

No. 4 FALL 1973

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

25c

## *Toward a Communist Women's Movement!... 2*

**How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women: History of the Journal Rabotnitsa... 4**

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**The Woman Question and the Split in the International Socialists... 6**



**On the Comintern Theses on Work Among Women— I.S. Slander Refuted... 8**

**Our Program... 23**

**Why We Support the ERA... 24**

# Toward a Communist Women's Movement!

It has been more than a year since the last issue of *Women and Revolution* was published. Beginning with this present issue, *W&R* resumes publication, at a projected initial frequency of three issues a year, under the direction of the Commission for Work Among Women of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League. This transformation of *W&R* into an organ of the Spartacist League is the product of several factors: the consolidation of *W&R* supporters around the Trotskyist program of the SL, the stagnation of the feminist-dominated petty-bourgeois women's liberation milieu and the continuing transformation of the SL itself into the nucleus of the vanguard party.

Over the course of the past few years, the Spartacist League has been engaged in an internal discussion over the perspectives and scope of our intervention around the woman question, a discussion which culminated in the adoption of several documents at our Third National Conference held in November 1972. This discussion focussed on a reassessment of the mechanisms for continued SL action on this question in the light of a critical review of the origins and evolution of our work.

## The Fight Against Feminism

The radical women's movement—as distinct from purely liberal, petty-bourgeois feminist organizations, such as the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.)—emerged as an outgrowth of 1960's New Leftism. The reality of women's oppression under capitalism predictably produced an elemental resentment and sporadic outbursts of resistance, but in the absence of a strong, proletarian pole of attraction and a principled revolutionary leadership, this partial consciousness could not generate a revolutionary program for women's emancipation. Inevitably it was channelled by bourgeois ideology into utopian and reformist dead ends and made prey to isolation and demoralization.

As revolutionists, we were compelled to intervene in the women's liberation movement both because we sought to honor our obligation to be what Lenin termed "a tribune of the people"—an organization responsive to the real needs of all the oppressed—and because this work was strategically important both in order to develop revolutionary class consciousness among the mass of oppressed women and in order to raise the general level of consciousness in the class itself on this issue.

The SL's earliest systematic involvement in this arena took place in the San Francisco Bay Area, where SL supporters along with others initiated the formation of the Socialist Workshop, a socialist women's liberation group which intervened in the

amorphous women's movement to struggle for an explicitly political, anti-personalist perspective based on the recognition of the working class as the central force for socialist revolution. On the basis of this involvement, as well as other more fragmentary work taking place on the initiative of other SL branches, the 1969 Central Committee Plenum established work around the woman question as a real although subordinate priority for the organization as a whole.



Boston *W&R* group in 1972 demonstration.

W&R PHOTO

Spartacist members and others drawn around the SL program initiated local groups in several cities, and the first issue of the national newspaper *Women and Revolution* appeared in early 1971. Its "Manifesto" stated: "Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it." *W&R* activists intervened to fight for the transitional program in such organizations as Bread and Roses and Oakland Women's Liberation. In New York, *W&R* participation in the "Working Women's Organizing Committee" (initiated by the International Socialists) was discontinued after the WWOC (which in its patronizing desire to avoid "alienating" anyone consistently shirked any discussion of program) codified its irrelevance to the struggles of working women by refusing to take any position on the union organizing drive taking place in the WWOC's chosen target of activity,

the telephone company.

W&R supporters also intervened in conferences and demonstrations of the SWP-initiated movement to legalize abortion; W&R demanded "Free Abortion on Demand," an end to support for capitalist politicians like Chisholm and Abzug, a break from "single-issue" campaigns and the adoption of a full working-class program and an end to the exclusion of men from the movement.

W&R fully expected an "unsisterly" response to its explicit anti-feminism from the bulk of the petty-bourgeois women's movement. Yet at the same time we found that many of the more serious women's liberation activists were drawn toward W&R on the basis of its uncompromising programmatic perspective. From out of the amorphous women's movement came individual recruits and, in addition, W&R intersected several local study groups and feminist collectives which polarized and split along the lines of the fundamental political alternatives posed by W&R supporters. Through their study of the woman question, and often through reassessing their own earlier experiences in attempting to organize working-class women, these groupings began to take sides on basic questions: feminism vs. Marxism, Maoism vs. Trotskyism, "serve-the-people" spontaneity vs. the vanguard party.

### Comintern Positions Rediscovered

It was at this point that the Spartacist League found itself compelled to rediscover concretely the work of the Leninist Communist International on the woman question, which centered on the building of transitional organizations—women's sections affiliated with the revolutionary proletarian parties.

The question of special communist work among

women had been a controversial one in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as early as 1896. Klara Zetkin's position in favor of such work was adopted by the party, and a party section for work among women was established to direct it. Within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) there was, beginning around 1905, a similar debate, in which Alexandra Kollontai was one of the leading proponents of special work among women on the German model. Special work among women was carried out by the Bolshevik party which published the journal *Rabotnitsa* (*The Working Woman*) under the direction of its Central Committee and which established *Genotdel* (The Department for Work Among Women) after the seizure of state power in 1917.

Within the Second International no special section responsible for directing work among women had ever been established. Lenin found the lack of such an international body intolerable:

"The first proletarian dictatorship is truly paving the way for the complete social equality of women. It eradicates more prejudice than volumes of feminist literature. However, in spite of all this, we do not yet have an international Communist women's movement and we must have one without fail. We must immediately set about starting it. Without such a movement, the work of our International and of its parties is incomplete and never will be complete...."

—Klara Zetkin, *Recollections of Lenin*, 1920

The Third International set itself the task of extending internationally and codifying the work begun by the German and Russian parties. On its initiative, the First Conference of Communist Women was held in 1920. This conference established an International Secretariat for Work Among Women with permanent representation on the Executive Committee of the International. The Comintern also made mandatory the establishment of special administrative and organizational bodies for work among women within all party committees. Thus, while decisively rejecting the notion of an autonomous women's movement, the Comintern in its first four congresses specifically demanded a special division of labor within the communist parties for the direction of work among women.

Comintern work among women degenerated qualitatively as part of the general process of Stalinization, and the positions on the woman question which the first four congresses had clarified were virtually forgotten. Thus these crucial struggles became inaccessible to the working class for decades. It was only in the course of the SL's extended internal discussion on work among women that we were compelled to rediscover many of these positions.

### Women and Revolution Affiliates With the SL

While the first W&R groups which the Spartacist League initiated were based on the SL's program for women's emancipation as an integral part of the struggle of the working class for socialist revolution and were linked to the SL through their most conscious cadre, they were not yet functioning as a disciplined part of the common Spartacist tendency. Predictably, many of the militants they recruited

*continued on page 17*

# Women and Revolution

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# How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women

## History of the Journal Rabotnitsa

Along with topical articles and reviews of particular importance to the struggle for women's emancipation and ruthless criticism of the programs and practice of the various ostensibly revolutionary organizations in relation to that struggle, Women and Revolution will also bring to light material—much of it either new to American readers or long-neglected—from the history of communist work among women. In this, the first issue of Women and Revolution to be published under the direction of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League—the nucleus of the revolutionary vanguard party in the United States today—we feel it is most appropriate to discuss an earlier journal which addressed itself to the attainment of women's liberation through international proletarian revolution. It was called Rabotnitsa (The Working Woman) and it was published in St. Petersburg (later called Petrograd, then Leningrad) under the direction of the Central Committee of the vanguard party of that time and place—the Bolshevik party.

Lenin always maintained that a vital precondition for the success of the Russian Revolution would be the support and active participation of masses of working women and peasant women. In its dual capacity as propaganda weapon and collective organizer for the Bolshevik party, Rabotnitsa played a crucial role in rallying masses of women around the party's revolutionary program and practice. Rabotnitsa was an important weapon in the Bolshevik party's struggle for hegemony among the working masses. The fact that the majority of proletarian women stood with the Bolsheviks, rather than the Mensheviks, at the time of the October Revolution was in part a result of the widespread influence of Rabotnitsa. (The Mensheviks attempted to counter this influence with a women's journal of their own entitled Golos Rabotnitsy or Voice of the Working Woman, but it appeared only twice and seems to have had little impact.)

To be sure, unlike the period in which Rabotnitsa appeared (1914-18), the task facing the revolutionary vanguard is not yet one of mass agitation, but rather of the dissemination of revolutionary propaganda and the carrying out of exemplary mass work preparatory to the building of a mass proletarian party, section of a reborn Fourth International. But while our tactics in this period are necessarily different from those of Rabotnitsa, our principles and program are essentially the same—i.e., Bolshevik—and thus our study of Rabotnitsa illuminates our intentions and our strategic goals in building a mass communist women's movement.

Prior to 1914, the Bolshevik Party carried on much of its propagandistic work among women in the pages of Pravda. It was Pravda which publicized the first celebration of International Women's Day in Russia on 23 February/8 March 1913 (dates are given in both the Old and New Styles) and which published a special Women's Day edition in which it greeted the women workers and congratulated them upon entering the ranks of the fighting proletariat, declaring, in opposition to the Mensheviks (who took a male exclusionist position in the women's movement) that the day signalled the evolution of the working women's movement to a movement which embraced the entire working class.

Working women responded enthusiastically to Pravda. In fact, by the winter of 1913, the editorial board was receiving much more mail from working women than it could handle. The solution proposed by Lenin was the creation of a new journal aimed specifically at proletarian women. Acting on his proposal, the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party authorized the publication of Rabotnitsa.

Writing from his residence in exile abroad, Lenin suggested that his comrade and sister, Anna Elizarova, organize the publication of the journal and select the editorial board. Her selections, later confirmed by the Central Committee of the Party, comprised two groups—one in exile and one in Russia. The resident editors were Elizarova, Samoilova, Kudelli and Menzhinskaia. They were responsible for the publication of the journal and for any organizational work connected with it, while the editors in exile, Krupskaja, Armand, Lilina and Stal', were responsible for conducting work among proletarian women in the countries in which they were residing and for linking the journal with the international proletarian women's movement.

International Women's Day—1914

To the amazement of the party, the Tsarist government gave its permission for the publication of

continued on page 14

### forum

## "Women and the Bolshevik Revolution"

Speaker:  
D.L. REISSNER  
Editor, Women and Revolution

Saturday  
October 20  
7:30 p.m.

### NEW YORK

Place to be announced  
For information call: (212) 925-5665

## Excerpts from *Rabotnitsa*

In recent times here in Russia, the question of the organization of working women has become one of the most burning and vital questions. All over Russia the insurance campaign has been unfolding, stirring the most backward strata of workers. The insurance law at the authorized elections does not make a distinction between men and women, granting them equal rights. Thanks to this, the working woman has become an immediate participant in the insurance campaign and has been involved, often against her will, in the struggle which the working class is waging for its rights.

Life has placed Russian working men and women face to face with the so-called "woman" question.

Only the "woman" question in the workers' milieu develops in a completely different soil and bears quite a different character than it does among the bourgeoisie.

Bourgeois women advocate their special "women's" rights, they always oppose themselves to men and demand their rights from men. For them, contemporary society is divided into two main categories: men and women. Men possess everything, hold all the rights. The question is one of achieving equal rights.

For the working woman, the woman question becomes quite different. The conscious working woman sees that contemporary society is divided into classes. Each class has its special interests. The bourgeoisie one, the working class another. Their interests are opposed. The division between men and women does not have great importance in the eyes of the working woman. That which unites the working woman with the working man is much stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common need, their common conditions, which are the exploitation of their labor, their common struggle and their common goals. "All for one, one for all!" This "all" means the members of the working class—men and women alike. The "woman" question for working men and working women is a question of how to organize the backward masses of working women, how best to explain to them their interests, how to make them comrades sooner in the common struggle. Solidarity between working men and working women, common activity, common goals, a common path to these goals—such is the solution of the "woman" question among workers. The struggle for women's rights against those antagonistic to women's rights—men—is the solution to the "woman" question among the bourgeoisie. The journal *Rabotnitsa* will seek to explain to the insufficiently conscious working women what their interests are, to indicate the communality of their interests with the interests of the entire working class. For this every incident in the life of working women will be used to make a close connection with the general conditions of capitalist production, with the

general conditions of the entire country. *Rabotnitsa* will elucidate everything occurring in the country from the point of view of the interests of the working class. It will awaken in working women the consciousness of the great liberating task of the workers movement and will call for a struggle for these great goals. *Rabotnitsa* will tirelessly reiterate the necessity for organization, will call upon working women to join workers' organizations and will make them active members.

Our journal strives to help working women to become more conscious and to organize themselves. The journal does not have any means of subsistence. Our work began with 100 rubles made up of donations from workers' publishing houses.

Our cherished desire is that *Rabotnitsa* become the organ of organized working women.

We call upon all conscious working women to join in work on the journal. This is your duty.

Share your experiences with less conscious working women, tell them of your first steps along the path of struggle, of your failures and victories, of your activity in workers' organizations.

Write notes and letters to the journal about whatever interests you, about what interests other working women; tell us what themes you want so there will be articles. Indicate the shortcomings of the journal. In the beginning there will be no small amount of them but through our common efforts we shall improve.

—Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Rabotnitsa*,  
23 February/8 March 1914.

Hunger, the high cost of living, the attack of the enemy army—all these disasters have been hanging over our heads like a leaden cloud. Every hour of such a state of things only intensifies our suffering. The mother's heart bleeds at seeing the deprivations which proletarian children suffer today. Wives sob over the participation of their husband-sailors in the fighting on the cold ocean waves....

There is one salvation—in place of that government which by its criminal policies has led the capital of revolutionary Russia into jeopardy, it is necessary to establish the power of those who have an interest in the quickest end to the war, who need land, who demand control over production; in other words, the working men, peasant men, working women and peasant women must themselves stand in defense of their rights, must become the masters of republican Russia.

Not the Kadet or Defensist-Socialist ministers should govern and play the masters in Russia, but the workers, peasants and sailors themselves with the help of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies...."

—"What Road to Take?", *Rabotnitsa*,  
18 October/1 November 1917.

# The Woman Question and the Split in the International Socialists

By Judith Shapiro, former member of the Leninist Tendency of the International Socialists

Debate over sharply counterposed approaches to women's liberation played an important role in the recent split in the International Socialists. Approximately one third of the IS' membership formally broke away on July 7 in an ill-defined leftist direction and is now organized as the "Revolutionary Socialist League" (RSL). The small "Leninist Tendency," which had struggled for Marxist clarity throughout the faction fight preceding the split, resigned from the IS at the plenum which expelled the RSL comrades. (For a full account of the issues behind the bitter fight which ripped the IS apart, see *Workers Vanguard* No. 26.)

While the woman question did not take center stage in the final convulsion, a careful look at the record of the battle reveals that this subject played an important role in the polarization process. While the leftward bulge was groping toward the rudiments of a Leninist approach, the present IS majority was busy codifying further adaptations to feminism. Given the counterposed directions of motion, great tension was bound to develop.

The RSL has done nothing more than restate basic revolutionary Marxist principles on the woman question, with some flaws and ambiguities. RSL writers have discussed the economic roots of women's oppression, noted the importance of revolutionary leadership and rejected the view that feminism in any form is a revolutionary companion to Marxism. This restatement of the Bolshevik theory and practice consistently upheld by the Spartacist League provoked a great storm in the allegedly Leninist IS. To understand this IS allergy to elementary Marxism it is necessary to examine the background of the IS position.

## The Tradition of Shachtmanism

The IS majority, commenting briefly in *Workers' Power* No. 80 on the massive IS split, claimed that the RSL, in taking up its new found near-Leninist position on women, was abandoning the traditions of revolutionary democratic socialism from below, thereby rejecting the method of Shachtmanism, of which the IS is the historical continuator.

The essential element in the IS position on the woman question is an insistence that male-exclusionist organizational forms are the appropriate vehicles for struggles for women's rights. But if one examines the history of Shachtmanism from the 1940 split in the Socialist Workers Party (where it began) until the emergence of the radical middle-class women's movement in the latter part of the sixties, one will nowhere find any mention of the importance of the IS-touted

"self-organization of women," nor, in fact, much mention of the woman question at all. Why then does the IS believe its championing of such methods of organization—which the IS insists are necessary if women are to be liberated, even given a triumphant proletarian revolution—is a basic Shachtmanite principle?

It is not just the IS' Stalinophobia and spontaneism—with the consequent distrust of Lenin's concept of the vanguard party—which leads it to this view. At the root is the IS principle of quite consciously tailing after any and all existing struggles. The "revolutionary feminism" which is being retrospectively attributed to old-line Shachtmanism is a crude theoretical expression of the application of this tailist strategy to the women's movement. Nowadays the IS majority has wholeheartedly endorsed workerism, but it still retains its fondness for the movements of the radical middle classes. After all, it was capitulationist deep immersion in these movements which built the IS into the organization it is today.

The IS has carefully worked out its approach to

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organizations such as those of the women's liberation movement. One enters an organization on its own terms, seeking to move it "a step at a time" to the left. The IS urges such movements to go to the working class with their defective and anti-Marxist programs and consistently fights *against* a socialist, i.e., working-class program in the organizations it tries to build, since a program of transitional demands would "alienate people" if put forward "prematurely"—that is, at any time in the foreseeable future.

The IS has carefully positioned itself a step to the left of the SWP. But this supposed golden mean, between the outrageous opportunists on the one hand and the principled communist politics of the Spartacist League on the other, has proven to be a hollow center. While the SWP's outspoken reformism has successfully appealed to outspoken reformists, the Spartacist League has attracted not just revolutionary individuals within the women's movement, but whole groupings (such as a collective in East Oakland which the IS tried very hard to recruit, but which was won in its entirety to the SL). The poor IS, squeezed from both sides, has been left with crumbs.

But the IS' entire method would be threatened if it abandoned this untenable middle ground for a revolutionary proletarian position, even on one question. Demonstrating once again that the IS' opportunism, anti-vanguardism and "third camp" (that is, anti-communist) world view lead it to reject not just Trotsky and Lenin but also Marx, the IS has moved to abandon any pretense to Marxism.

All this retreating is done, of course, in the names of Lenin, Trotsky and Marx, but it adds to its arsenal of interesting anti-Marxist concepts the notion of "revolutionary feminism," which it considers an historical sister to Marxism; not part of socialism, but not exactly a competitor either. The IS tendency has historically been no theoretical slouch when opportunist necessity demanded anti-Marxist "creativity."

Of course, the IS is really just sidling up to the SWP's viewpoint, in which "consistent feminists" somehow become Marxian socialists by trying hard enough to be feminists. What the IS cannot understand is that Marxists are not pontificating abstractly when they insist that class divisions are primary, that there are no "classless" movements in class society. Marxists *oppose* feminism, which is not just a desire for women's liberation, but an ideology which sees the oppression of women by men, rather than the exploitation of the proletariat by capital, as the essential axis upon which the existing society turns.

The assertion that the class division is primary reflects the obvious truth that all other forms of oppression are felt differently by different classes. A working-class woman experiences her oppression as a woman in trivial, monotonous, enervating and time-consuming housework; unrewarding, low-paid jobs; gross, sometimes even physical, male chauvinism. For a bourgeois woman, her oppression as a woman means primarily her inability to enjoy fully the privileges of her class. For women of the petty bourgeoisie it means something in between.

The IS' anti-Marxism is only just now flowering on this question; it will soon publish a pamphlet by Celia Emerson, IS right-wing theoretical hack, which fully develops this position of "revolutionary femi-

nism." Those who have read previous SWP accounts in this vein, such as Debby Woodrooffe's *Sisters In Struggle* (Pathfinder Press, August 1971), will learn little new about the battle of the "gallant heroines." But for the IS the Emerson viewpoint marks the spot where the IS moved to the right. Its middle position untenable, leftward motion undesirable, this direction was predictable.

### "Sisterhood or Class Struggle"

The change in IS policy will be particularly noticeable because the line of the previous year allowed considerable room for left-wing views. The reason for this was simple: the usual IS practice of papering over differences in the organization by adopting as the official position a document vague enough to allow more than one grouping to read its views into it. The document which served this purpose in this case was Ilene Winkler's, passed by the National Committee at Thanksgiving. Despite pages of fudge, and obvious feminist impulses, it had several parts which permitted a class-struggle interpretation.

But there was a frenzy of deep concern and opposition throughout the IS nationally when some branches of the IS took the document seriously and intervened with such an orientation. This threat from the left aroused even the somnolent Berkeley branch, which devoted its little-used energies to protesting against these embarrassing "sectarians."

A particular focus of the right wing was a brief position paper which the San Francisco IS distributed to a women's conference in late January. This leaflet was drafted, at the urging of the branch, by a member of the Leninist Tendency; it was approved by the branch executive committee. While the leaflet was carefully tailored to avoid overstepping the outer limits of the IS line, its clear Marxist approach was strikingly different from the usual IS writing. Its very title "Sisterhood or Class Struggle" sent shock waves through the right-wing sections of the organization. Worse yet, the leaflet was favorably received by women from the KPFA (Pacifica Radio Station) Women's Collective who attended the conference, and they quoted from it on the air!

Protests were heard from Seattle to New York at this unbridled display of Marxism in public. The Berkeley branch initially suggested that a joint Bay Area "women's caucus" be convened to discuss the politics of the leaflet. When the San Francisco women suggested that this was a subject for the whole organization, it probably added insult to injury. Eventually the Berkeley branch took the stencils, which had been left in its office for storage, and sent them off to the National Office with a demand that they be published in the internal bulletin.

The leaflet had, in fact, already been sent for comment to the National Action Committee (the IS' leading body) by the San Francisco branch, which was sure it had been within the limits of the new IS position. By the time the first reply was received, however, six weeks later, the drumbeat of the coming faction fight could be heard clearly in the distance. The NAC had referred a detailed discussion of the San Francisco leaflet to the newly formed Women's

*continued on page 18*

# I.S. SLANDER REFUTED

July 2, 1973

Barbara Zelleck  
International Socialists

Dear Cde. Zelleck:

Several of my comrades who attended an International Socialist forum a few weeks ago dealing with the work of the British I.S. in the woman arena reported that you made a statement to the effect that the Spartacist League had incorrectly represented a Comintern document dealing with communist work among women.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would substantiate this public statement by writing me at your earliest convenience and letting me know exactly where you think the error(s) has (have) been made. If through a faulty translation we have indeed misquoted the document, we wish to make the appropriate correction. If not, we want to put a stop to these allegations of the I.S.

Sincerely,  
D.L. Reissner  
for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League

July 25, 1973

D.L. Reissner  
The Woman Commission of the Central  
Committee of the Spartacist League  
Box 1377 G.P.O.  
New York, N.Y. 10001

Dear Comrade Reissner,

I have just returned from a visit to the British I.S. and found your communication.

