

**SISTERS,  
BROTHERS,  
LOVERS....**

**LISTEN...**

*Judi Bernstein*

*Peggy Morton*

*Linda Seese*

*Myrna Wood*

The authoresses are movement women who were active at the time of writing this paper in the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA), then Canada's leading new left organization. The paper was written for a SUPA membership conference, and was part of the organizing of the first women's liberation group in Canada (in Toronto).

This article is one of a series on women's liberation chosen by a group of Boston-area women and published by NEFP.

published by

New England Free Press  
791 Tremont St.  
Boston, Mass. 02118

# **Sisters, Brothers, Lovers.... Listen...**

*by Judi Bernstein, Peggy Morton,*

*Linda Seese, and Myrna Wood*

This paper is intended to provoke thought and discussion. We hope that it will not be taken as vindictive, but that certain directions may come from this discussion. Believing as Marx did that 'social progress can be measured by the social position of the female sex', we will attempt to describe the human condition in New Left terms as it exists today. We will also explore the position and role of women within this human condition. We will trace the history of the role of women in the New Left in Canada and show that this role is determined by the values of the dominant society. We will point out directions, methods for change and concrete suggestions for change both within and without the Movement.

We trust that you will consider this paper with the seriousness with which it was written.

## **Human Condition**

In all the things we stand for, are concerned with, and work for, as the 'New Left', is this concept we talk about as the LIBERATION of human beings, in order that they might develop themselves to the full potential that human kind may have. It is the concept behind our rhetoric on the Black people of the U.S., the Vietnamese, the Canadian Indians, the developing Third World, the poor and the middle classes.

Unlike lower forms of life, human beings are capable of becoming -- becoming more than a living entity that is enslaved to the creation and maintenance of the species. The potential we human beings share is to develop our own creativity and make valid our humanism. We need not be caught up in the animalistic biological concept of physical survival of the fittest. Our level of survival and creativity is intricately bound up with the spiritual, social and economic level of society. Our level of survival and creativity is dependent on our consciousness and the type of social relationships that allow the expansion of the consciousness.

We say that an acquisitive, frightened elite in society keeps all those who are dispossessed from growing in those areas which raise man to greater heights of creativeness, self-understanding, happiness than the more primitive past we come from. Liberation is to move freely through a lifetime's experience, learning from all, and **regardless** of one's supposed 'place', expressing oneself in ways that have rarely

regardless of one's supposed 'place', expressing oneself in ways that have rarely been possible in our conformist society. We live in a time when this seems possible to us, within our reach; we have some knowledge, ways of communicating, aids like drugs for self-awareness and awareness of others, but are limited in our freedom to use them. Hence our underground methods of circumventing these restrictions put on us; underground, whether cultural or revolutionary. However, since we hope for an extensive change in society, we constantly attempt to bring our way of living and thinking to the surface, to start the change occurring.

However, so often it means that instead of understanding that concept we espouse, we use it mainly as rhetoric, as a shallow political explanation for our dissent. That is not to say that liberation should or could come before we can politically use the concept, but certainly among ourselves being and using should be simultaneous. We must learn by doing how people who have no power can liberate themselves.

## The Human Condition as Reflected in the Position of Women

"The direct, natural, necessary relation of human creatures is the relation of man to woman... The nature of this relation delimits to what point man himself is to be considered as a generic being. As mankind, the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being. By it is shown, therefore, to what point the natural behavior of man has become human, or to what point the human being has become his natural being, to what point his human nature has become his nature."

Simone de Beauvoir has said in response to Marx's statement: 'The case could not be better stated. It is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain the supreme victory, it is necessary for one thing. That by and through their natural differentiation men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood.'

