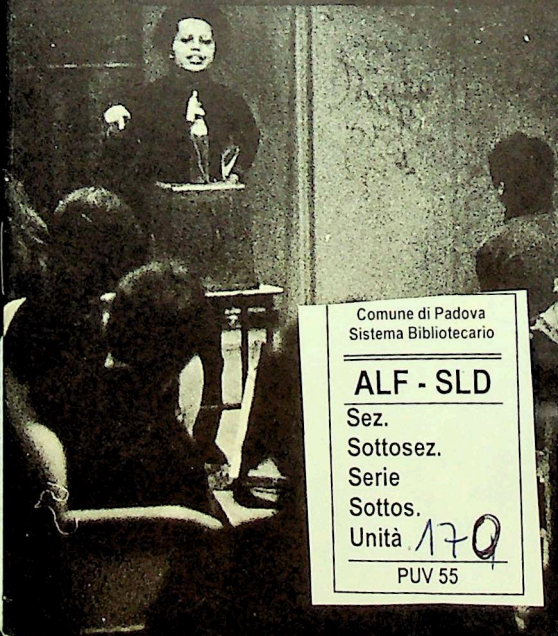


The Politics of Women's Liberation Today

by
Mary-Alice Waters



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Mary-Alice Waters

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Mary-Alice Waters is managing editor of *The Militant* and editor of the book *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (Pathfinder Press, 1970). She is author of the pamphlets *GIs and the Fight Against War and Maoism in the U. S.*

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The most remarkable aspect of the women's liberation movement in recent months has been its explosive growth. At the time of the SWP convention in late August of last year, we pointed out how rapidly the women's liberation movement had emerged on the political scene and become a major part of the deepening radicalization. We predicted that it would continue to experience a rapid pace of development because of the objective base that existed for the growth of the movement. Our general expectations have been borne out quite accurately.

Before discussing the evolution of the movement over the last few months, it is worthwhile to reiterate a few of the evaluations we made at the time of the convention concerning the basic character and potential of the struggle for women's liberation.

First of all, we consider the emergence of the women's liberation movement to be a significant indication of the deepening radicalization taking place in the United States today. Struggle by women for greater freedom, for an end to the various forms of oppression under which they live, has been an integral part of every period of radicalization or revolutionary upsurge since the beginning of the bourgeois revolutions. The fact that whole layers of women are today beginning to question and oppose the most fundamental forms of their oppression is one more indication of the depth of the radicalization taking place.

Women constitute 51 percent of the population, and their struggle, as women, manifesting itself in the form of independent, action organizations, around the key issues of concern to women, is potentially as important to the American revolution as the radicalization of the Afro-Americans and other national minorities and the youth. American women on the whole en-

joy a higher standard of living than women of any other nation in the world, and they also enjoy a great deal of formal, legal equality. American women were among the first to gain the right to vote (even if Georgia didn't ratify the women's suffrage amendment to the Constitution until a few weeks ago!). French women didn't win the vote until after the Second World War, for example, and women cannot vote in national elections in Switzerland even today.

Yet it has been among the American women—relatively privileged in relationship to women in other countries—that this movement has developed so rapidly.

Such a development serves only to emphasize the depth of women's oppression and its revolutionary implications. Even those with the greatest advantages are being propelled into action by a growing realization of the totality of the forms of economic, social and psychological oppression.

The very degree of formal equality that exists means that the true nature of women's oppression is more clearly exposed, and the thrust of the struggle goes even more rapidly toward the most basic issues. We have seen this already by the rapidity and resoluteness with which the most advanced sections of the women's liberation movement have correctly identified the family—one of the three main pillars of class society—as the fundamental mechanism by which their oppression is perpetuated.

The emergence of the movement is the result of the growing contradictions which American women face—a "revolution of rising expectations." Millions of women are today graduating from the nation's high schools and universities. Technological advances and a high standard of living give them increased mobility, freedom and leisure. Medical discoveries for the *first time in human history* make it possible for women to control their own bodies and, as a result, their basic life decisions.

Changing moral standards, reflecting such basic historical advances, give women greater personal freedom than ever before. Yet all these things simply serve to sharpen the realization of millions of women that they are excluded from playing any kind of social role that corresponds to their abilities, and that society conditions them from the day they are born to accept an inferior status.

