



-- L. Susan Brown
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Few would quarrel with the statement that societal changes resulting from feminist struggle have been nothing short of profound. These changes have been brought about by the efforts of women belonging to the "first wave" of feminism in the early 1900s and, more recently, by the "second wave" of women's struggle that emerged in the 1960s and continues to this day. It is hard to think of even one aspect of our lives that has not been touched in some way by the women's movement. We need only to look at the lives of our own mothers to see how much things have changed in the last 20 years. The restrictions that my mother faced first as a girl and then as a woman in the 1940s and 1950s have been largely overcome by women who fought against the confines of sexism. Today, women are by and large recognized as legitimate citizens of our society and are seen by most as valuable members of the community in their own right.

Women's fight for legitimacy has not been easy. It has been met with great resistance, not only by men, but also by some women. The fact that men as a group have resisted women's emancipation led to the establishment of a separate women's movement. If we look back to the 1960s, for example, we can see that the sexism within the New Left forced women to look elsewhere for satisfying political involvement. As Angela Miles notes:

The ringing statements of early feminist manifestos as well as subsequent analyses of the period show clearly that feminists left male dominated groups, not from weakness but from positions of strength and experience, to carry forward a struggle for a cultural, economic, social and sexual revolution that had faltered on men's refusal to address their own power over women.

The humanism of the New Left, like the ideology of mainstream society, was male-defined. The contradiction was great -- marxists, anarchists, trotskysts, maoists, and others were all ostensibly fighting for human liberation, but they undertook this fight without confronting sexism. The New Left simply did not take women as women seriously. These movements drove women out of the left because the fundamental conception of the human being within the left was overwhelmingly male. Issues like women's sexual and intellectual freedom, childcare, housework, violence against women and children, sexual harassment, and the objectification of women were not addressed in any serious way by the male left. Left politics was on the whole more concerned with the theory and practice of toppling governments or seizing power than with looking after children. This is not to say that left-wing politics accomplished nothing during the 1960s; in fact, the left was responsible for a critical re-evaluation of late capitalism which shook the very foundations of our society. The movement, at once playful and deadly serious, challenged the authority of the state to send men to war, challenged the authority of the capitalist to steal from workers, and challenged the right of the church to control sexuality. What it did not challenge was the right of men to exercise power over "their" women. On the whole, left-wing men did not question their own dubious right to define the human race in their image -- as male. As a result, a women's movement emerged not only in opposition to the

sexism of the dominant culture, but also in response to the lack of a nonsexist and thereby truly humanist left.

The struggle by women for liberation has emerged out of a myriad of contexts and situations, both personal and political. Some women came to feminism through left-wing politics: marxism, anarchism or socialism, for example. Other women embraced feminism because, trapped in suburban kitchens, they confronted and overcame what in 1963 Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name" by giving it a name: male domination. Still others found themselves involved in the women's movement because it allowed an alternative to heterosexuality. There are probably as many reasons for joining the women's movement as there are women. This has resulted in a wonderfully diverse collection of groups and tendencies within the feminist movement. Among others, these include marxist-feminists, socialist feminists, radical feminists, lesbian separatists, anarchy-feminists, integrative feminists, liberal feminists and eco-feminists. Not only do these various groups differ from one another, but even within groups there exist subtle and not-so-subtle differences and factions. This fluid, ever-changing pluralism, which resists rigid categorization, is one of the movement's strengths, while simultaneously posing challenging analytical problems for theorists concerned with understanding the feminist movement. Therefore, instead of becoming mired in a tiring and unrewarding discussion of what divides the women's movement, it is more useful to identify what these various groups have in common. What unites these women as feminists is their shared belief that women in our society are unfairly disadvantaged relative to men. While there is much disagreement over the causes, effects, and possible solutions to the domination of women by men, all feminists are united in their refusal to accept women's subordination as unchangeable.

This refusal has had enormous effects on the practice of politics in our society. Marxists, socialists, liberals, even mainstream politicians must now in some way or other address the concerns put forth by feminists. While some of the changes have been symbolic, like the decreasing use of sexist language in public, other changes such as the increased availability of birth control and abortion has been undeniably concrete. These changes are due to the militancy of the women's movement over the past twenty years, a militancy that has demonstrated very clearly that if men do not treat women as full members of the human species, we will simply go elsewhere. And go elsewhere we did -- into our consciousness-raising groups, our women-only study sessions, our feminist action committees, our autonomous, self-run women's movement.

