

ECONOMICS OF SEX BIAS

BETTY MacMORRAN GRAY

Mrs. Gray, who majored in economics at Vassar, is an editor with a Boston publishing house.

A women's liberation journal asserts, "To understand the superstructure of sexism today, female liberation must re-examine the foundations of civilization"—in the language of economics, a macro approach. Almost all of today's journals describe, in what comes close to a stereotype, the consciousness-raising meetings of a Liz, a Judy, a Sue. A micro approach.

Simone de Beauvoir says in *Force of Circumstance* that, if she had to write *The Second Sex* all over again,

I should take a more materialist position today in the first volume. I should base the notion of woman as *other* and the Manichaeian argument it entails not on an idealistic and *a priori* struggle of consciences, but on the facts of supply and demand. This modification would not necessitate any changes in the subsequent developments of my argument. On the whole, I still agree with what I said. I never cherished any illusions of changing woman's condition; it depends on the future of labor in the world; it will change significantly only at the price of a revolution in production. That is why I avoided falling into the trap of "feminism."

On balance, I choose de Beauvoir's approach. It strikes me as relatively practical, possibly French. For, although we are in a fix, we are not without tools—not only in automotive mechanics but also in psychology, anthropology, history and economics. As I read "movement" writing of whatever kind, I find little love of such tools. One exception, among others, seems to me Howard Zinn's manifest love of history—expressed, for instance, in *The Politics of History*. Zinn would not abandon history; he would try to use it well. The following note is an attempt to use economics in preference, say, to re-examining civilization or to essaying individual consciousness-raising, and to suggest some ways in which women's liberation can use it well.

A dominant call, whether voiced by liberal administrators of women's colleges, or by the ILGWU, or by radical women's liberation groups is, and has been for many years, for an increase in the quantity and quality of jobs for women. One often hears that women are unemployed, underemployed, underpaid; underlings. Very little is said about the interaction between the specific economic system under which we live and the condition of women as workers. Alfred Marshall, Cambridge's great economist at the turn of the century, asked, "Which blade of scissors does the cutting?" It is still a good question.

Capitalism is a specific system—as is the decimal system, the solar system, the Bell Telephone system. It is active and it is interactive with women's condition. It can no more use increasing numbers of women workers, on a regular basis, than the decimal system can use a pair of crazy eights. I shall examine, first, why capitalism cannot use increasing numbers of women workers; and, second,

how capitalism systematically *disuses* women workers.

Under capitalism, individuals and corporations own and control the means of production, and employ them, in a competitive fashion, to pursue profits. No theorist or apologist, from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman, has ever claimed their purpose to be other than that. In his article on "Capitalism" in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Werner Sombart writes, "An abstraction, the stock of material things, occupies the center of the economics stage. . . . The segregation of a certain range of activities into a distinct branch of industry is determined not by the outlook and limitations of a living personality but by purely material factors. . . . Labor is thus treated as a species of salable goods."

Capitalism's regulator has always been the market mechanism. It still is that, although new nuts and bolts have been added to it, for instance, by the price regulation of combines and the wage regulation of unions. Labor will be bought, along with other factors of production (say, iron, an acre of bottom land), when the parts of the market mechanism—demand and supply, market conditions, prices of goods and wages (a causal sequence)—interact to make the purchase of labor (or iron or land) yield the end product of the sequence: profits and more profits. Within the memory of most of us, the parts of the market mechanism have interacted so as to require the purchase of all available labor in only one period—in the full employment days and nights of World War II.

The market mechanism, thus, rarely requires the full employment of labor. What does it require of labor? It requires flexibility, or, to put the matter more bluntly, cyclical unemployment. Today, even President Nixon claims, "I am now a Keynesian." Yet all of Keynes's stabilization devices, at least the ones tried since the New Deal by both Democrats and Republicans, have failed to stabilize the mechanism's cyclical fluctuations—the rhythm of prosperity and depression or recession, of boom and bust. Full employment is rare. Cyclical unemployment is the rule. It rises and falls.

Labor consists, of course, of women workers and men workers. Women are no more exempt than men from being, under capitalism, "a species of salable goods." As goods, women are damaged, so to speak, in the sense that their employment is less protected, both by custom and unionization, than is that of men. (Approximately one out of every seven women is a "union maid"; one out of every four men is a union member.) Women must become more demanding if they are to be effective as workers. They must fight for inclusion in unions and for, say, day-care centers.

All workers are threatened increasingly by alternative goods. Automated goods make no demands—whether from within or without unions—and so they may prove to be the cheapest goods of all: the most productive of profits and more profits.

How does capitalism, unable to use an increasing

quantity of women workers, systematically disuse women workers? Unemployment is awkward, especially when it spirals up against the background of the American dream. During busts, the numbers of unemployed rise to embarrassing highs. However, what might be called the "statistical-industrial complex" comes to the rescue of capitalism. Often it can obscure the awkward highs as effectively as a cloud can obscure the top of the Empire State Building. The statistical-industrial complex defines the labor force as being made up of people who are *at work, or eligible for and actively seeking work*. Consequently, it counts only those people as being either employed or unemployed. The logic is faultless, but the reality behind it—the reality of the definition itself—is awry. Economists estimate that the number of people who want jobs and don't have them at any given time is considerably higher than the official reports—how much higher depends on which economist you read.

