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# Women for Peace or Women's Liberation? Signposts from the Feminist Archives

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# WOMEN FOR PEACE OR WOMEN'S LIBERATION? SIGNPOSTS FROM THE FEMINIST ARCHIVES

## JENNY BROWN FOR REDSTOCKINGS

Understanding the essence of what makes a good political organizer is especially vital to feminists at a time when our most basic demands are under attack. If we are going to advance again, rather than continue to cut our losses, we need to know why we are slipping backwards now, losing victories such as abortion which were won by a movement which started more than 20 years ago.

As a young woman who first started asking questions about feminism just a few years ago, I can say that my first impression of feminism was a distorted, watered-down facsimile which explains a lot of why women are in the position we are in today. I can also say that the lessons I later learned from the history of the rebirth years of feminism (1964-73) are a body of essential experience which we must uncover if we are to move toward the goals of equality and liberation for all, making militantly sure women are included in the "all."

Although reform feminism perseveres, exemplified by NOW, there is no longer an active, widespread left feminist alternative informed by the basic lessons learned in the radical movements of the Sixties. We will not be able to rebuild a radical movement for women's liberation or the liberation of anyone else until we uncover the foundations of radical organizing in our own history and experience. This history encompasses a key body of social change activist experience (i.e. revolutionary "practice")—with successes and failures to analyze—on the political questions of "gender and war." Feminism, after all, revived in the United States and spread like wildfire under the new name "Women's Liberation" during the height of the Vietnam War and of a very militant upsurge in the African-American liberation struggle. Then, questions of both armed self-defense and struggle (for both men and women) and nonviolent resistance (for both men and women) were immediate practical issues of daily life.

If this history and experience strikes others as it has struck me, it can provide solid footing among the shifting sands of current feminist thought.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, is the short course on why I believe feminists need—as we shall see—virtually to repeat history and escape once again from what I will call "peace-woman" organizing.

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*The inspiration for this paper came from working this past summer to help organize the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives with the Archives Project Director, Kathie Sarachild. All the pamphlets, papers, leaflets, cartoons, etc. that I cite in the paper or which are used as illustrations are in the Archives collection.*

## "FEMINISM"—18 YEARS AFTER BURYING TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD IN ARLINGTON CEMETERY

In 1986 when I was 20 I joined an organization calling itself the "Feminist Task Force," a group of women within a statewide peace and justice coalition I had become involved with through my work against U.S. intervention in Central America. I joined with a vague sense that feminism was good and that I wanted to learn more about it. I felt that NOW was not demanding enough fundamental changes—I wanted something more "radical"—and assumed that the Feminist Task Force would be a left feminist alternative.

"In recognition of the correlation between the oppression of women and the violence of militarism and the relationship between feminism and nonviolence, the [Feminist Task Force] was formed with the following goals in mind:" begins a letter laying out the objectives of the group, listed below:

1. To infuse a feminist perspective within the work of the Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice [the parent group].
2. To promote feminist process, i.e., the redistribution of power within the peace movement to create the future now through cooperative, non-hierarchical forms of decision making.
3. To address the many ways institutionalized violence and social violence occurs in women's daily lives including poverty, the military budget, rape and incest, and physical and emotional battering
4. To encourage women to explore the oppression that they have internalized and to encourage men to examine enculturated sexism that they have internalized
5. To explore the unique experience of Southern women as it relates to feminism and militarism
6. To move back to a feminist way of living in harmony with our planet. <sup>2</sup>

The underlying philosophy of the group was basically this: Women are more peaceful and nonviolent than men because women are more closely connected to the production and care of future generations and the planet. Women should therefore work nonviolently to end war and all other violence, which is the root of all injustice.

I was aware that there was a tradition of women opposing war as women, since I was familiar with such groups as Women Strike for Peace and Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. What I didn't know was the history of *opposition* to this method of organizing, nor did I know that the Women's Liberation Movement, which was responsible for reviving the term feminist in the first place and whose organizing actions had won so many important victories for women by 1973, came out of a radical line which specifically rejected an appeal to women's nonviolent, passive nature.