Members of the International Socialists do not make public charges, either written or spoken, against members of other revolutionary organizations without first having checked their facts. Nor do we publish such important documents as those of the Communist International without checking their accuracy.

The primary language in which proceedings of the Communist International were carried on was German. *Thesen und Resolutionen Des III. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale (Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921)* are to be found at the 42nd Street New York Public Library, on film, listed as \*ZAN-18, Communist International, Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale, Nr. 20, Moscow, 1921.

My primary source (since I do not read German) was the *Manifestes, Thèses et Résolutions des Quatre Premiers Congrès Mondiaux de l'Internationale Communiste 1919-1923, Textes Complets*, Bibliothèque Communiste, Librairie du Travail, Juin 1934, Réimpression en fac-similé, François Maspero, 1972. The discrepancies between the French and *Women and Revolution* texts I then checked (through an intermediary translator) with the German.

Let me cite you but four discrepancies:....[The "four discrepancies" are quoted in entirety below in the context of our reply.]

It is strange that all your errors seem to be of one piece. That is they run counter to the Marxist conception of self-organization and self-emancipation of the working class, i.e. of working men *and* working women organized as an independent class conscious force.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Zeluck  
New York I.S.

August 8, 1973

Barbara Zeluck  
International Socialists  
17 East 17th Street  
New York, New York 10003

Dear Comrade Zeluck:

We have received your letter of July 25 in which you persist in your allegation that the Spartacist League/*Women and Revolution* "deliberately distorted" a document of the Communist International which we reprinted in previous issues of *W&R*. This outrageous lie—which also appeared in your article "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organizations" and which you publicly repeated at a forum which several members of the Spartacist League attended—will not be allowed to stand.

Since you proudly assert in your letter that "members of the International Socialists do not make public charges, either written or spoken, against members of other revolutionary organizations without first having checked their facts" we have no choice but to assume that your action in making and repeating this baseless lie was deliberate and not merely the result of sloppy research, and that you intend to stand by this accusation.

The text of the Comintern document which we reprinted was taken *word for word* from the English translation of this document made in 1921 (a Xerox copy will be provided upon request). Therefore your accusation of "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions" is a fraud on the face of it. You may be assured that we have no intention of letting this matter rest but will use your clumsy slander to expose you.

In a future issue of *W&R* we intend to deal with the substantive question of the notoriously flawed French version of the document which you used, as well as with your own further mistranslations in the service of the IS's point of view. However, this is beside the point as far as you are concerned. Whatever the merits of the various versions, our republication of the 1921 English translation was letter-perfect. Even if it could be shown that your interpretation of the French version were the correct one, your repeated accusations of deliberate falsification on our part is a disgusting slander for which we demand



an immediate apology.

The record of the Spartacist League for absolute honesty is spotless (thus when we do make and discover errors we are careful to publish corrections and retractions). By your attempt to impugn our integrity you have succeeded only in again exposing your organization, and yourself personally, as unworthy of consideration by serious revolutionists.

D.L. Reissner

for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League

August 14, 1973

D.L. Reissner

for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League  
Box 1377 G.P.O.  
New York, N.Y. 10001

Dear Comrade Reissner,

Despite the uncomradely tone of your first letter, I proceeded on the assumption that you were seeking clarification and took the trouble, not to "allege", but to cite some of the errors in the *Women & Revolution* text of the Communist International's Third Congress resolution "Theses for Propaganda Among Women". The errors cited were based on comparison with the *original German* text.

Neither in my letter nor during the discussion period at our forum on the British Women's Liberation Movement, attended by some members of the Spartacist League, did I use the term "deliberately distorted". I *never* made such a *public* charge. You have personally thus just shot down the "spotless" record of the Spartacist League for "absolute honesty".

Because the French text of the Comintern resolution is known to be unreliable, I checked it with the original and reliable German text. On being informed in a fraternal manner that the early English text is known to be at least equally unreliable, without even checking the errors cited, you persist in defending the propriety not only of re-publishing the 1921 English version, but of relying on it in *public* debate.

Since your purpose is clearly to "expose" rather than to clarify the points at issue, I will not take the trouble to cite examples of the disparities that exist between the *Women & Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street, catalogued as "8 SFN, Communist International, Third Congress, Moscow, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, June 22-July 12, 1921*, published by The Contemporary Publishing Association, New York City, 1921."

"Expose" away, "Comrade". We are sure that the struggles of the working class—for power or for improved working conditions—will be little effected by your propensity for intersectorian debate of a non-political character (not to mention your repeated and deliberate public slanders of the I.S.). I must confess to finding your left gossip sheet, *Workers Vanguard*, highly amusing, but I realize that my personal tastes are not widely shared.

While you are "exposing", we are sure that you will not omit to include the fact that my *internal* Discussion Article, in which I did use the term "deliberately distorted" (a judgment which your letter of August 8, 1973 tends to support) appeared in an *internal* I.S. Bulletin, and that you secured a copy of that Bulletin through either (1) outright thievery, or (2) planting an agent of the Spartacist League within the I.S. Such are "Their Morals", not Ours.  
Barbara Zeluck  
New York I.S.

---

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have reprinted above an exchange of correspondence between Barbara Zeluck of the International Socialists and D.L. Reissner of the Spartacist League. This exchange was triggered by an article by Zeluck, "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization," which appeared in *IS Internal Bulletin* of 1 May 1973. We are publishing below an article by Comrade V.Z. of the SL discussing in detail the specific allegations made by Zeluck against the SL. Before proceeding to that discussion, however, the Editors of *W&R* consider it important to set this dispute in its political context.

As our editorial statement in this issue, "Toward a Communist Women's Movement," makes clear, the Spartacist League seeks to stand upon the basic principles of revolutionary organization which guided the communist movement of Lenin and Trotsky, in particular the position worked out most fully by the Communist International in its revolutionary period. Central to the Comintern's orientation was the understanding of the need for special organizations for work among women, indissolubly linked to the proletarian vanguard party itself. It was in order to emphasize this concept of communist organizations for work among women ("transitional organizations") that we reprinted, in issues No. 2 and No. 3 of *W&R*, a document on work among women adopted by the Comintern in 1921.

So far so good. The International Socialists, meanwhile, were busy putting forward their usual Menshevik politics, which over the woman question consisted largely of insisting on the need for the inviolable "self-organization" of the different strata of the oppressed (for elaboration of this view, see the analysis of the IS position on the woman question in the article in this issue by Judith Shapiro). The IS' insistence on "self-organization" was of course part of its pervasive opportunist adaptation to the multi-vanguardist mood of the petty-bourgeois New Left, which viewed the proletariat as at best on a par with other oppressed sectors of society, and the proletarian vanguard as an elitist device for the continued subjugation of blacks, women, national minorities, youth, etc. The New Left, the black nationalists, the feminists, the youth vanguardists, shrilly insisted on the revolutionary thrust of each oppressed grouping organizing itself in exclusionary "movements," and the IS tailed along prating about "self-organization." But like all revisionists, rather than explicitly repudiating Marxism, the IS sought to find justifications for its positions in the Marxist tradition itself.

*continued on next page*

## I.S. Slander Refuted

Enter Barbara Zeluck, eager volunteer for the thankless job of finding a "Marxist" historical cover for the politics of the IS. In some cases, the historical cover was explicitly Menshevist. For example, unlike the SL understanding of bodies such as a women's commission within the party as mechanisms to achieve a division of labor in the implementation of a political line determined by the party as a whole, Zeluck puts forward the IS view of an internal *political* grouping whose purpose is apparently to whip the *male* ISers into line:

"In 1907, when she was a member of the Menshevik organization, [Alexandra] Kollantai also postulated the formation of women's collectives *within* the party in order to impress on the men comrades the need for *the party as a whole to fight for women's rights, for the party to assume responsibility for the work among working women* (i.e. to perform the functions to be served by the projected IS Women's Commission, which we all support)." [original emphasis]

—Barbara Zeluck, "Women and the Revolutionary Organization"

If only these latter-day Mensheviks would simply content themselves with fighting for Menshevism! But alas, while the actual views and methods of the Mensheviks may be quite popular among the petty bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks themselves are discredited (to say the least), as reformists and centrists of all stripes rush to associate themselves with the names (though not the views) of Marx, Lenin and sometimes even Trotsky. So Zeluck, appropriately, resorts to the device of quoting Lenin and the Comintern and hoping that nobody will notice how the IS line takes off at right angles from its views. Thus Zeluck includes even the following quote from Lenin which flatly contradicts the Menshevist view:

"We want no separate organizations of communist women! She who is a Communist belongs as a member of the Party, just as he who is a Communist. They have the same rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score.

"However, we must not shut our eyes to the facts. The Party must have organs... with the specific purpose of rousing the *broad masses of women*, bringing them into contact with the Party, and keeping them under its influence. This naturally requires that we carry on systematic work among the women. We must teach the awakened women, win them over for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party, and *equip them for it.*" [elision and emphasis by Zeluck]

—"Women and the Revolutionary Organization"

In the course of her article, Zeluck also presented extracts from the Comintern's 1921 document on women.

After all, Lenin isn't around to defend himself against Zeluck's "interpretations" of the Comintern's views. But the Spartacist League is. And Spartacist League supporters had recently republished the 1921 Comintern document in *W&R*. And the Spartacist League was busily propagandizing the views of the Comintern document, exposing the revisionists by drawing attention to the gross departures of groups like the IS from the authentic traditions of Marxism. What was Zeluck to do? Simple enough—just announce

that the text printed in *W&R* was a forgery, thereby in one fell swoop eliminating both the text and the Spartacist League from consideration by those who might not be looking too closely at the IS' pretensions to be following in the footsteps of the Comintern.

The particular device Zeluck employed was six interlocked and extended "footnotes" to her article ("Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization" in an IS internal bulletin) whose import is that the Comintern didn't mean what it unambiguously and repeatedly said, but rather what the Menshevik Zeluck said it said, and that the *W&R* text of what the Comintern said is a forgery. What is behind all of the factual and textual argument is the IS' denial of the Comintern's central thrust: that the conscious class struggle for communism transcends and absorbs the struggle against the oppression of women, resolving the latter into irreconcilably counterposed individualistic bourgeois feminism on the one side, and the struggle for the communist emancipation of the whole of humanity on the other.

Zeluck made her hair-raising proclamation of *W&R's* "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions" very privately, in an internal IS bulletin. No doubt she assumed that the SL had no access to this bulletin; hence her protestations of indignation in her second letter at our daring to know or take note of her document. (Trotsky once noted that when petty-bourgeois elements start speaking of morality, you had better put your hand over your wallet. Stripped of its hysterical references to theft or planting agents, the Zeluck position amounts to the view that it's all right to lie so long as it's only to your own comrades!) A little later, she repeated orally in a public forum a sanitized and minimized version of her accusations, hoping to discredit the SL without saying anything specific on which she could be nailed. Following the inquiry by Reissner on the part of the SL, Zeluck's first letter charged: "It is strange that all your errors seem to be of one piece," but her second letter in effect denied that she had ever charged us with "deliberate distortion" (except, of course, in the sacrosanct internal bulletin).

Despite Zeluck's later pseudo-scholarly obfuscations, the factual core of the dispute is her charge that the SL publication of the Comintern document contained "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions." She begins by seeking to "prove" this by counterposing to our published text her translations of the French text. It is of course true that a dispute over the correct translation of a document can only be cleared up by recourse to authentic originals in the hands of competent multilingual researchers. It is nice that Zeluck knows some French, but her counterposing the *equally derivative* French text to our use of the Comintern's own English translation is but an exercise in empty, petty-bourgeois academic pretentiousness. Upon finding out that her attempt to elevate the French version to the status of an "original" would not hold up, she tried the German.

Stripped of the interesting but peripheral textual arguments, the dispute comes down to the question of the SL's integrity in publishing the Comintern document as authentic. Whatever the merits or deficiencies of the English version that *W&R* printed,

they are beside the point since the putative "errors" are not *our* "errors" but those of *Comintern* commissions and/or translators of 42 years ago. Forced to confront this, Zeluck tries one last brazen evasion; she asserts that she "will not take the trouble to cite examples of the disparities that exist between the *Women and Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library...." Since all parties in the dispute have already gone to a great deal of "trouble" over this affair, why this sudden reticence? It is simple; there are no "disparities" whatsoever!

Zeluck's account of where the "real" document is to be found is of no help to us; we took our text directly from that document and have carefully checked it against the self-same volume in the New York Public Library to which Zeluck refers us. But since Zeluck has thoughtfully provided the reference, we urge interested readers to write us for copies of No. 2 and No. 3 of *W&R* and check it against the original 1921 *Comintern* English-language version. Short of claiming that the SL has secretly altered all publicly available 1921 copies to correspond with our "distortions," Zeluck has no defense left. Her case has been laughed out of court.

Finally, let us lay to rest once and for all Zeluck's final, desperate allegation that our exposure of her lie—her attempt to disown the *Comintern*'s own English-language translation as the SL's "distortion"—was illegitimate because we could only have obtained knowledge of it through planting agents or outright thievery. Well, Comrade Zeluck, at least at the time you wrote your document, if not now, there were in the IS a number of comrades who thought sufficiently well of the SL, whatever their disagreements with our politics, to make immediate and forceful inquiries as to the correctness of the *Comintern* material published in *W&R*. Our source was not your paranoid Watergate world of planted double agents and burglars, but some of your own comrades with sufficient socialist integrity to know that there is a fundamental relationship between Marxist class consciousness and truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The recent exchange of correspondence between Barbara Zeluck of the International Socialists and D.L. Reissner of the Spartacist League Commission for Work Among Women presents us with a welcome opportunity to correct various errors in the translation of the *Comintern* documents published in *Women and Revolution*, Nos. 2 and 3, while also exposing the fraudulent and cynical methods of the IS. First, let it be said, the self-righteous sectarian relish of Comrade Zeluck notwithstanding, that the errors to which she points in this translation stem *not* from the Spartacist League but from the official English translation which we in good faith reprinted, *Theses and Resolutions adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International (June 22nd-July 12th, 1921)* (New York: The Contemporary Publishing Association, 1921), admittedly without checking this against the German original. Zeluck's charge of deliberate distortion thus stands revealed as utterly baseless. In a series of footnotes to her article,

"Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization" in an IS internal bulletin of 1 May 1973, on our supposedly intentional alterations of basic *Comintern* statements Zeluck had written:

"This is not to say that the Theses of the 3rd Congress of the C.I. opposed the separate organization of women outside the party. Quite the contrary. In this connection, it is to be noted here that the position of the C.I. is not to be confused with that of the Spartacist League. The latter, in its publication of the C.I. Theses in its *Women and Revolution* No. 2 and No. 3, has deliberately distorted said Theses.

"In checking the *Women and Revolution* texts against the *French originals* (as republished in facsimile in 1972 by Francois Maspero), I discovered omissions, distortions, and absolute inventions." [our emphasis]

This is a far cry from the pretensions to scholarly objectivity of her two letters to D.L. Reissner, which, n.b., demonstrate Zeluck's cognizance of the fact that there exists no such thing as a "French original," that in fact this French text is, as Zeluck writes, "known to be unreliable," is, to put it bluntly, notorious for its inexactness as well as its incompleteness.

This "scholarly" flexibility then serves a very definite political purpose, the "unmasking" of the supposedly bureaucratically deformed Spartacist League. Zeluck concludes her listing of supposedly purposive SL mistranslations with the words:

"The overall import of the Sparts' distortions is the intention of their leadership to force working women and women comrades, as well as working men and men comrades, to submit to bureaucratic control. The net result, were they to be successful in their intention, would of course be the impossibility of 'creative activity and initiative' on the part of women, and, as a necessary consequence, the impossibility of a victorious proletarian revolution."

While Zeluck publicly charged the SL with deliberate distortion of *Comintern* documents at an IS forum held in New York in June (Sy Landy, then of the IS, insinuated the same at an IS forum in the Bay Area held over Memorial Day weekend), the fact that she has not attempted to substantiate her charges in pub-

*continued on next page*

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## I.S. Slander Refuted

lic-charges which, if sustained, would go far toward discrediting the SL—is a reflection of the simple fact that these charges will not in fact stand up to even casual scrutiny. Instead, she has been caught out in lying to members of her *own* organization ("French originals") in an attempt to harden them up against the revolutionary politics of the SL in the process of internal differentiation then taking place in the IS.

Since the purported "errors" in the *W&R* Comintern texts stem not from us but from the *official* English translation, it might seem superfluous to examine these in detail, blessed as we are with Comrade Zeluck's corrections. But alas, despite her monumental self-assurance, Zeluck's scholarship leaves much to be desired. Let us then deal with these supposed corrections in order.

"GENERAL PRINCIPLES, IV, paragraph 4:

French text, page 144: 'Mais le communisme est en même temps le but final de tout le prolétariat. Par conséquent la lutte de l'ouvrière et de l'ouvrier pour ce but commun doit, dans l'intérêt de tous les deux, être menée en commun et inséparablement.'

My translation: '...But Communism is at the same time the final aim of the whole proletariat. Consequently, the struggle of working women and working men for this common aim must, in the interests of both, be organized in common and inseparably.'

Your translation, on the other hand, ends: 'under a united leadership and control.'

The German reads (page 151): 'Der Kommunismus ist aber gleichzeitig das Ziel des gesamten Proletariats, folglich muss der Kampf der Arbeiterinnen und Arbeiter im Interesse beider Seiten *gemeinsam und geschlossen* geführt werden.'

—Excerpt from letter of B. Zeluck to D.L. Reissner, 25 July 1973

1: In her letter Zeluck claims to have had recourse to an "intermediary translator" for the German (which she does not know) and states that this translator verified the correctness of her translation from the French. Nonetheless the German original repeatedly stands in contradiction to her version. Thus an exact translation of the German would be "...But Communism is at one and the same time the goal of the proletariat as a whole, wherefore the struggle of working women and working men must, in the interest of both, be conducted in *common and unifiedly*." The question here is the meaning of "geschlossen," literally "in closed fashion," en bloc, unitedly, unifiedly. The English translator of 1921 clearly thought that the revolutionary solidity ("geschlossen") was to be provided by party leadership, and the text, indeed the whole frame of reference, of the "Theses" as a whole, as well as Zetkin's and Kollontai's supporting speeches, confirm this. The French text is incorrect here: "en commun et inséparablement" clearly trivializes the content into male-female unity, i.e., offers two phrases of the German "gemeinsam," while overlooking "geschlossen."

"2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES, V, paragraph 1:

French text, page 144: 'Le 3<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Internationale Communiste confirme les principes fondamentaux du marxisme révolutionnaire suivant lesquels il n'y a point de questions 'spécialement féminines'; tout rapport de l'ouvrière avec le féminisme

bourgeois...'

My translation: 'The 3rd Congress of the Communist International confirms the fundamental principles of revolutionary Marxism, according to which there is no 'special woman question'; every relationship of working women with bourgeois feminism...'

Your inclusion of 'no specific woman's movement' in that first sentence does not appear in the original.

The German reads (pp. 151-152): 'Der III. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale betont den grundlegenden Satz des revolutionären Marxismus, dass es keine 'besondere Frauenfrage' gibt und dass jegliches Zusammengehen der Arbeiterinnen mit dem kapitalistischen Feminismus...'

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

2: The sense of the German is: "The 3rd Congress of the Communist International emphasizes the basic principle of revolutionary Marxism that there exists no 'special women's question' and that every act of cooperation of working women with capitalist feminism leads to a weakening of the forces of the proletariat..." The Comintern's English translation utilized in *W&R* took the liberty of adding "no specific women's movement," as Zeluck notes.

"3. METHODS OF ACTION AMONG WOMEN, 3.c. (5), paragraph 2:

French text, page 145: 'Tout le travail des sections féminines devra être fait sous la direction immédiate et sous la responsabilité des comités du Parti.'

My translation: 'The entire work of the women's Sections should be carried on under the immediate leadership and responsibility of the Party Committees.'

*Women and Revolution*: 'The entire work of the Sections or Committees should be carried on under the direct control and responsibility of the Party Committees.'

The German (page 155) reads: 'Die Parteikomitees haben die genaue Arbeit der Kommissionen unmittelbar zu leiten und sind für sie verantwortlich.'

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

3: A word-for-word rendering of the German would be, "The party committees are to immediately direct the detailed [or: exact] work of the commissions and are responsible for them [or: for this (meaning work)]; a more literate rendering would be, "It is the task of the party committees to provide immediate direction" etc. Zeluck was either unaware of the two meanings of "direction" in French ("leadership" vs. "direction," in the sense of directing or controlling a thing) or was prevented by her IS blinders from even a side glance at the second. Here the latter is clearly meant, since the German text employs the verb "leiten" (meaning to direct) rather than the noun "Leitung" (meaning "leadership"). (The German for Zeluck's version would be "under der unmittelbaren Leitung der Parteikomitees," but this would entail a restructuring of the entire sentence.

"4. METHODS OF ACTION AMONG WOMEN, 3.c. (5), paragraph 4:

French text, page 145: 'Toutes les mesures et toutes les tâches qui s'imposent aux commissions et aux sections des ouvrières devront être réalisées par elles, d'une manière indépendante...'

My translation: 'All the measures and all the tasks imposed on the Commissions and on the Sections of working women should be handled by the women, in an independent fashion...'

You reversed the meaning of this statement by incorporating the word 'not', thus: 'All measures and problems of the Sections... must not be handled by

them independently..."

The German (page 156): 'Die Kommissionen sollen selbständig alle Massregeln durchführen, die sich vor ihnen erheben...'"

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

4: Here the German text suffers from telescoping two successive actions into one. A literal translation would be, "The commissions are to independently carry out all measures which are raised before them [or: which are brought to their attention]...." Zeluck rightly objects to the "not" unwarrantedly present in the official English translation, but her own version of this passage is equally faulty. In her "French original" "réalisées par elles" cannot grammatically refer to "women" but only to "commissions and sections," both of which are feminine in French. Less significant is her misrendering of "s'imposent" as "imposed on": in the sense "thrust oneself upon" the French verb constitutes an exact equivalent of the German (as translated above).

Now in her first letter to Reissner Zeluck had (wisely!) refrained from bringing up two further charges of intentional distortion included in her internal document. (At this point she was presumably unaware that a copy of this document was in our possession.) We cite her footnotes 4 and 5:

"4. 'A member of the local party committee should be at the head of such section or committee.' (A complete invention))."

