

There is no alternative:

10 arguments for feminism



Sozialistische Jugend Deutschlands – Die Falken



feminism

Imprint

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Dear comrades,

the debate on patriarchal structures inside the capitalist society has to be a permanent one, to defend our achieved positions and to gain new ones. The SJD – Die Falken (Socialist Youth of Germany – The Falcons) is part of this society and has to deal with the existing circumstances to be able to change them. The fight against capitalist and patriarchal authority models and mechanisms is still ongoing. Women are still especially affected by discrimination, pressure, sexual violence and exploitation. Sexism starts where women are not treated in the same way as men because of their gender. The fields of discrimination are very diverse. Even though girls on average are better at school, this has no impact on their day-to-day life in general. In working life we can see that women are employed more often than men in lower paid jobs.

And what does it look like inside our organisation? Of course, we are in favour of equal rights. However, typical gender roles also dominate the division of labour in many fields: Often there are more boys and men than girls and women in the boards. In our employment policy, a gender balance often is considered as highly important, but in the end more often than not we can observe that women have to take the part-time jobs. And not to forget the division of tasks: still in most cases girls and women are involved in working with children and boys and men in working with young people, even though there might be regional exceptions. On national congresses and committees we find definitely more male than female delegates. We can observe that men take the floor at these events more often.

Feminism wants to change exactly these structures and stands for a society free of (gender related) domination. It is also important to know where the roots of feminism lie. Historically there were different streams of feminism. Its roots go back to the struggle of women against the view of being inferior to the male gender. Different currents all have in common the rising of women against this pressure, exclusion, (social) discrimination, (economic and sexual) exploitation and their pursuit of gender equality in all social

There is no alternative: **feminism**

and cultural aspects. The claim for emancipation, equality and political maturity was articulated for the first time by women and men in the age of Enlightenment and the European revolutions. In the middle of the 19th century a broad alliance of women evolved to fight for a general right to vote, the right to study and to be employed and to be unmarried instead of living subjected to a husband.

With the beginning of Labour movement Germany's women's movement increased in members and activities, but at the same time split into a middle-class liberal and a socialist tendency. This split became notable during the debates about the right to vote: Liberal feminist activists wanted to get the same voting right as the men of their class, and the feminist socialists like Clara Zetkin and Lily Braun claimed the right to vote for everyone. Already at this time they were sure that emancipation and feminism could not be restricted to formal political rights. Patriarchal structures had to be called entirely into question as the dominant power in all fields of private and social life.

In the 1960s a new wave of the women's movement developed. It propagated the slogan »the private is political« and put it into action. In France women laundered their underwear in public, in Germany they burned bras on noble streets to demonstrate against the commercialisation of their bodies, in the Netherlands they occupied public men's toilets because there weren't any for women. These women gained much attention by these protest actions and made their claim of equal social and economic living conditions, participation in political and economic power and sexual self-determination heard.

This brochure is the start of the feminism campaign »there is no alternative: feminism« of SJD – Die Falken. The aim of the brochure and the campaign is to encourage discussions on current issues. The brochure does not only include texts, but also educational proposals for dealing with those topics, not only in dreary discussion rounds. Since sexism and patriarchal structures are found in everyday situations, it is important to request and reflect day-to-day patterns of action. Only in this way can existing gender related discrimination be made visible. Becoming aware of hierarchic forms of institutions, and of social and domestic life based on gender inequality is the first step to transform the gender hierarchy.

This brochure will provide a basis for our movement to go public with girls' and women's political positions and aims with the goal to initiate a debate about feminism among our own members. As a socialist children's and youth organisation we have to do that permanently to be able to reflect and change our own acting and thinking.

The ten arguments of our campaign are examples of acting/arguing against prejudices, which are again and again brought forward against feminist positions. We want to show that feminism is still up to date and women's political positions are found in many fields of our work. Maybe some of you have already been confronted with these prejudices and were angry not to be well enough equipped to react adequately. This brochure wants to encourage the standing up for feminist ideas and stimulate ways and means for tackling those topics in the daily work of our movement. Feminist issues might be rather new for some, hence the language of this brochure could be a bit difficult to understand at a first glance. Therefore a glossary is attached at the end of this brochure to explain some words more precisely.



