

TOWARD A MASS FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Draft Resolution on Women's Liberation

The New Feminism

Few myths are on the surface so irrational, yet at the same time so widely believed, as that of the inferiority of women. For thousands of years, people all over the world have been taught to believe that women are biologically and intellectually inferior to men, with an emotional constitution that makes their acceptance of a subservient role in society natural.

Throughout history, women have rebelled against this, and fought for improvements in their status. But never before has there been a feminist movement as irreconcilable in its opposition to oppression, as radical in its critique of the social forces that breed these inequities, and as potentially powerful a force for helping to end that oppression, as the emerging movement of today.

The most outstanding characteristic of this new movement is its deep-going challenge of every aspect of the oppression of women, including the hitherto unquestioned "sacred" role of women in the family. The fundamental proposition being put forward by feminists today is that it is not biology but social institutions which have kept women "in their place" in the home; that the present-day psychological difference between men and women -- and even to some extent their physical differences -- have been culturally conditioned, not biologically determined.

This bold denial of biological inferiority is part of the unprecedented militancy of feminism today. For the first time in history many people are beginning to grasp the depth of

women's oppression, the degree to which womankind has been systematically stunted, warped and dehumanized to fit the role of wife-mother-housekeeper.

At the heart of this radicalization of women is the growing contradiction between the tremendous wealth of American society, the fact that the material resources already exist to free women from domestic slavery, and the reality that this is not being done by the capitalist social order. For the first time in history, large numbers of women are becoming conscious that there are alternatives to their present roles.

The consciousness that society is responsible for women's second class status is reflected in all aspects of the feminist movement's activities. It can be seen in the consciousness-raising groups, where women discuss how their personal problems are not the result of their own individual failings, but flow from a basic oppression suffered by all women. It is expressed repeatedly in feminist literature. Most importantly, it can be seen in the actions of masses of women in which demands have been raised for free 24-hour child care centers, free abortions on demand, and equal job and educational opportunities. If realized, such measures would bring much closer the day when women can make a choice about what they want to do with their lives.

Since the beginning of class society and the emergence of the patriarchal family system, women whether rich or poor have been relegated to the confines of the home and assigned the social responsibility of child-raising and house-keeping. Women have never consciously chosen this role, but have been

trained from birth to feel that their fulfillment can come only from marriage and child-rearing. Even when women have been forced, or have chosen, to take jobs outside the home, they have been charged with neglecting their "first responsibility" to the family. Thus, women throughout the history of class society have been prevented from being independent human beings. They have been dependent, both for economic security and for their very psychological identity and estimate of self-worth, on their husbands, fathers or boyfriends.

The role of women in the family means that the birth of a child commits a woman to years of work and drudgery. Because women lack control over the decision to have children, they have no control over their lives. The vulnerability and dependency which flows from this is an important aspect of every woman's existence. It helps to reinforce the concept that women are basically powerless.

Changes in the Family

Since its emergence at the dawn of civilization, the family institution has evolved and changed according to the different class structures and needs of the systems of slavery, feudalism and capitalism.

Industrialization has had a profound impact on the family. Industrialization has progressively displaced production centered around the family. Before industrialization most goods were produced on the family farm or estate or in the family shop or small business, and much of what each individual family consumed in the way of clothes and food was produced by the family members. The role of women in the family economic unit clearly defined their role in society. Women had little identity

aside from their functions within the family, and even fewer rights. They could not travel, speak in public, engage in politics, go to college, drink in the taverns or mix in society at large in any significant way.

Industrialization began to lay the basis for the replacement of the family by creating the possibility of relieving women of their economic functions in the home, and by giving them an independent productive role outside the home.

As mass production developed, for the first time in thousands of years, women were drawn away from the family to outside work. Brutal and exploitative though it was, by bringing women out of the home, industrialization led to a more and more obvious contradiction between the restrictions put on women in public activities and the need for them to participate in industry.

The rapid industrialization and urbanization of American society were key factors which led to the rise of the women's rights movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was part of and a sequel to a general worldwide upsurge in the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions against the traditional, inherited privileges of the ruling class under feudalism. In the United States, it grew out of the radicalization preceding the Civil War and got much of its impetus from the abolition movement.

At the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, a Declaration of Sentiments was passed, which called for women to have "immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United

States." Specifically this included the right to vote, property rights, freedom from the domination of the husband, the right to have a profession, to go to college, to better wages, and an end to the moral double standard between men and women.

The new rise of the American feminist movement is as much a response to the era of capitalism in its death agony, as the earlier women's movement was a response to the social conditions created by 19th century capitalism.

The demands of the present movement go beyond those of the earlier women's rights movement, while at the same time building upon the aims and achievements of this earlier struggle. The feminist movement today is still demanding equality -- in pay, in opportunity, in the types of options women have in life -- but there is a much more radical understanding that real equality cannot be won without the full right of women to control their bodies, without economic independence and without social alternatives to private responsibility for the raising of children within the individual family.

Whereas the early women's movement spoke in terms of gaining equal rights within American capitalist society, the feminist movement of today started out by questioning the basic structure and institutions of this society, especially the family. This new level is reflected in the demands raised at the Congress to Unite Women, held in November 1969 in New York City, one of the first major conferences of the women's liberation movement. It outlined some of the basic goals of fundamental importance to all women that are being raised by the feminist movement: 24-hour child care centers open to all children from

infancy to early adolescence regardless of their parents' income or marital status, with child care practices being decided by those using the centers; free abortion on demand, no forced sterilizations -- the right of women to control their own bodies; equal job opportunities; an end to the tracking system in education; women's studies programs; enforcement of Title VII of the 1964 Equal Rights Act which calls for equality on the job; an end to the derogatory image of women presented by the media; and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The early women's rights movement disintegrated after 1920, but continuing economic and social development in the U.S. laid the basis for the emergence of the new feminist movement and the more radical demands of today. The giant expansion of technology and industrialization, which has accelerated since World War II, has removed productive activities from the family to an unprecedented degree. The old family farm has virtually disappeared. Modern appliances, frozen and packaged foods, and ready-made clothes are all examples of the degree to which productive activities have been transferred out of the individual, isolated family unit, to be carried out on a mass production basis.