"5. 'Communists should be members of these committees or collegiums wherever it is possible.' (The French text reads 'camarades communistes hommes'; the only possible translation for 'hommes' is 'men'. If the Sparts mean the same thing, they appear to be saying that women cannot be real 'communist comrades!')"

—B. Zeluck, "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organizations," 1 May 1973

At this point it has become necessary to cite the whole of the second paragraph under Arabic 5 of the "Theses" in a translation from the German original:

"It is the duty of the party committees to provide immediate direction for the exact work of the commissions, for which they are responsible. At the head of every commission should stand a member of the committee. Insofar as possible several communists should be members of these commissions."

So much for *our* "complete invention." But what of Zeluck's vaunted French text, with its incredibly rudimentary translation error (mistaking German "mehrere," "several," for "männliche," "male")? Moreover, once one regards this paragraph as a whole, as opposed to the bits and snippets approach preferred (for good reason!) by Zeluck, her threadbare justification (in footnote 3 of her article) for preferring the vague "leadership" to the unambiguous party "control" as translation for French "direction" ("While 'control' is a possible translation of the French word 'direction,' the latter is almost invariably translated as 'leadership'.") stands revealed as the emasculation of Leninist organizational principles that it is.

We do not make this charge lightly. The whole thrust of the "Theses" goes against this IS downplaying of the role of the party. Thus this paragraph 5 is preceded (on the very same page!) by a passage which, recognizing the effects upon women of millennia of op-

pression, therefore calls for:

"...the creation of special organs for carrying out [communist] work among women. Such organs are sections and commissions, which must be organized for all Party Committees from the C.C. of the Party down to the city-level or county-party committee. This decision is binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International."

This unambiguous assertion of the *party-character* of the women's commissions Zeluck accordingly has in her article to water down into "Sections or Commissions, functioning in close association with all party committees...."

We would suggest, then, that the shift in tone from the scholarly detachment (fraudulent) of Zeluck's first letter to the sectarian virulence (genuine) of her second is capable of a perfectly straightforward explanation, her learning from Reissner's second letter that we had a copy of this internal discussion article. Realizing that we had the goods on her—in the matter of the "French originals" and that document's charges 4 and 5, judiciously omitted in her first letter—her sole recourse was to attempt to shift the grounds of discussion by inveighing against *Workers Vanguard* as a "left gossip sheet."

In fact Zeluck's second letter is devoid of substance, that is if one excepts her charge of "the disparities that exist between the *Women and Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street," which Zeluck could "not take the trouble to cite"—a wise action on her part, since it was this translation which we reprinted *verbatim* in *W&R*!

One final comment on Zeluck's systematic downplaying of the role of the party. The "Resolution on Forms and Methods of Communist Work Among Women" passed by the Second International Women's Conference in Moscow and adopted at the Third Congress of the Comintern concurrently with the "Theses" presents in particularly concise form just those principles adhered to by the Spartacist League but which an IS-mentality automatically rejects:

"...it is the duty of all parties affiliated to the 3rd International, for all their organs and institutions—from the lowest to the highest—to erect women's committees headed by a member of the party leadership. ... These women's committees... are, in all areas and at all times, to operate under Party direction while nonetheless possessing the necessary freedom of action to apply such methods and forms of work and to create such devices as seem indicated, with a view to the success of their work, by the special character of women and their, so far not yet overcome, special position in society and in the family."

—*Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921), Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale XXIII (Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1921), pp. 932-33

It is this interpenetration of creative initiative and party direction which will remain forever incomprehensible to the ill-assorted denizens of the IS swamp. ■

—V. Z.

(Continued from page 4)

## History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*

*Rabotnitsa* and it was decided that the journal would make its first appearance on 23 February/8 March—International Women's Day—1914. Subscriptions were advertised in *Pravda* and advance sales were quite successful.

Since the editorial board had no office, its first meeting on 6/19 February 1914 took place in Samoilova's apartment, where, in addition to the editors, eight women factory representatives were also present.

The second editorial board meeting was scheduled for 18 February/3 March 1914 in Kudelli's apartment, but Elizarova arrived late at that meeting to find only an empty apartment. The police had gotten there earlier and arrested the entire editorial board. The governor's written permission for the publication of *Rabotnitsa* which the women produced was of no avail. Following detention in St. Petersburg's Viborg Prison for several weeks, they were exiled from the region and placed under police surveillance for three years.

Due to her tardiness, Elizarova had escaped arrest. Now only she was left to complete the task of publishing *Rabotnitsa* in time for International Women's Day. Working with incredible energy and determination, she succeeded in meeting the deadline, and 12,000 copies of the first issue did appear, as planned, on the proletarian holiday.

Feminist organizations had been founded in Russia as early as 1905. Like feminist organizations today, they believed that the fundamental social distinction was one of sex, rather than class—that men are the enemy. They were also similar to such familiar feminist organizations as the National Organization of Women in that they were, by and large, organized by, composed of and operated in the interests of bourgeois women; they had very little impact on working women.

Krupskaja, who wrote the lead article in the first issue of *Rabotnitsa*, took the opportunity to draw a sharp distinction between Bolshevik and feminist methods of work among women. Feminist ideology, which survives to this day, continues to mislead women and to prolong their oppression under capitalism, and we are still forced to struggle against it and to delineate its differences from Marxism.

### Rabotnitsa Struggles to Survive

The first issue was a success, but a new wave of arrests among the most militant working women and the difficulty of finding a printer called the continued existence of the journal into question. Within the Party, too, some comrades discouraged the publication of a separate women's journal on the grounds that it would be a financial drain on the Party.

Working women, however, demanded its continuation. The new editorial office on Yamskaia Street was deluged with subscriptions and correspondence. This popular support reinforced Elizarova's determination to continue publishing *Rabotnitsa* despite all difficulties, and after a great deal of effort she finally managed to find a printer who consented to work on the journal. The editorial staff did sewing to pay for



Editorial board of *Rabotnitsa* in 1917. Top row, from left: Nikolaeva, Kudelli, Samoilova. Bottom row, from left: Elizarova, Kollontai, Stal', Bonch-Bruевич.

paper and printing costs and to cover losses. The second issue appeared in March, the third and fourth issues appeared in April and the fifth appeared at the beginning of May. Every issue, costing four kopeks a copy, was quickly sold out, chiefly to factory workers.

One issue was confiscated by the police because of two articles entitled "Wave of Disease Among Workers" and "They Became Angry" and a poem called "Working Woman." "Wave of Disease Among Workers" dealt with the mass poisonings of working women at the Treugol'nik Rubber Factory in St. Petersburg and other rubber factories in Russia in March, 1914. These incidents aroused the indignation of workers throughout the country and overcame the initial reluctance of the relatively well-paid working women in the rubber industry to participate in working-class struggle. Then, as now, capitalist enterprise operated to produce profits for the bourgeoisie and with little regard for the welfare of the workers. At this time, rubber manufacturers were cutting costs by using a low quality benzene with toxic properties which induced dizziness in the workers and sometimes caused blindness.

The publication of *Rabotnitsa* was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I in July 1914, when many workers' newspapers were suppressed in Russia and hundreds of radicals were imprisoned or exiled to Siberia. The great popularity which the journal enjoyed in 1914 had been created by only seven issues (two of which had been confiscated) over a period of five months. In this short time, *Rabotnitsa* had become an authentic organ of working women, in which they dis-



Front page of the first issue of *Rabotnitsa* dated 23 February [International Women's Day] 1914.

discussed their needs and their struggles and around which they united and organized. Now it was silenced by the autocracy and would not reappear until that autocracy had been overthrown. The discontinuation of *Rabotnitsa* in Russia did not, of course, affect the existence of its editorial board in exile, which continued to intervene in the international working women's movement.

**Organizing for October**

Publication of *Rabotnitsa* resumed in May 1917, under the editorship of Krupskaya, Elizarova, Kollontai, Samoilova, Kudelli and Velichkina. The first issue carried a series of resolutions which had been passed in several plants and factories, notes on the women's movement in Russia and abroad, greetings to Russian working women from the Swedish and Finnish Social Democratic Parties and greetings from the editors of *Pravda*, who expressed their confidence that the renewed journal would successfully rally broad strata of proletarian women so that "on the ruins of tsarism, they would build the temple of socialism" hand in hand with proletarian men.

Subsequent issues dealt with such contemporary questions as the war, the eight-hour working day, the elections to district dumas and child labor. As an organ of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, *Rabotnitsa* sought to advance Bolshevik politics and to argue for Bolshevik positions on all of these questions. But it functioned not only as a literary vehicle for the dissemination of Bolshevik propaganda and agitation, but also as a collective organizer. The first meetings of Petrograd working women were organized by *Rabotnitsa*, as were several protests and demonstrations. Forums bore such titles as: "Who Needs the War?" "The Working Woman and the High

Cost of Living," "Women's Labor," and "The Protection of Motherhood." In June 1917, the editors organized an international antiwar protest in Petrograd. This was the first public international meeting ever to be held in Russia and it drew over 10,000 people. The following month *Rabotnitsa* organized a demonstration to protest the high cost of living, which also attracted thousands of working people.

During the "July Days," when the Bolshevik Party was persecuted by the Provisional Government and its presses were closed down, *Rabotnitsa* remained the only functioning Bolshevik publication. In it, Lenin sought to publish his article, "Three Crises." When troops arrived at the printers to confiscate the issue, working women risked imprisonment to rescue it. At the very moment the search was being carried out, the women managed to sneak stacks of the journal past the soldiers and hide them. Later, they distributed them in the factories.

A great deal of agitation was carried out in the pages of *Rabotnitsa* during the days immediately preceding the October Revolution. A typical agitational article was "What Road to Take?", which appeared on the front page of the 18 October/1 November 1917 issue.

Just prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, *Rabotnitsa* organized the First All-City Conference of Petrograd Working Women, which was attended by 500 delegates representing 80,000 working women. This conference passed a resolution which, among other things, standardized the work day at eight hours and banned labor for children under the age of 16. One of the aims of the conference was to prepare non-Party working women for the coming uprising and to acquaint them with the goals that the Soviet government planned to pursue after the establishment of

*continued on next page*

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## History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*

the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Conference discussions were interrupted by the actual outbreak of armed struggle. The delegates thereupon adjourned temporarily and participated in the Revolution. The conference was resumed immediately after the Bolshevik victory.

### Under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In November 1918, *Rabotnitsa* convened the First All-Russian Conference of Working Women and Peasant Women which met in Moscow. Prior to this conference, a bureau of convocation dispatched agitators throughout Russia—even to the front-line regions—to inform women about the conference and to facilitate the election of delegates. In the difficult conditions created by the Civil War, it was expected that approximately 300 delegates would be elected, but the response of the women was overwhelming and the actual number was 1,147.

The conference, which convened on 16 November 1918, was presided over by K. I. Nikolaeva and was addressed by Sverdlov and Lenin. It took up such questions as: the problems of working women in Soviet Russia, the family and communist government, problems of social welfare, the international revolution and working women, organizational problems, the struggle against prostitution in Soviet Russia, the struggle against child labor and the housing problem.

During the discussion of organizational problems, the question of separate and autonomous women's organizations to deal with women's needs was raised. This position, which remains a cornerstone of feminism, was resolutely opposed by the delegates on the grounds that working women, although oppressed both as workers and as women, could be liberated only through the liberation of the entire working class, i.e., through communism. This decision was confirmed by later congresses, including the Third Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July 1921, which published a resolution stating the basic Marxist proposition that there is no separate woman question and that class collaboration between working women and bourgeois feminism leads to the undermining of the proletarian struggle, thereby delaying the triumph of the socialist revolution and the advent of communism, which alone can insure women's ultimate liberation. (See *Women and Revolution* No. 2, September-October 1971.)

In view of the fact, however, that working women were the newest and, in many ways, the least conscious section of the working class, it was proposed by Armand and Samoilova and resolved by the delegates that the conference appeal to the Bolshevik Party "to organize from among the most active working women of the Party special groups for propaganda and agitation among women in order to put the idea of communism into practice."

The Party responded to this appeal with the creation of a commission of the Central Committee for work among women under the presidency of Inessa Armand. In 1919, this commission was replaced by the governmental Department of Working Women and Peasant Women or *Zhenotdel*.

As a result of the transfer of the Soviet capital from Petrograd to Moscow in 1918, the closing of many mills and factories in the city and the subsequent dispersion of a section of the Petrograd proletariat, the publication of *Rabotnitsa* came to an end. Even after its official closing, however, those members of the staff who remained in the vicinity repeatedly called meetings of working women in the editorial offices to discuss important political questions.

At the beginning of 1919, at the suggestion of Samoilova, other organs of the Party press, including *Pravda* and *Krasnaia Gazeta*, began to include working women's pages and later peasant women's pages in their issues, and in the summer of 1920, a journal dealing especially with women again appeared. It was called *Kommunistka—The Communist Woman*—and it was edited by a group of prominent male and female revolutionists, including Bukharin, Kollontai and Armand.

While some people, and even some Party members, still failed to understand the function of a communist women's journal and were inclined to regard it as a "ladies' pastime," others, and especially Lenin, waged an arduous struggle for its continuation. As Lenin had argued for the publication of *Rabotnitsa* in 1914, he now argued for the publication of *Kommunistka* and in its third issue he carried his arguments outside the Party by publishing an article in which he clarified the enormous importance of the journal in winning the loyalty of working women around the world to communist politics.

This goal was never achieved. The Soviet State has long since degenerated—and as a part of and reflection of its degeneration, many of the decisive gains in the position of women in Soviet society accomplished by the October Revolution were reversed by the Stalinist Thermidor. The masses of working women of the world have yet to be won to communist politics. Solidly based on the Bolshevik principles and program of our predecessor, *Rabotnitsa*, *Women and Revolution* sets for itself the completion of this task. We are determined to advance the working-class struggle through revolutionary propaganda and the organization of working women around the proletarian vanguard of which we are an integral part. We look forward, therefore, to the creation of a Spartacist League section for work among women and a women's section of the reborn Fourth International. ■

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(Continued from page 3)

## Toward a Communist Women's Movement

recognized the need to become full communists and to become involved in the work of the Spartacist League as disciplined supporters. In the course of this common work, the SL realized the need to make the W&R groups a part of the common Spartacist tendency and enable disciplined W&R supporters to participate in the work and internal life of the SL. It was proposed therefore that local W&R groups organizationally affiliate with the SL. The impetus for this step came from the SL, but mainly as the formalization of an accomplished fact.

By the time of the opening of the SL's pre-conference discussion period in preparation for the Third National Conference, the New York and Boston W&R groups had voted to become supporters of the SL on the local level and were participating in the discussion process. Elements from the Oakland and New Orleans women's groups had already joined the SL or its youth group, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), and many had been implanted in industrial work, under the direction of the SL Trade Union Commission. The work around W&R, demonstrating the SL's principled approach on the woman question, had been instrumental in the fusion between the RCY and the Buffalo Marxist Caucus, a component of which had been heavily involved in the women's movement. Earlier, the woman question had been one of the focal points of the SL's oppositional intervention into Progressive Labor-dominated SDS, which had won to the SL dozens of ex-New Lefters and individuals from PL's periphery and had laid the basis for the formation of the RCY.

The virtual disintegration of the petty-bourgeois women's movement in the early 1970's played a crucial role in convincing serious militant women that Trotskyism was the only way forward. It also precipitated a reassessment of perspectives for W&R. The women's movement was virtually ceasing to exist as an arena for intervention, but a diffuse consciousness of the reality of female oppression had trickled down to broad social layers, and its effects were becoming more apparent, especially within the labor movement itself.

In a document drafted for the SL Political Bureau

and adopted by the Third National Conference, tactical guidelines for our work among women were set forth. While keeping in mind the current priorities and resources of the SL, we adopted as our goal a general strategy based on that of the Communist International in its revolutionary period, the creation of a transitional women's organization affiliated with the proletarian vanguard party:

"The organizational experience of the SL in this work has tended strongly toward the conclusion that the women's circles must be brought under the discipline of the party so that the non-SL comrades involved can participate fully in the debates and decisions of the movement and be represented on its leading bodies. In our experience in the women's arena we were forced pragmatically to rediscover the position of the Communist International, which strongly opposed the initiation of women's organizations not organizationally linked to the proletarian vanguard, not only when the revolutionary organization is a mass party—in which case 'independence' would in fact constitute counterposition to the revolutionary party—but also when the vanguard is weak and struggling to increase its contact with and influence among the masses. Our strategic perspective should be the development of a *women's section of the SL...*"

The National Conference decided to establish a Commission for Work Among Women responsible to the SL Central Committee. This commission will oversee SL work among women, centering on the regular publication of *W&R*. It will also work in close coordination with the other leading bodies of the SL, especially with the Trade Union Commission, since the struggle for the fullest possible integration of women into the organized labor force and against the divisive effects of male chauvinism in the working class occupies a central place in the work of both bodies.

*W&R* will feature articles on the women's movement in the U.S. and abroad, the history of the communist women's movement, the role of the family and women in the work force, as well as articles on topical issues and book reviews. The aim of the journal is the crystallization of a readership committed to the establishment of a communist women's movement, looking toward the creation of a Spartacist League section for work among women dedicated to the struggle for the emancipation of women through international proletarian revolution. ■

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(Continued from page 7)

## The Woman Question and the Split in the International Socialists

Commission. While this Women's Commission was headed by Shelley Landau, a secondary leader of the forming left wing, two of its three members were eventually to go with the majority.

And in its very first (nearly its only) action, the consideration of the San Francisco leaflet, the prefactional divisions on the Women's Commission showed up quite clearly. The two majorities voiced their distress and antipathy, while Landau tentatively defended it, though with disagreements. Controversy over the leaflet continued nationally until the tide of the onrushing factional struggle washed over it.

The leaflet had not yet been published in the IS bulletin. Now that the left-wing menace has been laid to rest, it may be deemed unnecessary by the fearful feminists of Seattle and Berkeley. No such small IS intervention has ever been given such attention nationally by the organization.

### The Woman Question and the Russian Question

The IS' view on women's liberation has always been flawed by its Stalinophobia. Its incorrect analysis of Russia, which it sees as a "new class" society and its inability to understand the basic dynamics of a socialist revolution, lead it to search for "guarantees" that a new Stalinist society will not be the inevitable outcome of any successful proletarian revolution. The IS' "guarantees" are found in a new sort of pluralism: a host of interest groups bringing pressure on the soviets will fight degeneration in the future workers state. Such "guarantees" are inevitably specious

and are barriers to the only possible guarantee against Stalinist degeneration—world-wide proletarian revolution.

"Because of the theoretical distortions inherent in Shachtman's abandonment of the Trotskyist position on the deformed workers states, ISers could not even comprehend the statement of the Spartacist League (*Spartacist* No. 17-18) that IS propaganda on women's liberation "is flawed by their premise that a socialist revolution is not sufficient for women's liberation, as if imagining that this country's proletarian revolution will take a Stalinist form and will somehow manage to defeat capitalism without any increase in social consciousness in the masses."

The IS' Stalinophobia is quite obvious when it tries its hand at analyzing the position of women in Stalinist-ruled countries. The IS feeds into the anti-communism of the petty-bourgeois women's movement by exaggerating and playing up the failure of these states to fully emancipate women, while trying to downplay the admitted gains. But when done accurately, this method backfires. Articles in *Workers' Power* (the IS press) on women in the Stalinist countries usually open by explaining that they will demonstrate once again that these states have "nothing in common with socialism." The articles then go on to show that because of the needs of the bureaucratically planned economy, women find themselves in a significantly better situation than before, but that they are not decisively emancipated; inequality and family oppression remain, and the vagaries of the bureaucracy lead to periodic shifts in policy on women. Such an analysis can be found in the widely circulated IS pamphlet by Laurie Landy, "Women in the Chinese Revolution."

A serious examination of this type of argument must eventually lead to the conclusion that the evidence is in fact ammunition for the Trotskyist view that these countries are deformed workers states, whose economies represent a distinctly higher form of rationality than capitalism, despite the burden placed on them by the Stalinist bureaucracies. Thus, revolutionaries must defend these states against capitalist attack, while working to overthrow the bureaucratic parasites who threaten the gains made. The IS conclusion is quite different, of course, but it is not justified by any honest telling of "the facts."

### RSL Refuses to Break from Shachtmanism

As the IS sought a way out of its troubles by chasing the dwindling women's movement to the right, the grouping which was to become the RSL edged leftward. And it has taken up a position which, like its other stances, reflects both its inconsistent leftward impulse and its deformations of Leninism due to the incompleteness of its attempted break from the Shachtmanite heritage.

The key RSL documents on the woman question, like other RSL documents, are often excellent in the abstract. Margaret Brecht wrote about the fight for women's liberation after the successful revolution:

"If this is not expressed in the consciousness, program, and organization of the vanguard then this must

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# Women and Revolution

be corrected. But this must come from inside the vanguard; not from the pressure of women organized independently outside of it to supposedly 'keep it on its toes.' Any other approach is to call on the more backward to lead."

—Amendment to Women's Liberation Perspectives, undated.

This amendment caused an upheaval at the National Committee meeting. Brecht charged that "the organization has reified the independent organization of women," and insisted:

"We will not win [the most politically advanced women leaders] to us by abstract rhetorical flourishes like the independent organization of women, but by concrete analysis, program, and strategy. It is the latter that they will seek, for it [is] only these that enable one to lead."

For the IS, this was tantamount to heresy, and some of the appalled majorityites suggested that these views constituted incipient Stalinism.

But the Brecht document suffers from weaknesses which are attributable to the RSL's refusal to break with the "third camp" view of the deformed workers states. Since it is dangerous to stress the economic base if one holds to "third camp" analysis (at all costs a "third camper" must ignore the fundamental Marxist insight that the relationship between people expressed at the point of production is the essential determinant of class) one must dwell on the important but secondary superstructural aspects like the state. This is the IS method, where we are told that "socialism is, above all, democracy," and this view is apparent in the Brecht document.

The analysis suggested in the "heretical" passages we have quoted from the Brecht document was amplified in the Leninist Tendency's Draft Program of 25 March 1973. (IS Bulletin No. 39, page 6):

"A central part of our conceptions on the liberation of women is the idea that the workers' power will have no material interest in the exploitation of women, and will necessarily be hostile to their oppression. Thus the victorious revolution will immediately begin to undercut that oppression and begin at once to provide the material basis for the replacement of the necessity of the family. Although male chauvinism will not disappear 'automatically'—what does?—we counterpose this view to the vision of a protracted and bitter struggle, with victory an open question, by 'independent' women's organizations after a triumphant revolution."

