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# SDS National Resolution on Women

This resolution was passed at the December 1968 SDS National Council meeting. It is one of a series of articles on women's liberation chosen by a group of Boston-area women and published by NEFP.

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Women form the oldest and largest continually oppressed group in the family of human-kind, their subjugation dating from the downfall of primitive communal society and the rise of private property.

The inability of the 'most advanced, technologically developed' etc. capitalist society to provide equality to half its citizens not only exposes the thorough hypocrisy of all that society's words about 'justice' and 'equality'. It also shows that the struggle for equality of women is a revolutionary task -- that is, one which cannot be completed under the present system of private property and the exploitation of the majority of people by a social class which is defined by its ownership of the means of producing wealth.

Male supremacy in the movement mirrors male supremacy in capitalist society. The fact that male supremacy persists in the movement today, raises the issue that although no people's liberation can happen without a socialist revolution in this country, a socialist revolution could take place which maintains the secondary position of women in society. Therefore the liberation of women must become a conscious part of our struggle for people's liberation.

Women are not oppressed as a class but they are oppressed as women within each class. We emphasize that oppression of women through male supremacy, like racism which oppresses black people, is not merely a quantitative increase in the class exploitation which women experience, but also a qualitatively different kind of oppression which they experience as women in addition to the exploitation of all working people.\*

## Material Basis

Before discussing the material basis of the oppression of women, we must emphasize here that not only is the oppression of women most severe in the working class, but that black working class women are the most oppressed group in the society. Black women are a uniquely oppressed group because as blacks, as workers, and as women, they experience the most compound forms of oppression capitalism/imperialism has devised.

The material basis of women's oppression can be listed under three main headings:

1. Women are a reserve army of labor to bring down wages; for instance, (a) they

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\* The process by which men are used as tools of the ruling class in the oppression of women is more accurately described by the term male supremacy than the term male chauvinism. Male chauvinism depicts only the mental attitude of male superiority, whereas the term male supremacy conveys that men occupy dominant positions over women in society and perpetuate that dominance, as well as incorporating the first idea.

have been used in the past to take the place of male workers needed by the military in wartime; (b) at times women are used against collectively organized groups of workers, since their condition forces them to work for lower pay.

2. Women fulfill the function of saving enormous costs for the bourgeoisie in that they perform free services (housekeeping), providing the necessities of life for the working class man at the lowest possible costs.

3. Another objective function of the oppression of women in capitalist society is to help obscure the class nature of that society. The nature of women's material condition places them in a relationship which acts as a lightning rod for men's justified frustration, anger, and shame at their inability to control their natural and social environment. This means, for example, that the potentially revolutionary violence of exploited and oppressed people against the original forces of their exploitation and oppression are transformed and diverted into oppressive violence towards those who have even less power than they do (e.g. women).

Again the analogy with racism is relevant: White workers carry out the racist oppression of black workers in the shops. While racism may serve to perpetuate the relative privilege of white workers, this is in no way to say that white workers ultimately profit by dominating black workers, or that men ultimately profit by dominating women, but rather to say that women (or black workers) suffer their immediate oppression at the hands of men (or white workers) who maintain a dominant position for themselves, and as supremacists, try to perpetuate that position of dominance.

## Superstructure in General - Ideology in Particular

The aspects of the oppression of women in a capitalist society are of a dialectical nature as are those of the oppressed classes in general, and the exploited class in particular.

This means that in the process of this exploitation and oppression, women themselves have come to act by necessity according to the function a class society has given them, hence believe in that function, and, in turn, through the total internalization of the necessity and value of that function, women themselves actively contributed to the perpetuation of their material exploitation. Thus they have helped to maintain that entire ideologizing which has 'justified' these conditions.

It is incorrect to see this aspect of maintaining these conditions as 'their fault' as it is incorrect to see it as the men's fault when they accept their own lack of control in all institutions they work in and thereby support and further the interests of the ruling class. This perversion of consciousness has to be viewed as a direct result of and integral aspect of the totality of people's victimization.

If we realize that the process of ideologizing, by altering and perverting consciousness itself, becomes a material force of its own -- which not only helps to maintain class relationships and particular oppressions, but in turn alters and contributes in shaping other forms of exploitation and oppression -- then we clearly have to evolve a strategy which takes into full account the consequences and implications of both: the material basis of our lives as well as the internalization of these conditions by ideologizing the totality of our social experiences.

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For clarification, we return to the much-loved and by now endearingly familiar terminology of this convention. Of course the basic-fundamental-primary contradiction is that between the working class and the bourgeoisie. At the same time the sharpest or most immediate contradictions may be what the convention likes to call 'secondary'. But whatever historical legitimacy that phrase may convey, it obscures the fact that a so-called secondary contradiction may in fact be the sharpest contradiction at a given time because people experience it most acutely in their lives. We emphasize that the sharpest contradiction can form the basis for the most

immediate struggle against oppression which in turn leads to greater, more effective participation in the total struggle. Hence we do not believe that the struggle for women's liberation is a detraction from the worker-capitalist struggle. Rather, the fight for women's liberation is a concretization of the struggle for the liberation of all people from oppression. It doesn't stand apart from the fight against capitalism in our society, but rather is an integral part of that fight.

## Program

In order for women to become full political people in SDS and in order for the oppression of women to be taken on as a struggle by SDS, male supremacy must be eliminated within the organization itself. SDS people must battle two beliefs. First, women in SDS must battle the belief that struggling for their own liberation is not important. Second, SDS must battle the belief that the fight for equality of women is solely the business of women, and that only women have the right and responsibility to oppose male domination.

Whatever forms within SDS are decided upon to organize this campaign, they should be such that the chapter as a whole has charge and responsibility, with women taking the main responsibility to organize women for their liberation, and men taking the main responsibility to attack male supremacy and to win the support of other men.

We propose that SDS take up the fight for women's rights on campus by raising several specific demands which will expose the way women are specially oppressed within the university set-up and rally students to fight against that oppression.

1. We should launch a campaign to bring the wages of women employees of the university up to the level of men. This must definitely not be subordinated in a general struggle to raise wages of all employees, nor should it be postponed on the ground that it would divert attention from the just demands of all employees, male and female. The central question is oppression -- the general oppression of all employees and the special harsh oppression of women employees. In some case, tackling the especially low level of women's wages may prove to be the key to solidifying all the employees and winning improvements for all. In general, it would be better to raise the two questions side by side, with equal emphasis; but in no case should SDS challenge the low wages and bad conditions generally without especially challenging the especially low wages and bad conditions for women.

2. It is necessary to begin the struggle for women's equality in educational institutions where working class women are trained and socialized. Within the context of work in the high schools, state schools, teachers colleges, junior colleges, and trade schools, emphasis should be placed on beauty schools, secretarial, nursing, and other job training schools for women.

3. We should relate the struggle for women's rights in the schools to the struggle of women generally, and especially working class women, against the institutions that repress them, for example juvenile court, girls' homes, women's detention centers and prisons, family court, welfare, labor battles such as Levi Strauss, and others.

4. Launch fights around curriculum and organize in classrooms to expose how the schools reinforce the male supremacist definition of 'woman's role'. Challenge the counseling practice of steering women into auxiliary occupations. Demand the teaching of the history of women's struggles for liberation. This should be carried out in the context of on-going programs which challenge course content and direction.

The campaign for specific demands should be accompanied by research, internal education and propaganda by SDS explaining why women are still subjugated by men, why they cannot achieve equality under the present system, and why all men and women should fight for women's liberation.