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»Since gender mainstreaming
a girls' and women's policy
is not necessary any more«

»Nonsense!
Especially today we need
an autonomous girls' and
women's policy«

Gender mainstreaming is a concept to treat men and women equally. It was made a mandatory task for all fields of society, in parliament, at workplace or in sports clubs. The aim is to change the structures so that concerns and experiences of both genders are considered in the same way. That means it affects women as well as men.

At the world's conference on women in Peking in 1995 the involved states agreed on this concept as the new strategy to achieve gender equality. With the Amsterdam Treaty 1997 it became mandatory for all member states of the European Union. At the national congress in 2005 the SJD – Die Falken decided to realise gender mainstreaming and several actions towards gender equality.

But gender mainstreaming is not enough for us. Gender relations are still power relations of which boys and men profit. This is visible in several areas, for example in the unequal chances at work and the division of labour in society that assigns women more private and social fields and men more public and political fields. In the fight for gender equality redistribution of resources and participation possibilities in society is crucial. This applies for our organization as well as other parts of society, because we do not live on an island far away from dominating structures and role models.

Despite gender mainstreaming we need girls' and women's policy for several reasons:

- » Because gender mainstreaming promotes the image of traditional gender roles. The aim of feminist work is to overcome these images,
- » Because there are still structural differences between the genders and role-models which restrict the life of women – and men,
- » Because in many parts of society girls and women do not have enough possibilities to articulate and to implement their interests,

» Because it provides a safe space for girls and women to develop their wishes and interests and to express them,

» Because history shows that women reached the rights they have today only by fighting together against resistance within society.

We see it as the most important task of girls- and women-politics to point out these forms of discrimination against women and to combat them. Hence gender mainstreaming can not replace an autonomous girls' and women's policy, but only complement it. Especially since we as women in a socialist children's and youth organisation do not strive to become part of the dominating hierarchy. We want to overcome hierarchies of all kinds!



»Women and men
have equal rights!«

»But only on paper!«

The human right's convention states the equality of men and women.

Gender equality should not be understood as claiming that men and women are 100% the same. The principle of equal rights declares that both genders have the same chances and possibilities. One example of discrimination is sexism. Sexism is considered as discrimination of people based upon their sex or gender.

Sexism has different faces, on the one hand physical and sexual violence against women, but also the view that women are inferior because of their gender and therefore not able to do »hard« work (whatever that means), but rather suited for emotional issues.

That gender equality is part of the human rights convention is a good and important matter. Formally, we have the same rights (there are little exceptions, e.g. the prohibition of women labour in mining). That has not been achieved until recently. In Germany for example husbands had the right to resign their wife's job on their behalf until the early 70s.

And even today the reality looks different! Even in our organization, we are far away from de facto gender equality. The chances in life and work are not balanced between men and women. Girls and young women on average get better school marks, but these results do not affect their professional lives. The income gap between men and women has increased during the last years. In Germany, the average income of women in full time jobs is 23% lower than of men. Many similar figures can be found for most Western states. One reason for this might be that women often have jobs that are lower valued and paid in our society, like those in the service and social sector. The skills of children and teenagers are seen and promoted gender-specifically, and in job centres young girls and women are often advised to choose traditional women's jobs. But even if women would more often choose jobs in which men are more represented, that would not change a lot about the gender-specific differences in professional life. As soon as the ratio of men and women would change in several jobs, the acceptance of those jobs in society would change as well.

A true equality needs changes in institutional and economic conditions as well as in social relations, in which inequality still exists.

Women have to be empowered, supported, promoted and encouraged. This is the most important basis for actions to reach true equality. That leads to changes of power relations and is an important condition for reaching a society that is not based upon domination.



