

The Tyranny of Tyranny

Cathy Levine

1979

Contents

Part I. The Tyranny of Tyranny	3
Part II. Addendum: <i>The Tyranny of Structurelessness</i> by Jo Freeman	8
Formal and informal structures	9
The nature of elitism	10
The ‘star’ system	12
Political impotence	13
Principles of democratic structuring	16

Part I. The Tyranny of Tyranny

An article entitled 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' which has received wide attention around the women's movement, (in *MS*, *Second Wave* etc) assails the trend towards 'leaderless', 'structureless' groups, as the main — if not sole — organisational form of the movement, as a dead-end. While written and received in good faith, as an aid to the movement, the article is destructive in its distortion and maligning of a valid, conscious strategy for building a revolutionary movement. It is high time that we recognise the direction these tendencies are pointing in, as a real political alternative to hierarchical organisation, rather than trying to nip it in the bud.

There are (at least) two different models for building a movement, only one of which does Joreen acknowledge: a mass organisation with strong, centralised control, such as a Party. The other model, which consolidates mass support only as a coup de grace necessity, is based on small groups in voluntary association.

A large group functions as an aggregate of its parts — each member functions as a unit, a cog in the wheel of the large organisation. The individual is alienated by the size, and relegated, to struggling against the obstacle created by the size of the group — as example, expending energy to get a point of view recognised.

Small groups, on the other hand, multiply the strength of each member. By working collectively in small numbers, the small group utilises the various contributions of each person to their fullest, nurturing and developing individual input, instead of dissipating it in the competitive survival-of-the-fittest/smartest/wittiest spirit of the large organisation.

Joreen associates the ascendancy of the small groups with the consciousness-raising phase of the women's movement, but concludes that, with the focus shifting beyond the changing of individual consciousness towards building a mass revolutionary movement, women should begin working towards building a large organisation. It is certainly true and has been for some time that many women who have been in consciousness-raising groups for a while feel the need to expand their political activities beyond the scope of the group and are at a loss as to how to proceed. But it is equally true that other branches of the Left are at a similar loss, as to how to defeat capitalist, imperialist, quasi-fascist Amerika.

But Joreen fails to define what she means by the women's movement, which is an essential prerequisite to a discussion of strategy or direction.

The feminist movement in its fullest sense, that is, as a movement to defeat Patriarchy, is a revolutionary movement and a socialist movement, Placing it under the umbrella of the Left. A central problem Of women determining strategy for the women's movement is how to relate to the male Left; we do not want to take their, Modus Operandi as ours, because we have seen them as a perpetuation of patriarchal, and latterly, capitalist values.

Despite our best efforts to disavow and dissassociate ourselves from the male Left, we have, nonetheless, had our energy. Men tend to organise the way they fuck — one

big rush and then that “wham, slam, thank you maam”, as it were. Women should be building our movement the way we make love — gradually, with sustained involvement, limitless endurance — and of course, multiple orgasms. Instead of getting discouraged and isolated now, we should be in our small groups — discussing, Planning, creating and making trouble. We should always be making trouble for patriarchy and always supporting women — we should always be actively engaging in and creating feminist activity, because we ail thrive on it; in the absence of feminist activity, women take to tranquillizers, go insane and commit suicide.

The other extreme from inactivity, which seems to plague Politically active people, is over-involvement, which led, in the late '60s, to a generation of burnt-out radicals. A feminist friend once commented that, to her, “being in the women’s movement” meant spending approximately 25% of her time engaging in group activities and 75% of her time developing herself. This is a real, important time allocation for ‘movement’ women to think about. The male movement taught us that ‘movement’ People are supposed to devote 24 hours a day to the Cause, which is consistent with female socialisation towards self-sacrifice. Whatever the source of our selflessness, however, we tend to plunge ourselves head-first into organisational activities, neglecting personal development, until one day we find we do not know what we are doing and for whose benefit, and we hate ourselves as much as before the movement. (Male over-involvement, on the other hand, obviously unrelated to any sex-linked trait of self-sacrifice, does however smell strongly of the Protestant/Jewish, work/ achievement ethic, and even more flagrantly, of the rational, cool, unemotional facade with which Machismo suppresses male feelings.)

These perennial Pitfalls of movement people, which amount to a bottomless Pit for the movement, are explained by Joreen as part of the ‘Tyranny of Structurelessness’, which is a joke from the standpoint that sees a nation of quasi-automatons, struggling to maintain a semblance of individuality against a post-technological, military/ industrial bulldozer.

