

Who's the Enemy?

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Recently a number of articles have appeared in various movement publications on women's liberation. Many of the articles (the most recent, by Robin Morgan of *The Rat*, reprinted in the *Fifth Estate* ["Goodbye to All That," FE #101, March 19-April 1, 1970]) have talked about the particular reality of male chauvinism in the movement. We can entirely sympathize with the sense of urgency, frustrations and gut feelings expressed in this article, but unfortunately we find their conclusions totally dead-end and irrelevant to the majority of women outside the movement with whom we must join to build a mass women's revolutionary movement.

It may be as we sit in our relative comfort, we can say goodbye to our brothers in the movement, but that ain't going to make a revolution; just as saying goodbye to the system won't get rid of it. Most of our sisters are bound by the necessity of surviving and providing survival for others in a system that doesn't give a shit about any of us. Most of our sisters can't simply say goodbye to their male supremacist boss or their chauvinist husband who brings home the bread for the 3-4-5-6 mouths to feed. A few individuals may be afforded the luxury of saying goodbye to the man's world, but most of us aren't. We then are left with one alternative—to struggle and change the conditions of our oppressions.

Our collective oppression is real. Our problem in the Women's Lib movement is to define the source of that oppression. After all the shit written on the "nature and character" of women's oppression, it seems silly to have to repeat a well-known fact—we live in a Capitalist system. It becomes important because a lot of women (in reaction to the arrogance and chauvinism of the movement men) are dismissing this fact as irrelevant to our struggle.

What we would maintain is that it is precisely this fact that forces women into motion, because not to do so is slow death. It is a luxury to have to only concern ourselves with the fuck-ups of individual men, and not with the survival needs of thousands of our sisters. More importantly, our relative luxury in attacking only the individual men, and not the system that produces these men is dead-end. It's theoretically possible we could castrate a ton of guys, and still some of us would be suffering under the pain of property relationships, private profit, and exploitation.

Capitalist society did not invent the systematic put-down of women. The division of labor that exists (men, the owners and money makers, women, the family socializers and homemakers) began thousands of years ago with the origins of private property, when man, the hunter, began to acquire land and desired heirs to pass it on to. Industrialization only accentuated the basic contradiction of this relationship and it is the particularities of our time and history we must understand.

Capitalism is based on making profit for a few white men. These men need two basic things to economically survive: (1) Labor—bodies and hands to do the work; and (2) Land—room to expand and new markets. The need for profits forces the creation of a cheap labor force, marginal to the work process, to

keep wages down and to divide the majority of people among themselves. The need for profit creates a continual army of unemployed—which grows and diminishes according to the needs of those few on top.

These creations of capitalism have a name—Surplus Labor. That’s us. All women and Black and Brown men. When the needs of Capitalist power calls for expansion and the plunder of other countries and people—our men are called into war, and “Rosie the Riveter” becomes the national heroine, and everyman’s sex symbol. When the war is over, it’s time to return to the home, where we provide an equally important economic function of providing the fuel—meeting the survival needs (food, rest, comfort) of the Man’s work force.

The privileged position of White Males is real. In 1965, women received a median income of \$2,098, or 40% of the male median of \$5,194. In 1965, for sales workers, the median income for women was \$3,000; for men \$7,000; for managers and officials \$4,500 for women and \$8,200 for men. It’s such little cost for the Profit men to pay off a segment of the population, when the result is a huge surplus labor force and a divided body of people. It’s such very little cost when all that is needed are a few pennies, and a well-developed set of ideas around “superiority,” “inferiority,” “inherent abilities,” and stereotypes. The thing to look at, though, is that this privilege ain’t no great shakes. About all a white privileged male can do, that women can’t do, is to sell his hands, body and head to a greater variety of bosses.

To have been able to accept these economic realities of private property, exploitation, and continual wars, a lot of time and money has been invested in brainwashing us all.

Our collective brainwashing allows men to come home after a long day with the foreman or supervisor on his back, and lay into his wife to release all his frustrations—to have something in his sterile, impotent life that can be controlled, just as a woman will turn on her children when it’s impossible to fight the man. The only one that benefits from all this, is the guy counting the money and pulling in the profit.

Our brainwashing teaches women from the time they are children to play a serving role, to be docile and submissive, and to get what we want by being coy instead of aggressive. We are socialized to expect we will be housewives and mothers. Thus most of us mature with the understanding that our primary role is that of servant and pacifier and that while we may by chance work, our contribution will be marginal and supplementary. This is true despite the fact that most women who work are essential to support themselves and their families; 70% of women who worked in March 1964 supported themselves or others, or had husbands who earned less than \$5,000 in 1963.

These attitudes which women have learned about ourselves and our work make a convenient cheap marginal labor force for capitalism. Because we consider our economic contribution supplementary even when it is necessary to maintain a decent standard of living for our families, we have historically been more willing than men to accept low pay and poor working conditions.

Because we have been socialized to be docile and accept subordinate positions, we are far less likely than men to organize or create trouble for the employer. As we feel responsible to continue our role as housewife and mother while working (and, while there are no facilities to relieve us) we are forced to accept a very low economic position and, even if skilled, to be exploited as a cheap labor force.

Many women work only part-time (about 2/3 of all women who work). In addition, many of us work until children are born, drop out of the work force for several years and re-enter anywhere between 1 to 20 years later. Thus we are never able to acquire seniority or qualify for retirement and other benefits—employers, who are reluctant to promote women to prestigious or high-paying jobs, have an excuse not to do so. Most employers will not hire women, even if they are “qualified” to a position where they have authority over men and will lay off women first during any economic recession.

Making profit for the Man—degrading ourselves and allowing ourselves to be degraded, insures a continuation of our oppression. Our only choice then is to join into a struggle for power—power for all those folks systematically put down by Capitalist Amerika. Our main task is a struggle for unity—the question being how to achieve that unity. We aren’t talking about a unity free of struggle, a unity based on the continuation of male chauvinism and racism; we’re talking about revolutionary unity based on equality and a program.

We have to break out. We have no choice. Our breaking out of the shackles comes from the inability of capitalism to provide for the people. A lot of women work, and a lot of men are becoming unemployed. Survival—food, clothing, medical care, and education needs—are harder and harder to come by. The shift in survival needs are forcing larger numbers of our sisters into action, and out of this are forcing a re-definition of traditional family forms. Our job as women and as revolutionaries (have we really any choice?) is to struggle for the needs right now of ourselves and our sisters, to present alternatives to Capitalist forms, and in the process, redefine the future.

It is our contention there isn't any possibility of revolution unless our struggle for liberation as women begins right now. As long as white men can direct their frustrations into male chauvinism and racism, the Man's got ahold of all of us. What's equally apparent, after years of movement history, is that men are not going to take on their false consciousness without women defining the needs of the sisters, through our own organizations and groups. What that means is that our first responsibility is to each other as Women, understanding that men who can dig the need for revolutionary struggle will be our allies—our comrades; those that can't break out of the illusions will be dropped by the wayside, or, if in the way, offed. [ellipses in original —online archive editors]

Our first responsibility to our sisters is to move out of the comfort of movement rhetoric and narrow concerns—reach out to millions of our sisters, at home, working, in school, and together develop programs that meet our-basic needs as women and that point to a direction for the future.

Struggle and Revolution are all we have... [ellipses in original —online archive editors]

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