This creation by women of a movement for women provided the opportunity for many of us to be taken seriously for the first time in our lives. Instead of fighting with left-wing men to put childcare on the agenda, we wrote the agenda ourselves. This, I believe, is the most important achievement of the women's movement -- women did not ask for freedom, we took it. As Emma Goldman boldly wrote:

The right to vote, or equal civil rights, may be good demands, but true emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in courts. It begins in woman's soul. History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn that lesson, that she realize that her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches.

The feminist movement has indeed freed "woman's soul", certainly within the movement itself. That this achievement has permeated the rest of the left, and to a lesser extent mainstream society, is a testament to the vitality and strength of women's struggle.

While acknowledging these accomplishments, I would like to turn now to what I see an inherent limitation of the feminist movement: the lack of an intrinsic critique of power and domination per se. The absence of such a critique in the core of feminist thought results in the inability of feminism as a whole either to envision or to create a world where all people can be free. I would like to suggest that the political philosophy of anarchism, with its implicit critique of power, offers an alternative to feminism in the ongoing struggle for human liberation.

To speak of power as a thing or phenomenon that can exist independent of human consciousness is to profoundly misunderstand the whole problem of power itself. Power exists as a relationship between

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individual human beings whereby one individual attempts to negate the free will of another. When the will of one has been successfully imposed upon another, then there exists a situation of domination. That power is a relationship between two parties -- the oppressor and the oppressed -- and not something metaphysical or otherwise beyond the grasp and control of human individuals, is clearly understood by anarchist thinkers.

In the early part of this century, Emma Goldman quoted these lines from John Henry Mackay's poem in her essay "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For":

*I am an Anarchist! Wherefore I will
Not rule, and also ruled I will not be!*

These words clearly and succinctly express the integrity that is fundamental to the anarchist position -- integrity born out of the double imperative to both denounce and renounce the exercise of power. Anarchist political philosophy is based upon the belief that people are capable of self-determination, that self-determination is the foundation for human freedom, and that power relationships undermine self-determination and therefore must be constantly opposed. This uncompromising anti-authoritarianism is what makes anarchism so compelling to its adherents, both as a philosophy and as a political movement. Anarchists understand that freedom is grounded in the refusal of the individual to exercise power over others coupled with the opposition of the individual to restrictions by any external authority. Thus, anarchists challenge any form of organization or relationship which fosters the exercise of power and domination. For instance, anarchists oppose the State because the act of governing depends upon the exercise of power, whether it be of monarchs over their subjects or, as in the case of a democracy, of the majority over the minority. Anarchists also rally against the institution of organized religion, which they regard as both implicitly and explicitly engendering relations of hierarchy and domination. Compulsory education, sexual repression, censorship, private property, alienated labour, child abuse -- all these are relationships of power that anarchists critically challenge.

Of course, many expressions of power exist in our society other than those I have just listed; what distinguishes the anarchist from other political activists is that the anarchist opposes them all. This condemnation of power per se is fundamental to the anarchist position and gives it a critical impetus that takes it beyond traditional political movements. The feminist movement, with its central concern the liberation of women, does not contain within itself the larger critique of power that is basic to anarchism. What I hope to demonstrate below is that without an implicit condemnation of power as such, feminism ultimately fails by limiting itself to an incomplete struggle for liberation.

In my view, it is absolutely necessary that an explicit anti-authoritarianism be present in a political philosophy if it is to bring about true human liberation. No hierarchy is acceptable, no ruler is allowable, no domination is justifiable in a free society. Clearly, if this anti-authoritarian principle is not fundamental to a political philosophy, then domination and hierarchy can exist in theory and practice without presenting a crisis. As a movement, feminism does not have as a defining characteristic an anti-authoritarian critique of power and domination; therefore, as a political philosophy, it is insufficient for the liberation of all people.