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Radical women rose up against the peace-women formation in one of the first public organizing actions to revive feminism. Shulamith Firestone, a founder of Redstockings and soon to be the author of *The Dialectic of Sex: A Case For Feminist Revolution* (1970), reported on New York Radical Women's participation in the Jeanette Rankin Brigade's January 1968 march on Washington, D.C., in the Women's Liberation Movement's first theoretical journal, *Notes From the First Year* (June, 1968).<sup>3</sup>

...The Brigade was a coalition of women's groups united for a specific purpose: to confront Congress on its opening day, Jan. 15, 1968, with a strong show of female opposition to the Vietnam War.

However, from the beginning we [New York Radical Women] felt that this kind of action, though well-meant, was ultimately futile. It is naive to believe that women who are not politically seen, heard, or represented in this country could change the course of a war by simply appealing to the better natures of congressmen. Further, we disagreed with a woman's demonstration as a tactic for ending the war, for the Brigade's reason for organizing AS WOMEN. That is, the Brigade was playing upon the traditional female role in the classic manner. They came as wives, mothers, and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the action of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears.<sup>4</sup>

New York Radical Women (which was soon to organize a protest of the Miss America Contest and give birth to Redstockings and other radical feminist groups) demonstrated their opposition the Brigade's march by "joyfully" inviting the participants to a "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" held that evening in Arlington National Cemetery. The black-bordered invitation read, in part:

Don't bring flowers...do be prepared to sacrifice your traditional female roles. You have refused to hanky-wave boys off to war with admonitions to save the American Mom and Apple Pie. You have resisted your roles of supportive girl friends and tearful widows.... And now you must resist approaching Congress and playing these same roles that are synonymous with powerlessness. We must not come as passive suppliants begging for favors, for power cooperates only with power. We must learn to fight the warmongers on their own terms, though they believe us capable only of rolling bandages.<sup>5</sup>

The "invitation" leaflet then went on to predict: "Until we have united into a force to be reckoned with, we will be patronized and ridiculed into total political ineffectiveness...." The action hit a responsive chord among women at the convention. Five-hundred joined a counter

congress to discuss the issues brought forward, overwhelming the original "burial" organizers, who, according to Firestone, were unprepared at the time to take the next step.

Moreover, the leaflet's prediction of ridicule was accurate, and the ridicule came from the Left. An article about the Jeanette Rankin Brigade entitled "Woman Power" in *Ramparts* "amounted to a movement fashion report"<sup>6</sup> according to one of the letters of protest that "poured in from women in radical groups around the country."<sup>7</sup> The condescending coverage simultaneously put women down and extolled the peace-woman approach, an unsettling combination which gave weight to New York Radical Women's critique. Lynn Piartney responded to the *Ramparts* coverage in a letter which was reprinted in *Notes From the First Year*:

Besides the reactionary political approach, the [*Ramparts*] authors make a historical blunder. HUAC, they say, was dealt its death blow in 1964 [*sic*] when Dagmar Wilson (leader of Women's Strike for Peace) presented flowers to its committee members. In fact, the Berkeley eruptions of 1964 [*sic*]<sup>8</sup> were far more significant.... The only reason the story was brought up was to demonstrate how "cute" women can be when dealing with the government. The authors applaud Wilson's use of the traditional concept of Womanhood as being passive, and gentle. By presenting flowers to the men, she made them realize that women in this country were incapable of posing any serious threat to the system; the case against Women's Strike being dismissed immediately thereafter.<sup>9</sup>

It may have been true in the early sixties that women were not in a position to launch a direct attack on HUAC or male supremacy, but by 1968 many of the experienced veterans of the Civil Rights and Anti-war Movements were women. One such veteran was Kathie Amatniek (later Sarachild) who laid out some of New York Radical Women's analysis of women's condition in a speech to the main body of the Brigade convention:

We have a problem as women all right, a problem which renders us powerless and ineffective over the issues of war and peace, as well as over our own lives.... We must see that we can only solve our problem together, that we cannot solve it individually as earlier feminist generations attempted to do. We women must organize so that for man there can be no "other woman" when we begin expressing ourselves and acting politically, when we insist to men that they share the housework and child-care, fully and equally, so that we can have independent lives as well.... We want our freedom as full human beings....<sup>10</sup>

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### TOUGH DEMANDS REPLACE SOFT PLEAS

The impulse for an independent women's movement came as a negative reaction to the second-class, restricted, exploited, unequal conditions of women in and out of left groups. The positive analysis was informed primarily by the revolutionary dynamite of black consciousness, brought to bear on the woman question by women in the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements. The militancy began to express itself in the form of various critiques of too moderate and defensive an approach in women's workshops and caucuses within SDS, the Black Liberation Movement, and the peace movement. In Astoria, Oregon, Gloria Martin wrote a powerful letter to the editor of *The Movement*, November 1967—one of the earliest examples of the rising militancy on the written record:

#### WOMEN, ORGANIZE YOUR OWN FIGHTING FORCES!

To the Editor:

It is of tremendous interest to me, a woman, that the Western Black Youth Conference will have a workshop on the role of women in the movement. In a sense this question is a soul-chilling one, because it should need no discussion in special sessions. This is very much like debating the rights of black people with a group of southern whites. The rights of women and black people should not, in fact cannot, be negotiated or bargained for; as we are finding out, they must be taken. The so-called role of women should be the same as the role of men in the movement, as in everyday life . . .

It is tragic indeed that we have this ever-present problem, the problem which has been like a rapier thrust into the living flesh of militant women in every walk of life. Radical women, women in the Civil Rights movement, the Freedom Workers in the south, all have felt the sting of oppression and discrimination. All have had to fight for independent political identity. They have been laughed at, jeered at, and used as bed partners, but one way or another they have met with defeat. Women are, at the very least, victims of grave humiliation and bitterness in this society . . .

The black liberation movement has been learning and growing day by day. The development of theory and practice is remarkable. The consciousness of the people is growing, very largely due to these struggles. Poor whites are finding that they have no power. Women must realize that they too must take their place alongside the men, as equal partners. This may very well mean a desperate struggle within the movement, as well as full scale all out war with the power structure. Every movement for women's rights has been diverted into other struggles which have appeared more urgent at the time. THIS MUST NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.<sup>11</sup>

In Chicago, Sue Munaker wrote "A Call for Women's Liberation," an article for *The Resistance*, January 1968, in which she traces how the rising feminist consciousness of women derived from the particular paradoxes and contradictions encountered by women working in the anti-Vietnam War movement, particularly in draft resistance. This took place under the historic conditions (still with us) when it was only men who had to face the personal conflicts and agonizing decisions around draft resistance to an immoral and unnecessary war.

As I understand the Resistance, its genesis grew from men attempting to live out—on a day-to-day basis—those assumptions about the kinds of lives they wanted to live. If they were working to build a society in which all people would be free, they had to begin by liberating themselves from the Selective Service System, that part of the military which serves to control, through threat and fear, the lives of American young men. While the draft has become an impenetrable block to the freedom of many young men, to women the draft symbolizes women's relationship to men both within the movement and within American society.

Men are drafted; women can counsel them not to go. Men return their draft cards; women sign complicity statements. That is, men take the stand, women support them . . .

A new consciousness is developing among women. Out of the frustration of trying to find our place in the anti-draft movement, we have come to realize that our total lives have been spent defining ourselves in relation to men . . .