»Gendersensitive language is unnecessary. Let us discuss more important things!«

»No, language reflects society!«

The main mean to communicate, also in our movement, is language. We discuss, give arguments, report, explain, write resolutions, ask, answer, repeat, advocate, educate, have points of view, represent interests, moderate....This list could go on forever.

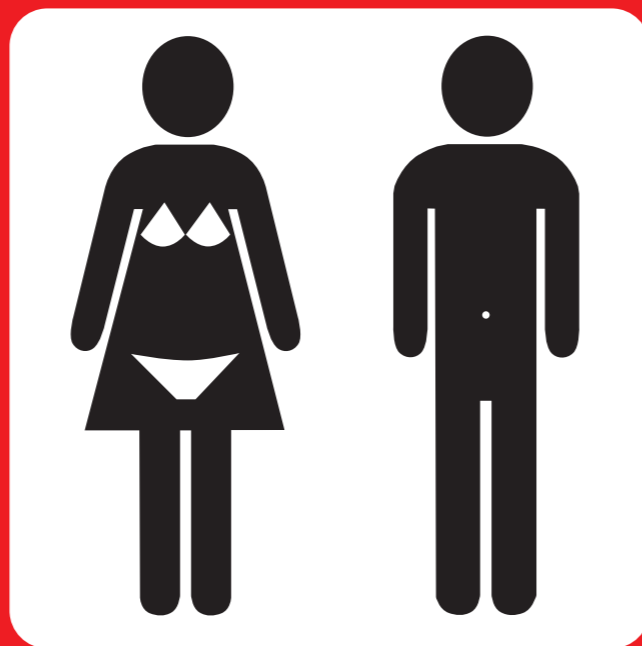
With language we act, for which there are also numerous examples: interrupt, ignore, exclude ... This is often not recognized by the ones who claim that language is 'only talking' und political-ly unimportant.

Quite the contrary! Those who say that dealing with our language is not important for us completely forget that most of the actions that take place within our movement could not take place without the use of language. Language furthermore influences the way we look at society and how we act individually. Most languages, English included, have the two genders built into them. There are many languages that use gendered articles, there are languages that have male and female endings of verbs, and there are in many languages different words for referring to a man versus to a woman. In the English language this last example often leads to a gender-biased language. Think for example about the term »chairman«. In our movement we want and try to change these gender-biased language forms in order to address all persons we want to reach. We use gendersensitive language to communicate a message. Why not say chairperson?! Language influences our way of thinking and the images we have of the world around us. Gender sensitive language makes girls and women visible in our images by not ignoring them in our language.

Leaving women out when they are actually meant to be addressed is a sexist use of language and it is only normal as long as everyone accepts it as normal. It is often said that »women are also included« even if a male form is used. Still stereotypes are reproduced by this way of using language. Discrimination is often expressed verbally, for example in the way women are addressed, or not addressed, how their speaking is received, or not heard, how they are misunderstood, falsely represented, interrupted, ignored, how they are being ridiculised, devalued and not in the last place, how people speak about them.

Our movement includes women, men, girls and boys, and all these persons should have a place in the language we use in speeches, announcements and publications. Saying that we should consider girls and women included in male dominated language means ignoring the discrimination that girls and women face in society which is reproduced in language. In our struggle for equality we should create a non-repressive language which fights sexism. By consciously using gender sensitive language we reclaim public spaces for girls and women which break stereotypical behaviours.

Often people are laughed at when using gender sensitive language in order to break sexist structures, but don't let them put you down! Stand up for gender sensitive language!



»Men are made to sexual objects as well as women!«

»No. Just because advertising recently discovered male bodies, women are still much more affected by sexism!«

We live in a patriarchy, which means that discrimination is an integral part of the society's structures. Sexism means discrimination against women just because they are women. The well-known prejudice that women are physically and intellectually inferior to men because of their sex is a manifest part of this ideology. This opinion justifies the suppression of women and serves to safeguard the male power. To the means of protecting male power belong – among other things – sexist expressions or jokes, unwanted touching up to rapes. Women are more often than men affected by sexism and sexual harassment. And they are discriminated against systematically in society and institutions! Sexism against women doesn't only exist on a physical and sexual level, but it is most noticeable there.

