

WOMEN AND SOCIALISM

Women in the Liberation Struggle—An Overview

Ma Bell Has Fleas — and a Lot of Angry Workers

These two articles are reprinted
from Red Papers 3.

published by
New England Free Press
791 Tremont St.
Boston, Mass. 02118

Women in the liberation struggle

AN OVERVIEW

(The following is based on a speech given by Mary Lou Greenberg, a woman in the Bay Area Revolutionary Union, at the International Women's Day celebration in San Francisco, March 8, 1970.)

About 140 years ago, black slaves led by Nat Turner were rebelling against their masters and plantation owners in Virginia. A few years later, women factory workers in the textile mills in Lowell, Mass., walked off their jobs to protest a 13-hour work day and wages that came to less than \$1.25 a week. From these events and many others like them, American working class heroines began to come forward:

Women like the black slave Harriett Tubman, who began to rebel when she was 15 years old. Her master ordered her to tie up a slave who had tried to run away so he could be whipped. Instead, Harriett helped him to escape, the first of over 300 of her people she helped to reach freedom. She escaped herself when she was 29, and did such a fantastic job helping slaves escape on the "underground railway" that the slavemasters put a \$40,000 price on her head. Armed with a revolver, she defended her passengers, and she was recommended to John Brown as the person best able to help him carry through with his plan to free the South.

About this time a white woman named Mary Jones began to help working people all over the country free themselves from



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Demonstration at the Women's House of Detention, New York City, March 8, 1970.

having to work long miserable hours for hardly enough to get by on. Called "Mother" Jones, she worked with the coal miners most of all, helping them plan and win strikes. One time she told the striking men to stay home and led an army of women, armed with mops, brooms, rocks, anything they could find, to chase the scabs out of the mines.

We're here today, International Women's Day, in the tradition of the rebelling black slaves, the Lowell Mill girls, Harriett Tubman, and Mother Jones. The Black Panther women in jail in New Haven, Conn.; brown women here in the Mission who are trying to fight the sweat shop conditions at Levi Strauss and are defending Los Siete; the hospital workers who are going on strike next week; the high school women who are trying to take education out of the hands of the ruling class and make it serve the needs of the working class--we can all take courage and inspiration from the past struggles of American women.

ALL PART OF THE SAME STRUGGLE

We're all here today, then, as part of the same struggle for liberation. But what is this "liberation" we're working for? Some might even say that the struggle for women's liberation is different from, say, the struggle for welfare rights. The program lists a speaker from the Women's Liberation Movement--but all the speakers here are part of the Women's Liberation Movement, just as Harriett Tubman and Mother Jones were.

Now, Mother Jones, for instance, didn't go around talking about women's rights. In fact, she was really pretty backward on this question. She felt that women shouldn't have to work, but should be able to stay home and raise the children. She wasn't about to go around urging that women should have the same jobs as men. She knew that women had worked in the mines once--stripped to the waist, crawling about in narrow tunnels on their hands and knees pulling heavy cars of coal. She knew that women's equality would mean that women would be free to die in the mines like men did.

One day she shocked a meeting of wealthy women suffragists when she



HARRIETT TUBMAN

said they didn't need the vote to raise hell like she did. They needed a strong hatred of injustice and a loud voice. She felt that politics was the bosses' game, and wanted to see economic justice achieved before anything else.

And in her own way, Mother Jones probably did as much for women's liberation as the suffragists or feminists. She taught the miners' wives to stand up and speak out and fight--and the miners themselves had more admiration and respect for her than they did for most men.

Of course, times are different now. Women are fighting for their rights as women. But the situation for working people and people without jobs is still a damned hard one. More and more workers are getting laid off every day. There are people on welfare who never thought they'd have to be there. And this situation is hitting women--especially non-white women--hardest of all.

WHAT IS "WOMEN'S LIBERATION" ?

All the speakers today have talked about women who are getting together and fighting back for their own survival and for the freedom of the entire working class. So what do we mean by "women's liberation," then?

Some people used to think that women's liberation meant a kind of personal liberation or freedom--the idea that by going bra-less, living in a commune, sleeping around with many men instead of just one, a woman could be "free." The idea was that it was possible for individuals to be free before--or even without--changing the basic structure of our present society.

But more and more people are realizing that individual solutions are available only to the rich--that there's no such thing as individual freedom for the masses of people--male and female--in a slave society like the one we've got now. Only socialism, where the working people own the industries and run the government for the benefit of all of us, can offer liberation for women as well as for men.