The role of women is directly affected by these changes in the nature of the family which have narrowed the tasks of millions of housewives to such functions as care of the very young and very old, and janitorial and cooking tasks around the house. Along with this is the fact that the average American woman has fewer children. For tens of millions of women this has meant that for the greatest period of her life, her domestic

role consists only of caring for her own and her husband's personal needs.

At the same time, more women than ever before are working outside the home, and those who do, continue to be discriminated against on the job. More than 43 percent of all adult American women are today employed outside their own homes. This represents a big jump from 1960 when the figure was 37 percent, and from 1950, when it was 34. Women earn, on the average, 40 percent less than employed males. The best paying jobs, almost without exception are closed to them.

In addition, they continue to have a double burden -- their jobs and their "duties" at home. For working women with children, facing a situation where there are few child care facilities available, this double burden is especially oppressive.

More women than ever before in history are receiving more and more education. Between 1950 and 1966 the percentage of American women aged 20-34 attending school quadrupled. In the last decade, the number of white women with at least four years of high school climbed from 65 to 80 percent. Among Black women, the figure went from 40 to 61 percent. Hundreds of thousands of women enter the country's colleges and universities. The number of women with some college education rose 160 percent in the last decade, against a 100 percent rise for men. Yet the gap continues to widen on all levels between the education and training women receive, and the availability of job opportunities commensurate with their skills. Even a superior education does not qualify women for most jobs held by less educated men.

Finally, the contradiction continues to deepen between the scientific and technological potential women see for emancipating themselves from the home and gaining control over their lives and bodies, and the fact they are denied this liberation. Technology and resources are put at the service of those who would destroy humanity while child care centers, hospitals, schools and food centers are not built, and reactionary abortion laws and a lack of adequate birth control education and safe methods deny women the right to control their lives.

Thus while women see the increased potential for freeing themselves of domestic servitude, escaping the crushing burdens of poverty, and participating fully in the activities of society, they are denied this opportunity and told that unlike men their identity and worth still come from the degree of their success in finding a man, settling down in a home, and having children. Just at the point when millions of women have more material possibility than ever to develop, more options than ever before about what they can do with their lives, more reason than ever to believe in their own intelligence and abilities, they are still held back by the basic wife-mother-housekeeper role assigned to females. The thoroughgoing radicalism of the new feminist movement is partly a product of these growing contradictions.

The new feminist movement is also a product of the broader radicalization in this country, most importantly the struggles of Blacks, Chicanos and other oppressed nationalities which are rebelling against the myths of supposed biological inferiority which have kept them down. The assertion of Black pride and Black

power helped spark the explosion of feminist consciousness, pride and sisterhood which have been necessary to the growth of the feminist movement.

The Function of the Family

There is no institution in class society whose true role is as hidden by prejudices and mystification as that of the family. Much religious teaching is devoted to reinforcing the monogamous family unit, any deviation from which is labelled as "sin." The academic world has been united in rationalizing the existence of the nuclear family and the oppression of women. Bourgeois psychology has upheld the basic definition of women as dependent and submissive, and has labelled any initiative or aggressiveness on the part of women as "unnatural." Bourgeois historians have hidden the true history of the struggle of women and have portrayed women activists and political leaders in a way calculated to make it difficult to identify with them. Bourgeois sociologists uphold the subordination of women in the family.

Bourgeois anthropologists perpetrate the myth that the family economic unit has always existed, and that women have always been subservient to men and played a limited social role because of their childbearing. They deny the fact that the origin of the patriarchal family coincided with, and flowed from, the development of private property, class society and the state. They hide the fact that in early communal societies, the basic economic unit was the clan, not an individual family. Within each clan goods were shared equally, and people worked in a cooperative way rather than competing against one another.

The historic turning point in the transfer of these economic functions from the clan to the family came with the development of an economic surplus and individual accumulation of this surplus as private property. Individuals began to separate themselves from the clan and set up separate households. Women became isolated from communal activity, and monogamy for the wife was strictly enforced to assure legitimate heirs.

Today, the patriarchal family unit remains as the basic economic cell of class society, and women continue to be isolated in individual households, dependent on individual men for economic survival. For working women, poor women, and women of oppressed nationalities, the role women are forced into is the most oppressive, both to themselves and their children. They are obliged to accept the worst jobs and have even less access to educational opportunities, childcare, safe abortions or birth control. This means greater economic vulnerability and dependence on a man. The alternative is often welfare. If a woman works, she may have to leave her children uncared for.

The fact that poor women suffer most from their oppression as women stems from the fact that the family is one of the basic instruments through which the social and economic inequities of class differences are perpetuated. Under capitalism, the nuclear family is assigned the responsibility for providing for the welfare of its members -- food, clothing, health care, child care, education and care of the old and sick. And each family is thrown into competition with all others to get its share of the available jobs, goods and services.

An important aspect of the class struggle under capitalism has been the fight to force the ruling class to shoulder more

and more of the responsibility for social welfare. Concessions have been won in this struggle, including limited social security benefits, medicare, free public education through high school, welfare, limited unemployment insurance, and state-financed colleges. These concessions represent significant advances, but the ruling class is constantly pushing to cut back on even the small gains made, which come no where close to providing for basic needs.

The demands being raised by the feminist movement today represent the sharpest challenge yet to the concept that the individual family must take full economic responsibility for each of its members. Demands like free 24-hour child care for all begins to place responsibility for rearing children on society as a whole and point in the direction of a redivision of social wealth so fundamental that it begins to bring into question the whole capitalist system.

The role played by women in the household serves as the chief rationalization for the oppression of women in all other spheres. The unique "duties" of women in the family are used to justify unequal job and educational opportunity, unequal pay, the exploitation of women as sex objects, the discrimination against women in all areas including the arts, sports, scientific research, etc., and the use of women as a section of the reserve army of labor.

The family system also plays a crucial role for capitalism in inculcating the norms and values of the private property system. The 19th century utopian socialist, Robert Owen, summarized this function of the family in the following way:

"The children within these dens of selfishness and hypocrisy are taught to consider their own individual family their whole world, and that it is the duty and interest of all within that little orb to do whatever they can to promote the advantages of all the legitimate members of it. With these persons, it is my house, my wife, my estate, my children, my husband; our estate, and our children; or my brothers, my sisters; and our house and property."

