Radical Feminism

edited by Anne Koedt · Ellen Levine · Anita Rapone

An anthology of radical feminist writings from the current women's movement. Forty-five articles ranging from the personal to the theoretical and drawn largely from the feminist annual NOTES.
ADC:  
Marriage to the State

by André Leo

Most women on welfare are on ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) because they have children and they left the man they were living with or he left them. Maybe their husband died, or they were never living with a man but got pregnant and had a child. The majority of people on welfare live under ADC and the majority of women receiving ADC are white (contrary to myth); the average length of time on ADC is approximately two to three years. Almost all ADC clients are women, and the only parent in the home; they are referred to as “ADC mothers” in this article.

The average ADC mother has three children and applied for assistance when she and her husband separated because she had no income and needed financial help. I have never had an ADC case where the woman received alimony. According to a lawyer I know, the vast majority of divorces do not involve alimony, but often do involve child support payments. However, when the courts track down a father to pay for his children (which isn’t too often) he will have to pay only about $10–15 a week per child. None of the ADC mothers I serviced ever got more than $15 a week, if they got that. Child support payments ordered by the courts are well under subsistence level and so ADC is available and pays the woman very little more.

In Michigan the budgets are set up to include $44 per month per person in the family. A maximum budget for a four-person family (one parent and three children) looks like this:

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$176 food, clothing, incidentals
100 maximum for rent or home purchase
29 utilities (heat, electricity, and water)

Total $305 monthly allotment

(If the woman gets support payments from the man they are subtracted from this total and she gets the remainder—she’s not ahead.)

That’s hardly enough to live on, and there’s nothing for an emergency. On top of that, the ADC is “given” out by the Department of Social Services as if the mother is begging for it, and the state is doing her a “favor” by doling out money to “help” her family.

A social worker next to me at work said, “These women have no pride. Why don’t they go out and work instead of getting handouts from ADC?” That same social worker’s mother never “worked.” But she is proud of her mother and would be thoroughly insulted if you said to her, “Why didn’t your mother have enough pride to go out and work instead of taking handouts from her husband?”

The fact is that ADC is just a substitute MAN and I will refer to ADC as “The Man” from now on as it makes the whole issue a lot more clear. Let me explain.

“Woman’s Work”

The principal economic fact about this society is the division of labor between male and female with “man’s labor” being paid for and “woman’s work” not. Woman’s work is defined as child bearing, child raising, and housework. That’s what every little girl is told she will do when she “grows up.” She is taught to think of “women’s work” as her main goal in life, and to be proud of thinking this way—since everything in the culture engraves this image upon her mind. Probably her mother was a housewife and she will be one too. Such is the rigidity of the sexual caste system.

In the conventional image the girl will become a housewife and child raiser only if she lands a man in marriage. The man has to bring in the bread for her to play house. So the essential thing to being a housewife and child raiser is having a man to dole out the money for food, clothes, and rent from his check which he gets from “working.”

Work has been defined by male-dominated culture to mean work
which you get paid for. Housework has been excluded from this
definition of work because male-controlled society has made sure
that women do not get paid for their labor as housekeepers and
child raisers. All things in this materialistic society are given a
monetary value, but household work and child raising have no
monetary value if done by a wife and mother for a man. The only
time women get paid for housework is when they go to another
woman’s house and do “her” work for her, either because she’s
working outside her home (and she certainly can’t get a house-
husband to do this work for her), or because her husband is
wealthy enough to give her money to get out of the low-status house-
wifely chores. Rich or poor, the woman still has the responsibility
to do the housework or to get someone else to do it for her.

The fact that housework is low-status work is important. House-
work when done by a “domestic worker”—i.e., paid for—is one of
the lowest paid jobs in this society. But really, what is the difference
between the actual work done by a housewife and the work done by
a maid or domestic worker? It’s clear that almost all women are
domestic workers, whether paid or unpaid. Women in male-domi-
nated society are primarily a servant caste. With the passing of the
days of cheap and plentiful servants, one vast class of servants still
remains with us: women. Women are servants in their roles as
wives, housekeepers, child raisers, etc. Women’s real and ancient
servant status and function in male society remains basically un-
changed in spite of industrialism and modern technology.

The male-dominated Left also defines work as what you get paid
for. When talking about the “working class,” they include those
domestic laborers who work for other women for pay. But they
conveniently exclude all women who work as housewives full-
or part-time for men, because they don’t get wages—only room and
board and handouts now and then from their man (employer). The
male supremacism of the Left has time and again interfered with
the development of a clear perception of how women are econom-
ically in bondage to men of all classes and races.

