

In Defense of the Women's Movement



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The three articles reprinted herein appeared in *The Militant* on February 13, 1970, December 12, 1969, and February 6, 1970, respectively.

Comune di Padova
Biblioteche

Cod. Bibl. PUVSS

SID L011199309

INV 1058673

A MERIT PAMPHLET

Pathfinder Press, Inc.
873 Broadway
New York, N. Y. 10003

First Printing, May 1970

Second Printing, January 1971

Manufactured in the United States of America



REPLY TO DR. BENJAMIN SPOCK

BY RUTHANN MILLER

"I think Blacks are physically designed in a special way in their very muscles and bones."

"Whites are the fighters, the builders, the trap-makers, the ones who think mechanically and abstractly. Blacks have stayed realistic, personal, more conservative."

"Blacks welcome the fact that whites stay more analytic and cool."

These are typical of the kind of racist statements made against Black people in this country for centuries, the arguments used to "prove" their inferiority. With the growth of the struggle for Black and Third World liberation, such crude statements of bigotry have become less common, at least in public life.

The ignorance and misconceptions about the oppressed condition of women, however, are still so deep in this society that such a respected and well-known humanitarian as Dr. Benjamin Spock was capable of expressing all the above abysmally backward, chauvinistic views about women.

Go back and reread the quotations at the beginning of this article. They are *almost* word-for-word statements made by Dr. Spock in a January 28, 1970, *New York Times* interview where he gives his views on women. I say "almost" because I substituted the word "Blacks" each place he used the word "women" and "whites" each place he used "men" to drive home the meaning of what he is saying.

In the interview, Spock accuses the women's liberation movement and modern women in general of discounting the "exciting and creative" work of rearing children in favor of becoming "over-intellectualized and academic," of stepping out of their role as mothers.

In his anxiety to argue this point, he even seems to lose a little of the "cool" which he says is so characteristic of men in general. "If our society can get it through its noodle that rearing children is exciting and creative work, we'll have accomplished something useful," he exhorts. "If we don't, as more and more women go to college, who the hell is going to take care of the children?"

Leaving aside for a moment the implication that women who

want to have children should renounce serious intellectual pursuits, let us consider the question of who it is in this society who has really ignored and discounted the needs of children for education and proper care. It is not the women's liberation movement.

The only requirement in capitalist society for taking on the responsibility of caring for infants and children is the distinction of having a uterus. Under this system, children are at the complete mercy of whatever parents they happen to be born to, regardless of their ability (or desire) to raise them.

The care of babies and small children is solely the responsibility of each competitive, isolated family. Each father and mother is expected to provide for and be concerned about "their" children only, regardless of whether society provides the jobs or financial assistance necessary to do this. Some children starve, while others get the best food, clothing and education available. Untold numbers of small children are left completely unattended each day because their mothers have to work and no nurseries are available.

What the women's liberation movement is saying is that the job of caring for children is so important to society as a whole that the total resources of the country should be made available to all children, that each child should not have to depend on the limited resources of isolated families, of individual women. We say that we, not Dr. Spock, are fighting for the right of children to the best care as part of our struggle for the right of women to full lives as human beings.

In the wealthiest country in the world, there is now little recognition of the rights of children. There is no serious consideration, for example, of the vast body of accumulated knowledge which shows the need for children to come into contact with many different adult male and female models. There is no consideration of the widespread psychological damage done to children as a result of their complete dependence on one or two individual, often neurotic, adults. (Being shut up in the house all day, forced to concentrate on boring, repetitive household chores, is often enough in itself to cause a mother severe psychological damage.)

In Israel, the Soviet Union and Cuba, which have experimented with raising children communally, and in similar experiments in this country, children have been shown to thrive in such an atmosphere. Dr. Spock admits these experiments have worked out well. But, he says, "taking care of other people's children

is considered responsible and respectable there—but not in the United States."

In the USSR and Cuba, the modest advances in communal child care have come as a result of the abolition of capitalism and the need to involve the maximum number of the population, including women, in the productive process. In capitalist Israel, the socialized child-rearing programs have been associated with the cooperative farming which exists in some areas.

