



WHERE HAVE ALL THE '60s GONE?

by Carol Hanisch

When I sat down to figure out what I could say in 12 minutes on this huge subject, I realized one thing that wasn't clearly stated was "activism for what?" Since a lack of clarity of goals, both on the part of individuals and of organizations, became one of the reasons for the decline of activism, I wish to start out by stating that the goal of my activism, generally speaking, has been the overthrow of capitalism, male supremacy and racism and the establishment of a classless society where all privilege is abolished. What I want is a government and an economic system truly of, by and for the people—all the people whose labor and creativity feeds us, clothes us, houses us, entertain us, and in every way makes life better for us.

I am a woman, and as a woman I am oppressed. Although it is not fashionable to talk of "oppression" these days, it's as real as it was 10 or 15 years ago. I am also a working person. As a working person in a capitalist system I am exploited. That is also just as true as it was in the '60s—or in the '30s for that matter. That is the consciousness I speak from and I'm not ready to admit we've lost the war, only the battle.

I think it is partially incorrect to talk about the '60s as a separate decade of glorious radical or revolutionary activism. For one thing the radical activity had its roots in the 1950s. It started with the political activity of black people in the 1950s, such as the Montgomery bus boycott. While white radicals (and some black radicals, too) were ducking the ruling class's attacks in what is called "The McCarthy Era," black people were starting to move. We must remember that the Black liberation movement was the spark that lit the prairie fire of what we are referring to as '60s activism. Of course it started even before that. All history is built on

what went before, but it was the immediate spark.

Also, I was at a meeting in New York City recently with a number of early Women's Liberation Movement activists—many of who had a hand in launching the WLM. As we were lamenting the demise of those "good old days," one woman spoke up and reminded us that those days were in fact not all good. She talked about the breast beating, honcho, rhetoric-filled, revolutionary posturing of the male-dominated movement. The male supremacy of the '60s radical activist movement was, in fact, a major reason the WLM came into being in the first place. And the activism of the WLM did not end with the '60s, but lasted well into the '70s.

In fact, when you take off the rose-colored glasses and apply a little hindsight, you realize that it wasn't just on the "woman question" that the radical movement was lacking. Where have all the '60s gone? We reap what we sow, and the situation we are in now is very much related to what happened then.

Instead of thinking of periods of history separated by decades, it's much more helpful to think in terms of assessing our past so that we can see the next step—what needs to be done.

There are two major categories of reasons why activism dropped off. One was the repressive attacks by the ruling class to wipe us out, and the other was our own mistakes. The tactics of the enemy against the movement took four basic forms:

1. One was the **BLATANT VIOLENCE FROM THE POLICE CLUBS AND GUNS**—the murder and beatings and harassment of both ordinary protester and of leaders. The Black liberation movement got the brunt of this, though whites got it too. It frightened and demoralized many people.

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2. The powers that be used PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTACKS. These varied from the attempt to personalize things to all kinds of lies and half truths and other manipulations. There was a great push on the cultural front to convince people that they needed to “get their heads straight,” to learn to love everybody, to submerge themselves in the real high of drugs, get into group therapy, religion, ad nauseam.
3. CENSORSHIP also played a big role in the tactics of the ruling class. You have to really dig around to find out what radicals are saying and thinking about these days. Gloria Steinem and *Ms.* Magazine's bad effect on the WLM is a classic example of this type of thing where a pseudo-feminist parallel mouthpiece was set up between the radical feminists and the masses of women. In 1975 Redstockings held a press conference and put out a press release discussing how Steinem and *Ms.* had replaced radical feminism with liberal feminism. We also revealed the connections Steinem had with a CIA-funded organization back in the '60s and her attempts to cover up those connections. There was an almost complete lack of coverage of this although many of the major New York newspapers and radio stations attended the press conference.
4. The powers that be love to create CONFUSION AND CHAOS in a movement. In fact, one of the CIA's pet domestic projects was entitled “Operation Chaos.” So have FBI files shown this to be so.

These of course are just a few of the enemy tactics used on us. We should study them enough to know what's going on. It's not enough to know that the enemy tries to wipe us out, we must understand exactly how, if we are to become more effective.

The radical movement made plenty of mistakes itself. In talking about these mistakes, we must bear in mind that on the whole, the activism we are talking about was a very positive time—it was a time of life and liveliness, of passionately fought political battles both with the establishment and with each other. In the course of this, people's consciousness about the state of their lives and what it was going to take to change the situation was soaring. We learned many lessons. We're smarter now. We accumulated a lot of valuable experience in dealing with the enemy and in dealing with each other.

One reason we made some of the mistake we did was that we were cut off from our immediate history, by the repression of the McCarthy era. That era did more than send people to jail or get them first blacklisted. It broke the continuity of learning, of the connectedness of our radical history, the thread of learning how to build the fight against our enemies. One thing some of us have learned from all this is that we must protect our true history, cherish it and learn from it and fight against all attempts to distort and bury it. Even our mistakes are a part of that history and if we are dishonest about them in an attempt to “look good,” to appear to have been “correct,” we are committing a crime against the people who would learn from us, from our mistakes, as well as making ourselves less effective in the struggle.

