

DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 12 OF 16

FOLDER 6

**MASS PARTY MOVEMENT
ANALYSIS OF WOMENS ROLES
A KINOY B DEMING**

January 1974

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

I am enclosing, with Barbara Deming's permission, a rough draft of a response and some ideas which were stimulated by her letter to me and "others who would start a people's party." For those of you who did not receive a copy of her paper, which was distributed at the September meeting it is reprinted in the December 1973 issue of Liberation Magazine. I would like to share with you these thoughts of mine even though they are not yet fully developed in any sense, and I would much appreciate any reactions, comments, criticisms, suggestions for further development, etc.

I do not deal in this paper at all with the "comment" on Barbara's paper, since among other reasons, my response was written before I saw the "comment" by the two Liberation collective members. I do not share at all their analysis of Barbara Deming's position, but I intend to respond to that directly in a letter to the Liberation collective.

After reading my response, Barbara called to my attention a very exciting pamphlet published in England called The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community, in which an article by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and an introduction by Selma James, opens up some of the same theoretical considerations I begin to touch on in the response. I would hope that the interim political committee can arrange to get additional copies of the pamphlet for those interested. Also, I cannot stress too highly the excitement in store for those of you who have the chance to read Sheila Rowbotham's new book, Women, Resistance and Revolution, which is now in paperback.

On a personal note, the doctors have prescribed a surgical course of treatment for my heart condition which, although it will remove me from active work for a few months, holds out the potentiality of a return to full activity thereafter. And so, while I may not be seeing and visiting as many of you as I had hoped in the next few months, I will struggle to learn the art of the exile -- correspondence -- and try to keep in touch. Meanwhile, I have the deepest confidence in the sisters and brothers of the interim political committee who have already established an office and have begun to form a full-time staff. But most of all, I take courage in the common determination to all of us to move forward together.

With affection and confidence,

Arthur Kinoy

Dear Barbara Deming:

It is more than overdue that I attempt to respond to your paper; that I begin to struggle to put down in words my thoughts and reactions which have been starting to form ever since my first reading of your paper. A word is owing to you on the long delay. It is now late November and I received a copy of your paper in early September. The delay is not merely the result of the driving compulsion which your discussion compelled, to read books hitherto ignored: particularly Sheila Rowbotham's *WOMEN, RESISTANCE, AND REVOLUTION*, and Shulamith Firestone's *THE DIALECTIC OF SEX*. To be as honest as possible the delay was grounded also in deeper problems -- a hesitation based partly in a recognition of an ignorance deeply rooted in years of blindness to the dimensions of the question, and partly resting on a fear of arrogantly conceptualizing about issues I did not share a direct perception of or full experience with. I have taken some courage in the words of William Thompson in his Foreword to his 1825 book which I read about for the first time in Sheila Rowbotham's chapter on "Utopian Proposals." Rowbotham comments (at p. 48), that Thompson in his "tribute to Mrs. Wheeler at the beginning of the book...says that although he can't feel as she would because he is a man, he can still state the facts of the case." I no longer even believe that it is written in stone that I or any man can never "feel" as a woman can because we are "men," but that is a long hard struggle few of us have even begun to undertake, and as Rowbotham points out in another context the ultimate resolution of this effort to share and merge our feelings as human beings and not as separately defined sexual categories may be "beyond our present imaginations." It is not too soon, however, for men to attempt, as Thompson tried to do 150 years ago, to try to honestly and as best they can, to "state the facts of the case."...This is not out of guilt or fear or decency or morality. It must be done, for as Rowbotham concludes in her book, "it is...a crucial part of any strategy to be employed against advanced capitalism." (p.246)

Permit some relatively random reactions to your thoughts, particularly in the light of the exciting experience of reading your paper, the mind-blowing quality of the experience of reading Rowbotham, the challenge and perception of Firestone, and the consequent compelled reading, rereading and reconsideration of certain of the Marxist studies of the past in light of these new and demanding questions thrust forth.

