

Letters

WOMEN, REVOLUTION, SEXISM, ETC., ETC.

TO THE EDITOR:

The women quoted in "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969" (by Peter Babcox, Feb. 9) do not represent the Women's Liberation Movement, which is not a "group," as the article says, but a loose coalition of groups with varying ideologies. Though superficially "revolutionary," their view of the women's movement is anti-woman and ultimately reactionary.

Women's situation, they assert, is "uniquely revealing" of larger inequities; our "uniquely visible condition . . . exposes the broader framework of social coercion." But we are not uniquely visible; we are uniquely oppressed. We are coerced not only by capitalism and racism but by male supremacy as well.

Robin Morgan calls Miss America, "Racism, militarism and capitalism—all packaged in one 'ideal' symbol: a woman." Why is women's oppression only a "symbol" of something else? Sexism is no less evil than racism or capitalism. Nor is it less basic. On the contrary, male supremacy is rooted in the patriarchal family, which existed long before capitalism and has outlasted it in socialist countries. In this society, sexism is even more deeply entrenched than racism. Though whites are at least ashamed of racism, most men are outspoken chauvinists and refuse even to recognize the problem.

Sue Adelman worries that preoccupation with "the discomforts of male chauvinism" will distract from "the imperatives of a larger revolutionary politics." But we believe that feminism is revolutionary. Male chauvinism is not simply a "discomfort" but an intolerable form of oppression that must be eliminated by any means necessary.

Bernadine Dohrn of S.D.S. allows that "our movement has not really made room for the enormous political potential of women's repression." In other words, the woman issue is a good organizing angle for the left. But despite a few Bernadine Dohrns, the New Left is dominated by men. Discrimination within the left inspired our movement. Black radicals have wisely refused to be part of the white left, allying with whites only when it is clearly in their interest. Women can profit by their example.

Sue Adelman again: "Women are more sensitive to repression than men because for them it's a 24-hour-a-day thing. Women have become an important force for the survival of The Movement, because the more

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women make men aware of their own repression the stronger they'll be together." This is obscurantism. Women must make men aware of how they are oppressors. Radical men are quite conscious of their own repression, but they are male supremacists just the same—at the anti-inaugural rally in Washington, "our" men greeted Women's Liberation speakers with jeers and obscenities. Anyway, this analysis reeks of stereotype: women are sensitive, closer to the realities of life, etc. We probably have a better sense of rhythm, too.

Bernadine Dohrn and Naomi Jaffe exhort women not to adopt "a defensive posture to rage against our exploited status vis-à-vis men," but to fight for autonomy for everyone. Moreover, to achieve autonomy as women we must fight male supremacy. Surely radical women cannot believe that education and moral pressure alone will make men come around. Like any other power group, men will not give up their privileges until they have to. We must build a feminist movement so strong and so independent that radical men will make women's liberation a central goal simply because they need us. Only then can we cooperate—from a position of strength—in making a revolution for everyone.

It is difficult and painful for women to recognize men as oppressors. Men and women are bound together. We cannot withdraw into separatism but must carry our politics into our most intimate relationships. Naturally many women do not want to face the conflicts involved. But to rationalize one's fears as "revolutionary politics" is terrible self-deception. It is interesting that the same women who are so anxious to avoid any anti-man stigma do not hesitate to insult another woman, and in a most unpolitical way. We refer to the disgusting parody of "Ain't She Sweet?" directed against Miss America. Miss America represents the sexual exploitation of women carried to its logical conclusion. It is senseless to blame her for her oppression. But such distortions are inevitable as long as women are squeamish about naming their oppressors: men.

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(With seven other signatures)

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