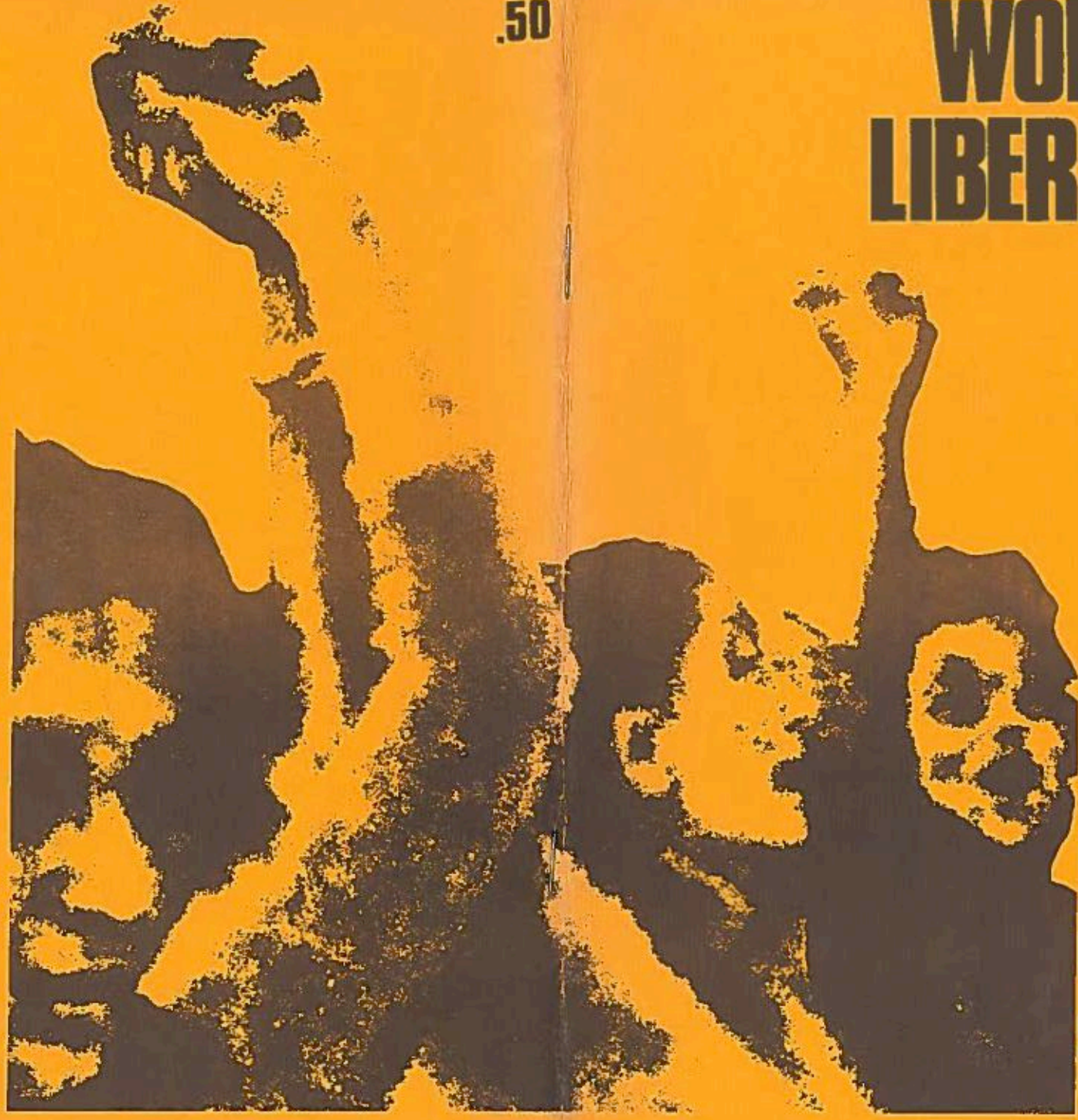


**Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution;  
No Socialism without Women's Liberation.**



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**WOMEN'S  
LIBERATION**

**rmg  
document  
series 1.**



# Introduction

The oppression of fully one half of the human population—the oppression of women—poses a major challenge to all those who struggle for change and a better social order. And yet, despite the enormity of the question, the record of many political organizations is poor, indeed hopelessly inadequate, in terms of both their understanding and their practice.