What we definitely don’t need is more structures and rules, providing us with easy answers, pre-fab alternatives and no room in which to create our own way of life. What is threatening the female Left and the other branches even more, is the ‘tyranny of tyranny’, which has prevented us from relating to individuals, or from creating organisations in ways that do not obliterate individuality with prescribed roles, or from liberating us from capitalist structure.

Contrary to Joreen’s assumption, then, the consciousness-raising phase of the movement is not over. Consciousness-raising is a vital process which must go on, among those engaged in social change, to and through the revolutionary liberation. Raising our consciousness — meaning, helping each other extricate ourselves from ancient shackles — is the main way in which women are going to turn their personal anger into constructive energy, and join the struggle. Consciousness-raising, however, is a loose term — a vacuous nothingism, at this point — and needs to be qualified. An offensive television commercial can raise a women’s consciousness as she irons her husbands shirts alone

in her house; it can remind her of what she already knows, ie that she is trapped, her life is meaningless, boring, etc — but it will probably not encourage her to leave the laundry and organise a houseworkers' strike. Consciousness-raising, as a strategy for revolution, just involve helping women translate their personal dissatisfaction into class-consciousness and making organised women accessible to all women.

In suggesting that the next step after consciousness-raising groups is building a movement, Joreen not only implies a false dichotomy between one and the other, but also overlooks an important process of the feminist movement, that of building a women's culture. While, ultimately, a massive force of women (and some men) will be necessary to smash the power of the state, a mass movement itself does not a revolution make. If we hope to create a society free of male supremacy, when we overthrow capitalism and build international socialism, we had better start working on it right away, because some of our very best anti-capitalist friends are going to give us the hardest time. We must be developing a visible women's culture, within which women can define and express themselves apart from patriarchal standards, and which will meet the needs of women where patriarchy has failed.

Culture is an essential part of a revolutionary movement — and it is also one of the greatest tools of counter-revolution. We must be very careful to specify that the culture we are discussing is revolutionary, and struggle constantly to make sure it remains inveterately opposed to the father culture.

The culture of an oppressed or colonised class or caste is not necessarily revolutionary. America contains — both in the sense of 'having' and in preventing the spread of — many 'sub-cultures' which, though defining themselves as different from the father culture, do not threaten the status quo. In fact, they are part of the 'pluralistic' American one-big-happy-family society/ethnic cultures, the 'counter-culture'. They are acknowledged, validated, adopted and ripped off by the big culture. Co-optation.

The women's culture faces that very danger right now, from a revolutionary new liberating girdle to MS magazine, to *The Diary of a Mad Housewife*. The New Woman, ie middle-class, college-educated, male-associated can have her share of the American Pie. Sounds scrumptious — but what about revolution? We must constantly re-evaluate our position to make sure we are not being absorbed into Uncle Sam's ever-open arms.

The question of women's culture, while denigrated by the arrogant and blind male Left, is not necessarily a revisionist issue. The polarisation between masculine and feminine roles as defined and controlled by male society, has not only subjugated women, but has made all men, regardless of class or race, feel superior to women — this feeling of superiority, countering anti-capitalist sentiment, is the lifeblood of the system. The aim of feminist revolution is for women to achieve our total humanity, which means destroying the masculine and feminine roles which make both men and women only half human. Creating a woman's culture is the means through which we shall restore our lost humanity.

The question of our lost humanity brings up the subject that vulgar Marxists of every predilection have neglected in their analysis for over half century — the psycho-

sexual elements in the character structure of each individual, which acts as a personal policeman within every member of society. Wilhelm Reich began to describe, in narrow, heterosexual, male-biased form, the character armour in each person, which makes people good fascists or, in our society, just good citizens. Women experience this phenomenon every day, as the repressed feelings, especially obvious among our male friends, who find it so difficult to express or even ‘expose’ their feelings honestly. The psychic crippling which capitalist psychology coerces us into believing is the problems of the individuals, is a massive social condition which helps advanced capitalist society to hold together.

