

# **WOMEN'S LIBERATION & SOCIALISM**



**Revolutionary Workers League Papers No. 1**



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# Introduction

The oppression of fully one half of humanity—the oppression of women—poses a major challenge to all those who struggle for a fundamentally better social order. Since the new rise of the women's liberation movement in the sixties, hundreds of thousands of women have moved into struggle against their oppression. The rapid growth of the women's movement internationally has provoked many important debates concerning the character of women's oppression and how best to end it.

As a contribution to the discussions occurring within the English-Canadian women's movement, the Revolutionary Workers League is publishing the following two texts. Conceived as preparatory contributions for the next World Congress of the Fourth International, they represent an important development in the position of revolutionary Marxists regarding the struggle for the liberation of women. The sisters who have produced these texts are currently working to prepare a document for submission to the pre-World Congress discussion of the Fourth International.

The point of departure of the two texts is the analysis of the origins of the oppression of women. Revolutionary Marxists since Marx and Engels have maintained that the oppression of women is a product of class society. The capitalist system perpetuates and deepens this oppression through the institution of the patriarchal family. The sexual division of labor between men and women in the family forces women to bear the responsibility for domestic labor and the reproduction of the labor force. As increasing numbers of women enter the labor force, they are forced to carry a double burden.

Their superexploitation as workers in the labor market is justified and maintained by the notion that their "first" role lies in their responsibility for domestic labor. At the same time, the performance of that labor within the home lets the capitalist patriarchs off the hook. This work, so essential to life, is performed privately by women—and the system as a whole takes no social responsibility for it. The economic benefits to the capitalist system of the maintenance of the family are enormous. So too are the benefits the social system reaps from family socialization, which inculcates competitive and authoritarian values and ensures rigid and repressed sex roles.

On the basis of this analysis of the sources of women's oppression, and the form that it takes in capitalist society, revolutionary Marxists politically demarcate themselves from other currents in the women's movement.

Reformists (eg. liberal feminists, the NDP) maintain and encourage illusions in the system, proclaiming that simple reforms within the existing framework will be sufficient to resolve the problems of women.

The "radical" feminists fail to recognize that patriarchal relations are fundamentally determined by the particular form of class society which prevails and that the ruling class' instrument of domination—in capitalist society, the bourgeois state—actively defends the patriarchal

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institutions that oppress women. By directing their fire solely against men, these sisters confuse the agent of their oppression (men) with the real source of their oppression (the social system).

Revolutionary Marxists also differentiate from those who call themselves "Marxist-Leninists"—those who claim to be struggling for socialism but who ignore the role played by the patriarchal family in the oppression of women. As a result they focus on narrowly defined economic demands of women and downplay the struggles of women against their domestic slavery. A further political consequence of this error is their inability to understand the profound need for an autonomous women's movement.

Both the following texts express the perspective that there will be no liberation of women without a socialist revolution. However, that revolution cannot guarantee the end of women's oppression. It can only create the *necessary objective conditions* for the abolition of that oppression, including the socialization of domestic labor and control by women of their bodies. Women will continue to organize and fight to ensure that the victory of the socialist revolution is accompanied by a real transformation of the relations among men, women, and children in all aspects of life.

While the liberation of women is inextricably linked to the struggle for socialism, the question of the relation between the struggle of women and that of the working class as a whole is starkly posed. In English Canada, as elsewhere, the workers' movement has failed to mobilize seriously to fight the specific oppression of women.

In response, women in the advanced capitalist countries have begun to form their *own* organizations in order to direct and lead their struggles.

The international appearance of an autonomous women's movement represents a critical step forward in the radicalization of women, in their confidence, in their ability to fight for their needs, and in their refusal to subordinate their struggle to any other.

Revolutionary Marxists reject the idea that the existence of an autonomous women's movement divides the working class. It is true that the working class is divided (not only by sex, but by race, nationality, etc.). But these divisions, so useful to the maintenance of capitalism, can only be overcome through a process by which the majority of the working class learns to fight for the needs of all the oppressed. The autonomous women's movement is a key agency which can bring about the necessary change in consciousness.

On the one hand, all the oppressed must organize themselves in order to struggle against their specific oppression. On the other hand, it is absolutely vital for these movements of the oppressed to link themselves politically with the struggle of the working class to ensure victory over the common enemy.

This requires that the workers movement recognize the legitimacy of the women's movement and actively fight for the emancipation of women.

Only on this basis can a unity be forged that will ensure the victory of the socialist revolution and the full liberation of women.

## **Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation**

### **Draft Resolution for Fifth World Congress Since Reunification (11th World Congress)**

**Submitted by Mary-Alice Waters**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The following resolution was originally drafted in 1973 at the request of the United Secretariat in preparation for the February 1974 world congress of the Fourth International. It was published in the International Internal Discussion Bulletin in November 1973. (See IIDB Vol. X, No. 22.)

The women's liberation point was taken off the agenda on the eve of the 1974 congress, but the written discussion remained open and it was agreed to place it on the agenda for the next world congress, now scheduled for early 1978.

A number of changes have been made in the current editing of the resolution to take into account the development of the international women's liberation movement during the last three years.

The basic Marxist positions on women's oppression are part of the programmatic foundations of the Fourth International. However, we are discussing and adopting a full resolution on women's liberation for the first time in the international's history. With that in mind, the purpose of the following resolution is to set down our basic analysis of the character of women's oppression, and the place the struggle against that oppression occupies in our perspectives for all three sectors of the world revolution.

Conjunctural questions concerning tactics that guide our work in the women's liberation movement will be part of the pre-world congress discussion, reflecting our growing involvement in the movement in many countries. This



resolution, however, focuses on the more fundamental questions of analysis and political line that differentiate revolutionary Marxism from the various bourgeois, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist currents against which we contend. Its goal is to provide a basic orientation for the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

## I. THE CHARACTER OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

### The New Rise of Women's Struggles

1. Since the late 1960s a growing revolt by women against their oppression as a sex has emerged. Throughout the world, millions of women, especially young women—students, working women, housewives—are beginning to challenge some of the most fundamental features of their centuries-old oppression.

The first country in which this radicalization of women appeared in a significant way was the United States. It was announced by the blossoming of thousands of women's liberation groups and in the mobilization of tens of thousands of women in the August 26, 1970, demonstrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the victorious conclusion of the American women's suffrage struggle.

But the new wave of struggles by women in North America was not an exceptional and isolated development, as the spread of the women's liberation movement through the advanced capitalist countries soon demonstrated. In country after country, large-scale campaigns against reactionary abortion and contraception regulations as well as medieval marriage laws rapidly confirmed that the fight for women's liberation must be regarded as a fundamental component of the new rise of the world revolution.

In many countries this new rise of women's struggles preceded any widespread changes in the combativity of the organized labor movement. In every case, the movement rose outside of and independent from the existing

mass organizations of the working class, which were then obliged to respond to this new phenomenon. But the women's liberation movement came upon the historical scene as part of a more general upsurge of the working class, which took many forms, from economic strikes, to struggles against national oppression, to student demonstrations, to an international movement against the imperialist war in Vietnam.

2. This radicalization of women is unprecedented in the depth of the economic, social and political ferment it expresses and in its implications for the struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation.

Growing numbers of women are raising demands that challenge the specific forms the oppression of women takes under capitalism today. They are demanding the right to be able to participate with complete equality in all forms of economic and cultural activity—for example, equal education, equal access to jobs, equal pay for equal work.

In order to make this equality possible, women are searching for ways to end their domestic servitude. They are demanding that women's household chores be socialized. The most conscious recognize that society, as opposed to the individual family unit, should take responsibility for the young, the old, and the sick.

At the very center of the emerging women's liberation movement has been the fight to decriminalize abortion and make it available to all women. The right to control their own bodies, to *choose* whether to bear children, when, and how many, is seen by millions of women as an elementary precondition for their liberation.

Such demands go to the very heart of the specific oppression of women exercised through the family and strike at the pillars of class society.

3. The rise of women's liberation struggles on an international scale is one of the clearest symptoms of the depth of the social crisis of the bourgeois order today.

These struggles illustrate the degree to which the outmoded capitalist relations and institutions generate deepening contradictions in every sector of society and breed new expressions of the class struggle. The death agony of capitalism brings new layers into direct conflict



with the fundamental needs and prerogatives of the bourgeoisie, and brings forth new allies for the working class in its struggle to overthrow the capitalist system.

The fact that the women's liberation movement emerged as an international phenomenon even prior to the exacerbation of capitalism's worldwide economic problems in the mid-1970s only serves to underscore the deep social roots of this rebellion.

4. Women's oppression has been an essential feature of class society throughout the ages. But the practical tasks of uprooting its causes, as well as combating its effects, could not be posed on a mass scale before the era of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The fight for women's liberation is inseparable from the workers' struggle to abolish capitalism. It constitutes an integral part of the socialist revolution and the communist perspective of a classless society.

The replacement of the patriarchal family system rooted in private property by a superior organization of human relations is the prime objective of the socialist revolution. This process will accelerate and deepen as the material and ideological foundations of the new communist order are brought into being.

The development of the women's liberation movement today advances the class struggle, strengthens its forces, and enhances the prospects for socialism.

5. Women can achieve their liberation only through the victory of the world socialist revolution. This goal can be realized only by mobilizing masses of women as a powerful component of the class struggle. Therein lies the objective revolutionary dynamic of the struggle of women's liberation and the fundamental reason why the Fourth International must concern itself with, and help to provide revolutionary leadership for, women struggling to achieve their liberation.

### **Origin and Nature of Women's Oppression**

1. The oppression of women is not determined by their biology, as many contend. Its origins are historical, economic, and social in character. Throughout the evolu-

tion of pre-class and class society, women's reproductive function has always been the same. But their social status has not always been that of a degraded domestic servant, subject to man's control and command.

2. In preclass society, where social production was organized communally and its product shared equally, there was no basis for exploitation or oppression of one social group or sex by another. Both sexes participated in assuring the sustenance and survival of all, with women playing a leadership role. The social status of both women and men reflected the roles each of the sexes performed in social production and the activities of everyday life.

3. The origin of women's oppression is intertwined with the growing productivity of human labor based on agriculture and stock raising; with the rise of new divisions of labor, craftsmanship, and commerce; with the private appropriation of an increasing social surplus; with the development of the possibility for some humans to prosper from the exploitation of the labor of others; that is, with the passage from preclass to class society.

Along with the private accumulation of wealth, the patriarchal family developed as the institution by which responsibility for the unproductive members of society—especially the young—was transferred from society as a whole to an identifiable individual or small group of individuals. It was the primary institution for perpetuating from one generation to the next the class divisions of society—divisions between those who possessed property and lived off the wealth produced by the labor of others, and those who, owning no property, had to work for others to live. The destruction of the egalitarian and communal traditions and structures of preclass society was essential for the rise of an exploiting class and its accelerated private accumulation of wealth.

As the exploitation of human beings became profitable for a privileged few, women as a sex became valuable property. Like cattle, they were a source of wealth. They could produce new human beings whose labor could be exploited. Thus the purchase of women by men along with all rights to their future offspring arose as one of the economic and social institutions of the new social order



based on private property.

All women, including the wives and daughters of the new possessing class, were progressively deprived of an independent role in social production and relegated to basically domestic chores as men took over the new social divisions of labor. This brought about the subordinate status of women on which the cohesiveness and continuity of the patriarchal family depends. If women could simply take their children and leave, without suffering any economic or social hardship, the patriarchal family would not have survived through the millennia. Thus the subjugation of women was based on the historical dialectic of economic and social factors, not biology.

Deprived of an independent productive role in society, women's social status was increasingly defined by their reproductive capacities. Like land, livestock, and slaves (both male and female), women became the private property of the men who owned them. Indeed, the word family itself, which is still used in the Latin-based languages today to designate the basic economic unit of class society, comes from the original Latin *famulus*, which means household slave and *familia*, the totality of slaves belonging to one man.

The patriarchal family, based on the subjugation of women, thus came into existence along with the other institutions of class society in order to buttress class divisions and perpetuate the private accumulation of wealth. The state, with its police and armies, laws and courts, enforced this. Ruling-class ideology, including religion, arose on this basis and played a vital role in justifying the degradation of the female sex.

Women, it was said, were physically and mentally inferior to men and therefore were "naturally" or biologically the second sex. While the subjugation of women has always had different consequences for women of distinct classes, all women regardless of class are oppressed as part of the female sex.

4. The family system is the institution of class society that determines and maintains the specific character of the oppression of women as a sex.

5. Through the history of class society, the family

system has proved its value as an institution of class rule. The form of the family has evolved and adapted itself to the changing needs of the ruling classes as the modes of production and forms of private property have gone through different stages of development.

The family system simultaneously fulfills different requirements in relationship to classes whose historical interests are diametrically opposed. What could today be called the bourgeois "family" and the petty-bourgeois "family" serve very different social and economic functions. Together, however, they constitute the contemporary form of the family system—an economic and social institution of class rule whose important social functions have remained constant throughout the history of class society. While the patriarchal family system to some extent and in a distorted way allows for the fulfillment of various individual human needs, such as love and companionship, this in no way defines the basic nature of the family system.

a. The family is the basic economic unit of class society. It is the mechanism through which the ruling class abrogates social responsibility for the well-being of the direct producers—the masses of humanity. The ruling class tries, to the degree possible, to force each family to be responsible for its own.

b. The family system provides the means for passing on property ownership from one generation to the next. It is the basic social mechanism for perpetuating the division of society into classes.

c. For the ruling classes, the family system provides the most inexpensive and ideologically acceptable mechanism for reproducing human labor. It enforces a social division of labor in which women are fundamentally reduced to a reproductive role and assigned limited tasks immediately associated with this reproductive function: care of the other family members. Thus the family institution rests on and reinforces a social division of labor involving the domestic subjugation and economic dependence of women.

d. The family system is a repressive and conservatizing institution that reproduces within itself the hierarchical,



authoritarian relationships necessary to the maintenance of class society as a whole. It fosters the possessive, competitive, and aggressive attitudes necessary to the perpetuation of class divisions.

It molds the behavior and character structure of children from infancy through adolescence. It trains, disciplines, and polices them, teaching submission to established authority. It then curbs rebellious, nonconformist impulses. It represses sexuality, forcing it into socially acceptable channels of male and female sexual activity for reproductive purposes and socioeconomic roles. It inculcates all the social values and behavioral norms that individuals must acquire in order to survive in class society and submit to its domination. It distorts all human relationships by imposing on them the framework of economic compulsion, social dependence, and sexual repression.

6. Under capitalism, the family system also provides the mechanism for the superexploitation of women as wage workers.

a. It provides capitalism with an exceptionally flexible reservoir of labor that can be drawn into the labor force or sent back into the home with fewer social consequences than any other component of the reserve army of labor.

Because the entire ideological superstructure reinforces the fiction that women's place is in the home, high unemployment rates for women cause relatively less social protest. After all, it is said, women work only to supplement an already existing source of income for the family. When they are unemployed, they are occupied with their household chores, and are not so obviously "out of work." The anger and resentment they feel is often dissipated as a serious social threat by the general isolation and atomization of women in separate, individual households.

b. Because women's "natural" place is supposed to be in the home, capitalism has a widely accepted rationalization for perpetuating:

1) the employment of women in low-paying, unskilled jobs. "They aren't worth training because they'll only get pregnant or married and quit."

2) unequal pay rates and low pay. "They're only working to buy gadgets and luxuries anyway."

3) deep divisions within the working class itself along sex lines. "She's taking a job a man should have."

c. This superexploitation of women as a reserve work force plays an irreplaceable role in holding down men's wages as well.

d. Capitalism's inexorable drive to incorporate more women into the productive process, in order to increase surplus value, has a limit and built-in contradiction.

The process of drawing women into the competitive labor market brings them a degree of economic independence that begins to undermine the acceptance by women of their domestic subjugation. As a result, the family system is undermined and begins to disintegrate.

But the family system is an indispensable pillar of class society. It must be preserved if capitalism is to survive.

This contradiction leads to periodic attempts to push women out of production and back into the home whenever the process of integration into the work force has gone too far, forcing the ruling class to assume too large a portion of the social costs normally borne by the family (such as widespread child-care facilities, public cafeterias, etc.).

A cyclical process of drawing women into the labor market, then forcing them back into the home, also results from the fact that women, as a component of the reserve army of labor, are drawn into production at a rapid pace only when capitalism is in a period of accelerated expansion.

e. The subjugation of women within the family system provides the economic, social, and ideological foundations that make their superexploitation possible. Women workers are exploited not only as wage labor but also as a pariah labor pool defined by sex. Thus women workers are doubly oppressed.

7. Because the oppression of women is historically intertwined with the division of society into classes and with the role of the family as the basic economic unit of class society, this oppression can only be eradicated with the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the transfer to society as a whole of the



social and economic functions borne under capitalism by the individual family.

8. The materialist analysis of the historical origin and economic roots of women's oppression is essential to developing a program and perspective capable of winning women's liberation. To reject this scientific explanation inevitably leads to one of two errors:

a. One error, made by many who claim to follow the Marxist method, is to deny, or at least downplay, the oppression of women as a sex throughout the entire history of class society. They see the oppression of women purely and simply as an aspect of the exploitation of the working class. This view gives weight and importance to struggles by women only in their capacity as workers, on the job. It says women will be liberated, in passing, by the socialist revolution, so there is no special need for them to organize as women fighting for their own demands.

b. A symmetrical error is made by many anti-Marxists (as well as by some revolutionists). They deny that the struggle for women's liberation is an aspect of the class struggle. They hold that the oppression of women by men is unrelated to class divisions.

The anti-Marxists who support this view reject the socialist revolution as the road to women's liberation because they deny that women's oppression is rooted in private ownership of the means of production. While they favor women organizing themselves in struggle, they see no need for the working class to take power. They see no need to build a revolutionary party of the working class, male and female, to lead such a struggle for power.

Both of these one-sided approaches deny the revolutionary dynamic of the struggle for women's liberation as a form of the class struggle. Both fail to recognize that the struggle for women's liberation, to be successful, must go beyond the bounds of capitalist property relations. Both reject the implications this fact has for the working class and its revolutionary Marxist leadership.

## Roots of the New Radicalization of Women

1. The women's liberation movement of today stands on

the shoulders of the earlier struggles by women at the turn of the century.

With the rise and consolidation of industrial capitalism during the 1880's, increasing numbers of women were integrated into the competitive labor market. The gap between the social and legal status of women inherited from feudalism and their new economic status as wage workers selling their labor in the market, produced glaring contradictions. For women of the ruling class, too, capitalism opened the door to economic independence. Out of these contradictions arose the first wave of women's struggles aimed at winning full legal equality with men.

Revolutionary Marxists played a significant role in these struggles by women to win for themselves many of the democratic rights popularized and institutionalized during the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. In Western Europe and North America, large numbers of working-class as well as upper-class and petty-bourgeois women were involved.

Through struggle the women of the most advanced capitalist countries won, to varying degrees, several important democratic rights: the right to higher education, the right to engage in trades and professions, the right to receive and dispose of their own wages (which had been considered the right of the husband or father), the right to own property, the right to divorce, the right to form and participate in political organizations. In several countries this first upsurge culminated in mass struggles that won the vote for women.

2. Women's suffrage, following or sometimes accompanying universal male suffrage, was an important gain for the working class. It reflected, and in turn helped advance, the changing social status of women. For the first time in class society, women were considered citizens fit to participate in public affairs, with the right to a voice on major political questions, not just household matters.

The underlying cause of the oppression and subordinate status of women lies in the very foundations of class society itself and women's special role within the family, not in the formal denial of equality under the law. Nevertheless, the extension of democratic rights to women helped the masses of women to fight more effectively



against all forms of their oppression and helped to expose the deeper roots of their problems.

3. It is not surprising that the resurgence of the women's movement today first came about in the most advanced capitalist countries—such as the United States, Canada, and Britain—where many democratic rights have been won and where a tradition of militant struggle by women survives. The radicalization spread rapidly to other advanced capitalist countries.

It was generally the young, college-educated women, those who enjoyed a relatively greater freedom of choice, and those most affected by the youth radicalization of the 1960s, who first articulated the grievances of women in an organized and outspoken way. This led many economist-Marxists to conclude that women's liberation is basically a middle-class or bourgeois protest movement that has no serious interest for revolutionists or the masses of working-class women. They are wrong.

The early development of the women's liberation movement serves only to emphasize the depth and scope of women's oppression. Even those with many advantages in terms of education and other opportunities were and continue to be propelled into action. The most oppressed and exploited are not necessarily the first to articulate their discontent.

But feminist consciousness spread rapidly into the working class, giving impetus to struggles by women workers and spurring the formation of women's caucuses within the labor movement.

4. The roots of the new radicalization of women lie in the objective economic and social changes of the post-World War II years, which have brought deepening contradictions in the capitalist economy, in the status of women, and in the patriarchal family system.

a. Advances in medical science and technology in the field of birth control and abortion have created the means by which masses of women can control their reproductive functions with relative safety and ease. Control by women over their own bodies is a precondition for women's liberation.

While such medical techniques are more widely availa-

ble, reactionary laws, reinforced by bourgeois customs, religious bigotry, and the entire ideological superstructure of class society, often stand in the way of women exercising control over their own reproductive functions. Financial, legal, psychological, and "moral" barriers are literally manufactured to try to prevent women from demanding the right to choose whether and when to bear children.