Within the patriarchal family, the children receive training in submissiveness to authority, a training which is necessary to an economic system which demands acceptance of the right of the rich to rule. The family is an authoritarian structure, with the man considered the head and the women and children dependent on him. Obedience to the father and to the norms of the monogamous family unit helps to prepare the child for acceptance of the ideology of class society. The fostering of a child's loyalty to the individual family unit is paralleled by the inculcation of patriotism and chauvinism. The family plays the central role in implanting in infants and children the character structure which reinforces tendencies to accept all the social relations intrinsic to capitalism.

The opponents of the women's liberation movement maintain that the feminist opposition to the family system is a challenge to the existence of affectionate relationships between people. But in reality, the family system and class society are the real destroyers of genuine human relationships.

Until the bourgeois revolution, among the wealthy and powerful possessing classes, the choice of a husband or wife was made strictly on the grounds of economic considerations, usually by the parents of the couple. It was only with the rise of capitalism, with its concept of free exchange and free labor,

that the idea of freedom of choice of marriage partners evolved along with other democratic ideas. However, despite this assertion that relationships between husband and wife should be based on free choice and affection, the old economic basis of the marriage tie remained, and along with it, the institutions of adultery and prostitution.

The fact that people are free to choose their own partners in marriage does not bring freedom and happiness within marriage any more than "freedom" to sell one's labor power means that a worker is truly free. So long as women and children are dependent on the male for their economic existence, they will tend to be subordinate to him in their personal relationships. This means that millions of people who do not want to live together, who often do not even like each other, will continue to live together, because they feel they have no other choice. When feminists oppose the patriarchal family system, they are talking about eliminating this economic compulsion, so that personal relationships will be freed from these economic fetters.

A factor which has promoted this radical critique of the family made by feminists today has been the fact that the family has come under attack as part of the general radicalization. More and more people are becoming alienated from the decadent social relationships inherent in the death agony of a society oriented toward competition and accumulation of private property. Many, especially young people, are beginning to see the hypocrisy of capitalism's reverence for the "sacred" family system. They see that while popular magazines and other media praise the ideals of family "togetherness," the relationships between human

beings are distorted by the crassest market-place ideas. Husbands and wives are chosen on the competitive sex market; the husband according to his status, the wife according to her value as a sex object. The children are seen as "products" produced by the family, with each family making "investments" in its children to prepare them for "success" in the competitive world. This get-ahead mentality is reflected not only within the family, but also in friendships since social relationships are calculated according to what would be most beneficial in the careerist struggle to advance.

The capitalist system itself has been laying the basis for the disintegration of the basic economic, competitive family unit. The rising divorce rate, the number of children running away from home, the growth of communes and collectives, increasing social acceptance of deviations from the sexual mores of the patriarchal family system, and the increased number of people living together without legal marriage certificates are all signs of this disintegration. More and more, the ideological covering that has hidden the true role of this institution is being removed.

The disintegration of the family has also been affected by other products of the technological revolution including the increased mobility of the population, the breaking down of traditional community ties, and the decline in religion. The "sexual revolution" is a result, not primarily of the pill, but of these broader changes in people's outlook.

Capitalism has produced its own grave diggers in more ways than one. The higher the level of material and technological

development, the more obvious it becomes to broader and broader layers of the population that the social forms and institutions of class society have ceased to play a progressive role. On the contrary, they have become reactionary blocks to the further advancement and welfare of humanity.

In this sense, we are on the threshold of a turning point in world history similar to the turning point thousands of years ago when the private property system replaced the communal clan system. Just as the beginning of class society and private property were associated with the separation of women into individual households, so the freeing of women will see the emergence of women from their dependence on individual men within the home into full participation in public life and social production.

Revolutionary Strategy for the Feminist Movement

Whereas the early women's rights movement, which was able to go part of the way in the struggle for liberation, was an aspect and extension of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the current female liberation struggle -- including the demands for the deferred democratic rights of equality -- is part of the process of the developing anticapitalist revolution. The question of how to end the oppression of women flows from, and is tied into, the question of how to end class society. The strategy of the feminist movement must flow from a basic analysis of how capitalism perpetuates itself, and what forces must be mobilized in struggle to eliminate it.

In the United States we are facing the strongest, best organized and most conscious ruling class in history. No small

or insignificant force will be capable of taking power from its hands. There are no "individual solutions" for large numbers of people. The struggle must be aimed at taking the resources away from those who control them for personal profit and placing them under the control of the vast majority.

The women's liberation movement represents the emergence of new forces which have the potential for organizing tens of millions of women in independent struggle. It is a struggle with its own unique roots, dynamic and demands, but at the same time, the fundamental questions of strategy which the movement poses are not new. They are basically the same as the questions posed by every other developing mass movement.

The building of any mass movement requires the understanding that the ruling class in this country maintains its dominance through illusion as well as violence. A key illusion among the masses of people that helps perpetuate class rule is the belief that the system is capable of reforming itself and satisfying the needs of the vast majority. But it is only through the experience of struggle that it becomes clear to masses of people that they must take over and control society for themselves if their demands are to be fully met. And it is through struggle that oppressed people begin to see the potential power they have to do this.

A revolutionary strategy for the feminist movement must be based on a program of democratic and transitional demands, rooted in the needs of the masses of women, and part of the broader transitional program of the socialist revolution. A program of struggle around such demands will have a revolutionary logic

because they mobilize masses in struggle against the ruling class and its government, and to win them in full requires a socialist revolution. The key question facing the revolutionary party, then, is how to help mobilize masses of women -- around what demands and through what forms can this be done, related to the immediate needs and level of understanding of masses of women.

No full program for the women's liberation movement has yet been worked out, and it is impossible, at this time, to develop such a full program of demands. However, the broad outlines of such a program have begun to emerge and several of the key demands are already clear.