Of course it is possible to point to various groups and individuals within feminism who are critics of power, domination, and hierarchy. The feminist writer Marilyn French, for instance, criticizes power in her book *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* and advocates building a new world on what she argues is the opposite of power -- pleasure. Another feminist writer, Starhawk, likewise criticizes the exercise of what she calls "power-over" and advocates the use of consensus decision-making as one means to counter power. Angela Miles, in her essay "Feminist Radicalism in the 1980s", argues for

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an "integrative" feminism that opposes all forms of domination. These are only three examples of feminist thinkers who consciously oppose the exercise of power and domination; there exist many others.

However, while one can point to examples of feminist thought that focus on the problem of power, this does not indicate in any sense that a critique of power is necessary or integral to feminist theory taken as a whole. In other words, just as one can be a feminist and oppose power like the three writers cited above, it is also possible and not inconsistent for a feminist to embrace the use of power and advocate domination without relinquishing the right to be a feminist. For example, in her essay "The Future -- If There Is One -- Is Female", Sally Miller Gearhart

Friedan, feminist author of *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Second Stage*, argues in both books that the struggle for and the achievement of women's equality should take place without disturbing the existing hierarchies of the state and the capitalist economic system. Friedan has no quarrel with economic or political power -- she simply wants men and women to be able to compete for power on an equal footing. Gearhart, Freeman, Friedan -- all three are undeniably feminist, and all three accept power as part of their world view. This acceptance of power does not in any way disqualify them from being feminists. Feminism may allow for a critique of power, but a critique of power is not necessary to feminism.

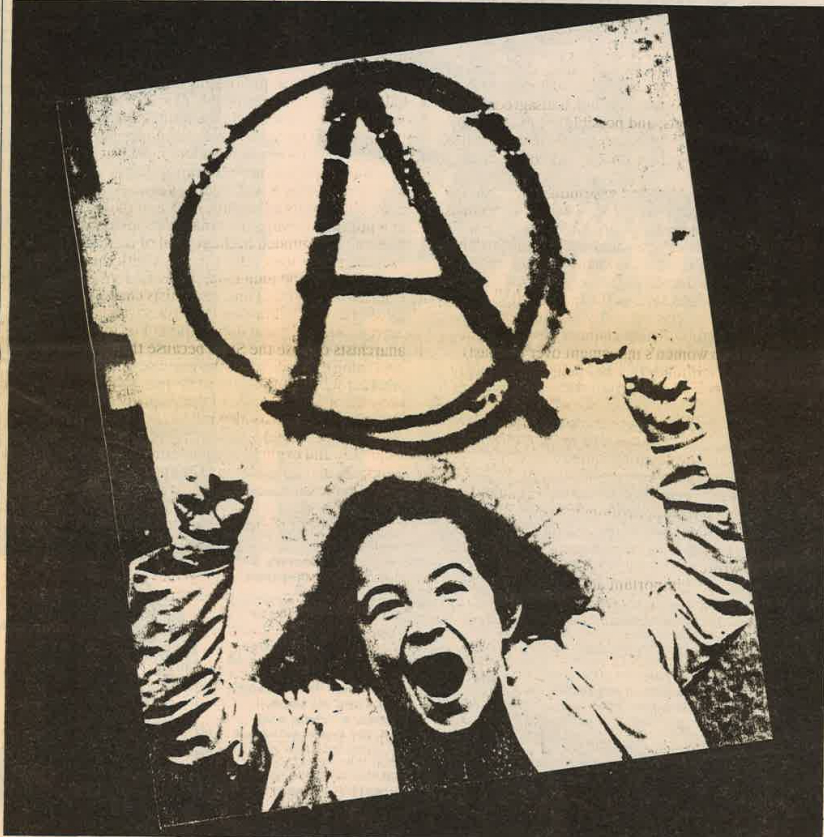
the iniquity of the oppression of women by men; anarchism opposes oppression of all kinds. Certainly some feminists look beyond sexism to a wider, anarchistic critique of power; however, this wider critique is not at all necessary to feminism.

Since it is possible, and in fact quite likely, that one could be a feminist without sharing the anarchist sensibility towards power, then it is logical to ask whether it is possible to be an anarchist without being a feminist. In other words, can anarchism accommodate the oppression of women without contradicting itself? As anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes *all* relationships of power, it is inherently feminist. An anarchist who supports male domination contradicts the implicit critique of power which is the fundamental principle upon which all of anarchism is built. Sexist anarchists do indeed exist, but only by virtue of directly contradicting their own anarchism. This contradiction leaves sexist anarchists open to criticism on their own terms. Anarchism must be feminist if it is to remain self-consistent.

