

Feb. 1998

Dear Friends,

I am writing to tell you that I have decided to close the Foundation for a Compassionate Society. The reasons for this are many:

1) In the 18 years I have been a feminist social change funder I have sold most of the property I inherited, and have used up all of my income and most of my principal. Maintaining the Foundation and Feminists for a Compassionate Society has been particularly expensive. I was never able to gather enough money together to create a large enough principal for the Foundation to allow our operations to be taken from interest. I have just been using up all my own money and also have incurred a number of debts which I want to pay. After I have done that more money will accrue which I will then be able to use in funding or in whatever way I see fit.

2) In order to maintain these organizations as a unified feminist community with an intent for social change my own energies have been drained. Funding a private operating foundation does not involve just writing checks but requires a lot of work and attention to innumerable psychological and practical details.

3) At this point I also have a good deal of experience and I know women in the Feminist movement world wide because I have funded them or put them in contact with other women with whom they could work. My creative input as a networker, activist and theorist are as important as my monetary input. If I spend all my money and my energy, my other capacities will not be useful either.

4) I have recently published my book, *For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange* where I discuss the theory that guided my using my money for social change. The Foundation and the Donation Fund have been my practise of this theory. The Donation Fund has been closed for many years now, while I have tried to maintain the Foundation and its 'sister', organization Feminists for a Compassionate Society. The Foundation was a private operating foundation, that is, it funded its own projects only. The 'sister' was necessary because some of our activities were too political to be tax deductible. In spite of the fact that I have now published the book I do not think it is clear to people that these organizations are the practise of the theory.

5) Perhaps, for me, the most important reason for closing the Foundation is a theoretical one. The practise of the gift paradigm is invisible in our society because the exchange paradigm is dominant. The exchange paradigm misreads the gift paradigm in many ways or simply takes from it and denies its existence. One example of this is that women's unmonetized (gift) work in the home has been invisible until recently though it supports the market

(exchange) system, which takes from it. An interesting aspect of the logic of giftgiving is that by giving to the other, we give value to the other by implication. Since value does not return to the giver as it does in exchange, the process and the motivation of giftgiving are invisible and unvalued. This 'defect' colludes with the tendency of exchange to take over and to hide its competitor so that the process of giftgiving is unseen and exchange seems to be the only game in town. Another logical 'defect' is that as soon as the process of giftgiving seeks to be recognized it contradicts itself and appears to be exchange. Thus if the gift process is to continue being what it is, it has to remain invisible with the consequence that its motivation is unrecognized and its logic is not given the dignity of a paradigm at the same level of importance as the exchange paradigm.

The logic of the interaction between the paradigms creates a centrifugal spin-out. In the Foundation as in the world, each woman contributes her own energy as she materializes the gifts she receives in projects for social change. However, women's very other-orientation and focus on the goal of change often keeps them from recognizing the gift paradigm they are practising. While I believe that breaking the nuclear chain, creating a clean environment, ending arms spending, military pollution, and economic and military aggression, uniting women across all boundaries, providing media channels where the truth can be heard, etc. would all be enormously important gifts to humanity, none of these goals can be permanently achieved without a change in the values by which society is organized.

The alternative values that are needed are the values of the gift paradigm: they are the values of care towards which women are socialized. Men can have these values though they are usually deeply buried beneath male socialization into an artificial dominant gender identity upon which patriarchal capitalism is based. It is my intention to make the values of the gift paradigm visible so that a new non-patriarchal way to organize society can be discovered.

Unfortunately I believe that the Foundation for a Compassionate Society has not succeeded in proving this point though many of the projects have had excellent practical results. Another reason for this lack of success is that in our society, especially regarding the gift paradigm, we have a gap between practice and consciousness, perhaps again because we are so used to thinking in terms of the self-reflecting values of exchange. I have worked on the practical, material level now for many years, and I believe it is time to work on the level of consciousness. Therefore I will focus more directly on the gift paradigm itself, promoting the idea through writing and other media products.

Three of the Foundation projects will remain and will become more completely examples of the gift economy: Stonehaven Ranch in San Marcos, Texas; Casa de Colores, an indigenous people's resource center on the Texas-

Mexico border near Brownsville, Texas; and the Temple of Sekhmet in Cactus Springs, Nevada. Each of the other projects has its own way of closing or spinning off. Women's Access to Electronic Resources (WATER) and the Foundation offices at the Living Well will close. Feminist International Radio Endeavor (FIRE) on Radio for Peace International in Costa Rica will reduce its hours of operation and at the same time reorganize as an independent NGO. Wings: Women's International News Gathering Service, the Sierra Blanca Legal Defense Fund, the Earth and Sky Women's Peace Museum to End the Nuclear Age, The Community Health Project at Kelly Airforce Base, and the Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region will continue their work as independent organizations. I ask your generosity towards them all as they seek funding from the wider community. I will try to support the international activists with whom I have collaborated over the years until they can find other funding.

6) Another reason why I am closing the Foundation is that it has not received much support from other funders. Perhaps the funders thought that because I was already funding the projects, they did not really need money. Now the situation of the projects is more critical and I hope the funding community will recognize this fact.

7) There is a saying that the point is not to distribute poverty equally but to distribute wealth equally. I do not believe in martyrdom or suicide. In fact it is our system which creates the scarcity for the many (through arms spending and other non-nurturing waste 'investments') by which everyone is kept subservient and competing for survival. I do not think it would help for me to be poor and disempowered. Rather those of us who can should contribute to social change in any way we can, using all of our different kinds of resources, without destroying ourselves economically or psychologically. I will continue to use my resources to create systemic social change even if I am no longer mainly 'a funder'.

I want to take this occasion to thank all of the women who have worked for me over the years in the staff and the administration of the Foundation and Feminists for a Compassionate Society. I appreciate your good work, your good will and your good humour. I think we have been an extraordinary organization which has been important in many ways, with far-reaching ripple effects we will never know. And I want to reassure the wider community: You haven't seen the last of any of us yet!

In sisterhood for peace,

Genevieve Vaughan

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