Out of your paper, Rowbotham's and Firestone's books, emerged loudly and clearly a both shocking and upsetting insight which for me had that rare quality of illuminating a fundamental truth with an explosive flash. Neither in the early utopian socialist discussions, nor in the later "scientific socialist" writings of Marx and Engels and their 19th and 20th century followers, even to the most contemporary of socialist and communist theorists, was there, in Rowbotham's words, any "concept of an historical agency of women" in fundamental social change. As she wrote in connection with a critique of Marx himself, "the specific oppression of women was never studied in the exhaustive manner which Marx applied to the exploitation of the worker. He looked

at women's situation more tangentially. There is no sense of women's agency for social change as there is for the worker." As Rowbotham, herself a Marxist, points out in respect to the most advanced of classic and contemporary Marxist writing, "although 'man' is used in the generalized sense of human being, there is still no concept of a historical agency of women. Woman is still the 'other,' part of the world outside as perceived, grasped, controlled by men...She appears as an indication of the state of society, not as a social group in movement, developing consciousness in history. The female is rather a representative symbol of man in relation to nature...The transformation of the relation of man to woman is thus an essential feature of communist society, but still the action of women themselves does not emerge as an essential part of the process." And as you and many other women have pointed out, this particular weakness in analysis is also a glaring deficiency in the original paper I wrote, TOWARDS A MASS PARTY OF THE PEOPLE.

From this failure in analysis flow many serious problems which if unrecognized and uncorrected can result in the derailing and destruction of any efforts, no matter how well-meaning or otherwise thoughtful, to build a social movement powerful enough to destroy the last stronghold of world imperialism; the awesome responsibility history has placed before the people of this country. This failure in analysis which has characterized socialist theory from the utopians to present-day Marxists results not only in weakening and undermining the enlistment of women, the majority of the people, in the struggle to liberate the whole world from the strangling impact of American capitalism. It consciously aids and perpetuates the domination of the present system not only upon women themselves, but upon all humanity. As long as the level of women's struggle for emancipation and freedom from domination is viewed as just another level or gauge of man's struggle for freedom from capitalist oppression, rather than as you put it, using the words I applied to the liberation struggle of Blacks in this country, "a special, a unique a catalyst role" in the overthrow of capitalist domination, the male characterizations of women's struggles will remain, as Firestone puts it, meaningless lip-serving rhetoric in a male defined program for a new but still male dominated society, itself destined for failure in its stated goal of creating a world of human freedom and equality.

For me, the key to beginning to grasp the analytical path which can illuminate the central role of women as a critical social agency for radical change, to use Rowbotham's words, was your analogy to the analysis of the role of Black struggle in this country which I attempted to spell out in the original paper. For some of us white radicals who participated in the incredible upheavals of the Black southern movements of the early sixties, one of the most lasting learning experiences was the beginning of an understanding that the explosive and central nature of this struggle for Black liberation in the heart of imperialist North America flows not only from a deep "moral imperative," to use Rowbotham's phrase, but from an objective analysis of the material origins of Black slavery as the economic structure of a colony

embedded in the very heart of the capitalist homeland, a unique development necessitated by the demands of the processes of the primitive accumulation of capital required for the growth of American capitalism. As you restated in your paper, this "built into the very heart of their system a basic internal contradiction...they built into the very innards of the system a time bomb," which has already, and will again, shake the capitalist system to its very foundations. Such an analysis places the question of the relationship of the movement for radical social change to the struggle for Black liberation on a wholly different plane than "guilt," "fairness," or even "moral imperative." The Black movement emerges out of such an analysis as a "critical agency for social change" which the general movement for radical change must learn to participate in fully, support totally, and accept leadership from. Otherwise, neither movement can achieve its objectives.

You suggest that a careful analysis of the "more disguised bondage of women" will reveal the existence of "another timebomb in the system's innards." If this is so, as I increasingly believe to be the case, such an analysis can become a fantastically important addition to what we are all searching for and what Sheila Rowbotham calls the "strategy to be employed against advanced capitalism."

Both Firestone and Rowbotham although vastly different in their techniques of analysis, suggest, I think, the key to such an understanding. Both writers point out, from different vantage points, the incredible fact that Marxist analysts from the very beginning, have explored and developed the implications of only one-half of their own formulation of what constitutes the definition of the essence of the capitalist mode of production.