The rise of the women's liberation movement in the sixties brought these inadequacies into the harsh light of day. Thousands of women radicalized on a new awareness of their oppression and came to the point of questioning the entire social order as a result. But the inability of the left organizations to respond to the women's movement left the majority of these women without a clear understanding of the relationship between their oppression and the capitalist society they lived in, and without a clear perspective for struggle.

The RMG itself was formed in the early seventies, after the decline in the new left and the organized women's movement. But our political roots stretched back into the previous period and the question of women's liberation was always central for us. We understood the weaknesses of the Marxist movement, the theoretical gaps and the practical abysses, and felt urgently the need to begin to fill them. The document which follows is the result of almost two years of discussion and writing inside the RMG. Adopted at the September 1975 Central Committee Plenum, it represents the adopted positions of our organization on the nature and importance of women's liberation, but we recognize it to be a first, rather than a final step. For this reason we warmly welcome all responses and contributions from our readers on their thoughts about it. And we hope that its publication will contribute to the essential discussions and debates that will form a critical component of the struggle that will finally lead to the liberation of women.

## I. GENERAL THESES ON THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

**I** A sexual division of labour which is related to the reproductive role of women and the long period of helplessness of human infants has always existed. The important question in terms of the oppression of women, however, is not the existence of a sexual division of labour based on the biological structures of the human species, but how this biological fact has affected social relations. In primitive pre-class societies, the sexual division of labour was a practical division of labour made in the context of the need to obtain the necessities of life and to reproduce the human species, and related to the biological role and capacities of men and women. While in a physical sense there may have been a domination of men over women, there appears to have been no systematic social, sexual, political or cultural oppression of women based on the sexual division of labour.

With the appearance of social surplus and the corresponding emergence of society based on the appropriation of this surplus by a minority, the sexual division of labour assumed a social character for the ruling class. Men became dominant within the ruling class because of the



role which force played in the initial appropriation of social surplus in the form of lands, herds, etc. The question of inheritance and the legitimacy of children which related to the desire or need to preserve the wealth accumulated meant that women of the ruling class were reduced to performing one function—reproducing the ruling class. This in turn led to the exclusion of ruling class women from production and social life, the establishment of legal marriage and monogamy (for women) and the development of an ideology to justify and preserve the situation.