This contradiction between what is possible and what is affects the life of every woman. It has given rise to the powerful abortion struggles, which have been at the center of the women's movement on an international scale.

b. The prolonged boom conditions of the post-war expansion significantly increased the percentage of women in the labor force.

To take the example of the United States, in 1950, 33.9 percent of all women 18 to 64 years of age were in the labor force. By 1974 this had risen to 53 percent. Between 1960 and 1970, two-thirds of all new jobs created were taken by women. Working women accounted for 29.1 percent of the total labor force in 1950; 39.3 percent by 1974.

Equally important, the percentage of working women with children increased dramatically, as did the percentage of working women who were heads of households.

Similar statistics can be cited for other advanced capitalist countries. For example, in Britain between 1881 and 1951 the proportion of women in employment was fairly stable, remaining at about 25 to 27 percent. By 1965, 34 percent of all women between 16 and 64 were in full-time employment, 17.9 percent were in part-time employment, and a total of 54.3 percent came within the category of "economically active." Nearly two-thirds of the working women were married.

As this influx of women into the labor force has taken place, there has been no substantial change in the degree of wage discrimination against women. In many countries this differential between the sexes has actually widened.

This is primarily because of the fact that the increased employment of women has not been spread evenly over all job categories. On the contrary, the proportion of women holding low-paying jobs has increased. Thus the growing number of women entering the labor force has resulted in



accentuating the discrimination against them relative to male workers.

In 1955 the median income of full-time, year-round women workers in the United States was 64 percent of that of men who were employed full-time and year-round. By 1975 it had fallen to 57 percent.

c. The rise in the average educational level of women has further heightened these contradictions. Capitalism's need for more highly skilled labor has resulted in the acceptance of women into institutions of higher education on a qualitatively larger scale than ever before.

Yet, as the employment statistics indicate, the percentage of women holding jobs commensurate with their educational level has not kept pace. In all areas of the job market, from industry to the professions, women with higher educational qualifications are usually bypassed by men with less education.

As they receive more education and their individual expectations are raised, the stifling and mind-deadening drudgery of household chores and the constrictions of family life become increasingly unbearable to women. Thus the heightened educational level of women has deepened the contradiction between women's demonstrated abilities and broadened aspirations, and their actual social and economic status.

d. The functions of the family unit in advanced capitalist society have contracted further. It has become less and less a unit of petty production—either agricultural or domestic (canning, weaving, sewing, baking, etc.). The urban nuclear family of today is a long way from the productive farm family of previous centuries.

As the standard of living rises, the average number of children per family declines sharply, industrially prepared foods become increasingly available, modern technology is applied to many housekeeping chores. The objective basis for confining women to the home becomes less and less compelling. Yet the needs of the ruling class dictate that the family system must be preserved. Bourgeois ideology and social conditioning continue to reinforce the reactionary fiction that a woman's identity and fulfillment must come from her role as wife-mother-housekeeper. The contradiction between reality and myth becomes increas-

ingly obvious and intolerable to growing numbers of women.

5. The postwar economic and social changes that have accelerated these contradictions, especially in the advanced capitalist countries, and laid the groundwork for the radicalization of women have dictated the radical thrust of the demands they are raising.

Greater democratic rights and broader social opportunities have not "satisfied" women, or inclined them to a passive acceptance of their inferior social status and economic dependence. On the contrary, they have stimulated new struggles and more far-reaching demands.

6. While the women's radicalization has a dynamic of its own, determined by the specific character of women's oppression and the objective changes that have been described, it is not isolated from the more general upsurge of the class struggle taking place today. It is not mechanically dependent on other social forces, subordinate to their leadership, or beholden to their initiative; but the women's movement has been and remains deeply interconnected with other social struggles and will share their fate.

From the beginning, the new upsurge of women's struggles has been strongly affected by the international youth radicalization. The increased questioning of all traditional bourgeois values has had a sharp impact on attitudes toward the family and sexual oppression.

The radicalization of women has also been fueled by the colonial revolution and the liberation struggles of oppressed nationalities such as the Black struggle in the United States. This has been important in bringing about a widespread awareness and rejection of racist stereotypes. The obvious similarities between racist attitudes and sexist stereotypes of women as inferior, emotional, dependent, dumb-but-happy creatures produced an increasing sensitivity to and rejection of such caricatures.

The women's liberation movement was also deeply influenced by the post-May 1968 rise of working-class militancy in many of the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. The growing combativity of important sectors of the organized labor movement, including women workers, led many to examine the relationship between class



exploitation and the oppression of women, and search for perspectives that could lead to an eradication of both.

The end of the postwar boom and the deepening economic, social, and political problems of imperialism on a world scale, highlighted by the 1974-75 international recession, have not brought about a decline in women's struggles, or relegated them to the sidelines while "more important" social forces came to the fore. Far from diminishing as the struggles of the organized working class sharpened in recent years, feminist consciousness and struggles by women continued to spread. They have been a powerful motor force of social protest and political radicalization.

Advanced capitalist countries such as Spain that were little touched by the rise of the women's movement in the early 1970s experienced an explosion of feminist struggles in 1976 as the post-Franco era opened. In Italy, mass mobilizations by women for the right to divorce and abortion provoked more than one governmental crisis. Resistance by women to being driven out of their newly acquired places in the work force, and broad female opposition to social cutbacks such as the closing of child-care centers, have created unexpectedly thorny problems for the rulers in many countries. Imbued with a growing feminist consciousness, women have been more combative and less willing than ever before to shoulder a disproportionate burden in the current economic crisis.

### **Women's Liberation in the Colonial and Semicolonial World**

1. Women's liberation is not a matter of interest only to relatively privileged women of the advanced capitalist countries, as some have contended. On the contrary, it is of vital concern and importance to the masses of women throughout the world. In its own distorted way, even the International Women's Year proclaimed by the United Nations in 1975 brought this fact home.

2. In many colonial and semicolonial countries, women have not yet won some of the most elementary democratic rights secured by women in the advanced capitalist

countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Even where formal legal equality does exist, the masses of women suffer crushing oppression. They are subject to the most reactionary, stifling prejudices, and are often considered scarcely human. In some countries women are still sold into marriage and denied the right to divorce; they can be murdered with impunity for violating the "honor" of their men. From cradle to grave they are ruled over, first by father and brother, then by husband or in-law. For many women the only alternatives are prostitution or suicide. Their life is one of hard domestic labor. They are totally dependent economically, denied access to education, unacquainted with modern contraceptive methods, and often bear child after child in the hopes of finding economic security in old age. Because of the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth, especially without adequate medical care and proper diet, women suffer a significantly higher mortality rate than men.

3. Centuries-old traditions and conditions remain relatively unchanged for the masses of peasant women who comprise the bulk of the female population in most of the semicolonial world. In this they are not unlike the Russian women in 1917. But the pressure of the world capitalist market is bringing changes that are affecting the situation of more privileged layers of women. The demand for more skilled labor has meant an increase in the number of young women who gain access to education and jobs. The student radicalization, as well as the women's liberation movement in other parts of the world, has encouraged those women to begin to challenge their oppression as women. The spread of birth control methods, even where prompted by reactionary goals, has brought a measure of relief from unwanted pregnancy to a section of women able to take advantage of the advanced medical technology.

These changes in the status of some layers of women, and the ever greater penetration of the capitalist market, mean that movement by women against their oppression and superexploitation will be an increasingly important part of the fight for national liberation and social revolution in the semicolonial and colonial world.

4. The importance of the struggle for women's liberation



in the colonial world has long been a distinguishing feature of the program of revolutionary Marxism in those countries. This was stressed in the resolutions of the third and fourth congresses of the Comintern, which drew special attention to the exemplary work of the Chinese Communists in organizing and leading the mobilizations of women that were part of the second Chinese revolution.

5. The role and importance we ascribe to the fight for women's liberation and the program we put forward for achieving it separate us from nonproletarian forces contending for leadership of the colonial revolution.

The struggle for women's liberation has always been intertwined with national liberation struggles. Large numbers of women invariably come forward to participate. Their active role is crucially necessary, and in the process of the developing struggle, women begin to break down the old barriers excluding them from political activity and greater social freedom. The deep contradictions they live with can only stimulate the revolt by women against their oppression as a sex, and trigger demands for greater equality within the revolutionary movement as well.

In Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, Palestine, and elsewhere, struggles by women to end the most brutal forms of the oppression they suffer have been closely intertwined with unfolding revolutions. But attitudes and policies concerning the demands and needs of women are inevitably one of the acid tests of the revolutionary caliber, perspective, and program of any leadership.

Revolutionary Marxists pay special attention to women and aim to play a leading role in mobilizing them to fight for their needs because our goal is to overturn private property relations and reconstruct society on a socialist basis. We know this cannot be done without women playing a conscious and leading role.

6. The crushing weight of women's oppression in the colonial and semicolonial countries gives struggles by women a particularly explosive character. Struggles beginning around elementary democratic rights can rapidly evolve to encompass additional demands relating to the broad range of urgent social needs of the masses of proletarian and peasant women. This process was clearly

evident in China, for example, where the struggle for liberation of women from both feudal traditions and the effects of imperialist domination became an important component of the revolution. Even the demand for freedom to cut their hair provided a starting point for the radicalization of women, leading to struggles of increasing social weight and political impact.

7. The direct involvement of sections of the Fourth International in women's struggles in the semicolonial countries has been limited. The initiatives taken by the Indian Communist League, the literature published by the Argentine PST, the analytical work done by the Iranian Sattar League, together with the early experiences of the Chinese Trotskyists, provide a starting point and useful guide for developing our women's liberation work in the colonial and semicolonial countries.

In 1972 the Communist League Central Committee adopted a resolution concerning the struggle for women's liberation on the Indian subcontinent. It emphasized the importance of this question in the construction of a revolutionary Marxist party in India today.

The resolution pointed to a number of factors that have brought changes in prevailing attitudes toward women on the Indian subcontinent and a rise in the self-confidence of educated and employed women in particular. These factors included the expansion of women's education since 1947; the expansion of opportunities for the employment of women; the rising cost of living, which forces wives to take employment; the possibility of family planning; and the existence of a political framework that permits women to hold elected public offices.

The resolution noted:

"The struggle against the social oppression of women will develop around the demands of free education for women, free hostels for women students, hostel facilities for employed women, child-care centers and cheap hotels for married women, reservation of jobs and the end of discrimination in employment and promotion, a lighter workload, fewer working hours, liberal conditions of work, including transfer only on demand. As the struggle develops, more basic and fundamental questions will be taken up, including the abrogation of Hindu and Muslim



personal laws on marriage, inheritance, and divorce; the right to free marriage and divorce, especially in cases of physical and mental torture and restrictions on personal freedom; the right to free legal abortions and women's control over their own bodies."

To help lead women's struggles to their logical anticapitalist conclusion, the resolution called for the formation of independent, mass-based, and democratically controlled women's groups, organized as united fronts on a concrete action program.

### **Women in the Workers States: Liberation Betrayed**

1. The October 1917 revolution in Russia and each subsequent socialist victory brought significant gains for women, including democratic rights and integration into the productive labor force. The measures enacted by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky demonstratively showed that the proletarian revolution meant immediate steps forward for women.

Between 1917 and 1927 the Soviet government passed a series of laws giving women legal equality with men for the first time. Marriage became a simple registration process that had to be based on mutual consent. The concept of illegitimacy was abolished. Free, legal abortion was made every woman's right. By 1927, marriages did not have to be registered, and divorce was granted on the request of either partner. Antihomosexual laws were eliminated.

Free, compulsory education to the age of 16 was established for all children of both sexes. Legislation gave women workers special maternity benefits.

The 1919 program of the Communist Party stated: "The party's task at the present moment is primarily work in the realm of ideas and education so as to destroy utterly all traces of the former inequality or prejudices, particularly among backward strata of the proletariat and peasantry. Not confining itself to formal equality of women, the party strives to liberate them from the material burdens of obsolete household work by replacing it by communal houses, public eating places, central laundries, nurseries, etc." This program was implemented to the extent possible

given the economic backwardness and poverty of the new Soviet Republic, and the devastation caused by almost a decade of war and civil war.

A conscious attempt was made to begin combating the reactionary social norms and attitudes toward women which reflected the reality of a country whose population was still overwhelmingly peasant and in which the dead weight of feudal tradition still hung over all social relations.

2. The decimation and exhaustion of the working class vanguard, and the crushing of the postwar revolutionary upsurges in Western Europe, laid the basis for the triumph of the counterrevolutionary bureaucratic caste, headed by Stalin, in the 1920s. While the economic foundations of the new workers state were not destroyed, a privileged social layer that appropriated for itself many of the benefits of the new economic order grew rapidly in the fertile soil of Russia's poverty. To protect and extend its new privileges, the bureaucracy reversed the policies of Lenin and Trotsky in virtually every sphere, from government based on soviet democracy, to control by the workers over economic planning, to the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination, to a proletarian internationalist foreign policy.

By the late 1930s the counterrevolution had physically annihilated the entire surviving Bolshevik leadership and established a dictatorship that to this day keeps hundreds of thousands in prison camps, psychiatric hospitals and exile, and ruthlessly crushes every murmur of opposition.

For women, the Stalinist counterrevolution led to a policy of reviving and fortifying the family system.

Trotsky described this process as follows: "Genuine emancipation of women is inconceivable without a general rise of economy and culture, without the destruction of the petty-bourgeois economic family unit, without the introduction of socialized food preparation and education. Meanwhile, guided by its conservative instinct, the bureaucracy has taken alarm at the 'disintegration' of the family. It began singing panegyrics to the family supper and the family laundry, that is, the household slavery of woman. To cap it all, the bureaucracy has restored criminal punishment for abortions, officially returning



women to the status of pack animals. In complete contradiction with the ABC of communism the ruling caste has thus restored the most reactionary and benighted nucleus of the class regime, i.e., the petty-bourgeois family" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38*, 2nd ed., 1976, p. 129).

3. The most important factor facilitating this retrogression was the cultural and material backwardness of Russian society, which did not have the resources necessary to construct adequate child-care centers, sufficient housing, public laundries, and housekeeping and dining facilities to eliminate the material basis for women's oppression.

But beyond these objective limitations the reactionary Stalinist bureaucracy consciously gave up the perspective of moving in a systematic way to socialize the burdens carried by women, and instead began to glorify the family system, attempting to bind families together through legal restrictions and economic compulsion.

As Trotsky pointed out in the *Revolution Betrayed*, "The retreat not only assumes forms of disgusting hypocrisy, but also is going infinitely farther than the iron economic necessity demands."

The bureaucracy reinforced the family system for one of the same reasons it is maintained by capitalist society—as a means of inculcating attitudes of submission to authority and for perpetuating the privileges of a minority. Trotsky explained that "the most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of forty million points of support for authority and power."

As part of this counterrevolution, the old tsarist laws against homosexuality were dusted off and reintroduced.

The conditions created by the proletarian revolution and Stalinist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union have not been mechanically reproduced in every workers state formed since 1917. Important differences exist, reflecting historical, cultural, economic, and social variations from one country to another, even one region to another. But maintenance of the economic and social inferiority of women and bolstering of the family institution as the

norm of social relationships is official policy in all the deformed workers states from China to East Germany.

4. The promotion and glorification of the family system have resulted in perpetuating the traditional burden of women, the double day's work, inside and outside the home. According to the official 1970 Soviet Union census, 90 percent of all urban women between the ages of 16 and 54 hold jobs outside the home. Yet the average Soviet woman spends four to seven hours a day on housework in addition to eight hours on an outside job.

The perpetuation of the responsibility of women for the domestic chores associated with child-raising, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for the personal needs of other members of the family unit is the economic and social basis for the disadvantages and prejudices faced by women and the resulting discrimination in jobs and wages. This deeply affects the way women view themselves, their role in society, and the goals they seek to attain.

While 50 percent of the wage earners in the Soviet Union are women, they are concentrated disproportionately in lower-paying, less responsible jobs, and in traditional female sectors of production and services. For example, 43.6 percent of all women still work in agriculture, while another quarter are employed in the textile industry. Eighty percent of all primary and secondary-school teachers, and 100 percent of all preschool teachers, are women. In 1970 only 6.6 percent of all industrial enterprises were headed by women. According to 1966 statistics, average women's wages were 69.3 percent of men's—up from 64.4 percent in 1924!

More than 40 percent of all scientists are women, but only 3 out of 243 full members of the Soviet Academy of Science are women. In the national political arena, only 8 of the 287 full members of the Communist Party Central Committee are women. There are no women in the Politburo.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as in the advanced capitalist countries, sufficient material wealth and technology today exist to significantly alleviate the double burden of women. Yet the distortions introduced in economic planning and the productive process because of



the absence of democratic control over production by the workers and the domination of the privileged bureaucratic caste are a source of resentments. Women feel the dead weight of the bureaucracy in this respect even more than men because they are forced to compensate for the distortions in the economy through the double day's labor they perform.

In the last decade, these potentially explosive resentments have forced the bureaucracy to plan expanded production in consumer goods and increased social services. But the supply of consumer goods continues to lag behind the needs and growing expectations of the masses of Soviet women. Social services also remain sorely inadequate. For example, while child-care facilities are more widespread than in advanced capitalist countries, crèches in Leningrad are able to accommodate only 13 percent of the children of preschool age. According to the official 1970 statistics, this figure rises to two-thirds by the level of kindergarten.

The Stalinist bureaucracies have also repudiated the view of Lenin and other leaders of the Russian revolution that unrestricted access to abortion is a woman's elementary democratic right. While legal abortion is generally available in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the ruling castes have repeatedly curtailed this right, frequently placing humiliating conditions as well as economic penalties on women seeking abortions (such as denial of paid sick-leave time to obtain an abortion or refusal to cover abortions as a free medical procedure). The more reliable birth control methods are generally unavailable. Women's right to abortion is subordinated to the twists and turns of bureaucratically conceived economic plans and social politics.

5. Women in the deformed and degenerated workers states will not win their full liberation short of a political revolution that removes the bureaucratic caste from power and restores workers democracy. Although there are as yet few signs of any rising consciousness concerning the oppression of women, there is no iron curtain between the advanced capitalist countries and the workers states, especially between Eastern and Western Europe. Women in the workers states will inevitably be affected by the

radicalization of women elsewhere and the demands they are raising.

The struggle of women for their liberation will be a significant component of the process of challenging and overturning the privileged bureaucratic regimes and establishing socialist democracy. Demands for the socialization of domestic labor in particular are an important aspect of the transitional program for the coming political revolution.

In some respects, in comparison with the capitalist countries, the economic independence and status of women in the workers states provide a positive example. But Soviet history also strikingly confirms the fact that the family institution is the cornerstone of the oppression of women. As long as it is sustained and nurtured as official policy, as long as its functions are not fully taken over by superior social institutions, the truly equal integration of women in productive life and all social affairs is impossible.

The Stalinist counterrevolution on women and the family, and the continued inequality of women in the workers states, today comprise one of the obstacles to winning radicalized women elsewhere to revolutionary Marxism. As with all other questions, the policies of Stalinism are often equated with Leninism rather than recognized for what they are—the negation of Leninism. Women fighting for their liberation elsewhere often look to the workers states and say, "If this is what socialism does for women, we don't need it." Many anti-Marxists pointed to the situation of women in the workers states as "proof" that the road to women's liberation is not through class struggle. Thus the fight to win the leadership of feminists in other parts of the world is interrelated with the development of the political revolution in the deformed and degenerated workers states.

## II. THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

### Our Perspective

1. The Fourth International welcomes and champions



the emergence of a new wave of struggles by women to end their centuries-old oppression. By fighting in the front lines of these battles, we demonstrate that the world party of socialist revolution can provide a leadership capable of carrying the struggle for women's liberation through to its conclusion. Our goal is to win the confidence and leadership of the masses of women by showing that our program and our class-struggle policies will lead to the elimination of women's oppression along the path of successful proletarian revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society.

2. This perspective of the Fourth International stands in the long tradition of revolutionary Marxism. It is based on the following considerations:

a. We recognize that the oppression of women is indispensable to the maintenance of class society in general and capitalism in particular. The struggle by masses of women against their oppression therefore has an anticapitalist thrust.

b. We recognize that women fighting for their liberation are a powerful ally of the working class as a whole in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Without the socialist revolution women cannot achieve their liberation. Without the mobilization of masses of women in struggle for their own liberation the working class cannot accomplish its historic tasks.

c. We recognize that the struggle for women's liberation touches some of the most basic needs of women, especially the most exploited and oppressed layers. It is an avenue to reach and mobilize them.

d. We recognize that educating the masses of workers through propaganda, agitation, and action around the needs of women is an essential part of the struggle to break the stranglehold of reactionary bourgeois ideology within the working class. It is an indispensable part of the politicalization and revolutionary education of the workers vanguard and the construction of a mass revolutionary party of the working class.

e. We recognize that it is only by consistently championing the demands and needs of the most oppressed and exploited layers of the class—the women, the oppressed nationalities, the immigrant workers, the youth, the

unorganized—that the full power and united strength of the workers can be brought to bear. Part of the fight to transform the trade unions into instruments of revolutionary struggle in the interests of the entire working class is educating the organized labor movement to fight for the demands of women.

In other words, our goal is not only to lead the women's liberation movement in a revolutionary direction but also to convince the working class as a whole and its organizations to recognize and champion struggles by women as their own.

f. The struggle against the oppression of women is not a secondary or peripheral issue. It is a life and death matter for the workers movement, especially in a period of sharpening class polarization.