Women's liberation, then, really means a society where women and men take part equally in all aspects of that society--in the workplace, in the community, at home, and in the schools. Where women and men both will be able to work in the fields and factories without bosses telling us what to do. We'll be able to run things ourselves with no bosses or rulers who make us do all the work while they get fat.

There'll be warm, friendly child care centers for our children and top-rate medical care for all. Now, it's just the rich who can afford to get sick--as it's mostly just rich women who can get either abortions or good medical care when they're pregnant. It's the poor women who are forced to be sterilized and are told to use birth control because "the reason you're poor is that you've got too many kids." (This is nonsense; the reason people are poor is that food and resources aren't distributed evenly: the capitalists hoard them and use them to make profits.)

In the future socialist society, the schools will teach our true history--

about the struggles of women and the entire working class and of black, brown, and all minority peoples. There'll be no unemployment insurance or welfare because there'll be enough work for everyone and enough for everyone to live comfortably. Of course, if we get hurt or sick, or we're changing jobs, our workers' government will make sure our family is provided for. And older people and the disabled will be well cared for--not cast out. But this kind of assistance will be based on real concern for the welfare of the people. Not a degrading system like we have today that tries to make you feel like a beggar for demanding what you've earned. Or cuts you off without a penny if you give up looking for jobs that don't exist.

Under socialism all women can decide whether or not to have children, or get married. We won't be told we have to look sexy, or be dumb and helpless--that the only thing a woman is good for is to be a wife and mother. There will be a chance for men and women to be really creative and to take pride in what they do and who they are.

WOMEN UNDER SOCIALISM

For instance, in Vietnam women had few rights before the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established under Ho Chi Minh in 1946. After the French were defeated, women were given immediate voting rights. Today in North Vietnam, women receive equal pay for equal work, and work in the fields and factories as well as fight alongside the men to defend their country. Married women are called by their own name, now, instead of their husband's as formerly, and the husbands take turns baby-sitting with the wives, so that both men and women can go to school and attend meetings.

In China, since the revolution, the situation of women has similarly improved, from one of feudal slavery to equal participation in society. Chinese women are now village officials, heads of agricultural stations, and play leading roles in all levels of society.

These changes were not accomplished without effort, however, and they are still going on. The male workers and peasants were reluctant to change after centuries of

women being subservient to men. But through the leadership and efforts of the Communist Party, led by the women in the Party, they realized that the full participation of women was necessary to defeat the landlords and rulers. When they saw the fine things women could do, they realized that women's liberation was a good thing.

Compare this to the situation in this country today where women workers are paid 40% less than male workers for the same job. Women are encouraged to stay in the home because that's where the big corporation owners want us. They need us there to raise the future workers for their factories and to take care of the present ones.

Just as the bosses use racism to keep white workers divided from non-whites, they use male supremacy to keep male and female workers, husbands and wives, divided from each other. Who benefits when the husband comes home tired and frustrated after a long work day--and takes out his anger at his wife instead of his boss? Who benefits when unions don't demand equal rights for women workers--and then the women scab on the men? The bosses come out ahead every time.

WHO IS THE ENEMY?

To build toward that socialist society and the women's liberation which must be a part of it, we have to recognize who the enemy is. Our enemy is not men. Our enemy is U.S. imperialism--the bosses, the big corporation owners, the politicians who work for them, and the police and the army who protect their interests. It's the same enemy the Vietnamese people are fighting--the rulers of this country who decide what the schools will teach, what our wages will be, what welfare crumbs they'll hand out, and who the police will shoot next.

Our enemy is U.S. imperialism, so we have to build a powerful United Front which will bring together all the women, men, workers, students, people on welfare--all people who will unite against the common enemy. This United Front will be led by working people at the point of production, particularly black and brown workers who are now leading the struggle in this country, because only workers at the point of production--the

industrial proletariat--have the power to shut the country down, take over the factories, and run them in the interests of all working people. The most courageous, the most self-sacrificing, the most far-seeing of these workers and their allies will form the core of the new communist party that we need to lead us in defeating the bosses and building socialism.

This United Front Against Imperialism will be formed:

In support of the national liberation of black and Mexican-American peoples, and the democratic demands of all oppressed minorities;

In support of the liberation struggles of oppressed peoples abroad, a struggle currently being led by the Vietnamese women and men;

To fight against the growing fascist repression in this country--the attacks by the police, supported by the courts, against the Black Panther Party, against Los Siete de la Raza, against working men and women on strike lines, against all those who are standing up against U.S. imperialism, like the Chicago 8. We must defend those currently under attack and remember that there will be many more "conspiracy" trials.