The IS right wing was able to seize on weaknesses in the Brecht document precisely because it ignores the point that the LT makes—that the workers state will have *no material interest* in the oppression of women, but rather an interest in the full development of all. Shying away from the materialist analysis of the LT, Brecht instead makes the unconvincing argument that:

"It is in the self-interest of the workers' state to liberate women, because the state is the class, and women are 50% of the class. Every cook must govern. Lenin points this out in *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* If the workers' state excludes 50% of itself it won't be able to govern."

Thus an important argument is weakened by the RSL's lingering Shachtmanism. Like the IS, the RSL finds consistent, authentic Marxism dangerous and

shies away. The difference is that the RSL, in straying further to the left, develops an inconsistency, whereas the IS is more wrong and more consistent.

The vacillation of the RSL is shown in other formulations in this otherwise excellent document. Brecht is vague about what program to call for when building organizations of women. She talks about their being organized "under the banner of the class." A better formulation is to be found in Shelley Landau's polemic of the same vintage. Landau, another RSL leader, writes:

"We call for and support independent organizations of the oppressed so that the oppressed can wage a struggle for their liberation in the course of which we can win them to a socialist program and leadership. To use an analogy, Trotsky described what he meant by 'independence' of the working class:

"'Independence from the influence of the bourgeoisie cannot be a passive state. It can express itself only by political acts, that is, by struggle against the bourgeoisie. This struggle must be inspired by a distinct program which requires organization and tactics for its application. It is the union of program, organization and tactics that constitutes the party. In this way the real independence of the proletariat from the bourgeois government cannot be realized unless the proletariat conducts its struggle under the leadership of a revolutionary and not an opportunist party' (*Trotsky on the Trade Unions*).

"The same is true for organizations of the oppressed. Real political independence is only possible under revolutionary leadership. This is why we must win the most advanced women to the revolutionary party and we must build a working-class women's movement on a socialist basis...."

—"Critical Comments on Emerson's Women's Liberation Document," page 8.

But Landau's writing also reveals the same flaw as Brecht's—we form organizations *first* (mislabeling them united fronts) and *later* we fight for our program. The major difference with the IS majority is that the RSL vigorously issues promissory notes that it will *really* fight for a socialist program later. But at bottom the RSL has not broken from the strategy of building organizations on a reformist basis first, hoping they will "grow over" into revolutionary ones in the future.

In sum, we can see that the RSL falters at crucial points, allowing its Shachtmanite residue to blunt even its correct positions. This did not, of course, lessen the force of the rupture with the IS right wing. The original leftward impulse of those who became the RSL is in conflict with its "third camp" view on the deformed workers states, which inevitably blights RSL's analysis. Despite occasionally fine polemics and persuasive argumentation, the RSL is caught between conflicting impulses. It cannot advance without abandoning its pervasive Shachtmanism and the resulting inability to break fundamentally from many of the IS' flagrantly anti-Trotskyist positions. Its vacillations on questions of program are an indication of this unresolved contradiction, which must be decisively shattered if the RSL is not simply to recapitulate the wretched history of the IS with a more "leftist" cover. ■

(Continued from page 24)

## Why We Support the ERA

effect of the ERA on working women will ultimately be the outcome not of "congressional intent" or "judicial interpretation" but of the class struggle itself. Legalistic and tokenistic affirmations of equality must be *transcended* in this struggle, not opposed.

### The Meaning of the Equal Rights Amendment

Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment would overturn hundreds of state laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. These include:

- laws excluding women from certain occupations;
- laws that discriminate in hiring for state and local government positions;
- laws that permit state colleges to set higher admission standards for women;
- laws restricting the rights of married women to own property or engage in business independent of their husbands;
- laws that bias jury selection against women;
- laws establishing dual pay schedules.

The ERA would also make the payment of alimony less arbitrary and discriminatory by providing that it be awarded to either partner or dispensed with according to the partners' relative incomes and ability to support themselves. (The Spartacist League opposes the very concept of alimony, which is a substitute for providing women access to jobs and training in marketable skills, instead limiting their domain to home and children.)

This list, by no means exhaustive, indicates that the Equal Rights Amendment would mean some real, if limited, advances in the areas of women's civil and economic rights and, particularly, employment opportunities for professional women and women in public schools and state institutions of higher education. Unlike ultra-leftists who proclaim that they have no interest in legalistic reforms like the ERA, Marxists recognize that such struggles for bourgeois-democratic rights are of profound importance to the proletariat. By fighting the special oppression of women, Marxists attempt to unify the working class on a correct basis and to demonstrate in struggle that sexual equality can be achieved only through socialist revolution.

### The Equal Rights Amendment and the Civil Rights Act

The laws ostensibly granting equal opportunity to women, including the ERA, are of the same basic character as the 1964 Civil Rights Act (CRA) and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In both cases, the capitalist state felt compelled to grant formal concessions of democratic rights in order to give the sellout "leaders" of the black and women's movements a few crumbs to distribute to their restive followers. The civil rights movement, like the liberal women's movement typified by N.O.W., was unashamedly reformist and operated in the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie, which recognized that legal discrimina-

tion was the main obstacle to educational and professional opportunities, turning its back on the black masses for whom "upward mobility" under capitalism is a cynical fiction.

Both movements contained the same inherent contradiction between the partial but legitimate aspirations of a specially oppressed group and the impossibility of achieving full equality under capitalism except for a class-privileged few. Women, blacks and Latins are the main source for the pool of surplus labor vitally needed by the capitalists to expand the work force in boom periods and to depress all workers' wages in bust periods. The poisonous ideologies of racism and male chauvinism keep the workers at each others' throats rather than uniting to smash the bosses. By denying cultural advantages and technical training to blacks, Latins and women, the bourgeoisie is able to recruit workers at starvation wages for the thousands of obsolescent sweatshops that could not operate otherwise. While blacks and Latins are concentrated overwhelmingly in the lowest social strata, however, women are distributed throughout all social classes. Their oppression has its special locus in the family which serves capitalism not only as a conservatizing social institution but also as the source of billions of dollars in unpaid labor necessary to reproduce the work force.

But even though full sexual and racial equality cannot be achieved under capitalism, the ruling class under pressure may grant token reforms rather than install outright barbarism. The ERA, like the Civil Rights Act, is an attempt to obscure the most blatant manifestations of sexual and racial discrimination while avoiding action necessary to eliminate the real substance of the oppression of minorities and women. The bourgeoisie can sustain a few adverse judgments by government anti-discrimination agencies but could not survive the loss of the billions in extra profits derived from the super-exploitation of women and minority workers.

To cover their opportunist policy of supporting the 1964 Civil Rights Act while opposing the Equal Rights Amendment, a number of left tendencies have invented a qualitative difference between them. To the Revolutionary Union the ERA "will bring nothing but sham equality and more real oppression for the vast majority of women in this country. It is part of the overall attack on the people's living standards launched by the U.S. ruling class" (*Revolution*, February 1973). To the RU the amendment is nothing but a cloak for the abolition of state protective laws: "The ERA neither comes from mass struggle nor does it benefit the masses" (*Revolution*, March 1973).

Further, the April issue of *Revolution* treats us to a particularly juicy attempt to tailor history to the RU's political needs:

"The ruling class only makes concessions in the face of mass struggle. While there has been some struggle around specific issues of women's oppression, there has not been any real mass movement around the general question of 'equal rights for women' or the ERA. The Civil Rights Movement was able to wring real concessions from the ruling class because it involved millions of people, including many working men and women, in militant, determined struggle" [emphasis in original].

The key word in these paragraphs is "real." The Civil Rights Movement was a "real mass movement"; the women's movement is not. The CRA contained "real concessions"; the ERA does not. What, comrades of the Revolutionary Union, distinguishes a supportable movement? Politics? Social composition? Both the civil rights and women's movements are multi-class, reformist movements under bourgeois leadership. Obviously the answer is numbers; the bigger it is, the more "real" (i.e., supportable) it is. We might suggest another such "real mass movement" to the RU, one to which their opportunist appetites inevitably lead, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

Those who remember the mass civil rights marches of the early sixties, led by pacifist ministers, sellout labor "leaders" and liberal politicians into the waiting arms of JFK and LBJ, may have difficulty reconciling that political reality with the RU's image of a revolutionary black liberation movement wringing "real" concessions from a cringing bourgeoisie. The struggle for racial equality did indeed produce stirrings of unrest (which generally developed in a black nationalist rather than a revolutionary direction) among the black masses (ghetto rebellions, independent political experiments like Detroit's Freedom Now Party, the development in SNCC and CORE of subjectively anti-imperialist politics, the emergence of the Black Panthers and the idea of armed self-defense, etc.). These, however, were not the cause of the various civil rights acts but were rather the result of widespread frustration over the ineffective tokenism and superficial nature of these laws. The CRA was nevertheless an advance in that it represented some genuine, although extremely limited, concessions to racial minorities and improved the conditions of struggle. The ERA, if passed, would provide similar concessions to women.

### Bourgeois Legalism and Labor Reformism

The Communist Party and the International Socialists, like the RU, justify their opposition to ERA primarily by claiming that the amendment would lead to the abolition of state protective laws. The crucial question of protective laws is examined below, but several preliminary points are important to make.

First, many state protective laws have already been voided on the basis of the Civil Rights Act. In 1963 40 states had maximum hours laws for women in one or more occupations or industries. State courts and attorneys general have since ruled these laws discriminatory under Title VII of the CRA, and 32 of the 40 states have eliminated them. Courts in California and Oregon have also used Title VII to overturn those states' laws establishing weightlifting limits for women. Do the RU, IS and CP propose to repeal the Civil Rights Act because it has been used to strike down protective laws? Perhaps the RU can invent some new history to demonstrate how the "sham equality" of the ERA differs from the "real concessions" of the CRA.

Secondly, the amendment itself says nothing one way or the other about protective laws; they could either be abolished or extended to cover men and still be consistent with ERA. Of course the bourgeois

will seek to establish the former interpretation; it is the responsibility of self-styled revolutionists (as distinguished from liberals) to seek to develop mass struggles to establish the latter. Precisely because it is such a simple and unequivocal statement of legal equality, the ERA is supportable and must become a basis for further agitation to defend and extend protective legislation.

The pattern established by court decisions and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines indicates that they will interpret the amendment to extend minimum wage laws, rest and lunch period laws to cover men, while invalidating laws limiting hours and weightlifting. The workers movement should, by no means, accept these interpretations as final. Whereas the RU, CP and IS position leads to the conclusion that it is preferable for women to be excluded from high paying jobs in major industries like auto, which require many hours of compulsory overtime, rather than face the loss of state maximum hours laws, we believe that all barriers to women's full integration into the work force should be removed while workers in auto and other industries should fight to extend the protection of maximum hours laws to men, to eliminate compulsory overtime and to institute a 30-hour week at 40 hours' pay in their national contracts.

The key to a correct evaluation of any extension of democratic rights like ERA or CRA is to understand that these laws necessarily have a contradictory aspect when implemented under a social system in which sexual and racial discrimination are inherent. As long as the bourgeoisie holds power, any democratic reform, any partial gain of the working class, can be perverted into a covert attack on all or part of the class (e.g., wage gains are used to justify wage controls). This is precisely the opportunity for socialist propaganda to expose the hypocrisy and the reactionary character of the bourgeoisie and to pose the class struggle as the road to equality.

The positions of the IS, CP and RU display a thinly veiled form of legalism and reformism. In the 15 March issue of *Workers' Power*, the IS states its case:

"We oppose the ERA simply because the elimination of protective legislation will severely weaken the position of working women. We would, however, support a legislative measure that would both guarantee the legal equality of women and protect the rights of working women."

What underlies this position are two assumptions: 1) that the interests of the proletariat can be protected by a perfectly worded law and 2) that the proletariat is a passive object that cannot defend itself against capitalist attacks. To the first point we answer that no "legislative measure" will ever "guarantee the legal equality of women and protect the rights of working women" because the bourgeoisie, despite democratic pretensions, *cannot* provide such a guarantee, which is inimical to its class interests. Only a workers state can guarantee real social equality and steady improvements in the proletariat's living and working conditions.

The CP, IS and RU reveal a deep-rooted reformist outlook when they accept the bosses' proposition that

*continued on next page*

## Why We Support the ERA

any further extension of democratic rights for women must be paid for by the loss of protective legislation. This is the cowardly and opportunist approach of the labor bureaucrats who tell the workers that they must pay for everything they get by trading off losses against gains, by accepting speed-up as the price for wage increases or by accepting compulsory overtime as the price for pension improvements. It is the same divisive outlook the bosses seek to engender when they insist that a gain for some workers is a loss for others and thus whittles must oppose the demands of black workers. By painting a picture of the working class as passive and defenseless, these so-called revolutionaries are only mirroring the cringing servility of labor's misleaders who betray and manipulate the workers' fighting instincts into the narrow and self-defeating tactics of business unionism. This is especially evident in the fawning admiration the CP shows toward various AFL-CIO bureaucrats (like Myra Wolfgang of the Hotel, Bar and Restaurant Workers Union) when they publicly oppose the ERA. In their quest "to be at one" with the workers—all the workers—these opportunists find themselves tailing the class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy. But despite their misleadership, American workers have not suffered a decisive defeat which would permit the capitalists to ride roughshod over them. It is hardly preordained that passage of the ERA would mean the loss of gains embodied in protective laws.

### The Reality of Protective Legislation

Protective laws are hardly unalloyed gold for women workers. A major problem in characterizing them is that from state to state the laws differ greatly in the specific restrictions on the employment of women, the number of women covered, legal penalties and enforcement procedures. This is due largely to the varied origins and intentions of the laws. Women's labor unions, bourgeois philanthropic organizations, job-trusting craft unions, factory inspectors and aspiring reform politicians all played a role in shaping these laws, often with very different ends in mind. Many of the laws have been invalidated under Title VII. Others are rarely enforced and are of little use to those women in small sweatshops, which the labor fakers consistently refuse to organize.

Some of the protective laws were class victories won by militant strike action and with the gains soon extended to men. Massachusetts' 60-hour law of 1874 was the first enforceable maximum hours law, and within a decade most of New England textile workers were covered by similar laws. Although through a legislative compromise the law applied only to women, the textile companies soon found it impossible to maintain different schedules for the minority of men in the industry, a general phenomenon noted by Marx in his study of the effects of England's factory laws.

These maximum hours laws were progressive insofar as they shortened the workweek, but they have also been used widely to exclude women from indus-

tries like auto that thrive on long hours of compulsory overtime. Passage of the ERA would put an end to the utilization of maximum hours laws as an excuse to exclude women from industry and sharpen the counterposition of the proletarian policy of a shorter workweek for all at no loss in pay to the bourgeoisie's policy of a longer workweek for some and unemployment for others.

Eighteen states have enacted laws either prohibiting or strictly regulating the conditions of night work for women. Night-work prohibitions have been defended as a measure for the maintenance of women's position in the home.

Although certain amenities like taxi fare for female night-shift workers could usefully be extended to men, in general, night-work laws are reactionary restrictions on women's rights and should be opposed by the labor movement.

Likewise the many state laws which prohibit women from working in certain occupations like mining, bartending, foundry work, meter reading, brass polishing, etc., only reinforce the image of women as docile, helpless creatures to be protected from "immoral" and "hazardous" occupations by a benevolent ruling class. Such laws were often the result of pressure by job-trusting craft unions that preferred to exclude women rather than organize them and fight for equal pay.

Bourgeois philanthropists, concerned that the pauperization of women workers was driving thousands into prostitution and onto public charity, were the main force behind most of the state minimum wage laws for women. Thirty-six states have these laws, and the vast majority has already extended coverage to men. Since they maintain wage levels in local businesses not covered by the federal minimum wage, these laws must be retained, extended to men in all states and increased from the present absurdly low minimum levels.

Although the weightlifting laws have frequently been used arbitrarily in job classifications to exclude women from better paying jobs, we favor both their retention and their extension to men to provide protection for all workers against the capitalists' disregard for their health and safety.

Women textile workers took the lead in fighting for maximum hours laws, the first protective laws, because the men in other industries like the building trades were better organized and had already secured shorter hours through trade-union struggles. The craft-union bureaucrats' policy of deliberate neglect of the more oppressed women workers was the root cause that drove the women to rely increasingly on bourgeois philanthropists like the Consumers' League and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, rather than on their own strength as part of the proletariat. The total inadequacy of protective legislation and the long-standing pattern of sexual discrimination in industry are an indictment of the labor bureaucracy's self-serving refusal to mobilize the workers to struggle collectively to overcome inequality and achieve class solidarity as well as to organize the unorganized and to advance the interests of all workers. ■

# OUR PROGRAM

1. Free quality health care for all, including free abortion and birth control on demand. Free prenatal and postnatal maternity care. No forced sterilization.
2. Socialize household duties by making available, at the workplace and residential areas, dining rooms and laundry services paid for by the state.
3. Free quality 24-hour child-care facilities available to all, controlled by parents and staff, paid for by the state or by the employer.
4. Free, immediate divorce on request of either partner. No alimony, with child support borne by the state.
5. No discrimination by employers or the state based on marital status. Equal legal rights for all—married or single. Abolish the legal classification of illegitimacy.
6. No laws or discrimination against homosexuals. No sex codes or discrimination against relations based on consent of those involved.
7. End the legal persecution of prostitutes.
8. For a state stipend available to all young people, enabling economic independence from the family. Lower the legal age of adulthood to sixteen.
9. Free and equal education—open admissions—with a state stipend. Worker-student-teacher control of schools.
10. End the falsification of history. Teach the history of the international class struggle, including the struggles of women and minorities.
11. End tracking in schools by class, race or sex. (Equal access to all types of academic and vocational training.)
12. Equal rights and benefits for part-time and temporary workers. Full pay, rights and benefits during training. Maternity and paternity leaves with full pay and no loss in job security.
13. Extend protective legislation to cover all workers.
14. Equal pay for equal work. Equal access to all job categories.
15. No job discrimination based on race, sex or age.
16. End unemployment at the capitalists' expense. For a shorter workweek with no loss in pay. (30 hours' work for 40 hours' pay—sliding scale of hours and wages.)
17. For unlimited cost-of-living escalator clauses in all union contracts.
18. Organize the unorganized. Union organization of the unemployed.
19. For union hiring halls. No racial or sexual discrimination in the unions.
20. For rank-and-file control of the unions. Oust the labor bureaucrats by building militant caucuses based on a class-struggle political program that includes a fight for the needs of the specially oppressed. No exclusionism in the caucuses by race or sex.
21. No anti-labor laws. Government out of union affairs.
22. For the right of armed self-defense of the working class.
23. No confidence in capitalist politicians—male or female. Build a labor party based on the trade unions.
24. For labor political strikes against the wage freeze and the Indochinese war.
25. For the expropriation of industry without compensation, under workers control.
26. For a workers government.

# WHY WE SUPPORT THE E.R.A.

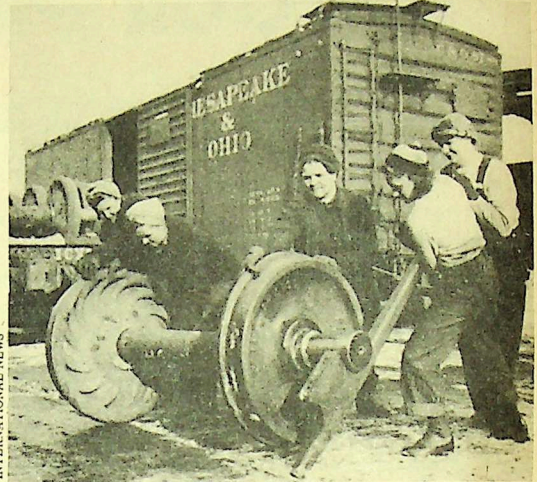
The Equal Rights Amendment is a simple statement of women's legal equality. It reads: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." In this or similar form, the ERA has been introduced (and defeated) in Congress every year since 1923.

After half a century, during which it rarely received a serious hearing, the ERA was passed by Congress in 1972. To become a constitutional amendment it must be ratified within seven years by at least 38 states. To date, it has been approved by 28 state legislatures and rejected by ten and is the subject of extremely sharp controversy.

This controversy has produced the most incongruous political lineup of recent history. Opponents of the amendment include not only reactionary standardbearers of white male supremacist ideology like the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society or pawns of medieval obscurantism like the National Council of Catholic Women but even major currents within the workers movement—the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the reformist Communist Party (CP), the left social democrats of the International Socialists (IS) and the Maoist Revolutionary Union (RU). Among ERA supporters we find the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Maoist October League (OL), the National Organization of Women (NOW) along with a myriad of petty-bourgeois feminist organizations, the United Auto Workers' and Communications Workers' bureaucracies, the Democratic Party and such "champions of sexual equality" as George Wallace, Richard Nixon and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM).

The bourgeoisie generally favors the amendment as a token gesture that will cost it little while shoring up the illusions of American democracy which have been severely shaken by the racial violence of the sixties, the Vietnam war and the general decline of the domestic economy. Nixon's veto of the childcare bill and the extreme backwardness of state and federal laws governing maternity leave and pay indicate the real extent of the ruling class's hypocritical concern for women's rights. In addition, elements like the NAM hope to use the amendment to secure the abolition of state laws regulating women's minimum wages, maximum hours and weight-lifting restrictions, as well as rest periods and other provisions of "protective legislation."

For their part, the more openly reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done their best to turn the ERA into a contemporary parallel of the Dreyfus case in nineteenth century France, where the denial of democratic rights to a Jewish army officer was the occasion for a mobilization of reactionaries and anti-Semites which conditioned the entire climate of opinion and affected every layer of society. Many of the forces that led the anti-abortion campaign have coalesced around "Stop ERA," a group headed by Phyllis Schlafly, well known right-wing writer and Goldwater supporter in 1964. Schlafly claims that the ERA would be a step down for women



INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Women do "men's" jobs during war. Railroads employed 100,000 women in 1944.

who "already have the status of special privilege." John Schmitz of the American Independent Party bemoans the fact that "Women already have too much freedom."

While this debate exposes both the seamy underside of bourgeois reaction and the transparent hypocrisy of liberal representatives of the ruling class and their lackeys in the labor bureaucracy, it is more important as an acid test which reveals the utter disorientation of many ostensibly revolutionary organizations faced with the struggle for legal equality and bourgeois-democratic rights in an epoch when the bourgeoisie has long since outlived any progressive thrust; in the imperialist era, only the proletariat retains a real stake in the issues of democracy.