The Right to Control One's Own Body

One set of demands are those centered around the right of women to control their own bodies:

- repeal all abortion laws
- free abortion on demand, no forced sterilizations
- free, widely disseminated birth control information
- free and safe birth control devices available to all
- a crash program of government funded research adequate to develop totally safe and effective birth control and abortion methods

The right of a woman to decide for herself when and if she will have a child is precondition number one to liberation. So long as a woman cannot control what goes on inside her own body, so long as she remains the victim of state-enforced motherhood, she does not have control over the most basic factors determining her life. Precisely because alternatives exist, the denial of adequate birth control and abortion are among the most brutal aspects of women's oppression. Millions of women are coming

to see this with increasing clarity and to demand changes.

Freedom from Domestic Slavery

The necessity of freeing women from the bonds of domestic slavery and establishing social responsibility for the important social function of the care and raising of children has given rise to a series of demands:

- free, 24-hour child care centers, open to all children from infancy to early adolescence regardless of parents' income or marital status; child care practices to be decided by those who use the centers
- low-cost, high quality cafeteria and take out food services available to all
- low-cost, high quality laundry facilities available to all
- low-cost cleaning services organized on an industrial basis available to all
- a crash, government financed development program to provide adequate housing for all; no rent to exceed 10 percent of income; no discrimination against single women or women with children

We counterpose such demands to the ultraleft concept of abolishing or destroying the family. Our goal is to create economic and social alternatives which are superior to the present family system and better able to provide for the needs currently met, however poorly, by the family system, so that personal relationships will be a matter of free choice and not economic compulsion.

Economic Freedom

To assure full economic independence for women we demand:

- equal pay for equal work
- no discrimination against women in any job classification
- passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution and enforcement of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in order to guarantee an end to all discrimination against women on the basis of sex
- the extension of "protective legislation" (providing special working conditions for women) to cover men, in order to provide better working conditions for both men and women and prevent the protective legislation from being used to discriminate against women
- guaranteed jobs at union wages for all women who are able and want to work
- preferential hiring, training and upgrading of women and oppressed national minorities, coupled with a sliding scale of hours and wages to combat unemployment and inflation
- full paid maternity leaves with no loss of job or seniority
- guaranteed minimum income for all women and men, regardless of marital status, protected against inflation by automatic increases, adequate to provide a decent standard of living

In putting forward and fighting for these and other demands of the women's liberation movement, working women will be forming their own organizations, as well as working through the organized

labor movement, insisting that the unions adopt these demands as their own. This will be an integral part of the fight to transform the unions into instruments of revolutionary struggle for the benefit of the working class as a whole.

Three major trade unions -- the United Auto Workers, the American Federation of Teachers and the American Newspaper Guild -- have adopted convention resolutions incorporating demands of the women's liberation movement for maternity leave, child care centers and an end to discrimination against women workers. At the 1970 AFT convention, women delegates formed a caucus to fight for their demands.

A national organization of women government workers was formed in 1968 -- Federally Employed Women. It now has 1,000 members in 30 chapters across the country. One-half of the members are Black women. In New York City, women workers for the city government have formed Women in City Government United, which participated in the August 26, 1970 demonstration. It is fighting discrimination against women in city jobs, for abortion coverage in women workers' health insurance, and for free 24-hour child care centers.

Equal Educational Opportunities

To combat the educational and psychological conditioning of women which prepares them for an inferior, second-class status, we demand:

- an end to the "tracking" system, beginning in the primary grades, which guides women towards socially acceptable courses and careers such as homemaking, secretarial skills, nursing and teaching

- open admissions for women to all institutions of higher education; special programs to encourage women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields
- women's studies programs controlled by women to teach the truth about women throughout history
- self-defense training courses open to all women
- the right of pregnant women and unmarried mothers to remain in regular educational institutions
- an end to the textbooks' and mass media's derogatory and stereotyped portrayal of women as sex objects, and stupid, weak, emotionally dependent creatures
- university facilities for and financing of child care centers and abortion-contraception services for students and employees

Because of the special role played by students and young women in the feminist movement as a whole, struggles on campuses and in the high schools can play an important part in helping to spark struggles by other women. The struggle to win control of university facilities to benefit women, such as medical facilities for abortion, and classroom and library facilities for women's studies, provides an example for the general fight to win control of the resources of society.

Women Prisoners

To combat the special forms of legal victimization of women by the police and judicial apparatus, we demand:

- abolition of all special legal penalties for women
- abolition of all laws victimizing prostitutes
- review the cases of all women prisoners; release of all imprisoned or held without fair trial

Imperialist War

Because women, along with every other sector of the population, pay the price of the ruling class' imperialist aggression around the world, the women's liberation movement should demand:

- immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops from all foreign bases
- an end to capitalist conscription
- funds previously used for war to be used to finance free child care facilities, abortion clinics and hospitals, schools, housing, and provide guaranteed incomes

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Women of Oppressed Nationalities

The feminist movement recognizes that most Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, Native American and Oriental American women suffer a triple oppression -- as women, as workers and as oppressed nationalities -- and that their struggle will, for this reason, take different forms. Black feminism and Black nationalism, Chicano nationalism and Chicana feminism are complementary aspects of the deepening revolutionary consciousness among millions of oppressed women. The movement of oppressed nationalities and the women's liberation movement have already had a profound effect on each other.

Black feminism leads Black women to a discovery of their identity as human beings and therefore builds a new confidence and spirit of struggle against all forms of oppression that Black women face. Groups such as the Phoenix Organization of Women, a predominately Black and Puerto Rican group of ex-drug addicts in New York, have played a vanguard role in building the women's liberation movement. Within all the various Black

organizations, discussions and debates are taking place over the question of the relationship of the Black movement to the women's liberation movement. More and more women of the oppressed nationalities are coming to the conclusion that feminist ideas are deeply relevant to their lives and are organizing to fight their oppression as women as well as their national oppression.

In La Raza Unida Party of Northern California women's liberation demands were incorporated as a part of the party's platform. The same question will be raised in connection with a Black political party.