But, in the U. S. and other advanced capitalist countries, women workers are a distinctly marginal part of the labor force, and the capitalist rulers see little need for the development of facilities which would provide freedom for the mother and care for children. New York, the richest city in the richest country in the world, has fewer nursery facilities than tiny, underdeveloped Cuba.

When social and economic priorities are determined by the profit system, as in the U. S., it is not surprising that, as Dr. Spock puts it, "taking care of other people's children" is not considered "respectable." It is to the advantage of the employers to keep the mothers in the home. This not only relieves them of any financial responsibility for child care and other facilities for children, but it provides the rationale for maintaining women as a reserve labor pool, paid less and hired and fired according to the needs of the employers.

Similarly, the needs of women are subordinated by Spock to the needs of capitalism: "What I say is that children are going to have to be reared, and you ought to have women growing up to feel this is important, womanly work." In order to do this, he says we must seek out the flaw in the educational system which is allowing women to think of themselves as other than mothers. History courses should "emphasize Napoleon's mother, as well as Napoleon" and we should endeavor to make motherhood more appealing.

This is precisely what the educational system does now. The reason women are rebelling now is not due to a breakdown in educating women in their role, but rather it is a product of the general radicalization in this country which has awakened women to their economic, cultural and social oppression. This radicalization is questioning all the basic institutions of this society which subordinate human needs to the needs of capitalism.

It is significant that at the very time he is criticizing the efforts of women to overcome their oppression, Dr. Spock has been actively involved in building the antiwar movement and other

movements which champion the right of Vietnamese, Black and Third World peoples to self-determination. What he and others in the movement must learn is that women are no different from other oppressed groups in this respect. It is we who must determine for ourselves what our identity is, what our goals and needs are as human beings. It is women who are in the best position to know concretely how the present family system has stultified our lives, and who must take the lead in the struggle to build an alternative to it.

REPLY TO PETE HAMILL OF THE N.Y. POST

BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

Pete Hamill, the popular *New York Post* columnist of liberal reputation, seems always to be for the rights of the underdog — until those who are being oppressed begin to organize and fight for their own liberation. Then he gets uneasy, or perhaps you might say scared — and all of a sudden he doesn't appear quite so "liberal" anymore.

We saw this transformation before when Hamill began getting scared by the militancy of the black liberation struggle. He discovered that black nationalism was really racism in reverse, and that he, as a "friend" of black people, didn't like it.

Now Hamill is feeling threatened by the growing women's liberation movement, and showing his true colors once more. He devoted his November 26 column to a disgracefully bigoted attack on the women who organized and participated in the Congress to Unite Women (see *The Militant*, December 5). Being broadminded, Hamill explained that he could go along with the anti-Miss America demonstrations, that he could only cheer and applaud the ban-the-bra movement and was all for burning girdles, "that modern chastity belt."

But, he considers that things are really getting out of hand now that women are organizing to demand such society-shaking changes as free twenty-four-hour childcare programs, repeal of abortion laws, opening of trade schools and all-male unions to women, and women's studies programs in the universities.

"I would like to see a woman in the ironworkers union, just for laughs, but I'd much rather see black males get into that union first," Hamill piously exclaims, trying to divide the black liberation movement and the women's liberation movement by suggesting that women's liberation is a threat to black men and

women, rather than a potential ally. (And what's so funny about a woman ironworker?)

"I suppose Women's Studies would provide some kind of intellectual facade for hatred on the basis of sex, and might have some therapeutic value, but Joseph Conrad would still be a better writer than Jane Austen, and Caesar more important to history than Cleopatra." Those, of course, are the opinions of Pete Hamill, white American male journalist, and, to put it kindly, his opinions are, at best, debatable. But it should also be added, in case Hamill didn't know, that Jane Austen and Cleopatra hardly exhaust the list of women who have played important roles in history.