The women's liberation movement is developing after a half century of dormancy, and as a result, there are no entrenched organizations or established leaderships which must be bypassed, few conservative "authorities" to be exposed. It has been built from the ground up by young, newly radicalized women.

And it has developed in the wake of more than a decade of radicalization during which the Black and Brown liberation struggles, and struggles by other oppressed national minorities, have emerged, a decade during which the entire student radicalization has developed and the anti-Vietnam-war movement has grown to encompass millions of Americans. The women's liberation movement has been built on the foundations of these movements, absorbing many lessons from them, reflecting some of the same weaknesses, and looking to those struggles for guidelines and models.

The most important basic characteristic of the emerging women's liberation movement, the key factor which gives it such revolutionary implications, is its independence. The movement, of course, is related to and interconnected with other struggles—youth, Black and Brown liberation, antiwar, working class—but it has its own dynamic, its own demands, its own organizational forms. It is not simply the women's wing of an antiwar committee, a union, or a Black organization, and its fate is not *directly* dependent on the evolution of other struggles. For the first time in decades, women are saying they are not willing to wait for anyone else to take up their struggle; they will

do it now, in their own way, and they are not willing to subordinate their demands to the needs of any other struggle.

The second aspect of the independence of the women's liberation movement is its development outside the framework of the two capitalist parties. At this initial stage, independence from the capitalist parties is almost assumed by the large majority of the activists, and this has not yet emerged as a crucial issue within the movement. But we can be confident that as the movement grows, there will be a wing of the liberal Democrats and Republicans who will try to adapt to some of the demands of the movement, to capture its resources and energies, and divert the movement from an independent, mass action, nonexclusionary direction.

We can be sure, for instance, that the Communist Party will try to turn the movement in this direction. One of the things they stress is the election of women to political office, and they point to the election of Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat and the first Black woman in the House, as a prime example of the kind of goal women should be fighting for. Organizations like NOW, the National Organization for Women, are also oriented toward involving women in liberal Democratic Party politics.

In the future, as the movement broadens and deepens and develops a real mass base, the fight to maintain independence from the capitalist parties will be increasingly important. But the demands raised by the women's liberation movement—for control over their own lives, for economic, social and physical liberation—are basically anticapitalist in their thrust. Although some demands can be met in their totality, the goals of women's liberation cannot be won under capitalism or embraced by the capitalist parties. The struggle to attain these goals will lead many to the realization of the need for a socialist revolution.

There have been some significant changes in the women's liberation movement in the last six months,

changes we should all be fully aware of.

First has been the proliferation of organized women's liberation groups. It would be impossible to establish an exact count, but hundreds of new groups have been formed. There are now more than 100 organizations in New York alone!

Many of the new groups have been campus-based organizations which emerged for the first time last fall. But more surprising has been the formation of dozens of groups composed of young women, mainly with college backgrounds, but whose common bond is the fact that they are young women trying to deal with the problems of finding jobs and/or raising families.

There have also been numerous professional organizations like the Media Women in New York and caucuses organized within almost every academic association and in different university departments.

Black and other Third World women's liberation groups have also begun to emerge. In New York, for instance, a few women in SNCC are initiating an organization for Black women. Some of the women in the Young Lords are very militant about the need to wage a fight for women's liberation within the Puerto Rican community, and the program of the Young Lords includes a point committing the Young Lords to support the fight for women's liberation. Debate on women's liberation is coming more and more to the fore within the Chicano movement as well.

The second big development in the last six months has been the emergence of action-oriented coalitions and united fronts to work on specific projects.

In the earliest stages of the women's liberation movement, the small groups of 10-12 women who met to discuss their own concerns and problems—what is known in the movement as consciousness-raising—such small groups were virtually the only form of organization that existed. The small groups have played a positive function insofar

as they help women to gain confidence in themselves, educate themselves, realize that their problems are not individual but are shared almost universally with other women. Some small groups have, of course, gotten bogged down in a self-devouring type of group therapy, but it would be a mistake to dismiss most of the small groups as belonging in this category. They play a vital role in helping many women to understand the sources and causes of their oppression.