Psychic crippling of its citizens makes its citizens report to work, fight in wars, suppress its women, non-whites, and all non-conformists vulnerable to suppression. In our post-technological society, every member of which recognises this as being the most advanced culture, the psychic crippling is also the most advanced — there is more shit for the psyche to cut through, what with Jonathan Livingston Seaquill and the politics of ‘You’re okay, I’m okay’, not to mention post-neo-Freudians and the psycho-surgeons. For the umpteenth time, let it be said that, unless we examine inner psychic shackles, at the time we study outer, political structures and the relationship between the two, we will not succeed in creating a force to challenge our enemy; in fact, we will not even know the enemy. The Left has spent hours and tomes trying to define the ruling class; the ruling class has representative pigs inside the head of every member of society -thus, the logic behind so-called paranoia. The tyranny of tyranny is a deeply-entrenched foe.

Where psychological struggle intersects political involvement is the small group. This is why the question of strategy and tactics and methods of organisation are so crucial at this moment. The Left has been trying for decades to rally people into the streets, always before a number sufficient to make a dent exist. As I.F. Stone pointed out, you can’t make a revolution when four-fifths of the people are happy. Nor should we wait until everyone is ready to become radical. While on the one hand, we should constantly suggest alternatives to capitalism, through food co-ops, anti-corporate actions and acts of personal rebellion, we should also be fighting against capitalist psychic structures and the values and living patterns which derive from them. Structures, chairmen, leaders, rhetoric — when a meeting of a Leftist group becomes indistinguishable in style from a session of a US Senate, we should not laugh about it, but re-evaluate the structure behind the style, and recognise a representative of the enemy.

The origin of the small group preference in the women’s movement -and by small group I refer to political collectives — was, as Joreen explains, a reaction against the over-structured, hierachical organisation of society in general, and male Left groups in particular. But what people fail to realise is that we are reacting against bureaucracy because it deprives us of control, like the rest of this society; and instead of recognising the folly of our ways by returning to the structured fold, we who are rebelling against bureaucracy should be creating an alternative to bureaucratic organisation. The reason for building a movement on a foundation of collectives is that we want to create a

revolutionary culture consistent with our view of the new society; it is more than a reaction; the small group is a solution.

Because the women's movement is tending towards small groups and because the women's movement lacks direction at this time, some people conclude that small groups are to blame for the lack of direction. They wave the shibboleth of 'structure' as a solution to the strategic stalemate, as if structure would give us theoretical insight or relief from personal anxieties. It might give us a structure into which to 'organise', or fit more women, but in the absence of political strategy we may create a Kafkaesque irony, where the trial is replaced by a meeting.

The lack of political energy that has been stalking us for the last few years, less in the women's movement than in the male Left, probably relates directly to feelings of personal shittiness that tyrannize each and every one of us. Unless we confront those feelings directly and treat them with the same seriousness as we treat the bombing of Hanoi, paralysis by the former will prevent us from retaliating effectively against the latter.

Rather than calling for the replacement of small groups with structured, larger groups, we need to encourage each other to get settled into small, unstructured groups which recognise and extol the value of the individual. Friendships, more than therapy of any kind, instantly relieve the feelings of personal shittiness — the revolution should be built on the model of friendships.

The omnipresent problem which Joreen confronts, that of elites, does not find solution in the formation of structures. Contrary to the belief that lack of up-front structures lead to insidious, invisible structures based on elites, the absence of structures in small, mutual trust groups fights elitism on the basic level — the level of personal dynamics, at which the individual who counters insecurity with aggressive behaviour rules over the person whose insecurity maintains silence. The small personally involved group learns, first to recognise those stylistic differences, and then to appreciate and work with them; rather than trying to either ignore or annihilate differences in personal style, the small group learns to appreciate and utilise them, thus strengthening the personal power of each individual. Given that each of us has been socialised in a society in which individual competition with every other individual is the way of existence, we are not going to obliterate personal-styles-as-power, except by constant recognition of these differences, and by learning to let differences of personal style exist together. Insofar as we are not the enemy, but the victims, we need to nurture and not destroy each other. The destructive elements will recede gradually as we grow stronger. But in the meantime we should guard against situations which reward personal style with power.

Meetings award prizes to the more aggressive, rhetorical, charismatic, articulate (almost always male). Considering how much the various derivatives of the term 'anarchism' are bandied about, very few people in the Left have studied anarchism with any seriousness. For people priding themselves on cynicism about social taboos, we sure are sucked in by this taboo against anarchism.

Like masturbation, anarchism is something we have been brought up to fear, irrationally and unquestioningly, because not to fear it might lead us to probe it, learn it and like it. For anyone who has ever considered the possibility that masturbation might provide more benefits than madness, a study of anarchism is highly recommended — all the way back to the time of Marx, when Bakunin was his most radical socialist adversary... most radical, because he was a dialectical giant step beyond Marx, trusting the qualities of individuals to save humanity.

