect, this Chicago-based organization, although corresponding with local women's clubs across the nation, was a paper organization. Without the Socialist Party behind it, the Federation was incapable of even raising money. On the other hand, the National Woman's Committee, although provided with only enough money from the Party treasury to staff a field organizer, was able to work through party channels to raise enough money to keep the rest of

the committee functioning. It organized benefits through the locals and tapped the wealthy members for special contributions. The New York local, for example, was fortunate to receive a gift from Louise Kneeland of \$1000, earmarked for the women's fund.

By early 1909, even those women who once feared official ties with the party were urging their sisters to join. One enthusiastic organizer wrote from Indiana, 'The woman no longer sits alone at the meetings... Now it is a matter of comment if there be no women at the Socialist propaganda meeting; and the men agitators print on their bills: 'Women Especially Invited!' From across the country, women were reporting substantial increases of women members attending the local meetings. It was estimated that in Chicago and Kansas the numbers of women in the party increased ten times within the year. 'Everywhere that special attention has been given the matter like results can be shown,' a member reported. (14)



As the women became an increasingly important sector of the Socialist Party organization, the ordinarily minor question of finances exemplified the internal tension. Traditionally the women members, assumed to be wives of Socialists, were allowed to pay one-third of the regular amount of dues. Apparently the male members, somewhat resentful of women's strong stance on equality, found the provision in the National Constitution somewhat inconsistent with the women's ideological goal. Proposing an amendment to the dues provision, the men urged the raising of women's allotment but keeping it less than the men's share. The women, in turn, reacted to this amendment as a distinction that suggested patronage, an objectionable 'half-rate for children'. The resolution adopted by the Woman's National Committee condemned 'its implied inferiority and subservience (which) smacks of that old chivalry which has ever granted to women these petty privileges and withheld from them equal responsibility with men.' (15) On the local level, however, the financial matters were not settled so ideally. An organizer from Seattle described her 'bitter experience':

After the election of the national committee on woman's work, we hastened to go before our local and put ourselves right by asking the local to make all women members of a committee of the whole to further the woman's work. At this time only a very few women belonged to the local, and a large proportion of these are women who became interested in Socialism by attending the club.

Recently we opened headquarters, which we kept open in the afternoons, had a woman in attendance to sell literature and to discuss the social question with any who might drop in, and we were planning to extend our literature work, when lo! and behold! the local woke up to the fact that the women were really handling some money, a part of their own dues, and spending it as they thought best! This would never do, of course, since in this respect even a Socialist man still has a capitalist mind, and still thinks the purse strings belong to the male sex. Consequently our 10 cents per month was cut off, and as an equivalent we were offered our room rent free! Well, the Woman's Club has taken a vacation... (16)

The Woman's National Committee defined its duties in this way: 'to make intelligent Socialists and Suffragists of women and to secure their active membership in the Socialist Party', and proceeded to use its most active organizers across the country in setting up various sub-committees within the women's locals. Accepting the general recommendations of the 1908 convention, they utilized their resources for

special propaganda and education among women, planning detailed prescriptions for efficient organization. The most popular method for attracting women proved to be agitation for suffrage, with the party's own 'Votes for Women' campaign. Although other committees were planned for the locals, such as membership, literature, children's education, and music committees, the current appeal of suffrage became such a powerful issue that many members of the party as a whole, especially male members, accused the women of favoring the sex struggle over the class struggle. But the women were out to prove the Socialist Party had risen to champion woman's cause, bringing the declaration for enfranchisement from the party platform to real life. One of the most popular features of the Committee's diverse program was one that they succeeded in making into a national, coordinated affair. Through the party presses across the country, the women announced the fourth Sunday of February as 'Woman's Day'. Socialists throughout the country held demonstrations in favor of woman suffrage on February 23, 1909, and the event was met with such enthusiasm that it continued as an annual 'Anticipation Day' for economic and political freedom for women, celebrated in the United States and Europe. (17)

Within a year of its inception, the Woman's National Committee proved itself capable of functioning as a national coordinating service, providing the women in the distant locals with literature, propaganda, and definite programs for organizing. They managed to win the support of the more prominent men in the Party, even Eugene Debs with his characteristic sentimental glorifications of woman and motherhood. Special sections of the party's press, its newspapers, international and internal bulletins, and magazines, were devoted to the Woman Question. In 1910 the National Woman's Committee was incorporated into the party constitution and made a permanent part of the bureaucracy. But despite its ability to win respect from the party, the Committee's success would ultimately be measured not by its popular appeal but by its practical results.



### III. THE WOMAN QUESTION

The Socialist women were confident that no one in the party could fail to be impressed with the rise of their organizations as a distinct form within the movement. At the 1910 convention, the Woman's Committee reported that new women's branches had been set up in 156 locals across the country and that five states had organized state-wide women's committees. Their success was symbolized by the election of the first woman, Lena Morrow Lewis, to the National Executive Board, and they 'rejoiced' that her election was due solely to her outstanding agitational ability. Thus themselves impressed, the women demanded more autonomy within the party and were given a party-funded correspondent to assist the enlarged seven-member executive staff of the National Woman's Committee. For the first time, the women gained floor space in the national office in Chicago, and a special Women's Department was created for their clerical necessities. The women delegates to the National Convention also displayed more interest in the debates on the floor: they were elected to serve on most of the important committees and expressed themselves unhesitatingly on questions ranging from the new farm platform to immigration.



Lena Morrow Lewis



The 1910 Convention seemed a turning point for the socialist women, and offered them a precedent for future labors within the party. In the immediate period following, they showed a willingness to forget their former attacks upon the men's failure to live up to the old sex-equality platform; sometimes they even congratulated their male comrades for casting aside traditional prejudices against 'feminine politics'. (19) One socialist woman wrote: 'Let us hope that this example of a peaceful intelligent mingling of the sexes will serve as a guide for the future' of society. And they compared their work with the futile attempts of women in other political parties. They praised by contrast the Socialist Party and urged women to take advantage of its program of full economic, social, and political freedom. Thus by 1910, the women had resolved the initial problems of organization. But the development of a positive program, based no longer singly on the prejudices against the 'inferior sex' but rather defined by their unique position as Socialist women in practical, organizational terms, remained to be accomplished.

The previous emphasis on suffrage agitation was challenged by women who wished to extend propaganda along more general socialist educational lines. The suffrage question, they felt, was being handled adequately by the women's reform organizations. The Party, for them, had a greater responsibility to the working woman and her special needs. This question of priority was debated extensively, and although no explicit conception determined all their actions, many women rejected cooperation with the suffragists for broader social appeals. Particularly in those states where women already had the ballot, the Party could point to the negligible effect that socialist propaganda had on voting results. Although proclaiming itself the vanguard of all progressive movements in the United States, the Party claimed it gained no immediate political benefits from woman suffrage, and could therefore stress the need for less transient issues to build a socialist woman's movement. (20)

The limited advantages of suffrage agitation sharpened the contradictions for those women who believed their tactics should flow from fundamental socialist theory. Despite the class-conscious rhetoric of their agitation, it seemed to appeal not to the women who most needed political expression in American society but rather to the same class from which the reformist-suffragist organizations drew their membership -- the professional women and middle-class housewives. Special efforts to reach working class women through suffrage propaganda did not achieve the hoped-for results, since the majority of women who joined locals



did so in the leisure time a working girl or mother of a working class family could ill afford. Propaganda was then redirected to appeals around a more general oppression of females. The tactics came nominally from a general theory that had been their inspiration through the early days of the struggle, what they called a 'Materialist Conception of the Woman's Struggle', which the Socialist women now integrated into the emerging Feminism of the decade.

The classic writings that most influenced their thinking were *Women Under Socialism*, by August Bebel, and *The Origins of the Family*, by Friedrich Engels. Taken with the anthropological analyses popular at the time, these two texts, unimpeachable for at least most American Socialists, provided women with a view of history that denied a biologically determined role for their sex. Both Bebel and Engels depicted the dawn of man as an era of cooperative struggle for survival, based upon primitive matriarchical structures. The exodus from this secular paradise had at once created the system of private ownership and woman's bondage within it. Over the ages the burden had fallen hardest upon her, for while her mate's dominant attitude had been acquisition and personal control, she had desperately attempted to conserve the family as best she could. Capitalism, as in so many other ways, both rendered the burden unendurable and created the preconditions for its elimination by creating the productive mechanization which potentially would provide plenty for all. The future civilization, like that in the dim past, would offer general cooperation and the realization of woman's desire to be an equal and to conserve the race as she had through the ages conserved the family.

The special appeal to women as women brought the socialists into the main line of the burgeoning Feminist movement, and by 1913 they observed that younger women were being attracted to radicalism primarily for their complete sexual emancipation. The Socialist women tried to bridge the gap to the older agitation by arguing that the Feminist program consisted 'very largely in what Socialists have been demanding for women for years and years', and by pointing out that only socialists understood complete freedom to be unattainable short of the common ownership of the means of production. As one woman socialist wrote: 'The Socialist who is not a Feminist lacks breadth. The Feminist who is not a Socialist is lacking in strategy.' Hence they held that whether women possessed the ballot or not, they would need to unite with all oppressed groups for a better society, and that the Socialist movement would ultimately provide women the courage to be in the forefront of the final battle 'fighting for the destruction of masculine despotism and for the right of womankind'. (21)

But with the concurrent passing of the suffrage issue and the ebbing of the inertia in the women's socialist movement, Feminism proved as an agitational issue to be unacceptable to the bulk of the socialist movement. Although the militant women insisted that Feminism could not be limited to any one reform, the men and more orthodox socialist women generally offered a blanket criticism of Feminism and all the implications of agitation 'along sex lines'. Feminism, they held, was middle class, and socialist-feminists were warned that their activity could swamp the party with non-wage earning elements. While an occasional middle-class woman could bring along her vitality and intelligence, any number of them, it was thought, were bound to bring their reformist taints. Thus even a mild variety of Feminism, which clearly



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disavowed free love and the destruction of the family, was feared as a divider of the movement along sex lines. With all the odds against them, the socialist-feminists failed to respond successfully to this plea for a return to traditional socialist agitation on all fronts, and a new wave of 'Male egotism' was evoked which, according to some women, was even more objectionable than the male attitudes dominating the party before 1908.



THE BURDEN LONG AGO CALLED "WOMAN'S DUTY."

#### IV. THE DECLINING YEARS, FROM 1912

During this period there were growing tensions within the Socialist Party which had undercut the development of an autonomous socialist women's agitational struggle and now worked against its revival. By 1910, American Socialism had accomplished basic propaganda tasks and entered a maturity, raising and sharpening internal differences that had been previously tolerated by nearly all concerned. Many Socialists long in the movement publicly warned against the influx of middle-class elements into the party and the danger of encouraging agitation which resulted in the enrollment of non-wage-earners. More important, an internal party struggle culminating in 1912 with the proscription of the advocacy of sabotage in party ranks had the effect of tightening party discipline against all potentially dissident elements. Finally, the success of 'Constructive Socialist' locals, particularly the Milwaukee Social Democracy, provided the 'lesson' of heavily concentrated agitation and propagandization with a city involving all socialists in a single-minded task. Cumulatively, therefore, women's agitation could have been seen to be divisive, disruptive and destructive to socialist energies. And without a body of

important defenders within the ruling circles of the party, women's agitation could not expect special treatment or solicitation for its case.

In retrospect, the true high point of women's agitation within the Socialist Party was the period around 1910 to 1912. Suffrage agitation died, for socialist purposes, as achievement loomed closer and the major political parties subsumed within them the energies that had been previously tapped by socialist women. There was an Indian Summer for socialist women in 1912-1913, as the vigorous national campaign and the residual effects of suffrage agitation swelled the women's ranks from ten per cent to fifteen per cent of the Party membership. But by 1913 the erosive effects of the changing conditions could already be seen.

The lack of an issue with the strength and popularity of suffrage, along with the Party's internal betrayal of the Woman Question, made impossible a clear program of organizational activities and stripped the agitational program to Socialism alone rather than feminism or suffrage. Even by 1913, the inertia of the women's socialist movement had slowed. The National Committee was no longer effective as a woman's committee, and prominent female socialists became increasingly involved in ordinary party work, above all action against the coming war. When in 1914 a proposal was made at the Party Convention to abolish the Woman's National Committee, its (female) Correspondent from the Party's Woman Department applauded the prospective amendment. Though remaining nominally in existence, the Committee ceased to function in any significant way. (37)

The most ominous sign was the death of *Progressive Woman*. Like other Party publications, the *Woman* had never been a solvent financial venture, and from 1912 onward the Party had subsidized its existence. But aid was at best partial, and at no point adequate to make up the deficit or provide a sound financial basis for the magazine's expansion to its own expected circulation of 500,000. The Woman's Committee in 1914 sought to abandon the sinking ship, and the magazine was salvaged only momentarily by its transformation into the *Coming Nation*, a name which its editor, Josephine Conger-Kaneko, derived from the enormously popular Socialist paper of the 1890s. By mid-1914, the socialist women had no publication of their own and more than ever were forced to rely upon the mechanisms of a Party decreasingly concerned for the welfare of an autonomous group of women.