The Spartacist League supports the Equal Rights Amendment because we are in favor of equality between the sexes but at the level attained through the struggles of the most advanced sections of the working class. Partial gains must be extended, thereby aiding in the unification of the class. The ERA makes no provision for extending protective legislation. In this situation we must give support to the Amendment while continuing the struggle to protect and extend the gains already won. We support the ERA from the standpoint of the proletariat and with not the slightest illusion of confidence in the bourgeoisie which "always takes away with the right hand twice what it grants with the left." But to oppose the ERA on the grounds that it will allow the capitalists to destroy (in the name of equality) the partial gains of women workers embodied in state protective laws would be to reject the struggle for democracy and to deny that the principle of equality is important. The proletariat has its own weapons for protecting and extending its social gains and the

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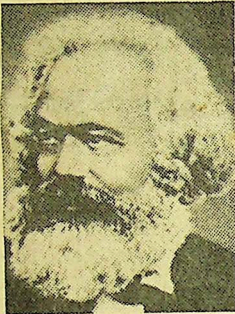


# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

25c



***Dalla Costa/James  
and the Subversion of  
Marxism: A Critique...2***

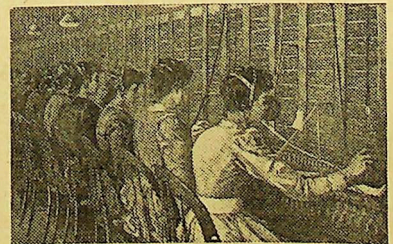


Mary Wollstonecraft

***Feminism vs. Marxism:  
Origins of the Conflict...7***

***Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union  
Expels Socialists...14***

***Class Struggle in the  
Phone Company...24***



# Dalla Costa/James and the Subversion of Marxism: A Critique

## The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community

contains

"Women and the Subversion of the Community"  
by Mariarosa Dalla Costa

"A Woman's Place" and "Introduction"  
by Selma James

The pamphlet, "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community," by Mariarosa Dalla Costa (published jointly by the Falling Wall Press and a group of individuals from the Women's Liberation Movement in England and Italy, 2nd edition, February 1973), with a lengthy introduction by Selma James, has been the source of much controversy within many women's organizations, particularly in Europe and England. (See for example the latest issues of *Radical America*, Vol. 7, Nos. 4 and 5, which are entirely devoted to the questions raised by it.)

"The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community" is basically an attempt to go beyond the simple "Third-World" redefinition of class—i.e., that the most oppressed, the "wretched of the earth," are the new revolutionary forces. Abandoning this line, which formerly sufficed for radical feminists, and citing Marx's analysis of capitalism, the pamphlet attempts to prove that women play a central role in capitalist production and must therefore play a central role in the proletarian revolution. In this attempt it fails miserably—or rather, succeeds only through totally distorting Marx's analysis of capitalist production.

In terms of its theoretical contributions, this pamphlet is unworthy of serious consideration by Marxists, but since many subjectively revolutionary women are now searching for ways in which their feminism can be integrated with Marxism through some programmatic "missing link," it is important to refute this work's fraudulent claim to be a Marxist analysis, which, if believed, will only lead women down one more blind alley. The fact is that there is no "missing link" between feminism and Marxism! The two outlooks are fundamentally and implacably counterposed!

In addition to this pamphlet, there are two other works which are important expositions of Dalla Costa/James's theories. "Women, the Unions and Work, or What is Not to be Done," by Selma James (first printed by Crest Press, London; reprinted by Canadian Women's Educational Press, Toronto), is an explicit attack on the left and particularly the trade unions as narrow, divisive organizations which must be opposed by women. "Wages for Housework," by Giuliana Pompei, with contributions from discussion at a feminist conference in Padova, 1972 (Cambridge

Women's Liberation, translated by Joan Hall and reprinted by Canadian Women's Educational Press, Toronto), takes up Dalla Costa's central theme of housewives as productive workers and emphasizes the demand "wages for housework" (which Dalla Costa herself does not stress).

It is rather frustrating for a Marxist to attempt to grapple with these works, because they are so full of internal contradictions. Despite this, however, we have attempted to summarize below some of the more important aspects of the theory. (Although James gives Dalla Costa credit for the new discovery, both developed it, and James has in fact arguments for it other than Dalla Costa's.)

## The Theories of Dalla Costa and James

1. Women are vital producers for capitalism, even when they do not work outside the home. "What we meant precisely is that housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value."

2. They produce a commodity "unique to capitalism: the living human being—the labourer himself!." This laborer, by selling his labor power to a capitalist, allows the capitalist to use his labor to produce more than his wage is worth, thus producing surplus value. But women are the ones who really produce this surplus value, because they produce the workers and their labor power.

"The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floors swept, its lunchbox prepared, its sexuality not gratified but quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the night shift. This is how labor power is produced and reproduced when it is daily consumed in the factory or the office. *To describe its basic production and reproduction is to describe women's work.*"

"The labourer himself" is thus equated with his "labour-power" as the commodity produced.

3. This discovery that the family is a center of capitalist production has been obscured because Marxists have traditionally concentrated on the working class (which James and Dalla Costa constantly equate with men). However, this vital role has also been obscured because women have not been paid a wage for their work. "Inside the home we have discovered our *invisible work*... the invisible—because unpaid—foundation upon which the whole pyramid of capitalist accumulation rests" (Pompei, "Wages for Housework"). This leads to the demand "wages for housework" as a way to expose women's role.

4. This division of the proletariat into waged (men) and unwaged (women) created by the transition from

feudalism to capitalism was the fundamental break between men and women and the alienation of both from their children. This waged versus unwaged distinction must be broken down.

5. "Capital established the family as the nuclear family and subordinated within it the woman to the man... Capital constructed the female role, and has made the man in the family the instrument of this reduction." The creation of wage labor completed the subordination of women, who appeared to be excluded from social production by not being paid a wage.

6. Women must refuse to accept this role any longer. James says, "if your production is vital to capitalism, refusing to produce, refusing to work, is a fundamental lever of social power."

7. Women must oppose membership in trade unions, because "like the family, these protect the class at her expense..." The unions, because they exclude non-wage-earners, divide the class against itself and make any common struggle impossible. Also, capitalism uses the unions specifically to hold down the workers' militancy.

8. The left, too, must be rejected because it is "male-dominated." Moreover, the left sees the solution for women as simply acquiring "trade-union consciousness" or adopting "the forms of struggle men have traditionally used," i.e., the forms of the organized labor movement.

9. James and Dalla Costa offer "social existence to housewives other than another job—we can offer them the struggle itself." So women must refuse to work outside the home, and inside the home as well, and instead participate in "the struggle itself." "Those who advocate that the liberation of the working class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are

part of the problem, not the solution." How will women survive? The growth of the women's movement will provide their support.

### Why Housewives Are Not Productive Workers

Two key concepts form the basis of Dalla Costa/James's theory of women as productive workers—their production of the laborer/labor power (i.e., child-raising and servicing the husband/worker) and their role in "consumption as part of production"—shopping, cooking, etc. The argument that these two aspects of housework are productive of surplus value ignores two crucial distinctions made by Marx. These are: 1) the difference between industrial and *private* consumption (i.e., family consumption) and 2) the difference between productive labor under capitalism, that is, wage labor for a capitalist generating surplus value, and simple work, which produces only use value.

James, after noting that "...so-called Marxists said that the capitalist family did not produce for capitalism, was not part of social production..." admits that "Marx himself does not seem to have said anywhere that it was." James is a classic revisionist; that is, she wants to use Marx's tremendous authority yet has the problem of trying to twist his words to fit her theories. She explains away his peculiar oversight in not explicitly stating her theory:

"Suffice it to say that, first, he is singular in seeing consumption as a phase of production: 'It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the labourer himself.' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1958, p. 572). Second, he alone has given us the tools to make our own analysis. And finally, he never was guilty of the nonsense with which Engels, despite his many contributions, has saddled us."

### Private Versus Industrial Consumption

There are two kinds of consumption under capitalism—industrial and private. Marx writes:

"The labourer consumes in a two-fold way. While producing he consumes by his labour the means of production.... On the other hand, the labourer turns the money paid to him for his labour-power, into means of subsistence: this is his individual consumption. The labourer's productive consumption, and his individual consumption, are therefore totally distinct. In the former, he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions *outside the process of production*." [our emphasis]

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 23

Of course this private consumption is taken into consideration by capitalists, as it is necessary in order to maintain and reproduce the labor force, without which capitalism could not exist, and as such it is considered to be "a necessary factor in the process of production." "But," as Marx noted, "the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation." The fact that it is necessary to eat, to live and to reproduce does not make the family a "center of social

*continued on next page*

# Women and Revolution

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## ...Dalla Costa, James

production." These things take place *regardless* of the form of social production. Individual consumption in the home is not capitalist production, because the capitalist does not own the family. The worker *owns himself* and *sells* his labor power to the capitalist. The capitalist does not have to concern himself with how the worker reproduces and lives (except to ensure that workers will be forced to continue to sell their labor power). So, while in the broadest sense, this individual private consumption is a "factor" of production, i.e., is taken account of, mainly in the calculation of wages, it is in no sense capitalist production. That is why Marx said individual consumption takes place *outside the sphere of production*.

### Productive Labor

The Marxist concept of "productive labor" is violently abused by Dalla Costa and James. It is not clear for *whom* this "productive labor" in the home is done, since the capitalist does not own the nuclear family. Clearly, Dalla Costa does not intend us to believe that the housewife is either a slave owner (since she "produces living human beings" which are commodities) or a mini-capitalist (since she owns the "means of production," her reproductive organs). Dalla Costa says women "produce" people. In the biological sense, this is true. But this "production" is not "productive labor" in the Marxist sense, as she claims.

James says that the commodity women produce is "the living human being." Elsewhere, this commodity is referred to as "labor power." But a distinction must be made. Under capitalism, human beings are not commodities (as they are in slave societies). Under capitalism workers are "free" to sell their labor power. It is precisely the alienation of the workers from their labor power and their sale of that labor power as a commodity on the market which characterize capitalist production:

"...labour-power can appear on the market as a commodity only if, and so far as, its producer, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale....In order that he may be able to do this, he must have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour, i.e. of his person."

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 6

But the other work women do in the home—the care, feeding and general maintenance of workers (husbands) is not Marxist productive labor either. The important question to ask about this domestic work is: Does this work produce value, and if so, how is the value of this "labor power" determined? Because if housewives' work produces value, it must be embodied in the commodity—labor power, according to Dalla Costa—which this housework supports.

The production of labor power is simple commodity production. Labor power is produced and sold in order to get use values in exchange, for the immediate satisfaction of human needs. Ira Gerstein, in "Domestic Work and Capitalism" (in *Radical America*, Vol. 7, Nos. 4 and 5), contrasts this simple commodity production to capitalist production:

"Production is limited, because the quantity produced is bounded by the finite human capacity, necessity and desire to consume. On the other hand, the aim of the capitalist is to continually increase his surplus-value. This has nothing to do with his personal consumption....Labor-power does not increase without limit as an independent way of piling up wealth."

Marx analyzes the value of labor power as follows:

"The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. So far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it....the sum of the means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the labourer's substitutes, i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its appearance on the market....The value of labour-power resolves itself into the value of a definite quantity of the means of subsistence."

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 6

Labor power is created by the consumption of material things (food, clothing) and of services (medical care, education). The sum of the value of these means of subsistence is the value of labor power. The domestic work done by housewives in processing these commodities is clearly *not* considered when adding up this total. Housework does *not add value* to the commodity labor power. This does not mean that women do not work inside the home—but this domestic drudgery is not *capitalist* production and is not considered therefore in analyzing capitalist productive relations.

### The Production of Labor Power

According to Gerstein, "Labor-power is the single and unique commodity in capitalist society whose general production does not take place in a capitalist manner." However, there are other commodities which are not produced in "a capitalist manner" under capitalism; for example, natural raw materials such as fish caught from the sea. These exist and reproduce themselves, although not in a capitalist manner. And the production of human beings, who possess within themselves the capacity for labor, must be seen in the same way as these other natural products because the propagation of the human species is a natural act. The *self*-production of services and things consumed by the worker and his family lies *outside* capitalist political economy altogether. It is, moreover, a *universal* activity of living creatures ("the instincts for self-preservation" which Marx noted). James, by stubbornly insisting that "there is nothing in capitalism which is not capitalistic," covers up this crucial difference between the production of labor power and capitalist production.

In designating propagation a "natural act," it must be made clear, however, that the organization of the propagation of the family is not determined simply biologically, but socially.

### Origins of the Family

How did women come to be enslaved in the home? This domestic slavery was not created by capitalism



SIPARIOGLU

Demonstration of Chilean housewives in 1972 against Allende government.

but has far more ancient origins stemming from the development of private property and the social surplus accumulated by men from their work. According to Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, land in the stone age belonged to all members of the tribe in common. While there was a division of labor between the sexes, there was also equality, for each took part in productive labor and contributed to the economy. With the eventual increase in the capacity of human beings to produce, it became profitable to employ slaves—the first form of private property. Herds, land and other forms of property also became privatized for the first time, bringing about a revolution within the family. Men had always been responsible for procuring the necessities of life, but now, although the division of labor within the family remained essentially unchanged, the domestic labor of women no longer counted for much alongside the economic power of men. Engels concluded that women could achieve equality with men only when they took part once again in general economic production on a par with men.

James claims that Marx was "never guilty of this nonsense" of Engels. But if this is true, it is simply because he died (1883) a year before Engels' completion of this book which was intended as a joint work. Engels in fact states in his preface to the first edition that, "The following chapters are... the execution of a bequest.... Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of Morgan's researches.... I have the critical notes which he made to his extensive extracts from Morgan, and as far as possible I reproduce them here."

Dalla Costa and James hold differing views of the question of the origins of women's oppression—and both are wrong. James claims that primordial sexism is the root cause of women's oppression. Dalla Costa, on the other hand, argues that it is the result of capitalist economic relationships, a thesis which leads her to assert that woman's position in feudal society was in some ways more progressive:

"To the extent that men had been the despotic heads of the patriarchal family... the experience of women, children, and men was a contradictory experience.... But in pre-capitalistic society, the work of each member of the community of serfs was seen to be directed to a purpose; either to the prosperity of the feudal lord or to our survival.... The passage from serfdom

to free labor power separated the male from the female proletariat...."

Dalla Costa/James's insistence on the importance of the productive labor of housewives as central to their revolutionary potential contradicts the assertions: 1) that women were forced out of productive labor with the transition from feudalism, and 2) that feudalism was *less oppressive* to women than capitalism, because women were recognized as productive workers under feudalism.

Capitalism in fact laid the basis for the liberation of women because: 1) it opened the way for the participation of women in social production once again, creating opportunities for the development of social consciousness and for organized struggle against oppression outside the isolated single-unit family structure; 2) the rise of the bourgeois concept of the free individual—as opposed to medieval notions of bloodlineage, aristocratic privilege and religious domination which codified the belief that women were inferior—laid the intellectual groundwork for the recognition of women as full human beings with rights equal to those of men, a concept totally foreign to the medieval mind (and apparently irrelevant to Dalla Costa).

Capitalism created the basis for the emancipation of women through the development of the productive forces, but it has long outlived its progressive historical role and is now a barrier both to the further development of the productive forces and to the emancipation of women. Women cannot be free until scarcity is eliminated, classes are abolished and the family is replaced. In other words, women cannot be free prior to the establishment of socialist society.

## The Family Under Capitalism

The perpetuation of the monogamous family unit under advanced capitalist society is not the result of some fiendish capitalist plot to extract ever more profit from the working class. Even the family as it exists today costs the capitalist more in dollars and cents than it would if its functions were socialized. The value of the family for the bourgeoisie does not lie in its *efficiency* in producing labor power, but rather in its usefulness as a reservoir of small private property and petty production which serves as an

*continued on next page*

## ... Dalla Costa, James

ideological brake on social consciousness. It is for this reason, as well as to end women's enslavement to repetitious, dull and enervating housework, that one of the tasks of the socialist revolution must be to replace the family.

The original economic function of the monogamous family was to transmit private property through inheritance. This function is economically useful only for the propertied classes, not for the proletariat, which owns little of material value to pass on. It is therefore in the material interest of the working class to play the historically progressive role of socializing family functions after the revolution.

But aside from this, the reactionary ideology of the nuclear family also renders possible the organizing of working-class housewives for reactionary ends, since their consciousness tends to be centered around defending and extending whatever small private holdings the family has. Thus in 1971 in Chile the opposition Christian Democrats and the National Party were able to successfully organize large demonstrations of housewives (as housewives) against the Allende regime. There is nothing in the family structure which can lead one to assume, as do James and Dalla Costa, that "when it comes to a showdown, [housewives] just go ahead and do what they know is right" and that what they consider "right" is aimed at overthrowing capitalism and not at maintaining it.

Dalla Costa/James's answer to women's oppression is that women should withdraw from capitalist society entirely, thereby bringing about its collapse. If they are working in a factory they should get out, because the recruitment of women into the workforce is a capitalist plot designed to ward off revolution. "The government, acting in the interests of the capitalist class..., has created unemployment" so that "... we will be glad for the crumbs that the master lets fall from his table." This theory of history as a fiendish plot assumes that capitalists are totally free to do what they please regardless of the laws of motion of capitalist economy. The fact is, however, that it is impossible to provide full employment in conditions of decaying imperialist society, whether the capitalists want to or not!

And the workers—far from being simply dupes—have an economic compulsion to work! But James and Dalla Costa ignore this. Their conception of why people do things is grounded not in the material world but in an idealist conception of reality.

### Trade Unions and the Left

Dalla Costa/James further argue that since working is exploitative and hence to be avoided, those organizations which center on organization at the workplace, i.e., the trade unions, are also bad. The trade unions are "divisive" because they take account only of wage workers and ignore the rest of the "proletariat" (such as old people, sick people, babies, housewives). This is nothing more than the old New Left practice of equating the most oppressed with the most revolutionary.

It was not the trade unions, however, which created

the hostilities among different social sectors—sexual, racial, employed/unemployed—which weaken the working class. These hostilities are part and parcel of *class society*—manifestations of bourgeois ideology which the trade unions do not create but (to the extent that they remain under conservative leadership) do reflect. Trade unions are basically defensive organizations of the working class to protect whatever economic gains it can wrest from the capitalist class. Marxists must therefore defend trade unions and seek to extend their protection to all workers. There is a crucial gap, which James ignores, between the appetites of the present-day trade-union bureaucracy, which serves as an agent of capital within the working class in order to maintain itself in power, and the ranks of the unions, who have neither soft jobs nor fancy pension plans to protect them nor the opportunity for class collaboration with the ruling class.

Marxists have never said that trade-union organization or "trade-union consciousness" is sufficient in itself to make a revolution. There would be no need for a revolutionary vanguard party if that were so. James misleads her audience when she writes:

"We are told that we must bring women to what is called a 'trade union consciousness.' This phrase is Lenin's and it comes from a pamphlet called 'What is to be Done?'"

This clearly implies that for Lenin trade-union consciousness is "the answer." But the whole point of *What Is to Be Done?* is precisely the need to transcend simple trade-union consciousness! Lenin writes:

"The spontaneous working-class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade-unionism, and working-class trade-unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics."

—V.I. Lenin. *What Is to Be Done?*

It is true that some left and even ostensibly Trotskyist organizations opportunistically tail uncritically every "left" bureaucrat and adapt to the most backward aspects of working-class consciousness, but this is a *betrayal* of Marxism, which we in the Spartacist League have consistently exposed. Dalla Costa's blanket charge that "the left" is "male-dominated" is particularly insulting to female revolutionaries, for it assumes that men will automatically dominate any organization, that no matter what level of consciousness they attain, women are really incapable of speaking up for themselves. This accusation is also insulting to male revolutionaries, because it is predicated on their incapability of transcending a chauvinist worldview and making a common struggle with women. It all boils down again to a New Left dictum: that "only the oppressed can really understand their own oppression."

### Conclusions

There exists in many women's organizations much confusion over the conclusions to be drawn from the works of Dalla Costa and James. This is because their rhetoric about "class struggle" partially obscures their real hatred of that struggle and their hostility to the proletariat. In truth, Dalla Costa and James have no program for women's liberation. Their "program" is solely one of *rejection*: women must reject work, must reject the left, must reject the

# Feminism vs. Marxism: Origins of the Conflict

Contrary to an opinion still subscribed to in certain circles, modern feminism did not emerge full-grown from the fertile womb of the New Left, but is in fact an ideological offspring of the utopian egalitarianism of the early nineteenth century, which was in turn a product of the bourgeois democratic revolution. It is noteworthy that the most original theorist of utopian socialism, Charles Fourier, was also the first advocate of women's liberation through the replacement of the nuclear family by collective child rearing. Since utopian socialism (including its solution to the problem of the oppression of women) represented the ideals of the bourgeois democratic revolution breaking through the barriers of private property, it was historically progressive. However, with the genesis of Marxism and the recognition that an egalitarian society can emerge only out of the rule of the working class, feminism (like other forms of utopian egalitarianism) lost its progressive aspect and became an ideology of the left wing of liberal individualism, a position which it continues to occupy to this day.

## Women in the Bourgeois-Democratic Vision

Without question, the most important bourgeois-democratic work on women's liberation was Mary

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792. Wollstonecraft was part of a circle of English radical democrats which included William Blake, Tom Paine and William Godwin, whose political lives came to be dominated by the French Revolution. A year before she wrote her classic on sexual equality, Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, a polemic against Edmund Burke's counterrevolutionary writings. A few years after, she was to attempt a history of the French Revolution.

While informed and imbued with moral outrage as a result of her own experiences as an unmarried, middle-class woman (she worked as a school teacher and governess), *Vindication* is essentially an extension of the principles of the Enlightenment and French Revolution to women. The first chapter, entitled "Rights and Duties of Mankind," sets the theoretical framework. *Vindication* rests heavily on analogies between the basis for the equality of women and general social equality:

For a contemporary reader, *Vindication* seems a highly unbalanced work. While the description of the role of women continues to be relevant, Wollstonecraft's solutions appear pallid. Her main programmatic demand, to which she devotes the concluding *continued on next page*

home, must reject their husbands, etc. And what substitutes do they propose? Only the purposely vague "struggle itself." Struggle for *what?* Pompei replies, "What we want is not to become more productive, not to go off and be exploited better somewhere else, but to work less and to have more opportunity for social and political experience." Certainly a legitimate desire, and one shared by all the oppressed and exploited. But to dream of its achievement apart from the smashing of capitalist class society is sheer utopianism. Without an understanding of how capitalism operates and of how it can be overthrown, all concrete programmatic demands become mere cosmetic reforms, whose effect is to buttress not overthrow the system.

At the heart of Dalla Costa/James's theses is the belief that women *can* withdraw from capitalist society, *can* find their own unique road to salvation outside capitalist relations. And why try to fit housewives into the capitalist economic system at all if their strength really lies outside it? This is the most glaring contradiction of all.

