

# The Feminist Process

by Maggie Phair

Many groups abandoned their gavels during the sixties. In this area of social change, we are confronted with some of the unconscious attitudes in our own decision-making that were learned in early childhood and left us with habits common to our opposition. Feminist process was developed in small groups where people learned to be more considerate, more open, more fair.

Feminist process does not mean that women dominate or exclude men – on the contrary. It challenges all systems of domination – matriarchy as well as patriarchy. The term recognizes the historical importance of the feminist movement in insisting that nonviolence begins at home – in the ways we treat each other.

When we say that we use feminist process, we mean that the relationships within our group cannot be separated from the accomplishment of our goals. We mean that the means control the ends. We mean that we value synthesis and cooperation rather than competition, that we value each individual's contribution to the group and encourage the active participation of everyone involved in an action.

We mean that our organizations are non-hierarchical; that power flows from the united will of the group, not from the authority of any individual. Nevertheless, our groups are not leaderless – each one of us is a leader.

The following are some specific ways we use feminist process:

- Protecting speaking time by going around the circle and allowing each person to speak for a specific time. Thus we hear the ideas of people who do not feel comfortable speaking out in a group, and highly verbal people do not always dominate meetings.
- Not interrupting people who are speaking. We can even leave space after each speaker, counting to five before speaking.
- Not giving all the answers and solutions. Our ideas are important, but when we wait or draw out others, the discussion is enriched.
- Interrupting others' oppressive behavior. Men can tell men; women can tell women; women can tell men; men can tell women when some behavior is oppressive, and how to improve it. It is no act of friendship to allow friends to continue dominating those around them.
- Becoming a good listener

- Not speaking on every subject. Before we speak, we can ask ourselves if we are truly contributing something unique with our comment.
- Sharing skills and knowledge. We keep our work groups open so new members can gain experience in many areas, and we share information openly and equally.
- Rotating responsibilities so new people can develop skills and share fully in all aspects of the action. Because a person does something well is no reason the same person should do it all the time. In general, we try not to perform the same role – such as facilitating a meeting – twice in a row.
- Working together cooperatively. Our goal is further the work of the group, not bettering our own position.
- We allow times when women can meet with other women, and men can meet with men – not to exclude the opposite sex, but to discover who we are. Our society conditions women and men to depend on the opposite sex to embody many common human qualities. Among those of our own gender, we cannot play the same limited roles, and must become more whole.