Because of women's place in class society and the hold of the ideology that buttresses their inferior status, women as a whole are a special target for all clerical, reactionary, and fascist organizations. Whether it is the Christian Democrats, the Falange, or the opponents of abortion rights, reaction makes a special appeal to women for support, claiming to address women's particular needs, playing upon their economic dependence under capitalism, and promising to relieve the inordinate burden women bear during any period of social crisis.

From the "kinder-kirche-kueche" propaganda of the Nazi movement to the Christian Democrats' mobilization of middle-class women in Chile for the march of the empty pots, history has demonstrated time and again that the reactionary mystique of motherhood-and-family is one of the most powerful conservatizing weapons wielded by the ruling class.

With a correct program and a resolute struggle to help win the demands being raised by the women's movement, the revolutionary party can mobilize broad fighting layers of women on the side of the revolution. The new radicalization of women and the changes in consciousness and attitudes make it more difficult for reaction to prevail. But the Social Democrats, the Stalinists, and the centrists are incapable of showing the masses of women how to escape the reactionary trap, to give them a perspective of struggle in alliance with the working class. The lessons of



the rise of fascism in Germany and the bankruptcy of the Stalinists and others must be absorbed by the new generations of the workers movement.

g. We recognize that the struggle for women's liberation is a form of the class struggle. Yet it extends beyond the working class, touching women of all classes to one degree or another, because all women are oppressed as a sex. Struggles around specific aspects of women's oppression necessarily cut across class lines in the sense of potentially involving women from different classes and social layers.

Whatever concessions the rulers may be forced to grant, the bourgeoisie as a class must oppose the struggle for women's liberation because it challenges basic institutions of class rule. But even bourgeois women are oppressed on the basis of their sex. Some, revolting against their oppression as women, will break with their class and be won to the side of the workers.

As Lenin pointed out in his discussions with Clara Zetkin, action around aspects of women's oppression has the potential to reach into the heart of the enemy class, to "foment and increase unrest, uncertainty and contradictions and conflicts in the camp of the bourgeoisie and its reformist friends. . . . Every weakening of the enemy is tantamount to a strengthening of our forces."

Even more important from the point of view of the revolutionary Marxist party, however, is the fact that resentment against their oppression as women can often be the starting point in the radicalization of decisive layers of petty-bourgeois women, whose support the working class must win.

By definition, a mass women's liberation movement is one that is basically working-class in composition and leadership.

3. Our class-struggle strategy for the fight against women's oppression, our answer to the question of *how* to mobilize the masses of women on the side of the working class, has three facets: our program, our methods of struggle, and our class independence.

### **Our Program**

Through the totality of the system of demands we put

forward—which deal with every issue from freedom of political association, to unemployment and inflation, to abortion and child care, to workers control and the arming of the proletariat—we seek to build a bridge from the current needs and struggles of the working masses and their level of consciousness to the culminating point of socialist revolution. As part of this transitional program we put forward demands that speak to the specific oppression of women.

Our program points to the issues around which women can begin to struggle to loosen the bonds of their oppression and challenge the prerogatives of the ruling class. It recognizes and provides answers for all aspects of women's oppression—legal, economic, social, sexual.

Our interlocking system of demands includes immediate, democratic, and transitional demands. Some can and will be wrested from the ruling class in the course of the struggle leading toward the socialist revolution. Such victories bring inspiration, increasing confidence, and self-reliance. Other demands will be partially met. The most fundamental will be resisted to the end by those who control the property and wealth. They can be won only in the course of the socialist reconstruction of society.

In fighting for these demands—both those providing solutions to the specific oppression of women and those answering other needs of the oppressed nationalities and working class as a whole—masses of women will come to understand the interrelationship of their oppression as a sex and class rule.

Our demands directed toward eliminating the specific oppression of women are centered on the following points:

#### *1. Full legal, political, and social equality for women.*

No discrimination on the basis of sex. Equal rights for women to vote, engage in public activity, form or join political associations, live and travel where they want, engage in any occupations they choose. An end to all laws and regulations with special penalties for women. The extension to women of all democratic rights won by men.

#### *2. The right of women to control their own reproductive functions.*

A woman has the sole right to choose whether or not to



prevent or terminate pregnancy. This includes the rejection of those population-control schemes which are tools of racism or class prejudice and attempt to blame the evils of class society on the masses of working people and peasants.

a. An end to all government restrictions on abortion and contraception.

b. Free abortion on demand; no forced sterilization or any other government interference with the right of women to choose whether or when to bear children.

c. Free, widely disseminated birth-control information and devices. Education on sex and birth control in the schools and clinics.

3. *An end to the hypocrisy, debasement, and coercion of bourgeois and feudal family laws.*

a. Separation of church and state. Marriage to be a voluntary process of civil registration. An end to all forced marriages and the buying and selling of wives. Abrogation of all laws against adultery. An end to all laws sanctioning legal penalties, physical abuse, or even murder of wives and daughters for so-called crimes against male "honor."

b. The right to automatic divorce on request of either partner. State provision for economic welfare and job training for the divorced woman.

c. Abolition of the concept of "illegitimacy." An end to all discrimination against unwed mothers and their children.

d. The rearing, social welfare, and education of children to be the responsibility of society, rather than the individual parents. Abolition of all laws granting parents property rights and total control over children. Enactment and strict enforcement of laws against child abuse and wife-beating.

e. An end to all laws victimizing prostitutes. An end to all laws reinforcing the double standard for men and women in sexual matters. Elimination of laws reflecting the assumption that female victims of rape are the guilty party. An end to all legislation victimizing homosexuals. An end to all laws and regulations victimizing youth for sexual activities.

4. *Full economic independence for women.*

a. Right to receive and dispose of their own wages and property.

b. Equal pay for equal work.

c. No discrimination against women in any trade, profession, job category, apprenticeship, or training program.

d. Guaranteed jobs at union wages for all women who want to work, coupled with a sliding scale of hours and wages to combat inflation and unemployment among men and women.

e. Preferential hiring, training, and job upgrading of women and other superexploited layers of the labor force in order to overcome the effects of decades of systematic discrimination against them.

f. Paid maternity leaves with no loss of job or seniority.

g. Paid work leaves to care for sick children to be given to men and women alike.

h. The extension of beneficial protective legislation (providing special working conditions to women) to cover men, in order to provide better working conditions for both men and women and prevent the use of protective legislation to discriminate against women.

i. Compensation at union rates throughout periods of unemployment for all women and men, including youth who cannot find a place in the work force, regardless of marital status. Unemployment compensation to be protected against inflation by automatic increases.

5. *Equal educational opportunities.*

An end to education and conditioning that reduces women to an inferior status.

a. Free, open admissions for all women to all institutions of education and all programs of study. Special programs to encourage women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields.

b. An end to all forms of pressuring women to prepare themselves for "women's work," such as homemaking, secretarial work, nursing and teaching.

c. An end to portrayal in textbooks and mass media of women as sex objects and stupid, weak, emotionally dependent creatures. Courses designed to teach the true history of women's struggles against their oppression.



Physical education courses to teach women to develop their strength and be proud of their athletic abilities.

d. No expulsion of pregnant students or unwed mothers, or segregation into special facilities.

6. *Reorganization of society to eliminate domestic slavery of women.*

a. Free, government-financed twenty-four-hour child-care centers and schools, open to all children from infancy to early adolescence regardless of parents' income or marital status; child-care policies to be decided by those who use the centers.

b. Free medical care for all and special child-care facilities for children who are ill.

c. Systematic development of low-cost, high-quality social services such as cafeteria and take-out food services available to all; collective laundry facilities; house-cleaning services organized on an industrial basis.

d. A crash, government-financed development program to provide healthful, uncrowded housing for all; no rent to exceed 10 percent of income; no discrimination against single women or women with children.

We counterpose such demands to propaganda and agitation for the "abolition" of the family. The family as an economic unit cannot be "abolished" by fiat. It can only be replaced over time. The goal of the socialist revolution is to create economic and social alternatives that are superior to the present family institution and better able to provide for the needs currently met, however poorly, by the family, so that personal relationships will be a matter of free choice and not of economic compulsion.

These demands indicate the issues around which women will fight for their liberation, and show how this fight is interrelated with the demands raised by other oppressed sectors of society and the needs of the working class as a whole.

The women's liberation movement raises many issues. The development of the movement has already demonstrated that not all will come to the fore with equal force at the same time. Which demands to raise at any particular time in any particular struggle, the best way to formulate specific demands so that they are understandable to the

masses and able to mobilize them in action, when to advance new demands to move the struggle forward—the answer to those tactical problems is the function of the revolutionary party, the art of politics itself.

## Our Methods of Struggle

1. We utilize proletarian methods of mobilization and action in order to achieve these demands. Everything we do is geared to bring the masses themselves into motion, into struggle, whatever their current level of consciousness. The masses do not learn simply by being exposed to ideas or by the exemplary action of others. Only through their own direct involvement will the political consciousness of the masses develop, grow, and be transformed. Only through their own experience will millions of women be won as allies in the revolutionary struggle and come to understand the need to get rid of an economic system based on exploitation.

Our goal is to teach the masses to rely on their own united power. We counterpose extraparliamentary mass action—demonstrations, meetings, strikes—to reliance on elections, parliaments, legislatures, and the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians who haunt them.

Our class-struggle methods are geared to awakening the initiatives of the great majority of women; to bring them together; to destroy their domestic isolation and their lack of confidence in their own abilities, intelligence, independence, and strength. Struggling together with them, we aim to show that class exploitation is the root of women's oppression and its elimination the only road to emancipation.

2. Given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist, class-collaborationist opponents, our perspective of trying to mobilize masses of women in action can often best be achieved in the present period through united-front-type action campaigns, mobilizing the broadest possible support around concrete demands. The united-front-type abortion campaigns in



France, the United States and Britain provide an example of this type of action.

Through such united-front-type actions we can bring the greatest power to bear against the capitalist government and educate the workers concerning their own strength. In the process, not only the liberal "friends" of women, but the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and trade-union bureaucrats who refuse to fight for women's needs will isolate themselves by their own inaction, opposition, or willingness to subordinate women's needs to their search for an alliance with the supposedly "progressive" sectors of the ruling class.

3. Struggles by women against their oppression as a sex are interrelated with, but not totally dependent on or identical with, struggles by workers as a class. Women cannot win their liberation except in alliance with the organized power of the working class. But this historical necessity in no way means that women should postpone any of their struggles until the current labor officialdom is replaced by a revolutionary leadership that picks up the banner of women's liberation. Nor should women wait until the socialist revolution has created the material basis for ending their oppression. On the contrary, women fighting for their liberation must wait for no one to show them the way. They should take the lead in opening the fight and carrying it forward. Their struggles advance the process of politicalization and radicalization. They help educate the male (and female) workers and convince them that it is in their class interests to champion the demands of women as their own.

4. The oppression of women as a sex constitutes the objective basis for the mobilization of women in struggle through their own organizations. The trend of radicalizing women to form all-female organizations—women's liberation groups, women's action coalitions, women's caucuses in the trade unions—is eminently progressive. It reflects the desire of women to take the leadership of their own struggles. They want to have their own organizations in which they can learn and develop and lead without fear of being put down or dictated to by men or having to compete with them from the start.

The Fourth International supports and helps build such all-female groups and organizations, which are an indispensable component of the mass feminist movement we strive for. We defend the right of women's liberation groups to exclude men from their gatherings. Unlike those "Marxists" who claim such all-female organizations and meetings divide the working class along sex lines, we say it is not those fighting against their oppression who are responsible for creating divisions. Capitalism divides the working class—by race, by sex, by age, by nationality, by skill levels, and by every other means possible. Our job is to organize and support the battles of the most oppressed and exploited layers who will lead the struggle for socialism. Those who suffer most from the old will fight the most energetically for the new.

Before women can lead others they must throw off their feelings of inferiority and self-deprecation. They must learn to lead themselves. Feminist groups that consciously and deliberately exclude men help many women to take the first steps toward discarding their own slave mentality, gaining confidence, pride, and courage to act as political beings.

The small "consciousness raising" groups that have emerged everywhere as one of the most prevalent forms of the new radicalization help many women to realize that their problems do not arise from personal shortcomings, but are socially created and common to other women. They often lay the groundwork for women to break out of their isolation, to gain confidence and move into action.

Such groups can become an obstacle if they remain inward-turned and limit themselves to discussion circles as a substitute for joining with others to act.

The desire of women to organize themselves in all-female groups is the opposite of the practice followed by many mass Stalinist parties that organize separate male and female youth organizations for the purpose of repressing sexual activity and reinforcing sex-stereotyped behavior—i.e., the inferiority of women. The independent all-female forms thrown up by the new women's liberation struggles express the distrust many radicalizing women feel for the mass reformist organizations of the working class, which



have failed so miserably to fight for their needs.

5. There is no contradiction between supporting and building all-female organizations to fight for women's liberation, or for specific demands relating to women's oppression, and simultaneously building mass action coalitions involving both men and women to fight for the same demands. Campaigns around the right to abortion have provided a good example of this. Women will be the backbone of such campaigns, but the fight is in the interests of the working masses as a whole and our perspective is to win support for the movement from all organizations of the working class and the oppressed.

6. Likewise, there is no contradiction between supporting and building all-female organizations and at the same time building a revolutionary Marxist party of women and men.

The struggle for socialism requires both a mass feminist movement and a mass revolutionary Marxist party. The two serve different functions. The former mobilizes women in struggle through their own organizations. The latter provides leadership, through program and action, for the working class and its allies, including women, and uncompromisingly orients all facets of the class struggle toward a combined drive to abolish capitalism.

The goal of the Fourth International is to win the best fighters for women's liberation to the revolutionary party. There is no objective basis for a separate revolutionary Marxist women's organization.

Likewise, we maintain that there are no exclusively "women's issues." Every question of concern to the female half of humanity is also a broader social question of vital interest to the working class as a whole. While we raise demands that deal with the specific oppression of women, we have no separate program for women's liberation. Our demands are an integral part of our transitional program for the socialist revolution.

Sexist attitudes and practices within the party can only be eradicated if the party has a correct program. Women take the lead in politically educating the entire membership, male and female, on the character of women's oppression, in developing a correct understanding of the

role of the fight for women's liberation in the socialist revolution, and in orienting the party toward active participation in the feminist movement.

7. The forms through which we work can vary greatly depending on the concrete circumstances in which our organizations find themselves. Factors that must be taken into account include the strength of our own forces; the size, character, and political level of the women's liberation forces; the strength of the liberal, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist forces against whom we must contend; and the general political context in which we are working. Whether we should form women's liberation groups on a broad socialist program, work through existing organizations of the women's liberation movement, build broad action coalitions around specific issues, work through trade-union caucuses, combine several of these forms, or work through some other forms are tactical questions. Our tactics are dictated by our strategic aim, which is to educate and lead in action forces much broader than ourselves and recruit the best cadre to the revolutionary party.

No matter what organizational form we adopt, the fundamental question to be decided is the same: What specific issues and demands should be raised under the given circumstances in order to most effectively mobilize women and their allies in struggle?

While the party needs special internal fractions or commissions through which to organize our participation in the women's liberation movement, we are opposed to caucuses within the revolutionary Marxist party that function as pressure groups. All internal fractions, commissions, or other formations must be open to any member democratically selected—regardless of sex, race, language, class origin, or whatever. To permit other kinds of undemocratic internal formations is to foster a federation of conflicting special-interest groups. The party has one program and only one class of membership with equal rights and responsibilities for every comrade. The party's political line and direction must be democratically discussed and decided with all members participating and taking responsibility for carrying it out.

8. Struggles by women in the unions and on the job have



a special importance. Here as elsewhere in capitalist society women are subject to male domination, to discrimination as an inferior sex that is out of its "natural place." Struggles by women to unionize; organize; win equal rights in the unions; fight for better conditions on the job, equal pay, preferential hiring and job upgrading, child-care facilities—these are all important aspects of the struggle for women's liberation as well as of the class struggle as a whole.

Moreover, unlike housewives, many working women are already semi-organized by the labor market itself. In addition, many are fighting from a vantage point within the unions and within the factories, where they are well-placed to speed the process of revitalizing and transforming the labor movement, educating layers and sectors of the working class with whom they are in contact. Sometimes they are able to draw the power of the organized workers movement in support of their struggles. Their demands will be an important component of the program of class-struggle left wings that emerge within the labor movement.

There are also special difficulties in organizing women workers. Precisely because of their oppression as women they are less likely to be unionized or to have a strong class consciousness. Their participation in the labor force is frequently more sporadic. Their double burden of responsibilities and chores at home is fatiguing and time consuming, leaving them less energy for political and trade-union activity. The prevalent prejudice that "women's place is in the home" is an additional obstacle and pressure.

Changes brought about by the spread of the women's liberation movement have already begun to alter the attitudes of working women, strengthening their inclination to organize, unionize, and fight for their rights.

Conversely, working women who become involved in struggles on the job often have to confront many of the questions that the women's liberation movement has taken up. As they begin to play an active role, to take on leadership responsibilities, to prove their capacities to themselves, to gain confidence and play an independent

role, they develop a greater understanding of what the women's liberation movement is fighting for. Thus, struggles by women as workers and by women challenging their oppression as a sex reinforce each other.

9. Our class-struggle methods of mass action are the antithesis of the orientation of many petty-bourgeois radicals who counterpose individual acts of moral witness or the promotion of new "life-styles" as the road to solution of their problems as women. They often concentrate on reforming men as individuals, trying to make them less "chauvinistic," rather than organizing to replace the bourgeois government which defends and sustains the institutions of class society responsible for male supremacy and women's oppression. They attempt to build "counterinstitutions" in the midst of class society.

As revolutionists we recognize that the problems many women seek to resolve in this way are real and preoccupying. Our criticism is not directed against individuals who try to find a way out from under the intolerable pressures capitalist society places on them. But we point out that for the masses of workers there is no "individual" solution. They must fight collectively to change society before their "life-style" will be significantly altered. Ultimately there are no personal solutions for any of us. Individual escapism is a form of utopianism that can only end in disillusionment and the dispersal of revolutionary forces.

### **Our Class Independence**

1. Political independence is the third facet of our class-struggle strategy for the fight against women's oppression. We do not defer or subordinate any demand, action, or struggle of women to the political needs and concerns of either the bourgeois or reformist political forces with their parliamentary shadowboxing and electoral maneuvers.

2. We fight to keep women's liberation organizations and struggles independent of all bourgeois forces and parties. We oppose attempts to divert women's struggles toward the construction of women's caucuses inside of or oriented to capitalist parties or bourgeois politics, as has occurred in the United States, Canada, and Australia. We



oppose the formation of a women's political party, such as has arisen in Belgium and has been advocated by some feminist groups in Spain and elsewhere. The election of more women to public office on a liberal-bourgeois or radical petty-bourgeois program, while a reflection of changing attitudes, can do nothing to further the interests of women.

Women's liberation is part of the historic struggle of the working class against capitalism. We strive to make that link a conscious one on the part of women and of the working class. But we do not reject support from bourgeois figures or politicians who voice their agreement with our demands or goals. It strengthens our side not theirs. It is their contradiction not ours.

3. We reject the reformist perspectives of the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties. The policies and conduct of both these petty-bourgeois currents within the working-class movement are based on defending privileges and preserving the capitalist system, regardless of any lip service they may pay to the struggles of women against their oppression. Both are ready to subordinate the needs of women to whatever class-collaborationist deal they are trying to negotiate at the moment. The Stalinists, for example, never tire of telling women that the road to happiness through "advanced democracy" or the "antimonopoly coalition." They advise women not to demand more than "democracy" (i.e., capitalism) can give.

The Stalinists have a special stake in defending the family institution and reinforcing the reactionary grip of bourgeois ideology on the working class: They must defend the fact that the family unit is extolled in the "socialist" countries as the ideal framework of human relationships.

The reactionary positions adopted by the Communist parties in countries like Italy and France on such issues as divorce and abortion, and the American CP's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, are such blatant betrayals of the needs of women that their stance opens up possibilities for us to make headway amongst their members and the layers they influence.

Both the Stalinists and Social Democrats initially abstained from or were hostile to the new rise of women's

struggles. But we can expect them to attempt to capture leadership as the women's movement develops, in order to divert these struggles into reformist channels.

4. It is only through an uncompromising programmatic and organizational break from the bourgeoisie and all forms of class collaborationism that the working class and its allies, including women struggling for their liberation, can be mobilized as a powerful and self-confident force capable of carrying the socialist revolution through to the end. The task of the revolutionary Marxist party is to provide the leadership to educate the working masses through action and propaganda in this class-struggle perspective.

### **Tasks of the Fourth International Today**

1. The ideas of women's liberation have had varying degrees of impact throughout the world. The speed with which revolutionary ideas and lessons of struggle are transmitted from one country to another, and from one sector of the world revolution to another, ensures the further spread of women's liberation struggles. Widespread questioning of the traditional role of women creates an atmosphere conducive to Marxist education, propaganda, and action in support of the liberation of women. Through our press and propaganda activities we can explain the source and nature of women's oppression and the revolutionary dynamic of women's struggle for liberation.

2. In addition to participating in organizations and groups of radicalized women where they exist, we should integrate women's liberation propaganda and activity into all our areas of work, from the trade unions to the student milieu. It is especially among the youth—student, young workers, young housewives—that we will find the greatest receptivity to our ideas and program.

3. Our experience thus far has shown that considerable potential exists for helping to organize and lead action campaigns around issues raised in the struggle against women's oppression. The Fourth International encourages international solidarity in the women's movement, and where possible, international coordination of action



campaigns around common issues.