The reason Dalla Costa/James attempt to fit housewives into the mold of Marxist "productive workers" is simply because they cannot cope with the challenge of Marxism to their feminist worldview in any other way. This thin veneer of "Marxism" is simply a cover for the same old New Left ideology that anyone who *works* has already sold out, in total ignorance of the

iron necessity, faced by most of the world, of working or starving. It is a reflection of the worldview of those privileged few, the petty-bourgeois "radicals" who have glorified primitivism to the extent of hailing the starving, diseased subsistence farmers of the "Third World" as the new revolutionary force. And while these armchair radicals refine their theories in air-conditioned comfort, the peasants whom they idealize are slaughtered *because* of their primitive resources. While it is nice that James is trying to "get over this guilt about having wall-to-wall carpeting," that is not the problem of most women (and men), who face the struggle to eat, to eke out a living somehow and to find a way to overcome the real material oppression they face, an oppression created by a society from which they *cannot* escape. James tells these working-class women to stop working, to reject their husband's wages and live on—what? Air? Or are they all supposed to come and sleep on her wall-to-wall carpeting? Is this what she means by "the movement will support them"? All of Dalla Costa/James's theories are mere playing at revolution without any real intention of actively seeking to smash capitalism. As Marx said, "All the philosophers have done has been to *interpret* the world differently, what matters is to *alter* it." And the point is not to walk away from capitalism or to create an alternative for the petty-bourgeois drop-outs within it—but to smash it forever and begin the construction of socialist society. ■

## ...Origins

chapter, is uniform education for girls and boys. Even when she wrote *Vindication* this was only a moderately radical proposal. In fact in the very year that *Vindication* was written, a similar educational program was proposed in the French Assembly. Yet generations after the establishment of coeducation and the even more radical reform of women's suffrage, Wollstonecraft's depiction of women's role in society continues to ring true.

Although Wollstonecraft was one of the most radical political activists of her day (shortly after writing her classic on women's rights, she crossed the Channel to take part in the revolutionary French government), *Vindication* has an unexpectedly moralizing and personalist character. Like many feminists of our day, she appeals to men to recognize the full humanity of women and to women to stop being sex objects and develop themselves. And there is the same conviction that if only men and women would really believe in these ideals and behave accordingly, then women would achieve equality.

The emphasis on individual relationships is not peculiar to Wollstonecraft, but arises from the inherent contradiction within the bourgeois-democratic approach to women's oppression. Wollstonecraft accepted the nuclear family as the central institution of society and argued for sexual equality within that framework.

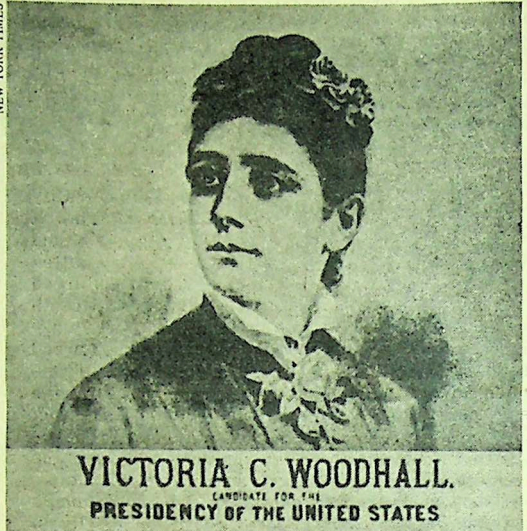
By accepting the basic role of women as mothers, Wollstonecraft accepted a division of labor in which women were necessarily economically dependent on their husbands. Therefore, women's equality was essentially dependent on how the marriage partners treated one another. In good part, *Vindication* is an argument that parents and particularly fathers should raise their daughters more like their sons in order to bring out their true potential. But if fathers reject education for their daughters, there is no other recourse. Here we have the limits both of bourgeois democracy and of Wollstonecraft's vision.

### Charles Fourier and the Abolition of the Family

The status of women in the nineteenth century represented the most acute and manifest expression of the contradiction between capitalist society and its own ideals. It was this contradiction that gave birth to utopian socialism. Early in the nineteenth century it became apparent to those still committed to the ideals of the French Revolution that liberty, equality and fraternity were not compatible with private property in a competitive market economy. As the most incisive of the pioneer socialists, Charles Fourier, put it:

"Philosophy was right to vaunt *liberty*; it is the foremost desire of all creatures. But philosophy forgot that in civilized society liberty is illusory if the common people lack wealth. When the wage-earning classes are poor, their independence is as fragile as a house without foundations. The free man who lacks

NEW YORK TIMES



Victoria Woodhull, U.S. presidential candidate, 1872

wealth immediately sinks back under the yoke of the rich."

—Beecher and Bienvenu (Eds.), *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*

And when Fourier applied the same critical concepts to the status of women, he reached equally radical, anti-bourgeois conclusions. The importance that Fourier attributed to the condition of women is well known:

"Social progress and changes of period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and social retrogression occurs as a result of a diminution in the liberty of women. . . . In summary, the extension of the privileges of women is the fundamental cause of all social progress."

—*Ibid.*

What is of decisive importance about Fourier's concern for women's oppression is that he put forth a program for the total reconstruction of society that would end the historic division of labor between men and women. In Fourier's projected socialist community, children were raised collectively with no particular relation to their biological parents, men and women performed the same work and total sexual liberty was encouraged. (He regarded heterosexual monogamy as the extension of bourgeois property concepts to the sexual sphere.)

Fourier's intense hostility to the patriarchal family in good part derived from his realization that it was inherently sexually repressive. In this he anticipated much of radical Freudianism. For example, he observed, "There are still many parents who allow their unmarried daughters to suffer and die for want of sexual satisfaction" (*Ibid.*).

Despite the fantastic nature of his projected socialist communities or "phalanxes," Fourier's program contained the rational core for the reorganization of society needed to liberate women. He was uniquely responsible for making the demand for the liberation of women through the abolition of the nu-



clear family an integral part of the socialist program which the young Marx and Engels inherited. Engels was more than willing (for example, in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*) to pay homage to the primary author of the socialist program for women's liberation.

### Utopian Egalitarianism and Women's Liberation

While not giving the woman question the centrality it had in Fourierism, the two other major currents of early nineteenth century socialism, Owenism and Saint-Simonism, were also unambiguously committed to sexual equality and opposed to legally enforced monogamy. The political life of the early nineteenth century was characterized by the *complete interpenetration* of the struggle for women's liberation and the general struggle for an egalitarian society. Those women advocating women's rights (no less than the men who did so) did not view this question as distinct from, much less counterposed to, the general movement for a rational social order. Those women who championed sexual equality were either socialists or radical democrats whose activity on behalf of women's rights occupied only a fraction of their political lives. The most radical women advocates of sexual equality—the Americans Frances Wright and Margaret Fuller and the Frenchwoman Flora Tristan—all conform to this political profile.

Frances Wright began her political career as a liberal reformer with a tract in favor of the abolition of slavery. She was won to socialism by Robert Dale Owen, Robert Owen's son, who immigrated to the U.S. to become its most important radical socialist in the 1820-30's. Wright established an Owenite commune in Tennessee modeled on the famous one at New Harmony, Indiana. In 1828-29, she and Robert Dale Owen edited the *Free Enquirer*, a newspaper associated with the New York Workingman's Party which championed universal suffrage, free public education, "free love" and birth control.

Margaret Fuller, whose *Women in the Nineteenth Century* was the most influential women's rights work of her generation, was a product of New England Transcendentalism and had edited a journal with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Like Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller approached the woman question from the standpoint of religious radicalism (the equality of souls).

Fuller was associated with the Transcendentalist commune, Brook Farm, about the time it was transformed into a Fourierist community or "phalanx," the year before she wrote her classic on women's equality. Shortly after that she went to Europe and became involved in the democratic nationalist movements that were a mainspring in the revolutions of 1848. In that momentous year, she went to Italy to run a hospital for Giuseppe Mazzini's Young Italy movement.

The most important woman socialist of the pre-1848 era was Flora Tristan. She began her revolutionary career with a tract in favor of legalized divorce, which had been outlawed in France following the reaction of 1815. (As a young woman Tristan had left her husband, an act which resulted in social ostracism and continual hardship throughout her life.) Her work on divorce led to a correspondence with the aging Fourier and a commitment to socialism. Among the most

cosmopolitan of socialists, Tristan had crisscrossed the Channel playing an active role in both the Owenite and Chartist movements. Summing up her political situation in a letter to Victor Considerant, leader of the Fourierist movement after the master's death, she wrote: "Almost the entire world is against me, men because I am demanding the emancipation of women, the propertied classes because I am demanding the emancipation of the wage earners" (Goldsmith, *Seven Women Against the World*).

In the 1840's the ancient French craft unions, the *compagnonnes*, were transforming themselves into modern trade unions. This process produced an embryonic revolutionary socialist labor movement whose main leaders were Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Auguste Blanqui and Etienne Cabet. Flora Tristan was part of this nascent proletarian socialist movement. Her *The Workers Union* written in 1843, was the most advanced statement of proletarian socialism up to its day. Its central theme was the need for an *international workers' organization*. (Marx met Tristan while he was in Paris and was undoubtedly influenced by her work.) The concluding passage of *The Workers Union* affirms: "Union is power if we unite on the social and political field, on the ground of equal rights for both sexes, if we organize labor, we shall win welfare for all."

*The Workers Union* devotes a section to the problems of women and its concluding passage indicates the integral role that sexual equality had in Tristan's concept of socialism: "We have resolved to include in our Charter woman's sacred and inalienable rights. We desire that men should give to their wives and mothers the liberty and absolute equality which they enjoy themselves."

Flora Tristan died of typhoid in 1844 at the age of 41. Had she survived the catastrophe of 1848 and remained politically active, the history of European socialism might well have been different, for she was

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# Women and Revolution

## ... Origins

free of the residual Jacobinism of Blanqui and the artisan philistinism of Proudhon.

Contemporary feminists and bourgeois historians tend to label all early nineteenth-century female advocates of sexual equality feminists. This is a wholly illegitimate analysis—a projection of current categories back into a time when they are meaningless. As a delimited movement and distinctive ideology feminism did not exist in the early nineteenth century. Virtually all the advocates of full sexual equality considered this an integral part of the movement for a generally free and egalitarian society rooted in Enlightenment principles and carrying forward the American and

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particularly the French Revolutions. The American Owenite Frances Wright was no more a feminist than the English Owenite William Thompson, who wrote *An appeal of one half the Human Race, Women, against the pretensions of the other Half, Men, to keep them in Civil and Domestic Slavery*. Flora Tristan was no more a feminist than was Fourier.

In the 1840's, a Transcendentalist radical like Margaret Fuller, a nationalist democrat like Giuseppe Mazzini and a socialist working class organizer like Etienne Cabet could consider themselves part of a common political movement whose program was encapsulated in the slogan, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." In its most radical expression, this movement looked forward to a single, total revolution which would simultaneously establish democracy, eliminate classes, achieve equality for women and end national oppression.

This vision was defeated on the barricades in 1848. And with that defeat, the component elements of early nineteenth-century radicalism (liberal democracy and socialism, trade unionism, women's equality and national liberation) separated and began to compete and conflict with one another. After 1848, it seemed that bourgeois society would continue for some time and that the interests of the oppressed, be they workers, women or nations, would have to be realized within its framework. Feminism (like trade unionism and

national liberation) emerged as a delimited movement with its own constituency, ideology and organization only after the great catastrophe of 1848 had temporarily dispelled the vision of a fundamentally new social order.

## Marx Against Utopian Egalitarianism

It is sometimes written that Fourier regarded socialism more as a means of overcoming women's oppression than class oppression. This is a post-Marx way of looking at politics and not how Fourier would have viewed it. He would have said that he projected a society which would satisfy human needs and that the most striking thing about it was the radical change in the role of women. As opposed to the materialist view that different political movements represent the interests of different classes, utopian socialism shared the rational idealistic conception of political motivation characteristic of the Enlightenment—i.e., that different political movements reflect different conceptions of the best possible social organization. The idealism of early socialism was probably inevitable since it was produced by those revolutionary bourgeois democrats who maintained their principles after the actual bourgeoisie had abandoned revolutionary democracy. The social base of early socialism was those petty-bourgeois radicals who had gone beyond the interests and real historic possibilities of their class. This was most true of German "True Socialism" which, in a nation with virtually no industrial workers and a conservative, traditionalist petty bourgeoisie, was purely a literary movement. It was least true of English Owenism, which had intersected the embryonic labor movement while retaining a large element of liberal philanthropism.

By the 1840's a working-class movement had arisen in France, Belgium and England which was attracted to socialist ideas and organization. However, the relationship of the new-fledged socialist workers' organizations to the older socialist currents, as well as to liberal democracy and the political expressions of women's rights and national liberation, remained confused in all existing socialist theories. It was Marx who cut the Gordian knot and provided a coherent, realistic analysis of the social basis for the socialist movement within bourgeois society.

Marx asserted that the working class was the social group which would play the primary and distinctive role in establishing socialism. This was so because the working class was that social group whose interests and condition were most in harmony with a collectivist economy or, conversely, which had the least stake in the capitalist mode of production.

Marx's appreciation of the role of the proletariat was not deduced from German philosophy, but was the result of his experience in France in the 1840's. Socialism had manifestly polarized French society along class lines, the main base for socialism being the industrial working class, the propertied classes being implacably hostile and the petty bourgeoisie vacillating, often seeking a utopian third road.

For Marx the predominance of intellectuals in the early socialist movement was not proof that the socialist movement could be based on universal reason.

Rather it was necessarily a phenomenon partly reflecting the contradictions of the bourgeois democratic revolution and partly anticipating the new alignment of class forces: "A portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat and in particular, a portion of bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" (Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*).

The propertied, educated classes could not be won to socialism on the basis of rational and democratic ideals even though objectively those ideals could only be realized under socialism. Along the same lines, women of the privileged class and the ruling stratum of oppressed nationalities cannot in general be won to socialism even though objectively sexual equality and national liberation can only be realized under socialism.

Closely related to the question of the class basis of the socialist movement is the question of the material conditions under which socialism can be established. Reflecting on pre-Marxist socialism in his later years, Engels quipped that the utopians believed that the reason socialism hadn't been established before was that nobody had ever thought of it. That Engels' witticism was only a slight exaggeration is shown by the importance of communal experiments in the early socialist movement, indicating a belief that socialism could be established under any and all conditions if a group really wanted it. The primacy of voluntarism for the early socialists again reflected the fact that their thinking was rooted in eighteenth-century, individualistic idealism which, in turn, derived from Protestantism, an earlier bourgeois ideology.

In sharp and deliberate contrast to the utopians, Marx asserted that inequality and oppression were necessary consequences of economic scarcity and attempts to eliminate them through communal escapism or political coercion were bound to fail:

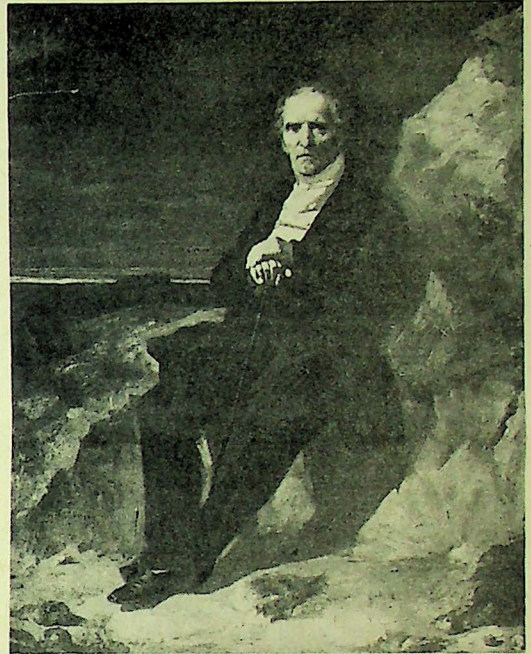
"... this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historic*, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced...." [emphasis in original]

—Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Marx's assertion that inequality and oppression are historically necessary and can be overcome only through the *total* development of society, centering on the raising of the productive forces, represents his most fundamental break with *progressive* bourgeois ideology. Therefore, to this day, these concepts are the most unpalatable aspects of Marxism for those attracted to socialism from a liberal humanist outlook:

"... although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual; the higher level of individuality is thus only achieved by a historical process in which individuals are sacrificed...."

"... it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means,...



Utopian socialist Charles Fourier called for the liberation of women.

slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and . . . , in general people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. 'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse...."

—Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*

It is evident that "women" can replace "individuals" and "classes" in these passages without doing damage to their meaning, since Marx regarded women's oppression as a *necessary* aspect of that stage in human development associated with class society.

Marx's programmatic differences with the utopians were encapsulated in the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" which he regarded as one of his few original, important contributions to socialist theory. The dictatorship of the proletariat is that period after the overthrow of the capitalist state when the working class administers society in order to create the economic and cultural conditions for socialism.

During the dictatorship of the proletariat, the restoration of capitalism remains a possibility. This is not primarily due to the machinations of die-hard reactionaries but arises rather out of the conflicts and tensions generated by the continuation of global economic scarcity.

This economic scarcity is caused not only by inadequate physical means of production. Even more  
*continued on next page*

## ... Origins

importantly it derives from the inadequate and extremely uneven cultural level inherited from capitalism. Socialist superabundance presupposes an enormous raising of the cultural level of mankind. The "average" person under socialism would have the knowledge and capacity of several learned professions in contemporary society.

However, in the period immediately following the revolution, the administration of production will necessarily be largely limited to that elite trained in bourgeois society, since training their replacements will take time. Therefore, skilled specialists such as the director of an airport, chief of surgery in a hospital or head of a nuclear power station will have to be drawn from the educated, privileged classes of the old capitalist society. Although in a qualitatively diminished way, the dictatorship of the proletariat will continue to exhibit economic inequality, a hierarchic division of labor and those aspects of social oppression rooted in the cultural level inherited from bourgeois society (e.g., racist attitudes will not disappear the day after the revolution).

These general principles concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat likewise apply to the woman question. To the extent that it rests on the cultural level inherited from capitalism, certain aspects of sexual inequality and oppression will continue well into the dictatorship of the proletariat. The population cannot be totally re-educated nor can a psychological pattern instilled in men and women from infancy be fully eliminated or reversed.

The rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary transition period to socialism is the central justification for utopian egalitarianism (including radical or "socialist" feminism) in the era of Marxism.

### The Battle over Protective Labor Legislation

Feminism was one of the three major extensions of utopian egalitarianism into the post-1848 era, the other two being anarchism and artisan cooperativism (Proudhonism). In fact, during the later nineteenth century radical feminism and anarchism heavily interpenetrated one another both as regards their position on the woman question and in personnel. The decisive element in common among feminism, anarchism and cooperativism was a commitment to a level of social equality and individual freedom impossible to attain not only under capitalism, but in the period following its overthrow. At a general ideological level, feminism was bourgeois individualism in conflict with the realities and limits of bourgeois society.

During their lifetimes, Marx and Engels had two notable conflicts with organized feminism—continual clashes in the context of the struggle for protective labor legislation and a short faction fight in the American section of the First International. While the question of protective labor legislation covered a great deal of ground at many levels of concreteness, the

central difference between the Marxists and feminists over this issue was also the central difference between Marxism and utopian egalitarianism—i.e., the question of the primacy of the material well-being of the masses and the historical interests of the socialist movement vis-à-vis formal equality within bourgeois society.

The feminist opposition to protective labor legislation argued and continues to argue that it would mean legal inequality in the status of women and that it was partly motivated by paternalistic, male-chauvinist prejudices. Marx and Engels recognized these facts but maintained that the physical well-being of working women and the interests of the entire class in reducing the intensity of exploitation more than offset this formal and ideological inequality. Writing to Gertrud Guillaume-Schack, a German feminist who later became an anarchist, Engels stated his case:

"That the working woman needs special protection against capitalist exploitation because of her special physiological functions seems obvious to me. The English women who championed the formal right of members of their sex to permit themselves to be as thoroughly exploited by the capitalists as the men are mostly, directly or indirectly, interested in the capitalist exploitation of both sexes. I admit I am more interested in the health of the future generation than in the absolute formal equality of the sexes in the last years of the capitalist mode of production. It is my conviction that real equality of women and men can come true only when exploitation of either by capital has been abolished and private housework has been transformed into a public industry."

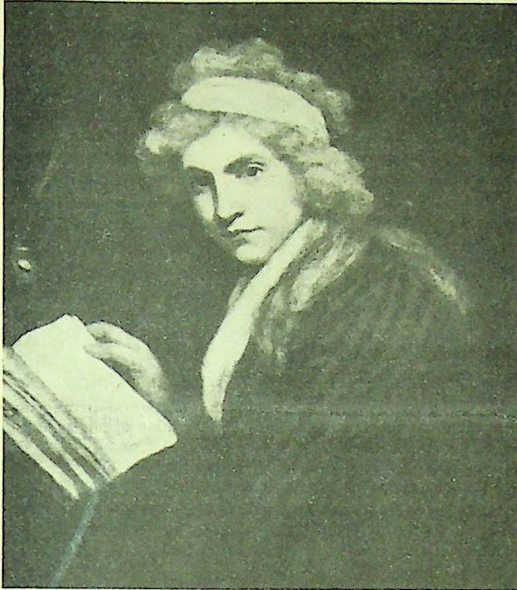
—Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*,  
Letter to Guillaume-Schack of 5 June 1855

Thus Engels recognized in feminism the false consciousness of the privileged classes of women who believe that since they themselves are oppressed only as women, sexual inequality is the only significant form of oppression.

Guillaume-Schack's conversion to anarchism was not accidental, for the anarchists also opposed protective labor legislation for women as an inconsistent, unequalitarian reform. Writing a polemic against the Italian anarchists in the early 1870's, Marx ridiculed the "logic" that one "must not take the trouble to obtain legal prohibition of the employment of girls under 10 in factories because a stop is not thereby put to the exploitation of boys under 10"—that this was a "compromise which damages the purity of eternal principles" (quoted in Hal Draper, *International Socialism*, July-August 1970).

### Woodhull versus Sorge in the First International

Because of the catch-all nature of the First International, the Marxist tendency had to wage major internal factional struggles against the most characteristic left currents in the various countries (e.g., trade-union reformism in Britain, Proudhon's cooperativism in France, Lasalle's state socialism in Germany and anarchism in Eastern and Southern Europe). It is therefore highly symptomatic that the major factional struggle within the American section centered around feminism, a variant of petty-bourgeois radicalism. In the most general sense, the importance



English radical democrat Mary Wollstonecraft

of the Woodhull tendency reflected the greater political weight of the American liberal middle class relative to the proletariat than in European class alignments. Historically petty-bourgeois moralism has been more influential in American socialism than in virtually any other country. This was particularly pronounced in the period after the Civil War when abolitionism served as the model for native American radicalism.