Not only is anarchism inherently feminist, but also it goes beyond feminism in its fundamental opposition to all forms of power, hierarchy, and domination. Anarchism transcends and contains feminism in its critique of power. This implicit opposition to the exercise of power gives anarchism a wider mandate, so to speak, than feminism or other liberatory movements such as marxism. Anarchist political philosophy and practice is free to critically oppose any situation of oppression. While race, class, age, gender, sexuality, or ability, for instance, may pose analytical problems for other movements, anarchism is capable of dealing with all these issues as legitimate because of its *fundamental commitment to freedom for all people*. No one oppression is given special status in anarchism -- *all* oppression is equally undesirable. Anarchism fights for human freedom against each and every form of power and domination, not just a particular historical manifestation of power. This gives anarchism a flexibility not available to any other movements. Not only can anarchism address any form of oppression that exists today, it is versatile enough to be able to respond to any form of oppression that may emerge in the future. If tomorrow, for instance, left-handed people were proclaimed to be criminals for their lack of right-handedness, anarchists would have to oppose such oppression in order to remain true to anarchism's underlying anti-authoritarian principles. It is this fundamental anti-authoritarianism that leads anarchists to fight for the dignity and freedom of such groups as women, people of colour, gays and lesbians, people with AIDS, the differently abled, the poor, and the homeless, among others. Anarchism goes beyond other liberatory movements in opposing oppression in whatever form it takes, without assigning priority to one oppression over another.

Unlike most other political movements, anarchism understands that all oppressions are mutually reinforcing; therefore it urges that the liberation struggle take place on many fronts at once. Thus some anarchists concentrate on challenging state power, others focus on opposing male domination, and still others spend their energy fighting against capitalist exploitation, compulsory heterosexuality, organized religion, and a myriad of other causes. The anarchist movement accommodates a diversity of anti-authoritarian struggles, and while each is recognized as being essential to the establishment of a truly free society, none is placed as prior to or more important than the others. Anarchism fights all oppression in all its forms.

Anarchism goes beyond feminism, indeed beyond most other liberatory movements, in its relentless quest for human freedom. Certainly there are people working within other movements who share anarchism's aversion to power; however, any political movement that does not have at its core an anti-authoritarian critique of power leaves itself open to anarchist questioning. The gift of anarchism lies in this critique -- a thoughtful but relentless questioning of authority and power, one which seeks to create a world where all may live in freedom.



argues for the establishment of a matriarchy; she says we must "begin thinking of flipping the coin, of making the exchange of power, of building the ideology of female primacy and control." A matriarchy, like a patriarchy, is based on power; the fact that in a matriarchy *women* hold the power does not negate the fact that power is still being exercised. Jo Freeman, in her article "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", argues that feminists must abandon their small leaderless groups in favour of designated power and a strong, centralized feminist organization. In place of small grassroots groups that use consensus to make decisions, Freeman advocates large-scale democratic decision-making, without questioning the tyranny of the majority over the minority that is inevitable in any democratic form of organization. For Freeman, if feminism is to be successful, then "some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found." Clearly, Freeman sees nothing wrong with women participating in forms of politics which are based on the exercise of domination and power. Betty

In spite of the fact that some feminists clearly embrace the use of power, the argument has been made by certain theorists that feminism is inherently anarchistic. For instance, Lynne Farrow takes this position when she claims that "Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches." Peggy Kornegger also asserts an identity between the two movements when she states, "Feminists have been unconscious anarchists for years." Both Farrow and Kornegger, in their enthusiasm to link feminism with anarchism, ignore groups and individuals within the women's movement who are decidedly "archic", that is who endorse the use of power in both theory and practice. By collapsing anarchism and feminism into one movement, Kornegger and Farrow disregard the rich diversity of perspectives that make up the feminist movement, at the same time committing a grave injustice to anarchism by rendering it redundant. If "Feminism practices what Anarchism preaches," who needs anarchism anyway? In fact, feminism and anarchism are not identical movements as Farrow and Kornegger suggest; feminism as a whole recognizes