The demands already discussed are of great importance to the women of oppressed nationalities precisely because it is they who suffer the most from the domestic enslavement of women and the reactionary character of the patriarchal family system. In addition to these fundamental demands of the feminist movement, women of oppressed nationalities are also fighting, as an integral part of their struggle for liberation as women and as members of oppressed nationalities -- for the right of the Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American and Oriental American communities to control the institutions which affect their lives. Of key importance is the struggle for the child care facilities, abortion and medical facilities and schools to be placed under the control of boards elected by the oppressed nationalities themselves.

A Perspective of Mass Action

Around these demands, and others like them which will emerge in the course of the struggle and the development of the feminist movement, it will be possible to build a mass women's liberation movement. However, it is not enough simply to have a

correct program of demands based on the needs of women. We must also have a correct appreciation of how to mobilize large numbers of women in struggle to win their demands.

Two basic questions must be answered:

1) Given the fact that women are divided by class, race, and other factors, what are the possibilities for uniting women in the struggle for liberation?

2) What is the relationship between the feminist movement and other social protest movements such as the antiwar movement, the movements of oppressed nationalities, the radical student movement and the struggles of labor?

Two main incorrect points of view have been put forward within the women's liberation movement in regard to the first question. There are some women who say that the class and racial divisions among women are unimportant. This tendency is often reflected in the attempt to designate women as "an oppressed class." Those who hold this view say that all that is needed for the liberation of humankind is a mass independent women's movement because the oppression of women is primary, other forms of oppression flow from it, and thus all other struggles derive from, or are aspects of, the feminist struggle.

At the other extreme are some women who say there is no basis, except a strict class basis, for uniting women, that the divisions among women are insurmountable. Those who hold this viewpoint tend to deny the significance of the oppression of women as women and hold that the feminist struggle should be subordinated to and wait for other struggles.

The truth is that women are at the same time both united

by sexist oppression and divided by class society. There is an objective basis for a unified struggle of women of different nationalities and classes, because all women are oppressed as women. Sisterhood is powerful because of this universal female oppression, and this is the basis for the existence of an independent, non-exclusive mass feminist movement.

Women of different social classes suffer to very different degrees from lack of child care and abortion facilities, unequal pay, poor jobs, warped education and social conditioning. But these are all aspects of the very real oppression of all women and all women have a stake in struggling around these issues. The broadest unity in struggle, closed to no woman, is possible and progressive if this unity is based on demands which combat the oppression of women perpetuated by capitalism. Women of the working class have the most to gain by united struggles around these issues.

Because women suffer different forms and degrees of oppression, different groupings will organize separately, as well as together. Black women, and women of the other oppressed nationalities will organize as Blacks, as Chicanas, as Puerto Ricans, because they suffer a unique oppression. Working women will organize to further their struggles on the job. High school students, college students, women belonging to religious organizations, gay women, and other groups of women are all already showing a need to organize separately around the particular oppression they face. In fact this independent organization is necessary to most effectively mobilize the largest numbers of women in broad-based actions.

Any attempt to disregard either those factors which divide women or those which unite them will lead to misunderstandings and roadblocks in the attempt to mobilize the full power of women.

The answer to the second question lies in the fact that the feminist movement, like the struggle against imperialist war, the liberation struggles of the oppressed nationalities, and the labor movement, all have one goal in common if their demands are to be realized: the destruction of the capitalist system. So long as production is organized on the basis of private property and profit, so long will the material foundations which gave rise to the family and the domestic servitude of women exist -- as well as war, racism and economic exploitation. Women have a basic interest in supporting and joining with others whose struggles will lead them in an anticapitalist direction.

At the same time, the feminist movement is also a struggle which is different and independent from all other movements, because it is based on a unique oppression. The movement therefore has its own dynamic and its own unique course of development. While women will need allies, it is only women, organized independently on the basis of struggle against their common oppression and with a correct program of struggle who can win full female liberation. No other movement can do this for them.

A correct program of democratic and transitional demands for the female liberation movement, an understanding of how women are united and divided, and a knowledge of how the feminist movement is related to other struggles points directly to the kind of strategy necessary for advancing the women's liberation movement. We want to be the best builders of the campus women's

groups, Black and Chicana groups, high school groups, women's caucuses within unions or on the job, and all the other kinds of women's organizations which will grow up as women begin to struggle. We will want to be involved in and build all the varied activities of such organizations -- conferences, actions, publications and consciousness raising.

Consciousness raising groups, and the general consciousness raising that comes from being part of a broad movement, can help give women confidence to get out of the isolation of their homes, and courage to lead independent lives and gain independent identity and strength. Consciousness raising is not an end in itself, but it is a vital part of laying the basis for taking action against female oppression.

In addition to building all the separate components of the feminist movement we want to build broad coalitions based on agreement to struggle around specific issues, like abortion or child care, and having a perspective of mobilizing broad layers of women in action independent of the ruling class and its political parties. Such coalitions must be built on the basis of non-exclusion and democratic norms. They must reject red-baiting in all its forms. They must reach out to the largest possible numbers of women, explaining the significance of the key demands being raised, and involving them in action.

The importance of building such broad, mass-action coalitions was shown clearly by August 26, 1970. Up to that point, the organized movement was quite small, with the main forces coming out of the radicalized student milieu. However, by organizing and publicizing the right kind of broad action, the turnout of

more than 50,000 women in cities and towns all over the country, in ~~the~~ first nationwide action ever to be organized by this movement, was a striking example of the widespread support that the women's liberation movement can mobilize.

August 26 helped to cut through the myth that only a handful of middle-class women could relate to their oppression as women. Secretaries, high school women, Black women, women from all walks of life turned out on that day.

By putting forward its demands clearly and by demonstrating for them, the feminist movement showed on August 26 that it was fighting for goals which are wanted and needed by masses of women. August 26 demonstrated the impact of the feminist movement and began to show masses of women the serious nature and potential power of the movement.

August 26 was an example of the real meaning of sisterhood -- that is, the concept that women can unite together as sisters on the basis of common struggle. It provided a feeling of solidarity, of power, and inspired women to see that their problems were shared by masses of others.

It put the onus for the lack of abortion, child care and equality of job opportunity squarely where it belongs -- on the capitalist government.

Women on August 26 were doing exactly what they **have** been trained not to do. They were out fighting for their own needs, putting these needs first, demanding these needs be met.