Who are the workers who don't make the official reports—the hidden unemployed? In the main, they are the woman (sometimes called "married," sometimes "adult"), the teen-ager, the old man and the old woman—almost a group, a rather touching one, from a Faulkner novel. It is easy for the statistical-industrial complex to count them, *at will*, as either in or out of the labor force. It is easy to hide them, for they come from and go to some place—presumably, the home, the school, retirement.

It is difficult to hide white adult males and increasingly difficult to hide black adult males. Either they are working or they are hanging around, visibly and embarrassingly. During booms, the woman, the teen-ager, the old man and the old woman can be counted in; they are dubbed "Madam" and "Sir," the "emergency labor force," the "secondary labor force," the "peripheral labor force." During busts, they can be counted out. When they are counted

out, not only are they not being used in increasing numbers but they are being systematically *disused*: the counting out compensates in large part for a major defect in the system of capitalism—for its cyclical fluctuations which lead to cyclical unemployment.

How do we know that, during a bust, the woman, the teen-ager, the old man and the old woman don't go back, happily, to cooking the chicken in the pot, to the Bunsen burners and the playing fields, to Florida? How do we know that their numbers are significant? We don't know about them all, but we have many clues about many. Here are three, from diverse years and sources.

(1) In 1944 and 1945, as the full employment years of World War II were coming to an end; the Women's Bureau surveyed 13,000 women who were employed in war-production areas and who represented all occupations, except domestic service. The bureau found that more than half of the women who had been housewives, at the time of Pearl Harbor, and three-quarters of the girls who had been students, wanted to stay, after the war, on the job or on another job; wanted to stay within the labor force.

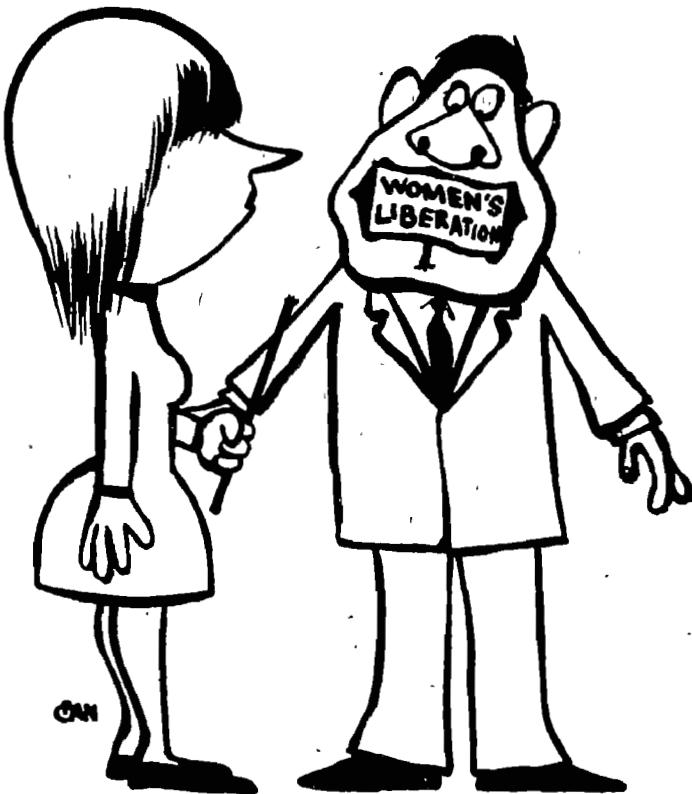
In 1947, however, J. Frederic Dewhurst explained in the Twentieth Century Fund's semi-official, indeed semi-biblical, *America's Needs and Resources*, that "Re-employment of returning servicemen and of workers laid off by munitions industries has been facilitated by the withdrawal of emergency war workers from the labor market." Indeed; 6 million of the 7 million members of the emergency labor force—which, according to Dewhurst, was made up of married women, young people of from 14 to 19, and superannuated-retired-marginal workers—"withdrew" within a year after the war's end.

(2) In 1955, the Bureau of the Census experimented with a new definition of unemployment. The bureau believed that the new definition might prove more objective than the existing one and more in accord with the actual labor force behavior of jobless people; that it might include, in addition to those actively seeking work, the inactive (people who wanted work but who judged there was no point in trying—at Macy's, at the machine shops).

The bureau turned up 1 million inactive unemployed. And the bureau stated, "Most of the additional persons who would be classified as unemployed under the proposed new definition were *teen-agers and adult women*. (Emphasis added.) If those million had been added to 1955's officially unemployed, they would have raised the total by one-third. The statistical-industrial complex failed to adopt the new definition; it is still using the old one.