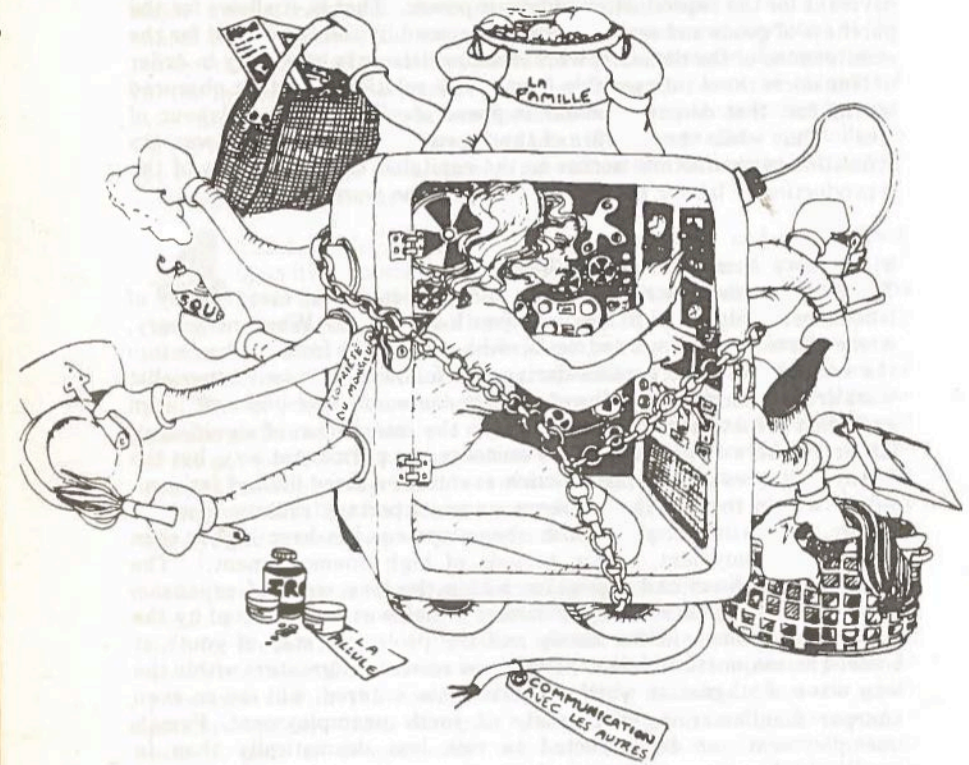
For the labouring classes, on the other hand, the establishment of class society meant that the sexual division of labour assumed a social meaning while still preserving its practical character. The women of these classes continued to labour productively. The family continued to be a productive unit with all members involved in the production of necessities and social surplus. However, the ideology of the ruling class—including the concept of the inferiority of women—permeated the dominated classes of society and resulted in the social subordination of women in all classes. Of course, these processes developed unevenly over many centuries.

**2** With the advent of capitalism, production was no longer centered on the family unit, but was increasingly socialized and concentrated in large-scale industrial units. However, in spite of a period of disintegration of the family during the early stages of capitalism, as its former productive function was superseded and all members were drawn out of it to labour for capital, the family did not disappear. Although the role of the family in production ended, its role in reproduction did not. As capital's need for a healthy, educated workforce grew, the labour time required for the maintenance and reproduction of labour power increased. Moreover, the rationalization of production as capitalism developed both permitted and required that children and women remain outside the labour force. Thus developing capitalism found that the early intensive exploitation and pauperization of the working class and concurrent breakdown of the working class family, characteristic of the period of primitive accumulation of capital, were not in its long term interests. The process of reinforcing the family began. But it is important to note that this process was not entirely one of conscious design on the part of the bourgeoisie. The working class itself conducted monumental battles to gain shorter working days, laws which gave special protection to women and children and other measures which undercut the ability of capital to exploit it ruthlessly. These measures helped to create conditions which stopped the erosion of the working class family.

**2** Under capitalism the family has been transformed into the **centre of domestic labour separated from social production**. This process brought about the exclusion of large numbers of women from the productive process to labour in the home. Capitalism thus altered the nature of the sexual division of labour. It has become almost completely "social" in character. There remains no material basis for its continuation. Capitalism has created the **material** preconditions for its abolition—technological sophistication, minimization of the importance of physical strength, birth control, socialization of domestic labour being materially possible, etc. Despite these achievements, however,

capitalism cannot do away with the family, even from the economic point of view.

It is the maintenance of the family institution and the sexual division of labour in the face of the achievement of the prerequisites for its abolition which has resulted in the extreme oppression of women under capitalism. The locus of the oppression of women then, is the family in class society. To understand the character of the present oppression of women, we must understand the role of the family in capitalist society as well as the role of women within that family.