During the declining years of women's activities in the Socialist Party, the remarkable example of Margaret Sanger's struggle served to typify the organizational obstacles in the path of prospective radical feminists. Her class position, the unusual interests and ability she brought to her work, and the nature of her estrangement from the socialist movement further indicated the limits of party flexibility, especially on questions of sexuality in practical organizational terms. (22)

Margaret Sanger's entry into the Socialist movement, like that of many other women, came through her husband's activity, in the New York Socialist Party. Frequently mingling with the salon crowd, she came to associate a socialist perspective with her own ethical and humanitarian concerns. Although her anarchistic sentiments fostered an intellectual attraction to 'individualistic' tendencies, the practical applications in an industrial society necessitated for her an organizational

framework which she sought in the Socialist Party. She regularly attended local meetings with her husband, but only inadvertently did she become one of the most important activists in the movement. She was asked to replace an ailing speaker at one of the local women's meetings. Although she had never given a public speech before, she accepted on the condition that her topic be of her own choice. She had little confidence about her understanding of Marxian theory and decided to speak about her own speciality, sex education and hygiene.

Margaret Sanger's appearance and her introduction of the topic into public discussion generated enormous enthusiasm among women in the local, who repeatedly expressed their urgent needs for more information. Soon she was offering a series of lectures, during which so many questions were asked that Anita Block, editor of the New York Call's woman's page, asked Sanger to provide a regular column for publication. In this, her first experience at public writing, Margaret Sanger planned a series under the general title, 'What Every Mother Should Know', to introduce the 'impersonality of Nature' in an effort to break through parents' rigid attitudes toward sexual development. After several weeks of its appearance, the title of her sequel column, 'What Every Girl Should Know', was followed by the black-typed notation 'NOTHING! By the order of the post-office department'. For the first time, Margaret Sanger's work had been publicly censored.

Margaret Sanger's writing for the Call continued sporadically into wartime, and even the censored article eventually appeared. But as she engaged in practical activities among working class women in New York and in such projects as the care of the children of strikers in Lawrence and Paterson, her sympathies were drawn increasingly to the direct actionists and syndicalists. She continually tried to work through the Socialist Party to disseminate birth control information among families of workers but met with constant frustration from the lack of help and the frequent scorn she received from the reformist socialist leadership. Meanwhile the IWW's Big Bill Haywood, a close personal friend, offered her contact with industrial workers and their wives. Finally, the attitude of the Socialists, that birth control would come with the victory of Socialism and thus was of negligible concern before the Revolution, returned her toward her original political inclination, anarchism.

In the spring of 1914, Margaret Sanger marked both her political anarchism and her desire to test censorship laws by founding a newspaper expressly devoted to women's liberation, the Woman Rebel. Across the masthead was emblazoned 'No Gods, No Masters', and inside a mixture of rudimentary sex education and anti-political articles, such as 'The Importance of Assassination in History'. During the Colorado mining strike, she asked socialist women to send the fiercely-repressed miners guns rather than sympathy, adding that 'When 40,000 (socialist) women cannot follow up a protest by action, then truly it would appear that they have something other than their 'chains to lose'.' The Woman Rebel never reached any significant circulation, and since all issues were banned from the mails, it was generally limited to a few Eastern cities. After the seventh issue, Margaret Sanger was placed under indictment for 'lewdness'. Rather than face trial she fled to Europe.

A year earlier, Margaret Sanger's columns in the Call had opened a controversy within the Socialist Party, carried on in letters to the paper, which revealed the deep differences on matters of sexuality and woman's place generally. (23) As Anita Block noted, the purpose of the

column was to 'turn the searchlight on all those rotten spots which those in power today find it in their interest to keep dark... and keep turning on the light in one way or another ever stronger and more penetrating until there is no part of our social structure that will not be clean and healthy and beautiful.' Readers appreciative of the column sent in a variety of intense and even touching responses. One woman wrote of the loss of her 'so-called innocence' which caused her husband to wrongfully suspect her past and nearly to destroy their marriage. On reading the column, the maligned woman's husband finally came to understand the possibility of a 'natural' loss of virginity, thus ending his thoughtless persecution. Another woman, sixty-six years old and mother of eight, wrote that she learned more from Margaret Sanger's articles than 'from any books or even from my own life'. A male machinist, perhaps more typical of a sympathetic socialist reader, wrote that such lessons were important, for active socialists could not be recruited from a population sick with venereal disease. Above all, readers stressed the fact that the knowledge which Margaret Sanger made available was imply not accessible elsewhere. Even those who doubted the logic of such material in the Call often expressed their gratitude for her serious and factual presentations.



Readers unfriendly to Margaret Sanger's views revealed quite another side of American socialism. The most usual arguments against her column came from those crude materialists who stressed economic determinism. Capitalism, according to this argument, was the cause of prostitution, and indeed all of the 'evils of the sex question'; only when Socialism arrived would a healthy society come into existence. A more serious objection was offered to the very publication of knowledge of venereal disease, reasoning that it 'placed the demands of FEAR and DISTRUST in the minds of hundreds of prospective wives and mothers', with the effect upon impressionable female readers of a discouragement towards marriage. One writer charged that Margaret Sanger's column would 'produce a panic which would cause women to lose all confidence in men and cause them to withdraw their capital (themselves) from the marriage market.' Like other critical correspondents, the writer felt that Margaret Sanger scorched the mental and spiritual in favor of 'the animal being'. Some critics even openly argued for an 'eternal' inferior status of women. One writer who wondered whether adequate contraception might eradicate 'mother love and the exquisite loyalty of the eternal female', confessed his hesitation 'before subscribing to a practice that would have the least tendency to destroy the spiritual qualities of women. Undoubtedly as an expedient for the individual, (birth control) is absolutely moral, but when, as a fixed social policy, it assumes an influence upon the social conscious, its morality is questionable.'

In responding to Margaret Sanger's attackers, Anita Block made clear the fundamental objection of some socialists to 'What Every Girl Should Know': Sanger had brought the issue out of the abstractions of idyllic life under Socialism and into the realities of women's immediate struggle for full equality. The editor of the Call's women's page assumed that her readers, as socialists, were more intelligent than non-Socialists and would consequently be logically more open to the notion of women's special oppression. But the obstacles placed in front of Margaret Sanger's party activity, and the failure of any decisive sector of the socialist organization to move to her defense, revealed the contradictory character of the socialists' radical sympathies. As a group, the socialists would more than any other sector of the nation's population affirm the ultimate equality of women and the viciousness of their

exploitation under capitalism. Indeed, many rank-and-file socialists could articulate and intelligently discuss the radical theories of Engels and Bebel. But even the advanced sectors, to say nothing of the party as a whole, rejected any notion of a special struggle for women, as they rejected generally the special struggles of blacks and even of unskilled workers. In retrospect, the socialists' position was historically understandable, for they viewed the coming of a socialist society as inevitable, smooth and not too far distant. But the situation in which radical theory seemingly justified conservative practice must have been all the more maddening for men and women who, like Margaret Sanger, had come to expect the socialist movement to represent the full liberating possibilities of mankind.



Like the initial, apparent acceptance by the mass of socialists of Margaret Sanger's activities, the solicitations of the party for the Women's National Committee and for the Progressive Woman had been deceptive. For as Margaret Sanger was judged by the irritation and even immediate danger she posed to the movement's internal stability, the National Committee and the magazine were judged by their results in recruiting females for the party rolls, and any figure less than the goal the women had set - for 50% of the membership - was bound to be ultimately disappointing. Of course, such a figure was at all odds incredible: the Socialist Party drew predominately from the ranks of skilled workers, while women in the population as a whole were, with scattered exceptions, unskilled workers, workers' wives, or middle and upper class housewives. Thus women's oppression was not generally felt at the point of production, and their needs were different and special. But the party, forced to extremes by internal disputes and the approaching world conflict, felt the necessity for such pragmatic yardsticks, and by such measurement there could be but one result for Margaret Sanger and the women as a group.

Yet, despite its rapid eclipse, the women's role within the Socialist Party was not a negligible one. At its best, it deeply touched the lives of the new women workers in mass trades such as garments, it moved leading radical literary figures such as Floyd Dell and Max Eastman, and it concentrated the energies of such outstanding women reformers as Margaret Sanger and Florence Kelley. More important, it left an indelible impression on the American radical movement, offering an early lesson - better than in any American radical movement since - of what women could do to link their sex-oppression with the general oppression of the social system.

\*Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Absolutism, New York, 1969.



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# WOMEN INC. & WOMEN'S LIBERATION



Over the last few years and until recently unknown to each other, there have arisen in the Bay Area two groups of women whose goals are the end of discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women. One is a general, the other a specific social movement. One has evolved out of the middle-class radicalizing student milieu, the other out of a rebel trade union. They have their inception in a widespread condition of unrest reflecting the cultural drift of women's emancipation, dissatisfaction with things as they are and hopes for a new scheme or system of living. Having adopted values of equality and self-determination, women have formed new conceptions of themselves which are incongruent with the positions they occupy, their inferior social status relative to men. Some aspects of the movement strongly resemble those of nationalism. 'Those who initiate the movement usually have had distressing personal experiences in which they have been made to feel inferior and as not privileged enough to enjoy a respectable status. Their wounded self-feelings and their desire to re-establish self-respect lead them to efforts to improve the status of the group with which they are identified.' (1) I believe that these two groups have a far-reaching significance; that one represents the form, the other the essence of what will be a fundamental part of the socialist revolution and must be understood as such. I believe that the exploitation of women in the production and reproduction of life is a basic cause, the essence, of discrimination which in turn is a form of psychological oppression.

My thanks to Magali Larson for her time and help and the useful concepts she has given me which provide tools for analysis. The concept of three elements of social movements, identity, designation of the enemy, and goals is used in the organization of this essay as are many insights of Herbert Blumer in 'Collective Behavior'.

In the spring of 1964 a rebellion occurred against what was believed to be corrupt, bureaucratic, undemocratic unions. From that rebellion evolved one union called the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers, 'one of the most significant upheavals in organized labor since the split between the AFL and CIO in 1938'.(2) That same year the Civil Rights Act went into effect prohibiting discrimination based on sex as well as color. These two events helped to lay the basis for the formation of a woman's caucus in the rebel union, as significant an upheaval as the rebellion itself.

The initial identity of the women was as workers and union members. In the course of the struggle against the old unions, they gained a new identity as rebels fighting for: (1) union democracy, rank and file election of bargaining agents rather than appointment by international leaders, (2) the settling of local grievances, issues like mill grievance procedure, management rights, and job analyses, and (3) more militant leadership. This new rebel identity and fight had a further radicalizing effect, particularly in giving the women the confidence to fight for their own demands and grievances. The fundamental question around which they organized as a women's caucus was job security. Women were being bumped and men given their jobs to save the companies money by getting around the restrictive laws on overtime and lifting. There are four union locals in five paper mills in Antioch and Stockton, California. Some women at Crown Zellerbach leafleted, calling for a meeting on job security to which they invited Madeline Codding Mixer of the regional office of the Women's Bureau. Their initial goal was to go to the California State Commission on Women hearing with testimony on job security. After the hearings they continued to meet, finally realizing their new identity not just as trade unionists and rebels but as women, an identity forced on them by a discrimination based on sex that threatened their job security. They organized formally into Women, Inc., to fight their specific grievances. Historically they were continuing a tendency to organize on the basis of identity as women, which showed up in the formation of the Women's Bureau in the UAW-CIO in Detroit in 1953 and 1954 and in the Detroit Square D strike of electrical workers. In both cases job security was a prime and critical issue. As automation hit their industries and jobs dried up, sex was used as a justification for laying off women without seniority and giving their jobs to men. In self-defense, they had to organize on the basis of sex identity.

There is another more complicated aspect of identifying and organizing as women. The dissatisfaction with inequality and the desire for self-determination of women can be harnessed and controlled and exploited by employers. Using business and professional women as their flunkies, they have organized a nationwide attack on the protective hours and lifting laws. In the name of fighting discrimination, these women executives have advocated an equal rights amendment that would abolish these laws instead of calling for the extension of protective laws to cover men. Yet, for example, statistics for back injuries due to lifting in industry indicate a desperate need for limits on lifting coverage to be extended to males and the increased application of machinery to lifting. Arguments can be made for the extension of the other protective laws to men.