Why has the Left all but ignored anarchism? It might be because the anarchists have never sustained a revolutionary victory. Marxism has triumphed, but so has capitalism. What does that prove, or what does it suggest but that maybe the loser, up to this point is on our side? The Russian anarchists fiercely opposed the very revisionist tyranny among the Bolsheviks that the new Left would come to deride with sophomoric callousness, before their old Left parents in the '60s. Sure, the old generation of American Leftists were narrow-minded not to see capitalism regenerating in Russia; but the tunnel vision with which we have charted a path of Marxist-Leninist dogma is not something to be proud of either.

Women, of course, have made it out of the tunnel way before most men, because we found ourselves in the dark, being led by the blind men of the new Left, and split. Housewife for the revolution or prostitute for the proletariat; amazing how quickly our revision restored itself. All across the country independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders and other factotems of the male Left, creating independently and simultaneously, organisations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales. No accident either.

The style, the audacity of Emma Goldman, has been touted by women who do not regard themselves as anarchists... because Emma was so right-on. Few women have gotten so many men scared for so long as Emma Goldman. It seems logical that we should study Emma, not to embrace her every thought, but to find the source of her strength and love of life. It is no accident, either, that the anarchist Red Terror named Emma was also an advocate and practitioner of free-love; she was an affront to more capitalist shackles than any of her Marxist contemporaries.

Part II. Addendum: *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* by Jo Freeman

During the years in which the women's liberation movement has been taking shape, a great emphasis has been placed on what are called leaderless, structureless groups as the main form of the movement. The source of this idea was a natural reaction against the overstructured society in which most of us found ourselves, the inevitable control this gave others over our lives, and the continual elitism of the Left and similar groups among those who were supposedly fighting this over-structuredness.

The idea of ‘Structurelessness’, however, has moved from a healthy counter to these tendencies to becoming a goddess in its own right. The idea is as little examined as the term is much used, but it has become an intrinsic and unquestioned part of women’s liberation ideology. For the early development of the movement this did not much matter. It early defined its main method as consciousness-raising, and the ‘structureless rap group’ was an excellent means to this end. Its looseness and informality encouraged participation in discussion and the often supportive atmosphere elicited personal insight. If nothing more concrete than personal insight ever resulted from these groups, that did not much matter, because their purpose did not really extend beyond this. The basic problems didn’t appear until individual rap groups exhausted the virtues of consciousness-raising and decided they wanted to do something more specific. At this point they usually floundered because most groups were unwilling to change their structure when they changed their task. Women had thoroughly accepted the idea of ‘Structurelessness’ without realising the limitations of its uses. People would try to use the structureless’ group and the informal conference for purposes for which they were unsuitable out of a blind belief that no other means could possibly be anything but oppressive.

If the movement is to move beyond these elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself of some of its prejudices about organisation and structure. There is nothing inherently bad about either of these. They can be and often are misused, but to reject them out of hand because they are misused is to deny ourselves the necessary tools, to further development. We need to understand why ‘Structurelessness’ does not work.

Formal and informal structures

Contrary to what we would like to believe, there is no such thing as a ‘structureless’ group. Any group ‘of people of whatever nature coming together for any length of time, for any purpose, will inevitably structure itself in some fashion. The structure may be flexible, it may vary over time, it may evenly or unevenly distribute tasks, power and resources over the members of the group. But it will be formed regardless of the abilities, personalities and intentions of the people involved. The very fact that we are individuals with different talents, predispositions and backgrounds makes this inevitable. Only if we refused to relate or interact on any basis whatsoever could we approximate ‘structurelessness’ and that is not the nature of a human group.

This means that to strive for a ‘structureless’ group is as useful and as deceptive, as to aim at an ‘objective’ news story, ‘value-free’ social science or a ‘free’ economy. A ‘laissez-faire’ group is about as realistic as a ‘laissez-faire’ society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others. This hegemony can easily be established because the idea of ‘structurelessness’ does not prevent the formation of informal structures, but only formal ones. Similarly, ‘laissez-faire’ philosophy did not prevent the economically powerful from establishing

control over wages, prices and distribution of goods; it only prevented the government from doing so. Thus 'structurelessness' becomes a way of masking power, and within the women's movement it is usually most strongly advocated by those who are the most powerful (whether they are conscious of their power or not). The rules of how decisions are made are known only to a few and awareness of power is curtailed by those who know the rules, as long as the structure of the group is informal. Those who do not know the rules and are not chosen for initiation must remain in confusion, or suffer from paranoid delusions that something is happening of which they are not quite aware.