At the same time that these small groups are important, it is also crucial for the women's liberation movement to unite in common actions, to turn outward, and this has begun to happen in the last six months. The demonstration in New Haven demanding freedom for the Connecticut Panther women, the numerous teach-ins, the broad meetings like the Congress to Unite Women in New York, the anti-abortion-law demonstrations scheduled in several places, and similar actions are indications of the direction in which the movement is developing.

As the movement gains confidence in itself, it is beginning to search for those demands and activities that have the potential for mass support.

Thirdly, there has been a significant growth in the movement's organizational and political capacities. For instance, arguments over whether or not a meeting needs a chairman and similar elementary questions are less frequent now than several months ago.

The political growth of the movement is reflected in the deepening search for answers to all the questions posed by the issue of women's liberation—which is, in the most fundamental sense, the problem of humanity itself. This growth is reflected in the way revolutionary ideas are received. There is a tremendous hunger for knowledge within the women's liberation movement, a search for full truths, not partial answers.

A large proportion of the activists in women's liberation are developing an anticapitalist consciousness, a real-

ization that no basic solution can be found short of social revolution. The anticapitalism is in many respects similar to the level of consciousness that developed in SDS before its demise: it lacks any real perspective for the road to be travelled from here to the revolution, but it is at least the beginning of revolutionary consciousness for many.

Fourthly, the movement has broadened its base considerably in recent months. Initially, most of the women's liberation activists were women who had been radicalized around a whole series of issues, who had been members of SDS, Resistance, and various other political groupings. They came to the women's liberation movement out of disillusionment with the male chauvinist attitudes and actions so prevalent in organizations like SDS.

But the movement has arrived at a new stage now, and the recent growth of the women's liberation movement has come largely from women who have not previously been political activists. They are coming directly to the women's liberation movement and have been radicalized on that issue.

The recent numerical growth and political development of the women's liberation movement has been extremely important, but a word of caution is also in order. It is not yet a mass movement in the sense that the antiwar or Black liberation movement has a mass character and reflects the level of consciousness of the masses. The potential exists for the development of a mass women's liberation movement though, and one of our key responsibilities to the movement is to contribute to the process of formulating a program and organizing actions that will lead toward a mass struggle for women's liberation.

In this respect, it is important to call attention to the fact that some of the earliest and most militant women's actions have been those organized by welfare mothers. Their actions, in essence, have been demanding that society recognize its collective obligation

for raising children and providing for them adequately. Such actions, and those organized by women workers fighting for equal pay and decent working conditions, may not be called women's liberation activities, but they are dealing with the exact same issues as the campus-based and other women's liberation organizations. They are natural allies.

Our job is to be part of the vanguard of the women's liberation struggle, to work with the radicalizing young women and the organizations they are creating on the campuses and elsewhere, and to help build a movement that will struggle to win the basic democratic and transitional demands which are being raised. We want the women's liberation movement to fight for basic demands such as free abortion on demand, free child care, and equal pay, and to consciously lead the fight by involving the broad masses of women in whose interests these demands are raised. When that happens it will signify a qualitatively new stage in the development of the struggle.

A number of key questions have emerged as the focal points of political and ideological debate within the growing women's liberation movement. Although there are many which are worth discussing, four questions are of particular importance at this stage.

The first question is whether or not women should form their own organizations for struggle, raise their own demands, develop their own leadership, and organize their own actions. And our answer to this question is an unequivocal YES. Not only is there a need for separate women's organizations, but this is one of the most progressive aspects of the current women's liberation movement. The separate organizations are a reflection of the independent character of the movement which is so important. We support these organizations and we help to build them. We are in favor of them restricting their membership to women only since this plays a key role in helping women to de-

velop their own self-confidence, identity, and dignity and to realize their full abilities.

It is a progressive step for women to want to get men off their backs so they can develop their abilities freely and fully.

The logic of such organization does not lead, as some contend, to introversion and a narrowing of the concerns of women, but on the contrary, it will lay the basis for women as a group, with their own special problems, to establish alliances in struggle with other oppressed sectors of the population. Far from narrowing women's horizons, it will enable them to develop a broader comprehension of the relationship between their struggles and struggles by other layers of society.

