

Coronet

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SLAVE GIRLS of the NEW-LEFT

By Edythe Cudlipp

• *"The only alliance Abbie Hoffman wants with women is in bed."*

• *"They judged a girl's politics by whether sex was free."*

• *"These revolutionaries talk about equality but when it comes to practicing it, it's a different matter."*

• *"Stokely Carmichael said, 'The only position for a woman in the movement is prone.'"*

These bitter statements sum up the experiences of girls who went into social causes bright-eyed and idealistic. But in the New Left of activism and revolution, the bright eyes soon turn hard and the idealism of equality—equal hardship, equal labor, equal leadership for a cause—struggles to surmount an Everest of rumpled beds, coffee grounds, typewriter ribbons, and mimeographed leaflets.

Take Kipp Dawson, who entered the civil-rights movement in about 1959 in San Francisco. "The men treated us as if we were cute kids," she remembers. "Some men never accepted us. We were treated as secretaries. We were never full partners or negotiators, or weren't supposed to be.

"There was always a lot of talk outside the movement that women were in it to find husbands or experiment with black guys. Maybe some girls did but, in general because of the talk, we were conscious of trying to avoid the label. Then, too, there were not very many black women in the movement."

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Forgotten Women of the Revolution

In 1963, while working in the civil-rights movement, Kipp joined the Young Socialists Alliance. By 1967, she had moved into the antiwar movement, where the pattern was repeated. There was always the attempt to relegate women to sex, scrubbing up, or secretarial work. Even though she fought her way to a leadership position, she found many men felt slighted if they had to talk to a woman. She adds, "My name tended to make people think I was a man, which meant I had an easier time making an appointment to talk to the police or the press. Even so, when they saw me"—she's a petite, pretty brunette—"they sometimes refused to talk to me, or they wanted to talk about other things."

Another girl who had been involved in the civil-rights movement said, "A girl had to fight tooth and nail to get to the top. She had to be pushy and all the things she didn't want to be. With the liberals, all the ideals are rhetoric. They talk a lot; then they say, 'Equality is great, but not my chick.'"

The Young Socialist Alliance, which hews to the Marxist theories, has for its heroes Mao, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara. Ruthann Miller came to it after joining the peace movement at Fordham, gradually becoming more activist after changing to Columbia. "The real problem of the New Left is leadership," she feels. "People in general are followers, and women more so than men. Once a man takes over, women tend to let him. Men reflect society, with the result that women are oppressed even in radical societies. We have to develop leadership."

Will men let women become leaders? One girl says acidly, "The New Left is now trying to adapt and to involve women, but not because they believe women are equal. They're scared, because they're losing their coffee-makers, their bedmates, and their secretaries. Look at what happened to the girls in the civil-rights

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movement.”

That movement is proof that coffee isn't the only thing which burns when it simmers too long. A former Bennington College student who worked with SNCC in Atlanta recalls, “Women did the office work; men, the decision - making. Part of the reason was that we were white in a black organization, but we were treated no worse than the black women, maybe better. What happened to me and other women was that they wanted us to function as wives and we wanted to function as ourselves.” In other words, all that coffee was beginning to boil over and burn up. Disillusioned, she adds, “What good does it do if a woman does a job and yet is still only a sex object?”

Married to a black man, this girl's experience as a woman in the New Left is somewhat different from girls with white husbands. It's possible, but not easy, to persuade a white leftist to share the housework. It's more difficult to ask a black husband to subordinate his identity to his wife's. In an interracial situation, she returns home from the revolution to transform herself into a “middle-class wife who cooks and washes the dishes and puts out the garbage. Otherwise, I would destroy him as a man.”

The assumption of the people on the outside of the civil-rights movement that white girls went into it for sex reasons may be partially right. At least, many of the black women of the New Left don't want white girls around their men. Florynce Kennedy, a black woman lawyer who has led and organized many anti - establishment demonstrations, says, “White women are best advised to leave black men alone. Black women just don't trust white women around their men.”

The black women of the New Left may have to take even more of a back seat than the white woman. Florynce Kennedy points out that

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black women often had to be the family provider—with whites, a male role—because the men couldn't get jobs. This may also explain why, in the Black Panthers, women answer the phones, run the mimeograph machines, and keep in the background. In trying to arrange to meet some Black Panther girls, one girl asked worriedly over the phone, "Did Daruba [one of the male leaders in New York] say it was all right?"

Florynce Kennedy says, "In Black Power there is more male chauvinism than most people realize. Black women are inclined to slow down and let the men overtake them and are even determined to avoid taking the lead."

She might as well have quoted Stokely Carmichael. He said, "The only position for a woman in the movement is prone."

Carmichael's stance is taken up by another of the heroes of the New Left, Abbie Hoffman, one of the Chicago Seven. His books are printed by Grove Press, a small New York publishing house that specializes in erotic literature and films and in writers of the New Left. A few months ago, a group of nine girls, members of the New Left themselves and also of Women's Liberation, had a sit-in at Grove, protesting the erotic literature as being sexually degrading.

When Hoffman was asked how he felt about Women's Liberation, he commented that he didn't know about working with a movement that did not make allies. In fact, the only alliance he wanted with Women's Liberation was in bed. If Hoffman is the self-styled spokesman for the New Left, then he knew he was speaking for the other men, just as the girls knew he was putting them down. As a revolutionary, he is reactionary in matters of the heart.

He probably also summed up the feelings of the Weathermen. Just as the Black Panthers represent the

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more militant of the Black Power movement, the Weathermen represent the more militant of the white New Left. The Weathermen broke off from the Students for a Democratic Society because they wanted more violence and radicalism than others in the SDS did.