If women are today growing angry because they are learning that textbooks written by men like Pete Hamill have blatantly lied about women for centuries—in order to reinforce women's socially created inferiority complex—Hamill can call it anything he likes, but it is a thoroughly progressive and justified anger. If it were to become a "hatred for men on the basis of sex," the reactionary male chauvinist "friends of women" like Pete Hamill would well be able to take a large measure of the credit. And, as if to add injury to insult, Hamill reserves some of his most ignorant and backward remarks for an attack on abortion reform!

"In the age of the pill, it is a rare or stupid girl who gets herself pregnant; if a girl shares pleasure, why should she not face the consequences? (Rape, extreme youth, medical reasons, etc., are, of course, exceptions.) At what point does life become sacred? And how does the State legislate away a life?"

Hamill's chauvinist attitude toward women, inferior and "stupid" beings whose social function is to reproduce, screams out from every sentence.

There are an estimated million to million and a half illegal abortions in the U. S. every year. For every woman who succeeds in getting an abortion, one can conservatively estimate that there are another one or two who cannot afford an abortion, or decide not to face the serious health risks entailed by an illegal abortion, often under unsanitary conditions. Yet in 1967 there were only three and a half million births in the U. S. Clearly, the majority of pregnancies are unwanted ones—hardly a "rare" occurrence.

There are millions of women who are unable to use the most effective means of birth control due to their side effects, their cost, or their unavailability—to say nothing of the health risks they entail, about which very little is known in reality.

Hamill's statement about "stupid girls" and unwanted pregnancies simply translates into the fact that he thinks the average woman is not as intelligent as the average male. It's an attitude held by most men (who are not anxious to take any "risks" for their "pleasure").

The only thing unusual is that most men who consider themselves enlightened and liberal-minded would be embarrassed to say what Hamill does, much less put it in print.

How about the question of "sacred life"? It's an argument invariably put forward by the most reactionary institutions and forces in society—like the Catholic hierarchy which wars against birth control while simultaneously supporting the "war against communism" in Vietnam, giving its blessing to a government that commits mass murder and other war crimes. Such defenders of "sacred life" remain silent while Vietnamese infants and children are murdered, while millions of children the world over die of starvation. But when a woman wants an abortion, they howl "life is sacred."

What about the "sacredness" of the life of the mother, her right to live as she wishes, without children if she prefers? Why should her life—either physically, mentally, socially, artistically, intellectually—be destroyed, sacrificed to a cluster of cells? It's all part of the old myth that a woman gains fulfillment only in being submissive and self-deprecating and by subordinating her needs, her life, her interests, to the whims of others.

The right of a woman to control her own body cuts deep in this society because it is precondition number one to the liberation of women. And that is precisely what terrifies the men like Pete Hamill who can feel their identity, their whole social order built on male supremacy, crumbling at their feet.

REPLY TO CLARA COLON OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Is the Family a Force for Progress?

BY EVELYN REED

As women gain greater militancy, solidarity and determination in their ongoing struggle for liberation, they are also looking for answers to fundamental problems. One key question is the part played by marriage and the family in chaining women to their degraded, inferior status. The more they suspect that this sanctified institution is an instrument of their oppression,

the more they are inclined toward Marxist positions for understanding and a guide to action.

If they turn to the Communist Party's explanation of these matters, however, they will be sorely disappointed. Their position is neither communist nor Marxist. It is a liberalistic position that can be held by any reformist critic of American capitalist society. This is made explicit by Clara Colon in an article in the June 1969 *Political Affairs*, which voices the views of the Communist Party.

"The Family: Obsolete Idea or Revolutionary Force?" is the query posed in her title. Colon's answer is that woman's oppression is *not* rooted in the marriage and family institution, an assertion that runs directly counter to the views held by Marx and Engels themselves. What they outspokenly condemned as reactionary, she upholds as a "revolutionary force," and she sets about to explain why the CP has so much better an approach to the question than did the founders of Marxism. Let us examine her arguments.

Colon does not deny the Marxist proposition that the family is rooted in property relations, male supremacy and the subjugation of women to domestic servitude. "The family dominated by man's authority was developed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the man's prior right to the family property and his right to pass it on to his heirs." Thus, she says, "the bourgeois family with its roots in property relations comes in for a sharp tongue-lashing by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*."

