

**WORKER CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING MEETING
... GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA, SUMMER 1969
NOTES by Carol Hanisch**

*TOPIC: When do we like work? Why?
When do we hate work? Why?*

Testimony No. 1 – white male student:

Said the only job he had ever had was washing windows. They were in a new building and were mostly already clean, but had to be washed as part of a contract. Felt disgusted to be doing unnecessary work. Thought other workers were stupid when they wouldn't take advice on how to do the work more efficiently. (We decided that they were probably pacing themselves so they wouldn't have to do more work for the same amount of pay. One other man in our group said he had often done that.) Said he learned not to watch the time because it made the work go quicker. First learned about racism in the unions from that job. He was hired instead of a black man. "Bothered me, but didn't bother me enough so I'd quit." Enjoyed feeling physically tired at the end of the day. Nice to get own money.

Testimony No. 2 – white male architect

Did housework. Mother hated doing housework and would quit. Father wouldn't do it, so he and brother did it. Would rather scrub floors than have small, slow mother do it. Didn't like being tired at end of day from doing housework. Always took care of the yard. Liked rebuilding their old farm house and yard. Worked as university draftsman and surveyor and liked the outdoor work. Liked the specialization when it was useful. Always had individual responsibility which made for a lot of pressure. Would rather share responsibility for the work. Shuffles: working fast or wasting time. Created fantasy to make work go faster. Learned from other workers on the job a long time the best way of doing things.

Testimony No. 3 – white female student

Worked as checkout girl. Didn't like being treated like a machine. Not allowed to talk to customers. Couldn't stand boss always yelling at her and saying the customer was always right.

Testimony No. 4 – white male student

Most jobs weren't so bad because always knew they were temporary and thought there was something better ahead. Didn't like three things on all of many jobs: having a boss, low pay, time going slowly. Hates to make work to look busy. Likes being busy so the

time goes faster. In service jobs, hated the condescending attitudes. While working in New York, he hated the city so much he liked work. Hated it if the cash register was under, the boss would take the difference out of salary, but if it was over, he would keep it.

Testimony No. 5 – white female ex-movement worker

Had worked as a maid and a waitress as a teenager and didn't like having the boss watching her constantly. Pay was much too low. Herded sheep for 25¢ an hour. Was not hard work, but the sense of responsibility was very great, and therefore thought the job worth more. Had worked in the dishroom at college where it was hot and the pay was only 80¢ an hour. Had to get up at 6:00 for the breakfast shift. But liked the people she worked with and the fact they could talk on the job. Detasseled corn for three weeks one summer. Except for the low pay, it was one of the most likable jobs because several friends would contract so many acres and do them together. Had a good crew where nobody sloughed off so it worked out well. Would sing and talk while doing the work, which was hard physically, but was outdoors. Worked as wire service reporter just before going into the movement. Hated the bad hours, discrimination against women, the pressure of an hourly deadline, emphasis on tragic events (the first thing one had to do at coming in at 4 a.m. was call the highway patrol about traffic deaths), dirty office. Liked the union winning a \$10 a week raise. Only real satisfaction was writing a good story with important content, but these were written mostly on own time. Didn't like being tied down by the bad hours. Worked with a co-op civil rights group in Mississippi. Didn't like other workers not doing their work, which held up everything. Liked being own boss, but sharing decisions. Worked several years for another movement organization. Didn't like worrying about being fired (which she eventually was) for not following the organizational "line" on women's liberation. Didn't like being a supposed "special expert", or having to "produce" for somebody else.

Conclusions:

We like work when: we are working in groups where we are free to talk to each other and where we share the responsibility for the work, if everyone works equally hard so the work doesn't fall on the shoulders of a few. We like getting paid. We like to meet people on the job. We like doing things that are constructive and creative. We like jobs that require both some physical and some brain work. Most of us liked to work outdoors. →

We don't like work when: we aren't getting paid enough for our labor, including when the responsibility is much greater than the wages. We don't like having the boss watching us and having to make work so we look busy. We don't like being idle because the time goes slowly. We don't like being tied down to our jobs so we can't do the things we really want to do—not having enough free time. We don't like doing exclusively mental or physical work, or working in isolation with a lot of individual responsibility. We

don't like doing unnecessary work. We think we wouldn't like doing the same job for our whole lives. When we are working in service roles, we don't like people being condescending. We don't like having to take shit from bosses and knowing that our labor is making somebody else rich.

Unanswered question for future meetings: Do we really throw ourselves into our work if other things in our life are bad? What does that mean?

An Experience With Worker Consciousness-Raising

Carol Hanisch

The pro-woman line says that men are oppressed by capitalists and their economic/political system, not by women and "sex roles", and therefore men should do consciousness-raising on class.

We called ourselves radicals from the very beginning of the women's liberation movement because we opposed all forms of oppression and exploitation, economic and political. We called ourselves radical women because we saw the liberation of women as a necessary priority. The goal was to abolish all classes, all oppression, all exploitation through the equal distribution of political, economic and social power. We wanted to build a mass women's liberation movement because it was clear from history and from our own experiences that only women organized as an independent political force could guarantee that in the society we envisioned the oppression of women would no longer exist. Equally important was to begin immediately to get rid of male supremacy as rapidly and thoroughly as possible, changing general economic conditions in the process.

It was necessary for a time to put most of our energies into getting the women's liberation movement off the ground, even though we knew that when it was strong enough we would want to and have to work directly with men on all common issues as part of ensuring that women would have full and equal access to all areas of power and society. The reason for a separate powerbase, after all, was to assure women an equal place in a totally integrated,

classless society and that included the general revolutionary movement that would build it. We knew that forces were oppressing us as part of the working class, too. For these reasons, some of us continued to put some of our time and effort into working with men in integrated (male/female) groups while building an independent women's liberation movement. This paper is about my experience trying to do this.

Since we had come to believe that people do best fighting their own oppression, we concluded women should fight as women for women's liberation and men and women should fight together for their liberation as workers. For women or men to fight on working class issues which are in the interest of both in sexually segregated groups is reactionary, for it reinforces male supremacy. Based on our experience that raising our woman consciousness greatly raised our consciousness on class and race, we figured men will have their consciousness of male supremacy raised only when their worker consciousness is raised.

Worker consciousness was low in general. Few men wanted to admit they were not their own boss. They denied they were exploited, often blaming themselves for "personal failings" rather than the class of owners who controlled their lives. At the first Miss America Protest, for example, some of us had a discussion with a cop on the boardwalk who claimed women didn't have to wear high heels, make-up, girdles, etc. "Yes, we do," I said. "Just like you have to wear that uncomfortable tie. You'd get in trouble with your boss if you didn't."

"I don't have a boss," he replied. "And nobody makes me wear this tie. I just do. I don't have to."

Many working men—and women, too—didn't know they were exploited as the working class just as many women didn't know they were oppressed as women until the