

REVOLUTION, SHE WROTE, by Clara Fraser
INTRODUCTION by Joanna Russ

Introduction

The logic of feminism is to expand inexorably into generalized radicalism.

I came to this conclusion only a few years ago, after 23 years of feminist activism, work and study. I came to a whole host of related conclusions, too: that single-issue activism is a dead end, that class, sexism and racism depend upon each other and that the feminism which doesn't understand this will inevitably decay into careers-for-well-to-do-white-ladies (who think that somehow they are representative of all the world's women), that no one must psychologically cut off parts of their own identity because these don't fit into the prescriptions of this or that particular group, that unjust behavior is exactly that and it's unacceptable, even when done by people in your own oppressed group, and that the famous "psychology of women" is no different from the psychology of other oppressed groups, i.e., that it's the psychology of oppression itself.

Clara Fraser came to these conclusions too—but long, long before I ever did. The edge she had over me wasn't an individual one. It wasn't her brilliance or her energy—though she is brilliant and energetic (and if anybody wants to call me brilliant, I certainly won't protest) but something a good deal more important. Clara's advantage over me is that she has always been a socialist revolutionary and that she has worked

with others in Radical Women, a group she helped found, which has successfully combined feminism and socialism for 29 years. She is also one of the founders of the Freedom Socialist Party. Both organizations have branches in many cities in the United States and overseas. It was a shock to me when I read the manuscript for the book you now hold in your hands and realized how entirely her columns and speeches had anticipated what I thought was new. It wasn't; it was only new to me. That's why the first sentence of this introduction isn't mine. It's Clara's—and it was written in 1965!

How do you think I feel about that?

Well, you're wrong. I'm delighted. In fact it's a joy to find myself saying exactly what others have said before me and continue to say in a tradition that spans at least 150 years. In any politics worth the name, "I" can do infinitely less than "we."

Here are some more socialist feminist ideas from Clara. They controvert everything I was told about socialist feminism when I first became a feminist and a good deal that I have heard since.

Never, never, never must male or female radicals counsel feminists to subordinate or table their demands in the interests of an abstract, isolationist "class" unity.

(1978)

[Their] contempt for women has carved a great gulf between leftists and feminists. Sexist revolutionaries have much to answer for.

(1995)

[Minority women] are destined for leadership of the entire human race.

(1972)

The single-issue is the dead-end issue. It always ends up

smack against the wall. True, it is large, but it is also, invariably, diffuse, ambiguous, contradictory, deceptive and mercurial. . . It moves to the right, *not* to the left, and it moves radicals right along with it.

(1973)

In 1973 Clara also predicted:

Women's liberation, led and oriented towards the center, will turn into its opposite, women's *reformism*, which in turn always becomes an enemy of workingclass and minority women.

Even more important, in the same year:

The capitalist system *cannot* grant working and minority women substantial reforms because these would seriously weaken the very pillars upon which the system itself rests.

Therefore:

Without [socialist feminist] leadership, the women's movement, like every other movement, will petrify, corrode, adapt and drown inside the Democratic Party or inane, single-issue liberalism. Or it will adopt an ultra-left, insanely sectarian and/or terroristic stance, born of desperation and bitterness.

I became a feminist as soon as I knew that such a movement existed, 27 years ago as of this writing. I have seen everything Clara predicted above come to pass. Only weeks ago in *The Nation* (of all places!) Gloria Steinem was quoted as saying that we had better vote for Clinton because Dole would be worse, a "wait until next time" that has an awfully familiar ring. Well, hey, as Steinem herself used to say about

sudden insights, *Click!*, there is feminism either turning rightwards with a vengeance or (at the very least) drowning inside the Democratic Party ditto.

But if socialist feminism in general, and Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party in particular are so important, why didn't I understand all this in 1984, when I first got to know about them? The answer is all too simple.