Having made these theoretical concessions with regard to the fundamental basis of the family institution, Colon then proceeds to suggest some reforms which will halt its deterioration and prop it up. Male supremacy is its principal flaw and that must go. A good working man must learn how to be "*a good father and husband at home*" (Colon's emphasis). That means "not only helping with the home chores" but exchanging and sharing his experiences as an equal with the harassed homebound wife. The advocacy of this household reformation purportedly shows that Colon shares "wholeheartedly in the revulsion and resistance against male supremacy." (While implicitly accepting that "home chores" are basically women's work, in which men should be "helping.")

Even the flaw of male supremacy, however, does not alter the immense revolutionary virtues of marriage and its home ties in her view. She enthusiastically lauds them. Marriage "still holds

rich reserves of revolutionary vigor" and the family is "still in the process of dynamic development."

To prove her point, Colon spells out the ideal "family concept" in more detail. It differs in no wise from the old-fashioned lyrical bourgeois and even clerical preachments on the "holy family." It is "the place where elders and children alike had roots, where the children received their earliest training as social, ethical human beings, where they first learned the meaning of love and respect for fellow-humans." It is "a haven where the stresses of everyday life would be discussed and resolved, a source of personal warmth, affection, security. In most instances, despite male supremacy, the woman emerged as the soul and organizer of the home."

This is not exactly the way the family in capitalist society is described in the *Communist Manifesto*, to which Colon gives lip service. That document declared, "The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation." And again, "The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education, about the hallowed correlation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor."

Colon admits that the essential character of the family has not changed since 1848. It is still founded upon property relations, male supremacy and the subordination of women. "On the face of it, then," she says, "it would seem that the ancient oppressive institution of the family should be tossed onto the rubbish heap of history."

Not at all! According to this CP theoretician, everything changes in the course of history and the formerly oppressive patriarchal family has now been virtually transformed into its opposite. "Has the family by some miracle escaped this dynamic process of change and development? Has it always remained and is it today an instrument to uphold the status quo?" she asks. "Or is it a force for revolutionary progress?"

Some rebellious women would maintain, and Marxists would agree, that the family has indeed changed—it has gone from bad to worse. But Clara Colon thinks otherwise. According to her starry-eyed view, the family has changed from a reactionary institution serving the propertied class into a revolutionary force serving the best interests of the working mass.

How did this amazing transformation come about? "Let's get

below the surface," Colon invites us, "and see what happened to marriage and the family since the early dawn of civilization when it all began." Her great revelation is that love led to the transformation—a factor whose importance the unsentimental Marx and Engels were presumably too shortsighted and fuddy-duddy to detect.

"Enter love!" is the dramatic exclamation—and explanation of the CP historian of the family. "Originally the family concept contained not the slightest concern for personal feeling, emotional or sexual, between the two partners to a marriage. Whatever relationship of sex-love may have developed was purely accidental. Marriage was an economic arrangement, pure and simple . . . uniting the wealth of dynasties, strengthening the power of large landowners, without regard for the personal sentiments of the man and woman involved." Sex-love existed, as in the affairs of the aristocratic ladies of the middle ages who were pursued by impassioned knights while their husbands were away from the castles on the crusades. But marriages were made for propertied considerations and not for love.

Then, through some magical wand, love was inserted into the marriage relationship. Although sex-love began as "secret, illicit emotional relationships" between furtive lovers, it "later became the acknowledged essence of the marriage relationship" between the legally wedded pair. "A drastic change began developing with the introduction of individual sex-love into the relationship between man and wife," says Colon. In short, a formerly hard-bitten commercial institution had now become purified and sanctified by love.

This cleaned-up, virtuous institution was then passed on to the common people, including the proletariat of capitalist society. "Just when and how love entered the marriage scene among the common people we may never know," says Colon. "But we do know that love did develop as the chief basis for marriage among the propertyless classes. More than that, the sanctity of marriage became a revolutionary force." Just like the happy ending of an old-fashioned Hollywood movie, it seems that "love conquers all!" And if the downtrodden, oppressed, exploited working masses have no property and no economic security, they at least have a legally sanctified family institution blessed by "love."