The United Front will fight against the oppression and exploitation of women under imperialism; and will fight against the increasing lay-offs, speed-ups, rising prices, higher taxes, and welfare cut-backs which are Nixon's answers to inflation.

WOMEN IN THE UNITED FRONT

Women must play a leading role in all of these areas of struggle--just as the fight against the oppression and exploitation of women is one of the key areas in the United Front. The fight for women's rights will take place in many ways: through women's caucuses, rank-and-file movements in the labor unions, and workers' solidarity committees to fight against all forms of on-the-job discrimination; through Welfare Rights organizations and tenants' unions--because everyone needs enough money to live on and a decent place to live; by fighting for good medical care for all--including the right of a woman to decide whether or not to

have children; through women's groups, where we can learn our problems aren't individual problems, but that they're caused by the kind of society we have. That we're having trouble with our husbands, for instance, not because we're neurotic, but because it's damn near impossible to have good relationships with anyone in this society. We've been trained to be competitive, mistrustful, individualistic, and only in a society based on cooperation and run by the masses of working people will it be possible for things to be different. Even then it will take a long time to get rid of the ruling class ideas that whites are "better" than non-whites, and men are "superior" to women. We must begin now to attack those ideas and to change the ways men and women relate.

To truly unite the working class, we have to help women become independent and not be dominated by men. We must fight against the idea that the only place for women is in the home. This means, for instance, when we set up child care centers, or Breakfast-for-Children programs like the Panthers have, men as well as

women should cook and watch the children. We have to encourage sharing household work at home, especially if the wife, as well as the husband, is working outside the home. Above all, we have to show by our actions that "women's rights" does not mean the right to be meek: to men-- that equality between the sexes can mean better relationships between women and men. Revolutionaries, especially, and those who are trying to become revolutionaries, must live up to the idea of men and women being equal, and revolutionary men have a special responsibility to bring these ideas to the men they are working with.

Women being equal also means women taking part in armed struggle against the capitalist state. We know that the bosses don't give up anything without a fight. And we can only win if we gather together all our forces, women and men, to fight on every level.

If we unite with all who can be united under militant working class leadership, our United Front will be capable of defeating our enemy, U.S. imperialism, once and for all. And in defeating our real enemy, we, as women, will find our real liberation.

Inside the phone company

MA BELL HAS FLEAS



And a lot of
angry workers



In the city where I work the phone company employs over 14,000 people. Approximately half are women--clerical workers, service representatives, and operators. These are the women who shuffle thousands of papers and soothe irate customers, day after day. As in any workplace, women are relegated to the dullest jobs, paid substandard wages, and treated like both small children and slaves. The women telephone operators are the most exploited of all phone workers. They make the lowest wages and suffer the worst working conditions of any group of employees in the Bell System. And they shall be the first to rise.

Inside the phone company buildings, hundreds of operators sit in poorly-lit, stuffy rooms. The equipment is backed against the sides of the room, so the operators sit in two long rows, facing the wall. Behind them, down the center of the room, desks are evenly spaced. Supervisors sit at these desks, staring at the backs of operators' heads, watching to see who is working too slowly, or who is turning to speak to the woman next to them.

Rapping is forbidden between operators, even when the calls are coming in slowly and there's no work to do. Rapping is also forbidden between operators and customers, although it's more difficult to suppress. The company expects operators all over the country to repeat, word-perfect, special phrases for every situation. These phrases are carefully programed to communicate the most information in the fewest words. But even though they're designed to be efficient, they're often clumsy and hard to understand. For example, when a customer calls up and wants to know if a line is busy or out of order, an operator is expected to say, "In order to check I may have to interrupt the conversation and indicate you have an urgent reason to secure the line. Do you wish that done?" Most often the customer won't catch all that and begins shouting impatiently at the operator to get on with checking the line. It would be for simpler and less ag-

gravating if operators were allowed to tell customers in their own words what could and couldn't be done about checking the line. If operators decided how operating would be done, this phrase and all the others would be abolished. But the company decides, and the phrases remain, because greater "efficiency" means greater profits.

Operators cannot be late or sick without endangering their jobs, no matter what the personal situation might be. When operators come in to work, they must walk into the room with their headsets on, and answer a call before they sit down. From that first moment they have to answer call after call, as quickly as possible, for as long as three and a half hours without a break. And they can't make any mistakes. All the calls an operator takes are carefully checked by computers in the Central Ticket Investigation Bureau and all errors are recorded. Eventually each operator is confronted with her computer transcript. Each error is treated as a serious mistake.

