

SOME THOUGHTS ON PROGRAM

by Midwives, a chapter of the Chicago Women's liberation Union

As the women's liberation movement grows, we are faced with the question of what kind of program and strategy we should develop to help our movement expand and struggle for power. Various groups within women's liberation have argued for one type of program over another; for example, the primary importance of consciousness raising or fighting around women's immediate needs like child care. This paper will argue for a program and strategy which emphasizes struggle on many different levels, none of which is a clear priority over the others, and none of which is adequate without the development of the others. We feel that our position has coherence and is not an evasion of the questions of what is of primary importance in program for women's liberation today; rather, we feel that it is a clear perspective that the only way we can build a winning revolutionary movement is to struggle on many different levels in the process of building that movement.

To try to make the notion of various levels of struggle somewhat clearer, we conceived of making a visual chart. Along the sides are the four major roles into which women are placed in American society — roles which oppress us, First is our role in production (as surplus, menial, unskilled, malleable labor force; domestic workers and keepers of the work force); second is reproduction (being responsible for the reproduction of the race); third is sexuality and fourth is our role as socializers of children.*

Across the top are the different levels or dimensions of struggle which we have begun to see as necessary to build our movement. First are struggles around the immediate needs of women; for example, free, legal abortions, day care, equal pay for equal work, decent medical care, equal access to education, etc. Second is the development of consciousness through educational and other work. This would involve activities from the small consciousness raising group to guerilla theater, female studies programs, and work through the media.

The third area of work which we list is work which leads to the development of an analysis of women's oppression and all oppression in our society, and which will lead us to developing a strategy for transforming this society. Study around the position of the role of the family, how capitalism reinforces and profits from the oppression of women, and investigation into the nature of social control in our society would all be a part of this level of struggle. And the fourth dimension is the building of a vision of how society should look and the building of alternative institutions to the oppressive ones which exist today. Such counter institutions could serve as an approximate model for how things might be; and more importantly they can begin to provide us with a sustaining culture and community as conventional forms become increasingly untenable.

We felt that this chart might be helpful in a number of ways. It might help us evaluate what program the women's liberation movement has developed up to now, and what specific areas of work we have not touched. It might help us also visualize the relationships between different sorts of program and the different ways any specific program can work to reach women.

*These four areas were taken from Juliet Mitchell's article, the Longest Revolution.

	Struggles around Immediate Needs of women	Consciousness raising/educational work	Development of Analysis and Strategy	Developing a Vision and Building alternatives
Production		August 26 Strike-		art-co-ops
Reproduction	struggles to legalize abortion	Myrna lamb's play on abortion		
Sexuality		Self-defense; anti-Playboy demonstrations		Self-defense classes
Socializers of Children	Childcare centers			Co-operative childcare

(A few examples were filled in the chart to show how it can work)

It should be remembered that this is just a two dimensional chart. It helps us look at different types of program necessary to organize around women's oppression as women. But it is clear that women are not only oppressed as women, but are also part of all other oppressed groups within this society (e.g. blacks, workers, students, gay people). Because of women's interrelatedness to all of society we must have a view of program which says that our oppression as women cannot be separated from the oppression of all other groups. That means that our movement must work on program which struggles against all kinds of oppression and must respond specifically to the ways the oppression of these groups affects women in them.

For example, consciousness raising and educational work must include the development of an awareness of the relationship of the oppression of women to the oppression of other groups and a corresponding investigation of the consequences for other groups of things which we want to demand immediately for ourselves. If we demand equal job opportunities, for example, will this demand mean in practice that white, middle class, college educated women get more jobs while blacks — men and women — get fewer? If so, what other demands must we raise and fight for in conjunction with a demand for equal job opportunity?

Also, the development of an analysis must include an understanding of the similarities and differences between the oppression of women and that of other oppressed groups, study of the common ways in which the system benefits from the oppression of all of us, and investigation of the ways in which struggle by any one oppressed group can help and can be helped by other oppressed groups. One of the major ways in which the system survives is by playing off the divisions among all of us against each other; we must investigate just what the nature of these divisions is» and understand the real consequences of conflicts among the oppressed.

Besides being two dimensional in terms of women's position domestically (not specifying race or class differences for example) the chart deals only with women within this country and does not bring in our relationship to the international community. Within that schema we find ourselves as a powerless

majority within a country which uses imperialist wars to control the world's resources. It is important that we always remember our position as American women, a position of relative economic privilege in relationship to poor and non-white peoples throughout the world, and develop program which recognizes the importance of struggling within this country against its oppressive foreign policies.

Although this chart has these important limitations, it can be useful to help us think about the different kinds of program that we must develop and where our movement has concentrated up to now. These levels of program are useful to a discussion of any kind of political work and can help us think of how to develop priorities. This specific chart is designed to talk about women-oriented program and to facilitate a discussion about program within the women's movement today.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PROGRAM

Each one of the four different levels of struggle is crucial to building our movement. We know that the oppression of women is real and that women are suffering,, starving, and in some cases dying as a result of that oppression. It is important that we attack the institutions of oppression and demand changes and reforms which will make women's lives more bearable. Only in this way will our movement be in reality one which is fighting for women's immediate needs.

But reforms will never bring about the kind of total change in society for which we are working. For that reason it is important to do educational work about the overall way in which our society functions and the many ways in which women and all people are oppressed by it. In addition, it is the educational work that women's liberation has been able to do over the past three years that has made possible the building of struggles for day care, equal pay, etc. If we build reform struggles without developing consciousness, then we are not building a movement which can transform this society. And if we build consciousness without also struggling around women's needs, we will be movement which does not take these needs seriously and which is not fighting for all women.

This gets us to the third area of work, which is the development of an analysis and a strategy for building a women's movement and gaining power. We need to have an analysis of how women are oppressed and what institutions in society maintain that oppression and profit from its maintenance; we need to know how our oppression is linked to the oppression of other peoples, and what the specific dynamics of common oppression are. We can then develop a strategy for liberating women and for struggling for real power. On that basis we can begin to understand the lives of women in America and can begin to develop priorities for our work (e.g. figuring out where women are located in production and deciding to focus organizing in areas of high concentration; figuring out the various forms the family takes in different race and class groups and thus being able to develop more meaningful program around the family). But analysis and strategy also hinge on the development of struggle-oriented program and consciousness raising, because an analysis and strategy are useless unless people are involved in real work with women and unless it grows out of a developing consciousness of women's oppression.

The fourth area is the development of a vision of the way society should be, and the building of alternative institutions which embody that vision. This vision allows women to see that things could in reality work differently and that it would be possible to conceive of a society in which women and all people would be free from exploitation and manipulation. Articulating this vision is important to counter prevailing attitudes in America which argue that there is no other way our society could operate. Struggling to build alternative institutions to the ones we find oppressive makes concrete that vision and gives women. Some hope that change is possible. These struggles also force us to act in new ways in accordance with the beliefs we have about democratic decision-making» collective work and could-rearing, non exploitative ways of relating to each other. But this vision and these alternatives are also

empty if they exist by themselves without the other areas of work outlined above. They can become simply individual solutions divorced from the building of a movement. If they are divorced from a strategy they can be seen as ends in themselves.

There is no simple way to build the women's movement. We have to be aware that different areas of struggle exist, that all are crucial, and that all are dependent on each other. We should systematically analyze the ways in which work in one area helps develop the others, and the ways in which that work affects all women. If our Movement is to be built in a conscious, directed way we have to bear this in mind as we evaluate our past work and lay down priorities for future program.

--Midwives Chapter, CWLU, 1971.