For everyone to have the opportunity to be involved in a given group and to participate in its activities the structure must be explicit, not implicit. The rules of decision-making must be open and available to everyone, and this can only happen if they are formalised. This is not to say that formalisation of a group structure will destroy the informal structure. It usually doesn't. But it does hinder the informal structure from having predominant control and makes available some means of attacking it.

'Structurelessness' is organisationally impossible. We cannot decide whether to have a structured or structureless group; only whether or not to have a formally structured one. Therefore, the word will not be used any longer except to refer to the idea which it represents. Unstructured will refer to those groups which have not been deliberately structured in a particular manner. Structured will refer to those which have. A structured group always has a formal structure, and may also have an informal one. An unstructured group always has an informal, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly in unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.

The nature of elitism

'Elitist' is probably the most abused word in the women's liberation movement. It is used as frequently, and for the same reasons, as 'pinko' was in the '50s. It is never used correctly. Within the movement it commonly refers to individuals though the personal characteristics and activities of those to whom it is directed may differ widely. An individual, as an individual, can never be an 'elite' because the only proper application of the term 'elite' is to groups. Any individual, regardless of how well-known that person is, can never be an elite.

Correctly, an elite refers to a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent. A person becomes an elitist by being part of, or advocating, the rule by such a small group, whether or not that individual is well-known or not known at all. Notoriety is not a definition of an elitist. The most insidious elites are usually run by people not known to the larger public at all. Intelligent elitists are usually smart enough not to allow themselves to become well known. When they become known, they are watched, and the mask over their power is no longer firmly lodged.

Because elites are informal does not mean they are invisible. At any small group meeting anyone with a sharp eye and an acute ear can tell who is influencing whom. The members of a friendship group will relate more to each other than to other people. They listen more attentively and interrupt less. They repeat each other's points and give in amiably. The 'outs' they tend to ignore or grapple with. The 'outs' approval is not necessary for making a decision; however it is necessary for the 'outs' to stay on good terms with the 'ins'. Of course, the lines are not as sharp as I have drawn them. They are nuances of interaction, not pre-written scripts.

But they are discernible, and they do have their effect. Once one knows with whom it is important to check before a decision is made, and whose approval is the stamp of acceptance, one knows who is running things. Elites are not conspiracies. Seldom does a small group of people get together and try to take over a larger group for its own ends. Elites are nothing more and nothing less than a group of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. They would probably maintain their friendship whether or not they were involved in political activities; they would probably be involved in political activities whether or not they maintained their friendships. It is the coincidence of these two phenomena which creates elites in any groups and makes them so difficult to break.

These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, usually sharing the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don't. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.

Some groups, depending on their size, may have more than one such informal communication network. Networks may even overlap. When only one such network exists, it is the elite of an otherwise unstructured group, whether the participants in it want to be elitists or not. If it is the only such network in a structured group it may or may not be an elite depending on its composition and the nature of the formal structure. If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group thus forming factions, or one may deliberately opt out of the competition leaving the other as the elite. In a structured group, two or more such friendship networks usually compete with each other for formal power. This is often the healthiest situation. The other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power and thus are able to make demands of the group to whom they give their temporary allegiance.

Since movement groups have made no concrete decisions about who shall exercise power within them, many different criteria are used around the country. As the movement has changed through time, marriage has become a less universal criterion for effective participation, although all informal elites still establish standards by which

only women who possess certain material or personal characteristics may join. The standards frequently include: middle-class background (despite all the rhetoric about relating to the working-class), being married, not being married but living with someone, being or pretending to be a lesbian, being between the age of 20 and 30, being college-educated or at least having some college background, being 'hip', not being too 'hip', holding a certain political line or identification as a 'radical', having certain 'feminine' personality characteristics such as being 'nice', dressing right (whether in the traditional style or the anti-traditional style), etc. There are also some characteristics which will almost always tag one as a 'deviant' who should not be related to. They include: being too old, working full-time (particularly if one is actively committed to a 'career'), not being 'nice', and being avowedly single (ie neither heterosexual nor homosexual). Other criteria could be included, but they all have common themes. The characteristic prerequisite for participating in all the informal elites of the movement, and thus for exercising power, concern one's background, personality or allocation of time. They do not include one's competence, dedication to feminism, talents or potential contribution to the movement. The former are the criteria one usually uses in determining one's friends. The latter are what any movement or organisation has to use if it is going to be politically effective.