Recently the company bought a new machine that will enable one operator to handle six times as many calls. Within a few years, these machines will eliminate most of the operators' jobs in the city. Today operators are being forced to automate themselves out of their jobs, while the company continues to rake in huge profits! However meager operators' wages are, the company would rather not pay them at all.

Operators' pay begins at \$2.15 an hour, unless she went to college. Then she's paid about 50¢ more a week. As in any workplace, women are barred from the higher paying jobs. By forcing women into the dullest, lowest paying jobs, the phone company makes millions of dollars in extra profits each year. And they successfully divide the men from the women in the work force. This division makes it difficult for the workers to get together to wipe out the differences between men's and women's wages, to raise them both and to fight against lousy working conditions.

If the operators weren't watched so

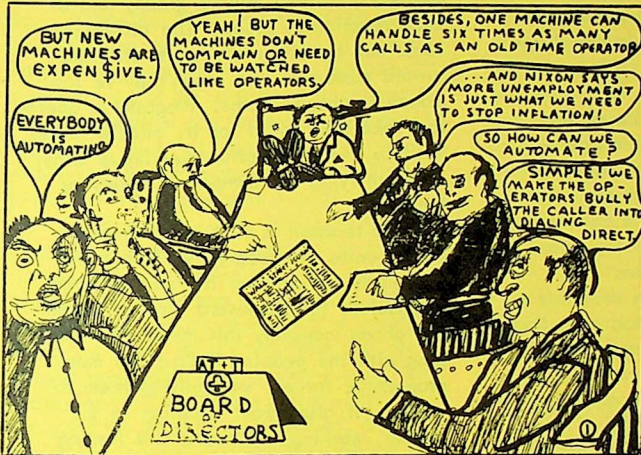


closely, they wouldn't go along with the company's schemes, like automating them out of work. Now, when people call up and ask for help, operators must tell them to dial direct and give them dialing instructions. This just irritates most customers, who insist on being helped anyway. This puts the operators uptight - even more uptight than they already were, sitting still all day, getting hoarse giving dialing instructions time after time, instead of putting the calls through like they were trained to do.

Operators suffer the worst working conditions of all phone workers. When they start work they are assigned to work continually changing hours, sometimes staying on the job until midnight and having to be back the next morning at eight. Even after several months of work an operator never knows what days or what hours she'll be working the next week until Thursday afternoon, when the schedule is posted.

While on the job, operators are constantly harrassed. They're told to work faster, to stop talking and to get into their chairs from the left and out from the right. In addition they're warned against ever sounding irritated. An operator can be fired any moment for a "bad tone of service" or for a "bad attitude." The company knows how an operator sounds because they listen in, secretly, while she handles calls. Occasionally, a supervisor will catch someone chatting with another operator or becoming angry when she's insulted by a customer. The supervisor will then walk up behind the operator and plug her headset into the equipment. Stepping back she'll talk to the girl through the equipment, and accuse her as she's sitting head down, wat-

Operators Revolt!



The cartoon on this and the following pages was written and drawn by the operators themselves.

ching the equipment. An operator is forbidden to turn her head to face her accuser, and forbidden to defend herself, for that would be "insubordination."

Most operators are fired this way, and many more simply quit. Out of 200 women in one office, 24 are replaced each month. The union will make no defense for the ones who get fired if they haven't worked six months. The company has a free hand to keep on replacing operators who've worked a few months with new people. This way the company has been able to break up the friendships and close ties that form between operators, before the women can develop an organization capable of fighting back.

RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT

In spite of this heavy turnover, rumblings of discontent continue and occasionally even surface. Outside the operating room where I work, someone printed "I didn't join the army" underneath a rule posted about not eating in the room. And inside the room women would write "I want out" or "Help" on the cards used to signify they were going on a break. Other operators saw the cards and added to them. For example, one card started out with a screaming face drawn on it. After a week someone had written "Ma Bell has

fleas" underneath the face. A week later someone else had added, "Ma Bell has fleas, rats, lice, supervisors and a chief. Ugh." This put the company uptight, so they made one operator scrub the writing off all the cards. This didn't stop the operators from writing on the cards but the drawings weren't solving any of the problems on the job either.

Most of the operators took a very defeatist attitude towards ever solving these problems. When I asked one elder woman about the fleas, she admitted she'd been bitten for years. But, she said, "The fleas were here before I came and they'll be here after I'm gone." The fleas breed in the old equipment and on warm days they come out and feed on the operators' blood.