August 26 was only one of the first steps in the struggle to build a mass women's liberation movement. It will be a prolonged process with many twists and turns, successes and set-

backs. Only through the experience of struggling for feminist demands -- by seeing concretely how the power of women can win concessions, and by seeing how the ruling class will try to hedge on and retreat from granting these concessions -- will large numbers of women gain the political understanding that is necessary to carry the battle through to a successful conclusion.

Opponents of a Mass Action Perspective

Opponents of the perspective of building a mass-action women's liberation movement around feminist demands include both reformists and ultralefts.

Reformism in the women's movement is based on the belief that it is possible to win liberation under capitalism, and logically leads to dependence on those responsible for perpetuating this system to grant liberation. It leads away from the concept of organizing women to fight for the needs of women, and thus away from struggle with the capitalist class.

The ultralefts reject struggles around the basic demands of the feminist movement on the grounds that these demands do not explicitly oppose the capitalist system. Because they do not see the revolutionary dynamic of struggles around concrete issues such as child care, abortion, maternity leaves, equal pay, etc., they have no program which can mobilize masses of women who do not yet see their enemy as the capitalist system itself.

Both ultraleftism and reformism make the fundamental error of ignoring the most important task of women's liberation: that is, the creation of a powerful mass, independent women's movement. Neither sees the dynamic relationship between struggles for immediate gains around issues like abortion that directly

affect women and the attainment of full liberation.

The anti-mass-action tendencies in the feminist movement can be roughly divided into four different categories. The first category is those ultraleft women who came out of the "new-left" or ex-SDS milieu. The second includes two kinds of idealist utopians: counter-institutionalists and what can be designated as "livingroom feminists." The third is the traditional-type reformists and liberals. And the fourth category includes the various "socialist" tendencies, the largest of these being the Communist Party.

The Ultralefts

Many of the founders of the first feminist groups around the country were women who came out of SDS or its general milieu, and they often brought with them the sectarian and ultraleft views of SDS. A good number of these women have remained active in the feminist movement, and while their ideology has gone through considerable flux and change, there are a number of main ideas which characterize their approach.

They hunt for shortcuts around the long, hard job of building a mass movement. To the revolutionary perspective of organizing struggles around the basic needs of women, they counterpose "anti-imperialist" or "pro-socialist" sloganeering. They often insist that the feminist movement must, from its very inception, be consciously socialist or anticapitalist. For example, the Chicago Women's Liberation Union has written into its statement of purpose that all members must be anticapitalist.

Another characteristic of these forces is the attempt to turn the women's liberation movement away from fighting for

feminist demands by insisting on substituting other issues and demands for them. For example, at one point last fall some groups turned all their energies toward organizing for the Black Panther convention in Washington and discontinued activities which would bring new women into the feminist movement. Many of these women also reject student struggles around feminist issues of the false grounds that these struggles are not oriented or important to the most oppressed layers of women.

Utopian Idealists

A second major group has been quite aptly designated as "livingroom feminists." The main characteristic of this tendency is that they want to make the movement a substitute for the inability of capitalist society to create an unalienated personal life. They orient toward making women's centers into "livingroom-like" areas, where small groups can meet together in supposedly unalienated relationships, and they tend to become nervous when more women get together than could fit into a livingroom. Call-16 in Boston is one example of this tendency to reject any kind of large-scale organization of women.

Common among livingroom feminists is a hostility to materialist explanations of female oppression. They tend to say that the oppression of women has grown up in society, not as a result of class oppression, but because men took advantage of the fact that women had the children in order to make slaves of them, and because men personally benefit from the subjugation of women. Many see the oppression of women as being the basis for all the different types of oppression in society.

Because many livingroom feminists think that female oppression

stems from the way men think and act, they tend to concentrate on small-group consciousness raising as the chief method for changing society. They believe that liberation can come from changing people's minds, as opposed to changing social institutions.

Relationships between individual men and women in this society are not relationships between equals; and individual men are often the direct agents of perpetrating many forms of discrimination and oppression from which women suffer. The women's movement, however, cannot be aimed at simply trying to change men, or to make them renounce their privileges, any more than the Black liberation movement can succeed if it is aimed at "reforming" whites. All forms of male chauvinism and oppression of women must be condemned and fought against, and the existence of a powerful feminist movement will have an impact on men and help force them to change. But any orientation of the women's liberation movement towards attempting to create unalienated, completely fulfilling human relationships through individual -- or large scale -- reform under capitalism is doomed to failure. It can only end in frustration because it is impossible for either men or women to completely remake themselves in this society.

In relation to the question of "renouncing privileges" and attempting to create an unalienated atmosphere within the feminist movement, the livingroom feminists and the newleft ultralefts have much in common. Both counterpose the necessity of intellectually understanding one's oppression to a perspective of mass action to end it. Both reacted to August 26 in a sectarian manner. They felt

that the women marching there were "low level," and didn't understand their full oppression. They felt that the demands raised on August 26 "weren't radical enough." Both also tended to reject alliances around August 26 with groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) because they disagreed with many of the women in NOW on other questions.

Related to the livingroom feminist approach is the perspective of changing society by building counter-institutions, that is trying to create islands of a perfect new society within the context of the old society. The counter-institutionists oppose making demands on the government or on existing institutions of society. Instead, they say, women should use their own resources to set up child care centers, abortion counseling, private women's liberation health clinics, clothing exchanges, food co-ops and loan societies. There have been some benefits to a few women from such activities. But the building of counter-institutions is no alternative to -- and is often a conscious retreat from -- building a mass women's movement to win liberation.

The women's liberation movement by itself does not have the basic economic resources to meet the needs of masses of women. For example, it is possible through abortion-counseling and small-scale abortion clinics to provide for some needs of a limited number of women. But the goal of the feminist movement must be to struggle for the right of every woman to have control over her body. And it is only possible to do this by fighting to see that hospitals and medical facilities are used to this end. Similarly, it is necessary to fight for control of the educational complexes and facilities, as well as the industries and businesses which discriminate against women.