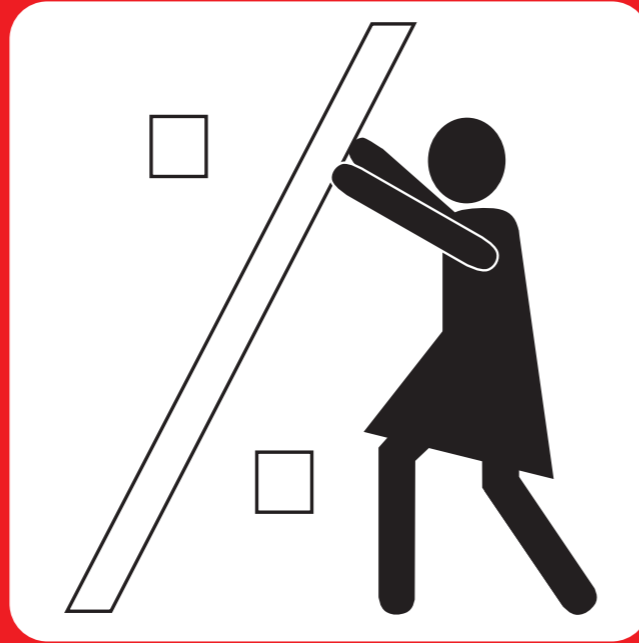
The cases of domestic violence show that particularly women and children are threatened and affected by domestic violence and that (almost) always men are the aggressors.

Not without reason women's shelters are a necessary instrument to protect women against male violence.

Even though there is a constant change in the representation of men and women in adverts, on billboards, in movies and so on, the basic differences are clearly to be seen. For example men are shown on posters advertising clothes. However women's images are used to make products like cars, or even the internet attractive. In media, culture, music industry and advertisement women are reduced to sex appeal, they should »turn on«.

Many people don't even realize any more how often women are reduced to their bodies and sexuality, because we encounter it constantly and do not know differently. Hence, the comparatively rare cases in which men are discriminated because of their sex are seen as much more important and used for arguing that women and men are affected by sexism in the same way.

We want to call attention to sexist illustrations of both, women and men. Only if sexism is not seen as something daily and normal, we can fight against it. Be aware of sexism and fight against it!



»We don't need quota women.
We want women
with competences!«

»You will get both in one!«

What is a quota? A quota in general is an instrument to influence the composition of a quantity (for example a board). This instrument is e.g. used to come closer to a true gender equality by making sure that there are more women in boards, delegations, on speakers lists etc.

By doing that it is accepted that individuals or groups might be disadvantaged to prevent an even worse discrimination (here: women through patriarchal structures). The quota is only one of many instruments.

There are different forms of quota either constituting a certain share of women or a certain share of both genders. These kinds of quota are called women-quota and gender-quota. The women-quota demands that e.g. in a board there is a certain minimum of women to prevent discrimination against women and reproduction of so-called »gentlemen clubs«.

With the gender-quota a board has to consist of both genders in equal parts, that means 50% women and 50% men. In most cases even then only women are supported, because there are hardly any areas in which women dominate in a way that men would need a quota to be on the board.

But why should we introduce a quota anyway? Experiences of more than 100 years of struggle for equality have shown that in most fields gender equality is not gained by coincidence.

Often only men are asked for posts and positions (and then everybody is surprised that no woman is interested). In the economic field many bosses fight against giving jobs to women because they are assumed to perform less and to drop out when having children. In these cases only a mandatory arrangement can change thinking and acting.

And who likes the quota? For real, no one. But as long as women and girls are discriminated as it is the case today it is a necessary tool. The aim of the quota is that it will be superfluous in the future.

