

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

feminist movement came along.

The male "left" was no different. We were learning that despite their class rhetoric, they had almost as little understanding of capitalist oppression as of male supremacy. We had to criticize them for not even recognizing their own position in the economic system.

Male radicals must start to look up instead of down, to be angry at the millionaires instead of grateful that they aren't poor blacks or women, to analyze their own exploitation as working people, and the stake they have in revolutionary change. . . . Men who understand their own exploitation as working people are more likely to recognize their stake in fighting male supremacy, both in themselves and other men.¹

Raising working class consciousness—our own and others—would do two things: build a working class movement which would be in our interest as workers and help change men's consciousness on feminism which would also be in our interest as women.

In the women's liberation movement consciousness-raising from our own experience was radicalizing us. We thought it would have a similar use in building a mass working people's movement.

An attempt to put this aspect of the pro-woman line into action was made in Gainesville, Florida, in the fall of 1969 when I formed such a group of men and women. An interesting preliminary foray had been made into a local movement coalition of SDS, YSA, and others who considered themselves radicals. It was hoped by some of the feminists who went to the group that the men there would accept the leadership of women in women's liberation who had worked out some theory and had more genuine political experience, thus turning the coalition into a worker consciousness-raising group. Others of us expected to find a few men who would accept feminist leadership and form an independent group.

SDS, which had most of the power in the coalition, was at that time in its death throes—divided, confused and looking for new directions. Therefore we were able to demand a consciousness-raising session within the coalition which some 50 people showed up for. At that first meeting we went around the room speaking about the oppression we had known in life from personal experience, each telling why we were there, how we were oppressed, how we had been radicalized, and what we wanted the coalition to do.

It was a fantastic meeting, despite the sarcastic remarks from men who could see their leadership threatened and their political theory being challenged—and by a few women to boot. We were only able to hold one more consciousness-raising meeting before the coalition went back to doing "more important things." Consciousness-raising was referred to as "personal garbage" and something to get out of the way in a meeting or two. They refused to

see it as an on-going process for sharpening the group's radical theory and strategy and awakening the working class consciousness of the masses of people.

Women's liberation was itself divided over the importance of consciousness-raising and many women in the coalition refused to defend it to the men, even though they did it in their women's liberation groups.

There was an equally strong objection to our evolving definition of who was a worker, which was anybody who *had to* work for a living. We considered housewives workers as they work directly for the wage-earner and indirectly for the capitalists in producing and caring for future workers. They are among the unemployed sector of the work force—unemployed in that adequately paid wage jobs are not open to them, not that they do not do work. Students were considered apprentices of future jobs.

Many of the college students, graduates or dropouts in the group—including those who called themselves radicals—resisted seeing themselves as workers, though most of them owned no income-producing property, were not employers and had to sell their labor just as did the industrial proletariat they were always talking about. Granted they received more status and sometimes more money for their work, but as non-producers they had even less potential power and would have to work with other workers to overthrow capitalism. America's "middle class" workers, including radicals, seem to prefer to see themselves as part of the "upper class" or "classless" but identifying with the working class. They resist the reality that they are merely the more privileged sector of the working class, which is what the "middle class" really is. The concept that there are three major class divisions instead of two—the owners and the workers—is a very convenient one for the ruling class as it "neutralizes" a large number of people.

As this left coalition could not accept these basic premises about consciousness-raising, class and feminism, it became clear that if we wanted a worker's consciousness-raising group we would have to start one independently.

THE GOOD EARLY DAYS

In the fall of 1969 the first meeting was held. We invited those people from the coalition who had shown an interest and others we knew. Nine people (five men and four women), two not from the coalition, showed up for the first meeting. As with women's liberation, people came and

CAPITALISM: 1. a system under which the means of production, distribution, and exchange are in large measure privately owned and directed. 2. the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, or the resulting power or influence. 3. a system favoring such concentration of wealth.

— *The American College Dictionary*

¹ "Hard Knocks: Working in a Mixed (Male-Female) Movement Group" by Carol Hanisch (1969).

went in the early meetings. Some never came back while others were to stick it out to the end more than three years later. Gradually, a fairly stable group emerged. However, those early days were the best. They were the days of good consciousness-raising in which we explored such questions as:

What did you want to be when you were young? What happened to those dreams?

When have you thought you were special and could get out of the system?

When have you thought you could individually beat the system? What happened?

Do you think you can get ahead by hard work? When have you? When haven't you?

Have you ever had to cover for or do the work of a fellow worker? How did you feel about it?

Do you think your parents "messed you over?" If so, how and why? If not, why not?

