

## History of THE FEMINISTS

On October 17, 1968, in New York City, a group of feminists decided to begin a new kind of feminist movement: radical feminism. Most of us had been crossing organizational lines during the past year in an attempt to formulate an adequate solution to the persecution of women. But it finally became evident that what we were groping for was not the sum of current ideas on women but an approach altogether new not only to feminism but to political theory as well.

We decided to operate under the transitional name of the day of our beginning, October 17th, until we were prepared to outline our analysis of the class condition of women and its implications and to present our program for the elimination of that class condition. At the end of the summer, 1969, we presented our preliminary analysis and plan of action, and announced the formation of our organization: THE FEMINISTS\*.

Just as we were about to begin actions on the basis of our analysis, a split occurred in THE FEMINISTS. Disagreements in theory which had escaped unnoticed or remained unclear during our work on analysis emerged immediately and decisively when we were about to begin to act publicly. The split was not a dichotomy, since there was no general agreement on several issues among individuals who broke away. The issues, however, most clearly defined by the split were (1) our stand on marriage and its key position in the oppression of women, (2) the responsibility of all men, individually and collectively, in our oppression, (3) the importance of the equality issue in the women's movement, and (4) the necessity for developing discipline and self-responsibility among all feminists for the success of the movement. The women who split off from THE FEMINISTS joined other groups in the movement or formed new groups on the basis of their differences with us. Though reduced in number after the split, we were able to move out more swiftly on the strength of our most radical conclusions.

Our first action took place on September 23, 1969, when five representatives of THE FEMINISTS appeared at the Marriage License Bureau and at City Hall to charge these offices with fraud and force, respectively, exercised against women in marriage. We chose marriage as our first point of attack because it is one of the essential institutions of our oppression, the model for our oppression throughout society, and because this institution directly affects more women than any other. Our purpose in this action was to inform women of the true nature of marriage (concealed from them by men), that marriage is for women what slavery was for blacks: confinement to a function incompatible with a

\*formerly known as the October 17th Movement

free political existence. Education on marriage is the first step toward the overthrowing of that institution by women themselves, and since September we have taken every opportunity to reach women with the facts about marriage.

In October, 1969, a lawsuit was brought against the State of New York by five women lawyers. The basis of the lawsuit is the contradiction between abortion laws of any kind and the U. S. Constitution. There are 400 plaintiffs in the case; THE FEMINISTS is the only women's group so far to register as a plaintiff. The main points presented by the plaintiffs are: that abortion laws are an invasion of women's privacy in matters of marriage, sex, and the family; that these laws curtail the right to free speech since it is presently illegal to give out information on the availability of abortions; that present abortion laws discriminate against poor women especially; and finally, that abortion laws amount to forced pregnancy exercised on women by the state since women are thereby denied the right to choose whether or not to bear children. At present (December, 1969), the case is being heard by a three-judge panel. If the case is won, it may mean the repeal of all state abortion laws similar to the New York law.

In accordance with our stand on abortion as a fundamental human right, THE FEMINISTS has continued to support the efforts of the oft-imprisoned abortionist, Dr. Nathan Rappaport, and to demonstrate in his behalf at his latest series of hearings. He is presently being railroaded by the State because of his efforts to help a woman who was the victim of an amateur abortionist and who subsequently died as a result of the ineptitude of that abortionist and the refusal of two hospitals to give her any assistance.

In November, 1969, THE FEMINISTS met with other groups and individual feminists from the northeast section of the U. S. at the NOW Regional Conference, called The Congress to Unite Women, which took place in New York City. Although originally a part of the planning committee for the conference, THE FEMINISTS was forced to withdraw from that committee because of its disregard of the Lot System (to which the planning committee had previously agreed) in picking chairwomen for the conference, and in recognizing speakers from the floor. We were also unable to join the Coalition coming out of the conference because of its consistent policy of reformism in its final resolutions which we considered contrary to the aims of revolution, and because of its refusal to act in accordance with the principle of equality among women or to recognize this issue as central to the liberation of all women.

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