So the quota doesn't call into question that women are as good as men. A common argument against the quota is that good women are successful anyway. But in many areas that is just not the case. Another objection is that in the end the quota will support a woman to get a post she is not qualified for. Why is the qualification question always asked when women are concerned? It is striking that only women have to justify themselves and prove that they really are capable of doing the job they are interested in. Unfortunately women are assessed not with the same measures as men: harder, more sceptical, more in terms of appearance. Often they are passed over, they are not challenged and their abilities are underestimated. Because of that the quota is an important instrument to make sure that women play a part.



»Our emancipation happens at the expenses of other women!«

»No! Our fight for emancipation is international!«

Of course, in Germany the situation is relatively good: compared to many other countries we have many possibilities to shape our life, the equal treatment by law helps girls and women. It is not a question at all that girls have a good education. The decision for or against children is not only taken by the husband, the decision if and whom we marry is ours.

But it is also correct that women beyond the western world are mostly affected by what is called »globalization«. Women from Russia are employed as careworkers in Germany under precarious conditions, women from Ecuador prostitute themselves behind our train stations, women in Kenya pick our cheap coffee and women from Bangladesh produce our clothes. And at the same time the Western civilisation – women and men – profits from cheap labour in other parts of the world.

For some women a way to combine family and work is to take a job doing paid household help. They are often underpaid and have to work illegally or in precarious circumstances due to European migration politics.

And those who take a house help avoid the notorious discussions about who is cleaning the toilet and doing the laundry.

So on the one hand there is a big inequality between women all over the world, on the other hand there is a lot in common: Also in our country it is women who have the unsecured, underpaid and exhausting jobs.

As a socialist youth movement, which is also part of international alliances, it cannot be our task to show which group profits more from the so called »globalization«. And neither can the aim be to emancipate oneself at the cost of others.

Hence we have to reflect that we too are parts of power structures, because other women in other countries and other social circumstances are forced to safeguard our backs with their labour.

The differences must not let us forget to lead a common fight against globalized realities of society and gendered labour circumstances!

Our fight against capitalism and against discrimination of women is international.



»Women are already supported too much!«

»But still women do not have a 50% share in the important fields!«

First of all supporting women doesn't mean that women are less intelligent or less able than men and would need special support. Talking about a lack of qualification is very often only a false pretence of those thinking in sexist stereotypes out of fear of losing their own position.

The aim of affirmative action programmes is to improve the equality of women in labour life. The differences in income show that we are a long way away from equal conditions for men and women.

Girls on average have higher and better school marks than boys, but that does not influence their professional lives. Still women are discriminated in professional life, among other things, because taking care for children and family is still considered to be a female issue, and hence women seem to be less flexible in the job.

Meanwhile more women than men go to university (in Germany).

In professional life men are constantly supported without calling it explicitly »support«.

Men are supported on a personal level and get access to existing male-dominated networks (the so-called gentlemen's networks). Affirmative action programmes like mentoring are a small but important contribution to oppose this imbalance.

Women are as competent as men and have the same abilities. But because they are women they structurally do not have the same opportunities. To overcome this inequality affirmative action is still necessary! Like the quota it is only a tool that – hopefully – won't be necessary any more in future: the moment when men and women will have the same chances to follow their interests and abilities.



»The discussion about the division of house work should be over by now!«

»But nevertheless the work is still not shared equally!«

Actually, women should not have to think about that problem any more. For 30 years now, we have been having a discussion about who should clear out the waste, do the laundry and cook the dinner.

We should think that things have changed over the years. However, that is not the case. Studies have shown that still women do most of the house work and child care.