And it is not only women associated with management who are advocating the abolition of the protective laws. Now, spurred by the desire for high overtime pay or by the threat to job security, trade union women in some areas are also beginning to fight the laws. However, the vast majority of working women are

unorganized and non-union, and not covered by union contracts giving them the right to refuse long hours, or to receive time and a half overtime pay for long hours. If the laws are broken, the majority of working women could be forced, under threat of job loss, to work longer hours at straight pay. The ten and twelve hour day could easily become a reality again for women, especially in a shrinking labor market with increased competition for jobs. What equal rights would mean under these circumstances is a few gains for upper class women at the cost of greater exploitation than ever for the majority of women workers and increased profits for the bosses based on that exploitation. In the case of Women, Inc., the protective laws were used by the employers as a reason to block their job advancement by preventing them from getting on progression ladders and for maintaining layoff lists based on sex. Used in this way the protective laws became a threat to job security. In the absence of union demands to extend the laws to men, Women, Inc. could only ask that they be waived. The protective laws thus became a weapon in the hands of the bosses to divide the labor force, male against female. This in turn was one more causal factor in the organization of a caucus based on their identity as women.

Organization on the basis of identity as women followed a similar path in Women's Liberation. From their initial identity as students, young women became part of the student movement. Joining in civil rights and student struggles, they developed a new identity as radicals and socialists. They repudiated old values, roles, the whole system. Watching the black power struggles demonstrate the meaning of equality and self-determination, women became aware that these values were lacking for women in the Movement too. Male chauvinism was much more glaringly apparent within the radical movement where men gave lip service to equality and self-determination for all humanity and then maintained a division of labor within radical organizations based on traditional sexual roles. Women in the old left accepted these roles as their 'proper' subservient supportive positions relative to men, so there was little threat to masculine supremacy within the Movement. However, when the younger generation of women decided that they fell into the category of human beings first and women second, all hell broke loose. They became more concerned with their humanity than their 'femininity'. Indeed, after accepting individual autonomy as a part of their new value system, being squeezed into a stereotyped box called 'femininity' appeared as a way of controlling and exploiting women. This was especially true when sex roles seemed to determine a division of labor in the radical organizations. Initially women fought their oppression on a one-to-one basis in their personal relationships with men, then in women's caucuses, and finally in separate women's liberation groups. Equality and self-determination meant the right of women to be on policy and decision-making bodies, to compete directly with men for power, power to make and carry out a program to meet women's needs. The process leading to the formation of separate organizations based on their identity as women was a direct response to the attitudes and actions of men in the movement. One of the first women to question male chauvinism in the Movement was Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, a young black who was the chief administrator for SNCC. It was her paper, *The Position of Women in SNCC*, presented at a conference in October 1964 which evoked Stokely Carmichael's famous remark, 'The only position of women in SNCC is prone.'<sup>(3)</sup> The laughter evoked was sufficient to negate any discussion of the question put forward by the most powerful woman in SNCC.

In the case of both groups, Woman's Liberation and Woman, Inc., specific

radicalization as women occurred within the context of a broader radicalization and as a direct result of having entered into struggle to change the world. In this, it is analogous to the way the earlier Woman's Rights Movement arose relative to the rise of the Abolitionist movement. It corroborates with a vengeance the Marxist theory that when people enter into struggle to change the world around them, they change themselves and their relations to their fellow men.

Looking at social movements as processes with emphasis on their temporal and developmental aspects, from formless collective behavior with non-specific goals to highly organized behavior with specific goals, enables one to fit a particular case into its historical development.

### ➤ Women, Inc.

The women trade unionists initially designated the companies and their employers as the enemy. In the formation of the rebel caucus and the breakaway to form a new union, the authoritarian bureaucratic leadership of the old International was also designated as the enemy.

As some of the men within the union and even the union itself became the enemy, women formally organized a Woman's Caucus. Because the women had to use the mechanism of the union to fight their grievances, it was essential to win the support of the union men. Tactically this was a much more difficult task than fighting an outright enemy like the companies. Just as the bosses had the profit motive behind their discrimination, so the union men had privileges in higher wages and advancement opportunities based directly on the exploitation of women. For example, Marge Hart, vice-president of Women, Inc., had applied for a job classified as men's work. She had seventeen years seniority and as the head of a family she needed the additional income. She was denied the job and instead it was given to a young kid who had been in the paper mill only six months and had no family to support. The degree to which the men would go to defend their privileges against the women was conditioned by the degree to which the women's demands threatened the very existence of the rebel union and the degree to which they won outside support.

In a letter to the Area Trustee of the union in July 1967, a year and five months after they had organized, the women blamed the union contract for the loss of two arbitration cases. They complained about the lack of help from the International and the locals and again they stressed the vital nature of the job security issue. 'We begged our locals for their advice, assistance and moral support which, in most cases, we received none... There is always talk about equal pay for women. The men think they are doing us a favor and we appreciate it, but we are afraid of equal pay without job security, especially if the Company can establish ladders and change job descriptions and rearrange jobs so that women can't have them.' The companies would add lifting and overtime requirements to a job description if a woman applied for it, using the protective laws as a means of keeping the workers divided along sex lines. It is illegal to add new requirements to a job to prevent a woman from getting it.

In their fight to win the support of their union brothers for their struggle against the companies, help came from an unexpected source. An NLRB representation election was to be held between the old internationals and the new

rebel union. The old union published an article aimed at winning back the votes of the women. They attacked the AWPPW leadership for not handling the women's grievances and forcing them to go outside the union for help to the Federal government and the courts. Under pressure and in naked self-interest, the union began to support the women, but only so long as the women kept on fighting. When they slackened, so did the men.

A mediation agreement to give equal pay to women based on the men's scale was announced in February 1968 which was worked out between the AWPPW and the Pacific Coast Association of Pulp and Paper Manufacturers in conjunction with the EEOC. The 'director of the manufacturers' association said the agreement would result in an estimated \$500,000 annual wage increase for the 2,000 women... Women in the pulp and paper industry have historically received less money than men although often working at the same job. The policy has long been a thorn in the side of union locals, and it is a subject which the union's new president, Hugh Bannister, made a major issue in his recent election campaign. (3) The agreement had to be approved by the union membership. Again the women received help from an unexpected source -- the employers! In January, Kimberly-Clark placed 22 men on women's jobs at the women's rate. This was the first time in the history of the ULS (Uniform Labor Agreement) that a company has paid men at a rate less than the men's base rate. The local union filed a grievance, demanding that the men be paid at the regular men's rate while working on these jobs... (5) This certainly had an effect on the agreement and the vote to approve it. If there was going to be equal pay it would be at the men's rate. However, there was still opposition to the women within the union. This was attested to by an oblique reference in the official union newspaper, The Rebel. In an article urging its members to vote for the proposed agreement as a major victory for the Association against the manufacturers, it said, '...the AWPPW, despite some 'Calamity Criers', supported the charges filed by its fighting union members...' (6) Having won active support of a number of union members and neutralized another large section, who even though they wouldn't support the women, would not actively oppose them, the agreement was approved. Yet about one-third of those who voted opposed the agreement. These rebel men who had fought for union democracy would not even extend equal pay to their sisters who had fought beside them. (7)

There were other enemies. Some of the married women in the mills felt that as secondary wage earners in the family, they should get less than men. They were strongly influenced by the traditional image of women. Some women were scared and insecure. The rumor went around that they would all lose their jobs if the fight continued. Some actively fought the women's caucus. No one knew the grievance procedure. Some men, including the foreman, started telling the women that if they won equality they would be put on the hardest jobs in the mill, be pushed out the door and men hired in their places and finally that they would be sent to Vietnam.

### Women's Liberation

In Women's Liberation the designation of the enemy went through a series of successive stages. Initially the enemy was the older generation, middle class values and norms and institutions. Then the capitalist economic system and the kinds of social relations it produces become the enemy. Experiencing chauvinism and oppression within the Movement, they turned against the white male



radicals and found it necessary to organize a separate woman's movement to fight for women's rights. They began to see the enemy in terms of psychological forms of oppression, which meant a fundamental task in redefining their own roles and, by implication, men's roles. Radical women accepted the values of equality and self-determination for all human beings, the ideals of the students and the blacks. In the course of the civil rights and student struggles to fight for these rights, women applied these rights to themselves.

Sanctions are used against women who question roles by men who felt their leadership threatened. Social, psychological, economic and in some cases physical threats are used. For example, the SDS boy, heckling a young woman trying to discuss women's rights, said, 'Take her off the stage and fuck her.' Or the Black Panther at the United Front Against Fascism who manhandled and then knocked down the stairs a young woman who was fingered by an SDSer as a member of PL. When she denied it they accused her of being a member of the Joe Hill caucus. She hadn't even made any statement of political position; he couldn't cope with the possibility of an opposing position, especially from a woman.

**W**omen, Inc. is a specific social movement with specific limited goals as compared to Women's Liberation which might be characterized as a general social movement, less organized and with more general goals. The fundamental goal of Women, Inc. is job security which they still have not won. Initially, before organizing as women, they adopted the goals of the union, essentially economic goals, pork chop issues of wages and hours and political goals such as supporting Democratic Party 'friends of labor'. When the rebel union organized, additional goals of union democracy, satisfactory handling of local grievances and more militant leadership were added to the earlier goals. Then came the attacks on their jobs. Job security became the crucial goal expressed in a fight to end economic exploitation and discrimination against women by ending male-female job classification, lay-off lists, promotion ladders, and pay differentials. To further the battle against specific forms of discrimination they adopted the goal of broader alliances with other women and organizations. They contacted women in other locals of the AWPWW, testified before the State of California's Commission on the Status of Women, and attended one of their conferences. They contacted women in the California State Department of Industrial Relations and in the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, and invited other working women to meet and exchange ideas with them. In this way they gained reinforcement in their struggle. They adopted the goal of a two-sided legal struggle, going to the courts after the EEOC decision and testifying at the legislative hearing of the California Civil Rights Commission.

Such demands might force the labor movement to unify around the lowest common denominator instead of splitting it by giving privileges to the skilled workers and the labor bureaucracy at the expense of the unskilled who are mainly made up of women and members of minority groups. This could lend a dynamic effect of leading to more generalized demands, as workers control, a 30-hour week at 40 hours pay, and even the establishment of socialized property relations.

The broad goal of Women's Liberation is to fight against the oppression of women and male chauvinism and to build a separate women's movement toward this end. Many of these women were initially radicals and socialists.

Some now give the struggle for women's rights first priority. Others maintain dual membership, seeing no contradiction between building a mass women's rights movement and a revolutionary party. Still others want to build a women's revolutionary party or a women's political party. Sharing of time, labor, including housework and childcare, and money in personal relations between men and women are goals. A major goal is coping with feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, overcoming caste etiquette, and relating directly to other women in a positive and trusting way. This is analogous to the Black Power movement which initially had to establish a new identity and redefine the roles of blacks through turning to black history. As all the institutions of society are male-dominated, including the radical movement, some see the need of building a separate women's movement and developing women as leaders; on the other hand some oppose leadership development as leading to elitism.

As a social movement develops from an amorphous to a more organized form, it begins to develop a literature and an ideology. The Old Left failed to confront the problem of Women's Liberation. They relied on Lenin's statement in the 1920s or Engels' Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. They avoided a careful Marxist analysis of contemporary social relations, necessary to the formulation of a transitional program for women. This can be understood, in part, as a reflection of the prejudices of white male skilled workers and intellectuals, groups which account for most of the composition of Old Left organizations. This composition may even be the 'labor aristocracy' of radical organizations, compared to the most dynamic elements of the organization -- women, blacks, most recent immigrants and youth. If a revolutionary group recruits from these strata in proportion to their centrality, its literature may reflect a more dynamic character. Thus militant women will formulate programs around which to organize their sisters in struggle for change, transitional demands to meet women's needs.

Women, Inc., a working class group, and middle-class Women's Liberation, organized on the basis of sexual identity, were forced into existence by sexism, oppression, exploitation and discrimination based on sex. Because of the sanctions used against women who try to defend themselves, even by those supposedly committed to equality, organization for protection, reinforcement, struggle and development of leadership capabilities is necessary. Women's caucuses in trade unions and radical organizations must be built and supported as well as a mass Women's rights organization.

Enemies include not only the capitalist economic system which profits from exploitation and discrimination but also some men, including radicals who maintain privileges at the expense of women, especially through role concepts. Also included as enemies are the uncle tom women, especially of the older generation who are intimidated into accepting traditional inferior roles. In some cases these women lead the attack on the women's rights members. Because trade unions and radical parties are important organs of struggle for economic, social and political change, it is necessary to win them over to support of women's rights. Those members who can't be won over must be neutralized and those who actively oppose women's rights must be fought. Some men and women will only be won over on the basis of naked self-interest such as the members of the AWPPW when they faced an NLRB election and would have lost their union organization if they lost the women's votes if they didn't support equal pay. Goals of women's organizations are both specific and general. Job

security is foremost among the specific goals. Without it equal pay and other gains are meaningless: women can be bumped and men put in their places. One demand to insure job security is equality in hiring, firing and upgrading. (On-the-job training for advancement.) Seniority in firing protects the mature woman. Twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week free child care centers prevents women from being driven out of the labor market by cutting off child care. Equality in sharing time, money and labor between men and women in personal relations is a specific goal as is the demand for women in positions of policy and decision making bodies in unions and radical organizations. Women must strive for these positions of power if they are to carry out a program to meet their needs. General goals include ending male chauvinism and the oppression of women, both psychological forms as well as the economic essence of that oppression. They also include changing women's images, breaking down role concepts and norms of behavior. Among the general goals is also the goal of socialism although not all the women in Women's Liberation are socialists and none of those in Women, Inc. are.