Although this dissection of the process of elite formation within small groups has been critical in its perspectives, it is not made in the belief that these informal structures are inevitably bad — merely that they are inevitable. All groups create informal structures as a result of the interaction patterns among the members. Such informal structures can do very useful things. But only unstructured groups are totally governed by them. When informal elites are combined with a myth of 'structurelessness', there can be no attempt to put limits on the use of power. It becomes capricious.

This has two potentially negative consequences of which we should be aware. The first is that the informal structure of decision-making will be like a sorority: one in which people listen to others because they like them, not because they say significant things. As long as the movement does not do significant things this does not much matter. But if its development is not to be arrested at this preliminary stage, it will have to alter this trend. The second is that informal structures have no obligation to be responsible to the group at large. Their power was not given to them; it cannot be taken away. Their influence is not based on what they do for the group; therefore they cannot be directly influenced by the group. This does not necessarily make informal structures irresponsible. Those who are concerned with maintaining their influence will usually try to be responsible. The group simply cannot compel such responsibility; it is dependent on the interests of the elite.

The 'star' system

The 'idea' of 'structurelessness' has created the 'star' system. We live in a society which expects Political groups to make decisions and to select people to articulate

those decisions to the public at large. The press and the public do not know how to listen seriously to individual women as women; they want to know how the group feels. Only three techniques have ever been developed for establishing mass group opinion: the vote or referendum, the public opinion survey questionnaire and the selection of group spokespeople at an appropriate meeting. The women's liberation movement has used none of these to communicate with the public. Neither the movement as a whole nor most of the multitudinous groups within it have established a means of explaining their position on various issues. But the public is conditioned to look for spokespeople.

While it has consciously not chosen spokespeople, the movement has thrown up many women who have caught the public eye for varying reasons. These women represent no particular group or established opinion; they know this and usually say so. But because there are no official spokespeople nor any decision-making body the press can interview when it wants to know the movement's position on a subject, these women are perceived as the spokespeople. Thus, whether they want to or not, whether the movement likes it or not, women of public note are put in the role of spokespeople by default.

This is one source of the tie that is often felt towards the women who are labelled 'stars'. Because they were not selected by the women in the movement to represent the movement's views, they are resented when the press presumes they speak for the movement ... Thus the backlash of the 'star' system, in effect, encourages the very kind of individual non-responsibility that the movement condemns. By purging a sister as a 'star' the movement loses whatever control it may have had over the person, who becomes free to commit all of the individualistic sins of which she had been accused.

Political impotence

Unstructured groups may be very effective in getting women to talk about their lives; they aren't very good for getting things done. Unless their mode of operation changes, groups flounder at the point where people tire of 'just-talking' and want to do something more. Because the larger movement in most cities is as unstructured as individual rap groups, it is not much more effective than the separate groups at specific tasks. The informal structure is rarely together enough or in touch enough with the people to be able to operate effectively. So the movement generates much emotion and few results. Unfortunately, the consequences of all this motion are not as innocuous as the results, and their victim is the movement itself.

Some groups have turned themselves into local action projects, if they do not involve too many people, and work on a small scale. But this form restricts movement activity to the local level. Also, to function well the groups must usually pare themselves down to that informal group of friends who were running things in the first place. This excludes many women from participating. As long as the only way women can participate in the movement is through membership of a small group, the non-gregarious

are at a distinct disadvantage. As long as friendship groups are the main means of organisational activity, elitism becomes institutionalised.

For those groups which cannot find a local project to devote themselves to, the mere act of staying together becomes the reason for their staying together. When a group has no specific task (and consciousness-raising is a task), the people in it turn their energies to controlling others in the group. This is not done so much out of a malicious desire to manipulate others (though sometimes it is) as out of lack of anything better to do with their talents. Able people with time on their hands and a need to justify their coming together put their efforts into personal control, and spend their time criticising the personalities of the other members in the group. Infighting and personal power games rule the day. When a group is involved in a task, people learn to get along with others as they are and to subsume dislikes for the sake of the larger goals. There are limits placed on the compulsion to remould every person into our image of what they should be.