4. To organize and carry out systematic women's liberation work, sections of the Fourth International should establish commissions or fractions of those responsible for this work, which might include male comrades as well as female.

5. Systematic education about the history of women's oppression and struggles, and the theoretical and political questions involved, should be organized within the sections of the Fourth International.

We have no illusions that sections can be islands of the future socialist society floating in a capitalist morass, or that individual comrades can fully escape the education and conditioning absorbed from the very struggle to survive in class society. But it is a condition of membership in the Fourth International that the conduct of comrades and sections reflect the principles on which we stand. We fight to educate the members of the Fourth International to a full understanding of the character of women's oppression and the pernicious ways in which it is expressed. We strive to create an organization in which language, jokes, and other acts expressing chauvinist bigotry towards women are not tolerated, any more than acts and expressions of racist bigotry would be allowed to pass unchallenged. We strive to build a party in which the full and rounded political development of women comrades is promoted and maximized.

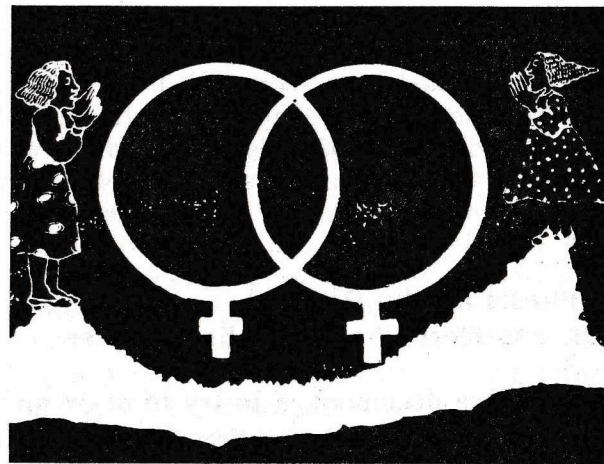
The process of internal education will take place along with and be facilitated by the growing involvement of our sections in the struggle for women's liberation. The impact of this struggle on the consciousness and attitudes of comrades has been profound. The transformation of the women cadre of the international, reflecting our involvement in the struggle for women's liberation, is a development of historic significance. The new self-confidence, political maturity, and leadership capacities of the women comrades of the Fourth International constitute a significant expansion of the effective forces of revolutionary leadership on a world scale.

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The new rise of women's struggles internationally and the emergence of a strong women's liberation movement prior to revolutionary struggles for power is a development of prime importance to the world party of socialist revolution. It increases the political power of the working class and the likelihood that the revolution will be successful in carrying through to the end its task of socialist reconstruction. The rise of the women's liberation movement is an additional guarantee against the bureaucratic degeneration of future revolutions.

The struggle to liberate women from the bondage in which class society has placed them is a struggle to free all human relationships from the shackles of economic compulsion and to propel humanity along the road to a higher social order.

December 1, 1976





## **For an Intervention by Sections of the Fourth International Against the Oppression of Women**

**By Allio, Darmelle, Ellis, and Nina**

### **Introduction**

The publication of this document, as well as the document "Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation" by Mary-Alice Waters (printed in *International Internal Discussion Bulletin* Vol. XIII, No. 9), is intended to give impetus to the discussion on the questions of the specific oppression of women, the development of the women's movement internationally, and the tasks implied for all the sections of the Fourth International.

The authors of the two documents do not consider them to contain counterposed political lines. On many basic questions there is agreement. On a series of other points there are differences whose scope will be clarified in the course of the discussion preparatory to the next World Congress. This will enable us to determine whether there is sufficient agreement to draft a single resolution on the women's liberation struggle and its place in the socialist revolution.

### **First Synthesis on the Basis of European and North American Experiences**

The aim of this document is to try to draw an initial balance sheet of the radicalization of women in the advanced capitalist countries, of the forms it has taken, and of its interaction with the struggles of the workers movement, in order to draw the concrete implications of the women's liberation struggle for the struggle of revolutionaries as a whole. In fact, the struggle against the interrelated aspects of the oppression of women as a sex and their superexploitation in the economic sphere is an

integral part of the more general struggle for socialism.

In capitalist society this oppression is based on the division of labor within the family, in which women assure the conditions for the reproduction of labor power. It is this division of roles that is at the origin of the inequality of women in all areas of society. In addition, it perpetuates and justifies wage inequality, discrimination in working conditions, and the lack of child-care facilities and centers for abortion and contraception, while at the same time it strengthens sexist ideology. Sexism and racism are important elements in the rule of the bourgeoisie. They weaken the entire working class politically, leaving it disarmed in face of all the wrong solutions that are supposed to resolve its economic and social problems. During periods of recession, for example, they serve to justify the fact that women are laid off first in order to preserve the jobs of men, while immigrant workers are expelled and controls on immigration are instituted in order to guarantee the jobs of indigenous workers.

The division of tasks in the family is also the source of the marginalization of women in the workers movement and often prevents them from responding to the initiatives of rightist movements (cf the manner in which the bourgeois press has sometimes managed to polarize the attention of proletarian women to the point of inducing them to act as strikebreakers).

In order to fight against the division of the working class, any strategy that puts forward the necessity of pressing for the creation of organs of dual power must incorporate into its program the means by which to put an end to the specific oppression of women.

In this sense, most of the European sections of the Fourth International, far from having been able to utilize the theoretical weapons represented by the many writings of Trotsky on this point, did not grasp the importance of the women's liberation movement from its emergence. They remained extremely propagandistic in face of the new wave of radicalization of the 1960s or simply neglected the decisive weight of this movement in the perspectives of building the revolutionary party.

If it is to correct these deficiencies, our analysis must enable us to understand the forms the oppression of



women takes in the advanced capitalist countries today and the type of radicalization to which it has given rise. That is what this document attempts to do.

## I. Origin of the Radicalization of Women

1. The current radicalization of women is reflected in mass mobilizations around themes related to the exploitation of working women and the specific oppression of women in general and in the emergence of increasingly numerous groups which, from the factory to the neighborhood, and trade union to the university, express the development of consciousness of working women, women students, and housewives who had not been affected by the women's liberation movement during an initial period.

At the root of this new radicalization are a series of objective factors linked to the development of the productive forces and the bourgeoisie's growing need for workers, which have conferred a new status on women in the social sphere, while at the same time the growing crisis of the capitalist system curbs the possibilities of emancipation of women and transforms all these factors into so many contradictions:

- The significant increase in the number of women who work has been accompanied by the maintenance of these women in the least skilled and lowest paying positions; further, it is women who continue to take on virtually all domestic tasks.

- The increase in the educational level of women and in the number of women studying in universities has not challenged the division of roles or the notion that women's wages are "extra" wages and women's labor is "extra" labor; although women are still the last hired, they are the first fired.

- The fantastic development of medical knowledge, especially in the sphere of birth control and abortion, ought to enable women to control their own reproductive functions, but science remains the prerogative of a small minority, and reactionary laws and the weight of religion do everything possible to prevent women from having access to genuine independence.

- Technological discoveries have permitted the mechanization of a series of domestic tasks, but the capitalist system, which has monopolized these discoveries, has transformed them into so many sources of profit, thus opposing any collectivization and contributing to maintaining the isolation of each housewife.

- The increase and improvement of social services after the Second World War, linked to the employers' mounting need for labor power, to the greater and greater intervention of the state in the economy, and to the struggles of the working class demanding that the state take charge of the system of health and social services (which, in some countries with a Social Democratic tradition, led to the establishment of the famous "welfare state")—the totality of this process is now being suddenly challenged because of the generalized economic crisis.

All these contradictions, sharpened by the development of consciousness among women of their sexuality and the possibility of their becoming active subjects, have resulted in a profound crisis of social relations, in particular in the family, and entail an increased combativity on the part of women, including working women, who are challenging their position and role as sexual objects.

The radicalization of women is stimulated to varying degrees in various countries by the previous traditions of struggle and above all by the new rise of world revolution. The end of the period of the economic boom, with its immediate social and conjunctural consequences, has led to the radicalization of broad layers of youth precisely because of the crisis of the system. Anti-imperialist mobilizations, in particular the struggle against the war in Vietnam, stimulated the struggles of Blacks and women in the United States. The radicalization of youth in turn contributed to stimulating the struggles of workers in most of the European countries. In more than one instance, and in a simultaneous manner, we have also seen the desire of women from the petty bourgeoisie to organize independent women's groups to struggle against their oppression and we have likewise seen the development of struggles by working women, whether or not in the framework of the traditional organizations of the working class. These two related elements trigger an important dynamic, for they



enable the struggle against the oppression of women to be based on the struggle of working women, while at the same time integrating specific understanding of oppression as is more particularly expressed within the independent organizations of petty-bourgeois predominance. Today, the struggle of women to free themselves from economic exploitation and the oppression they suffer as a sex contributes a specific dimension to the class struggle in that it emphasizes the battle that must be waged against all hierarchy, against all bureaucratic attitudes, for a modification of social relations, for another type of daily life, for a society that challenges the sexual division of labor. In this sense, this struggle is decisive for the recomposition of the workers movement.

## Objective Bases of the Radicalization of Women

### a) Employment

2. Because of the inexactness of statistics, it is difficult to establish a precise view of the rate of activity of women relative to the work force as a whole. Nevertheless, the general tendency is clearly one of increase (twice as many women are working in the United States today as in 1930, three times as many in Spain). The average appears to be about 35-38 percent of the total number of workers, 40 percent in the case of Sweden. Only the countries which still had a high percentage of agricultural workers after the Second World War have experienced a decline in female employment during this period (with the migration to the cities very many women were not reintegrated into the so-called active population and there has even been a declining curve in a country like Italy, where this factor has been combined both with the dominant ideology, which says that the place of women is in the home, and with the massive unemployment that now affects small enterprises in the "typically feminine" sectors).

Moreover, and this is true even in the countries in which the female percentage of the work force has barely varied in a century (Germany, Switzerland), there has been a strong increase in the number of *married women* who

work. In most European countries the latter now represent more than half of all working women.

Finally, it must be noted that behind the sometimes identical figures lurk quite different realities as to the average rate of employment of women, depending on the period in question. Since the 1940s, in fact, the proportion of women working in the tertiary sector has increased very strongly in comparison with those working in the primary and secondary sectors (even though the majority of unskilled workers are still women).

3. As far as the employment of women is concerned, it must first be noted that in nearly all countries women represent from 70 to 90 percent of the work force employed in textiles, shoes, ready-to-wear clothing, tobacco, etc.—that is, those sectors in which wages are lowest. Moreover, they also account for 70 percent or more of the people employed in the tertiary sector, and the great majority of them (90 percent in Sweden) occupy the least remunerative positions in this sector: secretaries, nurses, teachers in primary school, keypunch operators, etc.

It is this discrimination in employment much more than unequal pay for the same work which explains why the average wage for women barely exceeds 75 percent of the average wage for men, even in the Scandinavian countries, where the level of training and employment of women is nonetheless higher than elsewhere. This also explains why this percentage may even decline with the massive entry of women into the lowest paid sectors of the economy, as is the case in the United States (where the average wage for women was 63 percent of that of men in 1956 and dropped to 57 percent in 1974). To this it must be added that *immigrant working women* generally make about 10-15 percent less than indigenous women.

Nevertheless, increasing numbers of women, up to 40 percent of those who work, are the major breadwinners in the household. In Britain, where the average wage for women is only 57 percent that of men, statistics indicate that more than a third of women working in hospitals and local administrations receive wages below the "poverty line" established by the Trades Union Congress.

How can this gap be explained?

4. The reality is that women continue to assume the



majority, even the totality, of domestic tasks, in addition to their wage labor. The consequence of this is that:

- they quit working when they have children (that is, when they are between the ages of 25 and 40) and have that much greater difficulty finding new jobs later;
- they work only part time in order to reconcile their household and professional tasks (in the United States in 1965 only 37 percent of women were working full time);
- it is they who stay home when a child is sick (in Sweden very few fathers—less than 5 percent—have so far made use of their right to take paid leaves in such cases).

In spite of all the technological improvements, women who have more than one child continue to put in 80 to 100 hours a week if they also have a full time job (and the others scarcely any less), a figure higher than that revealed in inquiries conducted in 1926 and 1952. The increase in working hours despite the fact that household appliances have eased certain domestic tasks (cooking, laundry, etc.) is explained mainly by two things. On the one hand, with the structural developments of the capitalist system, the nuclear family has been reduced to its most narrow dimensions (father, mother, and children, in fewer numbers than previously), thus depriving the mother of the possibility of relying on the aid of a grandparent, aunt, or older brothers and sisters (cf the transition from the extended family as a production unit to the nuclear family as a unit of consumption, which is linked to the massive proletarianization of peasant layers and their migration to the urban centers). On the other hand, new tasks for mothers have emerged because of the extension of the studies of their children. And it is the working women, whose own studies did not last very long, who bear the greatest burden here.

To this must be added a series of discriminatory practices that weigh against women working and do not encourage them to maintain continuous employment: higher payments for health or unemployment insurance, piece-work or contracted domestic labor, employment in sectors in which particularly unhealthy conditions prevail, sexual aggression by foremen and supervisory personnel, ridiculously low maternity leaves in many countries, the need to work overtime in order to make ends meet because

of the low wages, and so on.

It is thus understandable that marriage often appears to the least favored women as a sort of "social security," the only thing able to grant them a certain degree of economic and emotional stability. Thus, all these constraints not only weigh on the organization of their "free" time (planning meals, doing the shopping, running home to take care of children, etc.), but above all prevent them from regarding their paid labor as a central activity in their lives. What is true for the most exploited women is less true for those women who hold skilled jobs and have some security, along with a professional interest and a better wage. But one must not underestimate the pressure represented by domestic labor for the organization of women as a whole ("what's the use of joining a union if you don't have the time to be active and if you have to quit work a little while later") and for their participation in struggles, so long as the workers movement has not launched a determined struggle to compel the bourgeoisie and its state to establish the social structures that can contribute to freeing women.

#### **b) Education**

5. The discrimination in the realm of labor is but the reflection and extension of discrimination in education which begins from the earliest age.

A recent inquiry indicated that the majority of girls finishing primary school wanted to become nurses, office workers, or saleswomen. There is nothing astonishing here, given the traditional division of manual labor that exists even at this level (sewing for girls and wood and iron working for boys). And there is likewise nothing astonishing about the fact that the percentage of girls who complete apprenticeships is so much lower than the percentage of boys who do so. All this corresponds completely to the image inculcated in girls from the earliest age as to the role they will later play in society. Girls still do not "choose" to become plumbers or engineers. In Europe they generally represent less than 1 percent of the students in technical courses in institutions of higher education (France is an exception, with 6



percent), while there are twice as many boys as girls in technical high schools, and nearly 80 percent of the girls who graduate from these schools chose the tertiary sector (and half of them became secretaries and typists).

Let us add that in France as of 1974 women represented 4 percent of highly skilled workers and 44 percent of unskilled workers. In Spain in 1970 the illiteracy rate was 6 percent among men and 14 percent among women (nearly 30 percent of women over the age of fifteen had already forgotten the rudiments they had learned in school).

This discrimination comes on top of the discrimination against the children of the working class as a whole. In Germany 6 percent of sons of workers study in universities, but only 2.8 percent of daughters of workers.

With the democratization of education, girls have gained access not only to high school diplomas (nearly half of all high school students today are girls), but also to higher education, although to an uneven extent (25 percent of women in the universities in Germany and Switzerland, but more than 40 percent in the United States and France, that is, double the figures of twenty years ago). In both cases, however, the great majority of these women are in the literature and social science departments. And it is precisely these departments which are the first to be hit by credit cuts and which pose the greatest problems for professional outlets (sociology, teaching, etc.).

### **c) The State and the Crisis of the Family**

6. Another important element in understanding the present radicalization of women lies in the change in the relations between the state and the family.

At the end of the nineteenth century the state began to intervene in the family in a selective manner, with the aim of preserving the interests of the ruling class, through laws protecting working women (maternity leaves, etc.) or relating to the education of children. The bourgeoisie needed a more highly skilled work force with a greater degree of education (a task that could not be accomplished within the family). But concurrently, the bourgeoisie insisted on assuring that the other tasks left to the family,

or rather to the women (the tasks of preserving and reproducing labor power), not be placed in question by the influx of women into the job market. Just after the Second World War, in a context of heightened demands by the working class that social needs be assumed by the state and at a time when the bourgeoisie was concerned with convincing women to go back to the home, this same bourgeois state took measures tending to consolidate the family as the "basic unit of society," at least in the most developed capitalist countries. In several of these countries this was reflected in increases in family allowances and in improvements in housing. On the other hand, some years later, when the boom of the 1950s generated an urgent need for labor power, the system of child-care centers and laundromats was extended in order to release women from some of their domestic constraints.

Today, at a time when the labor of women is becoming a question of survival for families in the poorest layers and not merely a matter of adding to the household budget, as was the case previously, the state is once again trying to force women to take charge of some of the tasks from which they had been temporarily released. This is what accounts for the reaction of significant layers of women to the bourgeois state's policy of credit restriction, especially in countries led by the Social Democracy, where the reforms had gone furthest.

7. Concurrently with this change in relations between the state and the family, we are seeing a deep crisis of relations within the family itself. The origin of this crisis lies both in the contradictions inherent in the development of the capitalist system and in a number of conjunctural factors. At the outset, the socialization of labor in the process of production and the private nature of the relations of reproduction constitute the source of contradictions in family relations. The atomization of women by the family comes into acute conflict with the structural trend toward the integration of women into production. This trend is accentuated by scientific discoveries (cf the new methods of contraception and abortion) and technological progress (household appliances, pre-cooked food, automatic laundromats, etc.) which provide, under the capitalist system itself, the material preconditions necessary for the



socialization of the sphere of reproduction. Hence the increasingly widespread consciousness among women of the absurdity of their double workday and, on that basis, the radicalization of some of them and the desire to struggle to abolish what lies at the root of their oppression.

#### **d) The Crisis of the Church**

8. Concurrent with the crisis of the family, all the institutions founded on moral and religious rules have been shaken: the role of the army, the militarization of youth through sports, the ideological and selective function of the school system, etc. But it is the crisis of the church—above all the Catholic church—which, perhaps more than anything else, best reveals the depth of the ideological crisis as far as the place of women in society is concerned.

The Christian and Jewish religions in particular have always considered women as inferior, if not as the very incarnation of evil and animality; these religions have always proclaimed that women have no rights, above all not the right to control their own bodies. Behind the power of the church stands the power of the state, both acting in the service of the interests of the same ruling class. This overlap of the two has been especially obvious under fascist regimes, whether in Germany, Italy, or Spain. In each case we have seen the church submit politically in the name of “Christian cultural patrimony” while in return the Catholic religion has been imposed as the official religion. The obscurantism to which the Catholic church and the Orthodox church in particular have subjected entire generations of women is still reflected today in the fact that Catholic marriage and education remain compulsory in countries like Spain and Ireland, that confession remains a powerful weapon for inculcating guilt and division, that the Catholic hierarchy in Spain actively supports the women of the Phalange who organize “compulsory civil service” for women between the ages of 17 and 35 (6 months’ apprentice housekeeping, etc.). Not to mention that the church, acting through the Christian Democratic parties, still manages to block a number of reforms relative to the emancipation of women, as has

recently been seen in the case of the abortion law in Switzerland.

The massive demonstrations drawing tens of thousands of women into the streets in Italy, like the hundreds of people who have attended meetings on sexuality in Spain since the death of Franco, clearly show that the reaction against the ideology fostered by the church is that much stronger the greater has been the pressure, which gives an idea of the depth of the crisis now shaking the church.

In addition, in oppressed nations such as Québec, Ireland, and Euzkadi (the Basque country), the ideology conveyed by the Catholic church is bolstered by “nationalist” arguments advanced by representatives of the ruling class in order to keep women “in their place.” The myth of the “woman-mother” as the only pole of social, emotional, or political stability comes on top of religious puritanism. In Québec nationalist ideology in the past has gone so far as to take the form of the concept of “revenge of the cradle” (suggesting that women must save the nation from assimilation by having many children). The recent “women for peace” movement in Ireland falls within the same dynamic. Women in these nations have become conscious of their specific oppression somewhat later than women in other countries, even though the patriarchal moral order is more stultifying there than elsewhere. Nevertheless, once it appears, this consciousness has taken on a much more explosive character, as is shown by the example of Euzkadi, where from the outset a great number of older women have participated in the first assemblies of the movement.

#### **Conjunctural Basis for the Radicalization of Women**

#### **e) Unemployment**

9. All the contradictory tendencies mentioned above find specific expression in the present context of deep economic and social crisis. It is precisely by virtue of the dominant ideology, which sees the woman primarily as wife and mother, that the bourgeoisie can exert pressure on women



during periods of rising unemployment, sending them back to their homes while at the same time sending immigrant workers back to their countries of origin. Women have always been considered a malleable and unconditionally subjugated work force, as is shown by the history of the first and second world wars.

Today all the figures show that the rate of unemployment is clearly higher among women than among men, from 10 percent to 20 percent higher than the percentage of women in the work force. Moreover, in considering these figures it must be noted that a great number of women are not officially registered in the unemployment statistics and that it is difficult to gain an exact idea of the real effects of unemployment on women. In many cases the sectors in which a great number of women work are the first to be affected by unemployment—public services, for example. In industry, apart from certain exceptions (such as Britain up to last year), in most capitalist countries it has been the companies in the least rationalized sectors, where the majority of the employees are women, which have been the first to lay workers off and close down. In addition, all available means are used to get women to give up their jobs: pressure is put on married women by refusing them teaching jobs as in Switzerland or Germany; discriminatory rules are established against pregnant women in employment offices because it is claimed that they already have a job, raising their future child; the fact that working women usually have to remain at home when their children are sick is used to lay them off.

