

## A R G U M E N T

### IN BEHALF OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROGRAM

#### "IS THIS THE TIME?..."

If you are thinking: "I agree with what women want, but is this the TIME to raise the cry for their rights?" Compared to the crises we are faced with in the nomination of a presidential candidate, the crucial war and foreign policy questions, the desperate need for attention to our disadvantaged citizens, urban problems, violence - IS WOMEN'S RIGHTS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO MERIT OUR ATTENTION NOW?

We say, YES! ...Consider:

1) If our purpose is to give priority to "critical" problems, what about the plight of the WOMAN in the disadvantaged community? In addition to suffering from being black, brown or red, from being poor, she has the added hardship imposed by discrimination against her because of sex. "More than 80% of the welfare recipients in every major city are women and their children. ... (There is a need for) revision of welfare legislation, which now tends to break down rather than to encourage the ties of strong family life and deprives women of their dignity, sexual privacy and self-respect; an end to sex discrimination in poverty programs which virtually ignore the existence and needs of women in poverty to secure more and better job training to give them a future in the economy; the establishment of child-care facilities, not as ghettos of discrimination and poverty but on the same basis as parks, libraries and public schools, adequate to the needs of all children from the pre-school years through adolescence; and the right of women to secure housing and family allowances on equal terms with men, but without prejudice to a parent's right to remain at home to care for her children." (Mrs. Betty Friedan, N.O.W.)

2) Perhaps the inequality of opportunity existing for women may seem relatively unimportant to those who think "women never had it so good". But just as the Black people no longer consider it valid to compare their present condition with slavery times, neither do women any longer appreciate comparisons of their present lives with "grandma's times". When at last will each individual be allowed the SAME OPPORTUNITIES as every other, regardless of color, race or SEX? There will always be crises - some more acute than others; why should women's rights be tabled in a period of history of world-wide revolution for human rights?

3) "Half of the country's women are working, but less than one percent of them make \$10,000 a year; ...but 75 percent of that half are working at routine clerical, sales, factory or service jobs, and making less than \$5,000 a year - most of them much less. The category of technical and professional workers includes plenty of nurses but very few doctors (seven percent are

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women), plenty of grade-school teachers but very few college professors... There are no women who top the management in any of the major corporations, and you have to look very hard to find a vice president. Four years after the passage of Title VII - the section of the Civil Rights Act which makes job discrimination for reasons of sex illegal - women still are taking the back seat in the working world... One third of all complaints registered with the Equal Employment Commission have charged discrimination because of sex; the vast majority of these concern pay and promotions at the blue-collar level. ...What's the reason? Discrimination, pure and simple..." (from Saturday Evening Post, July 27, 1968, "Women At Work" by Marilyn Mercer).

4) If it is increasingly being recognized that Black, Brown and Red people have a right to control their own destinies, why isn't it time for women to do the same? Not only pertaining to opportunities, but to life itself! ...Every year two million American women die or are mutilated, endure physical degradation and spiritual humiliation because of abortion laws which deny them the right to control their own bodies. Children are born out of wedlock, unloved, under-fed, under-clothed, under-educated, psychologically scarred for life, because man-made laws impose unwanted pregnancies on women. This at a time in history when we are threatened with over-population that will bring eventual destruction of human life on this planet! Is this not critical enough to merit our attention?

5) Of course the war and foreign policy are crucially critical problems that demand our attention. But we think that the ABSENCE of WOMEN from the male-dominated decision-making bodies of our land may be in some measure responsible for the over-orientation of our society toward power and violence. Our culture has perpetrated a hoax upon men, equating pugilism with manhood. The fear of being called "chicken" permeates the thinking of our foreign-policy decision-makers as though they were boys, not men of mature judgment. The competitive aggressiveness of these men makes them willing to have our sons do battle from boyhood on, then send them off to war to further prove their manhood. Conquering new territories or resources and then justifying it by our might has been characteristic of our nation's history. We attest that women, not oriented culturally to being aggressive or power-seeking (with few exceptions) would have a tempering effect on such drives if they worked side-by-side with men in non-competitive decision-making.

Because women are the producers of life, they would project their instincts for child-protection and life-preservation into the political arena with the result that decisions to make war could very well be retarded or withheld. Men have ruled the world from the beginning of time and the history of the world has been one war after another. Why not give women an opportunity to participate in government, where foreign policy is made? They couldn't do worse; and possibly they may influence men to turn away from the self-destruction that seems imminent.

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