The time has come for us to take the initiative and organize ourselves for our own liberation. If we are seriously talking about radical social change, we must begin by living . . . those assumptions upon which our future society should be based. We must come together, share our experiences and our expectations. We must make women a vital and a revitalizing force in the movement.<sup>12</sup>

In June of 1968 (the same month *Notes From the First Year* was published by New York Radical Women) a groundbreaking critique of women's strategy within Students for a Democratic Society was written by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown in Gainesville, Florida. Jones used the "Women's Manifesto" produced by the female caucus of SDS at the summer 1967 convention as a springboard to launch an attack on male supremacy and SDS women's inadequate response to it. Again the more advanced work of the Black Liberation Movement provided a reference point by which women could judge our own political situation.

For a middle-aged female accustomed to looking to militant youth for radical leadership it was a shock to read the Women's Manifesto which issued from the female caucus of the national SDS convention last summer. . . Here were a group of 'radical women' demanding respect and leadership in a radical

# DISARM RAPISTS



# SMASH SEXISM

Reprint from *NO MORE FUN AND GAMES: A Journal of Female Liberation* (Boston), No. 5 (July 1971). Graphic by Betsy Warrior. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.



"Someone has updated a great Irish slogan," wrote Jane Barry in *Meeting Ground* (No. 3, September 1977) about some graffiti a friend had seen scrawled on a wall in Derry. "The beauty of 'Women Unfree Will Never Be At Peace' is that it's a feminist slogan and a nationalist one, scoring against the Peace women on both counts." The original slogan comes from a speech made in 1915 by Patrick Pearse at the grave of Fenian leader, O'Donovan Rossa, which ended, "The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools!—they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace." The slogan "Fight On, Sisters" comes from a songbook of the same name by Carol Hanisch. (Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.)

organization and coming on with soft-minded NAACP logic and an Urban League list of grievances and demands. One need only substitute the words 'white' and 'black' for 'male' and 'female' respectively, replace references to SDS with the city council, and remember all the fruitless approaches black groups made and are still making to local white power groups to realize how ludicrous this manifesto is.

To paraphrase accordingly:

1. Therefore we demand that our brothers on the city council recognize that they must deal with their own problems of white chauvinism in their personal, social, and political relationships.
2. It is obvious from this meeting of the city council that full advantage is not being taken of the abilities and potential contributions of blacks. We call upon the black people to demand full participation in all aspects of local government from licking stamps to assuming full leadership positions.
3. People in leadership positions must be aware of the dynamics of creating leadership and are responsible for cultivating all of the black resources available to the local government .

And so on. The caucus goes on to charge New Left Notes with printing material on the subject, developing bibliographies, and asks the National Council to *set up a committee to study* the subject and report at a future date!<sup>13</sup>

In hindsight I see a certain similarity between the Women's Manifesto and the Feminist Task Force "encourag[ing] women to explore the oppression that they have internalized" and encouraging men to "examine enculturated sexism that they have internalized" produced by "feminists" 20 years later. Being soft and soft-minded would seem to be "in" again—under clever cover of the formerly harder and more tough-minded term "feminism."

## RESURRECTING TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD

But is the Feminist Task Force a fair example of what is called feminist on the left nowadays, or is it unusual? Going through my files I found many more examples of the peace-woman position than I had remembered. The Green Movement, for example, promulgates a debilitated view of feminism in its literature, as in this article by Dee Berry, Clearinghouse Coordinator for the Greens Committees of Correspondence.

With the advent of what we call civilization about 7,000 years ago, a profound transformation occurred on the planet. Most scholars now believe that the hunter-gatherer cultures that predate civilization were female-centered and matrilinear. However, between 5,000 and 3,000 B.C. a male-dominated, control-oriented thrust began. Male-oriented thought patterns have dominated human societies ever since.<sup>14</sup>

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Whether the history is reliable or not, Berry's take on it leaves women with no possibility of an accessible record of past experience to draw from, no successes and mistakes to analyze. Everything is going to have to be a complete break with the intervening 7,000 years of historic civilization that followed the female-centered prehistoric age. Virtually everything is going to have to be completely "new." Berry continues:

To liberate ourselves from a system that has pervaded everything we have thought and done for the last 5,000 years will not be an easy task. Power over others will not be given up without a struggle. Old habits are hard to break and require more than intellectual exercises. There is no one way nor are there easy answers. We will have to try many approaches. We will need to experiment together—to chant and sing and dance, to write new stories and rituals, to build support systems and communities as we struggle to free ourselves from patriarchal bondage.<sup>15</sup>

Berry's prescriptions leave the queasy feeling that we are forging ahead towards a destination that may not exist, using a boat that may not float, leaving behind the charts drawn up by people who have gone before.

Also, according to these prescriptions, feminism is somehow supposed to be the whole solution, nullifying not only feminism (since it is everything and therefore nothing), but eliminating a radical economic class and race analysis as well. In reading feminist writings from 1967-69 I was surprised to discover that the Women's Liberation Movement did not come as a complete rejection of radical thought, but rather as a deepening and augmenting of it. In the Feminist Task Force scheme of things all thoughts by men are tainted, Marx was a man . . . you can imagine the rest.

American Peace Test, an otherwise fairly reasonable group which is working to enact a comprehensive test ban treaty has this paragraph in one of their civil disobedience handbooks:

Because patriarchy supports and thrives on war, a feminist analysis is crucial to effectively change militarism. The view of women as the other parallels the view of our enemies as non-human, available targets for any means of destruction or cruelty. In fact, U.S. foreign policy often seems like the playing out of rigid sex roles by men trying to achieve and maintain power through male toughness. How can cooperative, humane public policy be developed by people who have been socialized to repress emotions, not to cry, to ignore their own needs to nurture children and others?<sup>16</sup>

Of course, if wars are not fought just because men are socialized wrong, and are instead fought for actual material interests, then this "feminist" analysis is not going to take us very far on road we want to

travel either. But a look at the twists and turns of history shows that it isn't a feminist analysis. Due to the popularity and power of the feminist insurgency, what might rather be called a *feminine* analysis is confusing itself and confusing others by calling itself "feminist."

Trying to squeeze the attack on all the burning issues of the world under the rubric of feminism ends up weakening the attack on all of them—and misrepresenting feminism, undermining its specific thrust.

A 1987 leaflet from The Fund For the Feminist Majority claims as feminist issues opposition to Contra aid, cutting the military budget, and not cutting spending on social programs.<sup>17</sup> The Fund uses the peace woman tradition in an attempt to inspire coalitions in electoral politics.

Feminists have a long tradition of fighting for equality, social and economic justice, and peace. The 19th Century feminists, led by Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony fought for women's suffrage and equality, for social reforms such as the elimination of child labor, the promotion of temperance, public education, health care, human services and the abolition of slavery and the end of racism . . . in the tradition of this proud feminist history, organizations and groups continue to press the feminist agenda of equality, non-violence, and peace today.<sup>18</sup>

The real basis for a coalition could be a common enemy or a common goal, but I daresay Harriet Tubman fought for the emancipation of black people not because she was female and therefore had a more caring heart, but because she was black. Furthermore the record fails to turn up a tradition of "non-violence" in Harriet Tubman's liberation tactics. Tubman was a pioneer of non-traditional womanhood. She *fought*. She carried a gun when she led slaves to escape to freedom. A Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) African American history "Freedom Primer" written in 1965 gives this description of Harriet Tubman: "Sometimes she had to be hard with the people she was leading, not everyone was as strong and brave as Harriet Tubman. . . She always carried a gun with her. One time a man was very tired, he said he couldn't go any further. Harriet pointed the gun at him and said, "Dead folks tell no tales, you go on or die." So the man went on to freedom . . . With the Civil War Harriet did not feel that her job was done and that the war was for men only. She served . . . as a spy for the Union Army."<sup>19</sup>

### NONVIOLENCE: A MANDATE FROM THE MASSES?

Nor is there any evidence the feminist insurgency of 1960s was dedicated to nonviolence. Karate demonstrations for women's self-defense pepper the Women's Liberation conference agendas of the late 60s and early 70s. A report of what was going on in the movement, given in a speech by Kathie Sarachild, reflects a very different mass feminist sentiment on the question of whether women are nonviolent and passive

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19th century woodcut. Harriet Tubman, holding her gun—outside the tents of the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. Courtesy of Restockings Women's Liberation Archives.

## THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S ALLIANCE



Cover of an informational handout (tabloid size) of the Third World Women's Alliance National Office in New York City, 1971. Courtesy of Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives.

by nature. In a speech at the Women's Strike March, August 26, 1971 entitled "Going for What We Really Want," Sarachild said:

I was visiting a consciousness-raising group on Long Island of mostly so-called middle class, suburban, married women, and they were mad at the Women's Political Caucus for not being radical enough when the caucus kept saying we're not going to be like men, we're going to be nonviolent. I heard about a speech Martha Shelley gave once which she opened by asking, "Who says women are nonviolent?," and then she pulled out a rolling pin and held it over her head....<sup>20</sup>

Rather, what both the rise of feminism and the reality of women's armed participation in the National Liberation Movement of Vietnam (and elsewhere) showed was that contrary to myth women longed for freedom as much as men did, and would *fight* for it (i.e. violently) if need be. Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh's famous revolutionary slogan—"nothing is more precious than freedom and independence"—was true for women as for men. The slogan "Women unfree will never be at peace," which Irish-American women's liberationist Jane Barry reported a friend finding scrawled on a wall in the midst of the Northern Ireland uprising, far better captures the spirit of the feminist insurgency than "women for peace."<sup>\*</sup>

## WAR, REVOLUTION, AND FEMINIST GAINS

How has it been possible to maintain this image of women as nonviolent and passive in the midst of television and newspaper photographs of women bearing arms in revolutionary and rebel movements all over the world? One myth which has been used to lend weight to the peace-woman position is that women have won feminist advances nonviolently in the past. Some who make this argument also like to invoke the successful nonviolent resistance tactics of the Civil Rights Movement as the inspiration of the feminist revival. Yet it can be argued that the Civil Rights Movement would not have been possible without Mau Mau and the many other armed freedom struggles in Africa. No African colonial state gained independence without an armed struggle.

The oft-made point that women in England and the United States may have won the vote as a reward for halting their militant suffrage agitation and backing their government's involvement in World War I suggests that this victory, too, rested to a certain extent on violent struggle, albeit indirectly, by proxy. Similarly, a look at chronology as well as public opinion artifacts of the time suggests that victories for women's suffrage agitation in the United States and England may have come also partly as a result of the threat which the Bolshevik revolution represented to capitalist Europe and the U.S. A 1919 poster issued by the Massachusetts Public Interests League of Anti-Suffragists, entitled

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\*See Kathie Sarachild graphic essay this issue.

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“DO YOU REALIZE That In Every Country Woman Suffrage and Socialism Go Hand-in-Hand?” called attention to the Soviet position on women: “In REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA 26,000,000 women can vote. Russian Socialism is the most fearful menace to the civilization of the world today.”

Additionally, the campaign which suffragists in England launched between 1907 and 1914, and then halted during World War I, included the cutting of telegraph wires to London, the slashing of art exhibits, arson, the destruction of mail, and the smashing of windows which saw 200 arrested for conspiracy, after which Emmeline Pankhurst declared “We have made more progress by breaking glass than we did when we allowed them to break our bodies.”<sup>22</sup>

That some movements have the ability to advance without violent struggle is a luxury built on the struggles of those who maintained and continue to maintain that threat. But while the myth of peaceful women persists, women such as Margaret Thatcher, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Corazon Aquino, and Benazir Bhutto are being used to provide a moderate, “non-macho” veneer to violent, repressive policies.