The second element reflecting a real deterioration in the situation of women on the job market relates to the massive increase in part time work in nearly all countries and, to a lesser extent, the increase in work done in the home. (In both cases, women represent 80 percent or more of these sorts of work force.)

First, as far as part time work is concerned, it must be noted that the rising curve registered in this sort of work dates from the 1960s (between 1967 and 1970 it increased 83 percent in Germany and by about the same figure in Britain). Although in part this reflected the desire of women not to work forty or forty-five hours a week in addition to their household tasks when they were able to

make other arrangements, it also meant that they were accepting the notion that their wages were mere "extras." But the recent figures indicating a strong increase in this sort of employment reflect another aspect of reality: A great number of women who have been laid off are compelled to accept any job they can get, even if it does not pay enough to make ends meet and provide economic independence (not to mention the absence of job security and the low level of social security benefits).

As for work in the home, this is a phenomenon which, on the industrial level, affects mainly Italy, Spain, and Japan but is found in one form or another in most of the capitalist countries. The Italian employers, in the South as well as in Lombardy, have long understood that they could get by with labor carried out with rudimentary machines requiring virtually no investment by a totally atomized toiling population whose members generally do not even know their employers (since everything is worked out through intermediaries). This enables the employers to control working women who thus have no means of organizing (they cannot denounce the intermediary without risking losing their jobs). In addition, not only do the employers make substantial savings by not having to make any payments toward social security, but the wages, according to the calculations of the trade unions, amount to 25-40 percent of the wages paid for identical work carried out in a factory (the very factories that have recently closed down). It is thus easy to understand why this is the only sort of job which has shown a numerical increase in Italy during recent years (official statistics say that 24,000 persons are thus employed, but the general estimate is between 2 million and 6 million).

In most of the other countries the increase in work done at home corresponds primarily to a growth in paid domestic tasks such as individual baby-sitting and caring for sick people and old people, a result of the ever greater deficiencies of social institutions.

#### f) Inflation

10. This generalized tendency to exclude women from the process of production clashes with the pressure of women



themselves to maintain their wages, which are integral parts of the family budget. Given the current annual inflation rates (Britain 21.5 percent, Italy 16.8 percent, Holland 10.5 percent, France 11.8 percent, Sweden 9.5 percent), the wage contribution of women is essential in most layers of society. But in any event, because of the low rate of unionization among women, their low wages, and their increasing difficulties in finding jobs, it is less and less possible for families to maintain a decent standard of living by virtue of the wages brought in by women. Women are thus compelled to intensify their work at home in order to deal with inflation. Pre-cooked food, ready-to-wear clothing, and household appliances, which enable women to save time, appear as luxuries for a very large portion of women of the working class. There are, of course, limits to this intensification, and it must be noted that a sector of the bourgeoisie has become increasingly dependent on food production and household appliances, and this comes into direct contradiction with the above-mentioned tendencies.

#### **g) Restrictions on Social Spending**

11. As far as social spending cuts are concerned, it may be noted that in Britain, where the effects of the economic crisis are most serious, the challenging of the famous "welfare state" is reflected in the fact that more than half a million people are on the waiting lists for hospital beds and that in some cities children in primary schools attend classes only three days a week, for the state has refused to hire enough teachers. For women this means increasing difficulties finding places in public-sector institutions for abortions, in spite of the 1967 law which had liberalized this procedure. For mothers it means a terrible extra burden in the education of their children.

This situation of acute crisis, which is now reflected in the £1,000 million cut in the public service budget in Britain, merely indicates a similar tendency in other countries, as is shown by the policy of cutbacks in the sectors of teaching and health care also being applied in Denmark, Germany, the United States, and Australia (with the resulting layoffs in these sectors, where the

number of women employed is very high).

The closing of child-care centers in particular is one of the first measures taken by the state to save money. Now, in the best of cases only one working mother in three benefits from a place in a public or private child-care center for her preschool-age child (Belgium, France), and more often it is one mother in six (Finland, the United States).

The tricks to which the bourgeoisie resorts in trying to save money at the expense of women are countless, from not applying laws that have been passed, as in San Francisco or Italy, to prohibiting unemployed women from placing their children in child-care centers, as in France, to waging demagogic campaigns around the fact that places are available in some child-care centers (because of the prices, women who are no longer working are of course compelled to take their children out of the centers), as in Germany, to simply eliminating the listing "child-care centers" from the budgets that are voted on, as has recently been done in Britain, the United States, and Canada.

This shortage naturally hits harder at proletarian women, for they generally have more children (since contraception is less widespread in the working class) and cannot resort to private centers, because of the excessively high prices.

#### **h) The Crisis of Bourgeois Values**

12. The family, site of inculcation of mores, punctuality, respect for one's elders and for hierarchy, and source of repression of all varieties, sexual repression in particular, is the institution that has been the first to be affected by the present crisis of social values. The contradictory pressures in regard to women and the family which we have already noted are further exacerbated by the offensive of certain sectors of the bourgeoisie which are trying to strengthen the traditional role of the woman in the home. The crisis of the family is reflected in the ever greater number of divorces, of battered women and children, of rapes, etc. One of the important factors in this crisis is the radicalization of youth, coupled with the crisis



of a series of other bourgeois institutions (church, school, army, etc.). The challenging of the traditional values of the bourgeoisie, from the myth of chastity and fidelity to the myth of labor as the only prospect for the flowering of the individual, has been at the root of the experiences of communes throughout Europe toward the end of the 1960s, the attempts at collective education developed on a relatively broad scale within the Berlin student movement (cf the history of the Kinderläden, linked to the developing consciousness of SDS women in 1968), the emergence of the current of left homosexuals, etc. For women, this meant the beginning of a challenge to their sexual, social, and political passivity, with criticism of the education which had accustomed them to silence, sentimentalism, and timidity.

And one of the essential factors allowing for this challenge lies in separating feminine sexuality and reproduction. This was particularly important for the emergence of the current of lesbians. Of course, the logic of the system extensively contributed both to the bourgeoisie's ability to turn this change in mentality to its own advantage (cf the spread of the market for sex shops and the substantial profits made by the pharmaceutical industry through the sale of various brands of pills) and to the fact that the bourgeoisie managed to partially coopt this radicalization through a new type of alienation: the elimination of all emotional content, replaced by "consumption." But this does not change the fact that masses of youth, including young workers, are now conscious of their sexual misery and are seeking types of emotional and intellectual relations different from those which have been proposed to them.

All of the above clearly demonstrates the complexity of the roots of the radicalization of women. Objective, conjunctural, and ideological factors lie at the root of their development of consciousness. What is important for us to call attention to, however, is the deepening and broadening of this wave of radicalization, which now affects all layers of society, proletarian women in particular.

## II. Characteristics of the Movement of Radicalization of Women

13. Although it is true that in the first countries in which they broke out (United States, Britain) the recent movements have been able to link up with the traditions of previous struggles, they are essentially different from these earlier movements, for the following reasons:

—The present period of the crisis of capitalism and its institutions and values gives rise to a radicalization and to demands qualitatively different from those which were expressed at the beginning of the century, when the demands that structured the movement derived from the incompleting tasks, for women, of the bourgeois revolution. Of course, in both cases the struggle of women puts forward bourgeois-democratic demands insisting that the bourgeoisie extend a certain number of rights to the female sex (the right to vote, equal pay for equal work, equality of rights for men and women in marriage and in regard to children).

—But because of the combativity of the working class and the fact that the struggle for socialism is now on the agenda, there is no longer any room for a broad movement of women putting forward demands solely from the standpoint of the women of the bourgeoisie (cf the movement of the British suffragists, who at the beginning of the century demanded the right to vote only for women of the privileged classes).

In fact, the winning of formal equal rights (in labor in particular) has only further highlighted the roots of the continued inequality, and this has generated a new type of consciousness, as a function of two elements which are perceived differently depending on the class to which women belong, the economic situation, and the bourgeoisie's greater or lesser need for labor power:

—the question of women's place in the family;  
—the social origins of inequality in a society of exploitation and the race for profit.

Proletarian women can be the bearers of an overall consciousness of these two elements in that their very place in the family enables the bourgeoisie to turn them



into superexploited proletarians. The women of the liberal bourgeoisie can radically challenge the sexual division of tasks in the family without on that account challenging their class privileges and the superexploitation of proletarian women (cf the statements of Giroud, secretary of state for the condition of women in France, who has denounced the mechanisms of social and sexual inequality without exposing their roots, or the movement against rape in the United States, with its demands for the institutionalization of reception centers for women based on the structures of the present regime—police, hospitals, courts—without making any criticism and without fighting for control of these centers).

Hence the possibility of radical formulations on the ideological and legal plane without waging any struggle against the system. In addition, the manner in which the family is challenged by the most privileged women generally does not take account of the economic and social functions it assumes for proletarians. If privileged women feel the family solely as an obstacle to their emancipation, it is because the level of their salaries, or their husband's salaries, allows them a certain independence and because their material resources enable them to cast domestic tasks and the education of their children onto others.

For proletarian women, on the other hand, the problem of their emancipation can be resolved only by the combination of:

—a struggle for the development of collective social services;

—a struggle to challenge the sexual division of tasks at all levels of society (family, education, labor);

—a struggle against superexploitation and against alienated labor.

It is on this overall basis that the family as an institution which perpetuates relations of alienation and oppression can be challenged. Consequently, the bourgeoisie's margin for reaction is considerable in the ideological and formal legal sphere (because it has its interests here) but is nonetheless limited by a series of factors:

—the conservatism that marks its history, the different currents within it (opposition between the liberal and

conservative bourgeoisie, weight of religion, etc.), and the reactionary positions of the layers that support the bourgeoisie electorally;

—the logic of competition and the race for profits and of individualism and the protection of bourgeois property, illustrated by the fact that the employer always seeks mechanisms of superexploitation which permit him to make the maximum possible profit, even if bourgeois law, and even the bourgeois state, proclaim the necessity of "equal pay for equal work."

In this context the anti-capitalist dynamic of the women's movement depends on its predominant social base, the slogans it raises, the scope of the struggles it is capable of stimulating, and its ability to forge links with the working class and its organizations (especially when campaigns are under way).

In this respect, the difference between the present period and the beginning of the century is that capitalist society, extending the profit system to all spheres, has massively proletarianized women in many sectors (public services, banks, department stores, industrial offices, post offices, etc.) and has concurrently extended their education, while at the same time scientific research has made real birth control possible. It is the totality of these conditions that creates the objective bases for the emergence of a mass women's movement of proletarian predominance and with an anticapitalist dynamic to its demands. As against the bourgeois feminist currents (the National Organization for Women in the United States, or, in other forms, Giroud in France), the task of such a movement is to win to the general proletarian view of the feminist struggle the masses of intellectual layers, youth, and petty-bourgeois women who, while they share the ideological challenging of oppression with the liberal bourgeois currents, can be won to a class point of view under the dual impact of the crisis of the system as a whole and the rise of workers struggles.

14. When we speak of the "independent women's movement" we mean all the women who organize among themselves at one level or another to struggle against the oppression imposed on them by this society. MLF [Movement de Libération des Femmes—Women's Libera-



tion Movement] groups; consciousness-raising groups; intervention groups in the neighborhoods; groups of high-school or university women; women's factory groups, and even some non-mixed\* trade-union structures having a relative de facto organizational independence (cf the Coalition of Labor Union Women in the United States); women's groups linked to the mixed\* movements around abortion, child-care centers, or employment—all these are so many elements of this turbulent and still largely unstructured reality called the women's movement. This movement is characterized by its heterogeneity, its more or less profound penetration into all layers of society, and the fact that it is not tied to any particular organization, even though various political currents exist within it. We may further note that its contours as a non-mixed movement are rather vague, as is shown by the MLAC [Movement Pour la Liberte de l'Avortement et de la Contraception—Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception] groups in France, which were transformed into women's groups once the broad mobilization around abortion declined, and, on the contrary, the British women's groups which turned into mixed groups of the campaign around the Working Women's Charter or the National Abortion Campaign (NAC).

It is quite clear that the broad radicalization whose roots we have enumerated above is expressed not only through the organization of women among themselves in non-mixed groups, but also in the framework of massive and punctual mixed campaigns around abortion, employment, or child-care centers. For many women and men, such campaigns have been the occasion to take the first step in an active struggle against one of the aspects of the specific oppression of women. And for many women who refuse to join non-mixed groups that would threaten their status in the family, this represents a different commitment which corresponds to their nascent radicalization. The same is true of the battle waged by many male and female militants in their trade-union organizations to get these organizations to take up some of the demands raised by the independent movement of women and to get the unions

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\* "Mixed" means involving both men and women; "nonmixed" means women-only.

to actively support the mixed campaigns in question (cf the echo of the NAC campaigns on abortion or of the Working Women's Charter in the British trade unions).

In regard to these varying degrees of radicalization, we must especially note the importance of the role that can be played by the most advanced component of the movement: that component which has an overall consciousness of the phenomena of oppression and which therefore understands the necessity of building an independent women's movement, but which is also aware that this movement will not be able to exist on a class basis without organic links with the working class and which therefore acts in accordance with this awareness. If this current (cf a portion of the "class struggle" current in France or the "socialist feminists" in Britain) is still generally marked by its petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois social origins, this goes back to the very genesis of the independent women's movement.

### The "MLF"

The "MLF" groups arose at the end of the 1960s in close relation to the "new left" and the student organizations and often out of the very fact that these organizations had not taken up the problems relating to the specific oppression of women. In countries like Germany, Canada, and the United States, where the low level of the class struggle allowed for all varieties of confusion, many women who came out of the student movement came to reject Marxism and Leninism as the very expression of the forms of "male" authority which they claimed to be fighting. The weight of the bourgeois and reformist feminists (cf NOW) contributed to bolstering the idea that the solidarity of women above and beyond classes creates a community of interests among women which transcends all other levels of oppression; this in turn leads to the theory of the struggle of the sexes with all its consequences: absolute priority to consciousness-raising and "self-help" groups, prevention of any external intervention and thus of any possibility of linking up with women of other social layers (cf the composition of most of the "MLF"



groups, in their majority made up of students and working intellectuals).

### The Neighborhood Groups

In reaction to this tendency, "neighborhood" groups arose which wanted to break with the purely internal functioning of the "MLF" groups by intervening in a given social reality. If this opening to the outside turned out to be so difficult, if many of these groups soon found themselves locked into discussions centering on their own experiences, it was because of a series of factors whose relative weight varies depending on the country involved: social heterogeneity and extremely diverse levels of consciousness within the groups; absence of any real roots in the neighborhoods (few of these women lived in the neighborhood concerned) and absence of structures (tenants or parents groups) for mass intervention; intellectual comprehension of the concrete problems posed for the women of a given neighborhood and difficulty in moving from words within the group to agitation around themes which appeared minimalist in any event; resistance of the women militants of some far-left organizations (our own included!) to committing themselves to local work which threatened to become administrative, etc.

It is often in the context of some campaign, whether mixed or not, around a precise objective (abortion, for example MLAC in France, NAC in Britain, the #218 in Germany; or employment, for example the Charter movement in Britain) that real intervention groups arose whose essential task was to carry on propaganda and agitation in relation to a given mobilization (demonstrations, pickets, interventions in parliament). These puntual groups generally disappeared after the culminating point of the mobilization, but they often gave rise to lasting non-mixed women's groups whose aim is to deepen understanding of their specific oppression among a certain number of women who became sensitized to these problems through the struggle. Nevertheless, we must note the importance of genuine neighborhood groups—locally implanted, capable of waging campaigns against rising prices or for the improvement of social services, assembling housewives

and working women—such as have recently emerged in Spain, where they are often directly linked to mixed neighborhood organizations (tenants associations, parents associations, local trade-union structures, etc.).

Apart from these groups of heterogeneous composition, there are now many groups linked to workplaces or educational institutions (women's groups in factories, faculty groups, high-school groups, etc.) whose essential objective is to intervene around the specific problems of their social or professional milieu.

Finally, in relation to the rise of workers struggles, it must be pointed out that in several countries we have seen the emergence of a number of more or less formal, more or less official groups in the framework of the unions themselves (reactivation of trade-union commissions, as in France or Britain; creation of interunion structures, whether or not open to unorganized women, as in Italy and Switzerland; emergence of specific trade-union structures for women centralized at the national level, such as CLUW in the United States, etc.). These groups are integral parts of the women's movement; their coordination around precise themes should permit stimulation of mass campaigns against this or that aspect of the specific oppression of women.

15. What ties all these groups together is not their general orientations, which vary enormously depending on whether the major influence within them is reformist, radical feminist, or revolutionary, but their common understanding that specific oppression of women exists and that the fight which must be waged against all the discrimination to which women are subject requires specific forms of organization that enable women themselves to take charge of the struggle for their own demands. Hence the importance of non-mixed meetings in which discussion about personal experiences can take place, in which each woman is given the floor and is able to develop confidence in herself, her ability to express herself and to convince and win over other women to the fight.

For this reason, even though the theories of the radical feminists have led some groups to turn in on themselves,



making "consciousness-raising groups" the movement's sole reason for being, there must be no question of rejecting the principle of discussions on personal experiences. In the majority of cases, this can be done only in a non-mixed context, which is absolutely not contradictory to the principle of a regular intervention. It is no accident that most women who radicalize—and the reformists themselves have understood this—feel the need for such discussion as a means by which to gain a more comprehensive social and political understanding, as a weapon that enables them to commit themselves individually to the struggle against their oppression and against the system that underlies that oppression.

16. Nevertheless, the concept "independent women's movement" represents quite different realities depending on the country concerned and the prevailing political situation. The first women's liberation movements in the United States, the Scandinavian countries, and Germany, born in countries marked by Protestantism and a certain degree of political liberalism and often basing themselves on the traditions of previous women's movements, are those which are now having the greatest difficulty finding a second wind, both because of the low level of the class struggle in several of these countries and because of the maneuvering room commanded by the bourgeoisie, which has been able to make a number of political and economic concessions. This has resulted in an ebb of the movement (cf the policy of investing in social sectors affecting women being implemented by the Social Democratic governments in the Scandinavian countries).

In most of the countries in which the depth of the economic and social crisis and the rise of workers struggles are out of phase, the scope of the movement and its organic links with the workers movement are obviously limited. The impact of the radical feminist current is that much greater since the leaderships of the traditional organizations offer no response to the nascent radicalization of women in general and women of the working class in particular. It may even be said that in a number of countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, etc., in the absence of a massive entry into struggle by the working class, the withdrawal of the women's movement into itself

threatens to move in the direction of growing sensitivity to positions theorizing the struggle of the sexes and the irreconcilable opposition between the women's movement and the workers movement.

Hence, the major difficulty for the movements in these countries remains the fragmentation and isolation of most of them. Coordinating bodies are either nonexistent or are rare and function badly because of resistance to any principle of democratic delegation and any attempt to structure the movement in general. The political level of discussion inevitably suffers and the predominance of themes of ideological discussion, as well as the often chaotic appearance of general assemblies (forms of "organization" inherited from the first "MLF" groups), often discourage the rare working women who come with the intention of effecting a linkup between their group and the rest of the women's movement.

In contrast, the movements in southern Europe, born under the impact of protracted struggles and mass mobilizations of the workers, with a real base in the popular neighborhoods and the factories, have very different possibilities of development, as is shown by the example of Spain. Although it was the most recent to arise, the women's movement in this country is nonetheless at this stage the broadest, most democratic, and best structured of the European movements. Although the prerevolutionary crisis has of course determined the extent of the radicalization, it is nevertheless the combined effect of the experiences of other countries and the assimilation of the gains made and mistakes committed which accounts for the rapidity with which the Spanish women's groups have been able to coordinate among themselves and sink roots into social or professional situations. Socially heterogeneous groups and those which do not correspond to a given geographical unit have very little room in which to exist in Spain. The maturity of the political situation requires that reality be dealt with directly: neighborhood groups which are really rooted in the life of the neighborhood through tenants associations or local structures of the workers movement, women's factory groups, groups linked to university coordinating bodies or local, regional, and national coordinating bodies, as well as specific



coordinating bodies organized by theme or sector—such are the elements which testify to the very new nature of this mass movement. While we must not at all mystify the degree of organization that has been achieved so far (in the situation of semiclandestinity which now prevails, permanent links among the various groups remain quite tenuous), this movement nonetheless indicates the general road to the construction of a movement that has a proletarian base and deals directly with the major concerns of the working class.

The development and coordination of various groups points in the same direction in Italy and even in France, despite the obstacles the reformists—and especially the Stalinists—erect against the independent organization of women. Of course, the explosion of May 1968 receded too rapidly to permit the nascent women's movement to convince significant layers of the workers movement of the importance of the struggle against the specific oppression of women. Because of this, the movement has had a tendency to develop sectarian positions, even among the groups claiming to adhere to a class point of view and declaring that they want to defend the interests of the most exploited and oppressed women. But the broad radicalization now being expressed in the factories and unions, although still unstructured, indicates that the necessary objective conditions exist to overcome this isolation (cf the way some long-term struggles, such as that of Lip, have brought the specific problems of working women to the fore, along with the necessity of these women linking up with existing women's groups). This has also been seen in Britain, where the attacks of the bourgeoisie, combined with certain gains of the workers movement in the struggle for the emancipation of women, have already permitted the beginning of an organic linkup between the women's movement and the workers movement.

