

NOTES FROM THE LOWER CLASSES II

by Josephine Cleary

That the women's liberation struggle is primarily a concern of upper-class women is clearly evident in the almost total absence of women from what are called the "lower socio-economic levels." (That translates into the despised majority.) From the very first session I attended (Columbia Liberation school) I was struck by the sameness of the women present: 99 to 100% white, apparently well-off financially, mostly young, educated to the nth degree, blissfully ignorant of the demanding call of the alarm clock signifying the start of another day of demeaning drudgery.

What is disturbing about this, is that historically this group has subverted every attempt at revolution, everywhere in the world. The most hideous example of this that comes to mind is that set by the Squire of Hyde Park, FDR, who introduced serfdom in the US in 1934. One can easily imagine the landed squire looking backwards to some good old days for his own kind and deciding that having an entire sub-class existing on the tolerance of their betters was really ideal, so why not father it? Significantly, this contemptuous attitude towards the working class received the most praise, not from the landed gentry, not from the underprivileged third who were forced to swallow it, but from the middle and upper-middle class groups, "that damned compact majority" as Ibsen called them.

Since the goal of our group is the destruction of every existing institution sired by males, the first of which very likely was the creation of a lower class status for all women, the effects of class distinctions are especially important. Lower class people generally, females particularly, grow up accustomed to being told. After a number of years of this any assertiveness one might have had is pretty well gone. This makes us ripe for being led--where the upper class has always led us, right up the creek. The physical, cultural, social advantages accruing to all members of the better classes manifest themselves in every conceivable way. An easy, poised manner. The self-confidence of always having felt in. The supposed obligation on their part to impart their uplifting mores (thrift is one) to the great unwashed. Ad nauseum. Conditioned from childhood to accept the standards of the ruling group as the ideal toward which we should aim, we have repeatedly fallen into the trap set for us. So what we are concerned with here is how to prevent this happening in this group.

One way, I think, is personally overcoming some unique heritage of our lower-class consciousness. In my own case, there are so many I'll be occupied for the rest of my life. There's height (small, little are derogatory words); age (that old bag, crone, the Bar Mitzvah mother, matronly, again all derogatory); lack of formal education; early wife/motherhood, and many, many others too numerous to mention. The strength to do this, hopefully, will come from the group. Having acquired the strength, and equipped with the knowledge that no upper class person has ever done anything but reinforce the class structure in another way, we may be able to get our ideas across to the women who have the most to gain from the overthrow of male rule, those like us who eke out an existence at the bottom of the barrel.

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