One warm day a friend of mine was bitten over twenty times on each knee. She complained to management, but nothing was done. So she and I got together and put out a cartoon of operators scratching frantically, with the caption "Ma Bell has fleas." We posted it up all over the workplace, and eventually sent a copy and a short note about the fleas to a newspaper columnist. Soon afterwards he wrote in his column, "If the voice with a smile sounds a bit scratchy, it's because Ma Bell has fleas..." That very night the company paid an exterminator to come in

and knock out all the fleas. Operators all over the city were stunned. The mood changed, and some of them became optimistic about solving other problems they faced on the job. In any struggle it's important to fight for things you can win.

In this city, more and more of the women who are getting hired as operators are young former students. Many of them come here in search of a hip paradise, and end up at the phone company because they need to eat and the phone company is always hiring. When they come to work they bring with them ideas that things are profoundly wrong with this country, without knowing exactly why. After a few months they've learned that the phone company, like all corporations, is run for the profit of a handful of company executives and stockholders, not for the benefit of the people who use the phones or the workers who build and maintain them. The company's drive for greater and greater profits is the source of all the problems they face on the job - speed-up, automation, insufficient lighting, and all the others. Those of us who went to work knowing in our heads that imperialism destroyed working people soon developed deep gut hatred for the entire system.

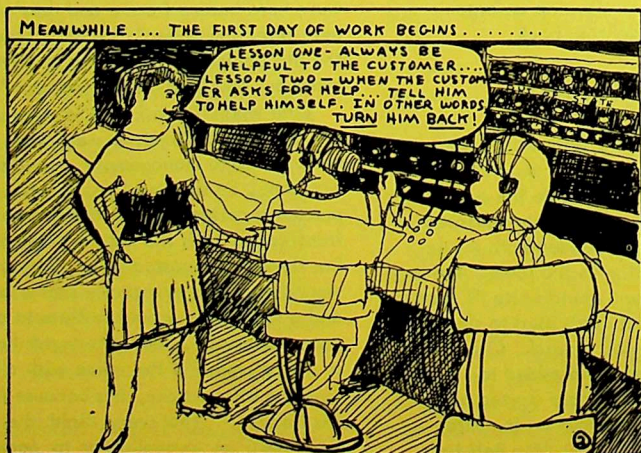
In addition to young white women, the phone company hires some black and brown women, and some older women. (The number of women who continue to work for the company year after year is

very small.) Altogether this makes up a relatively large progressive group among operators, a large middle group, and a small reactionary group. The differences come out clearly in operators' attitudes toward customers who claim they've lost money in phone booths. Progressive operators take their word for it, middle forces hesitate, while reactionaries argue about it, identifying the company's money as their own.

Mao teaches us that everywhere we should unite the progressive forces and rely on them, win over the middle forces, and isolate the backward forces. Inside the phone company this meant first rapping with the people, finding the most progressive forces, and getting them together. It also meant listening to the people, working with them, and finding out exactly what the problems on the job were.

Rapping to people, we learned that operators were most uptight about having to tell customers to dial direct. So a friend and I put together a comic strip beginning with the company's plot to increase profits at the expense of operators' jobs, showing how this affected working conditions, and ending with operators walking off their jobs. The comic was printed on the back page of a working class newspaper. We passed it out to our friends on the job. People dug it. Comic strips are a far less alienating form of agitation than long-winded, single-spaced leaflets.