What is the motive behind this rehash of nineteenth-century bourgeois morality and sentimentality by the Communist Party? Clara Colon makes the political purpose very clear when she lashes out against certain radicals in the women's libera-

tion movement for their forthright statements about the oppressive and degrading features of the family in our society. Denying, as they rightfully do, the sanctity of this institution, these militant women are the main target of her indignation.

This is made explicit by her condemnation of Beverly Jones and Judith Brown who wrote: "Now, with birth control, higher education for women, and the movement itself, it is becoming clear to some women that the marriage institution, like so many others, is an anachronism." ("Toward a Female Liberation Movement," Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1968.) Colon shudders at this and at the assertion by Martha Weinman Lear that "any real change in the status of women would be a fundamental assault on marriage and the family. People would be tied together by love, not legal contraptions. Children would be raised communally; it's just not honest to talk about freedom for women unless you get the childrearing off their back." ("The Second Feminist Wave," *New York Times Magazine*, March 10, 1968.)

Such demands as the collective care of children, the socializing of family functions, and the liberation of love from the decrepit institution of legalized marriage horrify this self-styled Marxist. She regards these as "an ideological attack against the very concept of the family" which she thereupon rushes to defend.

Thus she contends in a highly dubious statement that, under the beneficent influence of love, woman has been elevated from her former status as slave and household drudge to equal partnership with her husband today. "Just as the man-woman relationship in marriage has changed from that of master and slave to one of individual love and mutual respect . . . woman has risen from slave to central figure in the home. . . ."

She points out, to be sure, that this domestic elevation of woman has been offset by the downfall of the working-class husband "from master to partner in misery." Under capitalist exploitation, under conditions of unemployment and underemployment, the equal partnership of husband and wife has resulted in little more than "partners in misery." In the end, then, love is completely helpless to change a system that breeds millions of miserable families.

Engels pointed out that, while love-unions are more possible and prevalent among working people where property considerations are absent, the bonds of affection are curtailed and mutilated under exploitative capitalist conditions. Mutual love between married partners can become liberated only with the re-

moval of these conditions. Colon, however, obliterates this all-important point and proceeds as though love defines the character of the marriage and family institution today.

Merely to consider the mounting number of marriages which end in divorce or separation, the tens of thousands of "crimes of passion" committed each year, the "battered child syndrome" by which parents injure unwanted children, the resentment that even overindulged children feel for their parents who "give them everything" except a world fit to live in—these and other frustrations that mark the family unit applauded by Colon hardly reinforce her theory that it is an institution based on "love."

To try to save her case, Colon attempts a cunning trick. She uses the outrageous injuries and indignities heaped upon Black and Third World families, which tear asunder their sexual and family relations, to justify her efforts to patch up and rehabilitate an institution that contributes to these evils. If you do not accept as a solution her reformist plea, "Don't Destroy Our Families," the implication is that you are indifferent to the problems of these poorest of families.

But the family institution did not develop in the first place to foster either economic security or love and affection among the working masses; it was designed to serve the interests of the propertied classes. Under these conditions it became a supplementary instrument for the exploitation of the working people. The wealthy ruling class has dumped insufferable economic and social burdens upon these poor families, all in the name of the "sanctity" of love, marriage and the family.

The economic burdens heaped upon so many Black families are intolerable. A very large number of Black and Third World families are headed by women who have been forced to *the very bottom* of the economic scale in this country, pushed into the lowest paying, most alienating work. The fact that such families so desperately need another full-time supporter, but are prevented from raising themselves above the level of the most debilitating poverty by all the obvious and subtle means devised by the capitalist system, only highlights the fundamental role of the family as an institution based not on love but the economic requirements of class society.

