

# Going For What We Really Want

Kathie Sarachild

There's a lot of talk about the different sections of the women's movement, and some people say that the major division in the movement is between those who want to work inside the system and those who want to work outside the system, that this is what distinguishes the radicals in the women's movement from what they call reformist groups like the National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) or the newly formed Women's Political Caucus. But the real question is not working from inside or outside the present economic and political system, the real question is what are you working for? What are your final goals, both personal and political?

It's not a question of working inside or outside the system . . . it's a question of whether we want to finally go after what we really want, our own true desires, or whether we are toning down our desires, lying about them, even to ourselves, in order to get favors from men who have power. It's a question of knowing what our true desires are and working wherever we are, in whatever way we are able to, to achieve the power over our lives that we need.

It's a question of going after what we really want in our work lives and in our love lives—and, as women really know, the two are very related—and only having power will get us what we really want in both. It will get us the kind of jobs we want *and* the kind of love relationships. When we have power, men will finally begin to give *us* love rather than the other way around, the real love we've all been longing for all these years, and this will change our relationships with women, too.

It's a question of whether some of us are out to get a few favors from men under male supremacy or whether we're out to eliminate male supremacy once and for all. If we're out for the same goals—and I think most women are, that most women want to go all the way, or else not bother with the fight at all—if we're out for the same goals, to tell the whole truth, to expose male supremacy everywhere, leaving no corner still dirty, and win full power over our lives, then

it doesn't necessarily matter whether we work inside or outside the system. We're going to have to do both and we're going to have to use every means at our disposal to do it. Being true to what we really want, knowing what we really want, gives us power.

Now a lot of women have felt that they had to tone themselves down in order to "reach most women." And they spend a lot of time counseling others to tone themselves down. All I can say is that in my experience, you don't reach most women by toning yourself down, by lying about your needs and desires. That's the kind of deceit you use against people you really consider your enemies or your inferiors. It doesn't work with the people who are on your side, not with your own people. You don't reach most women with lies, you reach them with the truth. You reach out to people with the truth, and something in them either responds to it or doesn't. The truth arouses people's imagination, stirs the imagination. Lies are boring, lies are what women have heard a million times before. The truth is new and the truth is powerful. And in my experience, more and more women in all walks of life want to hear it. They want to tell it; and they're only interested in talk and action that goes right to the heart of what women's problems are. And the course that the women's movement has taken demonstrates, reflects, what I myself have experienced.

I remember back in the days of New York Radical Women there were some women who counseled us that using the term women's liberation was too radical; and yet women's liberation was a term that inspired powerful excitement and feeling in some of us, that expressed the spirit of what we really wanted and so we used it anyway, even though people counseled us it might be too radical and turn women off. And, as we all know, it has become the term to describe the whole movement.

I am not saying that women should pretend to be *more* radical than they really are, either, in order to "reach women." I think we women have suffered too long from worrying about what other people think . . . whether it's about what men think or about what other women think. Toning ourselves up—like toning ourselves down—is just another form of *not* being radical, of not being authentic. We have to do that, of course, in order to survive in our daily lives . . . but our movement should be dealing with what we really want and how we're going to get it.

---

Speech given at the Women's Strike March on August 26, 1971.

People think they have to tone themselves down to win

support from women, that women aren't radical. They asked for abortion law reform instead of repeal, when large numbers of women, myself included, would only rally for repeal. People worried that all-female groups would be too anti-male and turn women off, whereas women all around the country rallied to these groups. It is the radical language of the movement which has spread like wildfire. Sisterhood is powerful, women's liberation, consciousness-raising, male chauvinism—even male chauvinist pig.

Now we were also counseled that to oppose abortion reforms, to press for abortion repeal—total repeal of all abortion laws—was asking too much, would turn people off. But we just knew that we didn't want to fight at all if it wasn't for what we really want—that abortion reform was just more insult and humiliation for women—and so we decided not only to fight for repeal but to oppose more reforms in the abortion law. We busted up a reform hearing and demanded repeal instead. Woman after woman got up and testified how the reforms being proposed would not have helped her through her terrible illegal abortion one bit. It was the demand for repeal that rallied all the people to the march, that rallied all the people who worked on the court case, that created all the pressure which got us the most liberal abortion law in the nation. It didn't get us what we really wanted, but at least we fought for what we really wanted. We let them know what we really wanted and that we're not going to stop fighting for women's liberation 'til we get it, and a lot else, too. And by doing this we actually won some real relief in our lives, much more than we would have ever gotten if we had lied about our desires and supported reform. In my experience, toning things down—lying about ourselves—turns women off, it doesn't turn women on.

I was visiting in a consciousness-raising group on Long Island of mostly so-called middle class, suburban, married women, and they were mad at the Women's Political Caucus for not being radical enough when the caucus kept saying we're not going to be like men, we're going to be non-violent. I heard about a speech Martha Shelley gave once which she opened by asking, "Who says women are non-violent?" and then she pulled out a rolling pin and held it over her head. And I was talking to the neighbor of a friend of mine in another suburb—upstate New York this time. My friend's neighbor was the wife of one of the neighborhood policemen. Well, when she heard I was in Redstockings, a radical women's liberation group, she got very excited and started telling me about many of her ideas and dreams, one of which was that all the secretaries of New York were to go out on strike. You see, women all over the country have a sense of the fantastic power women could have to change our situation. And that policeman's wife was not just talking about the power of the ballot . . . elections. She was talking about something that would bring New York City to a halt—and not just for more money, but for political demands, for a whole new way of life—because that's what feminism is about, it's basically the demand for a whole new way of life. That kind of strike is what revolutionaries call a political strike and they consider it a

much more advanced form of action than simply an economic strike.