Some of the women in Women's Liberation (especially those influenced by SDS and PL) are (1) afraid of being co-opted by the conservative wing of the movement represented by NOW and (2) see specific demands and transitional demands as reform measures. They rarely raise women's demands without also raising the demand for socialism. To the extent that a mass women's rights organization with a preponderance of women workers is built, its class make-up will help prevent co-optation. Developing an outlook based on the interests of the lowest common denominator, the black woman worker, will have the same effect. Organizing women around specific demands to meet their needs will have a transitional, dynamic effect. As they come into conflict with the existing system their consciousness will deepen as to the nature of their problems, their root in the social structure and the solution. Their example will inspire other women.



The milieu of a mass women's rights movement including women's trade union caucuses will afford an excellent arena for recruitment to the socialist struggle. The radical milieu in turn can provide political propagandists and organizers for the women's movement. The dynamic effect of struggle will be to deepen and broaden the movement and raise its level of consciousness.

When a social and economic crisis hit Germany during the '30s Hitler's reactionary program to save the German capitalists included a major attempt to control and utilize women. A law was passed -- no women could hold jobs. Men were given the women's jobs at the women's rate of pay. In this way unemployment was used to drive down family income and increase the surplus profit of the capitalists. The myth of the woman only fulfilling herself as a breeder rationalized this policy and also provided the babies needed for the war between capitalist nations to redivide the world. Should growing inflation today lead to mass unemployment and a monetary crisis, we can expect similar reactionary laws against women, and theories to justify them. Already automation has led to a shrinking of the unskilled labor market and increased competition between men and women for jobs. If this trend should deepen, the contradictions between men and women will become sharper and industry will try to drive women out of the labor market. This in turn will conflict with the propaganda about population explosion which calls for women to find meaningful work to replace having babies. The demand for a sliding scale of wages and hours, a 30 hour week at 40 hours pay to provide jobs for everyone who wants one, can help resolve this contradiction, especially if raised by a mass women's organization.

Women's demands and organization should be supported; it is around those demands that they will be organized into revolutionary struggle. Clearly the party which doesn't recognize the primacy of the woman question, and subordinates it to the 'overriding class-struggle' (ignoring the fact that women are the most oppressed stratum of the working-class) may split itself wide open and lose the revolution. Perhaps women will be organized generally first on the basis of their own grievances and only later as working class socialists. One does not insist that a person become a socialist to join the anti-war movement or that a black become a socialist to join the black power movement or that either movement be limited only to class-conscious proletarians. Yet these movements provide a milieu in which revolutionaries can recruit as consciousness deepens through struggle. Often those women in the Bay Area who are spouting revolutionary rhetoric simply alienate the new apolitical women who are radicalizing first on the basis of their own oppression. Stratification along class lines should occur later, as class divisions deepen in the country as a whole.



Two final points. The deepening process of radicalization will facilitate the unity of action between the women students and the women workers, the black women and the white women. This unity will have to occur if the struggle for women's rights is to be successful, because discrimination flows from the concrete material reality of economic exploitation in the production and reproduction of life. Therefore the organization of unorganized women workers, of women's caucuses in trade unions, and of an all-woman workers national congress to raise economic demands at the point of production is fundamental. Considering production in its broadest sense, including the reproduction of life, housewives and mothers can be organized to end their exploitation by demanding payment (at least at average factory wage levels) for births and paid maternity and paternity leaves, complete socialized child care, not with the inadequate, barren, and poverty-stricken baby-sitting centers we have now but rather with the material and human resources for the full development of the child. The demand for women to gain control of the productive process and shape it to their needs is important. Using production for the qualitative development of the human being instead of the quantitative production of goods means the alternation and rotation of jobs even at the expense of a fall in productivity. It means structuring jobs to meet women's needs flowing from their dual roles in their procreative functions and in their human creativity in the process of social production. It means structuring jobs for the experiential learning and development of children too. Workers control of industry also means the application of mass production methods to home industry. This demand will free women from individual labor to enter into social labor which will provide a basis for their real equality and self-determination.

Women's Liberation groups have the intellectual skills to provide writers and editors of newsletters dictated by the union women's caucuses to help them organize. They can write and mimeo leaflets, set up meetings, and bring them aid from other women's organizations. They must be careful not to go like a missionary preaching but with an openness to listen and learn from the women workers. They can help organize the unorganized women workers. This kind of unity will have a reciprocal effect. The concrete class position of the women workers and their immediate struggles will help to prevent compromise and

wavering, and on the other hand the women students can give an understanding to the women workers of psychological forms of oppression and work to raise their consciousness from the need to struggle for specific immediate demands to the need to change the entire social economic system.

Sooner or later black women must enter into the leadership of a women's rights organization for its success. Traditionally more self-assertive and independent than white women, tempered in the struggle for black power, offering the perspective of the most oppressed, the bottom of the heap, they will be the most dynamic, militant and unflinchingly courageous leaders. They have already taken the lead in many ways. It was a black woman, Ruby Robinson, who wrote the paper on 'The Position of Women in SNCC'. It was a black woman worker, Rosa Parks, who started the Montgomery bus boycott by refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Long before the organization of Radical Women and Women's Liberation groups came organizations such as Black Women Enraged and newsletters for black women such as Women In Action from the Harlem Unemployment Center.

Black women from the slums took on the male chauvinism of the black nationalists who called on black women not to take the pill as it was a form of genocide. The slum women argued that they would control their own bodies and that was making their revolution and they weren't going to be used by the men for a power struggle for equality in which equality meant the men on top! These women refuse to accept the Moynihan report which blames the black women for the emasculation of the black man, thereby 'whitewashing' the capitalists and their profit motives and absolving them of responsibility. The emasculation of the black male serves the same purpose as the traditional image of the passive, inferior female. It facilitates economic exploitation and increases surplus profits. In any case Radical Women in Seattle, who include militant black women in their membership, have made the fight against the Moynihan report a primary target. Here is a beginning of that necessary unity between black and white women. It is this kind of unity which must be deepened and strengthened.

Vilma Sanchez

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#### FOOTNOTES

1. Herbert Blumer, 'Collective Behavior', in Alfred McClung Lee, ed., New Outline of the Principles of Sociology, p. 219.
2. Paul L. Kleinsorge and William C. Kerby, The Pulp and Paper Rebellion: A New Pacific Coast Union.
3. Linda Seese, 'You've Come a Long Way, Baby--Women in the Movement', Motive (March-April 1969: On the Liberation of Women, a special double issue), Vol. XXIX, 6 & 7, pp. 68, 70.
4. The Oregonian, Wed., Feb. 21, 1968, p. 16.
5. The Rebel, Feb. 28, 1968, p. 1.
6. The Rebel, loc. cit., p. 2.
7. Local 249 had about 600 members. The vote was 197 for, 84 against.



# socialist revolution

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# ◆ Project Company Kindergarten ◆

## INTRODUCTION

by Enid Eckstein

An important problem under consideration by many Women's Liberation groups is the establishment of day care centers for working class women. Some groups have proposed that these centers be set up within those industries where there is a heavy concentration of women and that the facilities for such centers be provided by the industries. While this does remove the financial responsibility of child care from the mother it does create many problems which Women's groups in the United States have only begun to appreciate and comprehend.

Women in West Berlin have begun to understand and confront the problems created by company kindergartens and thus a knowledge of their experiences can clarify the situation for those groups that are considering such a program. Helke Sander's article provides us with much information to evaluate the future of such demands. The author correctly distinguishes between those company kindergartens that offer women little escape from their maternal duties and only increase their oppression and those independent ones which are seeking to establish some sort of base of socialistic education. While some radical groups in the United States are in the process of setting up their own day care centers which will have a socialist outlook, there are a number of women's groups that still feel that the corporations can provide adequate centers.

The American equivalent of the company kindergarten has received an added push for its full scale development with President Nixon's new welfare program. One provision of the program calls for the establishment of day-care centers for working women so that they may continue working and for those women who now stay at home to provide for their children. Such centers would be forced on many welfare mothers so that they might enter the work force. One can imagine what the repressive nature of such centers will be and how they will start the rigid socialization and channeling process found in our schools at an even earlier age. It seems that these centers would further speed up the production of mental cripples. Groups that call for the establishment of corporation or government provided centers must see the inherent dangers in such a stance. While the raising of such demands challenges the role of women as mothers, the results of such a program based on company kindergartens could be disastrous both for mother and child. Helke Sander, speaking from experience can teach American women much about consequences of such a program. ❀



The basis group\* Wedding in West Berlin (a working class district) has planned for some time to establish company kindergarten (Betriebskindergarten) as part of their basis work, but so far there has been no open discussion about the role these kindergartens are to play within a socialist strategy.

Helke Sander, who is a member of the action council for women in West Berlin and who has had experience with a workshop for high school students, opens her discussion with a critique of the company kindergarten project:

First the term 'company kindergartens' has to be explained. Ordinarily it means a kindergarten established by a company for the children of its blue and white collar workers, out of the necessity to attract female employees. Thus a company kindergarten does not exist for ped-

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\* The term 'basis' has a double meaning in German. It means on the one hand foundation or ground work and is on the other hand the official Marxist term for superstructure. All compounds with 'basis' are used in this article according to this double definition. (translator's note)

(translated by Christel Koppel from 'Projekt Betriebskindergarten', Rote Presse Korrespondenz, No. 27-8 (August 29, 1969).



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gological reasons but is rather the ultima ratio of a company to get employees. The company pays the kindergarten teachers, the day to day costs, and makes rooms available.

The basis group Wedding, however, whose main political work consists of this company kindergarten project, sees such a kindergarten as an institution to which women of a company have been drawn by means of agitation and who establish a kindergarten for their own children with the help of other female comrades. The costs are to be paid by the parents, by comrades from the basis group, or by leftist organizations.

The make-up of the group, the distribution of the costs and the conceptual content are so different in each case, that one should not give the same name to such different phenomena. For that reason, I shall refer to the kindergartens of the basis group as basis children's shop (Basiskinderladen) or BCS; the company kindergarten or CKG will be used according to the common definition. Inaccuracies in the language, however, reflect vague objectives, and vagueness must be eliminated as far as possible.

The company kindergarten is on many people's minds at the moment and seems to be the 'in' thing for those who want to agitate in factories. Since 30.7% of all employees in West Berlin's industry are women and this number will increase in the near future, it is extremely important for us to get some clarity on how to work politically with the women and on whether or not previous attempts of this kind will lead to a dead end. Because of the importance of such a question I intend to discuss the company kindergartens more openly than has thus far been the case. I shall try to formulate some possible goals for this work:

One possible goal for a BCS project could be to initiate further BCS as a way of working toward the foundation of socialist mass education in cooperation with the parents and children. This, however, seems an improbable goal since the specific financial circumstances which made the first BCS possible will not repeat themselves indefinitely. There might be a possibility for three or four other children's shops of this kind, but after that the funds will be exhausted. The establishment of a children's shop alone is not proof of organizational power. This power comes from knowing sources for funds and with the consciousness that we ourselves must determine the education of our own children according to our own goals. If this consciousness were there, we would be looking for methods to make possible a socialist education for all children without having to conform to the working conditions of their parents. In other words, if the BCS has the goal to create a basis for socialist mass education, there is no reason why the mothers of these children have to work in the same company, since the child of a sales-girl or a white collar worker, etc., should also get a socialist education.

This leads us to conclude that the comrades of the basis group primarily have another purpose in mind with their children's shop, although it is clear that the whole education question will arise as a secondary problem for the people working with such shops. Thus it seems that the group to be won by agitation is not the parents working in a company but rather the women workers in a company with children. One can presume that the primary goal is to politicize the women on problems which concern them directly. It is well known how difficult it is to find an opening in one of the regular kindergartens, even when one is willing to put up with long commuting distances, loss of wages

and the inconvenience of having to get up early. This explains why any attempt to establish a new kindergarten will be supported by the women in the first place. This does not mean, however, that the organizers can claim any political success. We have to ask ourselves what cadre function the female workers whose children go to the BCS will have to fulfill. Furthermore, we have to know how the conditions of these female workers can be changed through such shops, i.e. to what extent the shop is a precondition for political work.

36% of all workers and employees are women. According to the union of the metal industry, 43.4% of them are married and 11.7% are widowed or divorced. In other words, more than 50% of all working women have family responsibilities. This number is going to increase in the coming years. That is an important factor in any political work with women. These facts must determine the answer to the question of how to develop political consciousness -- either within or outside the sphere of production.

If the center of gravity of agitation work lies traditionally (as I presume is true of the basis group in Wedding) in provoking conflicts between the workers and their company and in achieving solidarity for such provocations, then the women would have to be in a situation which would give them the time and energy for taking an interest in the production process. In this case a kindergarten with certain amenities would be an indirect way to lead women to the so-called primary problems, i.e. those which develop out of the process of production. What I cannot understand so far about those who are fighting for the BCS is the following: Do they want to politicize only a few women or all of them?