The dress code was another burning

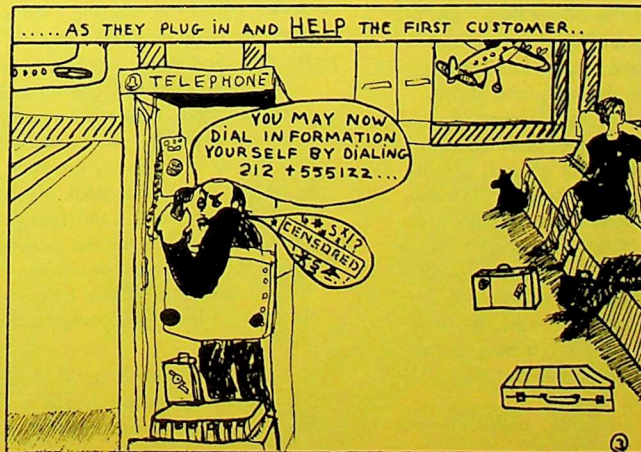


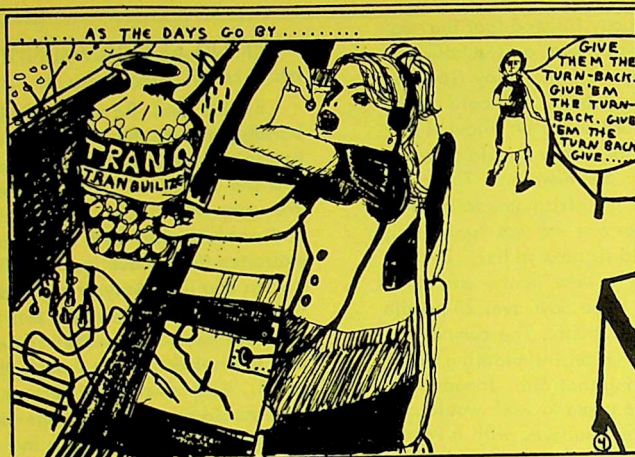
issue. The company insisted that the women wear dresses to work on weekdays, even though they were far away from any contact with the public. On cold rainy days, it was absurd not to be allowed to wear pants to work. So a couple of women simply wore them one morning. The company sent one of the girls home to change and told the other one she was "unfeminine" and no one would sit next to her. But the rebels continued to wear pants, and others joined in. After three days over 25 people were showing up in pants. The company reacted by putting up an intimidating announcement stating that after January 21 anyone who wore pants to work would be "dealt with." We countered with a People's Policy on Dress, stating that after January 21 everyone should dress as they please, for warmth or comfort. As the deadline approached the struggle tightened up. It had begun as a spontaneous rebellion against the arbitrary company rule, but as it progressed it became organized. Everyone agreed to continue wearing pants after Jan. 21. And they would have, even if the company hadn't backed down at the last moment. "Everyone must dress clean and neat" became the new rule, and although the people wearing pants continued to be hassled, no one was fired. Women wearing pants continued to say "Right on Sister" when they met in the cafeteria, and talked to each other about taking on new issues. Winning a struggle based on real needs and grievances is the only way to combat the defeatism holding back most working people.

WORKING AS A COMMUNIST: the importance of being open.

By this time I'd been working in the building ten months. Another comrade had joined me a few months after I started and the two of us worked closely together. We were both taking karate at the time, and occasionally we'd run through the exercises during our breaks. The other women dug it. Many of them didn't like feeling so afraid when they left the building after dark, and wanted to be strong and self-reliant, even though they'd been taught, ever since they were small, that they should be weak and dependent. People affectionately called us the "karate kids" and a few of them even joined our class.

Everyone was also very interested in the other things we were into - everything from street fighting to motorcycles to backpacking in the mountains. Most working women, especially the older ones, just move back and forth between their homes and work; their lives are boring. Consequently, even the women who insisted they disapproved of student radicals would listen eagerly whenever I told stories of the street actions I had been in, and explained the issues behind them. From the very beginning, I was out front about my politics and my former involvement in the student movement. This opened me up to a lot of SDS baiting. Occasionally some people would even ask me if I were a communist, and I'd answer





"yes." It was important to expose myself before the company or the union got round to it. The women reacted strongly against this at first, but after a while their reactions were tempered by the fact that I was one of them, that I worked hard at the same job, and shared the same problems.

It's always important to relate to people as friends, not just political organizers. Mao emphasizes this when he says cadre should "learn from the people," "serve the people" and "become one with the people." For me this meant a lot of personal changes. At first it meant listening to the other women, coming to understand credit problems, the complications involved in raising kids and holding together a family, and the discipline of having to go to work every day, even when sick. As time passed I got more into some of the things they were into, like cooking, and tried to help out when problems came up. Simple things, like going to baby showers, and giving away ear cushions for the headsets do a lot to counter the image of communists as brain-washed people, sneaking around, blindly carrying out orders from Russia. One day I told an elder woman I was a communist, and she jumped. "Card-carrying?" she asked. I told her no, that I was a revolutionary communist, and she looked relieved. "That's nice," she said. Most of the women who knew I was a communist thought at first I was crazy, but they also thought I was nice.

A few women, however, took the ideas

I put forward very seriously. I constantly tried to link their hatred for the job with an understanding that the problems stemmed from the fact that the company was run for private profit, not according to the workers' needs. It made sense and they agreed. The next step was getting them to agree not to quit, but to stick around and organize everybody else. A few of us couldn't change much, but all of us, once we got it together, could change everything.