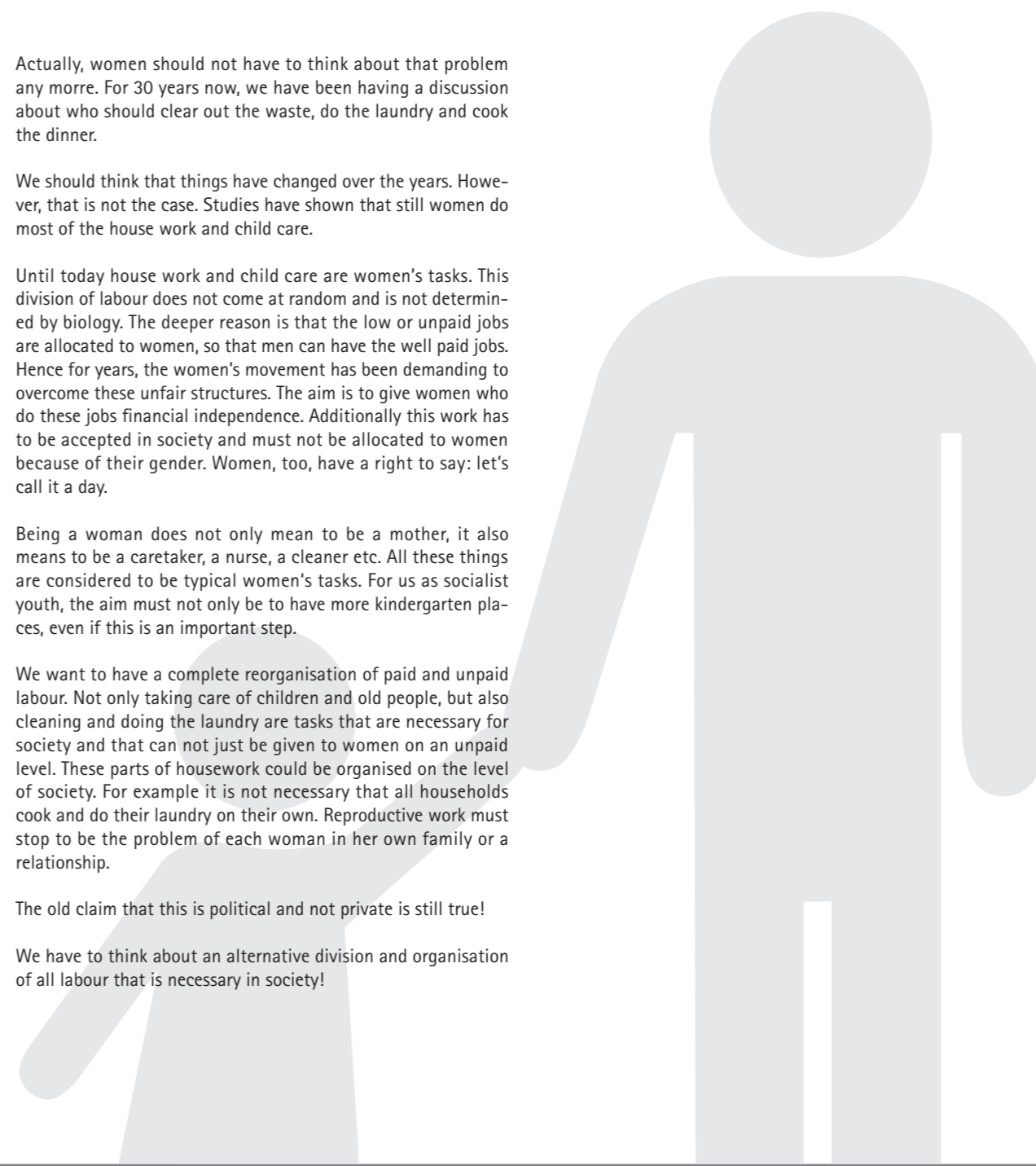
Until today house work and child care are women's tasks. This division of labour does not come at random and is not determined by biology. The deeper reason is that the low or unpaid jobs are allocated to women, so that men can have the well paid jobs. Hence for years, the women's movement has been demanding to overcome these unfair structures. The aim is to give women who do these jobs financial independence. Additionally this work has to be accepted in society and must not be allocated to women because of their gender. Women, too, have a right to say: let's call it a day.