The meetings were as informative and exciting as women's liberation consciousness-raising (See box for notes I took on one of the early meetings.)

THE PROBLEM OF LIBERALISM FROM THE LEFT

But such problems as leadership, opportunism, and personality attacks, which beset all revolutionary groups and which were already in full swing in the women's movement, began in the worker group shortly after it formed. The deterioration of the group which I am about to describe is a pattern which has developed again and again in the women's liberation movement as liberalism from the left and the right acted to stop the movement from within.

The first attack in the workers' group came from two women who had been playing a role in the women's liberation movement from the beginning, claiming to be feminists and my comrades. They said they were committed to consciousness-raising as a way of getting at the truth of our lives and verbally supported and participated in the development of the political theory which led to the creation of the workers' consciousness-raising group. They also supported and even partially led the attempt to change the coalition described above into just such a group. Yet they launched uncanny, confusion-causing attacks in both the feminist and workers' consciousness raising groups.

Just when the workers' group had achieved a fairly stable membership and we were at our best in doing theoretical work, these two women presented a paper to the group criticizing it for:

- 1) Being a therapy group.

- 2) Not doing more exchange of information of "survival techniques" (dealing with members' immediate job problems).
- 3) Not being larger and more representative of a cross-section of workers.
- 4) Putting ourselves in the vanguard position by putting our emphasis on consciousness-raising—which was teaching us too much and separating us from the masses (!)—instead of on group expansion and action.

The group was taken completely by surprise by the accusation that what we were doing was "therapy" because it was coming from two people who had previously been on our side in defending consciousness-raising to the so-called radical movement. In fact, this sudden unexplained and unacknowledged reversal caused such confusion that we didn't even notice that the points all contradicted each other.

Point 3 was actually a repeat of the left attack on our position that all people who have to work for a living are workers. It said, in essence, that we shouldn't do any more consciousness-raising until we were able to get some "real workers" into the group, that we couldn't learn about worker exploitation by studying our own lives.

Point 4 was an attack on anyone doing what she or he could to get more accurate political knowledge as fast as possible, an attack on the attempt to work out political theory based on our own experience as exploited workers. It was also a sneaky attack on leadership—sneaky because it rang of our own criticism of many so-called radical groups who were daily proclaiming that they were the "true vanguard" of the forthcoming revolution, separate from, not of, the masses, whereas we recognized that we essentially were of the masses.

Although I fought this attack, it shook me up. I now think I would not have been bothered by it if I had understood leadership in a revolution. In my work in the women's movement I was still in a quandary over some aspects of the "no leadership" line which was bringing the radical feminist section almost to a standstill.

These same two women were beginning to accuse the women's liberation consciousness-raising group of being a therapy group for not wanting to take the actions they proposed. Most of their proposals were rejected as typical "ladies auxiliary to the left" type projects, whereas we wanted to do more feminist theory and action.

Not wanting to further expose the political contradictions between their avowed pro-woman line, feminist theory on the one hand and their anti-woman, pro-New Left proposals on the other, they resorted to personality attacks on those who disagreed with them. The usual attack on feminists is that they are too "aggressive," "masculine," or "unsisterly," and "dominate meetings." Since these two women had been attacked for this themselves, it didn't work to use the same attack on others. So instead I was called "too nice," "too feminine," and "submissive," with an "unprogressive personality". This later escalated to

"sniveling prison guard," a term which came from *The Woman's Page*, a West Coast pseudo-feminist publication which later became the pseudo-leftist *Second Page*, changing its name along the lines of all the "phase two," "second stage" liberal attacks on feminism from both the left and right.

Back in the workers' group, these same two women tried to further deflect the potential revolutionary energy of the group by attempting to make us trade union organizers for a campus workers' union. One of them was to be the local paid organizer for one of the national unions seeking to represent the workers.

The attempts of these people to take over or destroy the group were not immediately successful and they left in disgust. But they had aroused uncertainty and confusion and the group was never the same again. Although we didn't go for the union organizing, we did try to expand again, looking for numbers rather than for people who were in basic political agreement with us. Four of the people who came into the group at this period when we were defensively searching for new members ended up leading the next attack on what the group stood for, this time from the right.