If the intention is to free a few women who would then be able to work politically through the help of this one shop, i.e. to work on conflicts in the company, this is just an elitist concept and has nothing to do with the formation of cadres since the same barriers to political work (children, husbands, home) would continue to exist for the other women. It is conceivable - even though undesirable - that this basis group wants to show off by forming a women's group which can talk about workers' control while a female comrade takes care of their children. If we eliminate these as possible intentions, however, i.e. if we want to enable all women to work politically, we would have to start a kindergarten campaign, and we would have to analyze the target of our demands. Since we are dealing with female workers who are organized according to companies we can assume that their demands are geared toward these companies, particularly since they do not have contact with other groups which might approach the problem in a different way. That could mean that the goal of this first BCS is to reach other women in the company through those women who send their children to the shop and who thus have gained the necessary time and consciousness so that together the women can demand and fight for a company kindergarten. A BCS would mean in this case that the company pay all the costs; the concept, however, would be determined by the experiences gained in the children's shops and in the first BCS. By this means the women could become interested in the production process itself.

We have to examine whether this age-old demand of the unions should be picked up or not. The need for female workers is increasing progressively. In order to get them, the companies have to develop some imagination. Since the reservoir consists mainly of married women,

mothers have to be freed from their children. For this reason demands for company kindergartens do not meet the same resistance today as they have for the past fifty years. On the contrary, several companies have even volunteered to establish such kindergartens. Some of the ads try to attract the women with them. Kreuzberg (a working class district in West Berlin) already has two CKG, and the tendency is that within a few years a CKG will be as much a matter of course as two weeks of vacation for the worker which enables him to toil better afterwards. According to a study by the Berlin State Commission, there were, by the end of 1966, 350,000 women of working age in Berlin who were neither in training nor, invalids, but who could not work, for several reasons although they were basically willing to. The reasons are primarily to be found in family duties. 'Most of the young mothers are particularly good workers, because they very often surpass their unmarried colleagues in greater interest in the job and stronger feelings of responsibility'; therefore, the Commission concludes that it will be necessary to look for new and even unconventional ways of utilizing this reserve labor force better than before, which would mean mainly that more CKG must be established. For: 'The reserves of 350,000 presently non-working women is of prime importance in all attempts to increase the number of workers in West Berlin without have to recruit people from outside Berlin.'

This means that we can be quite sure that the number of CKG will be increased. We have to ask ourselves, however, whether we should use our strength to get them faster or rather to prevent them. Should we give a personal quality to some of the CKG by politicizing the mothers in advance through work in the companies in order to get the women to fight, for instance, for having only 15 children per group instead of 20 or more? We certainly will be able to achieve this in some companies, but what will be the political effect? We have to ask what a CKG means.

#### For the children

At first glance, one might think the children should profit from going to the company together with their mothers in the morning. That might allow them to sleep a half an hour longer since they would not need to be taken to a kindergarten across town perhaps or to the grandmother where they would be without playmates. This way they will be torn from their beds a little later, but that does not change the fact that they still have to be dragged from their beds. A CKG does not change the times of the work shifts. A big company may set aside space outdoors and two bright rooms. But as for the many small companies where women also work, where are they going to put their kindergarten? Our demands should be acceptable to all women working in different fields who have the same problems, and they should be applicable to all of them -- even if slightly altered.

Let us assume, however, the child goes to a good company kindergarten and is in a group smaller than the average. The child sees the mother during her break as well. That means she is forced to show she is a loving mother, since that is expected from her, although she actually needs those few minutes during the break desperately for herself. Then, at half past four, the child goes home with his mother, is dragged along on shopping errands, and pushed around until it is time to go to bed. There are probably other children of the same age living in the neighborhood who are in the same boat. But our child only meets them when

the mother has time to go with him to the playground after work or if he is old enough - and the street safe enough - to play there without supervision. Except for a possibility of getting up a little later there won't be much of an advantage for the child. It is more likely, however, that the aggressions between mother and child will increase because she will have to deal with him immediately after her exhausting work day, without having had a few minutes to herself.

### For the mother

For the mother this demand seems at first to be reasonable; she will save the time and money involved in transporting the child to baby sitter or outside kindergarten. Or she will get rid of her bad conscience if she had been leaving the child with relatives before.

An important disadvantage, however, is this: if the job is too hard or too frustrating, the woman at least now has the option of changing jobs. But if her child goes to one of the CKG, she will have to think very carefully about a change since it is uncertain, if not improbable, that she will get her child into a regular kindergarten. Even if more CKG are established there is still only a slight chance that there will be enough to go around. Moreover, a company might get the idea that a place in a kindergarten of that company should be earned through special merit. Thus a CKG might be a useful means of keeping women in line in order to prevent them from achieving solidarity and taking up conflicts. A place in a CKG could be turned into a reward for special conformity.

### For kindergarten teachers

Kindergarten teachers in the regular school system are quite a relevant group for the CKG, since they are going to staff the CKG. Having organized for nearly two years, the teachers tried to prepare a strike with political content. I do not want to go into details as to why the strike could not take place and what mistakes were made. The kindergarten teachers have a different target in their struggle. They are organizing in their struggle against the Senate of Berlin to fight for substantive reforms in their work. They began with demands that they be allowed to fulfill their true pedagogical task. The negative reaction to their demands showed them that they could not achieve the fulfillment of their demands within the present structure of society but rather that they would have to fight the system. They refused to go on turning the children into such broken disciplined creatures as are found among the mass of today's population. For this reason, one of their demands was that the Senate not open additional day care centers until the present centers had enough trained personnel and until the size of the groups were reduced to numbers which would make meaningful pedagogical work possible.

The kindergarten teachers know who their real opponent is, and out of this knowledge they gain their organizational strength, not because they believe the Senate will give them what they want if only they organize well, but because they have recognized their power and its potential for breaking the system. Thus they are correct in fearing that the establishment of further CKG would obscure the situation and destroy the solidarity which has slowly developed. CKG at this moment would mean that trained kindergarten teachers would migrate into industry for better salaries, and the question of teacher education would remain untouched. Thus the demand for further CKG amounts to a stab in the back to those kindergarten teachers who are organizing themselves, and that according to socialist principles.

## For elementary school teachers

The kindergarten teachers have gained experiences which could be of great importance to teachers in elementary schools. The former realized the impossibility of doing anything for the individual child under present conditions. So far the politicized elementary school teachers have tried to a great extent to make improvements for the children under the same conditions or to experiment with new forms through which to achieve politicization, for example, by giving the children permission to eat in class or by allowing them to remain seated while giving an answer or even by talking to them about Vietnam. These teachers are, of course, faced with immense difficulties without being rewarded by any visible success. Moreover, the classes in the schools are bigger than the groups in the kindergartens, and thus the necessity for discipline is greater, making pedagogical work impossible.

Almost all teachers are very dissatisfied with these conditions, and we must ask ourselves whether this should not be picked up in an effort to organize and politicize the teachers. In that case, kindergarten and elementary school teachers would have to cooperate and coordinate their efforts.

— Therefore, the following points become clear:



The project of the basis children's shops in the form described will not help to create the basis for socialist mass education. Nor will it lead to the politicization of the women workers who do not have children in the basis shop since the conditions which had prevented any political work until now would remain unchanged.

What the basis children's shop can achieve at this point, namely to lead a campaign for the establishment of further CKG, would be objectively counterrevolutionary, since such efforts, directed as they are at the individual companies, would result in an increased distortion of the situation and not in a greater consciousness or in the emergence of fighting strength in the women.



What is the alternative?

Clearly the women need kindergartens. But they need only those which will really help them to cope with their problems and not the kind which will make them more dependent and tied down in the final analysis. In order to recognize where their problems lie at all, they need time. But this time must be fought for, and that would seem to be a reasonable goal. (If one has to work 16 hours a day, the work hours simply have to be shortened.) To be realistic we have to begin with the messed up structure of society as it is. It has been proven that it is extremely difficult to work with women in companies and factories. Even interested women are afraid that their husbands or friends will oppose such work. Or they have children and are thus kept from using their remaining energy for work problems.

Lack of time is the main problem for most women. That cannot be emphasized enough until those people understand it who can afford to stay in bed until eleven o'clock now and then. And who does not know women who wish they were sick so that they could stay in bed without a bad conscience. These things have to be taken into consideration. We cannot overlook husbands who restrict their wives. They are there. We cannot just overlook demanding children, either. They are there. And these problems can prevent meaningful politics on the job. In other words: The necessary politics on the job can only become meaningful for the women if the means are found to solve the aforementioned problems.

We know the following about their work situation: In general, women do the most simple-minded kind of work, which makes the slightest identification impossible. Their jobs are so dull, however, that they do not allow any imagination, such as thinking of ways to earn money or to reorganize their work or to determine their own work hours. The work is so bad that it should really be abolished. But it cannot be abolished since one depends on it. The idea that work should be automated to make room for more meaningful work is unrealistic for people who are used to getting only the kind of jobs which others do not want. They know that they would be left jobless if this kind of work were no longer available. This is truly a realistic evaluation since most women are not trained in any skilled labor.

To elicit their support, any work conflict would have to have for these women the quality of letting them envision a change in their situation outside the work sphere as well. This is the only area with which they can use their imagination, in which they still have hopes and where they have not yet become hardened. But that also means that this is precisely the area in which they are prepared to fight.

What can they fight for at first? The women who work and have children are almost unbearably overworked. The women who are not in the production process but stay at home are completely neurotic because of their isolation. Their children are their only contact with the outside world, and it is through them they must find their identity. Every rebellion against their situation is condemned by society which considers them sick outcasts who have to conform or be expelled, since they are, after all, 'getting what they have coming to them'.



These, then, are the problems:

First, the isolation must be overcome and the work load reduced to a bearable level; after that further work can proceed.

It follows, therefore, that we can no longer repress the children we have and the ones we will get in the future.

In this article we want to deal only with those women who already have children and who are in the production process or will enter into it in the coming years.

What are the possibilities if company kindergartens are an unacceptable strategy and if it is clear that we do need kindergartens?

Let us look again at the demands of the kindergarten teachers. They demand small groups, better teacher training and changes in the content of education. What does that have to do with the position of the mothers?

At first the mothers might agree theoretically that it would be better for the children not to be crowded into small rooms. They might also realize that because children become more stable in smaller groups, they would not need to provoke their parents at home after having been suppressed all day in the kindergarten. But this demand by itself will not get the mothers to join the kindergarten teachers on the barricades. For these demands are not relevant to their own situation. They will only be-

come relevant if one realizes that kindergarten teachers and female workers have to organize as women since the demands for smaller groups, more teacher training facilities and less repressive education has direct bearing on the overload of work and the isolation of the women. This is not immediately apparent.

At first glance it seems that kindergarten teachers and mothers are in a conflict of interests. This, of course, was immediately picked up by the press at the time of preparations for the strike. By defining the issues in this way, they tried to mobilize the mothers against the kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten teachers demand that there be an immediate halt to the admission of children, that no new day care centers be opened and that classes be cancelled in the event of sickness of a kindergarten teacher when there is no trained substitute available. The mothers' immediate demand, on the other hand, is for more kindergartens for all children. They are even willing to send their children to a bad kindergarten since that is the precondition for their being able to go out and work. And they depend on this work either for financial reasons or because it seems the only way of breaking out of their isolation.

However, the kindergarten teachers do not wish to exclude these children on principle from the concept of education which they are working on. On the contrary, they are interested in preventing all children from becoming mental cripples. They no longer want to contribute to the psychological destruction of children who will then later have very little motivation to defend themselves. The hysteric reaction of unions and Senate to the preparations for the strike show that the kindergarten teachers are seen as a key group. At the same time it was obvious, however, that the teachers themselves are not yet aware of their power because they lack the theory behind it. They will sink into reformism without the cooperation and control of the female workers. It seems that bureaucracy is one step ahead of us with its theoretical evaluation in that it realizes the significance of the development of such solidarity among teachers, working women and mothers. It will depend to a great extent on the political work of these women whether the 350,000 potential female workers in Berlin will remain suppressed women open to exploitation.

If the kindergarten teachers succeed in preventing the opening of new day care centers the general question of teacher training must be attacked; at the kindergarten level this involves the training of girls. Today kindergarten teaching is a middle class profession. For a socialist education, however, we need proletarian teachers. The militantly activated desire of women for more and different kindergartens will raise the whole problem of education for girls to a new level. This question determines whether automation is introduced in the interest of capital or in the interest of the working population. The women who are kept in a state of stupidity by all possible means and are thus suppressed and made dependent on official protection are the backbone of reaction. But nobody wants to give up this backbone.



What do the demands of the kindergarten teachers have in common with the interests of the mothers?