For example, one need hardly be worried that Black women who form their own organizations will forget about their struggle as Afro-Americans. On the contrary, such organizations will strengthen and help deepen both struggles.

Of course, there are some women who try to prevent the women's liberation movement from building bridges to other struggles. They usually argue that women have too many problems of their own to worry about, and should not get involved in other problems to boot. This is one of the tendencies we disagree with and argue against within the movement, and our experience—on the question of the war, for example—has been that it is not difficult to convince women of the obvious need for them to join the fight against the war, as women; that there are numerous and compelling reasons why the fight to bring the troops home now is their fight.

The approach we supported and which was adopted by the Student Mobilization Committee conference was a model as far as the relationship between women and the war is concerned. A separate women's workshop was organized; a position paper was adopted, outlining why women have a fundamen-

tal interest in fighting to end the war and projecting a day of activity to focus on "Women and the War" as part of the April antiwar actions; the workshop rejected the orientation that SMC itself should adopt a program for women's liberation, pointing out that such was not the job of an antiwar coalition.

Our unequivocal support for the development of an independent women's liberation movement places us in opposition to a number of other currents — although they all tend to equivocate somewhat and sometimes bend to pressure.

Organizations like the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA) and International Socialists (IS) seem to view independent women's organizations as competitors. RYM sometimes supports organizations of women, but thinks they should be formed to fight for RYM's full program, not for women's demands. Their attitudes are similar toward both the independent women's liberation movement and the independent antiwar movement — they would rather not have to be bothered with broad, independent movements in which their line does not predominate, but since such movements do exist, they sometimes intervene, attend conferences, join committees, etc.

The Communist Party is apparently in favor of such organizations, but so far they do not seem to be turning any real forces toward the vanguard women's liberation movement.

The positions taken by the various political tendencies are, of course, very familiar. They are a repetition of tactics and positions adopted toward the antiwar movement. And, as with the antiwar movement, our differences with them are not simply of a tactical nature. They are manifestations of our fundamental differences in approach to work of this kind.

Our basic concepts are outlined in the transitional program. We orient our work towards the independent forces in the movement, those who are representative of the newly radicalizing layers, who are not yet attached to any

of the different political tendencies but are gravitating towards one or another. We try to reach them at their present level of comprehension and understanding. We participate in the developing struggle in a nonfactional way, in a collaborative manner, and we contribute to the struggle, trying to deepen the level of understanding of the capitalist system, and what is necessary to abolish that system. In this respect our orientation to the women's liberation movement represents nothing new for us. It is guided by the same concepts that are fundamental to our work in every developing arena of struggle.

The second question around which there has been considerable debate is whether women's oppression is rooted in the development and needs of class society, or in the physical, sexual and psychological differences between men and women. And ultimately this comes down to the *key* question of whether the struggle is to abolish capitalism as a precondition to women's liberation, or whether the goal is to reform men.

The other major radical tendencies — those which consider themselves socialist — will agree, if cornered, that the oppression of women is rooted in class society. That is, they formally agree with the basic analysis developed by Marx and Engels. However, despite their formal positions, *none* of them take the step from the premise that women's oppression is rooted in class society to the only possible conclusion — i.e. the need to develop a *program* to lead women's struggles in an anti-capitalist direction.

RYM and PL, for example, put forward as their central programmatic demand: Fight Male Chauvinism! In other words, regardless of their theoretical analysis, their practical program is to fight to reform *men*, not abolish capitalism.

The Communist Party does something different—but quite predictable. While it accepts the class basis of women's oppression, the program it puts forward, as in all other arenas of strug-

gle, is not for the abolition of capitalism and its institutions—but for reform. In this case, their program is to reform one of the three pillars of class society, the family, which they argue can be transformed into a revolutionary force. Theoretically, this is as ludicrous as arguing that the institution of private property can be turned into an instrument for social progress.

There is also a wing of the women's liberation movement that does not accept a historical materialist approach to the oppression of women. It adopts the basic position that the oppression of women by men is more basic and antedates the emergence of class society. A clear expression of this general tendency is found in the Redstockings Manifesto, the basic statement of principles on which one of the small-group formations in New York is based. The Manifesto reads, "We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. . . ."