After we see the importance of our history, we must learn to apply it. Pete Seeger tells an old German folktale of Stupid Hans who goes courting and takes a calf to his girlfriend. He carried the calf over hill and dale to the girl's home and when he arrives the girl says, “Stupid Hans, why'd you I carry it? Why didn't you put a rope around its neck and lead it?” Hans says, “Oh, yea, that would have been a good idea.” Next week he decides to take her a loaf of bread, and he ties a string around it and pulls it. The story goes on and on, but I'm sure you get the point.

We must also guard against being arrogant about past history, thinking if we had been there, we would have done it all right. It's important to acknowledge what has already been won, that it was won, and that the knowledge that comes from it, comes because of the fight to win it.

I believe that the biggest failing of the radical movement has been its inability to support and encourage and learn from the two groups with the greatest need for revolution—black people and women. Sexism and racism within the radical movement have held the revolutionary movement back—way back. The activism we are talking about started with black people's fight for liberation. It was black people who taught and inspired and got our generation moving. There has been a whole lot of talk about supporting black liberation, but when push comes to shove, what comes from white radicals is what Joe Waller of the African People's Socialist Party has termed “ideological imperialism.” It means that when black people started to develop their own theories, strategies and tactics for their own

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liberation, most of the white left did everything it could to subvert it. The white left insisted that these black radicals let white people “lead” them, both theoretically and practically. Today there is a bigger schism between black and white radicals than ever and though black radicals made mistakes too, in this area, it is basically the fault of whites.

It is partially the fault of white radicals that the black liberation movement was so brutally squashed. Most white radicals couldn't bring themselves to accept black leadership and to protect that black leadership and even give a forum to the theory that was developing in a form undiluted and undistorted by their white racism. We must not only learn from those at the center of the struggle; we must acknowledge where those lessons come from.

The same thing happened to the WLM in the late '60s and early '70s. The male radicals who should by their own theory have been our supporters, fought us every step of the way. First we had to fight for the right to organize independent women's liberation groups. Then we had to fight for those groups to be taken seriously. We were told women should fight for the socialist revolution—that our freedom would come with the overthrow of capitalism. We were accused of dividing the working class. Marx, Lenin and especially Engels were quoted at us (often incorrectly it turned out when we looked it up ourselves) as “proof” that we were on the wrong course. We were told to stay away from consciousness-raising—the cornerstone on which the WLM was built. We were called middle-class and bourgeois by male Leftists who were themselves more middle class and bourgeois than we could ever be. Some of us were kicked out of so-called radical groups because we refused to compromise our radical feminism. The situation is worse today as the movement is in a state of decline.

When Redstockings came out with its press release on Steinem and the CIA in 1975, almost no major radical publications carried anything about it. It censored us every bit as much as the establishment papers. About a year later, *The Militant*, newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party, defended Steinem by accusing Redstockings of “witch hunting” of all things—as if working for the CIA was the same as working for communism. Instead of supporting the WLM, instead of giving radical feminists a forum, instead of trying to work with us to build a classless society the male

Left has tried to suppress, distort and destroy our movement.

Another big mistake that American radicals are making—and have been making for some time now—is not coming to grips with the fact that what we must work for is a revolution right here in the United States of America. That word, America, has come to mean so many ugly things to so many—and rightfully so that they just can't deal with it. It just is not enough to “identify” with liberation struggles in the so-called Third World, to spend one's time arguing about what is or isn't happening in China and making that the basis for alliances and splits. We desperately need to turn our attention to our own liberation fight here—right here on American soil against the American ruling class which in many ways is the ruling class of the world, albeit a declining one.

We have to realize that guilt is not a revolutionary emotion. Americans have a lot to be ashamed of but guilt is something else again. Guilt is a paralyzing emotion that leads to wrong tactics, bad strategy and off-the-target theory. To feel guilty for being born in America is outrageous. To feel guilty for being born male is just as outrageous. So is feeling guilty for being born white. It is what we *do* that counts, not what we were born. What we were born does, however, affect what our task is going to be if we choose to fight the revolutionary fight. We have a whole lot of radical history to be proud of as well as history to be ashamed of. You can either feel guilty for what the ruling clique of this country has done and is doing or you can fight them. That is what will make our support of Third World revolutions real, anyway.

I don't have any blueprints for the next ten years. I do know that we must start talking to each other again politically. We need to do consciousness raising about our current political situation. We must build theory as well as actions based on the right here and now truths of our own lives. And we must get serious and take ourselves seriously. No more drugs, religion, macho, psychological cop-outs. No more revolution for its own sake, no more revolution for the hell of it. We must realize that the revolution is to save ourselves and our land.

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