17. As the campaigns of MLAC in France and NAC in Britain have shown, mixed movements on a theme relating to the oppression of women are a decisive means by which to stimulate discussion on this oppression within the trade unions and the working class in general, even in

countries in which the women's movement is only embryonic. The movement for abortion and contraception, which has had a mass character in some European and North American countries, consisted essentially, in its broadest aspect, of a struggle to win abortion as a democratic right. A series of bourgeois governments, donning the mantle of liberalism, then judged that there was no great danger in granting a right that remains a very formal one for the majority of women, and they were able to maneuver rather cleverly to defuse the broadest mobilizations (cf the impact of MLAC in France and rapid decline of the movement after the law was passed). Nevertheless, the importance of winning this right, even if limited, must not be underestimated for the development of consciousness on the part of the most underprivileged women. The women who have always had to get abortions secretly and under the worst conditions are beginning to realize that in spite of the modification of the law, in spite of their "right," things have hardly changed if there is no space in the hospitals.

The dynamic of such a movement can thus enable important layers of women to take a step forward in their consciousness both of the specific oppression of women and of the class character of this society. Moreover, in its recent developments in Italy, it emerges as a mobilization that attacks the roots of inequality between the sexes.

In Italy a wing of the women's movement active in the creation of the *consultori* (consultation centers managed by women) has contributed to the discussion on the rights of women, to making decisions themselves in regard to abortion, to exercising control over a series of questions relating to maternity and health care in general. The all-powerful position of local authorities, like that of the medical and psychiatric "experts," has been challenged by the very creation of these *consultori*, which aim at demonstrating by concrete example how women can organize to control certain specific aspects of their condition. In this sense, the struggle around abortion and the mobilizations to which it has given rise are levers with which to intervene in the traditional organizations of the workers movement around problems that had previously been considered secondary and to compel the trade-union



leaderships to take positions on them. This is especially important at a time when a wing of the bourgeoisie is using the theme of abortion to divide and weaken the workers movement as a whole.

"Laissez les vivre," "Oui à la vie," "Friends of the Fetus," "Society for the Protection of Unborn Children"—the names change but the objective remains the same: maintain order, defeat the desire of women to assert their independence. All these associations are linked both to far-right xenophobic or fascistic currents and to the most retrograde wing of the Catholic church. In the United States they go so far as to spend millions of dollars on hospital equipment to keep three- or four-month-old fetuses alive artificially. But the often bizarre appearance of these associations should not lead us to ignore the real audience they have among a portion of the working class still subject to the most backward ideologies.

The response of the political and trade-union organizations is thus decisive in the end, at a time when the scope of mobilizations indicates that broad layers of the working class are really sensitive to the theme of abortion.

It is incumbent upon the women's movement to base itself on this to generate a much broader discussion on all the themes relating to the oppression of women, beginning with such immediate subjects as the discrimination working women continue to suffer and the almost complete absence of the collective social services without which it is useless to speak of challenging the sexual division of labor. But at the same time, it is the capacity of the workers vanguard to offer responses to all the questions that arise within the framework of the present crisis of the family; responses which, by offering a socialist alternative, will strengthen the objective basis for the recomposition of the workers movement.

### **III. Varieties of Responses to the Question of the Oppression of Women**

#### **A. The Response of the Bourgeoisie**

18. As has been shown by the battle around abortion,

the positions of the bourgeoisie in face of the "threat" the radicalization of women represents for the equilibrium of traditional relations within capitalist society are far from uniform. The existing division between the progressive and the most reactionary wings of the bourgeoisie was constantly reflected on the parliamentary level in a struggle by the latter wing to block any changes in the legal sphere. This has been seen in Germany, with the CDU-CSU's opposition to any reform of the family law, in Ireland, where the government has tried to refuse to apply the law on equal pay, and in the United States, where the "Stop ERA" movement is doing all it can to prevent the constitutional amendment on equal rights from being approved by a sufficient number of states before 1979.

What has been striking in the policy of the bourgeoisie during recent years, concurrent with the economic attacks mentioned above, is the general tendency to make a series of concessions on the matter of formal equality for women, the obvious aim being to try to contain the nascent radicalization within the framework of reforms of the capitalist system. This is also the result of the pressure exerted by some members of the bourgeoisie itself, women in particular, who are sensitive to the need to adapt, to alter traditions and institutions in face of the general crisis of traditional social values. The many reforms made during International Women's Year attest to this.

Moreover, the contradictory character of this International Women's Year for the radicalization of women must be noted. It is certain that the prestige and public relations operation undertaken by the bourgeoisie succeeded in part. But one must not make the mistake of neglecting the fantastic impact this "women's year" had on broad layers of working women in the sense that it enabled them to begin to become conscious of a series of inequalities to which they had not been sensitive up to then. This is especially clear in a country like Spain, where what is emerging from the influence of the ideas now penetrating the consciousness of thousands of women for the first time is not at all the point of view of the bourgeoisie as expressed in the mass media campaigns, but rather the will to struggle, on a class basis, against the injustices suffered by the most oppressed women. For the rest, it is



quite clear that the essence of the concessions made by the bourgeoisie are primarily ideological and do not have direct implications on economic policy. This is shown by the innumerable reforms made in the family during past years, all of which concern absolutely secondary features which do not challenge the institution itself (the right to select the woman's name as the family name, modification of the laws on responsibilities of spouses in the household, recognition of illegitimate children and their right to inherit, etc.).

In the case of reforms that could have economic consequences, such as the law on equal pay, we have already seen what the reality is as reflected in the statistics. Wherever the bourgeoisie is strong enough to impose its will on the working class, changes in the law cannot change anything in the sexual division of labor, the foundation of inequality in employment and thus of the wage inequality between men and women. (In the United States, where the equal pay law was passed in 1963, it is now applied in 145 contracts out of 1,300.) Nevertheless, in a number of countries the well-known "Convention No. 100" of the International Labor Organization (which dates from 1950) has enabled the bourgeoisie to make a lot of noise and claim the mantle of liberalism, going so far as to create a "council of equality" in Denmark.

As for the other reforms of social legislation which have economic implications (maternity leaves, family allocations, etc.) the least one can say is that there is a gap between the crumbs that have been accorded today ("because of the crisis") and the many promises made nearly everywhere on the eve of International Women's Year.

#### **B. Responses of the Organizations of the Workers Movement**

19. The emergence of the women's liberation movement has profoundly affected the reformist currents as a whole, forcing them to alter their positions and break their silence. Their responses vary according to whether they

are strong or weak nationally and whether or not they participate in government bodies, but none of the Social Democratic or Stalinist parties have been able to maintain silence in face of the radicalization of women, for all of them have suffered the by-products of this radicalization internally. The year 1975 in particular gave rise to a flurry of position-taking in which these parties often concretized their turns, since most of them understood the electoral importance of not remaining silent in face of the initiatives taken by the bourgeoisie in the context of International Women's Year. At the same time, we must not underestimate the impact of reformist ideas and currents among the masses of women whose radicalization is still in its initial stages.

20. As for the Social Democratic parties, whose heterogeneity is in any case well known, they have often reacted to the first feminist mobilizations before the CPs, for they were under pressure from part of their own rank and file. What generally comes through in the *written* (one dare not say "programmatic") positions expressed by the majority of the SPs since the beginning of the 1970s is a relatively progressive line, clearly more liberal than that of the CPs in regard to the independence of women. This is particularly reflected in their positions on abortion (acceptance among many SPs that the women should have the right to decide). As for the independent women's movement, in most cases they carefully avoid speaking of it or having to recognize its existence (although some Socialist women militants are active in this movement on an individual basis), and we have seen the beginning of a change in attitude in the policy of some groups of Socialist women toward local women's groups.

But it is important to distinguish the written positions of the Social Democrats from their *practice*, especially when these parties find themselves heading up governments. Wherever they have had opportunities to polish up their image at low cost by stating that they favor liberalization of abortion, they have not hesitated to act as Kreisky did in Austria or Brandt did in Germany during an initial period. Wherever they have found themselves facing a women's movement strong enough to force concessions on



them, as in Australia, they have jettisoned some ballast by granting subsidies to women's groups demanding child-care centers, simultaneously arranging for these groups to administer the shortage and often making them keep quiet by integrating them politically. But as soon as the question of a confrontation with a significant wing of the bourgeoisie has been posed, the Social Democrats have retreated immediately. The lack of response from the German Social Democracy when the Karlsruhe Supreme Court annulled the Bundestag vote authorizing saline abortions is an example. As is the complete silence of the Wilson government about the recommendations of the Select Committee—actively supported by some members of the Labour party, such as James White—which called for restrictions of the 1967 law, the intensification of penalties, and the limitation of the right of immigrant women to get abortions.

Finally, we have noted above the haste with which these same "Socialist" governments have proceeded to make the budget cuts demanded by the ruling class, which they have done the more sharply the more politically threatened they have been (cf the 5,000 jobs eliminated in the child-care sector in Denmark at the strike of a pen).

In both cases, Socialist women militants have showed to what extent they are caught between the dynamic of the demands they had advanced up to then and the fear that if they protested against these "betrayals" they would deal a blow to the precarious government equilibrium in which their party was functioning by revealing to the masses the inability of the Social Democracy to keep its promises and its desire to collaborate with the most reactionary wing of the bourgeoisie at all costs.

Thus, it is important for us to participate in the debate which is now going on in most countries between the women of the Social Democracy and their leaderships (cf the debate on the question of the six-hour day in the Swedish SP).

21. As for the Communist parties, the evolution of their positions has been generally dependent on their greater or lesser fidelity to the USSR. The particularly reactionary theories of the French CP on the family were issued when the new family code was introduced in the USSR in 1934

and when abortions were prohibited after 1936. And the fluctuations in Soviet abortion law that have occurred since then—liberalization in 1955, reintroduction of restrictions toward 1970—have scarcely troubled either the Soviet leaders or the French Communists in their elegies of glory to the family order. As in the other workers states, women in the Soviet Union have no rights in the matter of abortion. It is the bureaucrats who, having deprived the working class of all power, decide whether the birth curve ought to rise or decline, and they modify the abortion law accordingly—just as it is they alone who determine the economic plan. The family is thus one of the pillars of the bureaucratic order in the USSR. The European CPs, whether they address women as workers in the unions or as voters in the election districts, have long axised their demands around "arranging" the tasks that fall upon women in the family. From the struggles for guarantees for pregnant women to the improvement of working hours and conditions, the fight is always centered on improving the working conditions of the housewife and not on the socialization of domestic tasks.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1970s, the deep fissures in the Stalinist movement and the pressure brought to bear by the radicalization of women and the evolution of the bourgeoisie itself have compelled a number of CPs to evolve, and even the most conservative are now tending to modify their positions. The resistance of most of these parties to recognizing the existence of the independent women's movement derives in large part from the fact that some of them had formed their own women's organizations just after the Second World War, and for a while they cherished the hope of passing these organizations off in the eyes of the working class as the only viable alternative to the "movement of mad women." But reality prevailed over their obstinacy. Some CPs that are relatively weak on a national scale, such as the British, recognized more rapidly than others the positive role that had been played by the movement in bringing broad layers of working women into struggle. In the countries in which the revolutionary crisis is most acute the mass movement has compelled the CPs and the Social Democrats to modify their positions both on their analysis of the



family and on their assessment of the women's liberation movement. The flexibility with which the women of the MDM (Democratic Women's Movement, the Spanish organization supposedly "independent of any political organization" but actually closely linked to the CP) reacted to the recent emergence of the women's movement in Spain, like the present turn of the UDI (Union of Italian Women, linked to the CP), shows that the Stalinist reformist currents are capable of some flexibility as soon as they perceive that a movement affecting a broad section of the working class could bypass them. As in the case of the Social Democracy, the position this or that CP occupies in the national political field largely determines its reactions: The desperate attempts of the Italian CP not to break with the Christian Democracy by making all possible and imaginable concessions on the question of abortion obviously did not facilitate the task of women of the UDI (while at the same time these attempts caused crises to break out within the party).

It is essential to correctly estimate the impact of reformist women in the movement, for many of the women who animate the movement are feminists who are far from limiting their struggle to the purely economic aspects of the exploitation of women. There is thus great danger that the reformists may win many otherwise quite combative women to their positions ("the democratic government or the Republic will resolve all our problems," they say in substance in Spain), thus holding up the entry of these women into the fight for the overthrow of the bourgeois state.

22. The trade unions have often been the last to react to the radicalization of women, since the pressure of women in their own ranks has not been immediately felt. On the one hand because women are proportionally not very numerous in the unions—with a few exceptions resulting from particular historical factors, they represent between 15 and 25 percent of the organized workers (or sometimes even less)—and on the other hand because women are almost completely absent from the leadership bodies, which places absolute limits on their possibilities for self-expression given the bureaucratic functioning of virtually all unions.

Here again International Women's Year triggered the first reaction in many cases:

- minimal elaboration of a "program";
- reactivation of women's commissions which had long been moribund (or composed of a few bureaucrats, generally male);
- organization of the first somewhat broad gatherings of women in the unions;
- establishment of training courses for women and often placing of the "question of women" on the agenda of trade-union cadre courses for the first time in years.

This is accompanied by an increase in the rate of unionization of women in most of the advanced capitalist countries. As a whole, we can see that the irruption of women onto the political scene shakes the traditional structures and contributes to breaking down barriers: of the many interunion commissions—often open to unorganized women—which have been established in Italy, Canada, Switzerland, and elsewhere. These are, of course, empirical and paternalist responses of the bureaucrats to their past deficiencies ("we have to let the women get together because there are so few of them") and they may be temporary, but they also express the desire of women to break down the category barriers, comprehend their oppression, and defend their interests as superexploited working women from a central point of view.

In the United States, for example, the trade-union leaders who in 1974 had themselves initiated the creation of a women's trade-union organization, CLUW, found themselves outflanked by their rank and file, who forced them to wage an active campaign for defense of equal rights, a result of the significant number of working women who had participated in the mobilizations stimulated by NOW. In view of the total absence of activity by the American working class and the generally extremely reactionary positions of the AFL-CIO, it is important to note that it is the mobilization of women—and also Blacks on occasion—that has served as a lever for challenging not only the chauvinist positions of the unions, but also their bureaucratic functioning and their habitual policy of integrating the working class through negotiations with the employers carried out at the top. The discussion



around the Working Women's Charter in Britain has allowed for a recent meeting of 400 male and female delegates from unions, NAC groups, political organizations, women's groups, etc. and the principles of such a charter have been taken up by women of various currents in France, Ireland, and Spain. This shows that the participation of women in trade-union life points in the direction of strengthening the independent activity of the workers as a whole, while at the same time preparing women to play an active role in the bodies of self-organization of the working class during prerevolutionary or revolutionary periods.

23. Whatever the tactical problems that may be posed in various countries in relation to what structures to push for (more or less open trade-union commissions, links among factory women's groups), the essential thing is to maximally utilize all available opportunities to permit the entry of the greatest possible number of women into the unions, often beginning with the "weak links" represented by public services, in which women represent a very high percentage of the work force and where sensitivity to the women's movement is greater than elsewhere.

Two fundamental questions which must be posed are *trade-union democracy*, without which there will be no lasting activity of women within the workers organizations, and the *struggle against the sexism* of the workers movement and its leaderships in particular. In fact, every member of the unions must be allowed to exercise full membership rights. For women the struggle for democracy in the unions thus implies a fight for the leaderships to recognize their specific needs (meetings during working hours in order to avoid problems of taking care of children, etc.). And it is only if the union is organized in a genuinely democratic manner that these demands will be able to be met.

Moreover, the unions' acceptance of the social and sexual division of labor partly explains why combative working women are so often prepared to organize to struggle for immediate demands provided they do not affect the problems of their households. In the case of Lip we saw the importance of the struggle itself for women

beginning to break down this wall between their professional and private lives. Collective discussion at a special moment when solidarity is expressed in a daily manner is a decisive element in leading the greatest number of women to become conscious both of the double exploitation to which they are subject and of the necessity of organizing in a permanent manner to combat it.

Everything indicates that it is on the basis of such a fight in the unions that we will see the end of the situations such as have arisen in Britain and elsewhere, where workers' wives have been won over by the arguments of the bourgeoisie to such an extent that they have organized to break their husbands' strikes. Several recent examples show on the contrary that with a correct intervention by the union or by a women's group, those women who are called "inactive" in official statistics can be won to the struggle and can strengthen it through their solidarity actions.

24. The reactions of the organizations of the *far left of the workers movement* to the emergence of the independent women's movement have varied as a function of their political orientations and the type of base they have.

The positions of the "orthodox" Mao-Stalinists (with the exception of those in some Scandinavian countries) is characterized by rejection of any form of independent organization of women, the claim being that this divides the working class. In general they have no specific intervention, except for a paragraph here and there in their factory leaflets. For the rest, we may note *two major tendencies* among the various *centrist organizations*, whether they be of Maoist origin, Trotskyist origin, or issued of the Social Democratic left or of the traditional centrist parties or even neo-Stalinist parties. (There is, of course, no rigid barrier between these two tendencies, since these organizations are in full evolution.)

• The *first tendency* is composed of organizations (PT and ORT in Spain, POCH in Switzerland, etc.) which admit the necessity for women to meet among themselves, but in groups directly controlled by the "party." They generally refuse to recognize the existence of the independent women's movement in its composite and non-mixed aspect as a strategic element in the liberation struggle of



women. On the contrary, the women's groups they lead are conceived from a tactical and conjunctural point of view. The aim is to win some women militants to their ranks. They often mechanically rely on the resolutions of the Communist International to justify this rejection of work with women of other political currents in common permanent structures and content themselves with participating in broad campaigns when they cannot do otherwise. While they correctly insist on the work that must be done in the mixed structures of the workers movement, particularly the trade unions, they more or less reduce the problem of the oppression of women to the question of their superexploitation in the work place. Their fear of the "petty-bourgeois" character of the independent women's movement (which was not always unfounded in the case of the "MLF" groups, as we have seen) makes them reject what gave this movement its richness and underlay its existence: its understanding that specific oppression exists not only on the job but at all levels of society, especially in the family.

• The *second tendency* is composed of organizations which until quite recently often still defended either the workerist positions of the Mao-Stalinists or the positions of the tendency described above. They have since recognized the strategic importance of the women's movement and are more or less present in it depending on the weight of the movement, their own political and social reality, the relationship of forces between them and the other currents of the workers movement, etc. What generally characterizes the positions of these political groups (Avanguardia Operaia, Lotta Continua, and the PDUP in Italy, Révo! in France, Kommunistische Bund in Germany, etc.) is a certain populism, ultraleftist attitudes (or sometimes, on the contrary, opportunist ones) on the trade-union question, lack of understanding of the role of the state with respect to the family and hence of the relationship between the women's movement and the workers movement (and between the women's movement and the mixed, punctual mobilizations). This gives them a constant tendency to oscillate between sectarian positions and the greatest impressionism, (cf the sharp turn of Lotta Continua in face of the pressure exerted by the women's movement in its

own ranks after some of its sections attacked the abortion demonstration in Rome in December 1975). Their attempt to align themselves behind the forces that hold hegemony in the workers movement—SP, CP, trade-union bureaucracy—comes through particularly when it is no longer a matter of theoretical analyses but comes time to determine the axes and slogans of a campaign or when a fight has to be waged against attempts at cooptation by the reformists. Their lack of understanding of the role of the vanguard particularly resulted in some of the women members of the PDUP refusing to clearly defend the positions of Democrazia Proletaria within the women's movement during the spring 1976 elections in Italy for fear of scaring off movement militants.

Whatever the confusion and hesitation, including in our own ranks, there is no doubt that the contribution of the women of these currents to the building of an independent women's movement has been decisive during the past period.

The emergence of a class-struggle tendency stimulated by revolutionary Marxists wherever the situation calls for it requires a common practice of our comrades and the most advanced layers of the movement, with the militants of these groups, and a theoretical and programmatic clarification that affects these organizations as a whole. More generally, we must do all we can to exacerbate the contradictions that run through the reformist and centrist organizations on their analysis of the oppression of women and their responses to it. Through our initiatives we can not only win important layers of women still subject to the influence of reformists of all stripes, but can also force an evolution on the part of a good number of those women who are now vacillating between ultraleftist theoretical positions and actions on minimal bases.

#### **IV. Program and Strategy of the Revolutionary Marxists**

##### **A. Evolution of Positions Within the Workers Movement**

25. The contribution of Marx and Engels on the analysis



of the oppression of women is fundamental for us in that they showed that this oppression was rooted in the development of the patriarchal family with the birth of class society. They believed that the present forms of this oppression were the result of a long historical process and that the massive entry of women into production would be a decisive element in the rapid withering away of the proletarian family and in the emancipation of the proletariat as a whole.

Nevertheless, bourgeois ideology, based on the social division of labor and the sexual division of tasks which derives from this social division of labor under class society, has turned out to be so strongly rooted in the mentalities of all social layers that at its beginning the workers movement refused to recognize the possibilities the process of industrialization offered for the emancipation of women (with the exception of the anarchist current or some circles influenced by the utopian current). The whole discussion that took place in the First International reflects this. Against the analyses of Marx and Engels, the positions of the Lassalleans and Proudhonists retained a very broad audience in the various sections of the International Workingmen's Association. They asserted that "the woman's place is in the home" and that the aim should be to "assure her an honorable status in order to put an end to prostitution." Convinced that the wage-labor of women was the source of male unemployment and the lowering of the wages of men, they counterposed the demand for male wages sufficient to maintain a woman in the home (at two congresses of the IWA certain delegates went so far as to propose a wage for housework in order to convince women to stay at home).