Okay, so what are the women who want to go all the way, after what we really want and after the power to get it, going to do inside and outside the system to unify our work—to make all our individual struggles, however small or on however specific an issue, a part of the whole fight for freedom for women and the elimination of male supremacy across the board? How can we get to the point where large numbers of us understand what we want clearly enough to be able to unite around it?

One way many of us hoped this could be done was in consciousness-raising groups, that in consciousness-raising groups we would be able to stay in touch with what we really wanted even as we had to make compromises in our daily lives and even in some of our political battles. We also thought of consciousness-raising groups as a way we would all stay in touch with all the issues of feminism even though we might be doing our concrete political work on only one issue.

Of course, writing is another way of doing this. And this, of course, is what we hoped *Woman's World* newspaper could do. *Woman's World* and the writing in it would be a means of keeping what we really want in sight—in our own sight and visible to the whole world—even as we might have to accept certain short-term compromises in our actions. We hoped that *Woman's World* could help the feminist movement do the theoretical work that every woman must do at all times if we women are ever to achieve full liberation.

We need a means of keeping what we really want in sight, constantly defining and developing it. To do this we have to:

1. Know exactly what it is we want, what we really want, dare to express it, be able to express it, and, therefore, define it.
2. Know how far you—we—are from what it is we want, be able to analyze this at all times as exactly as possible. In other words, we must figure out what the obstacles are to our true goals, and be able to spot them as they are ever changing, ever being turned into new forms.
3. Know what exactly it is that has gotten us our improvements, reforms, changes when they do occur.
4. Have tactics, which, among other things come from knowing all the above. We must devise the most effective tactics for overcoming the obstacles, and these tactics will include strategic advances or strategic retreats. The question was how to do this.

What gains we have made recently—and there have definitely been some already, affecting the lives of masses of women—we've only made because there is now a movement, and it is essential that all women know this if we are to continue to make gains. Until we've gone all the way and defeated male supremacy, until we women have won full and equal power for ourselves and can begin to relax, there

will have to continue to be a militant feminist movement here at all times.

And in order to stay alive, the movement must grow; it has to keep growing, reaching more and more women and therefore more and more corners of male supremacy. But women aren't going to keep on joining the movement, women aren't going to stay in the movement, unless it expresses our true desires, unless it tells the truth and fights for the truth.

For instance, most women wouldn't join a movement that called for "free love" when some women in the movement

were saying that it is okay for men to sleep around and to sleep with a woman and leave her the next day, because they know that isn't either freedom (for women) or love (for women). They would know it is a lie. And they also aren't going to join a movement that doesn't say anything about men, that skirts the problems with men and talks about women's "identity" all the time, even about freeing *men* from nagging wives and various other alleged female monsters. We *are* the nagging wives and we know we only nag in an effort to get what is our due . . . and when we escalate our tactics beyond nagging, men—and women—who complained about nagging are going to wish we had gone back to nagging.

# The Double Standard Of Organization

Elizabeth Most

Older women, like many powerless Americans, are hooked on the cult of the individual. The more homogenized everything is around us, the more we are pressed into being unique. Older women, in particular, having been identified as the wife or mother of so-and-so, become anxious about their individuality when bereft of these props.

What the individual is most afraid of, must avoid at all cost, is organization. Organization calls up regimentation, the spectre of the automaton, blue ants. The worst enemy of individuality is structure. Among the least organized in our country are the housewives and, topping them, the older women. Yet, instead of being the freest, most independent sector of our society, we hear one another moan about alienation, loneliness, no one's caring.

A glimpse through Alice's looking glass to the other side, seeing the double standard at work, may help turn us "little" Americans around. The "big" Americans are organized within every inch of their roles and careers. They are companies, corporations, combines, consortiums, conferences, cartels, conglomerates. Jack Anderson said of Litton Industries' shenanigans, "Like all multi-million dollar matters the story is complex." Complex means organization. It means that one cannot separate the top Wall Street firms from the Rockefellers, the Duponts from

the state of Delaware; one cannot extricate the CIA from ITT, disengage Generals from corporation executives, detach Nixon from Mutual Funds or Pepsi-Cola (witness under-table negotiations on his trip to Moscow). Try to unravel interlocking directorates or to split up the military-industrial-government complex.

Organization means that the same families crop up over and over again. Multi-millionaires are on government payrolls (without benefit of OEO or Just One Break) in cabinet posts, as ambassadors, as heads of agencies; they are our most successful politicians. Patronage, the heart and soul of politics, means organization. Each member is beholden to others for favors, and each one's neck depends on the necks of friends (see Watergate). They are organized at all levels, from the small town big shot to the lifetime high office holder in Washington.

Organization means that those on top stay on top. No matter how wildly they and their extended families spend, their wealth is inexhaustible from generation to generation, as their establishment drains money from the earnings of the rest of us. They are organized to assure that Internal Revenue is mercifully soft on capital and interest, and firm on wages. Organized to pass laws favorable to themselves (oil depletion, farm and carrier subsidies) and to obstruct laws benefiting the less affluent public, such as industrial safety, environment, rights of blacks or migrants. They are organized to evade laws they don't like: Monopolies are stronger than ever; and who ever paid the upper-level maximum tax? Organized legislators sold senatorships for 124 years until 1913 before we finally pushed through a law permitting us to elect our own senators. In contrast, Johnson, with a last stroke of his pen, passed a law that was to raise Nixon's salary from \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year, in the spirit of bipartisan fraternity.

Reprinted from *Prime Time*, Older Women's Liberation (OWL) Journal.