

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

members. The clash escalated to the point where the SCEF director and her husband were allegedly kidnapped by three members of the Black Panther Party. They were released unharmed. SCEF decided to bring charges against the three Panthers and later dropped them under protests from Walter Collins, the Bradens and others. The incident triggered a good deal of controversy, charges and counter-charges within SCEF and among its supporters over such issues as black nationalism, separatism, and red-baiting. Some people were fired; others, including the Bradens, resigned.

There have been several changes in the SCEF staff since this letter was written and we do not know the organization's current position.

However, the issues raised in this upheaval, which in some ways parallel New York Radical Women's history with SCEF, has significance for black people, women and all other people interested in building a real left.

AN OPEN LETTER TO PAST AND PRESENT SCEF STAFF AND SUPPORTERS

I have read with interest Anne and Carl Braden's resignations from the SCEF staff and Walter Collins' Interim Report. My interest in this is the desire for the emergence of a left in this country that can embrace women's liberation as both independent of and an integral part of the working class revolution. Since the position of left groups on women's liberation has closely paralleled that on black liberation (except that women have not yet been taken as seriously), I view what has happened with SCEF and JOMO and SCEF and the Black Panthers as something I have an interest in.

I'm going to confine myself here to what I see as the major issue of the conflict, though there obviously are other issues involved that need analysis.

Let me begin by saying I don't side with either the past or present "administration." Neither has addressed itself clearly and strongly to the basic issue which started the conflict, either in terms of *seeing* it as the basic problem or of *stating* their position on it. That issue is black liberation. SCEF has had the same problem with women's liberation, which is why I was fired from the organization five years ago.

Anne mentions black nationalism as a major issue in her paper, but then goes on to claim that the *real* problem is red-baiting from the left as she chooses that issue to resign over. Red-baiting is also the major issue raised in Carl's resignation. I'm not going to debate here the whole

question of red-baiting from the left or the question of agents, though it seems very likely that agents were at work in the situation, something that should be fully investigated. However, if there were red-baiters and/or agents at work, they probably took advantage of the chaos created by a very serious incorrect political position on black liberation. Such charges as red-baiting, agents and even of inexperience should be put aside temporarily until the root question is dealt with and a firm position taken and made public. All personality attacks should be put aside for good. They are always an evasion of the real issue. For instance, we *like* people to be "rigid" if by that we mean firm—firmly on the side of justice.

Anne says in her paper that the SCEF position on black nationalism is "ambiguous." It could be more accurately described as "two-faced" or maybe even "many-faced." When I first joined the SCEF staff in 1966, its stand and work regarding "black power" seemed admirable to me. I liked the fact that it put a good deal of effort into fighting racist fears of black power and into encouraging people to continue to support black liberation. I took this to mean that SCEF recognized the right of black people to secede politically and physically from white dominated (and domination does not mean numbers but ideology) political organizations. And that included the entire spectra of so-called "left" organizations, including SCEF. I thought SCEF further recognized that *black people* were the ones to decide *when* and *to what degree* such secession was *necessary* and that white people should continue to support the black liberation movement whether it seceded or not. In short, that black people know best the tack their movement should take.

At some point, however, (a point corresponding to my soaring woman consciousness) I began to pick up that many people in SCEF saw such secession as a "stage" that black people go through on the road to becoming "real revolutionaries" meaning they recognize the primary importance of the class struggle to get rid of capitalism. Some even viewed this "stage" as a personal immaturity, though an understandable one, brought on as the result of oppression. What racist paternalism! If black nationalism is a "stage"—or a temporary necessity—it is a stage made necessary by white racists, not by blacks, by the political (and personal) "immaturity" of the white left, not the black left.