In SOCIALISM: UTOPIAN AND SCIENTIFIC, one of the classics of Marxist theory, Engels characterized the "two great discoveries" of Marx as the "materialist conception of history" and the "revelation of the secret of capitalist production through surplus value." This later "revelation" Engels said, "lays bare the essential character of capitalism...which was still a secret." The exposure of the heart of capitalism was "done by the discovery of surplus value." He went on to explain, "It was shown that the appropriation of unpaid labor is the basis of the capitalist mode of production and of the exploitation of the worker that occurs under it; that even if the capitalist buys the labor power of his laborer at its full value as a commodity on the market, he yet extracts more value from it than he paid for; and that in the ultimate analysis this surplus value from which are heaped up the constantly increasing masses of capital in the hands of the possessing classes." Engels concludes, "...with these discoveries socialism became a science. The next thing was to work out all its details and relations."

The role of the working class as the central agency for the overthrow of the system of capitalist production flowed directly from this analysis. It was the extraction, the robbery to put it more plainly, of the surplus value which the worker produced which ultimately shapes the working class into the active agent with a most direct stake in opposing and abolishing

the system of robbery itself. This analysis in turn depends upon the further development by Marx and Engels of how the value of labor power is determined in capitalist production. The surplus value, the profit which is accumulated into capital, is the difference between the exchange value of the commodity created by the living labor of the worker, and the value of the labor power the capitalist pays for. This value, the wages paid living labor, Marx spelled out in CAPITAL, "is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labor time necessary for the production and consequently the reproduction of this special article." But at this point in the discussion a curious thing happens which repeats itself throughout all or most of Marxist analysis. The refinement and development and definition of the value of living labor revolves almost exclusively around the maintenance of the labor. Discussion of the value to be attributed to the reproduction of the living labor never develops. This seems to me to be the origin, the initial weakness, in the subsequent inability, which Rowbotham speaks of so sharply, in Marxist analysis to understand women as an "agency for revolutionary change."

For example, Marx continues at this crucial point in the discussion in CAPITAL to say, "Therefore the labor time requisite for the production of labor power reduces itself to that necessity for the production of those means of subsistence; in other words, the value of labor power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the laborer." (CAPITAL, Vol. I, pp. 170ff.) But living labor, essential to the production of capital, requires, as Marx concedes, not only its maintenance, but its reproduction. The labor which goes into its reproduction, which is essential to the creation of the surplus value upon which the entire system rests, is either wholly unpaid, or at best subsumed as a minor item, not paid to the workers, the women, who produce the commodity, living labor, but may be included as a minor item in figuring the cost of maintaining the man. The reproduction of this commodity, living labor, without which the system itself could not function, the creating source of surplus value, is expropriated by the capitalist virtually without payment at all. And most incredible of all, the workers, the women, who produce this most essential of all commodities for the capitalist, living labor, are not even recognized or acknowledged as a class of workers producing a critical commodity!

How is this extraordinary fraud perpetrated, this robbery of value which probably constitutes a substantial portion of the total surplus value extracted by the capitalist class? It is through the utilization by the present system, of the pre-capitalist division of labor within the family in which the myth of "women's role" in reproducing the species as her unpaid duty to the man becomes the justification for the capitalist's total expropriation of the labor value involved in the woman's labor in reproducing the commodity, living labor, without which, as Marx brilliantly explained, capital could not accumulate, and the capitalist system could not survive. Thus by perpetuating and sanctifying the pre-capitalist sexual division of labor through the form of the family, the capitalist class has achieved this incredible tour de force! It hides and camouflages the fact that women in producing living labor- are in reality an exploited laboring class in capitalist production. They are in fact, a super-exploited class in that, unlike those working in a factory or office, they remain, like the slaves in a slave economy, working for bare subsistence, "owned"

relation to the means of production, as women, and not solely through their entrance into the work force in the factory or office, (Rowbotham has a fascinating discussion of the impact of the failure to understand the role of woman in the reproduction of living labor, upon their social role and relationships within the work force), and consequently with the objective potential of becoming an "agency for revolutionary change," since the struggle for their liberation from the super-exploitation of their labor leads them directly into the center of the battle against the accumulation of surplus value by the capitalist class-- the same objective analysis which for years has led Marxists to base their understanding of the objective historic role of the working class upon.