**3** Capitalism inherited a number of institutional forms from feudal society. Some of them atrophied and withered, others like the family and the church evolved with the development of the new social order and became integrated into the new social fabric. The family does not exist in a vacuum. As an historically received institution, the family's functions have altered to need the needs of capitalism. By virtue of its complete integration into capitalist society it has become a capitalist institution. The family can be no more 'disposed of' without violent social repercussions than any other bourgeois institution. Although the socially productive role which was the original material base for the family was undercut by the development of capitalism, the family has adapted and become integrated in a way that continues to fulfill several critical economic and ideological functions which facilitate the preservation of capitalism:



### a) Domestic Labour and the Reproduction of Labour Power:

Domestic labour is responsible for the reproduction of labour power--an essential component of the forces of production--both on a generational and day-to-day level. While domestic labour is necessary, it does not produce surplus value or have a direct relation to capital. The labour of the domestic worker is only indirectly related to capital since she does not enter into a wage relation with capital, but is supported by a portion of the wage received by the worker in the industrial unit. In fact, while the wage appears as payment for work performed, it is in reality payment for the reproduction of labour power. That is, it allows for the purchase of goods and services to be consumed by the family and for the maintenance of the domestic worker whose labour is necessary in order to transform these into useable form. This relation is further obscured by the fact that domestic labour is posed ideologically as a 'labour of love'. Thus while the benefits of the reproduction of labour power (its utilization in production) accrue to the capitalist class, the costs of the reproduction of labour power are borne by the working class.

### b) Reserve Army of Labour, Cheap Labour:

The family is also the repository of a large sector of a reserve army of labour--primarily women, but also youth and men. When necessary, women have been drawn and/or forced economically from the home into the work force. The periods during and following the two imperialist wars are the classic examples of this phenomenon. The post-war boom and third industrial revolution has seen the integration of significantly larger numbers of women into the economy in a permanent way, but the family continues to play this function even if in a more limited fashion. Youth within the family also serve as an important reserve army of labour. (In the recent past youth unemployment has been higher than female unemployment, in the periods of high unemployment.) The conjunctural booms and recessions within the long wave of expansion necessitated flexibility of the work force which was accommodated by the elasticity of women in the family and the prolonged stay of youth at home. The conjunctural booms (fewer) and recessions (greater) within the long wave of stagnation which we have now entered, will see an even sharper manifestation, particularly of youth unemployment. Female unemployment can be expected to rise less dramatically than in pre-World War II years because of the new structured place of women in the work force. Nevertheless, their concentration in the public and service sectors makes them vulnerable to unemployment in the event of an attack on social services in a recessionary period.

A related function of the family is its role as supplier of cheap female labour. Because the vast majority of women have 'obligations' in the home which cannot be met other than through their own domestic labour, they are forced to take low paying jobs, often temporary or part-time, on shift work and with a loss in seniority accruing due to time taken out for maternal and domestic responsibilities. (This latter factor makes them particularly susceptible to being the 'first fired'.) When the husband is laid off work, the wife is forced to take a job to ensure the survival of the family--at a lower rate of pay than her husband, of course (30%-50% lower). Because the organization of domestic labour is **4** individual rather than social the time for its accomplishment can be organized to fill the day when the woman moves out of the labour force.

### c) Consumption:

The family structure is the perfect unit of consumption for an economy based on the law of the market. It provides an inefficient privatized organization of consumption necessary to maximize the size of the market. Single family dwellings maximize the quantity of commodities required for the reproduction of labour power and increase the cost of specific dwellings. The bankruptcy and alienation of social life in a world overflowing with commodities has accelerated the frantic consumption of goods as a way to achieve happiness. The family as the major unit of consumption is necessary and complementary to the anarchic method of capitalist distribution. The economic functions of the family stem directly from the needs of the capitalist mode of production. On the one hand, a free market in labour demands there be no control over the availability of the labour force (as for example under feudalism). On the other hand, private ownership cannot survive unless inequality in the distribution of the social surplus prevails at the same time as massive consumption is encouraged.

**4** The family's ideological functions flow from and reflect back upon its economic functions. Despite the ongoing 'state-ization' of a series of directly ideological and technical functions through the expanding school system, the family remains the primary institution which moulds the individuals who make up class society. Capitalism needs obedient, self-denying workers and the family does the job. The development which takes place in the early years within the intense matrix of the family is of primary importance to the development of the personality. The socialization which children receive with regard to installation of respect and fear of authority, acceptance of the existing order, individualism and sexism, come first and foremost from within the family, and are subsequently reinforced by other institutions.