The attempt to change society through the creation of counter-institutions reflects a middle class and utopian outlook. It is only the relatively privileged women who have the resources and time to create their own child care centers and other institutions. Moreover, if the counter-institutions are built with a "serve the people" perspective of providing for working women and poor women and children, this orients the movement in the direction of philanthropic social work.

The heart of the struggle for the liberation of women is a struggle for gaining increasing control of the vast resources of the richest society in the world, so that these can be used for the greatest welfare of human beings. Anything less than this struggle means co-existence with an exploitative system which continues to make its basic decisions on the basis of what is profitable to the ruling class.

A parallel error is that of attempting to find personal liberation through the formation of collectives and communes. One of the most powerful aspects of the current radicalization of women has been the rejection of the kinds of dehumanizing relationships imposed on men, women and children by capitalist society. The experimentation with collectives and communes is an example of this rejection and an effort to find something better. But these attempts can have no chance of success as an alternative to the capitalist system because, even in communal living arrangements, someone still has to perform alienating labor outside the commune to support non-working members, and someone -- often the women -- has to prepare food, wash clothes, clean, and take care of children. This perspective is unrealistic and utopian.

Liberals

The third basic political category within the movement is composed of the traditional liberals and reformists. That is, those women who rely on the Democratic and Republican parties to change things. Most prominent among these non-socialist reformists are some women in NOW, and such politicians as Bella Abzug. We can anticipate that the efforts of the liberals to orient the movement toward support for capitalist party politicians will increase as the feminist movement grows and becomes more of a force. This pressure has a cyclical character, rising as elections approach, receding in years when there are no major political contests. As we approach the 1972 elections we can expect that the "off the streets and into capitalist politics" pressure will increase.

Instead of supporting capitalist party candidates, the feminist movement must expose these parties which are among the main institutions upholding this sexist, racist, capitalist society. Women have nothing to gain by working through the Democratic or Republican parties, or by supporting "lesser evil" or women candidates within those parties. The Democratic and Republican parties are completely controlled by the capitalist class of this country, and are structured to perpetuate this control. Any attempt to work within these parties will contribute to the illusions that masses of women have about the system. The job of revolutionary women is not to reinforce the illusions that masses of people have in the capitalist ruling parties, but to expose the fact that these parties and the economic system they represent cannot provide liberation.

Many of the women in the feminist movement who orient at one time or another to the Democratic Party, either through lobbying or campaigning for a political candidate, are women who can be involved in building independent mass actions around basic women's liberation demands. Although these women will often switch back and forth -- depending in part on whether it's an election year or not -- they can often be won to support mass actions. Some of these women are very serious, and as they become convinced through their experiences that the Democratic Party is a trap, we can expect to win many of them to a revolutionary perspective.

Communist Party, Progressive Labor, International Socialists

Without exception, all the reformist "socialist" tendencies have exhibited one or another degree of hostility towards the women's liberation movement.

Progressive Labor completely rejects the feminist movement on the basis that the only valid women's struggles are those which are waged by women workers around narrowly conceived job issues.

International Socialists have a more confused approach, which changes from time to time and is different in different parts of the country. But all of their groups have a tendency to question the legitimacy of feminism if "working" women are not immediately and directly involved. They underestimate the role which students and young women out of the student milieu can play in initiating and building the movement, and they try to orient to what they narrowly conceive of as struggles which relate to working women.

The Communist Party in a whole series of articles and statements has shown quite openly its hostility toward feminism. Their

attitude is expressed most clearly in their assertions that the feminist struggle is less important than other movements and in their reactionary defense of, and romanticization of, the family.

The communist Party's hostile attitude toward feminism flows from their general perspective of supporting the Soviet bureaucracy's attempts to co-exist peacefully with world capitalism, and their defense of its reactionary domestic policies. For one thing, feminism represents a challenge to the situation of women in the Soviet Union. It doesn't take a feminist very long to figure out that the role played by women in Soviet society is not what we are fighting for.

Secondly, the CP fears all potential mass struggles in this country which could pose a real threat to the ruling class and upset the world equilibrium of the "great powers." The Communist Party does not see this period as a time when forces capable of actually **making a revolution are being assembled and organized independent of the ruling class.** As they see it, the perspective we have before us in this country is not one of revolution, but of assuring the ascendancy of the liberal, pro-peaceful-coexistence wing of the capitalist class. They think of all independent movements against oppression in terms of how they can channel them into acting in support of, and as a pressure on, the liberal wing of the capitalist class. They are afraid of feminism because -- like the nationalism of the oppressed nationalities -- it poses itself so sharply against not only the conservatives, but the liberals as well.

What the CP fears most is a mass, fighting women's movement which struggles for "unreasonable" demands which the capitalist

liberals cannot meet. And they are the strongest opponents of the perspective of building such a movement. We know that as the movement grows bigger they will adapt to it more and more and their opposition will become more astute. They will use both sectarian and ultraleft and utopian tactics as well as try to orient the movement toward giving support to Democratic Party candidates such as Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug.

All four of the above political categories are united in one way: they are all opposed to building the feminist movement in a way which could attract masses of women and orient them toward independent struggle. The new left, the livingroom feminists and the counter-institutionists all either organize in such a way as to keep the movement invisible to the masses of women, or around issues which do not relate to their concrete needs. The reformists, instead of building a mass, independent movement, look to the Democratic Party and the capitalist rulers to give women liberation. These are the forces which we and other women who support a mass action perspective will continue to contend with, and fight against in order to create a viable mass movement.

Our Tasks

The feminist movement has experienced an explosive growth in the last two years. From a few small circles meeting together to discuss the deepgoing problems women face in this society, it has already expanded to a movement composed of hundreds of organizations and capable of mobilizing tens of thousands of women in the streets. In addition to all the groups organized around the needs and interests of specific groups of women -- high school, campus, gay, Black,

Chicana -- broad action coalitions have been built in at least a dozen cities and states.

Women in the Socialist Workers Party have participated in all the activities of these organizations and done our best to build them and win them to a perspective of organizing and appealing to the broad masses of women.

Around the country the SWP has participated in actions built around all the central demands of the movement. We've been fighting for women's studies, against sexism in advertizing, for high school women's rights. We've helped organize Black, Chicana and other Third World women's activities and groups and we have organized to support struggles opposing discrimination against women on the job. Child care is another issue we have helped to organize around, especially in fighting for child care centers on campuses.