We believe they both state the case very well. We also see the human condition of this society as one of loneliness, alienation, and fear. We all look for support against this. Men attempt to alleviate this fear by having a person - a woman - who he can depend upon and dominate. He must see her as an inferior in order to strengthen his identity which is constantly threatened by an inhuman society. This leaves the woman with only one role with which to eliminate her similar fears. She must gain her identity through that domination. The woman begins to tie the man to her through his need for her. He is dependent on her playing the role of being his helpmate and being dependent on him for providing and protecting. The man's function is creation and procreation; the woman's is maintenance. This role chafes her. She realizes in her subconscious what Marcuse says: 'Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves.' The woman becomes possessive in retaliation for her forced role. She cannot allow him to be free because she is not free. Marcuse says, 'In a society based on exploitation both the slave and the slaveholder are unfree... and this mutual dependence is... a vicious circle which encloses both the Master and the Servant.' The human quality of love is destroyed. And we are the children of such relationships.

As Marian Ramelson writes: 'Not only (will) men have to re-estimate women's place in the home and society, but women will have to re-estimate themselves, giving their work and potentialities a far higher value than they've been accustomed to do.' Yes, the 'woman problem' is a human 'problem' but we women are beginning to understand the necessity of re-estimating ourselves. We are learning what Marcuse knew: 'The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but what can be chosen and what is chosen by the individual.'

Perhaps the position of women in the sexual act, most often lying underneath the man, illustrates the social and economic position of women in society. Women feel they are still on the bottom, in all respects. The notion of human liberation is in direct opposition to the notions of efficiency, profit, accumulation of possessions. The separation of man from woman contributes to the maintenance of such a society.

## The Historical Basis of the Position of Women

Juliet Mitchell, in an article on the position of women ('The Longest March', New Left Review), has set out four categories which she sees as operating dialectically to create and reinforce a subservient position for women in society: production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization. Her categories will be used to develop an outline on the historical basis of women's enslavement.

### PRODUCTION

Socialist writers have traditionally linked the origins and continuation of women's domination with the physical superiority of men, and their consequent ability to perform work, with a resulting division of tasks of men as creator and conqueror, while women act as preservers and maintainers.

Historically, this is not true. While it is true that man's physical strength has given him a capacity for violence in war and conquest, and thus political control, the role of women in production has been a varied one. For example, in many agricultural societies, women have performed the bulk of work in the fields. In Britain during the period of early industrialization, women and children provided the bulk of the cheap labor force in the textile factories and the mines. In addition, women have of course performed socially necessary work which falls outside the market economy, such as housework. These examples show that coercion has and will be used to force women to engage in productive labour when the economic system demands it, or when men have decided that women will perform certain kinds of work.

In societies where women have not played a major role in the labour force, they are generally accorded the role of stabilizers of the social order. This occurs in the following way: work is an alienating experience because men have no control over either the process or the products of their labour. An escape must be provided. The institution of the family has provided such an escape. Women have the job of maintaining a retreat from the alienating society without which alienation with no release might reach the point of rebellion against the social order. In the same way that poor whites have been controlled by teaching them superiority to black people, men have been controlled by giving them a role superior to that of women.

It is obvious that the granting to women of equal rights to work and to be creative within the present society cannot be considered as liberation, since work in capitalist society is unfulfilling and alienating. The question of the role of women in production cannot be divorced from that of the necessity of a transition from capitalism to socialism, but the demand of rights in this area for women will be one step in breaking down the social order.

### REPRODUCTION

The problems of production and reproduction are closely linked. The inability, until recently, of women to control their own reproductive capacities has made it convenient to accord to women the position that they have been given. As long as women have no control over the number of children they wish to bear or when they wish to have them, they are easier to control, being more in need of protection and less useful as members of the labour force. 'The pill' has the potential for making women free agents in this matter. The most optimistic thing about contraception is that once child-bearing becomes one option among many and women have some power to control their destinies, they may well be less ready to accept subservience as an inevitable part of their condition.

It is important to remember, however, that the questions of production and reproduction must be seen as socially rather than strictly biological. Since the continuation of the race depends on reproduction, an economic system based on human needs rather than profit would see that women who are pregnant or who have young children should be provided for economically if this removes them for a time from other productive labour. Capitalism, of course, makes no such social judgments.