Once a friend and I sat down to talk about it, we decided there were ten things we wanted to change--things ranging from paid sick leave, to an end to secret observations, to free day care. I took the program to my next collective meeting, and a comrade suggested I read Lenin, What Is To Be Done, about the dangers of economism. After the meeting I stayed up all night studying chapters three and four. I'd tried to read these chapters before, but hadn't been able to wade through them, because I hadn't reached a point in my practice where it was necessary to use this theory to guide my practice to a higher level. When I got back together with my friend we wrote a militant, anti-imperialist preamble for the program, and added four demands--including an end to the 10% surtax on phone calls and the institution of free local calls from phone booths.

Lenin also tells us in What Is To Be Done that communists should work in the trade union movement but that they should

also build support among workers for all ongoing struggles against the state. In this country that means building support for struggles of black and brown people, and support for colonial liberation struggles, like Vietnam. It also means opposing the growing fascization of the state, and opposing the oppression and exploitation of women under imperialism. And it means unifying all working people, men and women, white and third world. Inside the phone company a handful of us began to build this united front by forming a radical caucus. We were men and women, communists and non-communists, from all the different locations. A fighter for one became a fighter for all. For the women it meant not only organizing among operators to oppose their exploitation as women, but organizing all phone workers to oppose the exploitation of all oppressed people.

BUILDING THE UNITED FRONT UNDER WORKING CLASS LEADERSHIP: applying the thought of Mao Tsetung.

Our first project was building support for the people of Vietnam. We put out a leaflet asking people to join us in the October Moratorium march and held a meeting where a Vietnam veteran showed his slides and rapped. A small group of new people came to the meeting, and we continued to have them, picking up a few contacts each week.

From the beginning we attended union meetings, and raised issues from the floor.

But, except for one meeting, where we were able to pass a resolution supporting the Indians on Alcatraz and donated union money to them we were usually outvoted or ruled out of order. The union wasn't about to let us turn it into a revolutionary organization, so more and more we turned to our own projects. We wanted to build solidarity between all working people, and we began by raising money and canned food for the GE strikers, and going to the picket line outside the local appliance store ourselves.

We are also trying to build support among the workers for third world struggles, including the right to self-determination. After the Indians moved onto Alcatraz and it was in the newspapers, we put out a leaflet titled, "Who Owns Alcatraz?" In the leaflet we tried to explain how the U.S. cavalry had slaughtered the Indians and pushed them off their land just as the modern imperialist army is attempting to slaughter the Vietnamese today. Response to the leaflet was good, but isolated leaflets, coming out irregularly, don't make much of an impact on workers. What's needed is a newsletter that comes out on a regular basis and links up issues less haphazardly.

At its peak thirty phone workers came to caucus meetings. Mostly they were people we met on the job, although some saw our leaflets and sought us out. We wanted the caucus to grow and encouraged everyone



to come to our meetings and help out with our projects. Eventually this led to serious problems. It's hard to integrate new people into an ongoing group without stopping everything, going back over the history of the group, and answering questions. It was necessary to define our unity principles and tighten up the organization of the caucus. We did this by setting up a steering committee, which met often and systematically tried to sum up the practice of the group. For example, when we were collecting food and blankets for the Indians we got permission from the company to place the boxes inside the buildings, where we set them up. Later we decided it had been a mistake to collaborate with the company, and from then on stood outside the buildings whenever we made collections.

Another more complex problem developed around a decision to disrupt a union meeting because the union had suspended stewards who were fighting back against racist discrimination in their office. Some caucus members had second thoughts about this tactic, so we discussed it again, this time stressing Mao's principle that correct ideas come from practice, and that the only way to know whether a decision is correct or not is to carry it out wholeheartedly, and then sum up the effects. If some of us disrupted the meeting, and the rest of us calmly raised issues from the floor, we'd have no way of knowing which tactic was correct. From past experience we already knew that when we raised issues from the floor, we were quickly ruled out of order. So we decided, once more, to disrupt the meeting, and did it. Later we summed up the effect of this action, and decided it had been the correct thing to do.

Then people began to ask about where they could read about where correct ideas come from. In this way some people came to appreciate Mao as a guide to action and began to read Mao.

As communists working in the caucus, another woman and I constantly put forward Mao Tsetung Thought as a guide to solving the problems we faced. We wanted to organize all the operators in the city, and we wanted all the other phone workers to support them. So keeping in mind Mao's principle that you should investigate a

problem thoroughly before attempting to solve it, we organized a fact-finding meeting of all the operators we knew in the city. At the meeting we collected numerous stories of severe harassment and injustice operators faced on the job. Later we printed up the material and distributed it widely among all phone workers. Investigating and then exposing the operator's problem was the way to solve it, because all the other phone workers could see the need to line up behind the operators, even if they weren't there already. Operators are the most oppressed sector of the phone workers, and any struggle that develops against the company will have to be based on them.