The end of consciousness-raising leaves people with no place to go and the lack of structure leaves them with no way of getting there. The women in the movement either turn in on themselves and their sisters or seek other alternatives of action. There are few alternatives available. Some women just 'do their own thing'. This can lead to a great deal of individual creativity, much of which is useful for the movement, but it is not a viable alternative for most women and certainly does not foster a spirit of co-operative group effort. Other women drift out of the movement entirely because they don't want to develop an individual project and have found no way of discovering, joining or starting group projects that interest them. Many turn to other political organisations to give them the kind of structured, effective activity that they have not been able to find in the women's movement. Thus, those political organisations which view women's liberation as only one issue among many find the women's liberation movement a vast recruiting ground for new members. There is no need for such organisations to 'infiltrate' (though this is not precluded). The desire for meaningful political activity generated by women by becoming part of the women's liberation movement is sufficient to make them eager to join other organisations. The movement itself provides no outlets for their new ideas and energies.

Those women who join other political organisations while remaining within the women's liberation movement, or who join women's liberation while remaining in other political organisations, in turn become the framework for new informal structures. These friendship networks are based upon their common non-feminist politics rather than the characteristics discussed earlier; however, the network operates in much the same way. Because these women share common values, ideas and political orientations, they too become informal, unplanned, unselected, irresponsible elites — whether they intend to be so or not. These new informal elites are often perceived as threats by the old informal elites previously developed within different movement groups.

This is a correct perception. Such politically orientated networks are rarely willing to be merely 'sororities' as many of the old ones were, and want to proselytise their

political as well as their feminist ideas. This is only natural, but its implications for women's liberation have never been adequately discussed. The old elites are rarely willing to bring such differences of opinion out into the open because it would involve exposing the nature of the informal structure of the group. Many of these informal elites have been hiding under the banner of 'anti-elitism' and 'structureless-ness'. To counter effectively the competition from another informal structure, they would have to become 'public' and this possibility is fraught with many dangerous implications. Thus, to maintain its own power, it is easier to rationalise the exclusion of the members of the other informal structure by such means as 'red-baiting', 'lesbian-baiting' or 'straight-baiting'. The only other alternative is formally to structure the group in such a way that the original power is institutionalised. This is not always possible. If the informal elites have been well structured and have exercised a fair amount of power in the past, such a task is feasible. These groups have a history of being somewhat politically effective in the past, as the tightness of the informal structure has proven an adequate substitute for a formal structure. Becoming structured does not alter their operation much, though the institutionalisation of the power structure does not open it to formal challenge. It is those groups which are in greatest need of structure that are often least capable of creating it. Their informal structures have not been too well formed and adherence to the ideology of 'structureless-ness' makes them reluctant to change tactics. The more unstructured a group it is, the more lacking it is in informal structures; the more it adheres to an ideology of 'structurelessness', the more vulnerable it is to being taken over by a group of political comrades.

Since the movement at large is just as unstructured as most of its constituent groups, it is similarly susceptible to indirect influence. But the phenomenon manifests itself differently. On a local level most groups can operate autonomously, but only the groups that can organise a national activity are nationally organised groups. Thus, it is often the structured feminist organisations that provide national directions for feminist activities, and this direction is determined by the priorities of these organisations. Such groups as National Organisation of Women and Womens Equality Action League and some Left women's caucuses are simply the only organisations capable of mounting a national campaign.

The multitude of unstructured women's liberation groups can choose to support or not support the national campaigns, but are incapable of mounting their own. Thus their members become the troops under the leadership of the structured organisations. They don't even have a way of deciding what the priorities are.

The more unstructured a movement is, the less control it has over the directions in which it develops and the political actions in which it engages.

This does not mean that its ideas do not spread. Given a certain amount of interest by the media and the appropriateness of social conditions, the ideas will still be diffused widely. But diffusion of ideas does not mean they are implemented; it only means they are talked about. Insofar as they can be applied individually they may be acted upon;

insofar as they require co-ordinated political power to be implemented, they will not be.

As long as the women's liberation movement stays dedicated to a form of organisation which stresses small, inactive discussion groups among friends, the worst problems of unstructuredness will not be felt. But this style of organisation has its limits; it is politically inefficacious, exclusive and discriminatory against those women who are not or cannot be tied into the friendship networks. Those who do not fit into what already exists because of class, race, occupation, parental or marital status, or personality will inevitably be discouraged from trying to participate. Those who do not fit in will develop vested interests in maintaining things as they are.