## SEXUALITY

The role accorded to women in the sexual act is inseparable from the values taught to people about how to treat one another, and to the possibility or impossibility of a human relationship between men and women. Woman is the object; man is the subject. Women are fucked; men do the fucking. Men see sex as conquest; women as surrender. Such a value system in the most personal and potentially meaningful act of communication between men and women cannot but result in the inability of both the one who conquers and the one who surrenders to have genuine love and understanding between them.

The question of sexual liberation for both men and women is fundamental to both the liberation of women and to the development of human relationships between people, since the capacity for meaningful sexual experience is both an indication and an actualization of the capacity for love which this society stifles so successfully.

As 'modern' women begin to recognize their own sexual potential and to demand sexual fulfillment, women begin to treat men as the object, so that we have two people, each treating the other as the object. This is natural, given that people are taught, in order to keep them alienated from one another, to treat other people as the object of their wants and needs, and not as human beings. The partial liberation that has taken place and is taking place for women in the sexual sphere does, however, hold out the possibility of more real human relationships between men and women. Both become equal and active participants; the potential for a mutual experience is greatly increased.

This kind of sexual liberation creates the possibility for people to unlearn those social roles which act to preserve an alienating society -- men can no longer act as conquerors, women as the dominated and conquered, and this will in turn have its effect on the social roles that they must play.

## SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDREN

Women are taught to be parasites - as Emma Goldman says - to live off men as dependent creatures. It is hardly surprising that since they are also the major socializers of children, children grow up not learning to be independent of others and able to make independent judgments about their own lives and the values of the society.

There is no particular biological reason, apart from early feeding, that women should act as the socializers of children. Indeed, the separate functions given to men and women in teaching children behaviour and in developing personality structure are in themselves evidence of the unintegrated personality structure that results from the roles of men and women in the society: the mother is the unconditional love symbol, the father that of authority. We see this also in the personality characteristics which men and women are taught -- men are intellectual, strong, aggressive, women passive, emotional, tender and so on. Such a division, biologically speaking, is of course so much nonsense.

The nuclear family, with the love symbol and the authority figure, also provides social stability in that it provides a structure in which 'frustration transference' takes place. The man returns from work where he is unable to take out his frustrations in the appropriate place, and transfers the hostility to wife and children. The mother allows this by accepting this as the male role... 'Just wait until your father gets home and hears what you did -- you're going to get it then.' It also provides a way of socializing children that will teach them to obey authority by providing, in the early years, a complete authority system of adults which they must submit to.

In all of the areas mentioned above, biological necessity cannot explain the roles accorded to men and women. Biology is a useful excuse, since for the sake of efficiency many differentiations in social roles are made most easily in this way. However, maintenance of the social structure can also be seen as a primary cause for the

division of roles between men and women that has taken place. Thus the liberation of women is a revolutionary demand in all its aspects, for it demands the most complete restructuring of the social order. The realization of this would mean in fact human liberation.

## Cultural Determination of the Role of Women

The role of woman as the centre of the family - child-raiser, cook, and housekeeper - and that of the man as the provider of the family has been assumed as natural. The nature of woman and of man has also been assumed. We contend that, in fact, culture could determine the exact opposite. There is no natural inborn instinct for certain roles and personality traits.

Margaret Mead says this in her books Sex and Temperament and Male and Female. Let us review her findings. The Zuni, Arapesh, and Samoan tribes consist of men and women with the characteristics we attribute to women in our society. The women also actively enjoy sex while the men do not (Jung is turning over in his grave). The Mumudugumor tribe is the opposite -- both men and women have the masculine characteristics of our society. The women, by the way, detest child-bearing and rearing (there goes the myth of 'maternal instinct'). They are also the providers for the family. The Tchambuli and Zuni have their men raise the children. The former tribe finds men adorned with lovely ornaments, and long curls, while the women are unadorned and have shaven heads. The men spend their time with the children, doing the shopping and gossiping. The women work in the fields and forests to provide food and shelter for the family.

