WOMEN AND THE RADICAL MOVEMENT

Within the last year many radical women's groups have sprung up throughout the country. This was caused by the fact that movement women found themselves playing secondary roles on every level...be it in terms of leadership, or simply in terms of being listened to. They found themselves (and others) afraid to speak up because of self-doubts when in the presence of men. Their roles ended up concentrating on food-making, typing, mimeographing, general assistance work, and as a sexual supply for their male comrades after hours.

As these problems began being discussed, it became clear that what had at first been assumed to be a personal problem was in fact a social and political one. We found strong parallels between the liberation of women and black power struggle, being oppressed by similar psychological/economic dynamics. And the deeper we analyzed the problem, and realized that all women suffer from this kind of oppression, the more we realized that the problem was not just isolated to movement women.

It became necessary to go to the root of the problem, rather than to become engaged in solving secondary problems arising out of that condition. This, rather than storming the Pentagon as women, or protest the Democratic Convention as women, we must begin to expose the eliminate the causes of our oppression as women. Our job is not only to improve the conditions of the movement any more than it is to only improve the condition of professional working women. Both are reformist if thought of only as ends in themselves; and it ignores the broader concept that one cannot achieve equality for some members of one's group while the rest are not free.

In choosing to fight for women's liberation it is not enough, either, to explain it only in general terms of "the system." For the system oppresses many groups in many ways. Women must learn that the specific methods used to keep her oppressed are to convince her that she is at all times secondary to man, and that her life is defined in terms of him. We cannot speak of liberating ourselves until we free ourselves from this myth and accept ourselves as primary.

In our role as radical women we are confronted with the problem of assuring a female revolution within the general revolution. And we must begin to distinguish the real from the apparent freedom.

Radical men may advocate certain freedoms for women when they overlap their own interest, but these are not true freedoms unless they spring out of the concept of male and female equality and confront the issue of male supremacy.

For example, men may want women to fight in the revolution because they need every able bodied person they can get. And they may need women to join the work force under a socialist economic system because they cannot afford, like capitalism, to have an unemployed (surplus) labor force not contributing work, being supported by the state. And men may therefore advocate state nurseries so that mothers are not kept from work.

But has the fundamental concept of women changed? Do these changes mean that men have renounced the old supremacy relationship, wherein women must always be defined in terms of her man? Has the basic domination changed?

It is important to analyze the history of revolutions in terms of special interest groups. The American Revolution was a white male bourgeois revolution. The issue was being able to freely make a profit without England's interference: the Declaration of Independence was specifically written to justify independence from England. It
was a document which guaranteed rights neither to the blacks or to women. Crispus Attucks, one of the first black men to lose his life for the revolution, was fighting in a vicarious revolution - the white revolution. Betsy Ross sewing the flag was participating vicariously in a male revolution. The rights gained were nor for her.

It is always true of an oppressed group that the mere fact of their existence means that to a certain extent they have accepted their inferior-colonial-secondary status. Taught self-hatred, they identify instead with the oppressor. Thus such phenomenon as blacks bleaching their skin and straightening their hair, and women responding with horror at the thought of a woman president.

The economic revolution – i.e. change from capitalism to socialism – can also be viewed in terms of male interest. Under capitalism, the majority of men were exploited and controlled by a few men who held the wealth and power over their lives. By changing the economic structure to socialism, this particular economic exploitation was eradicated.

Women in the Soviet Union fought for and supported the revolution. But whether out of genuine hope that non-domination and non-exploitation would be applied as liberally to them, or worse, out of a lack of even a minimum awareness that they themselves were important, the Soviet revolution remained a male power revolution, although many new benefits fell to women. The Soviet Union is still primarily male governed; women's integration into the labor force meant simply that she transferred her auxiliary, service relationship with men into the area of work. Soviet women are teachers, doctors, assistants, food handlers. And when they come home from work they are expected to continue the submission role to men and do the housework, cooking and assume primary responsibility for the child-rearing.

It is important for radical women to learn from these events. The dominant/submissive relationship between men and women was not challenged. Not confronted. We were asked by them instead to equate our liberation with theirs...to blame our inferior conditions on the economic structure rather than confront the obvious male interest in keeping women "in their place." We never insisted upon as explicit a program for freeing women as the man had demanded for freeing himself from economic exploitation. We never confronted men and demanded that unless they give up their domination over us, we would not fight for their revolution, work in their revolution. We never fought the primary cause, hoping instead that changing the secondary characteristics would win us freedom. And we ended up with a revolution that simply transferred male supremacy, paternalism and male power onto the new economy. A reformist revolution that only improved upon our privileges but did not change the basic structure causing our oppression.

A black revolutionary today would not be satisfied knowing only that the economic structure went from private to collective control; he would want to know about racism. And you would have to show him how white power and supremacy would be eliminated in that revolution before he would join you.

Until we make such similar demands, revolution will pass us by.

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