The relative political backwardness of the American working class is rooted primarily in the process of its development through successive waves of immigration from different countries. This created such intense ethnic divisions that it impeded even elementary trade-union organization. In addition, many of the immigrant workers who came from peasant backgrounds were imbued with strong religious, racial and sexual prejudices and a generally low cultural level which impeded class—much less socialist—consciousness. In general the discontent of American workers was channeled by the petty bourgeoisie of the various ethnic groups into the struggle for their own place in the parliamentary-state apparatus.

The American working class's lack of strong organization, its ethnic electoral politics and relatively backward social attitudes created a political climate in which "enlightened middle-class socialism" was bound to flourish. Not least important in this respect was the fact that the liberal middle classes were Protestant while the industrial working class was heavily Roman Catholic. Indeed, an important aspect of the Woodhull/Sorge fight was over an orientation toward Irish Catholic workers.

Victoria Woodhull was the best-known (more accurately notorious) "free love" advocate of her day, ambitious and with a gift for political showmanship.

Seeing that the First International was becoming fashionable, she organized her own section of it (Section 12) along with remnants of the New Democracy, a middle-class, electoral-reformist organization, led by Samuel Foot Andrews, a former abolitionist. The Woodhullites thus entered the First International as a radical liberal faction, with an emphasis on women's rights and an electoralist strategy.

Section 12 rapidly retranslated the principles of the First International into the language of American liberal democracy. Needless to say, it came out for total organizational federalism with each section free to pursue its own activities and line within the general principles of the International. Section 12's political line and organizational activities (its official paper, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* preached spiritualism among other things) quickly brought it into conflict within the Marxist tendency, led by the German veteran of the 1848 revolution, Friedrich Sorge. Section 12 was able to cause much factional trouble, not only in the U.S. but abroad, because its radical liberalism fed into the growing anarchist, electoral-reformist and federalist currents in the International. The Woodhullites were part of a rotten bloc which coalesced against the Marxist leadership of the First International in 1871-72. Woodhull enjoyed a short stay in the anarchist International in 1873 on her way to becoming a wealthy eccentric.

The immediate issue of the faction fight was the priority of women's rights, notably suffrage, over labor issues particularly the eight-hour day. That for the Woodhullites what was involved was not a matter of programmatic emphasis, but a counterposition to proletarian socialism was made explicit after the split with Sorge: "The extension of equal citizenship to women, the world over, must precede any general change in the subsisting relation of capital and labor" [emphasis in original] (*Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 18 November 1871).

After splitting with the Sorge wing, while still claiming loyalty to the First International, Section 12 organized the Equal Rights Party in order to run Woodhull for president in 1872. The program was straight left-liberalism without any proletarian thrust. It called for "... a truly republican government which shall not only recognize but guarantee equal political and social rights to men and women, and which shall secure equal opportunities of education for all children" (*Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 20 April 1872).

The general political principles of the Woodhullites were clearly expressed in their appeal to the General Council of the First International against the Sorge wing:

"It [the object of the International] involves, first, the Political Equality and Social Freedom of men and women alike.... Social Freedom means absolute immunity from the impertinent intrusion in all affairs of exclusively personal concernment, such as religious belief, sexual relations, habits of dress, etc." [emphasis in original]

—Documents of the First International, The General Council; Minutes 1871-72

This appeal was answered by a resolution written by Marx, which suspended Section 12. After cataloguing the organizational abuses and rotten politics, Marx

*continued on next page*

# The Myth of the "Socialist-Feminist" Organization: Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union Expels Socialists

Throughout the period of the late 1960's and early 1970's the majority of women's liberationists, even those "radical" refugees from New Left politics, rejected socialist revolution as the solution to the problem of women's oppression. Engels' analysis of the family, while appreciated in the abstract by some, remained for them an inoperable theoretical contribution unconnected to the Marxist perspectives of integrating women into social production (and the collective power of the working class) and of replacing the nuclear family through the socialization of its tasks. The rotten politics of fake Marxist-Leninist organizations deterred many women's movement activists from seeking a genuinely Marxist approach to the struggle for women's liberation. Public abstention on the woman question (Workers League), puritanical attitudes toward homosexuality coupled with opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (Revolutionary Union), defense of the family as the "fighting unit for socialism" (Progressive Labor Party) and single-issue reformism (Socialist Workers Party) provided an excuse for feminist currents to reject the Marxist movement in favor of a determination to put "our own" struggle first.

Lately, however, there have been several attempts to combine the two historically counterposed viewpoints of feminism and socialism. This is the result of several factors, particularly the recent workerist turn of a section of the left. The recognition that there were important class distinctions among women called into question the concept of an all-embracing

"sisterhood."

But since feminism defines itself and its tasks in terms of sex and socialism defines itself and its tasks in terms of class, these attempts inevitably fail, although they occasionally result in alliances between feminism and one of the two reformist strains of "socialism"—social democracy or Stalinism—whose essence, like that of feminism, is class collaboration.

One of the so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations to emerge in the recent period has been the Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union (BOWU), an organization which originated in the dissatisfaction of some radical feminists with the orientation toward Berkeley electoral politics of the liberal Beyond Anger Conference held in December 1972. While calling itself "socialist-feminist," the organization has, at least on paper, frequently taken stands in favor of socialism and opposed to traditional feminism.

## Feminists vs. "Socialist-Feminists"

Two distinct political tendencies soon emerged within the newly-formed organization—feminists and "socialist-feminists." The Feminist Caucus argued for a broadly inclusive organization of radical women based on no specific political program. This was consistent with its traditionally feminist view that capitalism and sexism were separate systems of oppression and that men were the immediate enemy whom women must fight. The "socialist-feminists" argued

## ...Origins

concluded by reasserting the central difference between democratic egalitarianism and proletarian socialism—namely, that the end to all forms of oppression must run through the victory of the working class over capitalism. Marx called attention to past International documents:

"...relating to 'sectarian sections' or 'separatist bodies pretending to accomplish special missions' distinct from the common aim of the Association [First International], viz. to emancipate the mass of labour from its 'economical subjection to the monopolizer of the means of labour' which lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of social misery, mental degradation and political dependence."

—*Ibid.*

While the Marxist case against the Woodhullites centered on their electoralism, middle-class orientation and quackery, the role of "free love" in the

socialist movement had a definite significance in the fight. While including personal sexual freedom in their program, the Marxists insisted on a cautious approach to this question when dealing with more backward sections of the working class. By flaunting a sexually "liberated" life-style, the Woodhullites would have created a nearly impenetrable barrier to winning over conventional and religious workers. One of the main charges that Sorge brought against Section 12 at the Hague Conference in 1872 was that its activities had made it much more difficult for the International to reach the strategically placed Irish Catholic workers.

The historic relevance of the Woodhull/Sorge faction fight is that it demonstrated, in a rather pure way, the basis of feminism in classic bourgeois-democratic principles, particularly individualism. It further demonstrated that feminist currents tend to be absorbed into liberal reformism or anarchistic petty-bourgeois radicalism, both of which invariably unite against revolutionary proletarian socialism. ■

for an autonomous membership organization based on political principles defining a unified struggle against capitalism.

During the course of the struggle which led to the eventual departure of the Feminist Caucus in June 1973, the "Principles of Unity" (PoU) was drawn up which was explicitly anti-capitalist and to the left of the politics of the largely social-democratic membership.

However, the PoU also contains much that places it more in the realm of utopian socialism than revolutionary Marxism, particularly a protracted discussion of the quality of life in socialist society stressing the necessity of beginning to build such a society *now!* This utopian conception that an organization capable of overthrowing capitalism must necessarily contain within it the social institutions and relations of the new society is counterposed to a Leninist understanding of the necessity of making a revolution with the means which capitalism has produced.

Only the organized working class and its allies have the power to destroy the system which sustains class oppression and exploitation. This system cannot be destroyed by idealist conceptions regarding human freedom and advanced social relations because these conceptions can become realities only *after* the destruction of capitalist society and the realization of socialism.

### BOWU Seeks "Autonomy"

The central role of the working class and the need for its instrument—the vanguard party—to destroy capitalism is totally absent from the BOWU "Principles", and this is not merely an oversight, but a conscious policy:

"Although we feel connected to the struggles of the left, our experience and our history teach us that a male-dominated revolutionary movement can ignore our oppression in the name of its own priorities and expediency. Not defining ourselves in reaction to the left, we assume the legitimacy of our movement. We are an autonomous women's union which will embody and struggle for the new forms of organization and relations between people which we define as socialism."

Despite these weaknesses and distortions, however, the generally anti-capitalist thrust of the program laid a basis for the possible development of a class-struggle perspective.

After eight months of internal struggle the BOWU surfaced at a Suffrage Day celebration on 21 August 1973, distributed its "Principles of Unity" and advertised a public meeting on "Women and the Economic Crisis" the next day. Spartacist League members and supporters attended and arranged to participate in the "political groups," which were the basic units of the organization and to which members were assigned at random for a term of four months. It was here that political decisions and discussions of strategy were slated to take place.

The several months of SL participation generated a good deal of discussion, and political differences within the organization became apparent. During one discussion of the current economic crisis, for example, an SL supporter voiced differences with the New Left "anti-imperialist" analysis which asserted that this crisis began in the mid-sixties and was specifically associated with the Vietnam war. She contended that the crisis was actually part of a general and extended crisis of capitalism in the era of imperialist decay. She particularly objected to the Maoist proposal of seeking to weaken the bourgeoisie by allying with its liberal wing against the right.

These issues were raised again in a political group discussion on impeachment where an SL supporter and members of the Militant Action Caucus (MAC), an opposition caucus within the Communications Workers of America, which is supported by the SL, argued that simply calling for the impeachment of Nixon in the absence of a political party which represented the interests of the working class could only build support for the Democratic Party and that the call for impeachment must include demands attacking not only the crimes of the president but also those of the class which he represents. Arguments were also raised against the BOWU's joining any coalition which included representatives of either major bourgeois party—Republican or Democratic.

During a discussion on the class backgrounds of women in the BOWU a member of the MAC explained how her view of class divisions in society had changed between the time she entered the phone company as a women's liberation activist and her subsequent development into a militant struggling to replace the reactionary CWA bureaucracy in order to fight the company. The group exploded with hostility at the MAC member for "disrupting" the discussion of class backgrounds by drawing political conclusions from her personal experience.

But the incident which became a cause célèbre within the Women's Union occurred on 22 September

*continued on next page*

## Spartacist Local Directory

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## Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union...

1973 at a Maoist-led demonstration against martial law in the Philippines. The Maoists both slandered and attacked physically supporters of the SL and its youth section, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), including SL supporters of the BOWU, who were selling an issue of the *RCY Newsletter* (No. 18) which contained an article critical of Maoist class collaboration in the Philippines. (See *Workers Vanguard* No. 31, 26 October 1973, for the complete story of the incident.)

Members of the BOWU were horrified, not at the Maoist attacks, but at the audacity of Trotskyist criticism. Their denial of elementary workers democracy, including full freedom of political criticism for all working-class tendencies without fear of gangster reprisals, and their failure to see the necessity of *polemical* struggle for leadership within the working-class movement while maintaining a united defense against the class enemy is consistent with the Women's Union's polyvanguardist conception of autonomy. That is, the BOWU posits the necessity of each oppressed sector of society—women, blacks, Chicanos, homosexuals, etc.—struggling autonomously against its own oppression under the leadership of its own mini-vanguard. Behind this methodology is the political fantasy that all of these separate vanguards will somehow merge on the day of the revolution into a single, united anti-capitalist force. But the reality is that the isolated struggles for special interests within the working class can only prolong the racial and sexual divisions and make the defeat of the well-organized common enemy impossible.

### The Purge Begins

The exclusion of the SL from the BOWU began in the political groups, from which SL and MAC spokesmen were ousted following political confrontations on the class and childcare issues. Then an SL supporter's article on childcare was rejected by the Newsletter Committee. An article entitled "Lessons of Chile" submitted by a member of the MAC was also rejected. Finally at a meeting of the entire membership a proposal was made by one of the political groups to change the essential qualification of membership from acceptance of the written principles to acceptance of their "spirit," which was defined as "the willingness to build Unity" not through the struggle of political ideas but "by working out *our* politics *together*." This proposal was intended to serve as a basis for excluding supporters of the SL/RCY and the MAC from membership in the union as a whole. However, there was no time for discussion, and a motion to vote without discussion was overwhelmingly rejected.

Although steeped in activism, the BOWU had failed to develop a strategy to drive forward the goals stated in its principles. Overpacked agendas which focused on organizational issues limited the political discussion necessary to clarify political differences on crucial issues. This blocked the possibility of

mobilizing the organization for united action. Members committed to specific issues burned themselves out working on their pet projects with little support from the organization as a whole. When a Women's Union member was fired trying to organize her shop, few Women's Union members responded to the call for picket support, and support from the soon-to-be-excluded SL and MAC supporters was greeted coolly by the Women's Union members involved, although official trade-union pickets welcomed their militancy.

It was becoming increasingly clear that anti-communist prejudices focusing on the concept of a disciplined vanguard party were being whipped up by the central clique of the BOWU, and on 2 December 1973 a second attempt was made to purge the SL and the MAC from the organization.

To familiarize the membership with the political reasons for its proposed exclusion, the SL distributed a position paper, the controversial article on childcare originally censored by the Newsletter Committee and a response to it by the children's project. MAC members also presented a short written statement entitled "Against Our Exclusion," which said:

"As militants in the phone company union, as women committed to the fight for women's liberation, as members of the Militant Action Caucus, we have constantly struggled in the company and the union against sexism and for the rights of women workers. The phone company, which employs more women than any company in the world, has over the years perfected a system of heavy repression based on their ability to exploit women's oppression: the primacy of the private identity, a concern for the ladylike image, etc. Our work

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in our union demonstrates that there is no contradiction between militant unionism and the fight for women's liberation.

"Within our union we have faced the grossest of sex-baiting (we were publicly attacked in a leaflet as the 'feline chorus,' all we needed was a sadistic man like Sam Yorty, etc.), and we were able to successfully mobilize and defeat attempts by the leadership of the union to red-bait us out. We are pained to have to wage a similar struggle within the Women's Union. At this time the many political differences within the Union are being clouded in order to wage a campaign against ourselves and our politics. We feel that our expulsion within the Women's Union will commence a political drift to the right, away from the struggles of masses of working women, as we have seen happen time and again in the union movement after such expulsions.

—"Against Our Expulsion," signed by three members of the MAC

The accusers stood solely on their original motion and refused requests to discuss the political points in question.

An SL supporter brought a representative sampling of SL literature on the woman question to allow the membership to read for itself the politics in question, but members of the planning committee objected to the presence of literature from another organization even though that same literature was quoted in their presentation for exclusion! The relegation of the literature to a less central location aided the avoidance of political discussion.

The pro-exclusion presentation prepared by members of the BOWU planning committee raised four political positions of the SL alleged to be in extreme contradiction with the PoU, three of which—opposition to autonomy as a principle, opposition to feminism and the concept of programmatic intervention as a means of political clarification—were accurately characterized with appropriate quotes from "Toward a Communist Women's Movement" (*Women and Revolution*, No. 4, Fall 1973). The fourth assertion, that the SL does not recognize the personal aspect of women's oppression, was distorted. The evidence given was that SL spokesmen disrupted meetings by bringing in "alien" politics from a mixed organization, thus showing contempt for the organization, the membership and their personal lives.

The SL speaker affirmed opposition to feminism which, presumably, all who agreed with the PoU also opposed. She affirmed the SL's strategic perspective of a women's section of the vanguard party and explained that it was largely through combatting women's special oppression and building transitional women's organizations that the Bolshevik party had been able to mobilize women in support of the October Revolution. She challenged the BOWU to adhere to its stated goal of a unified struggle against capitalism.

The MAC speaker outlined her history of fighting for women in her union, argued for a class position on childcare and opposed joining the Impeachment Coalition which included Democratic Party representatives. She ended with a prediction that the exclusion of her views and those of the SL would hasten the drift of the organization to the right.

The discussion which followed was practically devoid of politics. A New American Movement (NAM)

member noted that the PoU was about to be politically revised and thus a political exclusion was not in order, but a leading BOWU member encouraged others to relate their experiences with the SL, and this started a harangue of SL supporters on their "nerve" of publicly criticizing traitorous misleaders like Chavez and the Filipino Maoists. The pro-exclusion speakers never attempted to explain or motivate their political disagreements with the SL. MAC members were viciously red-baited, exposing them to possible retaliation by their employers and the union bureaucracy.

The major political statement was an eloquent anti-communist denunciation of the concept of a vanguard party by an ex-member of the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC). Throughout this the Maoists (including one who had led a split in Oakland Women's Liberation on the basis of opposition to mass organizations in the absence of a vanguard party) kept silent or emphasized unity and, to avoid their own expulsion, hid their political differences. They called for the expulsion of the SL on the basis that raising political differences was "disruptive."

The SL was not allowed to place a countermotion against the expulsion on the floor. The vote was 38 in favor of expelling the SL/RCY, eight opposed and five abstaining. The vote on expelling the MAC was inconclusive with 17 abstentions and a good deal of sentiment in favor of the continued participation of MAC members, who were seen as representatives of acceptable union militancy rather than agents of the dreaded vanguard party. The BOWU was fearful of MAC's politics, yet fearful of expelling union militants with such an impressive record of struggle for the rights of women workers against company exploitation and the unresponsive and sexist union bureaucracy. The feminists' dilemma was resolved when the MAC members denounced the BOWU's betrayal of the crucial principle of workers democracy and announced that they could not support an organization which excluded communists. Two independents also walked

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Continued from page 24

## ... Phone Company

These temporary employees had little interest in honoring the union picket line.

Female operators who crossed the picket lines often cited the extreme wage differentials between men and women telephone workers, which made it relatively easier for craft workers to afford the loss of a few days' pay, and the union's record of failing to fight for those demands which are of particular importance to operators, such as fewer suspensions, provisions for sick leave and an end to compulsory overtime.

While the local union bureaucracy under Anthony Candopoulos, which has consistently ignored the special oppression of women workers in the telephone company, proposed fines for those who crossed the picket lines, two opportunist groups within the union, Strike Back and Harper's Ferry, capitulated to the scabs on the grounds that women have been so abused by the union that they cannot be blamed for scabbing. The other workers, they argued, should try to *understand* these women's motives and to *communicate* with them. This feminist apology leads directly to dual unionism and the undermining of class solidarity. These excuses for scabbing and justifications for women's hostility to the union lead easily to the dual-unionist line that operators should have their *own* union which organizes them as *women* rather than as *workers*. This position capitulates to the company-engineered division of the work force along sex lines and only perpetuates the oppression of women workers, who suffer the most from the inability to wage a united struggle against the company.

In strike situations scabs, whatever their motivation, must be stopped by a mobilization of the organized workers. The special oppression of women *means*, in part, low consciousness, i.e., a lack of class consciousness which allows them to be used as strike-

breakers. A campaign to raise this consciousness through presenting a strong, united union as the operators' greatest weapon must at the same time educate the male workers about the need for sensitivity to the double oppression of women workers. But this sensitivity can never be instilled by capitulation to anti-union backwardness and outright strikebreaking. A hard class line must be drawn at the gates of the workplace. At the same time militants must explain that sexual divisions will continue to weaken the *entire* working class so long as the union leaderships refuse to wage struggles against women's special oppression.

Many locals now going into the 1974 contract negotiations are preparing the ground for blaming the operators for the CWA leadership's failure to win gains in the contract. But it is the failure of the CWA bureaucracy to fight against the special oppression of women which makes it possible for these operators to remain unorganized, thus crippling the entire union. The operators cannot be fully mobilized by a union bureaucracy which has consistently refused to fight for their needs.

What is needed is a union leadership committed to a program of militant struggle in the interests of the entire work force. Such a program would include demands for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay to end unemployment; an end to restrictive educational requirements; equal access to job training, hiring on a first come, first served basis under union control; free, 24-hour childcare paid for by the state or the employer and under worker-participant control. Demands such as these would undercut the sexual and racial divisions within the union and facilitate the organizing of all workers. But such a program implies *class struggle* against AT&T and against the entire capitalist system, the merest suggestion of which causes CWA International President Joseph Beirne to break out in a cold sweat. So the Beirne leadership clings instead to a policy of job trusting for one section of the work force at the expense of another and main-

## Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union...

out with the three MAC members and the one SL supporter present.

### Political Questions Remain Unanswered

Supporting "autonomy" in the struggle for women's liberation and limiting that struggle to women means negating in practice the socialist political perspective and adopting the feminist line, "women's liberation now—socialism later."

The desire of some members to reform the flawed politics of the PoU or to force the organization to adhere in practice to its politics would require a thorough political struggle which would split this supposedly non-sectarian organization into its remaining political components—social-democratic supporters of the NAM and *Socialist Revolution*, Stalinist supporters of the Communist Party, October League and Revolu-

tionary Union and feminists who would like to exclude all these elements. Attempts to mobilize the whole organization around any common activity such as strike support, community organizing, providing services or organizing at the point of production would again pose the underlying sharp divisions in the group and raise the basic questions of program and strategy to which the excluded SL supporters were addressing themselves.

Members of the BOWU must deal with these questions, for they cannot be ignored, and suppression of the necessary clarifying discussions can lead only to endless organizational squabbles and clique fights resulting in fragmentation, demoralization, cynicism and the gradual attrition of any remaining serious, subjectively revolutionary elements of the membership.

The politics of revolutionary Trotskyism, i.e., the politics of the Spartacist League, are necessary both to clarify the contradictions inherent in so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations and to expose the Stalinist and social-democratic currents which use such formations as vehicles for their class-collaborationist politics. ■

taining at all costs its policy of peaceful co-existence with capitalism.

How then can militants struggle for these demands within the trade unions? The initial form of class-struggle organization within the union is the caucus, which is the nucleus of an alternative, militant leadership for that union. A class-struggle caucus must be based first of all on a full political program and it must ruthlessly expose the union bureaucrats as unwilling and unable to fight for the class interests of the workers. Transcending simple bread-and-butter demands, it must use its program to raise proletarian class consciousness and demonstrate in practice the necessity for united class struggle against capitalism.

### The Militant Action Caucus

What is needed in CWA throughout the country is a militant rank-and-file caucus, based on a class-struggle program such as that of the Militant Action Caucus (MAC) of Local 9415 in California. The work of these militants should serve as a model for unionists throughout the telephone company.