The informal groups' vested interests will be sustained by the informal structures that exist, and the movement will have no way of determining who shall exercise power within it. If the movement continues deliberately not to select who shall exercise power, it does not thereby abolish power.

All it does is abdicate the right to demand that those who do exercise power and influence be responsible for it. If the movement continues to keep power as diffuse as possible because it knows it cannot demand responsibility from those who have it, it does prevent any group or person from totally dominating. But it simultaneously ensures that the movement is as ineffective as possible. Some middle ground between domination and ineffectiveness can and must be found.

These problems are coming to a head at this time because the nature of the movement is necessarily changing. Consciousness-raising, as the main function of the women's liberation movement, is becoming obsolete. Due to the intense press publicity of the last two years and the numerous overground books and articles now being circulated, women's liberation has become a household word. Its issues are discussed and informal rap groups are formed by people who have no explicit connection with any movement group. Purely educational work is no longer such an overwhelming need. The movement must go on to other tasks. It now needs to establish its priorities, articulate its goals and pursue its objectives in a co-ordinated way. To do this it must be organised locally, regionally and nationally.

Principles of democratic structuring

Once the movement no longer clings tenaciously to the ideology of structurelessness', it will be free to develop those forms of organisation best suited to its healthy functioning. This does not mean that we should go to the other extreme and blindly imitate the traditional forms of organisation. But neither should we blindly reject them all. Some traditional techniques will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs to the individuals in the movement. Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations. The 'lot system' is one such idea which emerged from the movement. It is not applicable

to all situations, but it is useful in some. Other ideas for structuring are needed. But before we can proceed to experiment intelligently, we must accept the idea that there is nothing inherently bad about structure itself — only its excessive use.

While engaging in this trial-and-error process, there are some principles we can keep in mind that are essential to democratic structuring and are politically effective also:

1. Delegation of specific authority to specific individuals for specific tasks by democratic procedures. Letting people assume jobs or tasks by default only means they are not dependably done. If people are selected for a task, preferably after expressing an interest or willingness to do it, they have made a commitment which cannot easily be ignored.
2. Requiring all those to whom authority has been delegated to be responsible to all those who selected them. This is how the group has control over people in positions of authority. Individuals may exercise power, but it is the group that has the ultimate say over how the power is exercised.
3. Distribution of authority among as many people as is reasonably possible. This prevents monopoly of power and requires those in positions of authority to consult with many others in the process of exercising it. It also gives many people an opportunity to have responsibility for specific tasks and thereby to learn specific skills.
4. Rotation of tasks among individuals. Responsibilities which are held too long by one person, formally or informally, come to be seen as that person's 'property' and are not easily relinquished or controlled by the group. Conversely, if tasks are rotated too frequently the individual does not have time to learn her job well and acquire a sense of satisfaction of doing a good job.
5. Allocation of tasks along rational criteria. Selecting someone for a position because they are liked by the group, or giving them hard work because they are disliked, serves neither the group nor the person in the long run. Ability, interest and responsibility have got to be the major concerns in such selection. People should be given an opportunity to learn skills they do not have, but this is best done through some sort of 'apprenticeship' programme rather than the 'sink or swim' method. Having a responsibility one can't handle well is demoralising. Conversely, being blackballed from what one can do well does not encourage one to develop one's skills. Women have been punished for being competent throughout most of human history — the movement does not need to repeat this process.
6. Diffusion of information to everyone as frequently as possible. Information is power. Access to information enhances one's power. When an informal network spreads new ideas and information among themselves outside the group, they are already engaged in the process of forming an opinion — without the group

participating. The more one knows about how things work, the more politically effective one can be.

7. Equal access to resources needed by the group' This is not always perfectly possible, but should be striven for. A member who maintains a monopoly over a needed resource (like a printing press or a darkroom owned by a husband) can unduly influence the use of that resource. Skills and information are also resources. Members' skills and information can be equally available only when members are willing to teach what they know to others.

When these principles are applied, they ensure that whatever structures are developed by different movement groups will be controlled by and be responsible to the group. The group of people in Positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open and temporary. They will not be in such an easy Position to institutionalise their Power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the Power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.

The Ted K Archive

Cathy Levine
The Tyranny of Tyranny
1979

www.angelfire.com

Originally published in "Black Rose", number 1, Spring/1974 (Rising Free Collective).

Article by Jo Freeman originally published in the "Berkeley Journal of Sociology",
1970, reprinted by ORA and the Anarchist Workers Association in 1972.

www.thetedkarchive.com