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Speak Out Now

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The Liberation of Women Will Mean the Liberation of Us All

In response to the ongoing attacks on women by Donald Trump and other men in power, the #MeToo movement organized ongoing protests against the harassment, discrimination and violence that women face in the U.S. But to get rid of this sexist cancer it is important to understand where the oppression of women comes from and who benefits from it.

The claim that the division between the sexes has always been one of men dominating and controlling women is not true. For most of our existence, people lived in small groups, worked together, shared the resources and took collective responsibility for society. There was no exploitation by individuals or a ruling group. Work was divided between women and men or shared. All work was valued and decision making was usually collective.

There was no benefit to have one group dominate another. There was no wealth or power to accumulate, sharing meant greater security for all. Land and resources were not owned or controlled by anyone. If we are to talk about “human nature” this is what it means to be human. Our ancestors lived in this way for more than 100,000 years.

When agriculture or domestication of herd animals began to develop, it was possible to exert control over property, land or animals. It was possible for social divisions to emerge, based on who controlled the most productive land or had the largest herds. In these societies, the role of women often shifted from a role as equal participants and producers in the larger society to a focus on the household. Their main productive activity became a reproductive one - producing children. More family members available to work the land or herd the animals, meant possibilities of accumulating wealth.

Defending the land or animals from raiders became the role of men while women took care of the household. For those with wealth to inherit, women became the producers of heirs to wealth – their sexuality controlled and guarded by the men. The free-

doms women previously enjoyed were greatly limited. This process didn't take place overnight, it took hundreds or thousands of years. And in some societies these oppressive relations never emerged.

Where wealth and power began to accumulate in the hands of a small grouping, social classes based on ownership developed. Myths developed rationalizing the inferior position of women, claiming they are weaker, and more emotional.

During industrialization, women were brought into the workforce at lower wages, and with worse conditions than men. This benefitted the capitalists. Women continued to do the housework and raised each generation of workers, without compensation. There was no need for the capitalists to devote any wealth to provide services to families. The health and wellbeing of the family was “women's work”.

To enforce the inequalities of class society, the owning class uses myths of superiority, like the myths about women being inferior to men. Some societies considered women as the property of their husbands, who could legally rape or even kill them. Some men still accept this hierarchy and act as oppressors of women in the home and at work.

Throughout history women have not accepted their oppression. They resisted individually and collectively. They provided leadership to the women's movement, civil rights movement, and the workers' movement. Many women now have greater access to jobs and education, control over their bodies and equal rights.

Capitalism requires oppression and exploitation to keep its profits flowing to a small minority, while denying the rights and control of society's wealth by the majority. Women's liberation will come about when capitalism is overthrown and we live in a society run by those who do the work - a society like those in our past, which is organized to fulfill the needs of all and respects and values everyone.