

SOME VIEWS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

By Kathy Walker

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We are surrounded — on TV, in the movies, at school, at work — by society's definition of women.

Our womanhood is defined by manufacturers of clothes, cosmetics. Our objective is supposed to be to make ourselves as attractive as possible to men — we are portrayed as toys, sexual objects for the satisfaction of men.

But the reason it is so important to attract "A Man", we are told, is that Man is the key to a Woman's Own World — to a home and family. Our relation to the world outside the family, indeed our very identity as human beings is defined by and through our husbands and children. We are identified not by our own names but as "Mrs. Johnson", "Bob's wife", "Billy's mother".

We are expected to produce healthy, well-adjusted children by devoting all our attention 24 hours a day to them, by never taking an outside job when the children are young. We may in reality produce angry, neurotic children because we are unable to get away from the house, and release all our frustrations of being trapped and stifled on our children.

We are supposed to be Tension-Management Specialists — to soothe our husbands after they come home from a hard day at the office. Society dictates that we must be reasonably intelligent in order to make interesting conversation with our husbands. Our socialization says we must be charming and attractive both for when our husbands bring their bosses home for dinner, and so that he will attain status in the community for making a "good choice", as he would if he bought a new car.

We must challenge this secondary status of women — her role defined by constant catering to, and living her life through her husband and children. We must challenge the society that socializes women from girlhood to adulthood to want and to be happy with this stultifying definition of her womanhood.

We cannot solve these problems as individuals. Only by working with other women can we change our own consciousness and the factors in society that form that consciousness.

In order to attain autonomy as an individual with an identity separate from that of her husband, so that her life is not totally defined in terms of her husband — his occupation, his social class — she must be economically independent. Within the marriage structure, women must often beg their husbands for ready cash for any reason, yet the Chase-Manhattan Bank calculates that women work an average of 99.7 hours a week in the home. This is unpaid labour. Many women simply cannot leave their husbands even in light of complete marriage breakdown simply because they cannot support themselves or their children with a standard of living that even remotely approximates that which their husbands, with their superior job getting qualifications, simply because they are male, can give them.

THE RIGHT TO EQUAL EDUCATION

The discriminatory channeling that women face as workers begins when we are students. The edu-

cational system has three basic channels for women: 1) DIRECTLY INTO THE HOME. All of us are in this channel to some extent since we are taught that our ultimate destination is home and family. Those who go directly into the home acquire almost no skills and are nearly completely helpless and dependent economically on their husbands. 2) INTO "COMMERCIAL COURSES", to be trained for office work or other "women's work" at low pay. 3) INTO THE TRADITIONAL WOMANLY PROFESSIONS. Those few women who buck the early channels to make it to university almost inevitably end up in teaching, nursing, social work, or "home sciences" — nearly all extensions of their role in the home.

The entire educational system is designed to convince us that we are inferior to men, that our place is in the home, that the nuclear family (mother-father-children) is an Eternal and Natural institution. We are not taught that women won the rights to have in this society through their united struggle. We are not taught that Canadian working women make less than 40% of what men with the same education earn. We are not taught that Canadian Medical Schools have quotas for women, of about 10%. We are not taught of other forms of family and methods of raising children that have existed and do exist.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN

We should not have to give up economic independence in order to have children; or vice versa. This means that child-care facilities must be available for pre-school children. Some argue that it is "unnatural" for mothers to leave young children. In fact the nuclear family with 2 or 3 children completely dependent on their parents is not a natural but a historical phenomenon. History has seen other methods of raising children and, there is little evidence that the methods of today's society are the best.

Studies have shown that women who work outside their homes are "better" mothers: that children who spend most of their young days with others of their own age and have other adults to relate to than just their biological parents, are happier and adjust more easily to school.

A cooperative nursery on this campus, with mothers or fathers responsible for the children a half-day out of five would permit women to work or attend classes and study freely, would give their children other children and adults to relate to, and would let men share in the socialization of children. In Halifax and the rest of Canada, day-care centers or baby-sitters make it not worthwhile to get low-paying jobs which are all that are available to women in the community.

JOBS

Women cannot be independent or autonomous intellectually, emotionally and socially, without being economically independent. We therefore must organize for:

1) EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK. Even in occupations where both men and women are underpaid (i.e. clerical), women make much less than men who do exactly the same work.

2) EQUAL WORK itself. In spite of automation and mechanization which remove the necessity for physical strength from most jobs, most jobs, and promotions with jobs, are still closed to women.



One guy got
her on
the first try.

3) JOB SECURITY. The number of women who are not working — the "hidden" reserve labour pool of unemployed women in the home — helps keep women workers in an insecure position. Women are always last hired and first fired.

4) TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION. Only about 15% of Canadian women workers are organized in trade unions, and the percentage is probably even less in Halifax. This kind of organization is clearly necessary to combat discrimination, low wages, and job insecurity.

WOMEN ALONE?

We cannot rely on others to fight our battles. Women have special problems in this society—and the problems of working women affect women as students and women in the home. All of us confront myths about and discrimination against women. It is both possible and necessary for women to organize as women independently.

At the same time, the problems of women relate to more general social problems. We cannot begin to open up jobs to women without confronting the general problem of unemployment. In opposing the channeling of women in the education system, we must work with students who oppose channeling of working-class and minority-group students. Our work towards societal responsibility for children helps to liberate men and children as well as women — and it is important that they understand that.

While we must organize independently, we must also have allies. Our struggle is a part of the struggle for an educational system that serves people rather than corporations; for a society where working people benefit from technology rather than become impoverished and unemployed; a society which considers children as people — important to all society — rather than as the property of individuals who are their parents.

MARIJUANA LAWS ATTACKED

The following is a paraphrase of a news release which we received from the Legalize Marijuana Committee, concerning a brief presented to the Hon. John Munro, Minister of Health and Welfare. Although the brief has already been presented, the committee asks for your support. Many people feel that the laws regarding marijuana should be changed but have expressed fear about openly expressing their belief. In commenting on this, Mr. Munro's office made two points. Firstly it is not an offense to use marijuana, it is an offense to possess or to traffic marijuana, and so by implication to say you have used marijuana cannot incriminate you directly. The second point is that the R.C.M.P. has not asked for and has not been sent any information about names and addresses of those expressing

support for this issue.

One of the purposes of the brief is to stress the fact that all the scientific studies done on Marijuana consistently conclude that it is a less dangerous drug than either tobacco or alcohol, and to suggest that the law should deal with it as such.

The committee has had wide support for its proposals. Judge William T. Little of the Juvenile and Family Court (Ont.) said that if he were to choose between marijuana and tobacco he would choose marijuana on the basis of scientific information about health hazards. Pierre Berton wrote, "Of course I am happy to support the brief, which is as a sensible one and I am fascinated to see how much work there has actually been done on marijuana". In July of this

year, the Canadian Home and School and Parents-Teachers Federation asked that marijuana be removed from the Narcotics Control Act and made the point that, "Imposition of severe penalties leads to alienation of youth from law-making and law-enforcing bodies of the country, and this alienation presents a severe threat to the future development of the nation."

Letters of support have come from Halifax to Vancouver, with the most interesting of these being a small unsigned postcard that was sent in response to a story in a local paper: "Having read your article . . . I fully agree with your view on pot. I am retired, 69 years old, and became acquainted with pot in 1923 and have used it more than once for the past 45 years. Whiskey, beer, and cigarets, I don't use."