While the nuclear family extracts a high price from all its members for the love and security which it is seen to provide, the ransom is doubly high for the female sex. Ultimately, sexism in the working class is based on the man's control over the wage--both in the direct material power he possesses and in the social value which is attached to work which produces money. Since domestic labour within the family--the woman's role--is seen as economically non-functional, women's social status reflects this. She is inferior. But while sexism, as a total complex structure of attitudes and material facts rests on the woman's weak economic position, it is by now relatively autonomous from the strictly economic plane. In Cuba, for example, where both employment and wages have been equalized to a large degree, women remain oppressed. It is not a question of equalizing the situation of male and female within the family, but of doing away with the family as we know it today. Most importantly this will mean the release of women from economic dependence upon the male, and the family structures.

The family is both originator and perpetuator of women's oppression. Woman's role--mother, love object, supporter--and the ideological justification and mystification of that role profoundly influence the female personality. From the mother's example, and the father's expectations, the daughter internalizes the requirements of 'femininity': passivity, weakness, deference to men, lack of instrumentality, **5**



emotionality, the list is by now well known. The woman's primary responsibilities for the family in combination with the psychological effects of sexism upon both male and female workers severely hamper the woman's ability to be instrumental socially and politically. This is the real source of women's conservatism. Ghettoized in the family, practically and psychologically deprived of the experience of individual and collective capabilities and strengths, women can feel a deep reservation about change lest the present be risked for an even grimmer future. This is not to say that women are forever doomed to play a conservatizing role, nor that the 'female characteristics' are immutable, (nor for that matter that all of them are negative.) The combative role played by women in innumerable situations of social struggle, from February 1917 to their activities in neighbourhood commissions in Chile, and in Portugal, provide many examples of the potential of housewives to participate politically in the class struggle. But so long as women remain imprisoned in the family, they will by and large continue to reflect its conservatizing effects.

Regardless of the role that mothers play in the family, the agent of women's oppression is the male, who derives a relative privilege from his superior position. Freed from the drudgery of housework, the responsibility of child care and enjoying a higher salary in the labour force, the male worker has a petty interest in perpetuating the oppression of women. While capitalism as a social system is the ultimate reason for women's oppression, it is difficult for the housewife to locate it as such since the relation of her labour to capitalism is indirect and hidden. For working women, the enemy is more visible but the connection is still difficult given the sexism of both boss and husband. For the masses of working class women, the daily encounters with their husbands are daily dramas of their subordination and oppression, whether they work for a wage or not. Because the male proletariat enjoys a limited social privilege in relation to women, a real struggle to overcome sexism within the working class is acutely posed. It will not disappear spontaneously with the downfall of capitalism.

In sum, the family is a profoundly conservatizing institution. It conservatizes the working class in a number of ways: by the effects it has on the female sex as a whole; by placing responsibilities on male and female workers which encourage a fear of the consequences of militancy—long strikes, job loss, etc.; and in a more general sense by the amount of repression and self-denial which is a constant and which is internalized in all other spheres of social life as well.

**5** In spite of their role within the family and in the reproduction of labour power, and a hegemonic ideology that has declared that role as primary and 'natural', women have constituted a section of the labour force since the very emergence of the capitalist mode of production. Although historically the numbers of women in the labour force have varied (depending on the general level of prosperity, the availability of labour power and structural changes in the economy), since the second imperialist world war there has been a consistent increase in the proportion of the labour force that is female. In Canada today women make up a permanent 40% of the labour force and in all the advanced capitalist countries the figure is somewhere between one

third to almost one half. As such, women constitute a significant part of the social power of the working class in their own right.

However, the structural change in women's position in the workforce wrought by late capitalism has not brought with it an improvement in their situation within it. Women's wages have been **declining** relative to those of men even as their working numbers have been increasing. Fundamentally, this is the result of the reproduction of the sexual division of labour within the workforce. This has been reflected in the lower salaries and wages paid for the jobs that women perform.