(3) The woman, the teen-ager, the old man and the old woman, according to multitudinous reports, are forever "withdrawing from," "leaving" or "dropping out of" the labor force—at moments convenient for capitalism. A random example: "Last month's improvement [in unemployment] was due to a drop in unemployed women, presumably because they had left the labor force," wrote *The New York Times* on December 2, 1962. Another: "49,000 people, many of them students and housewives, dropped out of the work force [of Massachusetts] after the Christmas holidays," *The Boston Globe* reported almost a decade later, on February 25, 1971.

In such observations, the woman, the teen-ager, the old



man and the old woman sound, in their labor-force behavior, as obliging as Fielding's Sophia who "took the first Opportunity of withdrawing with the Ladies," as content as baseball fans leaving a double-header, as ready as pears to drop out of a tree. It is likely, however, that the terminology of the statistical-industrial complex is as slippery as that of the Pentagon; that, for instance, "withdrawing" resembles "Vietnamization." A general comment (in a "Crisis of Confidence" editorial): "The Bureau of Labor Statistics is suddenly stopped from explaining its data when such an analysis might remind the American public that all is not well with the economy," from *The New York Times* of April 13, 1971.

It boggles the imagination—at least my imagination—how you can make a springboard for women's liberation out of capitalism. Capitalism, which rarely requires full employment, cannot use increasing numbers of women workers. Capitalism, which needs to compensate for cyclical unemployment, systematically disuses women workers.

Surely, all liberators, whether concerned primarily with re-examining civilization or with individual consciousness-raising, or indeed with the locus of the orgasm, would agree that for any freely chosen activity a chance, at least, at a room of one's own is necessary; would agree that rents and mortgages come high these days. No true liberator could suggest a take-over of jobs and of rooms by women. No such take-over, even if successful, could last—for then there would be men's liberation and then women's liberation and then. . . .

If we are serious about women's liberation, we must challenge, or at least explore, capitalism's interaction with women's condition. For such activity, the statistical-industrial complex seems to me an ideal starting place. Indeed, we must use economics well. If we do, we may find that woman is, in de Beauvoir's simple word and rich concept, *other* to the system of capitalism; that man too is *other* to the system of capitalism; that woman is *not necessarily other* to man. □

MISLEADING THE PRESIDENTS

THIRTY YEARS OF WIRE TAPPING

ATHAN G. THEOHARIS

Mr. Theoharis, associate professor of American history at Marquette University, is the author of Seeds of Repression. Harry S. Truman and the Origins of McCarthyism (Quadrangle Books) and The Yalta Myths: An Issue in American Politics, 1945-55 (University of Missouri Press). The research for this article, in which Mr. Theoharis was assisted by Paul Quirk of Marquette University and Lynn Parsons of Wayne State University, was supported financially by the Truman Institute for National and International Affairs.

The history of government use of wire tapping, particularly during the early years of the Truman Presidency, provides one reason for concern over White House-Justice Department relations. In 1940, responding to the outbreak of war in Europe and the subversive role played during the 1930s by Fascist parties in France, Austria and Czechoslovakia, the Roosevelt administration supported legislation to legalize wire tapping in "national defense" cases. At that time, Rep. Emanuel Celler (D., N.Y.) had introduced a bill that would have amended section 605 of the Communications Act of 1934 and permitted the FBI, subject to the approval of the Attorney General, to wire tap in cases involving interference or attempts to interfere with the national defense by sabotage, espionage, conspiracy, violation of the neutrality laws, or "in any other manner." Information thus obtained was to be admissible as evidence. The Congress failed to enact the legislation and, lacking legislative authorization, President Roosevelt on May 21, 1940 issued instead an executive order stipulating:

I have agreed with the broad purpose of the Supreme Court decision [in *Nardone*] relating to wiretapping in investigations. The Court is undoubtedly sound both in

regard to the use of evidence received over tapped wires in the prosecution of citizens in criminal cases; and it is also right in its opinion that under ordinary and normal circumstances wiretapping by government agents should not be carried out for the excellent reason that it is almost bound to lead to abuse of civil rights.

However, I am convinced that the Supreme Court never intended any dictum in the particular case which it decided to apply to grave matters involving the defense of the nation.

It is, of course, well known that certain other nations have been engaged in the organization of propaganda of so-called "fifth columns" in other countries and in preparation for sabotage, as well as in active sabotage.

It is too late to do anything about it after sabotage, assassinations and "fifth column" activities are completed.

You are, therefore, authorized and directed in such cases as you may approve, after investigation of the need in each case, to authorize the necessary investigating agents that they are at liberty to secure information by listening devices direct to the conversation or other communications of persons suspected of subversive activities against the Government of the United States, including suspected spies. *You are requested furthermore to limit these investigations so conducted to a minimum and to limit them insofar as possible to aliens.* (Emphasis added.)

With the end of World War II and Harry S. Truman's accession to the Presidency, the issue of continuing this directive came into question. In July 1946, Tom C. Clark, Truman's Attorney General, pressed the President to continue the wire-tapping authorization. Exploiting Truman's anxieties about deteriorating U.S.-Soviet relations, the active role of the U.S. Communist Party in civil rights and labor activities, and recent disclosures of subversion or

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