The other outstanding example of deviance from the norms of western society is the position of men and women in lower-class Negro society in the U.S. Because of the old slave system where the white women were allowed no freedom and the use of black women by white men, black women have had a special role, and a degree of freedom. There is an old Southern saying that 'the only free people in the South are white men and black women.' (A rueful addition by the white women in SNCC was: 'So now we're fighting for the freedom of Negro men. When is it our turn?')

The lower class Negro women are the ones who can get the jobs. There are very few jobs for the men. Welfare reinforces this since women can receive welfare only when they prove they are not living with a man. Negro women are breadwinners. They are the rulers of the roost. They are assertive, active in politics (within the confines of their caste society) and the dominant force in their society. It is the women who are free to partake in affairs with men of other classes and colors. Men, if they remain in the family, are submissive, fearful and definitely the less favored half of the relationship. They are also often forced to raise the children.

The bulk of the membership and leadership of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, and the Poor People's Corporation (the only truly grass roots organizations in the South) were and are women. We mourn the loss of manhood of Negro men. It is easy to see that they have been deprived by the culture in which they live of their full humanity. Very few people mourn the loss of humanity of the exploited half of the human species -- the women. Negro men are asserting their manhood in the ghettos of the U.S. Perhaps the women of the world will be asserting their womanhood soon.

## Women in the New Left

We have mentioned the human condition and how we of the New Left deplore exploitation of all kinds. At the same time we realize that the revolution in this country will be a long hard pull. In order to keep the revolutionary movement alive it will be necessary that we attempt the most humane interaction. We must act as though the revolution had occurred by our relationships with one another.

We assert that SUPA people have the same hangups, frustrations, and neuroses as the

rest of society. One attempted solution to our lack of real ego identity was finding it within SUPA. We all know that this failed. We tried to make such a group our family, peer group, and society. We created or allowed to be created father figures. This was proven harmful to all concerned and we hope a facet of our past from which we can learn. As a result of this kind of psychological seeking we never gained the principles of participatory democracy. A few people were allowed to lead. Many people were excluded from leadership. The largest excluded group was women. SUPA in respect to women totally accepted the mores of the dominant society.

Stokely once said, 'The only position for women in SNCC is prone.' We cannot imagine any of the fine SUPA men uttering such a statement, but we can imagine many of them thinking it. In fact they put women in SUPA in two categories or roles -- the workers and the 'wives'.

One role for women is that of servicing the organization's men. These women maintain the stable, homey atmosphere which the radical man needs to survive. They raise the future radicals of Canada. They earn the money in the mundane jobs that our society pays people to do, so the radical men can be at home and be political, creative and so forth. Of course, these relationships are ones of 'freedom'. But it is, in fact, a one-sided freedom and we all know which side is 'free'. This, we feel, is a situation not unlike that of the dominant society -- behind every successful man is a successful woman. While these 'real' women are being women (earning money, cooking and housecleaning), their radical partners can run around being political, creative, writing, thinking and oozing charisma.

But in order to do this, these men need followers and maintainers. Therefore the workers of the Movement -- the second role of women in SUPA. They are the typists, fundraisers, and community organizers. The vast majority of community organizers were women and we must ask why. Community organizing was considered tedious. It required patience, sensitivity, understanding, and more patience. It is a sad commentary that so few men felt they could do this kind of work.

Every so often one of these workers would try, through her efforts and work, to attain a position of leadership. They, as we all know too well, were labeled 'castrating females' and not 'real women'. (They were no longer good niggers.) These women were forced out of the organization by various unconscious means, or accepted their subservient roles. The work of these women has been used to build a myth for SUPA, but they must not try to gain recognition for this.

The myth of participatory democracy is just that if one looks at the participation of women in SUPA. Old Leftists, who agree totally with the aims and goals of SUPA, are astounded that we permit the degree of male chauvinism that abounds in it to exist. One sometimes gets the feeling that we are like a civil rights organization with a leadership of southern racists. This is disastrous for an organization. An organization that permits half its membership to be kept from using their talents and energies is in sad shape. Because of the attitude within the Movement (in the minds of both sexes) women are not free to think and act outside the limited role given to them in the broader society. We are allowed to speak but our thoughts are not given serious attention until expressed by a male. We are allowed sexual freedom but are (a) still faced with a loss of respect on the part of many males if we take advantage of that freedom, or (b) still expected to designate our 'man' as our first priority. (How many times have you heard a man express the sentiment that a woman in the movement is taking a particular political position because that is what her 'man' thinks?)