THE ATTACK FROM THE LIBERAL RIGHT

The problem of the liberal right differed from that of the liberal left more in form than in content. Nationally there had been a development in the liberal right wing of the women's movement led by N.O.W. and *Ms. Magazine* to coopt radical feminism and radical feminists. One of their major tactics was to revise the original tenets of radical feminism, which was swiftly mushrooming into a mass movement, back into individual struggle, which is safer for the ruling class. Like the liberal left they at first opposed consciousness-raising by demanding "action" in its stead. When it became apparent that consciousness-raising had caught on and there was no stopping it, they appeared to jump on the bandwagon. But in fact, they tried to change consciousness-raising from an effective political means of getting at the truth of our lives into what really could be called "therapy". That is, a place to get help in solving immediate problems and discussing those problems and their solutions in psychological/sociological terms (damaged, conditioned, socialized, brainwashed) rather than in political power terms.

It was people who turned out to follow this liberal rightist line that came into the workers group in our search for new members. Their attack did not take the usual form of red-baiting or feminist-baiting directly, but rather of insisting that the personal is *not* political which was contrary to the basic radical tenets of consciousness-raising under which the group operated. That is, they constantly undermined our attempts to put internal difficulties among the men and women in the group and the external differences between members and their bosses into a political power perspective by insisting that these differences were matters of personal values, individual choice, etc. They constantly attempted to make what had

already been established in the group as *political* to be *personal*.

It was at their urging that we made the great mistake of allowing ourselves to get pulled off worker consciousness-raising and into fighting male supremacy within the group. Actually we had gotten our first big shove in that direction earlier from the two women who had criticized the group for not getting into union organizing. They had also, and suddenly, attacked us for not dealing with the male supremacy of the men in the group. Although the commonly agreed purpose of the group was to raise working class consciousness—not become a mixed women's liberation group—we did begin to get diverted. After these two women left and the new people came in, one of these "personal solution" couples announced at a meeting that they were splitting up. The woman unleashed her criticisms against the man (mostly about sex, as I recall) and several other women followed with intense criticisms of their men. This could have led to exciting insights in a women's liberation group, but in the worker group it was a diversion. We immediately moved to "save the group" by trying to bring group pressure on the men to stop some of the oppressive things they were doing to women outside the meetings. Our first attempts seemed to work and this brought on months of meetings trying to force changes in the men, straying from our original purpose. (Two malingering 30-year-old men in the group did finally get their college degrees as a result of their raised worker consciousness combined with pressure from the group.)

About this time serious theoretical issues also were

THINGS WE DO LIKE ABOUT WORK

1. Getting paid
2. Working with other people
Meeting other people
3. Work that is socially useful
4. Creative work
5. A mixing of mental and physical work
6. Work that is an escape from a bad situation

THINGS WE DON'T LIKE ABOUT WORK

1. Low pay
2. Boss-worker relationships; fear of constantly being watched by boss
3. Doing either entirely mental or physical work
4. Doing useless repetitive work
5. The large individual responsibility
6. Having to make work or always look busy
7. Condescension of public to service jobs
8. No free time
9. Facing same useless work forever
10. Job tying you to one place
11. Bad hours
12. Boss expecting loyalty from employees
13. Boss getting rich off our work

splitting Gainesville Women's Liberation. Foremost was the old fight about whether women were "damaged, conditioned, socialized, brainwashed" into feminine "roles," etc. vs. the pro-woman line that women basically do what we have to in order to get what we want and need. The same conflict brought the battle in the workers' group to a head and the right wingers left the group, the women stepping up their personality attacks ("cold, unsisterly, intolerant, dominating") against us within the women's movement, going back to groups they had long since dropped out of to complain about us. Having seen political differences fuzzied and covered up by personality attacks time and again, we decided to fight back by putting our differences in writing and distributing these papers to women's liberationists. This prompted their replies and more name calling. Though it took up much of our time for several months, the clarification of issues for ourselves, if not for them, strengthened us.

ACTION IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

After the liberal rightists pulled out of the worker group, we should have gone back to doing workers' consciousness-raising, but we were so beaten down by all the attacks and hassles, we turned instead to that supposedly magical cure-all for faltering groups—a public action. Actions should be taken out of strength, as a result of our theory and as a means of pushing one step closer to our goal, not out of weakness and frustration to "do something."

An analysis and description of the action we chose would only be repetitive of similar community type projects going on all over the country. We won a small reform after months of hard work, done mostly by the men since the women were involved in a women's liberation project. The most positive thing that can be said for it is that it gave the men some needed political experience, though one of them finked out and compromised much of our plan. That was the end of the group after more than three years.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the positive lessons I learned from the Gainesville experience was an affirmation of our analysis that men should do consciousness-raising on class, not on male supremacy. We were on the right track for a time in the workers' group, long enough to be encouraged by the glimmer of what is possible. It was in fact, when we went against our own theory that our group failed.