Let us return to the small groups. Much space is necessary to allow for small kindergarten groups; however, they would not necessarily need to be in houses. The small groups could be almost anywhere. A kindergarten housed in the one building is desirable and conceivable: one can see that there are empty apartments, stores or offices everywhere. The advantages of such a kindergarten are obvious. Enough children from the

neighborhood are available; that means spontaneous social contacts either already exist or are possible because the families live in the same neighborhood. When a mother realizes that it would be feasible to establish a kindergarten for her own and the neighbor's children right in their own apartment building and then she finds out that the Senate refuses to give any money for it, she will start wondering why there is money available for land speculators but not for the children. If there are no kindergarten teachers available, she will ask why so many girls in junior high school who are interested in this profession do not have the opportunity to become kindergarten teachers with their educational background. She will also want to know why it is that those people who have had only eight years or less of schooling have so many children of their own but that these same people are not permitted to learn how to take care of the same number of children who are not their own.

In order to activate these desires we must continually examine the demands of the kindergarten teachers and compare them with the demands of the mothers, so that we may learn to demand from society as a whole that which it denies us. But for that purpose we must learn as women to realize our oppression in its full extent so that we can fight against it from the bottom. We have to see the point from which women can learn to fight -- the point where specific feminine interests coincide with the specific class interests.

We cannot permit conflicts to be picked up hastily and solutions offered which once again would leave us as diminished human beings. In order to learn how to fight for real socialism we have to learn to articulate what we understand by it and to transfer this knowledge to other women so that our strategy can be developed out of this understanding and not out of men's perception of the position of women; men make less radical demands because they lack the experience of certain oppressions.

We are, however, still only stuttering. We still have trouble formulating our own demands and standing up for them without chickening out before the theoretical superiority of the men. Despite the action councils (for women's liberation) we still are in danger of vacillating as individuals and may do things we have not thought through independently only because we want to defend ourselves in front of the men and prove to them that we can work politically. I consider it dangerous when female comrades say they want to work in companies in order to 'reach the women' but at the same time are extremely bored when other female comrades talk to them about their problems which originate from the fact that they have children. In other words, problems which they will have to face in the companies, too. I also know comrades who refuse to move into communal apartments with children because the children would disturb their political work. This kind of political work seems to follow the pleasure-pain principle rather than to have developed out of necessity.

I believe that we can only become ready to work after we have developed the strength to discuss rigorously with the women the necessities which result from our specific situation which cannot be discussed away. We shall be ready after having overcome our fears about whether our work is political enough for the men and whether the work we are doing will be recognized or not. I think we will be strong only when all theoreticians can call us inflexible, rigid, unbending, and emancipationist and we no longer regard these words as attacks but rather as an expression of insecurity in the men....







## FROM FEMINISM TO LIBERATION:

### bibliographic notes

When looking at the history of women one is struck above all by the continuity of their inferior status. At points of transition from one technological or socio-economic period to another, when they might have expected to gain a lasting measure of liberation, this has not come to pass. If there has been progress in any sphere for women, it has been accompanied by regression in others. Moreover, it has proved very difficult for women to study the history of their sex. Such a history does not exist, has yet to be written. This article was originally planned as a bibliographical essay of some scope on the body of literature pertinent to women. But the tedious job of salvaging truth from the myths and the chauvinism will have to wait. The marginal and distorted treatment of women by scholars, scientists, and writers has been well documented by Mary R. Beard.(1) Simone de Beauvoir has written what is probably the best general summary of the limitations of the existing theoretical systems used to define woman.(2) She has probably sacrificed accuracy in some few areas to comprehensive coverage, but it is discouraging that twenty years after The Second Sex was first published, we are still having to fight the same verbal battles, defend ourselves against the same ageless proclamations on woman's nature, woman's sphere. Norman O. Brown shows how Freud revealed Kantian 'schemata of rationality' to be 'schemata of repression'.(3) People are now looking with the same critical eye at Freud himself, among others.(4) Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown do try to push beyond patricidal-castration-guilt complex to a primal 'maternal reality principle', but we should beware lest those who would save us from the old familiar myths bring us only reinterpretations or new ones in their stead.(5) There does seem to be a trend away from regarding women as a part of the 'natural phenomena' which form the constant background of history, a trend corresponding to the growing respectability of social and cultural history alongside constitutional, diplomatic, and economic history.(6) But as the same author mentions elsewhere, women have been premature before in predicting a change for the better in their affairs. In a fragmentary way this article will review some early sources important to the past woman's movement, give a brief discussion of some establishment literature, and, finally, references to commentary both friendly and hostile on women's liberation as a movement, past and present.

### Beginnings

Surely it is no coincidence that the present movement for the liberation of women is going back to the pioneering works written on women, some 100 years old, which were influential in the Women's Rights Movement. Women are re-discovering the more radical strain in the movement which ran its uneven course from 1848 to 1920. Historians have defined the movement as the suffrage movement, thereby obscuring or ignoring its radical nature at some periods and the work of some women who worked in the suffrage movement but for whom the vote was at most a means for greater social change.(7)

There is a well-founded distrust among radicals of much of the work done in the field of anthropology during the last decades, for they are permeated with a cultural relativism, the motto of which is, in Norman O. Brown's words; 'When in Rome do as the Romans do'.(8) The most critical appraisal of cultural relativism, as regards anthropological research on women, can be found in some of the recent writings growing out of the women's liberation movement.(9) Moreover, throughout history, chauvinists of one sort or another have banded about such an assortment of theories on the natural woman in her savage, barbarian and primitive stages that caution seems the better part of wisdom in this area. Widely cited in the current women's liberation movement is Friedrich Engels' The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.(10) This work must have had enormous impact in the early 'natural rights' period of the feminist movement. The book must have been influential on Veblen's work on archaic society, although this is not open to verification. We find many parallels to Veblen's work in the writing of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose major work Women and Economics(11), in turn, became the bible for the woman's cause, although she herself was a disciple of Lester Frank Ward. To summarize very briefly, Marx and Engels recognized that the family system and the position of women, involved as they were in that original production - reproduction of the species - had much to do with the development of society and social institutions. Engels based his book on the work of Bachofen, McLennan and Morgan.(12) The enduring contribution of their work was to shake the unquestioned belief in the correctness of the male-dominated nuclear family with all the corresponding limitations on sexuality and sex roles. But this anthropological material has proven to be the weakest point in Engels' book. However, it has been pointed out that Engels' arguments on the inextricable connection between the development of private ownership and the subjugation of women are still valid if one postulates a more nearly equal position of women instead of the gynocracy which Engels describes.(13) Marcuse, in discussing Freud's even more dubious depicting of prehistory, says: 'If Freud's hypothesis is not corroborated by any anthropological evidence, it would have to be discarded altogether except for the fact that it telescopes, in a sequence of catastrophic events, the historical dialectic of domination and thereby elucidates aspects of civilization hitherto unexplained. We use Freud's anthropological speculation only in this sense: for its symbolic value.'(14) This is in part very persuasive; however, a history of the dialectic of domination based upon a symbolic anthropology has a way of spiralling off in tangent, missing our subject; woman. But this is an area which needs much sensitive work, preferably by women.

Before moving on to other commentators, a brief summary of Veblen's ideas on women may be of interest. This is not to overlook the problematic and contradictory nature of his work, the fragmentary and erratic psychology, some of which caused him to fall into oblivion within the social sciences. For the record, in a discussion of the personal psychological motivation of Veblen's radical views regarding masculinity and femininity, we read: 'Much of his work can be seen as a passionate defense of women; Veblen regarded women as the great oppressed cadre, whether they were the slaves of marauding tribes and thus the first 'private property' or the 19th century slaves of fashion who bore the brunt of male emasculation; intrinsically freer than men of such superstitions as nationalism, the women were the core carriers of social decency and simplicity underneath the perversions and rituals created and dominated by men.'(15) More specifically, Veblen analyzed 'the close connection, particularly in point

of psychological derivation, between individual ownership, the system of status, and the paternal household, as they appear in this culture.' (16) As in Engels' book, warfare and slavery arise at that level of technology which makes possible the production of a surplus. Prior to this stage, Veblen postulates a form of non-coercive monogamic marriage terminable at will by either party. He calls it 'the household of the unattached woman'. The type of marriage replacing this older form arises from the new custom of securing women from other tribes as trophies of battle. From this, marriage based upon coercion and ownership is introduced. Because of the growing prestige of the warriors and, consequently, of 'ownership-marriage' all other forms, and most particularly the independent, unattached woman, lose caste. In the minds of all men and woman the relationship between the sexes based upon capture and ownership by the man becomes the standard for 'beauty and honor'. When the group's increased size makes it difficult to secure enough wives by capture, marriage rites involving 'mock capture' are introduced to make it possible to find wives within the group. 'Hence the formal profession of fealty and submission on the part of the woman in the marriage rites of peoples among whom the household with a male head prevails... In the words of the formula, even after it has been appropriately softened under the latter-day decay of the sense of status, it is the woman's place to love, honor and obey.' (17)

J. J. Bachofen, using as sources ancient classical literature, postulated the existence of a religion of the Great Mother. (18) However, mother worship does not necessarily mean rule by women. 'Myth is not so crassly tied to reality.' (19) Simone de Beauvoir discusses the ambiguities of being enshrined in this way. Her central criticism of Engels in The Second Sex is that he reduces woman to an economic being in his analysis. However, in a later criticism of her book, she says she should have used a more materialist analysis: 'I should base the notion of woman as other and the Manichean argument it entails not on an idealistic and a priori struggle of consciences, but on the facts of supply and demand.' (20) Engels does give an overly simplified outline of how woman's supposed economic disadvantage was basic to the subsequent growth of exploitative and male-dominated social institutions, but this may not be sufficient reason to discount his work. As an anthropologist of the cultural relativist school has said, Marx and Engels did not seek to explain all of social life as but a reflex of economic life; 'Despite Engels' attempt to establish certain broad principles of social evolution along the lines of Lewis H. Morgan's stages of culture as given in Ancient Society,... stress is laid almost entirely on the influence exerted by economic elements in culture on those mechanisms and institutions which, based on economic inequalities are most responsive to the modes of exploitation and the vested interest of special privilege.' (21) In a general discussion on 'stereotypes of woman's place', a veteran in the struggle for women's rights sums it up in this way: '...the state of the economy affects the limits of personal range. Then the persuaders take over and make those limits attractive. The rewards are certified, the penalties suppressed. Nor is the pattern limited to the design for making a living. Every cultural process has its corresponding caveat.' (22) Another approach to a re-evaluation of Marx and Engels on archaic society sees power as essentially psychological in derivation: 'Marxian anthropology, with its assumption of the economic derivation of power and its correlative assumption that the psychology of economics is universally the psychology of appropriation, is committed to deny or belittle the existence of power in the archaic society.' (23)

Slave or idol, it is not of woman's choice. L.H. Morgan worked with kinship systems among American Indian tribes in formulating his view of archaic society as a peaceable gynocracy run along the line of a primitive communism. But here we should beware of creating new myths to conquer the old. There have been doubts cast upon the matriarchy theory which cannot entirely be passed off as male chauvinism, although the vengeance with which critics of this theory proceed is strange. On the other hand, Norman O. Brown, in searching for a theory of dynamic interrelations between family structure, religion, and natural culture, says: 'If the emergence of social privilege marks the Fall of Man, the Fall took place not in the transition from 'primitive communism' to 'private property' but in the transition from ape to man.' (24) A more cautious statement reads: 'Yet the burden of the theory put forward by Bachofen and others seems incontrovertible. If we scratch hard enough to reach beneath the benevolent Jovianian patriarchy of ancient Greece, we discover surely all the signs of the earlier matriarchal cultures.' (25) August Bebel in referring to criticism of his book saw in them an attempt 'to prove that neither the natural sciences nor anthropology provide any material for showing the necessity and usefulness of socialism.' (26) Simone de Beauvoir shows the problems in lumping together matriolatriy, matriarchy and matrilineage. She refers to Claude Levi-Strauss's work. For what it's worth, he analyzes marriage as a bond not between men and women but between men by means of women. (27) Woman herself is but the symbol of her line. True authority rests with her father or brother. Moreover, the persistence of the custom of residence after marriage among the man's kin takes away from our picture of autonomous women under matrilineal systems. Malinowski goes so far as to say that, in view of the universal pattern of legitimacy with regard to children, it can be thus said that 'the group consisting of a woman and her offspring is not a sociologically complete unit'. (28) With the same 'bias' he goes on to interpret the matrilineal family as did Levi-Strauss later as permitting a freer relationship between parents and child but retaining the stern authority figure and model for social ideals and ambition in the mother's brother. Furthermore, in the course of looking for a variant explanation of the incest taboo, Levi-Strauss defines woman in archaic society as the original and most precious form of goods for gift and barter. Yet, after defining woman as a piece of merchandise, Levi-Strauss can still say that in spite of centuries of abuse as an object, she retains something of her innate subjective value, 'thus explaining that richness, that fervor and mystery which the relations between the sexes have preserved.' (29) In a similar attempt to 'soften the blow', Herskovits takes issue with the designation of woman as 'property object' or 'profitable capital' and says that as supposed 'living property' (livestock?), women 'must be cared for in a special manner, they arouse especially strong sentiments of affection or antipathy, etc.' Therefore he would modify the claim of ownership a man has over a woman as 'authority and responsibility' over her. These are very fine distinctions indeed.