As some of us women have become more aware of our intellectual and political powers we experience a loss of emotional identity in our personal lives. Men seem to find it difficult to relate to a person who combines both roles: i.e. 'masculine' intellectualism and 'feminine' emotionalism. They insist we be one or the other.

If we refuse to be relegated to a womanly, wifely emotional role and insist on being accepted in the realm of the mind - theoretical, strategic, and analytical work - most men will eventually accept us there (on a tenuous basis waiting for our first big slip). However, we find then that we are no longer women 'feminine' to them and

must look for emotional involvements outside the left environment.

Some women react to this by reverting to the physically feminine and intellectually passive role. Hardly aware of it, they opt for the easier way -- to have their emotional and sexual needs fulfilled (by men they respect) at the expense of their chance for intellectual development.

It is our contention that until the male chauvinists of the movement (North American and world-wide) understand the concept of Liberation in relation to us, the most exploited members of any society, the Women, they will be voicing political lies.

Some movement women are ready for revolution. We are thinking for ourselves. We are doing the necessary reading, writing, and conversing to find the analysis and theory for the task. We have the background of experience to do this. We have the frustration of being excluded to force us to do this. We are realizing that we have brains. That we can be political. It is the liberating feeling that black folk have when they discover that being black is beautiful and therefore they are beautiful. It is a feeling of beauty and power. We are getting these kinds of feelings. We have rejected many of the traditional leaders as irrelevant.

We are going to be the typers of letters and distributors of leaflets (hewers of wood and drawers of water) NO LONGER. We are recognizing our own existential position and know the exploitations that affect us. At some time the men of the movement will have to understand our position. We are going to fight to change the atmosphere that forbids participation. We hope that those men who are excluded will join us in the fight.

Fall 1967

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beard, Miriam: Women as a Force in History  
Bebel, August: Women and Socialism  
Bettelheim, Bruno: 'The Case of the Kibbutz', in Schur's The Family and the Sexual Revolution  
Borgese, Elizabeth Mann: Ascent of Women  
Briffault, Robert: The Mothers  
\*de Beauvoir, Simone: The Second Sex; The Prime of Life; Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, etc.  
Deaustsch, Helene: Psychology of Women  
Ellis, Havelock: Man and Woman  
Engels, Friedrich: The Origins of Family, Private Property, and the State  
\*Flexner, Eleanor: Century of Struggle  
\*Goldman, Emma: 'On Love', in Horowitz's The Anarchists; The Autobiography of Emma Goldman  
Lenin, V. I.: The Emancipation of Women  
\*Lessing, Doris: The Golden Notebook, The Grass is Singing, This Was the Old Chief's County, Children of Violence - Martha Quest, A Proper Marriage, A Ripple from the Storm, Five, Retreat to Innocence, The Habit of Loving, Winter in July, Going Home, In Pursuit of the English, A Man and Two Women, Each His Own Wilderness, Play with a Tiger, Landlocked.  
Komaronsky, Mirra: Women in the Modern World  
Kronhausen, Phyllis and Eberhard: The Sexually Responsive Female  
Mead, Margaret: Male and Female; Sex and Temperament  
Mill, John Stuart: The Subjection of Women  
\*Mitchell, Juliet: 'The Longest Revolution', in New Left Review  
Montague, Ashley: The Natural Superiority of Women  
Nin, Anias: The Diary of Anias Nin  
Ramelson, Marian: The Petticoat Rebellion  
\*Reich, Wilhelm: The Function of the Orgasm  
Shaw, George Bernard: The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism  
Woolstonecraft, Mary: A Vindication of the Rights of Women  
Lysistrata  
Electra