It was only under the pressure of the struggles of women, which became increasingly numerous during the 1870s in all the European countries, that the most backward positions were really questioned.

Similar observations may be made about the Second International. On the basis of a literal interpretation of Marx and Engels's prediction about the dissolution of the proletarian family—a correct prediction over the long term—the leaders of the workers movement at the beginning of the century, partly under the influence of the

evolutionist positions of a Kautsky, did not seek to utilize the theoretical weapons of Marxism to make a correct analysis of the situation of women at that time.

It is obvious to us today that Marx underestimated not only the adaptive capacities of capitalism but also the specific dimension of women's oppression, linked to the question of child-rearing. The massive increase in the number of women wage workers during the years 1890-1910 did not bring about the disappearance of the family, although the wave of radicalization expressed a previously unprecedented combativity among proletarian women (cf the very tough struggles in the textile industry in most European countries and the desire of women to organize, including in their own structures when the existing unions refused to accept them). But the Social Democrats' lack of a profound analysis of the transformation of the role of the family and its utilization by capitalism must be placed in its historical context. On the one hand, the overestimation in the writings of Marx of the pace at which the struggle for socialism would unfold is a phenomenon that is by no means limited to the analysis of the oppression of women and the conditions for their liberation; the idea of the imminence of the revolution was deeply rooted in broad currents of the workers movement. On the other hand, the objective situation goes a long way toward explaining the insistence on a series of demands around legal equality and economic conditions. Finally, account must be taken of the weight of ruling ideology in regard to women within the workers movement itself and of the fact that the radicalization of women around their own oppression was still very limited among working women, as was their understanding of the need to organize among themselves. At the time, it was mainly women of the bourgeoisie who were mobilizing around specific problems, but on the basis of positions reflecting their own class interests. Of course, things had changed since Marx and Engels had described the English situation of 1850, in which women were working twelve to fifteen hours a day and many children were doing the same from the age of six or eight on, while others were abandoned to themselves without any education, and in which the rate of alcoholism and mortality resulted in a life expectancy among the workers which did



not exceed thirty.

But it is obvious that throughout the whole period of the early twentieth century, even in the most developed countries, the struggle to win the minimum economic base to permit any talk about the emancipation of women appeared as absolutely primordial given the development of the productive forces at the time. It is thus in the light of this reality that one must understand the delay of the workers leaderships in understanding the totality of the factors that subtend the oppression of women.

Nevertheless, a number of militants of the Social Democracy—particularly women, headed by Zetkin—fought against this delay. Prior to 1914 the acquisitions of the Second International may be summarized as follows: In some countries gigantic efforts were made to organize working women within the workers movement, which was a big step. Even though these women were organized essentially as workers and their oppression as women was little stressed, specific demands were raised, especially as concerns the socialization of housework. The audience of *Die Gleichheit (Equality)*, the newspaper edited by Zetkin, the circulation of which was 100,000, was enormous; it contributed extensively to the organization of women in trade unions and in the ranks of the Socialist party. Given that at the time the workers movement was marked by the greatest hesitation in a number of areas (support to the Russian revolution, antimilitarism, price control, contraception), this journal adopted particularly progressive positions and in 1914 enabled significant layers of women to be won to the positions upheld by the left wing of the Social Democracy.

26. The Bolsheviks based themselves on these gains when in 1917 they enacted the most progressive laws ever passed to foster the emancipation of women (freedom of divorce, free abortion on demand, abolition of laws punishing homosexuality, protection of women workers, free marriage, etc.). Nevertheless, here again underestimation of the factors which in most cases prevented women from becoming active militants in the workers movement—and in the structures of the new regime in the USSR—and underestimation of the weight of the dominant ideology within the workers movement, including in

the ranks of revolutionaries, led the Communist leaders to pass a resolution during the Third Congress of the Communist International which appears extremely propagandist in hindsight and which is far from taking account of the problems raised by certain delegates to the women's conference which had preceded the Comintern Congress. Louise Colliard in particular, after noting that the French section had refused to carry out any intervention among women up to then, stressed the importance of women being able to meet among themselves during an initial period in order to get used to taking the floor and to gain self-confidence. Nevertheless, this resolution had the merit of being the first to be so extensively distributed in the workers movement and to include an analysis of the family and the specific oppression of women (although without posing the question of the organization of women among themselves in this context).

In the USSR the creation of the Genotdel (Ministry of Women Workers and Peasants of the CP) attempted to respond to this problem through the organization of local groups coordinated at various levels. With Lenin, Kollantai, and Inessa Armand, Trotsky was nevertheless one of the few Bolshevik leaders to stress these questions and to try to respond with concrete solutions to the problems proletarian women were raising, as is shown by his conferences with working and peasant women in the years 1923-25. In particular he encouraged them to take initiatives themselves to create new cultural structures in view of the economic backwardness which made it impossible to create the collective organs planned by the state several years previously.

These profound economic difficulties, the isolation of the USSR in the international political context, its cultural backwardness, and the death of a very great number of Bolshevik leaders during the civil war lie at the origin of the development of the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy's struggle to preserve itself, relying on some of the most reactionary patriarchal values (hierarchy, authoritarianism, search for production at any price, etc.), explains the very sharp turn backward that accompanied the new family code of 1934. This code abolished the essence of the progressive laws passed in 1917 (the central task of women



again became being mothers; in 1949 they went so far as to reintroduce a medal glorifying women with the most children). But the almost complete lack of reaction among women to these retrograde processes cannot be explained solely by fear of repression nor even solely by the repercussions of the economic situation (the lack of planned collective social services did not especially encourage challenging traditional relations). Account must also be taken of the weak insertion of women into the machinery of the new regime and the difficulty women had, the great majority of them being illiterate, in actively participating in building socialism when they were not even always aware of their rights. While there is no question of accusing the Bolsheviks of not having understood the scope of the problem, it must nevertheless be said that their underestimation of the subjective factor and of the specific oppression of women in the family (parallel to the reticence of many of them toward the movement of communes and the search for different lifestyles among the youth during the 1920s) certainly had its effects on the noncommitment of broad layers of women who later stood by passively as the bureaucratic counterrevolution developed.

The importance of this evolution in the USSR has proved to be decisive for the reactionary positions adopted by the other CPs on a world scale, which reproduce on a national scale the theories of "big brother." If to this one adds the consequences of fascist ideology on the question of the place of women in society and the reemergence of the most conservative theses within the international Social Democracy, one can understand the blanket of silence around the question of the emancipation of women from the end of the 1920s through the 1960s, as well as the profound gap that exists in the history of the radicalization of women (cf the meager weight of this question in France in 1936, in spite of women's effective participation in struggles).

27. Probably the only important exception was Spain, where in 1936-39 women linked to the anarchist current stimulated a broad women's movement on a class basis, composed of some 200 local groups coordinated among themselves on the neighborhood, factory, and regional

level and based on a number of national secretariats with distinct tasks. This organization, *Mujeres Libres*, whose existence is explained by the particular historical development of the workers movement in Spain and the weight of the anarchists within it, clearly opposed the pacifism of bourgeois feminists and consciously emphasized the struggle against illiteracy and for the education of women in order to enable them to emerge from their ignorance and win their economic independence. Although a series of ambiguities and deviations marked this movement because of its anarchist leadership and its positions on the question of the state, and although the situation of civil war was an obvious impediment to the application of the program which was advanced, it is no less true that this is to our knowledge the most advanced historical example of a women's movement which, while asserting its class character and anticapitalist objectives, insisted on its organizational independence of the workers movement, since chauvinism repelled broad layers of women who were able to be won to action because of the existence of independent structures.

#### **B. The Origin of the Oppression of Women and the Marxist Method of Analysis**

28. Our approach begins from two fundamental considerations:

a) There is no inevitable link between biological differences and oppression. Individual physical characteristics have evolved through the ages as a very function of the degree of development of society; they no longer play the same role today in determining social status as they did in the past. Discrimination linked to physical differences has been accentuated or attenuated depending on the period and the policy of the ruling classes. There is no "natural" link between childbirth and sexual, social, and cultural discrimination. This discrimination arises from a certain type of economic and social relations; it has changed, and we know that it can be overcome under given historic conditions. Such is the conclusion of the analysis of Engels, which separates us from all those men or women who believe that the oppression of women is a "natural" phenomenon, either because (in the case of the



former) they believe that the social inferiority of women flows from their very nature, or on the contrary, because (in the case of the latter) they believe that the oppressive role of men is inherent in their nature (cf the theories of the radical feminists).

b) The analysis of the place of women in a given society must highlight the articulation between the conditions of reproduction of the species on the one hand (conditions of the birth and rearing of children) and the relations of production on the other hand (the way in which labor is organized). Each society (and within it, each class and each layer of women) must be analyzed in terms of how maternity is assumed socially and what connections exist between relations of reproduction and production in general. This is also an acquisition of the approach used by Engels, and we think it is possible to apply this approach more systematically today than he was able to do in his time.

29. We do not wish to enter into a debate here on the question of whether a matriarchy existed or not. Recent research has led some anthropologists to contest Engels' conclusions on this point, underlining the somewhat linear aspect of his approach, which relied on the limited knowledge of the time. Many of these anthropologists insist on the fact that matrilineal kinship does not necessarily mean matriarchy in the sense of a system in which women hold a privileged social status. Likewise, while women were valued for their fertility in cultural and religious symbols during various periods, this does not entitle us to automatically conclude that their role was superior to that of men. On the contrary, one may consider that this exaltation of women essentially or even exclusively as mothers must have had profound consequences on their social status later, as well as ideological consequences.

What appears important to us is that the conditions required for the emancipation of women are *historical and social* developments which can be better grasped on the basis of the *more advanced development of present societies* than on the basis of the hypothesis that a matriarchy existed. These conditions relate above all to:

- the development of scientific and medical knowledge

permitting control of childbirth, with the positive implications this has for the health of women and particularly for their sexual liberation;

- the development of techniques permitting the elimination of all social consequences of physical differences;
- the development of society in general, especially culturally, permitting the social division of labor no longer to be reflected in the form of a sexual division of tasks. For example, the fact that breast feeding is no longer a long-term obligation or constraint for women is by no means secondary as far as the conception of division of tasks which has been dominant up to now is concerned. (And it is clear that this division is not solely the product of class society—although class society did perpetuate it and transform it to its own profit—but was originally the result of a necessary division in order to better respond to the needs of society as a whole, given the low level of development.)

If we agree with this analysis, then we are in better position to grasp the social factors which, as a result of the division of society into classes, have conditioned and accelerated the emergence of the specific oppression of women:

- the need to guarantee the men of the ruling classes control of paternity in order to transmit inheritances transformed the family into an element of oppression for women (cf the assumption of the education of children by the private family instead of the community);
- the low level of development of the productive forces and of scientific and medical knowledge combined to impose a social division of labor implying a sexual division of tasks and linking the principal role of women to their role as mothers by rendering them permanently dependent economically, culturally, and emotionally (cf the greater mobility of men, while women were compelled to remain in the home because of their maternity).

Consequently, the development of class societies transformed participation in social tasks, which varied according to sex, into a specific oppression of women serving the interests of the ruling classes.

We do not know whether the differences in status between men and women in some pre-class societies



amounted to forms of oppression in the sense that decision-making powers were unequal and could have involved discrimination against women. On the other hand, we are sure that the existence of these differences in the sexual division of roles explains why, once a certain threshold of higher development was reached with the emergence of a social surplus and of classes, men were able to define the interests of the ruling classes to the detriment of women, and why in all dominated classes the features of domination which weighed on men have been compounded by a specific oppression of women.

30. The oppression of women has served the interests of the ruling classes in all class societies and in capitalist society in particular. Nevertheless, this oppression is not effected solely by men of the privileged layers. To be sure, this does not mean that men are "naturally" oppressors. There are objective bases for their behavior; in the dominated layers, as elsewhere, the woman not only belongs to a class but must also assume her role as mother, and this is a social function which, so long as it is not assumed by society as a whole, has negative consequences on the division of labor in general and within each class in particular. Nevertheless, the transformation of women into sexual objects, the cultural discrimination against them, and the contempt to which they are subjected demonstrate how great the weight of ruling ideology is, even within social layers that have no historic interest in reproducing these sorts of relations.

In the context of the system of capitalist exploitation, everything propels men, and in particular male workers who suffer the violence of this system, toward relations of violent domination toward women. Although Engels well analyzed the role of the family from the standpoint of the ruling classes (private property, transmission of patrimony, etc.), he nevertheless underestimated the oppression of women in the dominated classes. In fact, the proletarianization of women occurred without fundamentally challenging women's central place within the family, whereas Engels foresaw a rapid decomposition of the family with the massive entry of women and children into the labor market during the period of the development of large-scale manufacturing industry. Hence, working

women were compelled to combine their family tasks and their jobs in a double workday, with all the consequences this implies for the place they occupy in the process of production, the low level of their wages, which are considered "extra" wages, etc. (See point 1, sections 1-4.)

31. The relationship between the family as the site of effectuation of the reproduction of the work force—this being taken on essentially by women—and the superexploitation of women on the job has been little analyzed by Marxists. Since it maintains the material dependence of the mass of working women on their husbands, this superexploitation cannot be fought without challenging the sexual division of tasks within the family. This division assigns women the most thankless tasks, perpetuates their status as sub-proletarians (the first to become unemployed), and at the same time perpetuates relations of oppression within the proletariat. Nevertheless, it must be noted that although the institution of the family asserts itself in capitalist society as a whole as the framework for the private rearing of children, it does assume different functions according to class.

*Within the bourgeoisie* the family guarantees the transmission of goods and education to the children. This occurs "under the direction" of the lady of the house, who commands all the material and financial resources which enable her to delegate work to domestic servants. While the woman is considered primarily a sexual object and a mother, she nonetheless has access to resources which enable her to control childbirth and she has been granted certain sexual liberties compared to traditional morality. Juridically, the rights of bourgeois women tend to be equal to those of men, even though most positions of responsibility remain closed to them, both on the job and in public life. But these women need not be managing directors of corporations in order to share in the privileges of their class.

*Within the proletariat*, on the other hand, the family remains above all a site of reproduction and upkeep of labor-power, even if the state has taken on certain tasks because of the needs of the labor market (development of education and some services). The fact that increasing numbers of women work, regardless of their economic



dependence, has resulted in the division of tasks within the family appearing unfair, in spite of the continued exaltation of women's traditional role (to be a good homemaker, a good mother, to be able to organize the home and make it pleasant for everyone, etc.).

Generally speaking, the family is also the site of the reproduction of dominant values, although the development of contraception and the proletarianization of women are increasingly challenging these values. The weight of traditional values is especially great since the milieu is culturally and socially impoverished and since religion (especially the Catholic religion) plays a great role here. But in general the maintenance of a division of roles between men and women represents the model which the child internalizes as normal. Likewise, the dominant values on sexual relations and sexual repression, as well as the hierarchical relations of domination which are transmitted within the family (although not without conflict), are supposed to instill bourgeois social values in the child: spirit of property, competition, but also submission to the established order, etc. It is obvious, however, that a simplistic view of the family as a "cog" in the state apparatus of the ruling class is inoperative to the very extent that the family is not simply an "institution" but also a site of social relations, marked, of course, by the dominant alienation but also by class relations.

32. It is on the basis of this understanding that we completely disagree with the currents that theorize and develop a strategy of "struggle of the sexes." The most coherent version of their approach may be summarized as follows:

- The sexual division of tasks existed before class society and was based on biological differences between men and women;
- The opposition between men and women is thus the first class antagonism to have arisen and has continued to exist ever since;
- The class of women is defined by women's biological reproductive functions and the domestic tasks that are assigned to all women;
- Consequently, the most fundamental oppression is the oppression of women by men. The revolution therefore

requires the struggle of women even before the class struggle.

Our critique rests on the fact that the development of the division of tasks between the sexes prior to the division of society into classes does not make the sexual division of tasks a stronger reality, nor does it place it above classes. On the contrary, it is combined with class society, that is, with the situation of women according to class and historical period. It is on the basis of the way women are oppressed by capitalism today, which differs according to their class, that it is possible to understand how to struggle against this oppression. Of course, oppression affects all women, but it is combined either with class privileges or with exploitation of the woman's labor-power or the labor-power of the man she lives with. This is true for the differing conditions of sexual relations depending on whether one works forty hours a week and does not have access to the pill or whether one really controls one's body, time, money, and leisure, in addition to having contraception and abortion. It is true for differences in caring for children according to whether one has much or little money, household resources, domestic servants, leisure time, etc. Finally, it is true for the obligation to stay at home in order to fulfill domestic tasks when one does not have the means to do otherwise. Consequently, it is on the basis of both the products of the most recent developments of this society (socially, technically, scientifically, and culturally) and the obstacles which still remain that one can understand against whom and with whom to struggle.

We adopt the method and strategy of the permanent revolution, as opposed to a method of revolution by stages (neither class struggle *without* or *before* the struggle against oppression, nor struggle of the sexes *before* and *above* the class struggle). The capitalist system has turned the oppression of women to its own profit, just as it has reappropriated all the vestiges of the social relations of the societies which have gone before it. In so doing it has subjected them to its own rules. It is the logic of profit which limits the development and quality of the social services required for the emancipation of women and which results in the fact that every employer always has



an interest in relying on sexual differences to justify the superexploitation of women. It is bourgeois property which needs the institution of the family to transmit its patrimony and double moral standard (one for men and another for women). It is capitalist society that generalizes market relationships, extending them to all spheres, forcing many women into a form of prostitution as a by-product of bourgeois marriage and as a result of the discrimination they suffer in employment. It is the bourgeoisie that regulates according to its own interests women's access to the most advanced scientific knowledge permitting birth control.

But the elimination of private property is not sufficient to eliminate the oppression of women. Even the development of collective services, which nevertheless represents a *giant step forward* toward the emancipation of women, would not put an end to this age-old oppression. It is *also* necessary, through this collectivization of tasks, for the very notion of "*feminine*" and *masculine tasks* and thus of *any sexual division of roles* to be challenged. Otherwise the very employment of women will regenerate the old division and discrimination.

That is why our struggle against the oppression of women is a struggle against the system in all its mechanisms of oppression and exploitation, which implies, on another level, a struggle for the workers' movement to become conscious of all the dimensions of the oppression of women and the rut into which they are confined everywhere, even within the ranks of the workers' movement itself.

This is an essential dimension of the permanent revolution in the sense that it implies the total elimination of any vestige of oppression after the socialist revolution itself.

### C. Strategic Consequences

34. We are against any approach that, erasing class differences, would appear simply as the most minimal lowest common denominator among women.

Behind every struggle, every demand, we highlight the inequality of the social situation. This does not mean that we refuse to fight for *equal rights*; but from the very outset,

through the body of demands and propaganda that we advance, we show that formal equal rights represent a limited gain.

Generally speaking, each partial struggle must be judged in light of the following objectives:

- To stimulate the self-organization of women in the struggle and to stimulate their confidence in proletarian forms of struggle;
- To combat possible illusions in the framework of the system and thus to consciously strengthen aggressiveness against the system. Since it would be false to believe that the liberal bourgeoisie possesses no maneuvering room to make reforms, it is essential to highlight the social content of demands and to expose the logic of profit and the general bourgeois interests which condition the application of each gain—otherwise we would be working for this liberal bourgeoisie.
- To make at least a part of the workers' movement take up the struggle against each partial aspect of the oppression of women. This is a condition not only for the effectiveness of the struggle, but also for the credibility of our responses to the currents that advocate the "struggle of the sexes."