The eventual failure of the workers' consciousness-raising group must be attributed to 1) the attacks on the group by its opportunist members and 2) the political mistakes of its leadership.

We had to learn, as we did in women's liberation, that "saving the group" and "expanding the group" should never be attempted for their own sake. Who one works with is of primary importance and cannot be a random thing. It must be based on real agreement on basic political theory and strategy.

One problem with people . . . is that they would first think that in order to go to people and get them together, they would have to have a program to carry to them or they would have to have something to organize them around. But it doesn't turn out to be true from our experience. You could, in the North, in the ghettos, get together ten or twenty people and out of their getting together and giving them a chance to talk about their main problems would come some programs that they themselves decided on, that they thought about. If that happened and began to happen around the country, that would be the key to spreading some of the things that have happened in the South to the rest of the country. That not only goes for poor people, but for professional people as well.

— Bob Moses (Parris)
"Questions on the Fifth Anniversary of SNCC"
THE MOVEMENT (San Francisco newspaper)
 April 1965

It is said that when the Guatemalan guerrillas enter a new village, they do not talk about the "anti-imperialist struggle" nor do they give lessons on dialectical materialism—neither do they distribute copies of the "Communist Manifesto" or of Chairman Mao's "On Contradiction." What they do is gather together the people of the village in the center of the village and then, one by one, the guerrillas rise and talk to the villagers about their own lives: about how they see themselves and how they came to be who they are, about their deepest longings and the things they've striven for and hoped for, about the way in which their deepest longings were frustrated by the society in which they lived.

Then the guerrillas encourage the villagers to talk about their lives. And then a marvelous thing begins to happen. People who thought that their deepest problems and frustrations were their individual problems discover that their problems and longings are all the same—that no one man is any different from the others. And, finally, that out of the discovery of their common humanity comes the decision that men must unite together in the struggle to destroy the conditions of their common oppression. . . .

— Greg Calvert, SDS, 1967

I have recently been studying the history of working people in this country in addition to the revolutions in China, Russia, Cuba, etc. and the recent and past liberation fights of black people and women. Ever since before the Revolutionary War, working people in America who were organizing against capitalists have been wrestling with many of the same problems that came up in our group. They too have faced such problems as opportunism, leadership, and the question of who is a worker. The patterns of left and right liberal attacks emerge from history, clarifying and deepening my understanding of the present. Without current experience, of course, these patterns would not be meaningful, fully understood or even recognized for what they are. Reading of other periods in this country when worker consciousness was sky high, for instance, confirms that consciousness-raising for working people is an absolute necessity. (The preamble outlining the necessity for the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1881, for instance, began: "Whereas, A struggle is going on in the nations of

the civilized world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor, which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the toiling millions of all nations if not combined for mutual protection and benefit."²)

I'm eager to do workers consciousness-raising again. I'm surer than ever that men are radicalized fighting their own oppressors. Getting them to admit they are not the rulers of their own lives will probably be even harder than getting women to admit they are oppressed by men and male supremacy. But that is a job that must be done.

Even though men acquire class consciousness, it does not mean they will stop oppressing women. But it will be a giant leap forward which, combined with a strong feminist movement, will provide the conditions necessary to make a revolution—the kind we really want.

²*History of the Labor Movement in the United States* by Philip S. Foner, Vol. I, pp. 520–21.

SUGGESTED READINGS

All readings recommended for "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" by Kathie Sarachild.

Also:

History of the Labor Movement in the United States by Philip S. Foner. Esp. volumes 1 & 2, 1947.

Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution in Tsinghua University by William Hinton, 1972.

Oppose Bookworship by Mao Tsetung (May 1930).

Blacks, Women, And The Movement In SCEF

Carol Hanisch

The Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF) which has fought for racial, economic and political justice in the South since New Deal days, has a historical connection with the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement. In 1967, when the movement was forming, the late Carl Braden (then SCEF's co-director) was supportive of our interest in women's liberation. New York Radical Women met in SCEF's New York office for its first, explosive year and a half. However, there were growing political differences over the independence of

Women's Liberation which eventually resulted in the firing of Carol Hanisch as SCEF's women's liberation project organizer in 1969 and the end of the project.

The following letter was prompted by documents which came out of a later struggle in SCEF over similar issues regarding black liberation. These issues brought SCEF to a crisis situation in 1972. SCEF had been allowing the Panthers to use its office and printing equipment in Louisville, Ky. Serious differences arose. The Panthers charged, among other things, that some SCEF staff who were open members of the Communist Party were trying to divide the black group by attempting to recruit its