The reverence of the CP for marriage and the family not only departs from the views of the foremost scientific socialists, from Marx and Engels to Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg; it is less progressive than the positions of such eminent nineteenth-century Utopian socialists as Fourier and Robert Owen. Here is how

Owen indicted the white, middle-class family in pre-Victorian England, which was not essentially different from the white, middle-class family in America today.

In his lectures on marriage (1835) Owen condemned that institution as "the sole cause of all the prostitution and of more than one half of all the vilest and most degrading crimes known to society." And the effect of the family unit upon the children was just as bad. "The children within those dens of selfishness and hypocrisy are taught to consider their own individual family their whole world, and that it is the duty and interest of all within that little orb to do whatever they can to promote the advantages of all the legitimate members of it. With these persons, it is *my* house, *my* wife, *my* estate, *my* children, or *my* husband; *our* estate, and *our* children; or *my* brothers, *my* sisters; and *our* house and property." (*Robert Owen*, by Frank Podmore, pp. 491-92.)

Owen's denunciation of the me-and-mine greed and selfishness of the narrow, exclusivist family and the harm it does to children for the rest of their lives, which influenced the pioneer Marxists, is a far cry from the CP's ecstatic celebration of its virtues.

Exactly how far removed the CP's version of marriage is from the comprehension and insight of the leaders of the Russian Revolution can be judged by comparing Colon's praise to Lenin's uncompromising condemnation:

"The coercion of bourgeois marriage and bourgeois legislation on the family . . . is the coercion of 'sacrosanct' property. It sanctifies venality, baseness, and dirt. . . . People revolt against the prevailing abominations and perversions. . . . Sexual and marriage reforms in the bourgeois sense will not do. In the sphere of sexual relations and marriage, a revolution is approaching." (V. I. Lenin, "On the Emancipation of Woman," excerpt from *My Recollections of Lenin*, by Clara Zetkin.)

Hitherto it was the capitalists and the church that came forward as the saviors of the family. They are now joined by the U. S. Communist Party leaders, who agree with them that the task of the day is "Keep the Family Together."

What accounts for the surprising *de facto* united front of such forces against the radical wing of the women's liberation movement? The CP is neither a revolutionary nor a Marxist organization. It is a reformist outfit that long ago abandoned revolutionary politics. It limits itself to proposing modifications in the existing system rather than fighting to abolish it.

And so, when the rebellious women of the liberation movement criticize an institution that they see as one of the prime instru-

ments of their oppression, the CP intervenes and attempts to make it more palatable to them. Their leaders take the same reformist approach to this institution of capitalist society as they do to the Democratic Party. This method is part and parcel of their Stalinist training and outlook.

After the process of bureaucratic degeneration began in the USSR under Stalin, the bureaucrats turned against the aims and achievements in emancipating women initiated in the early years of the Bolshevik revolution. The cult of the family was revived, with the wife encouraged to be a breeder for the state. This is one of the underlying reasons why the American CP (ever the apologist for Moscow) today upholds the family institution. If they did not develop the theme that it is a revolutionary force, they would have to explain why it continues to exist and is shored up by reactionary laws in the Soviet Union—which they contend has a revolutionary government.

Here is what a former editor of *British-Soviet Friendship*, Pat Sloan, wrote on the sexual counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in the fourth quarter 1969 issue of the pro-Moscow *New World Review* under the title, "Sex, Morals, Family: A Look at Soviet Experiences."

"From the permissiveness of the first 15 years, marriage and divorce laws were tightened up, so that divorce was made progressively more difficult. Abortion was again made illegal. Homosexuality was again outlawed (a decision apparently never since revoked)." Birth certificates were given only to children bearing the name of a father inscribed on them, while "the Order of Heroine of Motherhood was created for mothers of large families."

What Clara Colon, the American CP theorist, is counseling in the face of the rising and radicalizing women's liberation movement is essentially the same thing—a move "back to the home and family." What a pitiable minor edition in the field of ideology of the reactionary attitudes toward the family enforced by the Stalinist bureaucrats in the Soviet Union!

Further Reading

Readings in women's liberation from Pathfinder Press:

BOOKS

The Mod Donna and Scyklon Z:

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