Among the women who hold the position that men are the primary enemy, however, it is important to make some distinctions. Some are very conscious about it, have a well-worked-out position, and can defend it with very serious and elaborate arguments.

For others, such a position often simply reflects a positive desire to escape men's domination and their ideas get twisted into a rejection of *all* men, an identification of men with the root causes of women's oppression.

The distinction is important, because many women in the latter category can be convinced that men are also the victims of class society, and that women's liberation will bring men's liberation with it. The identification of men as the primary enemy is often simply an initial reaction, a first step toward deep-

ening radicalization.

The tendency within the women's liberation movement that rejects a basic historical materialist approach is not necessarily antisocialist. Many would say that class society at least contributes to the oppression of women, but they disagree that the elimination of private property in the means of production will establish the material foundation for eliminating sexual oppression. In their minds, the fight against men is primary; the fight against the system is secondary.

And one of the most powerful "proofs" for this position, in the eyes of many radical women, is the status of women in the workers states. As on so many other questions, Stalinism has become equated with socialism. Many women respond quite understandably by saying, if that's socialism they want no part of it, they will keep looking until they find some other solution.

We disagree with this general tendency that rejects a materialist approach to the question of women's oppression. Just as with racism, male chauvinism and the oppression of women have very deep historical roots that are nurtured and sustained by the capitalist system. The abolition of capitalism is a *precondition* for the total emancipation of women. That in no way means the fight for women's liberation should be postponed, but the realization that capitalism must be abolished does determine the basic strategy for the struggle.

At the same time, however, we agree that male chauvinism and all the myriad forms of women's oppression will not suddenly disappear on the morrow of the revolution. The oppression of women is older than virtually every other form of exploitation and bondage. It is older than slavery, racism, national oppression. It has existed throughout man's entire recorded history. It permeates every single aspect of human life and is so thoroughly ingrained in every human being that the average person is largely unconscious of its pernicious effects. Even

within the radical movement the attitudes of male supremacy are widespread and many women are bitterly resentful of this — rightfully so.

However, while it will take time to eradicate attitudes and patterns of behavior with such deep historical roots, the socialist revolution will eliminate the material basis of women's oppression, its roots in class society and capitalist exploitation, the causes of man's inhumanity to men and women.

One of the favorite targets of the conscious anti-Marxists and anti-Leninists within women's liberation is the "male-dominated left." It is often an attempt to capitalize on the healthy distrust and skepticism of radicalizing women who have been disillusioned by those organizations which, for all their radical verbiage, relegate women to running mimeograph machines, typing and similar work — while men make the political decisions, act as public spokesmen, write articles and do the other "important" work.

But it would be a mistake to ignore the fact that pressure from the extreme "feminist" point of view is reflected inside our party at times as well. For example, it is occasionally reflected in the idea that men should be excluded from women's liberation work fractions on principle.

We don't want to make any concessions to this pressure in our own organization. We must understand the objective reasons for it, but at the same time, if and when it arises, we should use it as an opportunity to explain the basic principles on which a Leninist combat party is built. It unites within its ranks the most conscious elements of all oppressed sectors of the population and welds them into a unified fighting party. The party must do everything possible within its ranks to destroy the divisions and antagonisms created by class society in an advanced state of decay. We are not a federation of oppressed groups, representing different and conflicting interests, but a democratic centralist party in which all

members participate in developing a program for and helping to lead a multifaceted struggle for the abolition of capitalism.

There is absolutely no contradiction between fighting to build independent women's liberation organizations with all-women leaderships — and at the same time recognizing that it is not just women members of the party, but our party as a whole which is responsible for and must lead our work in the women's liberation movement.

We should also be clear on how to deal with the question of the "male-dominated left."

First of all, our party is genuinely unique among left-wing organizations. Our party has a better understanding of the issues involved in the struggle for women's liberation than any other radical group. Women play a greater leadership role in our movement than in any other left organization.

We sometimes take this for granted, but a good gauge of how different we are has been the surprised reaction of many women's liberation activists as they see how our movement functions, and the general level of understanding within our movement on the question of women's liberation.

Yet, even though we may be more advanced on the question of women's liberation than other organizations, it is still obvious that even in our party more than 50 percent of the membership and leadership is male.