The Working “Unemployed”

What if a housewife and mother, working without pay, is sud-
denly without that man who got paid for his work? Does it enter
this woman’s mind to now demand pay for the work she is doing? No. She has been too well conditioned to think that her work is “special women’s work,” “you can’t put a price on motherhood,” and “it’s not a job—it’s unselfish devotion.”

But where would she go, who would pay her for her work, if she did demand pay? No one. They’d even laugh her out of the unemployment security commission offices if she applied for unemployment compensation. Besides, she’s still doing “her work” and not getting paid for it. It’s the only layoff where the employee has to keep right on working.

So she goes to the only place that is available, to the S.S. (Social Services, that is) to get “welfare.” She is made to feel that she is being “given” something for nothing. Meanwhile she’s still doing that housework and child raising she was supposed to devote her life to. But now she’s bad, lazy, and a leech for doing all that hard work.

The ADC mother learns that there are two kinds of housewives, the “good” ones and the “bad” ones. The “good” ones do the same work as she does but they are still living with a man who “provides” them with their needs from his pay from his work. The “bad” ones are those who are not living with or being paid for by a man and so the state replaces him in the form of an ADC check (“The Man”).

“They Should All Go To Work”

What about the argument that ADC mothers could find jobs to support their families if they had enough pride to get off welfare? The stigma of ADC is so great that many ADC mothers believe this themselves. But the argument is shallow and does not hold up for the majority of ADC mothers. If a woman has a large family (two or more children), she will most likely not be able to support her family on a woman’s wage rate. If you don’t believe this, here are figures on women’s wages (they are for 1966 but the situation has gotten worse for female labor since then): In 1966 the median income for a white man was $7,164; for a nonwhite man, $4,528; a white woman, $4,152; a nonwhite woman, $2,949 (full-time year-round work only).

Things are getting worse, and the gap between men’s and women’s
income has been widening. More than two thirds of all women working full-time, year-round jobs had incomes under $5,000, while fewer than one fourth of all men were in this bracket. Men often make more money than women in the same job. Women sales workers earn 60 percent less than male sales workers. Women managers, officials, and proprietors earn 45 percent less than men in those same jobs. Women clerks earn 44 percent less than male clerks. Besides, women are systematically kept out of the labor market and discriminated against more strongly than any other group, their unemployment rates are highest.

Even if a woman does get a job, she's likely to get more money on ADC than from work outside her home. She will also have problems finding and paying for baby-sitters or day care. This has been a very effective way, so far, for this male-controlled economy to keep mothers with pre-school children out of the labor market. When she has finally got her job, she will realize why so many ADC mothers stay home. Now she has two full-time jobs, and only one for pay! Her life will be a continual round of back-breaking labor with hardly any time for leisure or the enjoyment of her children. And all that for poverty-level wages.

The Man and Patriarchal Society

When you put all these facts together some curious patterns begin to emerge. "The Man" (ADC) has been set up to preserve the family system in which men get paid and the women are unpaid and kept in a colonized position economically and psychologically. This is done by refusing to pay women for honest work done in the home, but rather treating them as "welfare recipients"; by making ADC checks so low that women have to live with a man to be adequately "provided" for; by not providing child care centers, and, in fact, making it difficult to set them up; by perpetuating sex discrimination in the Work Incentive Program and throughout the agency; etc. ADC makes a concerted effort to strengthen the patriarchal family system and works to prevent the development of other forms of social structure for child raising and work division. The agency literature is full of patriarchal male-supremacist dribble all sugar-coated in terms of "helping" these women who are ADC mothers.

There is no just solution to the situation of women under welfare
within the present male-dominated family system. The only way out is for women to get together themselves and to create new structures which do not treat women as a caste labor group or oppress children. Structures where women and men share all tasks and decisions of the society for equal rewards and treatment. The women’s liberation movement has already begun to bring women together to try to work out alternatives to the present family system; women on welfare are also beginning to organize themselves to confront the welfare system. The two groups need to work more closely with each other as they are confronting many of the same issues—and the same white male-controlled system.

The saddest thing about “The Man” is that “he” turns woman against woman. Some women say with pride, “Well I got along without ADC [The Man], why can’t they?” But chances are, those same women couldn’t have made it without some man to pay for them. For remember, sister, if you have a child or the potential to bear a child—in other words, if you’re a woman—you are a potential recipient of “The Man.”