I remember being quite embarrassed and disappointed when Stokely Carmichael was asked to speak about black/white coalitions at the 1968 SCEF dinner. His speech at the Huey Newton Birthday Party had made it clear that he felt the black liberation movement had more immediate problems than worrying about and waiting for coalitions. That speech raised my consciousness no end while most of the SCEF staff put it down. I now see that I should have spoken up more about this at the time. I was shocked and confused by the reaction of the SCEF people to the speech and to my enthusiasm for it. Since then I have learned that the way to get unconfused in such a situation is to state your position loud and clear and do what you can to force other people to state theirs.

It wasn't until the New Orleans staff meeting at which I was fired amidst similar defensive reactions to women's liberation that I began to see clearly what the problem was. The real feelings against SNCC closing its ranks to whites began to slip out in the heated debates over women's liberation. SCEF publicly had defended that position on SNCC's part, but I guess it was more because SCEF had no real choice in the matter than because of the gut feeling that SNCC was right to do so. The black movement was strong enough at that time to lay out its own terms and SCEF would have lost its good reputation with blacks if it had opposed it. This is what I mean by two-faced.

Then there was the defense of the male caucus and the similar defense of the exclusion of blacks from "white groups" by some staff members. It seems necessary to point out again that there exists a very important difference between all black or all women groups and all white or all male groups. The purpose of forming all black or all women groups is to *fight the exclusion* of blacks by whites, women by men, be it physically, ideologically or any other way. Therefore the exclusion of blacks by whites or of women by men is reactionary in and of itself. That this very basic political fact has not been fully grasped by the left after at least eight years since Black Power and six years of women's liberation in recent history alone is significant of the left's inability or unwillingness to *welcome* the political progress and growing strength of the very oppressed groups it purports to be so concerned about. I know of at least one instance when black people were barred from a "white" meeting by Bob Zellner and co-workers on the grounds that the presence of black people would upset the whites. That is pure and simple racism no matter what organizing terms it is couched in.

In reality, SCEF has mistakenly continued to make its major priority integration, not the fight to get rid of capitalism, which it—not the black liberation movement—should primarily concern itself with. SCEF should be an organization of people organizing *working people* (not whites) against capitalism and for a classless society. To do this it will have to stop pushing integration on blacks and segregation on whites in practice and in theory. As a group attacking capitalism the emphasis should be taken off black and white and put on *worker*, regardless of race or sex. This of course means that racism and male supremacy should be exposed and fought every step of the way, but in the context of organizing *working people*, not in the context of pushing integration. This would mean that black people and women would *always* be *welcome* at any activity, in addition to having the right to caucus or independently organize in order to deal with racism and male supremacy.

This would mean, too, that SCEF stop *using* black liberation and women's liberation. Anne says in her paper that people who feel "used" by the movement are merely succumbing to the stereotype of "what left-wing groups do to people." But this is a cop out. Even if they shouldn't, left-wing groups and people do make the mistake of "using" other people and issues to support their own politics, to raise money, to impress certain people, etc., in the same way that liberal organizations use oppressed

groups to make political hay. It has nothing to do with any sinister left conspiracy; it has to do with opportunism, which, unfortunately no movement, including women's liberation, has been able to escape. Inviting Stokely Carmichael to speak at a SCEF fund-raising function when nearly everyone on the staff was privately feeling angrily at odds with his latest political statement and asking him to speak on coalitions was attempting to *use* him, not to give him a forum, which is what should have been done.

Black liberation has been a political hay-maker for quite some time. Women's liberation has become one more recently. A case in point is SCEF's Women's Liberation Calendar. That publication is a *working people's* calendar. It has little to do with women's liberation. With so much interest in women's liberation these days (an interest built by the independent women's liberation movement, not by SCEF) SCEF can sell a lot of calendars on a woman theme. Also SCEF wants to appear to be a supporter of or/and have connections with women's liberation, a connection which it chose to sever in practice when it, among other things, fired me and has not since made a real effort to correct. It looks bad for SCEF not to be involved with one of the largest mass movements in the country, so the solution is to pretend it is when in fact out of fear and ignorance it has skirted the issue. To use a good phrase of the Bradens', the left has been "attracted to the light and repelled by the heat" of women's liberation. And out of that fear and ignorance has grown the attempt by the left, along with the right and the liberals, to redefine (revise) women's liberation to make it comfortable, controllable, acceptable and *useful* to its own program. The result has been a stripping away of the dynamic truth and spirit that made women's liberation a radical mass movement in the first place. The SCEF calendar is called a women's liberation calendar but manages to avoid any real projection of feminism.

