

THE ISSUES

The Issues

by Susan Satterthwaite

The issues which feminists direct their efforts and attention toward are numerous and they cover virtually all aspects of society. This is because discrimination against women pervades all aspects of life, both public and private, sexism and inequality prevail in the home as well as in the workplace, and in all places it is equally wrong. It is not just the outward and visible signs of sexism and discrimination that feminists are trying to eliminate, but the deeper feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about the inferior status of women. One of the major issues of the feminist movement is the enforcement of the laws which prohibit sex discrimination in employment. Yes, it is illegal to refuse to hire a woman because she is just that a woman. And no, it is not a law that is readily

enforced. It is still a very common practise to refuse to hire a woman on the basis of her sex. Equal employment opportunity is the right of every individual, regardless of race, sex or religion. However, women must still fight to ensure that this right is guaranteed.

Another of the issues related to employment which is a very serious one is that of maternity leave rights. In many places it still remains understood that when a woman leaves her job to give birth, her employment is terminated. However, this situation is being rapidly remedied as more and more women stand up for their rights. Women are demanding to be protected by law so as to ensure that they will be able to return to their jobs within a reasonable time after childbirth. They are also demanding and rightly so, that they not lose any seniority or accumulated benefits

A FEMINIST'S PERSPECTIVE

which they may already have attained. Furthermore—feminists believe that women should be paid maternity leave as a form of social security or employee benefit or both.

In ever increasing numbers, women are entering the work force. For many, it is because they want to participate in the labor force and pursue a career. For others, actually 75% of employed women, it is a necessary step to support themselves and/or their children. Because of this, feminists are calling for the legal establishment of child care facilities on the same basis as are established parks, libraries and public schools which are adequate for the needs of all children and are available to everyone from every income level.

One of the most controversial issues, and one of the most important, concerns the right of women to control their own reproductive lives. Specifically, this includes doing away with restrictions on the availability of birth and control information and devices and removal of laws and regulations governing abortion. Women do have the right to decide for themselves in these issues. Their privacy and their dignity

is greatly violated when the control of their own bodies is in the hands of others who claim to know what is best for everyone.

These are by no means the only issues which concern feminists. Feminists protest the crude and degrading image of women portrayed in pornographic magazines. They protest the image of women portrayed in all media. They protest the issue of rape, in my opinion, the worst violence committed against women with particular attention to the difficulty in getting a rape conviction, the humiliation and degradation suffered by the woman, the victim of the rape, who decides to press charges, and the legality of rape in marriage.

The issues are almost endless and the problems exist everywhere. Every issue, no matter how big or how small it appears is a major issue. These discriminatory practices exist and we cannot allow them to persist. If we are to eradicate sex discrimination and the unequal treatment of women, we must know what the problems are and we must work together to rid our world of them now.

(Next week: Feminism and The Liberation of Men)

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