Such an analysis requires a deep consideration of the fundamental programmatic demands which a recognition of women's role as a class in the production and reproduction of the commodity, living labor, calls for. Among these demands would emerge, I think, the sweeping demand that all women involved in the production of this "commodity," living labor, be paid a wage commensurate with the most skilled workers, a wage to be financed directly from the profits of industry, and paid directly to the women themselves. A radical demand? Yes, but one flowing directly from the analysis of the camouflaged and hidden role of women in the productive process itself in the production and reproduction of the commodity which is the basis for the accumulation of capital itself.

2) More than this, such an analysis begins to lay the basis for a struggle among men for an understanding as to why the battle against the ideology of male supremacy, the concept of the "woman's place," the mores and ways of life which flow from the pre-capitalist sexual division of labor within the family, must not be as Firestone correctly characterizes it so often as being, a guilt-ridden, half-snide, "nod" to the "eccentricities" of a passing fancy, "women's liberation," but rather a central struggle against an ideology which is a principal weapon of capitalist oppression and a primary obstacle to the development of an essential alliance with one of the main "agencies for revolutionary change." This is a struggle which will not be won overnight, which like the struggle against racism will continue for years, but cannot even be opened in a meaningful way unless it is understood as not "only" a "moral imperative," but as a struggle essential to the reaching of the goal of human liberation from imperialist oppression.

3) It now seems to me, that the development of such an analysis will have to become central to the building and growth of the concept of a mass party of the people. We have argued at some length that at this moment in the nation's history, the key, the path, to the overthrow of the system of capitalist oppression, lies in the building of a new political form--a mass party of the people as an instrumentality for the taking of political, economic and social power by the people. It is impossible to build a mass party of this type without the active

virtually for life, and until very recently subject to the total control of the master. And the height of the irony is that by utilizing the pre-capitalist sexual division of labor embodied in the family, the task of maintaining this role is assigned, not to the capitalist or even as in a factory, to the foreman agent of the capitalist, but rather to the working class man, the husband, who the myth says, is "entitled" to this unpaid labor of the woman expended in the critical reproduction of living labor. In a certain sense then, the working man, in enforcing the practices of male supremacy in the home, in the same manner as the white worker who engages in continuing the practices of white supremacy in the factory or community, is acting as the agent of their own principal enemy, the capitalist class, in perpetuating the ideologies which simultaneously mask the super-exploitation of both the women and the Blacks, while making incredibly difficult an alliance between those with the greatest stakes in overthrowing the system of exploitation itself.

I recognize that an analysis of this kind requires an extraordinary amount of thought, refinement, debate and modification. Perhaps it will not withstand the rigors of intense examination. But this is hardly a surprise when one recalls the over 100 years of study, struggle, and polemic which Marxist students have spent in spelling out the implications of the social relations which flow from a minute examination of the determination of the value of labor based upon the cost of its maintenance, and the almost total absence of any such minute examination of the implications of the social relations flowing from any examination of the value of labor based upon its reproduction.

But even at this first moment of reaction to the implications of this analysis certain thoughts emerge:

1) This concept of women as the workers who reproduce the commodity essential to the functioning of the capitalist system, living labor itself, and who through their super-exploitation, camouflaged by the ideology of the family and the myth of the "woman's role," provide an important source for the creation of surplus value, the cornerstone of capitalist accumulation, may establish a theoretical basis for both the recognition of the struggle of women as objectively as "agency for social change" (Rowbotham) in the same sense as the industrial workers are, and may help to correct what Rowbotham characterizes as a weakness in the ideology of revolutionary feminism itself which, as she points out, tends to consider "women's need to struggle (as) still a moral imperative (which) remains voluntary, an exertion of the will." She relates this to an inability to break with utopianism since theoretically "there is no apparent way in which women could not help but act in some manner towards a socialist society." (p. 82) The relationship of women to the mode of production as the workers who through their labor reproduce the key commodity upon which capitalism, rests, living labor, lays the objective basis for the recognition of their existence, not as the "other," but as a class with a direct and intimate

participation of the women, a majority of the people, themselves objectively a powerful "agency for revolutionary change" whose energy, strength, and leadership, is urgently required in the struggle to change the system. Without their active participation and leadership no mass party as we visualize is a possibility.

