

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 unjuries 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.'⁽³⁾ 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.

Women, 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.