Women's oppression within the family objectively and subjectively affects their position in the labour force. The objective limitations on women workers because of family obligations and the various manifestations of sexism limit the nature and type of wage work available to them. The bourgeoisie is ever eager to exploit this problem to pay lower wages using the excuse that women workers are 'less reliable', have their main concerns elsewhere, and so on. The sexual division of the family is reproduced in the workforce in a number of ways: women are relegated to the lowest paid job categories; often part-time and temporary work; poor working conditions and a lower rate of unionization. Above all, however, their jobs are increasingly sex-typed and reflect that traditional female role—whether it is as cleaners, or as nurses, or whatever. The major wage differential between male and female workers does not occur in jobs where both perform the same tasks, although this is also true. Rather it is to be found in the separation of jobs between male and female workers. "Female" jobs are paid less than "male" jobs. Women workers are also exterior to the organized labour movement in their majority as



unorganized workers. Where they are organized they are limited in their participation in the trade unions because of their domestic obligations; by the sexism of the bureaucracy which takes no initiatives to ameliorate their situation; by the sexism of the majority of the male working class and finally by the effects of sexism on them. The use of women as strikebreakers, for example, due to their desperation for work and lack of class or even trade union consciousness, stems precisely from this condition.

The oppression of women within the economic and political life of the working class significantly weakens the fighting strength of the workers' movement. In so far as many women workers conceive of themselves as "mothers" first and "workers" second, if at all, an enormous pool of fighting potential lies dormant. Certainly the growth of the numbers of women workers begins to lay the foundations for a change in consciousness, but this process is only in its beginning stages. The existence of sexism is an important component of the false consciousness of the working class as a whole, and given the large numbers of women now in the workforce, will have to be taken up by the vanguard if the Canadian working class is to unify itself for the revolutionary project.

**6** To complete our analysis of women's oppression it is necessary to outline yet another aspect of it, an aspect that permeates the totality of bourgeois social relations--sexual repression. Sexual repression and the nature of sexual relations under capitalism have a profound effect on women. Like the family, sexual repression in capitalist society is rooted in the relations of production. The monogamous (for the woman only) family evolved as a means of preserving the property rights of the ruling classes. The possibilities for the expression of female sexuality have been deeply distorted by this form of social organization. One of two roles is open to women: the wife or the prostitute. The common feature, despite the bourgeois myths to the contrary, is that both sell their sexuality for a price. There is no doubt that the structural changes in the workforce in late capitalism have produced changing social mores, a women's liberation movement and the prefiguration of new sexual possibilities for women, (for example the "independent woman", the "career girl", etc.) Nevertheless, the unchallenged primacy of the family in the context of capitalist social relations continues to produce distorted sexuality on a mass scale. Like everything else under capitalism, sex is a commodity, bought and sold on the public market and in the family where women are in a position of economic dependence on the man. All other bourgeois institutions reinforce this--the church, the schools, the legal system, the police. The woman has the goods, the man has the price, and alienation is the end result. As the object rather than subject, woman's passive role in sexual relations is produced and reproduced by her role in society as a whole. The domination of the male in the family, in the workforce, in all spheres of social life is strengthened by the most intimate of human relations. Thus women's sexual repression is an important component of their oppression.

**8** In all repressive regimes, sexual repression plays its part. In the workers states for example, we note the continuation of the binds of the

nuclear family and the special oppression of gays. Recently the Chinese bureaucracy took a position severely discouraging masturbation because "it saps revolutionary will". The links between sexual repression, traditional sexual roles and fascism have also been well-documented. While it is beyond the scope of this document to present an analysis of the relationship between the social effects of sexual repression and the imposition of political repression, there is without doubt an empirical relationship.