In the coming few years, those percentages will become much more equal than they are now. And in the coming American revolution, women will probably play a more central role than in any previous revolution in history. But it is still quite possible that well over the majority of the central leaders of the American revolution may be men. If that happened, it would not be because we or anyone else wanted it that way, or thought it should be that way, nor would it reflect a lack of sensitivity on our part to the importance of the struggle for

women's liberation.

Rather it would reflect the fact that the composition of our party and its leadership cannot be artificially modeled after our vision of the future, or what is abstractly good. Unfortunately, our party will reflect much more the society we are trying to destroy than the one we are trying to establish—and it must if we are not to become utopian socialists. We are developing an instrument to be used in the fight to destroy the most powerful ruling class the world has ever known, not a microcosm of the future.

The problem of leadership and the composition of the vanguard is not something that can be artificially established, the way that RYM has tried to do it, for example. It can be a healthy sign when the majority of the central leadership of a revolutionary organization is composed of women—as the majority of the YSA National Executive Committee has been at times. It says a great deal about the organization. But unless it truly represents the leadership, the result can only be hypocrisy, a mockery of democratic forms, and cynical disrespect for both the formal and real leadership. While the women may be the elected leadership, unless it is genuine, the real leadership will simply maneuver around the elected bodies and do what they want without being subject to the control of the organization or responsible to it.

As with every other question, it is our *program* that is decisive, and we are the only organization that can put forward a genuinely revolutionary program and perspective for women's liberation. We are the revolutionary party of women's liberation, and to build that party, we must make use of the human material that capitalism has provided, constructing the strongest party we can.

One final word on the question of men as the enemy. We also reject the proposition that only women will gain from women's liberation. It will be a tremendous advance for men as well, as they too will be liberated from the reaction-

ary shackles of the family institution. If anyone has any doubts on this, they need only read *Portnoy's Complaint*.

Women's liberation touches on the most fundamental questions of human existence. When it is attained, it will mean the liberation of men, women and children from the deepest forms of sexual, psychological, social, and economic oppression. It will mean humanity has reached an entirely new historical level—classless society.

The third question around which there has been considerable discussion within the women's liberation movement is whether women's oppression affects *all* women to one degree or another or whether it is basically only a subcategory of the exploitation of women as workers. Related to this is the question of whether or not the revolt of women as women is a revolutionary development, or whether only those struggles by women workers are progressive.

On this question, our main disagreements are with Progressive Labor, because PL takes exactly the same approach to women's liberation that they do to Black nationalism. As far as they are concerned, the oppression of women is a subcategory of the exploitation of workers. Only struggles by women *as workers* are progressive; anything else can be harmful and the main danger to be avoided is the destruction of working class unity.

In the resolution on women's liberation presented to the December 1969 National Council meeting of the Worker-Student Alliance, a resolution which basically reflects PL's line, the authors put forward the proposition that "the real basis of male chauvinism is the profits made off the double exploitation of women workers." With such a position it is hard to explain the oppression of women for thousands of years before the working class or the capitalist system came on the scene! And it fails to account for the many additional forms of oppression which must be fought and which provide the objective basis for the struggle, for the emergence of a

women's liberation movement that involves women from different economic and social backgrounds.

Abortion, birth control, education, equal pay, child care, preferential hiring, and other demands are all issues that are relevant not only to working class women but to *all* women. Of course, there are class differences. But the women's liberation movement as a whole, involving women from all class backgrounds, can and will be an ally of the working class in the struggle to abolish the capitalist system. In other words, it is through the battle for women's liberation, as through the battle for the liberation of oppressed nationalities, that the working class will win crucial allies.

The fourth major question being debated within the women's liberation movement is whether or not the family is a reactionary institution under capitalism, and on this question we have major disagreements with the CP and PL. Our major ally has been the most radical wing of the women's liberation movement.

Many of the radical women have educated themselves on Engels. That is, the movement's founders largely *begin* by accepting a class analysis and a Marxist perspective on the question of the family—and this became the basic yardstick by which every other position was measured.

It was our unequivocal agreement with the basic position elaborated by Marx and Engels that won us wide respect within the women's liberation movement—as opposed to the CP and PL, for instance, which reject the Marxist analysis in practice. They try to convince people not only that the nuclear family under capitalism can be reformed, but that under socialism it will—and should—continue to exist as the basic social unit.

