

## **A Strategy for the Integration of Arab Women in the Arab Unity Movement<sup>(1)</sup>**

Women's participation in the Arab national movement has taken a passive and marginal aspect and her role in national organization has been that of a follower. Revolutionary slogans raised by Arab progressive socialist parties, which aimed to do away with exploitation in all its forms, remained a dead letter.

Throughout their recent history, women have been excluded from political activity. Feminine organizations created in post-revolutionary periods reflected the influence of the ruling class. In the early part of this century they consisted of wives of pashas and other high dignitaries. Later on, they included the wives of the military. Even so, their role was restricted to charity works. Their number was highly limited; their aim was to support programs initiated by men.

The ruling class in Arab countries refuses to recognize the existence of a sexual conflict. Political leaders concentrate on class struggle; they pretend that women do not form a class by themselves, since they are natural partners to men in family and society. This means that they should be followers and have no right to form a party or to acquire political power.

International imperialism, which tries to spread its international effectiveness by enforcing free trade and economy, aims at the same time, and through calculated plans, to wipe out national and local culture in developing countries. While it preaches unity of mankind, religions, and cultures, actually it tries to oppose local unity movements such as Arab unity. It encourages religious and sectarian division with the aim of using religion in its reactionary form as a power against progressive movements.

The Arab women's movement today should beware of submitting to these tactics of imperialism. It should not aim at fighting religion per se, but it should fight its exploitation for subversive ends. This movement must include not only bourgeois women but also those of the laboring masses.

### **Reinvestigation of Arab History**

A rereading of Arab history will show that a militant, progressive trend permeates its pages since early Islamic days. Women who embraced Islam in the Prophet's day, claimed the same rights as Muslim

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men. Consequently, special reference to them was made in the Koran, such as: "Muslim men and women", "Men and women believers". Aisha, the Prophet's favorite wife, used to argue with him about certain questions and protest against some of his decisions, even if they were religiously confirmed. Muslim women took part in political as well as in military and cultural activities.

### Meaning of Democracy

True democracy means equality and close association between leadership and infrastructure in the process of planning and decision-making. Women's problems do not relate only to their inability to read and write. There is also political ignorance and a whole past of oppression which has resulted in deforming their nature. All this has led many of them to enjoy masochism and hero-worship of their enslavers.

A democratic women's movement should struggle to free women from mental slavery. It is not enough to claim political, social and economic freedom without freeing the soul, thus breaking inner chains.

The chief defect of Arab revolutions has been the monopoly of authority by a minority group, while the majority, including women, were forbidden to rebel. The ruling minority understands its function as a political dictatorship, allowing its members to impose their will and banish all opposition.

### Injustices of the Patriarchal System

This system which gives men complete control of the family, weighs on women not only in capitalistic countries but also in socialist ones. According to this system, women and children are the property of the male (father or husband) and, as such, he has the right to handle them in whatever way he likes. Family honor is exclusively the man's honor. If the woman defiles it by misconduct, she incurs the penalty of death. The same property right permits him to make her work in his house and in his field freely, without any remuneration except food and lodging. It is such injustice that women's organizations should fight independently from political parties dominated by men, too many of whom are totally unmindful of woman's problems.

### The Family System, a Factor of Woman's Enslavement

The family is to most people a sacred institution which should not be touched. When an emancipated woman tries to free herself from family duties and to

practice an independent profession, she is accused of encroaching on man's rights and of trying to assault the sacredness of the family system. Critics ignore the fact that this system has lived on woman's slavery and has been responsible for many family tragedies. To treat family problems women must organize as a separate group and find the way of making marriage laws more just and humane. Equal rights must be given to them in all aspects of family life. Divorce should not be the husband's sole privilege. Responsibility for the children must be shared by both parents in an equal manner.

### Organization of the Women's Movement: Creation of Local Groups

The first characteristic of women's movement should be its democratization, i.e. its ability to bring together all classes of women, urban, bedouin and rural. They could form local groups, similar to "people's councils", where women can discuss their problems and initiate their own plans and solutions.

Such groups are actually developing in many parts of the Arab world. The success of the Women's Regional Conference in the Gulf states, March 1981, was due to the pressure of those women's groups and to their ability to direct meetings, initiate ideas and impose women's demands on the Conference. "Women's groups" were able to act independently and to recommend the gradual formation of a network of them, which model will be disseminated all over the Arab countries. Each group will benefit from a democratic structure and will have the power to make its own plans independently from outside pressure. Democratic organization and democratic politics, free from minority dictatorship should be the distinctive trait and the ultimate goal of the present women's movement.

#### A Bastard

What is a bastard?  
A law was established, Its explanation  
exists no more  
All men are my father  
I was born without having one  
Of what use is this?  
I do not know  
All men could be my father  
Each tells me he has got one  
They relate their stories in lively tones  
Yet I see them lonely  
They all look like bastards...

Hoda Adib  
Translated from French