Robin Morgan, who describes her politics as New Left, is one of the organizers of the Women's Liberation movement. She calls the Weatherwomen the "heaviest" sex objects of any women in any revolutionary organization. She points to their harem mentality, where women exist only to serve the man, citing as proof their admiration of Charles Manson, the alleged mastermind behind the Sharon Tate killings, whose "family's" subservience went so far that they are alleged to have killed for him.

A Weatherwoman substantiates this theory, claiming that women are the more fit revolutionaries, since "Who suspects a well-dressed woman of carrying a gun or a bomb in her pocketbook?" Does this mean that Weatherwomen are more expendable than *Weathermen*? At one demonstration before the group formed cells and went underground, the Weatherwomen were placed in the vanguard to draw the brunt of the police action. This is another form of the women being given the "dirty work," playing on the idea that policemen would have enough male chauvinism to hesitate about hitting a woman.

Life within the cells is similar to many other communes of the New Left, where women do the cooking and serve the man. Marriage may be considered unnecessary but the bed rights of men over women is the male prerogative. A Weatherwoman wrote in one of the papers of the New Left that monogamous relationships weaken the movement, but once monogamy is rejected the movement becomes freer: "One-man,

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one-woman sex is an ego trip.”

She says, “We began to see concrete examples of how monogamy politically weakened women. One woman told how she and her boyfriend were working on a Weatherman summer project together. She contributed very little and sort of hung around. When her boyfriend went to jail for a month, she assumed some leadership . . . immediately on his return she retired into the background again.” She goes on plaintively. “We do not view ourselves as sex objects but as part of the revolution. Sex isn’t something to happen isolated from daily work.” Ironically, not so long ago, girls of some groups of the New Left were complaining about “gang rape,” the fact that it was always open season because girls “belonged to everyone.” Now, it seems that is what at least this one Weatherwoman wants.

The trouble is, when it comes to sex, men in the New Left are reactionary in other ways, too. A few years ago, some of the girls complained that the men wouldn’t let them use birth-control methods because they didn’t want to “spill their seed uselessly.”

Another of the New Left groups is the Venceremos Brigade that goes to Cuba to cut sugar cane for Castro. The first brigade was composed of 96 women and 110 men. Three of the girls who went exclaim enthusiastically about how the revolution has changed Cuba, then add, “We went as a part of the revolution. We found that men cut the cane, while women piled it. As workers, we lived in a camp where everything was taken care of by others—the cooking, the laundry. We shared equally in the benefits of being workers but not in the work. At first, we didn’t mind piling the cane, at least until we got used to the work. Then we wanted to cut, too. The Cubans put us down at first, because that was the way it was always done; the men cut, the women pile. Finally, they let us cut,

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too.”

Another brigade was told that the fuss was more a near revolt, on account of the “indefensible” show of male supremacy on the part of the Cubans. When the women were told it was a more “productive experience,” there was an “explosion.” Later brigades, therefore, had both men and women cutting and piling.

A girl on the first brigade was shocked when one of the Cubans began romanticizing over the beautiful sky. She says, “I didn’t think that romanticism belonged in a revolution. He said, ‘Revolutionaries are romantics.’” Men maybe, women, no.

Sex and revolution is a combination that is characteristic of the New Left. Former revolutionaries, such as Lenin, were ascetics, foregoing sex until they achieved their aims. Today’s revolutionaries see sex as part of the revolution; that is, the men take and the women give.

There’s give and take in another relationship of the New Left, too—the question of who is the provider. In a turnabout of middle-class society, often it is the girl who makes the living while the man devotes his time to the revolution. One sociologist believes this is an aping, although unconscious, of lower-class mores. As Florynce Kennedy points out, in a Negro family the wife often works because the man can’t get a job. In the New Left, the girl may better fit into society’s picture of an employee. She can tie her hair back, put on a skirt and the other accouterments of a “wage slave.” The boy, on the other hand, cannot change his image or shave his beard as easily. Ironically, the girl who’s a wage slave by day is just as much “unliberated” at night; she changes one kind of chains for another, while the man is free to ponder, laze in bed, think, and lead.

According to one sociologist, marriages or man-woman relationships

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have this characteristic in the New Left because revolutionary men marry up in social class while women marry down: The girls are classified by working-class norms and, because of the attitude toward sex, even below the status of a decent working girl. They are more on the level of a prostitute. Not only are they inferior but so inferior that they are undeserving of protection, which would account for the reason why the Weatherwomen were put in front to absorb the blows, a case in some instances of men biting the hand that feeds them.

Another authority, Dr. Ethel Alpenfels, whose field is educational anthropology and sociology at New York University, believes that the forming of communes is basically a search for a family relationship. "Regardless of how liberated the young people are, they come to the point that the family organization is still the best way to live—and they want their privacy, too."

The putting-down of women in the New Left has had one aspect the men didn't expect. Their revolutionary dreams and ideals frustrated, many middle-class girls are turning to the women's liberation movement.

Robin Morgan, a former Reform Democrat, a worker in SNCC and CORE, and member of the New Left, explains, "I found to my sadness that the vision of the new society and the revolutionary consciousness didn't include women. Women typed speeches for men, they didn't give them. Women brewed coffee for men to drink. At the SDS convention in 1967, the women tried to put a woman's plank in the platform. They were laughed at and had tomatoes thrown at them. In the New Left, the men judge a woman on whether the sex was free."

She calls it "a counterfeit left, male-dominated cracked-glass reflection of the Amerikan [sic] nightmare. Women are the real left."

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In the New Left, some people — men — are more equal than others. The revolutionary girl is distinguished from her male counterpart by one significant difference. The male can cut his hair, shave his beard, and step back into the society he condemns. In trying to help the oppressed, the girls found they wear a uniform that they can't remove any more than the blacks can remove their skin. They can't remove their sex—and the men make use of it only too well.



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