## Family vs. Work For Women

### Socialist and feminist views

Engels and August Bebel after him saw in the family institution in embryo form slavery and serfdom: 'in miniature all the antagonisms which later develop

on a wide scale within the society and its state'.(30) Consequently, they thought the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the capitalist system could be seen at work in destroying the nuclear, male-dominated family. With the full employment of women in industry he predicted the removal of both the *raison d'être* and the foundation of male-dominated monogamy. This led him to believe that only in the proletarian marriage, where the husband was economically powerless and in many cases the wife herself employed, could there be any possibility of true 'sex love'. This, in turn, led to his statement, far less reprehensible than the male chauvinism of many another writer but irritating nonetheless, that 'the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation -- except (!) perhaps, for some of that brutality toward women which became firmly rooted in the establishment of monogamy.'

It does not seem that socialist women carried through this sharp critique on the origins and functions of the family in their organizational and educational work.(31) Mari Jo Buhle's paper on 'Women in the Socialist Party, 1901-1914' shows how sporadic were the attempts to organize women around distinctly women's causes. The German women's movement, which seems to have suffered from the same lack of ideology as did the American movement, nevertheless did have a number of very charismatic leaders on the socialist side, in the proletarian women's movement. Clara Zetkin and Lily Braun were active for many decades working within the labor and socialist movements for women's rights. Zetkin had close ties to Lenin, resulting in a number of interesting interchanges between the two on women. In one, Lenin, while agreeing that women had to be freed from the home, proposed that women try to achieve an 'extension and exaltation of motherliness from the individual to the social sphere', i.e. women comrades should work within the youth movement.(32) However, seldom does one find stress on the words of Engels and Bebel taken up that woman was the first human being to experience oppression. At the end of her militant pamphlet on the awakening of political consciousness among women workers, Lily Braun says social and economic conditions 'hit women in the hallowed center of their nature', i.e. their mother love. In the conclusion she says that 'only intellectually free, strong women can bear and raise a generation of free men capable of leading socialism on to victory.'(33) This emphasis on the protection of motherhood in socialist programs was praised by Ellen Key, who wrote and spoke against the 'amaternalism' of much of the women's movement.(34) Miss Key proposed that the 'service of the mother' be given equal status as military service. The woman whose work was in all likelihood being so described was Charlotte Perkins Gilman. A non-Marxian socialist, Darwinist, she has been called the 'Marx and Veblen of the movement'.(35) A comparison with Marx and Engels is true in so far as she relates the subjugation of women to their exclusion from recognized social production and calls for the organization and industrialization of housework. However, she felt that the labor movement as well as the women's movement had mistakenly made a class issue of what she termed 'social evolution'. Furthermore, whereas she may have agreed with Engels and Bebel that woman was the first being to taste of bondage, she believed the centuries of woman's subjugation a necessary step in racial evolution. Woman is the 'bearer of the life principle' whose innate ability toward sustaining and preserving functions has civilized the man, her master. For, once subjugated by the man, she became his responsibility and in the process he was forced to take on some maternal traits of protecting and caring. 'Love makes the world go round,' she said. In this area she was drawing from a general Darwinist ap-

proach common throughout the period as well as specifically from the writings of Lester F. Ward on the biologic supremacy of women. The 1890s were much affected by racist thought.(36) One section of Kraditor's collection of readings is entitled 'Science enlisted in the cause of feminism', a practice which in some ways proved as risky for the movement as the early citation of chapter and verse to show Biblical support for the equality of the sexes. And yet, the work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Veblen, to name but three, were valuable in counteracting the pernicious theories on women put forth by other Social Darwinists around the turn of the century.(37) The major criticism which Perkins Gilman directs against this unhealthy 'sexuo-economic' imbalance (not to be confused with Reich's sex-economic morality) is its socially and racially counter-evolutionary effects on women, 'Half the human race is forced to confine its productive human energies to the same channels as its reproductive sex-energies.' Woman becomes a parasite and a 'Priestess of the Temple of Consumption'. Olive Schreiner made many of the same points in her book on Woman and Labor.(38) However, as she points out in discussing male attitudes toward woman and labor, 'it is not the labor, or the amount of labor, so much as the amount of reward that interferes with his ideal of the eternal womanly.' In a sense, the tendency of many feminists to stress the economic powerlessness of women obliterated their indispensable economic functions in the past in much the same way that the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions adopted at the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, by stressing the civil and legal death of the married woman, obliterated and distorted the body of laws which, in practice, gave women more leeway than indicated by the infamous and influential Sir William Blackstone in his Commentaries on the Laws of England. M. R. Beard also has a good discussion of this in her book. Under these conditions it is understandable, says Perkins Gilman, that the attitude of the married woman toward the prostitute is like 'the hatred of the trade-unionist for scab labor'.

The comparison with Veblen seems more valid in that both concentrated upon the problems of consumption in relation to women. Both believed that the time of woman's re-entry into socially useful work was not far off. But since Veblen defined consumption narrowly as a luxury directed to the comfort of status of the consumer, and therefore the privilege of the master, in consumption by women he could see only vicarious consumption for the head of the household. He was less sensitive to the implications for human sexuality in general of irrational non-gratifying consumption and the development of women in particular than was Perkins Gilman, who hints at relationships later taken up by Marcuse. In Woman and Economics she says: 'The false economic position of women... sexualizes our industrial relations and commercializes our sex relations. And, in the eternal effect upon the market, the over-sexed woman, in her unintelligent and ceaseless demands, hinders and perverts the economic development of the world.' Her disdain for women caught in this parasitic existence was expressed elsewhere when she referred to a society as filled with a legacy of 'Innumerable weak and little women, with the aspirations of an affectionate guinea pig.' Yet, she was radical as an ideologue for the movement, especially in view of the arguments of expediency then rampant in the literature of suffragism. Her work and that of Elizabeth C. Stanton, the only comparable figure in the women's movement, shows the radical potential which has been until recently obliterated. Their views on religion are close. The 'alien and imbecile' preoccupation of women with 'devout observances', traceable to

the fact that 'they stand in no such direct organic relation to the industrial process at large as would tend strongly to break down those habits of thought which, for the modern industrial purpose, are obsolete', had often been ridiculed; however, Mrs. Stanton believed that women would never be emancipated until the pernicious influence of organized religion were thrown off, and she reinterpreted the Bible from a feminist point of view. Perkins Gilman went on to say that 'modern religion would show less preoccupation with death and damnation, if women had more to do with its origin and development.' (40) She relates the prevailing attitudes toward motherhood partially to the influence of religion; for this phenomenon she used the term 'matriolatry'. Her most radical proposals were not the insistence that women combine home with work, something which was then in fact taking place, but that domestic industries be made public services and that child-rearing also be removed from the private sphere. 'Simply to bear children is a personal matter -- an animal function. Education is a collective, human, a social function,' she wrote. These views together with her vague prescription of a period of consciously directed evolution link her with the earlier work of Robert and Robert Dale Owens and John H. Noyes (Oneida Community). She outlined the liberating benefits to child and mother if both were freed at least partially from the isolation of the home, from the intensely personal relationship between parent and child.

## Establishment Literature

In contrast, the central position of the family is measured in positive terms by the huge corpus of establishment research on women, family and marriage. The key words here are socialization and stability; or in the language of the social sciences: 'The family serves as an agent of social placement for the new members of society, and by acting as an agent of control of marital relations, it regulates social alliances between family units and helps to place individuals into a patterned network of interweaving social relationships. The first of these features is known as the Principle of Legitimacy, the second as the Principle of Reciprocity.' (41) Another encyclopaedic book, The Family and Democratic Society, by Joseph K. Folsom, provides a mass of material bewildering in its detail. Out of a mass of data some few references stand out. Folsom found family systems of primitive and complex societies readily comparable and concluded that 'civilization does not elaborate the family system as it does the material culture and the economic organization.' (42) Folsom attempts to make correlations from the mass of data he covers: The tendency to give consideration to the bride increases 'as we go up the cultural scale'. Yet, there is no correlation between marital stability and stage of economic and cultural development. He notes the fact that throughout much of the modern period in the West the state has used the family to strengthen itself, most conspicuously through laws of inheritance. Folsom finds no qualitative difference in the treatment of women in matrilineal and patrilineal societies: 'A genuine matriarchate is nowhere to be found.' However, he also mentions briefly a very interesting hypothesis that patrilineal societies taboo female orgasm of the clitoris, whereas matrilineal societies permit it and encourage sex fore-play toward that end. (43)

Books, special issues of scholarly journals and newspaper articles concerned with the threatened stability or transition in the institutions of family and marriage in the U.S. and Europe multiplied many times in the late Forties and Fifties. Folsom's book was part of that group, and in a section on trends in the



American family, he calls for major reforms toward specialization and industrialization in the domestic sphere. He then went on to say, with less subtlety than most, that such steps were necessary for 'the salvation of democratic society'. A 1950 example states in consternation that not only was there never a Golden Age of the family in the U.S. but that there have been periods of dissatisfaction and rebellion against the values, restraints and objectives of family life throughout the history of the country. In the same article, the sharpest criticism levelled is: 'Society is far more interested in preserving the status quo of its social institutions than in determining whether these human institutions actually promote human welfare for which they are supposedly intended.' (44)

Viola Klein's widely cited book The Feminine Character, History of an ideology (45) lists as factors which sway research on women: the prevailing status and ideology assigned to women in a particular society as well as the author's personal, perhaps unconscious, attitudes toward women. In her introduction, one of the few places in the book where she actually admits that women are a subjugated group, she, as have others, describes women as an "out-group" distinguished from the dominant strata by physical characteristics, historical tradition and social role.' The Vaertings, in their book The Dominant Sex, examined by V. Klein, collected attributes of subordination (in either sex) from the ancient 'matriarchal' civilizations of Egypt, Libya and Sparta. The subordinated sex showed these traits: a passive role in love-making, obedience and submission, dependence on spouse, fearfulness, modesty, chastity, love of home, restricted interests, tenderness toward babies, relatively greater monogamous inclinations, interest in bodily adornment, finery. (46)

In her historical section on women's social and economic roles and the women's movement, she is careful to stress that women were not kept in submission by men but rather that cultural lag was in operation. Whereas Bebel, as noted earlier, described woman as the first slave, V. Klein merely sees that woman remained a serf 'after men had already outgrown the state of serfdom'. She rightly counters the viewpoint that women were throughout history excluded from the economic life of society; yet she is forced to admit that in all periods woman's work was dependent upon and subservient to man's work, meagerly reimbursed and largely unskilled. In this section her historical sketch corrects the overly positive portrayal of woman's influence in Mary Beard's book.

Ten years after The Feminine Character, V. Klein collaborated with Alva Myrdal on Women's Two Roles, Home and Work. (47) It is a competent work but refuses to allow a radical critique of the problem and consequently has no radical proposals for change. They see the main problem confronting women as their uncertain position between two conflicting ideals: the hardworking housewife and the lady of leisure. The general explanation for this phenomenon is, according to Klein and Myrdal, that women have in all spheres lagged one step behind men in the process of social evolution. Alice Rossi questions the irrational, dysfunctional maintenance of traditional marital and fertility customs. Recent women's liberation literature has tried to analyze ways in which the nuclear family is indeed quite functional, with periodic reforms, within the system. It should be noted that her analysis of the position of women has become considerably more radical in its criticisms, while remaining concerned chiefly with women in the professions. (48) The practical effect of so-called labor-saving devices has been, Klein and Myrdal explain, 'to decentralize services which had

in an earlier stage moved from the home into the factory... The concentration of production, which was the governing principle of industrialization, had come to a standstill in the sphere of the home.' While the authors do state after 161 pages that there must be a change in the 'minds and habits of men' and that the patriarchal family has outlived its day, the main thrust of their book places the blame of inferior status with women themselves: 'This is the price women have to pay for their uncertainty as regards their occupational future.' Their assessment of women's occupational opportunities in the course of the book shows - unintentionally perhaps - that a middle-class reliance on Right-to-Work and Equal Opportunity reforms can lead full circle. Women's entrance into the labor force, they write, amounts to the recovery of positions lost to women when they were 'squeezed out of the economic process'. However, they note, as is well known, that women, on the whole, remain in the lowest positions regarding skill earnings. They further note that the 'emancipation' of women has replaced 'amateurs by professionals in the 'feminine' occupations rather than men by women in the 'masculine' spheres.' Their solution to the conflict in women's roles is to structure a woman's life into three successive phases: education, family and social service. And lest this seem too radical, they are careful to add that their plan need not entail a new sexual division of labor. While not abandoning the feminist call for equality, 'there is no use shutting our eyes to the facts of life in pursuit of an abstract ideal.' Joseph Folsom was more innovative in his unequivocal plea for industrialization of housework. With some variation in emphasis or tone, most establishment literature on American women in the past fifteen years holds out as future steps a drive to bring social values more completely up to date with changes in economy and development, to educate public opinion to accept wider, more flexible roles for both sexes and to establish cooperative or public arrangements for household tasks and child care. A little adjustment is deemed sufficient to restore peace and tranquility. Betty Friedan has a good section attacking the 'functional freeze' effects of social science research on women. Ironically, Mirra Komarovsky, one of the sociologists bitterly criticized by Friedan, has in her own book pointed to another branch of science, psychoanalysis, as the intellectual basis of neo-anti-feminism.(49) This criticism refers to the work of Freud and Helene Deutsch as opposed to the 'dissident psychoanalysts' (elsewhere known as the 'neo-Freudian revisionist school')(50) which, she says, takes into account social causes for feminine character. There is another way of evaluating the effect on women of the work of such psychoanalysts as Fromm, Bettelheim and Erikson with their discovery of 'motherly and fatherly principles'(51) and 'inner and outer spaces'.(52) Much of psychoanalytic writing in the recent past, having cast off the more blatantly patriarchal, as well as other dialectically more penetrating sections of Freud, continue, with their imitators and vulgarizers, to do much to give scientific credibility to the image of women projected in the mass media. Another way of looking at the general problem with most research and analysis of women is that, on the one hand, woman is examined out of historical context without consideration for social factors or, on the other hand, she is measured and judged within the confines of the institution of the family. This is the criticism also made by Juliet Mitchell in regard to Socialist theory on women. 'In Marx's early writings woman becomes an anthropological entity, an ontological category, of a highly abstract kind... (Later) the problem of women has been submerged in an analysis of the family.' She mentions as one error resulting from this approach Marx's premature prediction of the imminent dissolution of the bourgeois family and the idea that the traditional family no longer existed in the working-class.

## OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTARY ON MOVEMENTS FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The first American women's movement has received scant attention from social analysts in view of the fact that it stretched over the better part of a century. The few books on the movement show the injurious effects of a tendency to rely on the biographical approach when the subject is woman. This has perhaps led historians and others to discredit ideological convictions in favor of personal psychological motivation on the part of activists in the women's movement.(53) Recently a number of books have dealt with ideological trends within the women's movement taking into account the relationship to the broader social and political climate. The Kraditor book and William L. O'Neill's recent book, subtitled 'the rise and fall of feminism in America'(54) stress the early radicalism in parts of the movement. Kraditor calls this the 'Natural Rights period', during which women fresh from the Abolitionist Movement redefined woman as human being, citizen, woman, wife, in that order. Kraditor and Andrew Sinclair(55) credit the anti-slavery movement with having radicalized the active women into an awareness of their own oppression. Kraditor discusses further steps in this process: 'When woman suffrage was a radical cause, a handful of pioneers who were willing to brave public censure were its leaders... The treatment they received in turn encouraged their tendency to question all that their society held sacred in the realm of religion as well as in the field of politics. But, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, woman suffrage had become respectable, and women who held orthodox opinions on every other issue could now join a suffrage organization without fear of ostracism.'(56) O'Neill does not quite agree with the analysis of the origin of the movement which links it so closely with the radicalizing effect of Abolitionism. He explains the emergence of the movement in the 1830s as women's rebellion against their confining, male-dictated sex-role within the Victorian conjugal family.(57) Christopher Lasch speaks of the movement as one of 'emancipated neurasthenic women', 'aliens' to their own class. For him the movement, 'the feminine impulse', is nothing more than one 'aspect of a more general development -- the revolt of intellectuals against the middle-class.(58) In any case, there is wide agreement that the movement was reacting against oppressive domesticity. Veblen in Theory of the Leisure Class and V. Klein et al have examined the fact that revolt was not possible until industrialization freed some women from the drudgery of housework, concretely in the sense of providing them with maids from among the masses who came to the cities looking for jobs. Alice Rossi, underlining the fact that marriage itself ('which tends to be endogamous with respect to class, race, and religion') hinders the growth of solidarity among women, finds that 'the size of a woman's rights movement has been responsive to the proportion of 'unattached' women in a population'. She links the lull in women's rights activism in the '50s to the early age at marriage and the all-time high proportion of married vs. single women. Likewise, she relates the rise in activism in the mid-'60s to a reversal of trends in the '50s.(59) Whatever the basic causes underlying the emergence of the movement in the 1830s, they are all related to its middle-class origins. Feminists were demanding equal rights and opportunities at a time when women in the labor and socialist movements were demanding differential and protective treatment and legislation. Ellen Key phrased it in this way: 'Nothing so clearly elucidates in what stage of feminism the upper-class movement was than its obstinate adherence to 'the principle of personal freedom', in the face of the atrocious actual conditions which resulted from 'the

freedom of work' of the women factory hands.' Only when the women's movement identified with the working-women as workers did organized labor begin to actively support the major goal of the movement -- suffrage. Kraditor also points out that the egalitarianism of the early stage of the suffrage movement with its origins in the anti-slavery struggle, returned in the form of social concern for the poor immigrant, Jane Addams' work. But this time the social concern for another oppressed group did not have a radicalizing effect on the women. The movement had in its latter stages become broad and moderate, willing to form alliances with any group in its drive for the vote. The vote itself was no longer demanded as an inalienable right but rather held up as a means for insuring more educated middle and upper class voters to counteract Negro and foreign-born voters and in other ways to give the country the unique benefits of feminine character. Thus, in the end, women were redirected to the very idealized roles as wives and mothers from which the movement had originally sought freedom. (60)

Lenin believed that a proletarian revolution would create the basis for 'real renovation in marriage and sexual matters'. Consequently, he chastised Clara Zetkin for allowing questions of sex and marriage to be the main topics in discussion groups of women comrades. He did not consider the enlightenment of proletarian women on these subjects as of very high priority. More specifically, Lenin was critical of Rosa Luxemburg's efforts in organizing and supporting prostitutes, even though he realized they were doubly oppressed by the property system and moral hypocrisy. Zetkin's reply to his admonishments is similar to arguments in women's liberation today: 'The questions of sex and marriage in a bourgeois society of private property, involve many problems, conflicts and much suffering for women of all social classes and ranks... A critical, historical attitude to these problems must lead to a ruthless examination of bourgeois society, to a disclosure of its real nature and effects, including condemnation of its sexual morality and falseness. All roads lead to Rome.' Speaking of experiments in new sexuality, Lenin said, 'However wild and revolutionary the behavior may be, it is still really quite bourgeois. It is, mainly, the hobby of the intellectuals...' In a brilliant essay on the woman and the German youth movement, Elisabeth Busse-Wilson makes a similar criticism of communal sects and other exhausting attempts at total personal opposition to the existing society. She refers to Marx's characterization of such experiments as being carried on 'behind society's back'. She believed that the only course was to organize a common struggle for an encompassing social solution. Herbert Marcuse also rejects a reliance on the supposed revolutionary power of a liberated adult sexuality as proposed by Wilhelm Reich. This is very obvious from an interesting interview with Marcuse in Germany on the emancipation of women done in 1962 prior to the publication of One-Dimensional Man. (61) Marcuse criticized feminist efforts as having the effective result of obtaining for women an equal share in the repression to which the man is exposed in the work sector. The point was then raised that parts of past women's movements had seen themselves as the last prop holding up a repressive society; they believed that society might undergo major change if men, coerced and manipulated in the production process, were unable to compensate by having a woman at home to dominate. To this Marcuse replied that the entry of women into the work sphere would not emancipate the woman as woman but transform her into an instrument of work. Furthermore, he believed that society could successfully absorb the full employment of women. Today in Women's Liberation there is little dis-

agreement that women have spent much of their history as precisely that -- an instrument of work, a beast of burden. One remembers the arguments of the anti-suffragists, arguing that participation in politics would diminish the innate purity of women. Marcuse is not as crass, of course; he goes on to relate a theory of Sartre in Being and Nothingness that the woman's capacity for joy, not as an instrument of labor but as a giver of pleasure, lies precisely in her distance from direct participation in the production process. Sartre becomes very specific: those parts of the body which have the least to do with work are the most erogenous zones and as the woman becomes more involved in the production process, organically as well as psychologically, her capacity for pleasure also decreases. Marcuse also doubted whether the expansion of public services to ease housework or child care responsibilities of the women would be a progressive step, for the reason that any intervention of the apparatus of social production into the private sphere becomes in turn a means of further social conformism and repression. In a repressive society the good becomes bad. S. de Beauvoir herself, after spending much of her book describing the dulling effects of woman's sphere of 'immanence', makes a telling distinction between 'white collar' work and housework. 'Cooking, washing, managing her house, bringing up children, woman shows more initiative and independence than men slaving under orders... The woman gets more deeply into reality. The baby fed and in his cradle, clean linen, the roast, constitute more tangible assets; yet just because, in the concrete pursuit of these aims, she feels their contingency - and accordingly her own - it often happens that woman does not identify with them and she has something left of herself. Man's enterprises are at once projects and evasions: he lets himself be smothered by his career and his 'front'.' Implicit in these reservations is a question as to whether the woman is a freer less co-opted being than the man. This small sampling of commentary on women's liberation shows the extent to which the revolutionary potential of the movement is judged by impressions of the failure of previous movements. All of which makes more necessary than ever that Women's Liberation develop an ideology which avoids the errors and weaknesses of past movements.

- E. H. Altbach

## FOOTNOTES

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## — RA News ←—————

RA has been slower than expected in getting onto a new publishing schedule and in establishing a pamphlet series. Rather than four issues in the Fall, only two appeared, due not only to a lack of money but, more primarily, to inadequate printing arrangements. With the Surrealist issue (properly Vol. IV, #1), the press upon which we had relied throughout RA's life finally collapsed. The present issue is the last to be printed on a small machine, for beginning with the next number, RA will be put together by the Black & Red group in Detroit on modern machines.

Directly ahead are three more "special" issues: the James issue, edited by Paul Buhle and M. Glaberman; the Socialist Scholars' Conference (April) number, featuring the leading papers from the 1969 Conference (by P. Buhle, R. Aronson, T. Schroyer and B. Brown); and, translated into English for the first time, Guy Debord's La Société du Spectacle, the marvelous Situationist text on everyday life under advanced, urbanized Capitalism--co-produced by the Black & Red group as an enlarged (approx. 100 pp) issue, with much graphic work.

With the June number we resume a more "regular" schedule, with special features in perhaps three of the four issues, taking up only a portion (40 or 50pp) of the issue. Some of the articles now being completed include: three essays on W.A. Williams' The Roots of the Modern American Empire, by Michael Meeropol, Robert Berkowitz and Martin Sklar; three essays on Paul Mattick's Marx and Keynes by R. Wicke, M. Glaberman and Dick Howard; two documents by Wilhelm Reich previously unavailable in English, with commentaries by Robert Auerbach and Elliott Eisenberg; a special segment of the July-August issue on the Political Economy



of Racism; an exchange of views over Youth Culture between John Heckman and the Buffalo Collective; a special segment of the September issue for an evaluation of Hegel's heritage, including contributions by the Italian Marxist-phenomenologist Enzo Paci, by Russell Jacoby on the Hegelian sources of thought in Lenin and Luxemburg, by Paul Piccone on Lenin's thought, by Franklin Rosemont on Hegel & the Surrealists, and by Paul Buhle on the interpretation (and its effects) of dialectics in the American Left of the 1930's; two essays by Benjamin Peret on the problem of Marxism and irrationality, with comments by F. Rosemont; a growing number of working class studies, culminating in a special segment of the Nov-Dec issue on the present state of the American working class; and a continuation of the debate in the September (1969) number on the political implications of Marxist philosophy.

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BACK ISSUES: Mar-Apr, 1969 and Nov, 1969 are being reprinted and will be available in bulk soon.

PAMPHLET SERIES: pamphlets now available include d.a.levy's "stone sarcophagus"; f.perlman's "Reproduction of Daily Life," r.head & darlene fife's "From Weird to Word"; and Herbert Marcuse's "The Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis," co-produced with Black Swan Press. Also TELOS #3 (#4 out soon), ROOT & BRANCH #1, both distributed in part by RA.

BOOK SERIES: the first RA Book will appear in the Fall, Dick Howard's Rosa Luxemburg Anthology, with MR Press; an arrangement with New Critics Press, St. Louis, has been made, and anthologies by Paul Mattick and Ernst Fischer, as well as an expanded hardcover edition of the Women's Liberation Number, are in preparation.



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## WOMEN'S LIBERATION

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**I AM FURIOUS(FEMALE)**, E. Cantrow, E. Diggs, and others. A general introduction to the subject. Originally a working paper for the women's caucus of the New University Conference(NUC). Covers the influence of Freud and Christianity in the ideological oppression of women. 15¢

**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION**, Margaret Benston. A basic statement of the material conditions in capitalist (and other) societies which define the group "women". Focus is upon the nature of work performed in and by the family. 10¢

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