If one looks at history, it seems that as many, if not more feminist advances have been made in times of war or its aftermath as in times of peace. In fact, women have often advanced into new areas of economic and political independence during wars (both of the national liberation and imperialist kind) only to lose ground again in times of peace.

As a general rule, it seems dangerous—inviting further repression, exploitation and oppression—for those who are oppressed to bind themselves to an absolute principle and policy of peace and nonviolence. Fidel Castro noted in a recent speech, “there are two kinds of survival and two kinds of peace . . . the survival of the rich and the survival of the poor; the peace of the rich and the peace of the poor . . . That is why the news that there may be peace, that there may be detente between the United States and the Soviet Union, does not necessarily mean that there is going to be peace for us.”<sup>23</sup>

It may be true for women, too, that peace will not lead to justice.

### **THE TIP OF THE ARCHIVES**

We have to alert our sisters to the vital radical storehouse in the feminist tradition and get our movement going in a direction which will actually win some of the things we need before the reforms which were won in the rebirth years are completely rolled back. Fortunately I don't think it requires too much chanting or ritual-writing to go from peace-woman to radical feminist. (This is not to suggest that peace women as a group are necessarily as good a pool of potential feminists as, say, secretaries.) I do think it will take some consciousness-raising and some uncovering of the written record. The first thing that was shoved under my nose (by a pushy member of Gainesville Women's Liberation) was the Florida paper, followed by Redstockings' *Feminist Revolution*.

After some exhuming of history, we will find there are many lessons that can inform our strategy in the fight for the liberation of women as well as the general movement for equality and freedom. Here I've just mentioned a few of the insights contained in the rich written record of our own movement's experience. The feminist archives include documentary evidence of the most priceless and irreplaceable of lessons, hard-won victories and edifying defeats, which can be used again to advance us further towards our goals.

I've experienced changes in my own organizing from the revelations contained in the lessons I've given a taste of here. The knowledge of this history has made me wary of throwing myself into *noblesse oblige*-type organizing out of some imposed mandate to mother humankind and instead has caused me to work to achieve "selfish" freedom and justice goals such as abolishing abortion law restrictions, demanding equal pay, and achieving complete social sharing of the costs of child-rearing. It also made me examine what my stake is in organizing around certain issues and not others, and made it possible for me to explain to other women, as never before, why they should join the fight.

This is not to say that women should not fight on many fronts, even ones that are not specifically feminist. But if we fight on issues that affect us because we are humans, or workers, rather than because we're specifically women, we have to watch out that we're not using the peace-women appeal. For example, in fighting against carcinogens in food, we could use the appeal to women's traditional role as cook (the Housewives for Healthy Hotdogs approach.) But we don't want to continue to be isolated in the kitchen so we shouldn't make demands on that basis. Mothers Against Drunk Driving? What about fathers? Don't they mourn their children killed and maimed in alcohol-caused car accidents? If they don't mourn equally, we need to fight to make parenthood equal, not let them off the hook by organizing in segregated groups.

The record shows that the Black Power militants in SNCC were right when they told the white civil rights workers to "go fight your own oppressors." And what Beverly Jones said in the Florida paper was true: "People don't get radicalized (i.e. engaged with basic truths) fighting other people's battles."<sup>24</sup> We have been better organizers and more effective fighters when we fight on our own behalf and in our own interests, and when we consult our own experience of oppression and exploitation, than if we try to fight battles in which we don't see that we have an interest. If we fight battles in which we have not established a real stake in winning, we are just playing at social change until we become "engaged with the basic truths" of our own lives.

Finally I should mention that it makes me angry that we still have to repeat these fundamental lessons in the third decade after the rebirth of feminism. I'm angry that the hard work that women did before us can be so thoroughly buried that we have to fight the same battles over and over again, walk up the same blind alleys and even some new ones for the lack of a knowledge of history that is rightfully ours. Not only the

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history and experience itself but the *idea* that we should use our history and experience has been buried. As an antidote, I hope that we can uncover enough of these lessons to construct a vibrant new offensive on the side of freedom and equality.