To understand what the MAC is, it is necessary to know something of its political history since its inception in 1969. At the same time it is instructive to draw a comparison between the MAC and the Operators Defense Committee (ODC), a New Left feminist group with which it maintained a parallel existence for three years. Many of the questions which were debated between the two organizations—methods of consciousness-raising, dual unionism, minimal-maximal vs. transitional program, male exclusionism, nationalism, syndicalism, feminism—continue to be debated by militants.

Like many of today's so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations, the ODC wanted to organize workers, for according to its "mass line" correct political program flows naturally through the veins of true proletarians.

That the ODC would be male-exclusionist was simply assumed, since the enemy was believed to be men

as well as capitalism. The ODC felt that women's groups would *eventually* have to unite with men, but that it was first necessary to go through a period of struggle to strengthen women's position in the working class relative to that of men. The ODC's formula was "unity without equality is not unity." Equality within the work force was seen as a prerequisite for the fight for socialism.

On the question of working within the CWA, the ODC wanted to intervene in the union during strikes, but at the same time wished to build women telephone workers' organizations independent of the CWA, aspiring at some future point to form an autonomous women's telephone union linked to other unions through Oakland Women's Liberation.

The ODC oriented toward women in the working class through its eclectic combination of New Left, Maoist and syndicalist politics embodying all the components of workerism adapted to the women's movement. It argued that struggling for gains for women is equivalent to and can never conflict with a fight of the whole class and that "correct ideas" and roots in the masses are by-products of immersion in the struggles of real workers. These politics were tested out alongside those of the MAC during the 1971 telephone strike.

In contrast to the ODC, the MAC was organized along class-struggle lines and argued that so long as the working class is unconscious of its social power, it is simply material for exploitation. Only after it becomes conscious of itself and its historic tasks can it oust the bourgeoisie and institute its own class rule.

### The Fight for Sick Leave and the 1971 Strike

The initial work of the ODC in late 1969 was extremely primitive, consisting of organizing discussions of all operators who, for any reason, disliked the telephone company. MAC members attended these discussions at first to try to win operators to their political program, but they were eventually expelled on the grounds that the MAC was open to men. The discussion group fell apart shortly thereafter.

The ODC reconstituted itself shortly before the 1971 contract expired and surfaced during the struggle, arguing for the inclusion of sick leave as a CWA demand. The ODC called meetings to discuss the question of sick leave, and a number of operators came on their night off to hear what the ODC had to say. For its part, the ODC was delighted by this large turnout and simply waited for a strategy to flow spontaneously from the workers. After one or two agonizing meetings, however, the ODC decided that whether or not correct ideas flowed automatically from the workers, the ODC itself had better formulate some ideas to present to them at the next meeting. Thus the ODC broke empirically from the "mass line."

During the strike, members of the ODC realized that popular single-issue campaigns such as the fight for sick leave do not inevitably grow over into the fight for socialism. They saw that to win even the simplest reform required a concentrated, nationally organized fight against AT&T which presupposed a struggle to throw out the CWA bureaucracy.

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While the ODC, like the supporters of the Progressive Labor Party, served the picketers free food, the MAC concerned itself centrally with the politics of the strike and held daily strategy meetings. After one week the union bureaucrats called a special meeting to convince the workers to return to their jobs. The workers, however, voted overwhelmingly to stay out. The bureaucrats then simply abandoned the union hall to the rank and file. The MAC immediately organized strike committees and picket lines, but the wildcat dissolved after about 18 hours because no group had the earned authority in the local to maintain the strike. Only where union stewards came out on the picket lines did the workers stay out. The ODC learned several lessons from the strike: that the union leadership is the acknowledged leadership of the working class which cannot be ignored but must be defeated; that the class must be politically broken from the bureaucracy which maintains its hold, despite its sellouts, in the absence of a proven alternative; that militants cannot simply assert the correctness of their politics but must demonstrate in crises their ability to lead; that the union is the organization not only of white males, but of all workers, who look to it for leadership during upsurges in the class struggle.

After the Oakland local had been back to work for two days the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in the building, mainly Yellow Pages employees and some electricians, went out on strike. The CWA local president led scabs across the picket lines and the union advised members to "use their own consciences" in deciding whether or not to cross. The ODC saw women from the Oakland Women's Liberation "consciousness-raising" groups cross the IBEW lines and the ODC put out a leaflet calling for respecting the lines, thus breaking from the position still held by the reformist Socialist Workers Party that consistent feminism develops spontaneously into communist consciousness.

Following the contract strike, the wildcat and the IBEW strike, whose main results were defeat due to the union leadership's sabotage, the local entered a period of demoralization. The ODC, having learned that militants must fight for leadership in the union, toyed with the idea of waging a campaign to change the local bylaws to provide for the election, rather than the appointment, of stewards and they proposed a bloc with the MAC on this issue. While the MAC supported the proposed bylaw change, it argued against initiating a mass campaign in a period of demoralization and insisted that the ODC and other militants should consider the lessons of the strike and determine their intervention in the context of an overall strategy and program. This debate over tactics for mass work led to a series of discussions about program between the ODC and the MAC.

The decision to talk with the MAC generated an internal fight in the ODC in which two tendencies emerged—a pro-MAC wing and the Women for Armed Revolution (WAR) tendency, which argued that blacks should organize blacks and whites should organize whites and that all leadership was elitist. Eventually

WAR split from the ODC and retreated to the comfort of a semi-clandestine study group.

## Giving up on Women

The remaining ODC members had become convinced that even elementary reforms could not be won without a union-wide strategy. But they remained apprehensive that MAC's conception of a caucus aimed at the most militant and conscious layers of the working class meant abandoning the organizing of women, who are frequently the most backward sector of the class. For a while the ODC adopted a policy of dual recruitment—recruiting "political" women to the MAC and "apolitical" women to women's liberation discussion groups. But the organizations had counterposed politics—one said capitalism was the enemy; the other said it was men.

It became increasingly clear to the ODC members that it was the MAC's program, and not feminist empiricism, which could generate a real struggle against the oppression of women, a struggle necessary both for the development of class consciousness among women and for the raising of the general level of consciousness in the class as a whole. The MAC program not only raises demands which advance the struggles of workers at the point of production but also addresses itself to the question of the family, seeing the fight against women's oppression intimately linked to such demands as the socialization of household work, free 24-hour childcare paid for by the state or employer under worker-participant control and free medical care. Throughout, the MAC continued to demonstrate in practice its programmatic commitment to the needs of women-workers. When a black operator was fired for having struck a manager who made a racist remark, the MAC called for a strike. When the local president was fired and the entire executive board suspended, the MAC called for a strike to reinstate them despite its clear and well-known political opposition to these bureaucrats.

## "Affirmative Action"

The acid test for militants in the phone company on the question of program for women and minorities is their response to the "Affirmative Action" Program under which AT&T has agreed to establish quotas for the upgrading of women, thus sidestepping the union seniority system. The ODC, like every other political tendency in the industry with the exception of the MAC, stood for preferential hiring.

The practice of hiring, upgrading and organizing the work force under union control on the basis of seniority, as opposed to "merit" or favoritism, is a hard-won gain of the working class which must be defended at the same time that a fight is waged against unemployment and discrimination. This is critically important in a period of rising unemployment to insure that union activists are not singled out as the first to be laid off. Since the "affirmative action" rulings went into effect last January, CWA has charged that the company has been using them as a *carte blanche* to promote whomever it chooses while refusing to reveal the details of any individual case to the union.



Militant Action Caucus, opposition caucus within the Communication Workers of America, marches in San Francisco labor rally—28 April 1973

WV PHOTO

The MAC contends that the bourgeoisie's manipulation of ethnic and sexual antagonisms—to which the conservative union leadership is a too-willing accomplice—is central in maintaining political backwardness in the American working class. To defeat these antagonisms and fears, it is crucial to demonstrate that the gains of oppressed racial groups and women will take place not at the expense of other workers, but at the capitalists' expense. Categorically opposing government interference in unions and preferential hiring schemes as a pretext for union-busting, the MAC demands replacement of job trusting and discriminatory seniority systems by plant-wide seniority, equal access for all workers to job training and apprenticeship programs, a fight for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay and union-controlled hiring on a first come first served basis.

The question of preferential hiring was critical for the ODC. Only after the ODC had been won to the MAC position was a decision made by the two groups to fuse.

### "Dear Mummy"

By late 1972 the MAC, which had succeeded in getting its candidate elected to the office of alternate representative to the executive board on the basis of its militant program, was becoming something of a threat to Local President Loren Blasingame and his retinue, and they retaliated with a series of vicious attacks culminating in the notorious "Letter to the Editor" which appeared in *Labor News*, the Local newsletter.

The so-called "letter" (reprinted in full above) was actually nothing more than a compilation of vicious slanders laced with male-chauvinist woman-baiting and sexual innuendo, all designed to discredit the MAC through ridicule, particularly in the eyes of the male workers, and to intimidate any potential opponents of the Blasingame regime.

The MAC responded with an answering letter to *Labor News* which, needless to say, was never printed and subsequently with a leaflet which said:

"The savage content of this anonymously authored letter renders everything else in the issue fraudulent, dishonest and patently self-serving. . . . Faced with the possibility of being voted out of office by a hostile membership, the paper is a cheap gimmick, revived by the local bureaucrats as part of their election machinery to ridicule and smear the only principled opposition in CWA."

After the publication of the leaflet the bureaucracy escalated its campaign against the MAC. MAC members were frequently denied speaking rights at union meetings and then, after one tense meeting, three bureaucrats waited until the hall had emptied and physically assaulted Caucus members.

In January 1973 the MAC was brought up on charges for causing "disunity" in the union, but a successful defense campaign was waged which proved that, far from "bringing the union into disrepute," as the bureaucrats had charged, the MAC had been tireless in its efforts to build and defend the union. It had encouraged members to grieve every contract violation, had signed up new employees, had fought for the democratic election of all union offices, had defended the president when he was fired, had fought to reinstate the fired black operator, had struggled to defend the picket lines of Western Electric and IBEW workers as well as CWA and had waged campaigns against layoffs and relocation. The MAC had in fact demonstrated what class-struggle politics for the union meant and in so doing had threatened the bureaucracy's hold on the local.

At the CWA national convention in Miami in July 1973 a section of the bureaucracy tried to reverse its defeat by ramming through an amendment to the CWA Constitution which would have given the International bureaucracy the power to persecute "reds"

*continued on next page*

## ... Phone Company

and "disrupters" in all union locals. The MAC responded by organizing a "No on 19-2C" Committee, sent delegates to the convention in order to marshal trade-union forces against this threat to all militants and led the floor fight which resulted in the defeat of this proposal.

The Militant Action Caucus is one of several rank-and-file caucuses within CWA but, as the struggle against the red clause illustrated, it is the only one which has demonstrated the capacity and the determination to lead telephone company workers in a successful fight against the capitalists and their "labor lieutenants," the CWA bureaucrats.

The "No on 19-2C" Committee initiated by the MAC was also formally supported by *Yellow Pages* (San Francisco), *Bell Wringer* (Oakland) and the United Action Caucus (New York), but from beginning to end the MAC carried the brunt of the work while the others rendered only token assistance at best. Of the \$125.00 which the Committee raised to help send two representatives (both of whom were MAC members) to the

Miami convention, *Yellow Pages* supporters contributed only \$5.00. The United Action Caucus in New York refused to take part in the struggle at all beyond a pro-forma endorsement. Another caucus, Traffic Jam (San Francisco) showed up for only one Committee meeting and left after half an hour with no explanation. Faced with a witchhunt which threatened their very existence these so-called "militants" did nothing or next to nothing.

Rejecting the single-issue reformism of many of these caucuses, the MAC stands on a comprehensive program which includes calls for the nationalization of the telephone company under workers control, full union democracy, the ousting of the trade-union bureaucrats and the formation of a labor party based on the trade unions to fight for a workers government.

The need for a nation-wide Militant Action Caucus within CWA is clear. Additional information concerning MAC's program and strategy for trade-union struggle as well as the Militant Action Caucus Newsletter may be obtained by writing to:

Militant Action Caucus  
P.O. Box 462  
El Cerrito, California 94530

666 Unwholesome Street  
San Francisco, California  
June 1, 1984

Mother "Ma" and (69% of) Pacifier  
"Baby" Bell  
132 Tawdry Street  
New York City, N.Y.

Dearest Mummy:

Reports from the Coast are super! Your girls have done it again. Union busting was never so fun. With their neurotic whines, the Mac Pac (better known) as the "mini-muddy-murky-multi-purpose racus [*sic*] clawed their way through another union meeting. This was the one I told you about for the strike vote. Only this time the feline chorus managed to convince the sheep that their leadership was wrong for not calling a strike without the raucus' permission. Another great job done for our company by your broads. Mac's policy is very effective. They inform the company through their rags about who's who in union politics, thereby making it easy for us to spot out the leaders of the latest walkouts, etc. (Strange their initials spell out a man's name—might be some deep, subconscious lack here. After all, the only men I've seen them with are pale, shaking, downtrodden types—they need somebody like Sam Yorty, William Buckley (some fascist sadist maybe).

Nevertheless, they are approaching the credibility gap with some of their stuff. It might be well if you keep an eye on them—someone may start getting wide [*sic*]! For instance they call for the end of government control of unions, yet where did your star, Kathleen Strichnine, go when she was sus-

pending—to Uncle Sam N.L.R.B. Maybe the raucus ought to be tipped off that this is the government too, or are they under the impression that the NLRB are our agents also? We better set them straight.

Yet there's the great rag they put out after the "holiday." The Ms. Yellow journalists explained the officers lied to the stewards by saying the "holiday" was sanctioned (whatever that means). They they [*sic*] discredited the "holiday" which was frighteningly successful with the members and we'll probably never have any trouble with honest union support again. Your girls call for strike action at every meeting and have successfully convinced the membership that strikes are impossible without raucus permission, never mind any democratic strike votes.

It's amazing how the mini's [*sic*] manage to get one of their cronies, Golem Sarcophagus—someone like that suspended by only spending a mere hour in front of the Franklin Street building. Well they had to make at least one martyr for this election in traffic against Karen White. Naturally the people who spent the whole day in front of the building and were suspended don't count. The raucus will probably come out with an article explaining that since a lot of them were plant, they make much more money than Marbles or Go-List or whoever she is.

Well boss, that's about all. Hope the raucus keeps it up, I'll be able to retire.

Sincerely, your loving and devoted

T. Kafuzzle  
Special Agent & Consultant to the  
Mini-Muddy-Murky-Milti[*sic*]-Purpose Raucus

# Letter

Chicago  
10 December 1973

Comrades:

I read with interest the exchange between Barbara Zelluck of the International Socialists and Comrades Reissner and V.Z. of the Spartacist League. I can attest to the scrupulous accuracy of the translations of V.Z. from my own research into the Comintern Theses and Resolutions (that is, the German originals, not the French or English translations), as well as on the basis of corroborative evidence, which I would like to submit. Obviously, theses and resolutions are condensed expressions of a political position and therefore—taken in isolation—may be open to various interpretations (especially when there are vested interests involved in such "interpretations," like deriving Bolshevik authority for a fundamentally Menshevik position). Although there can be little legitimate doubt about the Comintern Theses on the "Woman Question" taken in themselves, any such question must disappear in the light of the discussion at the Third World Congress itself.

The principal reporter on the "Woman Question" at the Congress was Klara Zetkin, long-time member of the SPD left-wing, member of the Spartacusbund, and co-founder of the German Communist Party. Zetkin had also been, for three decades, one of the prime movers of the proletarian women's movement. Her remarks on the relation between the "Women's Committees" and the party are quite specific and deserve to be quoted at length:

"The goals and the tasks of what one calls the communist women's movement are given in the goals and the tasks, in the principles, in the tactics of the Third International—to which we are proud to belong [emphasis mine—F.B.]. For the conference [The Communist Women's Conference] it was a matter of creating the weaponry to defend these principles, [to defend] these tactics in struggle against the capitalist world, in struggle against all that supports it. Therefore, the conference dedicated a large part of its work to the two questions, which forms and methods should be utilized for communist work among women, and how the *closest and firmest international relations* [emphasis—K.Z.] may be established between the women communists of the individual countries and their parties, as well as with the Communist Women's International in Moscow and through its mediation with the Executive of the IIIrd International as the *common, unified direction and leadership* [emphasis mine—F.B.].

"Comrades, the conference was guided in the discussion of these questions and in formulation of its decisions by a supreme principle. *There is no special communist women's organization* [emphasis mine—F.B.]. There is only a movement, there is only an organization of women communists within the communist party, together with male communists. The tasks and goals of male communists are our tasks, our goals. No separatism [*Sonderbuendelei*], no doing your own thing [*Eigenbroedelei*] which would in any way lead to splitting the revolutionary forces and diverting them from their great goals of the conquest

of political power by the proletariat and the construction of communist society. The communist women's movement means nothing other than the planned apportionment, planned organization of the forces, men as well as women, in the communist party, in order to win the broadest masses of women for the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat, for the struggle to overthrow capitalism, and for communist construction.

"[Because of the special oppression of women and their concomitant relative political backwardness]... special organs, special measures are required, in spite of the joint character of the organization, in order to reach the masses of women and collect and educate them as communists.

"As such organs, we recommend that in the directing and administering party instances committees for women's agitation, or commissions, or whatever the party wants to call them, be established. Indeed, such committees should exist starting with the leadership of the small local groups on up to the highest central leadership. We call these organs *Women's Committees*, because they should carry on the work among women, but not because we lay weight upon their being composed solely of women. On the contrary. We welcome it, when men with their greater political experience and their ability also belong to the women's committees. What matters to us is that these committees be active in a planned fashion and continually amongst the masses of women; that they take a position on all the needs, all the interests which touch upon the lives of women; that they intervene with knowledge of the facts and energy in all areas of social life for the well-being of the millions upon millions of proletarian and semi-proletarian women. These women's committees can and must, of course, work only in the closest organizational and ideological community with the organs of the party as a whole. But it is also self-evident that, if they are to fulfill their tasks successfully, they require the right of initiative and a certain freedom of movement."

— *Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921, Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1921

The message couldn't be much clearer: Bolsheviks oppose parochialism, separatism and dual vanguardism. While the women's committees or commissions must have room for initiative in their field of work, they remain fundamentally an arm of the party—a part of the common movement. There is one enemy, there must be one revolutionary vanguard—any other conception is menshevism or worse. Comrade Zelluck has shown that she fits snugly and comfortably in the ranks of the Mensheviks.

F.B.

## Forum

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Editor, *Women and Revolution*

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**BUFFALO**

# Class Struggle in the Phone Company

Questions of program and strategy for the women's movement often find a focus in the work of militants within the telephone company—and with good reason. Not only is American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) the largest employer of women in the United States, but over the years it has developed and honed to precision its ability to harness the specific qualities of women's oppression to maximize its rate of exploitation and preserve its ideological cover as a community service.

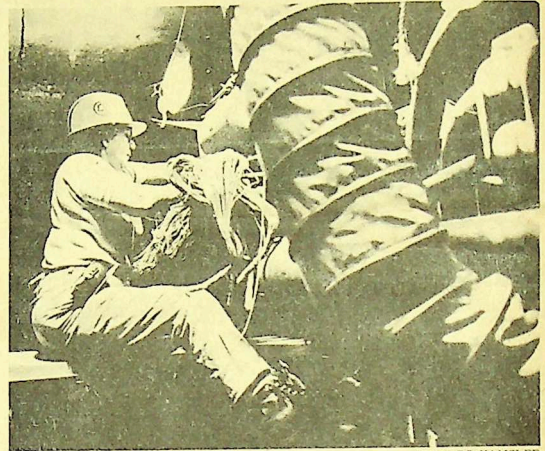
American Telephone and Telegraph finds it useful to maintain its image as a "public utility." Herein lies one important role for women at Ma Bell. The operator (who is almost always female) is used as a buffer between the consumer and the company. She is the soft, sweet "voice with a smile"—warm, motherly and overflowing with concern for the public. Moreover, as part of a marginal pool of labor, women work at lower wages than men, are less fully organized in (and are often ignored by) trade unions and allow themselves to be disciplined more easily than men.

Working conditions are extremely oppressive. The operator is required to sit on a chair of a certain height and at a prescribed distance from the switchboard. She may not cross her legs or swing her arm over the back of the chair, nor may she smoke, chew gum or turn her eyes. In one office it was common practice for the supervisor to sneak up from behind and hold a pencil alongside an operator's head. If the operator turned around and saw the pencil, she could be reprimanded for looking around too much. Management has the license to pull operators into the "glass cage," from which the operating floor is observed, and give out advice on how to dress, whether to take an aspirin or not, whether to use deodorant, what kind of hair style to wear, vocabulary to use and life insurance to buy. There is constant secret monitoring of the private conversations between operators.

## Women and the CWA

Any attempt to organize women workers in the telephone company must necessarily deal with their special oppression as women. The question is an important one for the Communications Workers of America (CWA) because of the deliberate separation of women workers from the rest of the telephone company employees, their relegation to the lowest paying jobs and their organization into company unions or separate CWA locals—factors which have resulted in operators' scabbing on plant strikes and plant employees' scabbing on operators' strikes.

In New York City, for example, where operators are represented by company unions, the company was able to hold out for seven months during the 1971 CWA strike because of widespread operator scabbing. As



LEONARD KAMSLER

Woman cable-splicer at work in the Bronx

long as the operators are working, calls are going through and revenues are coming in, so the company can afford to take its time reaching a settlement until the striking union is demoralized and exhausted. It takes several months before repair, installation and craft skills become critical for continued operations.

This strategy of attrition also seems to have been employed by the company in the recent New York Long Lines strike called by CWA Local 1150. The strike was called in response to the Christmas Eve assault by a company supervisor on two plant employees.

The key strategic question in this strike was the woman question, because, due in part to its insensitivity to the special oppression of women, the local union leadership was incapable of calling out the women workers and building a solid strike. This weakened the union's position vis-à-vis the company and also led to its inability to convince other locals to support the strike. While 100 percent of the craft workers walked out, most of the operators, who viewed the action largely as a "craft issue," scabbed.

At least 40 percent of these operators are unorganized and many of those hired since 1971 have come under the modified agency shop plan in which union dues are deducted from their paychecks but they do not become union members unless and until they pay an initiation fee. This deal between company and union insures an expanded dues base without concomitant voting or attendance rights at union meetings. In addition, large numbers of temporary, unorganized student employees (many of them relatives of management) had been hired during the Christmas season.

*continued on page 18*