The reason black people and women "feel" used by left groups is that we are.

What is really important to consider from the series of events of last summer is what had to happen before SCEF acknowledged that it should rethink its position on black nationalism. It actually took armed threats and the use of the police against blacks to defend an integrated base in the black community. What it will take to get SCEF to actually take any clear stand, much less the correct one, I hate to imagine.

But I, for one, prefer an incorrect stand to an ambiguous one; at least it gives me the information I need to decide what to do about it. But just taking a stand is not enough; in the end it has to be the right one. SCEF took a stand on women's liberation when it ended the women's liberation organizing project I had begun and fired me. That stand was a wrong one which it's never changed and that is why it is isolated from the essential radical core of feminism to this day.

There are people who think it's time for Anne and others to just shut up and let the organization go on, who now that its so-called "internal" problems have hit the fan in a public way want to quickly hide them under the rug

again and forget about them. But the issue will remain and continue to combust until the organization confronts these issues head on and takes a clear and strong public stand. Then the question can clearly be "Should SCEF have my support?" not merely "Can SCEF survive this crisis."

There is a lot of "political" debate going on on the left all the time, but rarely is it the critical, analytical type that sticks determinedly to the real issues involved, that gets to the real root of differences and the reasons for them. All too often people think that battles on the left should be kept quiet because they are damaging to the organizations involved. The left needs criticism, analysis, even disunity if that is what it takes to get *real* unity on the basis of good analysis and action.

The existence of strong black liberation and women's

liberation movements in this country has forced the left into the position of either becoming truly radical or becoming irrelevant. Since it wants neither, it is resisting both to the detriment of all. The American left needs to take a good look at *itself*. Instead of blaming black nationalists and radical feminists for the divisions that exist between us, it needs to see where *it*, not women or blacks, is wrong. For so far it has been wrong and the breach will not be surmounted by individual tolerance on either side, but by a correction of the left's ideological line with a followup of appropriate action.

Hopefully the present disorder and dissolution of the American left is the preliminary stage for rebuilding it into a dynamic organization which will genuinely represent and include *all* the working people of this country.

—December 1973

SUGGESTED READINGS

"Hard Knocks: Working in a Mixed (Male-Female) Movement Group" by Carol Hanisch (1969). In *Notes from the Second Year*, Shulamith Firestone, editor.

Stokely Speaks by Stokely Carmichael. Esp. chapter 9: "Free Huey."

"We Are an African People" by Joseph Waller. A three part editorial series in *The Burning Spear*, African People's Socialist Party newspaper, P.O. Box 12792, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33733: April, May-June, July-August 1975 issues (\$1).

... as Black people attempt to move together to concretize our aspirations in the form of organizations and programs, we are being confronted by our new would-be bosses on the left. Our bosses, who, rather than see the Black liberation movement grow and unfold according to its own historic process, wreak havoc and sow destruction within our midst. These miscreants, these ideological imperialists, who are socialist in name, but imperialist in aims, would destroy the Black liberation movement rather than see it move independently of WHITE control.

While the objective conditions for revolution in the U.S. are ripe, the white workers have been abandoned by the opportunistic leeches on the left, who more often than not, are engaged in internecine struggle over control of the Black movement, leaving the battered corpse of Black organizations in their wake.

The white workers, who with true revolutionary leadership, could be mobilized to fight in their own interests as well as to support the just demands for political independence for Black people, have been abandoned to the reactionary forces of Ford, Reagan and Wallace.

— Joseph Waller,
THE BURNING SPEAR, 1975