- <sup>1</sup> Many of the documents cited can be obtained as photocopies of the original, by mail order from the "Archives for Action" catalog Redstockings has just produced. This catalog, available for a stamped, self-addressed envelope plus 50¢ (in coins or stamps) covers the selected materials Redstockings currently has the resources to make publicly available. It is the beginning of a larger project to compile a chronological bibliography of all the public materials of the "the rebirth years." As resources grow, Redstockings will be able to make more and more of the collection available. Write: Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives, 255 Ft. Washington Ave., #33, New York, NY 10032.
- <sup>2</sup> March 31, 1988 letter from the Feminist Task Force to the author.
- <sup>3</sup> Jeanette Rankin was the first woman elected to Congress, from Montana, in 1919. She was a pacifist and the only Congressperson to vote against World War I — also voting against World War II 24 years later. (C. Andrew Sinclair, *The Emancipation of the American Woman* (New York: Harper & Row) 1965: 330).
- <sup>4</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" *Notes From The First Year*, (June 1968).
- <sup>5</sup> Invitation to "Burial of Traditional Womanhood" distributed by New York Radical Women, Jan 15, 1968. Designed by Shulamith Firestone.
- <sup>6</sup> Lynn Piartney, "A letter to the editor of Ramparts Magazine," *Notes from the First Year*: 22.
- <sup>7</sup> Firestone: 19.
- <sup>8</sup> The sit-in disruptions of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings in San Francisco were in May 1960. Dagmar Wilson's presentation of flowers to the HUAC investigators who subpoenaed her was in 1962.
- <sup>9</sup> Piartney: 23.
- <sup>10</sup> Kathie Amatniek (Sarachild), "Funeral Oration For The Burial of Traditional Womanhood" *Notes From The First Year*.
- <sup>11</sup> Gloria Martin (Astoria, Oregon) "Angry Black Woman Speaks Out," *The Movement*, San Francisco, (November, 1967).
- <sup>12</sup> Sue Munaker, "A Call for Women's Liberation," written for *The Resistance*, Chicago, (January, 1968).
- <sup>13</sup> Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, *Toward a Female Liberation Movement*, (widely called the 'Florida Paper'), Gainesville, FL, June 1968: 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Dee Berry, "Beyond Patriarchy," *Palmetto Post*, St. Petersburg, Florida (March 1989): 5.
- <sup>15</sup> Berry, *Ibid*.
- <sup>16</sup> American Peace Test, "Feminism (expanded from an article by Starhawk)," *Reclaim the Test Site Action Handbook*, Salem, OR, (March 1988).
- <sup>17</sup> Fund For the Feminist Majority, "Feminists Are the Majority," 1987 leaflet, Washington, DC.
- <sup>18</sup> Fund For the Feminist Majority, "The National Feminist Agenda," 1987 leaflet, Washington, DC.
- <sup>19</sup> Bobbi & Frank Cieciora, *Negroes in American History: A Freedom Primer*, published by *The Student Voice* (Atlanta: SNCC) 1965.
- <sup>20</sup> Kathie Sarachild, "Going For What We Really Want," speech at Women's Strike March, August 26, 1971, in *Feminist Revolution*, 1975 (New York: Random House) 1978, .
- <sup>21</sup> Jane Barry, in a letter printed in *Meeting Ground*, Carol Hanisch, ed. New Paltz, NY, (September 1977).
- <sup>22</sup> Both the 1919 poster and the Pankhurst quote are from Faye Levine, "The Truth About the British Suffragettes," *Feminist Revolution*, 1975, 1978.
- <sup>23</sup> Castro in a speech before Gorbachev's December 1988 visit to Cuba, reported in *The New York Times*, (11 Jan 1989).
- <sup>24</sup> Jones & Brown: 2.