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Responses

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Responses:

It has been apparent in the effort to win ratification of the equal rights amendment the objectives of that amendment have never been adequately interpreted to the working class woman. As a result some of the strongest and most pervasive opposition to the ERA has come from those who need it the most. One of the disappointments of the Women's Movement is that it initially had little interest in reaching working class women and, even of late, the majority of its members cannot think in terms of the problems faced by that group of women. Most disturbing is that the channels for communicating the ideas of the Women's Movement have primarily been those which are keyed to the middle and upper class women. Television talk shows, the highly successful Ms. Magazine, and conferences; all have been aimed at the more elite women. As an initial starting point perhaps this thinking was tolerable. Today the movement must truly grow beyond this if it is to effectuate meaningful improvements in the lives of all women. An appreciation must be developed for the goals of those women who may be working totally from necessity rather than from any desire to develop their identity. Many of these women would welcome the luxury of staying home and caring for their children, and of having time to themselves. Telling them that caring for a home is drudgery and that they should want a career is not the approach that meets their needs. At some point the Women's Movement is going to have to fully understand the meaning of liberation and freedom of choice for an individual. The early movement tended to replace the traditional stereotyped female image with an equally stereotyped and rigid one of the liberated woman. Tolerance is especially needed as is an appreciation for divergent views. The goal of the movement must be to grow beyond rigid lifestyle patterns of all types and the tendency to categorize people. When the elite of the Women's Movement begins to listen more than we may actually have the "freedom to be you and me."

by Margaret Shaffer*

The article is highly elitist; it betrays precisely the patronizing and snobbish attitude which middle class women often demonstrate toward working class women and which I assume it was the author's purpose to point out and critically analyze.

Equality is not a synonym for attainment of professional and intellectual status and the middle class can hardly be said to have a monopoly on considering dignity and self-respect important. Further education is not necessarily a prerequisite to awareness of inequality and questioning of

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power structures; it does not necessarily have value to an individual development which the author seems to assign it. In fact, many studies have proved that the institution of education tracks working and middle class students into pre-determined job classifications which perpetuate the class basis of our society.

If anything, working class women became aware of their equality to men long before their middle class sisters. They have been working side by side with men in factories since the Industrial Revolution (and before that in cottage, home-based trades). In comparison it is only recently that middle class women have seen the value in and have attempted to enter the professions. If the potential of working class women is denied, it is the fault of the middle class, both men and women, whose interest in maintaining a classed and economically structured society is probably the strongest of any group in our society.

From the author's point of view working class women are stupid, uneducated, unmotivated, mindless dolts. Given that they no doubt perceive this attitude in middle class women, it is no wonder that they refuse to "join the movement" Maybe we should stop telling them that child day care is only important if women are seeking to leave the home to *pursue a career*. What about leaving the home to go to a job that supports our capitalist economy?

by Marilyn Zilli

The "lack of awareness" of the working class women does not prevent frustration; it only prevents it from achieving a clear focus. The domination of the current women's movement by the well-educated, then, is a result of the ability to specify and articulate their feelings.

by Linda Lanam

All of us who are involved with this issue of *Iustitia* are rather unusually well-educated. So far as I know, none of us has expressed a desire to enter the blue collar-work force or the white collar-clerical work force. In this, I think we typify the bulk of women involved in the women's movement. We seek "meaningful" employment. To us, and in the rhetoric of the movement, this implies work which will allow us to use our education and training

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in some way. We have always had the opportunity to work in factories, to serve as waitresses, to work in the fields, to type someone else's thoughts. We chose not to work in these areas because while our education has taught us that society cannot function without people who will do this work (and, therefore, may be more meaningful ultimately than many of the types of work we seek), it has also taught us that we possess the same intellectual capabilities as males, and can function on a par at the jobs which well-educated males hold. Our goals are as elitist as theirs.

There are, of course, exceptions, and the movement has given support to women entering blue-collar jobs; efforts have been made to eliminate "protective" legislation which precludes women from entering somewhat high-risk, but also high-paying jobs. However, the focus of the movement seems to be not directed at getting more women into the labor force, but rather at the exclusion of well-educated women from the jobs that their male counterparts hold. I agree with Ms. Stam that the movement offers little to the woman who seeks a job and not a "career" aside from the same moral support and work in the day-care center area. It may be that an outgrowth of the movement will be to see all employment as having a value to society and the view that a particular job is one that "somebody's got to do" will give it more status than is currently the case. Unless the movement concentrates on this, however, it will not speak to the majority of the working population, male and female, and cannot expect much support from that population.

by Karen Cutright*

It is obvious, I agree, that the women's movement is dominated by well educated women. However, I find it less obvious that the fault lies with the working class women's lack of awareness. It seems to me that people involved in social movements in this country find it easier to kick down walls than to build bridges.

by Sharon Wildey

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