Women's liberation is a question that is shrouded in the most irrational and emotional attitudes, because it cuts so deeply into the personal lives of every individual. And of all the touchy issues

surrounding women's liberation, the question of the family is probably the most explosive.

Everyone is a mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife, son or daughter to someone, or some set of people. Every individual is personally involved in family relationships. People tend to react very subjectively, depending on their own personal history. And that is why it is so easy for the opponents of Marxism like the CP to demagogically exploit some of the most conservative and backward attitudes on the family question.

We keep these things in mind when discussing the reactionary nature of the family institution, but we do not make any theoretical concessions to the prevailing prejudices.

The family shifts from society to an individual man and/or woman the total responsibility for caring for and raising children, for taking care of the aged, for the education and inculcation of bourgeois values in children—the values they need to survive in this society—for policing the adolescent. Intolerable economic burdens are placed on the fundamental unit which is then proclaimed sacred, and the institution destroys millions of individuals helplessly caught within its framework.

There are, of course, good husbands, good wives, good parents and good children—as individuals. But as an institution, the family is a reactionary pillar of class society, and it is only when its individual members are freed from the economic shackles that bind them together that it will be possible for truly human relationships to blossom.

It is important for us to continue to take the lead in explaining and educating about these questions within our own movement and within the women's liberation movement. The theoretical debate underway is one that we can only be anxious to participate in.

When we discussed the women's liberation movement six months ago, we enumerated a series of demands we

considered important. Since then a number of those demands have begun to emerge as key issues.

This has been particularly true of the demand for free abortion on request. In several states—New York and Michigan especially, but others as well—the fight to abolish abortion laws has begun to evoke widespread support, and in a number of places, we have been centrally involved in this fight.

The abortion question is made-to-order as the initial issue on which the women's liberation movement can cut its teeth. In involves *the most fundamental* rights of women—to control their own bodies, to remove from the state the prerogative to decide who will bear a child and when.

Under the existing laws, one out of every four women in the United States has had or will have an illegal abortion during her lifetime. There is hardly a woman alive who has not at some time been concerned about the prospects of bearing an unwanted child—or having to face the dangers and expense of an illegal abortion.

The abortion issue has a built-in appeal to millions of men and women, which makes it possible to build an action-oriented mass movement. A well-directed fight on this issue can give the women's liberation movement a taste of what can be done if it turns outward and begins to lead a struggle, such as the antiwar movement has done. The anti-abortion-law demonstration scheduled for New York on March 28 is an excellent example of the type of action that can and should be organized.

One of the reasons support for the abortion issue is growing so rapidly is that a real possibility exists for making a historic breakthrough. Under growing mass pressure and effective legal action, it is possible the issue will be fought to the Supreme Court, with a chance that current abortion laws in most states will be declared unconstitutional. But even short of that, many states are already bowing to popular pressure and adopting new abortion

laws with very minimal restrictions. While the new laws will not solve the problems of making abortions free and available to women who cannot afford the high medical fees involved, they at least set the stage for advancing the struggle to a new level. They will save thousands of lives every year and unmeasurable anguish over unwanted pregnancies.

The abolition of abortion restrictions in the U.S. would be a historical step forward and a tremendous boost to the burgeoning women's liberation movement. Women would see it as a direct result of their own actions, a proof of their power, and it would increase their confidence and determination to continue to fight for their liberation.

A number of the other demands that we have raised, primarily through our election campaigns, can also become focal points for mass action—free 24-hour child-care centers controlled by those who use them; equal pay for equal work; access for women to all educational opportunities; a sliding scale of hours and wages along with preferential hiring for women and oppressed national minorities; truthful teaching of women's history; free birth control information and devices on demand; and many others.

We are now seeing the dawn of a movement that will probably be one of the most important mass movements in American history. As capitalism continues to decay, to rot in its own death agony, the angers and frustrations of every oppressed sector of the population will explode with greater and greater force. We expect this, we anticipate it, we look forward to it, and we want to be right there in the middle of it helping to lead it in an anticapitalist direction. That's exactly what is beginning to happen in the women's liberation movement today, and we can greet it with nothing but extreme optimism.

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