Being a woman does not only mean to be a mother, it also means to be a caretaker, a nurse, a cleaner etc. All these things are considered to be typical women's tasks. For us as socialist youth, the aim must not only be to have more kindergarten places, even if this is an important step.

We want to have a complete reorganisation of paid and unpaid labour. Not only taking care of children and old people, but also cleaning and doing the laundry are tasks that are necessary for society and that can not just be given to women on an unpaid level. These parts of housework could be organised on the level of society. For example it is not necessary that all households cook and do their laundry on their own. Reproductive work must stop to be the problem of each woman in her own family or a relationship.

The old claim that this is political and not private is still true!

We have to think about an alternative division and organisation of all labour that is necessary in society!





»Feminism?!
Let us fight against
capitalism first!«

»No! Without the
liberation of women
there is no socialism!«

Women have been discriminated, suppressed and exploited for most of human history. As workers they have been exploited as much as men. But they have also been discriminated against within their own class. Women do not have equal rights, even if they belong to the ruling class. The capitalist system gives women and men different roles and maintains itself by doing so. In socialist organisations women who fight for their rights are often told that it would be more important to fight for socialism first. Capitalism is seen as the main problem and sexism will disappear with capitalism. That can't be an argument for not fighting against sexism as we fight capitalism. Overcoming the capitalist system does not automatically establish gender equality. On the other hand true equality within the capitalist system, which is based on oppression and discrimination of certain groups, is not possible.

We understand that complete gender equality is always connected with overcoming the capitalist system, and so our fight against capitalism and for the emancipation of genders goes hand in hand.

The fight for socialism and the fight for feminism belong together.



»Feminists are
women's libbers!«

»Yes, of course!«

Within society there is still the image of the unattractive feminist without any sense of humour. Women who fight against existent structures are stigmatised as women's libbers. It might be correct that feminists who fight against patriarchy seem to be humourless. But no struggle against oppression is fun. Those who argue with a person's appearance do not argue at all. The fact that feminists are attacked on this level actually shows how important it is to fight against patriarchal structures.

We, as women, don't own the word emancipation. Emancipation means a process of liberation of the existing oppressions and of gaining self-determination. So emancipation applies to women as well as men who are ready to liberate themselves from the dominating structures and act self-determined. In the late 1960's, with the second wave of women's movement, women began to use the word emancipation. They used it to liberate themselves from their chains and to encourage other women to break theirs. The patriarchy did not like it and was scared by self-determined women, who raised their voices on issues like unwanted pregnancy, (domestic) labour, their role as mother, homosexuality, sexual violence, and female sexuality.

Even if it has not been - and still is not - an easy way, we have to be aware: Women who emancipate themselves have to be supported! We, as women, want that men emancipate themselves, too.

We want that women's self-determination is socially accepted, that they have the courage to try new and unknown things and that we go the path to equality together. Let's emancipate ourselves and fight against the existing oppressions. And if feminists are called women's libbers take it as a compliment. One more reason to fight for our goal.



A concern for all of us ...

Discrimination and structural disadvantaging of girls and women impregnate but the tiniest elements of society – up to the individual consciousness of any human being. This consciousness is formed by parents and school but also by the social and economic system we live in, with all the values and standards shaping it. Many role images and clichés we adopt unconsciously, and seldom are we encouraged to question them. But it is exactly this questioning and forming of consciousness that is a vital part of the fight for gender equality. Though to change things for real, it takes more than that. Change can be achieved if people get together and fight for their rights united. That's how women in the women's liberation movement fought for their rights, too: the right for education, the right to vote and the right for abortion are just a few goals who would never have been achieved, hadn't women fought united.

We fight for a socialist society where no human being is discriminated because of class, gender, origin, disability or sexual orientation. Therefore, we strongly stand up against any form of discrimination, oppression and disadvantaging within and outside of our organisation. That's why girls' and women's policy remain a main and lasting topic in the work of our organisation.

Sexism and sex related hierarchies are a concern for all of us. Only if we fight them united, we will manage to achieve a change.