Just as I used to think, many years ago, that radicals were little cartoon men who hid bombs under their coats (where they hid them in the summertime, when it was too hot to wear coats, I never did figure out), in the same way I had been taught an automatic and entirely unthinking response to a certain list of words, which included "workers," "Marx," "Marxism," "Marxism-Leninism," "the ruling class" and so on. Even after I had met socialist feminists in person and realized that they were on to something extremely important, I still couldn't quite eradicate that suspicion, inculcated most vigorously during the Cold War (when I was a teenager), that becoming a socialist meant I would have to (1) martyr myself, (2) give up thinking on my own, (3) give up my feminism, (4) lose my job, (5) associate with overbearing and nasty people, and (6) listen to the ghastliest, most boring kind of rhetoric you can imagine, which would kill me in two minutes max.

Just as meeting declared lesbians for the first time in 1970 scared me half to death because I knew the moment would come that they would do something horrible, sexual and—well, something *lesbian* that would scar me forever—in the same way, I couldn't quite believe that socialists wouldn't eventually reveal their basically evil nature. They would leap at me, tie me down in spite of my screams and struggles and administer some drug that would make me their will-less slave.

The name of this nonsense, of course, is propaganda. It's like the similar falsehood that the struggle against sexism and the struggle against racism are rivals and that you must choose one of them but never both. Similarly we are taught that

socialists can't just be people, warts and all, but that every wart on a socialist face is a sign of deep, political evil while others' warts are merely personal imperfections and don't have political implications.

I've seen the movement that I joined in 1969 make terrible errors. I have seen feminism turn, all too often into an advancement club for middle-managerial, white, professional women. I've seen academic feminism become so jargon-ified and elaborate that even the theories in it that are useful can hardly be understood by anyone—including a good many academics—who's not already part of it.

Much feminism has moved steadily away from the radicalism that characterized it in the 1960s. Its fundamental error has been to ignore the interconnectedness of all oppression. Feminist theory can't explain every oppression. Not all women are "naturally" on the same side on other issues. The radical feminist view that women are the primary social issue of the ages irrespective of class, race, nation, etc., is paralleled by cultural nationalism in people of color and ethnic movements.

And as Clara says:

Cultural nationalism is what the Black Panthers used to call "pork chop nationalism." It is where you make the cultural folkways. . .and lifestyles of your own group into a substitute for politics, philosophy and a strategy for change. It doesn't work. . . What it *can* do is destroy a movement. . .

My father used to have a friend [whose sole interest was] "what's in it for the Jews?". . . The only thing he cared about was what might directly, narrowly, benefit the Jews. . . This type of attitude has produced the Palestinian uprising known as the *intifadeh*. If you're going to do the cultural nationalist trip, you end up being Jewish

Nazis shooting down Palestinian kids.

(1989)

Feminism is precious to me. That's why I hate seeing it become a new lifestyle for middleclass, career-minded couples or an improvement in certain men's public manners or an excuse for demanding that more women work a 90-hour week (and the mass media blame *feminism* for that!) or another way of blaming individual people for not being billionaires.

Clara knew all this all along. So read this book carefully. Have fun with it, too. Her writing is pointed and very funny. The very titles will make you chortle, from the name of the book itself to "Exit Stage Right" (Betty Friedan) or "Dr. Zhivago: Dixiecrat of the Steppes." To "The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name" she simply adds "in the Army." Her extended comparison of the employer who fired her (Seattle City Light) and its lawyers' defense when she sued, to Mount St. Helens and an imaginary defense of *it* against the charge of having erupted builds and builds. "Eruptions" she wrote "are a management prerogative of mountains," and "Anyone leveling such a charge obviously hates mountains and wants to level *them*." There are six more comparisons, each more accurate (and more purposely absurd) than the last. (The mountain, of course, *had* erupted. And Clara ultimately won her suit against her former employer.)

Clara is also *hopeful*. Her wit is her own, of course, but her hopefulness is hers *and* socialist. At a time when demonizing the poor or otherwise helpless has become an indoor sport in our United States, when the media offer us ever more trendy circuses and bread disappears, when human beings are treated as consumables, when we're told that wealth and style are the only things that matter (mall ethics, I call it), when the greed of the ruling class is so openly displayed that ever more logic-twisting and censorship are regularly employed in the hopes that we won't notice, in an election year in which it took a

thorough-going bigot even to mention poverty as an issue, this book is hopeful. It has good reasons to be. Read it and find out what they are.

I could go on quoting Clara's words forever, but I won't. Like Spock's Vulcan father, Sarek, I submit to the logic of the situation.

Here's Clara.

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