35. Our orientation takes fundamental consideration of the fact that the specific oppression of women is a product of class society. It thus aims primarily at exposing the roots of this oppression. We must demonstrate that the historic interests of the men and women of the working class as a whole are common ones and that it is in their immediate interest to begin to challenge the division of tasks. Many recent strikes have shown that in order to permit full participation by women in the struggle and in trade-union tasks, it has been necessary to immediately launch a battle against the reactionary attitudes of men—and women—in the workers' movement, against the current division of this movement. This requires bringing to light the alienation of day-to-day relationships, the paucity of interests—even though they are real—which induce the men of the working class to oppress their wives, to maintain relations of violent domination toward them. Granted, the oppression of women is an element of comfort, satisfaction, and self-inflation for men. But these



are piddling advantages compared to the impoverishment of human relations they provoke. That is why under the historic conditions of ripeness for socialism, modification of these relations becomes possible.

a) We are therefore in favor of the independent organization of women, because we recognize the inalienable right of the oppressed to organize against their oppression. The very existence of women's movements may be explained by the dominant tendency of the workers movement not to fight this oppression systematically, a tendency whose roots lie in the profound inequality and alienation produced by class society and perpetuated by the policy of the reformist leaderships. Hence the importance of non-mixed women's groups, which are both the place in which women can express themselves and begin to become active and the factor compelling the workers leaderships to take the demands of women seriously. The organization of women among themselves on all levels—and especially in the factories—is the only thing that can challenge the sexism of the workers movement and lay the basis for the struggle that will have to be pursued even beyond the overthrow of the bourgeois state. The depth of the subjective divisions that run through the working class, the internalization of patriarchal values, and the conviction among the majority of male workers that the division of roles is a natural thing will not disappear by magic after the elimination of the economic bases on which they rest. The non-mixed organization of women will thus very certainly remain a necessary feature of the struggle against all forms of division between the sexes after the seizure of power by the working class, for even the satisfaction of some of the demands advanced today (equality between men and women, free abortion on demand, socialization of domestic tasks) will not be sufficient to eliminate the oppression that exists in all social relations.

b) At the same time, we are convinced that there is no class antagonism between men and women and that the historic interests of the proletariat imply a resolute struggle against this oppression, a struggle that must not wait for the socialist revolution but must begin right now. Thus, we also fight for mixed struggles to be taken up by

the workers movement. Their aim is not only to intervene concretely to speed up the emancipation of women (committees linked to campaigns on abortion, child-care centers, etc.), but also to create a united framework that responds to the radicalization of men against the oppression of women. In the long run these mixed groups will play a decisive role in getting the discussion on the division of roles in the family and on sexual oppression to penetrate the workers movement and especially the trade unions. For while we do not speak of destruction of the family we do on the other hand fight for the emergence of another type of emotional and sexual relations in which the monolithic aspect of marriage for women will disappear, as well as their role as isolated "women in the home," spurred on to consumption by the mass media and objects of all sorts of fetishization. And we know that there will be no liberation of women unless men become conscious of their own alienation. It is thus part of the role of these mixed groups to permit such a step forward, to contribute to questioning the existing antagonisms between men and women, and to encourage all the so-called "inactive" women who cannot be active in a trade union or a factory group because they "do not work" to commit themselves actively in their neighborhoods to struggles that bring them out of their isolation while at the same time strengthening the women's liberation struggle.

For all these reasons, we consider that the place and forms the independent organization of women is taking and will take will vary infinitely as a very function of the responses put forward by the workers movement. In this regard we ought not to define the women's movement in a "normative" fashion. And we think that the effectiveness of such a movement will also be measured by its capacity to have its own objectives of struggle taken up by a growing number of men, and most especially by the workers movement.

The struggle against the oppression of women requires combatting the oppression of all women and thus of the most exploited and oppressed ones (regardless of the consciousness they may have of their oppression). This means that it can only be a struggle against capitalist



society. That is why the women's movement must be an integral part of the class struggle.

Programmatically, the heterogeneous social composition of this movement must never lead to attenuating the class viewpoint of the women's movement. As against the reform proposals that bourgeois feminists advance on certain themes of the oppression of women, we do not fight for the organic unity of the various components of the women's movement at all costs. We try to win the major part of these components to a radical struggle on a class basis, that is, a historic program of the proletariat. Moreover, we put forward perspectives of punctual unity in action and around partial objectives (abortion, etc.).

The class bases of the women's movement do not imply that we should demand a priori agreement on the whole of our socialist program and revolutionary strategy. This would be a sectarian and maximalist approach. Whatever the dominant social base of the movement, at the outset the class orientation is given:

- by the formulation of slogans and campaigns that highlight the social reality hidden behind each of the aspects of oppression, even the most ideological in appearance;

- by the special search for common struggles with the workers movement as opposed to the support of bourgeois parliamentary candidates and forms of action (as advocated, for example, by NOW in the United States).

The women's movement on a class basis which we want must be capable of drawing in women who come from all currents of the workers movement, both reformist and revolutionary, who must be able to defend their own points of view within the movement, respecting the democracy of the movement.

In this sense, we think that questions like abortion, contraception, child-care centers, and the problems of jobs and the "high cost of living" are the main themes for stimulating massive campaigns capable of drawing in very broad layers of women of the working class who are today still atomized in their neighborhoods, trade unions, or factories and of compelling a portion of the workers movement to commit itself to these struggles actively, both locally and nationally.

In each mixed struggle, as well as in the mixed mass organizations, and primarily the trade unions, we aim at asserting the point of view of the struggle against the oppression of women. We thus stimulate all forms of specific gatherings in the framework of these mixed structures so that the point of view of women may be expressed there. These gatherings can be non-mixed if women have felt obstacles to taking the floor and speaking; there is a place for such an approach even within the structures of dual power and strike committees linked to the development of struggles.

The bodies in which women will develop consciousness of their oppression can be manifold, both mixed and non-mixed. This is why the boundaries of the independent organization of women are not definite. And above all, this is why such an organization, while independent organizationally, must forge many links with the forms of struggle of women and with the organized workers movement itself.

The independent organization of women can be the link of coordination, synthesis, and memory of various experiences. Women who have developed consciousness of their oppression through strikes, through partial struggles, whether mixed or not, through a more general development of consciousness from the outset, etc., can and should be present in such forms of organization.

The totality of these experiences and instances of coordination of struggle can result in the emergence through qualitative leaps (and not in linear and "pure" fashion) of a mass, united women's movement on a class basis, basing itself on a charter of reference of which it is the synthesis and which tends to permanently reflect it. The modes and rhythm of the emergence of such a movement cannot be defined in a general manner. It is possible that the relationship of forces, the heterogeneity of experiences, and the sectarianism of some components of the women's movement may result in the emergence only of bastardized forms of coordination which last for varying periods of time depending on the struggles.

For our part, we must be guided:

- Not by an a priori schema, but by the concrete analysis of the levels and forms of radicalization in order to draw support from them;



- By our desire on the basis of each struggle to advance a more general and lasting development of consciousness of all the objectives of the struggle and its lessons.

While the organized workers movement can and must be the bearer of this memory, at least in part, all the women in struggle may not necessarily be able to be part of the workers movement, and that is why there is also a need for an organization of women linked to these struggles.

#### D. Tactical Consequences

36. As for the organizational resources with which the revolutionary vanguard must provide itself in order to be able to wage a battle within the workers movement around the strategic perspectives it puts forward, here again they may vary more or less from one country to another. Exactly because of everything we have said above about the mode of radicalization of women and the delay of the workers movement as a whole, and also because of the relative weakness of the influence of revolutionaries within the movement, we think that the construction of groups directly linked to our organization could only be seen by the majority of women as a sectarian attempt at division which would be purely and simply rejected (this was, moreover, an error we made in some sections, of the initial history of the "Socialist Women" groups).

Revolutionaries must on the contrary be present in all the groups that make up the mass movement, provided that these groups raise the level of political consciousness of the women who are active within them and provide them with weapons with which to struggle against their oppression.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient simply to speak of the class orientation we want to lend the movement, for it is obvious that in many cases the reformists adopt a class point of view (at least verbally). And in a period of revolutionary upsurge it is precisely our ability to assert our strategic perspectives against theirs which will be decisive in winning the mass of women to the perspective of the socialist revolution and to the tasks that flow from this perspective. In fact, just as democratic demands do not necessarily have an anticapitalist dynamic, the

women's movement, even if it is rooted in the working class, is not automatically anticapitalist either. Without the intervention of revolutionaries it can also be diverted into perspectives of the struggle of the sexes or into totally reformist perspectives. Thus, the revolutionary vanguard within the women's movement must do all it can to politicize the struggles that begin around immediate demands, whether they be child-care centers, wages, etc., through systematic propaganda around transitional slogans and through stimulating all forms of struggle that move toward direct action and educate women to take the initiative themselves. The point here is especially to popularize and generalize the "qualitative" demands that emerge from struggles (especially those axised around the slogans of workers control) and to extend examples of self-organization (for example the struggle for child-care centers or against price increases).

This therefore implies both that we must work for the building of a broad and united mass movement allowing us to work in a common framework with the reformists and that, through our work of programmatic clarification within the movement, through the axes and forms of struggle we push for, we must lay the basis for the construction of a future tendency, which is already on the agenda in Spain (and will be on the agenda tomorrow in Italy). Nevertheless, for reasons that relate both to the general political situation and to the level of development of most of the movements—their political immaturity and the relative weakness of revolutionaries within them—we are not yet at that stage in most countries. To try to construct a tendency in a movement that has not yet succeeded in gathering the broad radicalization of women together, whose social composition is still predominantly petty-bourgeois, and which is in fact situated on the margins of the workers movement would amount to building an enlarged fraction of our sympathizers, as has been shown by experience in France. In most of the countries in which we exist, such an orientation would presuppose making use of the current that more or less identifies with the perspectives put forward by revolutionaries, but without a profound debate or direct confrontation with the reformist positions having enabled the



majority of women to determine their overall political options. We must not neglect the manner in which the majority of women develop consciousness—becoming sensitive to individual problems which later lead to more general perceptions of political and social reality—and must understand the importance of the phase of open and democratic discussion for their conscious commitment on the side of revolutionaries.

37. When the building of a tendency in the proper sense of the term is not yet on the agenda, in many cases it is nevertheless possible and necessary to set up an enlarged fraction in order to prepare our sympathizers for a political and educational intervention in all the groups in which we are present and in order to systematically discuss the priorities determined by the leadership, both from the standpoint of the resources we commit and from the standpoint of the objectives and forms of action to push for within the independent women's movement and the mixed groups. The existence of such an enlarged fraction depends on the strength of our presence in the movement, the audience we have already acquired, and the manner in which the problems of recruitment are posed, depending on whether or not there are recruitment structures into which the comrades we have won to our positions can be integrated. In any event, while we must take account of the level of consciousness of the women to whom we are addressing ourselves in our manner of intervention in order not to provoke sect-like debates, on the other hand there should be no ambiguity about the political affiliation of our comrades active in the women's movement, and we must on the contrary wage an open polemic with the other political currents.

38. We have *particular responsibilities as internationalists* convinced that solidarity with workers struggles, and more particularly with the struggles of women of other countries, is a decisive element both in the impact of these struggles themselves and in the politicization of those women who thus learn to go beyond their immediate concerns and inscribe their struggle for socialism in a perspective that must not be limited to the borders of a single country. This seems to us especially important since up to now we have not been especially lively in our

responses to the initiatives taken by the international bourgeoisie during "International Women's Year" (Mexico, Brussels tribunal, etc.) and since the women workers do not wait for us before being inspired by struggles that are waged elsewhere. One example, among others, in this regard is that of the Portuguese women, who, following the example of the British, Swedish, and more recently Spanish domestic workers, have created a trade union of household workers to defend their interests (forty-hour week, minimum wage, social security, right to organize) and have opened a center in Lisbon to respond to their immediate needs and to encourage a collective struggle against all the forms of exploitation to which they are subject as among the most isolated and oppressed working women. It is incumbent upon us to popularize this type of struggle as much as possible, a struggle in which women, completely disunited at the outset, rapidly came to discuss the oppression they suffer in their families and the best way to make their experiences known so that they could serve to trigger other struggles.

We must base ourselves on this sort of example to demonstrate to the workers movement in other countries that the combative capacity of women goes well beyond the thankless tasks they tend to be assigned in the heat of struggles and that in periods of violent confrontation with the bourgeoisie it will be important not to relegate them to the canteens and infirmaries, but rather to assure their participation in all political and organizational tasks.

39. Such propaganda implies, among other things, that we must provide ourselves with the *necessary instruments* and that, just as we bring out pamphlets on certain exemplary struggles of the workers movement, we should have at our disposal publications highlighting the most advanced sectors of the mobilization of working women or mixed movements dealing with the oppression of women.

It is rather obvious that our current has lagged behind somewhat in *theoretical elaboration*. Whatever critical judgements we may make of the work published by the "radical feminist" current in particular, it cannot be denied that they have made certain contributions to the discussions going on in the women's movement on



questions which have been virtually ignored by the workers movement up to now (sexuality, domestic labor, etc.). The contributions of certain Communist parties on the question of the family often go rather far in the body of problems posed, and certain analyses of bourgeois sociologists have resulted in a real enrichment of the theoretical discussion on the origins of the oppression of women, a discussion in which we must participate in a much more consistent manner than we have up to now.

The point is to close these gaps and also to reappropriate history by making a profound analysis of the past positions of the workers movement on the question of the oppression of women, particularly those positions adopted by the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Not only must we make much more systematic use of the possibilities offered us by the various reviews of the Fourth International to make political contributions to the development of the women's movement internationally, but in addition this theme must be presented regularly in the *newspapers* of all our sections, which is still far from being the case.

## V. Our Program of Demands

40. The program of the Fourth International consists both of the specific demands for which we fight and the proletarian methods of struggle we employ in this fight. These methods are based on the political independence of the working class of all the institutions of capitalist society as well as independence of the political forces and parties of the bourgeoisie. In the struggle for the specific demands that make up our program we put forward the need for a strong, united organization of the working class as a whole, capable of uniting all oppressed layers of society.

Our demands relating to women's oppression are directed against the capitalist state, challenging the way capitalist society delegates the tasks relating to women's role as reproducer to the individual woman in the family unit. The thrust of our fight is to pose the *socialization* of these domestic responsibilities, under the control of the working class. In this regard, we reject the demand for

wages for housework, the thrust of which is to *reinforce* women's role as domestic laborer instead of contesting the oppressive and repressive relations of the family.

For example, the Fourth International wholeheartedly participates in the struggle for the fundamental right of women to control their fertility and to decide when and if to bear children. As revolutionaries, we inject into the struggle for abortion such themes as the need for working-class control over health facilities, the fight for the nationalization of the drug companies, the links between the fight for abortion and the overall struggle for the liberation of women. We point out that the fight for women's liberation is part and parcel of the struggle for a socialist society, which can lay the material basis for the superior forms of social relations that will supplant the repressive relations bred by class society.

Inasmuch as the working class remains imbued with bourgeois ideology on the question of women's role in society, we fight for the massive unionization of women workers, for the recognition of the right of women as a specifically oppressed layer to organize independently to struggle against this specific oppression. Within the workers movement, this implies challenging the traditional division of tasks in the family. The independent organization of women is necessary to ensure that the fight against women's oppression is waged effectively and that the working class as a whole will emerge united and capable of accomplishing its historic task of leading all oppressed layers.

## Our Demands

1. Free abortion on demand; for women's right to control their own bodies.

- No forced sterilization or government interference with the right of women to choose whether or when to bear children.

- Free, widely disseminated birth control information and devices.

- Education on sex and birth control in the schools and clinics.

2. Free, state-provided 24-hour child-care facilities under



the control of the workers, users, and organizations of the working class.

—Full integration of private child-care facilities into the public sector.

3. Equal educational opportunities for women.

—Preferential treatment for women in training for jobs and in educational courses where women are underrepresented.

—Employers to provide on-the-job training for all men and women.

—Training and retraining provisions and grants for women returning to work.

—For women's studies courses and research at educational institutions to teach the history of women's struggles against their oppression; against sex stereotypes in textbooks.

4. Full economic independence for women.

—Against low pay; equal pay for equal work; for a national minimum wage.

—For the right of women to employment; jobs for all; for a shorter work week with no reduction in wages.

—Preferential treatment for women in hiring, training, and job opportunities in order to overcome the effects of decades of systematic discrimination against them.

—Paid maternity/paternity leaves without loss of jobs or seniority.

—Protective legislation beneficial to women to be extended where appropriate to cover men, and not to be used as grounds for discrimination against women. Part-time workers to receive the same benefits and protections as full-time workers.

—For paid leaves to care for sick children or to deal with other family responsibilities for men and women alike.

—For a vigorous campaign of unionization among women workers; for the right of women to meet independently in the trade unions in order to prepare the most effective struggle by the trade unions against the specific oppression of women.

5. The removal of all legal and bureaucratic barriers to equality, regardless of sex, marital status, and sexual orientation, with regard to taxation; passports; care, control, and custody of children; state benefits, etc.

—Full protection of all state benefits against inflation through automatic increases based on a cost-of-living index determined by the working class organizations.

—Against all bourgeois and feudal family laws; for the separation of church and state; for marriage to be a voluntary process of civil registration.

—For the right to automatic divorce on request by either partner, with state provisions for the economic welfare and job training of divorced women.

—Against all penalties for adultery.

—Abolition of the concept of "illegitimacy." An end to all discrimination against unwed mothers or their children.

—An end to all laws victimizing prostitutes; an end to all laws reinforcing the double standard for men and women in sexual matters.

6. For the right to be openly homosexual; an end to all legislation victimizing homosexuals or interfering with sexual activity.

—Against all discrimination on the basis of sexual preference in hiring, housing, etc.

—An end to the portrayal in the mass media, etc. of homosexual relations as "unnatural" or "abnormal," etc.

7. Freedom from all forms of domestic slavery.

—Systematic development of free or very low-cost quality social services including cafeteria and take-out food services and laundries organized on an industrial basis.

—A crash, government-financed program to provide healthy, comfortable housing for all, planned and controlled by users and the organizations of the working class. No discrimination against single mothers or women with children.

In order for all these demands to be genuinely taken up by the workers movement as a whole, we must fight for a massive campaign of unionization of working women, for the establishment of mixed trade-union women's commissions, and for the right of women to meet among themselves in order to give an impetus to a real battle against their specific oppression in the unions, which means to insist on the importance of trade-union democracy in order to enable women to participate in all the



leadership bodies and, concurrently, to insist on the importance of a fundamental challenge to the division of tasks within the family.

## **VI. The Place of 'Women's' Work in Building the Organization**

The delay in work on the question of the oppression of women in many of the sections of the Fourth International (with all the attendant consequences, including the low percentage of women militants in many sections) is primarily due to lack of political comprehension of the strategic and conjunctural importance of this work. It is often the pressure of an already existing, active, and somewhat structured movement that has provoked a beginning of reflection within the leaderships. Previously, these leaderships, composed in their majority or even exclusively of men, had swept this problem aside under the pretext of "not understanding anything about it." This simply proves that even a revolutionary organization like ours does not escape the pressures of the dominant ideology it is fighting. This is also reflected in the fact that the struggle within the organization against the division of tasks—as well as other practices and attitudes imposed by capitalist society—has been undertaken only recently.

One of the essential tasks in the ranks of the Fourth International thus relates to the problem of how to educate militants on this question. This education must not be limited to "specific" courses from time to time, but must on the contrary become part of the daily life of the organization, with discussions in general assemblies, cells, and recruitment structures. Just as we require that a militant entering the organization have a basic knowledge of the fundamental positions of revolutionary Marxism, we must also require that he or she be acquainted with our analysis of the economic and ideological basis of the oppression of women.

But the concrete comprehension of the importance of this work for both militants and sympathizers requires an intervention undertaken politically by the entire section and in particular by the central leadership. This should not be limited to the intervention of women comrades in

non-mixed organizations, but must be integrated into the work of the sections on all levels (trade unions, youth movement, etc.). This is the only way to prevent work on the oppression of women from becoming locked into a ghetto and from leading to the aberrant solution of creating "women's cells," as has been done in some sections. This nearly always winds up in the departure of women comrades who are active only in the non-mixed movement (and encourages all the deviations about which complaints are raised later), but above all it results in the question of the oppression of women remaining the concern of a single cell, whereas it should be discussed and taken up by the whole organization. The following measures are best able to aid the sections in attaining this goal:

a) Preferential measures for women comrades, provided they have equal political capacities, during the election of the leaderships of the sections. Experience has shown that at the leadership level only the presence of women in the central bodies such as the Central Committee and the Political Bureau—women responsible for the intervention on this theme—contributes to altering the practices of the organization. This is obvious, even if only because male comrades cannot participate in the non-mixed groups. This policy should also be applied to the structures of the International such as the IEC and the United Secretariat. The point here is certainly not to establish quotas for the number of women in the leadership, but rather to break in a voluntarist manner with the present situation, under which women are always and still confined to technical tasks even though many of them would have the capacity to take on political responsibilities.

b) The establishment of local and national commissions responsible to the leadership bodies in order to assure application of decisions at all levels of the organization, including within the intervention fractions in the mass organizations and the various campaigns.

c) Establishment of an intervention fraction which must include all comrades, male and female, who are part of structures intervening on the question of the specific oppression of women, whether mixed or not, in order to avoid the tendency toward fragmentation of this work (for



example, total separation between our tasks in the MLF groups and in the trade unions).

d) Efforts to set up the material resources to allow women who have children to participate in educational classes, general assemblies, cadre schools, etc. (child-care facilities, etc.).

e) Possibility for women to meet among themselves so they can discuss the specific internal problems they face in order to stimulate discussion on these problems in the rest of the organization and to demand that the leadership take the necessary measures to remedy them. These problems—which range from difficulties in integrating comrades who have families and children, especially when the wife or husband does not accept the political commitment of the comrade involved, to the general lack of self-confidence of women comrades because they are women—are problems that can only explode unless the leadership offers a considered political response.

Although there are limits to the ability of a revolutionary party (in the context of a capitalist society) to definitively overcome the specific barriers that confront women comrades—which diminish their capacity to play a full political role within the organization—it is clear that these problems must be taken up by the leadership. Gatherings among women are not a norm of the revolutionary party. If some sections have been led to propose this sort of measure after discussion in the organization, it is precisely in light of the internal consequences of the organization's delay in intervening on the specific oppression of women: maintenance of women in certain types of functions, difficulties in self-expression, lack of confidence in their leadership abilities, and increasingly numerous departures of women comrades who leave the organization because of lack of response to the problems they raise.

In sum, our work on the specific oppression of women must reflect the strategic importance we accord this question. But it is only through a daily intervention on this theme on the part of the sections of the Fourth International that our women comrades will become

convinced feminists, that our male comrades will join them in the vanguard of the mixed and non-mixed groups campaigning against the various aspects of the oppression of women, and that we will contribute to rooting the women's movement in the working class, basing itself on all the social layers that are integral parts of the struggle for socialism.



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