At one point, the caucus organized a one-day picket-line outside the company employment office, to protest the policy of barring women from jobs as installers, and other exclusively men's jobs. In organizing this demonstration around the real needs of working women, we were able to win the support of several women from NOW, National Organization of Women. NOW is made up of middle class women and has mainly concerned itself with the problems of middle class and upper class women. In this case, the NOW sisters followed the leadership of the caucus, and even got two male contacts they had to apply for work as operators the same day as our demonstration. The company did not change its hiring practices but this action did change the thinking of a lot of women, and men, working at the phone company, and of a number of NOW women, who began to see the importance of basing the struggle for women's liberation on the working class.

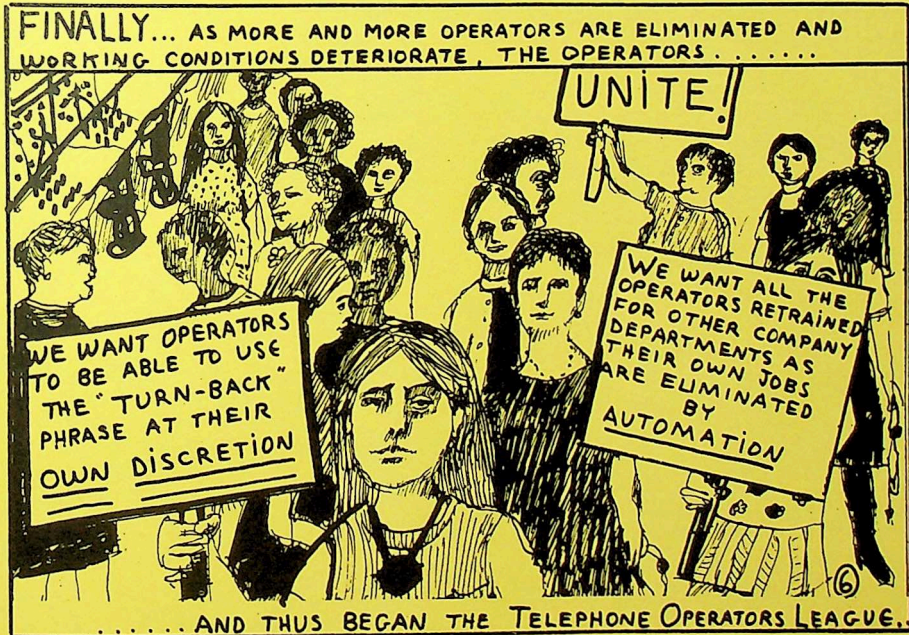
Working closely together enabled RU comrades to develop our work as rapidly as we did. We criticized each other carefully because we wanted to correct our mistakes and serve the people better. Other comrades working on other jobs helped out by summing up their experiences and telling us about it. We tried to avoid each other's mistakes and adopt each other's successful methods of work. All of us were attempting to build caucuses in our workplaces, and eventually we planned to bring them together into a city-wide Workers' Com-

mittee. Drawing on the experience of comrades in nearby cities, we tried to avoid a narrow trade union approach to our work, and planned to branch out into an organization of working people where Third World men and women would plan a leading role.

The phone company caucus was about half men, half women. The women had played a leading role from the beginning, but in forming the caucus it was important to unite men and women. The primary struggle is class struggle. Throughout this country working women are exploited for huge profits, and all women are socially oppressed. These are basic components of

U.S. imperialism.

As communists, we have continually pointed out, through all our work with women in the phone company, that the liberation of women is bound up with the freedom of the entire working class. That women will only win complete freedom when the workers overthrow the dictatorship of the imperialist bosses and establish our own state: socialism. And revolution lies in combining the struggle for women's rights with all other struggles against the imperialist enemy, under the leadership of a real Communist Party representing the true interests of working women and all working people.



*I was born in old Kentucky,
in a coal camp born and bred,
I know all about the pinto beans,
bulldog gravy and cornbread,
And I know how the coal miners work
and slave in the coal mines every day
For a dollar in the company store,
for that is all they pay.*

*They take our very life blood,
they take our children's lives.
Take fathers away from children,
and husbands away from wives,
Coal miners, won't you organize,
wherever you may be,
And make this a land of freedom
for workers like you and me.*

*I am a coal miner's wife,
I'm sure I wish you well,
Let's sink this capitalist system
in the darkest pits of hell.*

Sara Gunning
Harlan County, Kentucky