

SOCIALIST FEMINISM: A STRATEGY FOR THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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I. SOCIALIST FEMINISM

We choose to identify ourselves with the heritage and future of feminism and socialism in our struggle for revolution. From feminism we have learned the fullness of our own potential as women, the strength of women. We have seen our common self-interest with other women and our common oppression. Having found these real bonds as women, we realize we can rely on each other as we fight for liberation. Feminism has moved us to see more concretely what becomes of people shaped by social conditions they do not control. We find our love and hate focused through our feminism — love for other women bound by the same conditions, hate for the oppression that binds us. A great strength we find in feminism is the reaffirmation of human values, ideals of sisterhood: taking care of people, being sensitive to people's needs and developing potential.

From feminism we have come to understand an institutionalized system of oppression based on the domination of men over women: sexism. Its contradictions are based on the hostile social relations set into force by this domination. This antagonism can be mediated by the culture and the flexibility of the social institutions so that in certain times and places it seems to be a stable relationship. But the antagonisms cannot be eliminated and will break out to the surface until there is no longer a system of domination.

But we share a particular conception of feminism that is socialist. It is one that focuses on how power has been denied women because of their class position. We see capitalism as an institutionalized form of oppression based on profit for private owners of publicly-worked-for wealth. It sets into motion hostile social relations in classes. Those classes too have their relations mediated through the culture and institutions. Thus alliances and divisions appear within and between classes at times clouding the intensity or clarity of their contradiction. But the basic hostile nature of class relations will be present until there is no longer a minority owning the productive resources and getting wealthy from the paid and unpaid labor of the rest.

We share the socialist vision of a humanist world made possible through a redistribution of wealth and an end to the distinction between the ruling class and those who are ruled.

We have come to understand that only through an organized collective response can we fight such a system. Sisterhood thus also means to us a struggle for real power over our own lives and the lives of our sisters. Our personal relations and our political fight merge together and create our sense of feminism. Through the concept of sisterhood, women have tried to be responsive to the needs of all women rather than a selected few, and to support, criticize and encourage other women rather than competing with them.

Our Vision — Socialist Feminism is Desirable and Not Possible Under the Existing System

The following would be among the things we envision in the new order, part of everyday life for all people:

- free, humane, competent medical care with an emphasis on preventive medicine, under the service of community organizations
- peoples' control over their own bodies — i.e., access to safe, free birth control, abortion, sterilization, free from coercion or social stigma
- attractive, comfortable housing designed to allow for private and collective living
- varied, nutritious, abundant diet
- social respect for the work people do, understanding that all jobs can be made socially necessary and important
- democratic councils through which all people control the decisions which most directly affect their lives on the job, in the home, and community
- scientific resources geared toward the improvement of life for all, rather than conquest and destruction through military and police aggression
- varied, quality consumer products to meet our needs
- an end of housework as private, unpaid labor
- redefinition of jobs, with adequate training to prepare people for jobs of their choice; rotation of jobs to meet the life cycle needs of those working at them, as well as those receiving the services.
- political and civil liberties which would encourage the participation of all people in the political life of the country
- disarming of and community control of police
- social responsibility for the raising of children and free client-controlled childcare available on a 24-hour basis to accommodate the needs of those who use it and work in it
- free, public quality education integrated with work and community activities for people of all ages
- freedom to define social and sexual relationships
- a popular culture which enhances rather than degrades one's self respect and respect for others
- support for internal development and self-determination for countries around the world

We outline this vision to be more concrete about what a socialist feminist society might mean or try to be. This vision of society is in direct opposition to the present one which is based on the domination of the few over the many through sex, race and class. While there are concessions that it can make, the present form would not or could not adjust to the kind of people-oriented society outlined above.