In the course of these struggles and experiences, it has become clear that at this time the abortion fight is the issue which is attracting the largest numbers of women and the greatest enthusiasm. Abortion projects and coalitions have sprung up all over the country and many of these groups are reaching out to very broad layers of women, including church groups, unions, and Black groups.

In response to the pro-abortion struggles, opposition to the right of women to have free access to abortions is also building up through the efforts of reactionary groups. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in particular is investing huge sums of money in this effort, taking out advertisements in newspapers and even organizing demonstrations. In those states where liberalized laws have been passed, the legislatures, city governments and conservative forces have continually fought to take back even the limited gains made.

If women are going to continue to win victories in the struggle to gain control over their own bodies, much less prevent the ruling class from taking away those gains already made, the women's liberation movement must make the abortion fight the central focus of activity in the coming period. The feminist movement must intervene decisively in the growing national ferment and discussion over the issue of abortion and lead the struggle for the repeal of all laws restricting the right to abortion, and for free abortion on demand, no forced sterilization.

Abortion is an issue that affects millions of women in the most immediate way. Victories around this issue will be very important in showing the growing power of the women's liberation movement, in proving to masses of women that the feminist movement is serious, fighting around issues which are of concern to all women. A successful fight to make abortions available to all women would have a tremendously liberating effect and help to raise the whole movement to a higher level. It could serve as an inspiration and an example for struggles over other issues and enable the movement to take the next, powerful step forward.

A central task in the period ahead will be working with other women to inspire and educate about the central political importance of the abortion fight, and building a nationwide abortion movement which can have a real impact and win significant victories for women.

In addition to the fight around the abortion issue there are a number of other specific tasks which are of central importance in the coming months.

One is to continue our activity to build the feminist organizations and activities of Black women, Chicanas, Puerto Rican women,

and other oppressed nationalities. As the debate on feminism continues to deepen within the nationalist movements we want to continue to be the champions of the position that nationalism and feminism are complementary, not contradictory struggles, that they will strengthen and advance each other. Through our publications, forums, election campaigns, tours and other activities we want to take an active part in this debate.

We also want to continue and deepen our work in building campus-based women's liberation groups, high school organizations, and broad city-wide and state-wide coalitions.

We should continue to educate within the movement on the importance of the war as an issue of vital concern to women. The successes we had in building the April 24 United Women's Contingent are a clear indication of the correctness of this perspective. Those women who are convinced of the need to mobilize and act against the war are going to be among the best builders of a mass feminist movement around other concrete demands of concern to women.'

Building the 1971 and 1972 socialist election campaigns is another focal point of activity for us. Our party is the only one which fights unequivocally for the liberation of women, and which has a program to achieve that end. Our election campaigns have proved an effective way of reaching out to literally millions of women with the ideas and demands of the feminist movement. Our candidates, both men and women, have become known as campaigners for women's liberation, and our campaigns have played an important role in winning new women to ideas of the SWP. Through women's support committees for the 1972 campaign in particular we will be able to win many women to the revolutionary socialist movement.

In the past months we have put out a tremendous amount of literature about women's liberation, including regular articles in The Militant and the International Socialist Review. Many of these have been reproduced in pamphlet or book form. The sales of all our literature concerning women's liberation is an important task. Subscriptions to and individual copies of The Militant are especially important because this is the place where we put forward a week-by-week analysis of the perspectives for the movement, where we can help build national campaigns, answer attacks against us or the feminist movement, take part in discussions and raise general consciousness about the roots and causes of women's oppression. And it brings readers our analyses of all the basic political issues of today, giving them a perspective on the relationship between the struggle for women's liberation and other social issues.

There are a whole series of educational activities we engage in which are of particular importance. In addition to forums and branch educationals on specific questions as they arise, members should be encouraged to read the women's liberation press and consciousness raising literature. Both external and internal classes on women's liberation should be organized regularly.

Finally, significant numbers of activists in the women's liberation movement have begun to join the SWP and YSA. We have an especially important job in educating these new forces, giving them a thorough grounding in our program and integrating them into all aspects of party activity. The best of the new generation of feminists will be attracted to our movement; our job is to educate them as revolutionary politicians in the fullest sense.

The Revolutionary Party

The combined power of all the different social struggles which are emerging in this country will be needed to constitute a force strong enough to overthrow American capitalism and establish a workers state, based on and fighting for the needs of the vast majority of the people.

Although the women's liberation movement has the potential of organizing tens of millions of women in independent struggle, it is not by itself capable of destroying the capitalist system and thereby laying the material foundations for the destruction of class society and the liberation of women. Such a successful struggle can only be achieved through the mobilization of the working class and its allies.

Only a revolutionary Marxist party, composed of the most conscious representatives of all the oppressed sectors of our society, and based on a correct program capable of mobilizing the working class and its allies, can hope to lead the revolutionary struggle to victory in this country. Only such a party can develop a perspective and program for bringing together the diverse struggles that are emerging so that their striking power can be unified.

So long as capitalism exists it is impossible for either women or men to gain full dignity and humanity, other than by fighting against oppression. It is with that perspective that we try to win the best of the new generation of feminists to the revolutionary party, to raise their consciousness to revolutionary socialist consciousness, and to organize and inspire the masses of women to fight to change society.

While a socialist revolution is a precondition for the complete liberation of women, a socialist revolution cannot be complete until women are totally free. The development of a powerful women's liberation movement now, before the socialist revolution, means that this movement will not only strengthen the struggle against capitalism, but will also be a powerful stimulus to revolutionary changes in the family system and other institutions which oppress women in the period of the construction of the new society.

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The essence of being "feminine" has always meant the opposite of asserting control over one's life. Women have been trained to be passive, weak, submissive, self-sacrificing, gentle, emotional -- in short to think of themselves as being powerless as individuals and as a group. In carrying out the struggle for liberation, women must and will do something they have been systematically educated to believe themselves incapable of: women will become fighters, leaders, organizers, and clear political thinkers, so the power of the masses of women can be mobilized in the decisive struggle against the capitalist system.