Simultaneously, the immediate and long-range programmatic demands of the class of women, as is true of every oppressed and nationality in present capitalist society, call for and require fundamental changes in the existing society. The demand for the end to the super-exploitation of women and the "brands of inferiority" which Rowbotham brilliantly characterizes as "to be a woman is to be an inferior animal, an inferiority...indelible like the skin of a Black" (p. 49), cannot and will not be accepted by the present rulers of society whose mode of production rests upon this exploitation.

This means, that perhaps for the first time, at least in this country, the objective basis is present for an approach which says loud and clear that the call to men who seek the radical solution, to honestly battle against the ideology of male supremacy and throw themselves into the struggle for the liberation of women, and the call to radical feminists to throw themselves into the struggle to replace the capitalist system, are not as Rowbotham correctly characterizes them as being up till now only "moral imperatives," but are in reality political and actual necessities for men and women radicals alike. It may be that a mass party of the people which develops a scientific analysis of the relation of women as a class to the capitalist mode of production may for the first time be able to begin to struggle for an understanding that an alliance between revolutionary feminism and a revolutionary struggle against capitalist society is a practical necessity for both movements.

4) In the introduction to her book, Sheila Rowbotham explains that she has "tried to trace the fortunes of an idea. It is a very simple idea, but one with which we have lost touch, that the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings." (p.11) I have attempted here to begin for myself the exploration of that idea. It is not easy. As Rowbotham so keenly remarks, "beginnings are hard to find. People don't see themselves as beginners." And male radicals particularly find it hard to "see themselves as beginners." This is part of the centuries of imprint upon all of us of the ideology of male supremacy which each successive stage of society has pressed upon us to justify the inequalities and exploitations flowing from the sexual division of labor within the family. And as Rowbotham and Firestone remind us so sharply, this ideology has often stifled and corrupted radical and revolutionary organizations as well as institutions of the established order. It occurs to me now that certain of the distortions and deep-rooted problems in the functioning of the classic "vanguard party" concept which has plagued the left in this country and abroad, and which I touch on in the original paper on a "mass party," are related in part to the failure of these parties to develop an analysis of women as "an active agency of

revolutionary change," and the consequent tacit, and sometimes overt, acceptance and perpetuation within these organizations of the ideology of male domination, which in life can only have the effect of strengthening and reinforcing the functioning within these organizations of an elite hierarchy. Rowbotham points out that "just as the women's revolt in political terms spoke for those who were silent within the revolutionary movement, the economic organizations of women...encouraged the organization of all workers who were low down even within the working class. Both carry the revolutionary possibility of breaking through established caste hierarchies which continually develop actually within those movements which attempt to resist and overthrow the capitalist class hierarchy" (p.116). This is an insight which can become fantastically important for those of us who are becoming increasingly convinced that the building of a mass, edemocratic, anti-hierarchical party with a leadership truly responsible to its membership is crucial to the tasks which lie ahead. The mass involvement of women in the creation, building and leadership of the mass party will require the thoughtful evolution of a theory which soundly bases in a scientific analysis, the conception of women as a crucial agency for revolutionary change, at the same time as it requires an honest and unending struggle against the ideologies of male supremacy. I think Rowbotham is suggesting here a profound truth which few have perceived--that the very struggle, theoretically and in practice, with both women and men, to involve masses of women in the creation, organization, and leadership of a mass political party, strengthens the struggle against the development and perpetuation of a dominant elite in the control of such a party. Without such a struggle the concept of a mass party cannot succeed. It will die before it is born.

There are so many more facets to the question which stir within me and which I want to explore. But as Rowbotham teaches we must learn to see ourselves as "beginners." This is for me a beginning. The exploration of these ideas and the innumerable avenues they open up, so crucial I now believe to the building of a mass party of the people, must proceed apace, individually, collectively, women with women, men with men, and if we are to succeed in this most difficult, but most crucial of tasks, women with men. I deeply believe that the opening of these questions, the explorations, the discussions, the testings in practice, will begin, just begin, in the closing words of your paper, "to make it possible for us truly to bring ourselves into each other's presence...and into our own presence."

In the spirit of the struggle
to build the "sisterhood of man"

Arthur