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The objective of Women's Caucus is to build a mass movement of women who are united and strong enough to confront, and change, the social conditions that oppress us.

In terms of hard-core activists, Women's Caucus has been mostly limited to privileged women, i.e., young, childless, many of them students, who do not experience in the same way the oppression that the housewife with male-chauvinist husband, or working mother does.

Because we in Women's Caucus are in a position now to begin to build a mass movement involving working women and housewives as well as students, debate on strategy is essential and decisive. While our activities were limited to general education -- speaking, leafleting, actions aimed at getting publicity -- it was possible to let things happen to us, to play things by ear, to go anywhere that we could be heard. Now that we are beginning to organize women, to involve more and more women in struggle against their own oppression, Women's Caucus must develop priorities, based on analysis of the different problems faced by specific groups of women, and how those separate struggles can be brought together. Our disagreements are becoming apparent now because we are being forced to make important decisions about what we do from here.

Life Styles -- a basis for organizing?

The discussion following the abortion caravan has clarified some strategic disagreements. One of the inspiring things about the caravan was that it had the potentiality of being representative of the movement that we are hoping to build, in that not only students, but housewives and working women were represented. Yet members of the caravan were subjected to pressures to conform to an image of women's liberationist (jeans, no make-up, straight hair), under the guise that that image somehow has something to do with women's liberation. In fact that image represents only one segment of the movement -- youth and students -- and it is very important not to exclude the other aspects that working women or housewives can identify with.

There is no objective political significance to wearing jeans or straight hair. In fact it is nothing more than a fad! There are corporations making millions of dollars on jeans as well as on make-up. The cosmetics and fashion industries, based on the objectification of women, must be challenged by a movement, not by individuals. To pose dress as criteria for how intense your political convictions are or how dedicated to women's liberation, is a serious error. (Witness many women with long straight hair, no make-up etc., who are not political at all; and that large minority who are prepared to demonstrate in solidarity with Vietnam or the Panthers but have not been touched by women's liberation, and remain unaware of their own oppression.)

This kind of 'liberation' is not a realistic alternative for working women whose dress and appearance is determined by their jobs. Dress restrictions have to be dealt with collectively -- and can be important issues in organizing specific groups of women (i.e., the right to wear slacks, not to wear nylons, or not to have to spend half a pay cheque on hairdos and clothes).

Student radicals should not conceal what they are, but it is also important that housewives and working women do not feel that they have to adopt the style of student radicals to be in women's liberation. They

must be able to organize their sisters against their common oppression, and to consider appearance political can alienate them from their sister on a very superficial and subjective level.

Solidarity comes through the process of collective struggle against the common enemy. This meaningful solidarity of the abortion caravan was evident all across Canada, and would have been in spite of any difference in appearance or dress. It would have been more meaningful to housewives and working women if they had seen it clearly as it was: the solidarity of students, youth, working women, and housewives, against the system that oppresses us as women.

Work Collectives

The discussion around another aspect of life style -- work collectives-- has further clarified disagreements on strategy. Some see work collectives as central to organizing women. Again, we must distinguish between organizing women around collective struggles against the system, such as abortion and day care, and partial solutions to individual problems.

The history of co-op living on the student left, when it is a goal in itself, shows the ineffectiveness of trying to build a model of the new society within this one. If cooperative living is seen as a means of making individuals more effective in our political activity, or sharing responsibility in order to free more women to participate actively in building the movement, it can make a significant contribution. If it is seen as a political strategy, as a kind of liberation or as a higher level of commitment or development, it can be negative -- time consuming, introverted, and sectarian in that it excludes large segments of the most oppressed women who find it impossible to participate.

Work collectives are only possible for a small minority of privileged women. We must find ways to make it easier for women who cannot participate in work collectives -- women who have children, husbands, jobs -- to participate actively and consistently in Women's Caucus. We should organize day care for demonstrations and meetings, and we should make meetings more efficient, so that women with little time do not find themselves coming to meetings which are not relevant to them: each meeting should have a clear objective, and should reach it. (Efficiency does not imply bureaucracy; by enabling women to find the meetings which really concern them, we should make participation in meetings, and involvement in Women's Caucus, easier.)

Group solidarity and individual relationships are important, but not ends in themselves. It is a truism, but nevertheless crucial to remember, that if all or even most women could opt for liberation -- that is, if it were a matter simply of consciousness and choice -- we would not need a revolution at all. The closest we can come to overcoming our personal hang-ups within this society is in the comradeship that comes from collective struggle against our common oppression.

Levels of consciousness and the mass movement

Recently there have been complaints that Women's Caucus (or people in Women's Caucus) is holding people back from getting further into women's liberation. Is this really the case? In fact, there have been no objections to the militant actions that Women's Caucus has carried out. No one has attempted to cool the militancy of the movement (in spite of some misunderstandings about this). No one could claim that the movement has been held back (although we have reached a critical stage; we could be held back if we fail now to develop a strategy, a direction,

priorities for future organizing). People feel they are being held back as individuals -- in terms of their individual political development or in terms of their life style. (This in spite of the fact that no one objects to work collectives, but rather to considering them a strategy or a measuring stick for people's levels of consciousness.)

The concept of levels of consciousness within the movement, as it has been expressed in recent discussions, appears also to be biased in favor of those women who are relatively privileged, who can spend hours every week at meetings, who can live with and spend most of their time with others in women's liberation, who can use the language of the student left. The decisive difference in consciousness is between those who see their problems as individual and those who recognize the social causes of their situation, and the necessity of building a movement, that is, between those who identify with the women's liberation movement and those who do not.

Of course it is important for individual women to develop their political abilities and ideas, but only if there is a connection to the movement as a whole and the collective struggles of that movement. Political development is not abstract. The development of individuals must depend on the development of the consciousness of the movement as a whole (and the thousands of women who will be brought into the movement through struggle or it becomes introverted, sectarian and purist).

The task of the conference is to develop an analysis and strategy which can move the movement as a whole forward.

Conclusion

There has been talk in Women's Caucus of a split. To avoid unnecessary division in our ranks, we must clarify our political disagreements -- disagreements over strategy and orientation, not over style or language.

The implication of life style, of work collectives, as a strategy is to orient the movement towards students rather than working women and housewives. The hundreds of young women who are affected by the youth radicalization, who are prepared to demonstrate in support of other people's struggles but have hardly been touched by women's liberation, are an important priority for our movement. But to organize them primarily around their life style is to organize them around their privileges, around those things which separate them from the majority of women.

There should not need to be a conflict between the task of organizing students and street-women (possibly the most ready to be organized at the moment) and the task of organizing working women and housewives. Those women for whom there are no individual solutions, working women and workingclass wives, will be the backbone of a movement which cannot be co-opted or diverted from the struggle against all forms of the oppression of women.

There will be differences in approach related to these different organizing tasks, and we will have to work separately to some extent, but the strength of the women's liberation movement depends on our ability to bring together working women and students, housewives and street-women, around the common oppression of women.

This conference must develop an analysis of the relationship of these struggles that can be the basis of our work together.