International capitalism is currently undergoing a deep crisis which expresses itself in a crisis of social relations as well as economic ones. The family itself is beginning to crack under the strain of too many contradictions, (increase in divorce rates, also re-marriage rates). On the one hand, capitalism requires an obedient, self-denying work force, one which is sexually repressed. On the other hand, it raises the cultural aspirations and expectations of the masses as it constantly develops the productive forces. These two tendencies come more and more into conflict. The so-called "sexual revolution" of the sixties only exacerbated the contradictions. By providing a material basis for the pursuit of sexuality for pleasure, not procreation (through the pill and other forms of contraception) and by ripping down the most anachronistic aspects of bourgeois sexual morality (for example, the fetishization of virginity, chastity, and to some extent fidelity), it has stimulated the desire for better sexuality without answering the question of how this can be done. The proliferating and now public sex market is capitalism's answer and it is no solution. The increasing commoditization of sexuality leads finally to a new stage of alienation as the emotional content is progressively drained away. The escape industry is just that--a false liberation. The most important expression of the contradiction, however, is that for the first time since the war, the question of sexuality has been put on the political agenda. Masses of youth especially, possess a consciousness of their sexual oppression and misery, and they are looking for solutions.

The "sexual revolution" has moved the question of sexuality into the public realm. The exaggerated commoditization of sex and the advertising which inevitably accompanied it have legitimated a public discussion of sexual relations in a new way. A few years ago, serious discussion of the quality of sexual relations barely passed outside of the bedroom; today it is a topic of discussion among both working and student youth.

For women, the present situation is particularly explosive. While certain victorian restrictions have softened with regard to legitimacy and frequency of sexual activity for women, nothing fundamental has changed. Women are as much as ever relegated to the passive role--in the magazines, the strip joints, the massage parlours--and the family remains as the only mass form for regular sexual relations. Confinement to the passive role is the crux of female sexual repression. Once again, though capitalism is ultimately responsible, the woman experiences her denial by men, although in this sphere, the hollow victory which men maintain over women is most apparent. The sexual oppression of women is a crucial component of the sexual repression of men, since the sexual 'split' which it requires necessitates the denial of full sexual expression by both sexes. The distortion of sexual relations has severely affected the

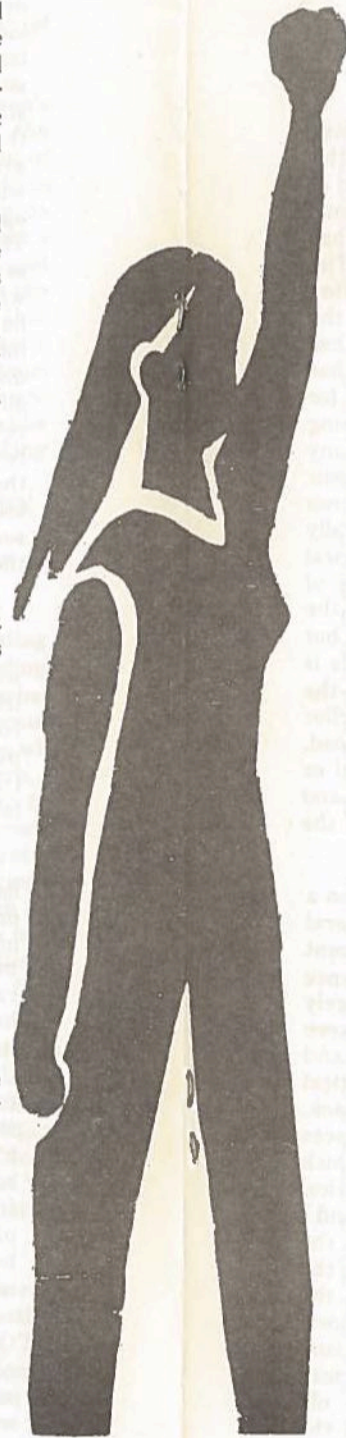


reinforced. The petty-bourgeois ideology of the ruling caste, propagated through every available channel, has a powerful impact on the consciousness of the masses. In all the workers states, the fundamental roots of womens oppression have not been altered. The roots of their oppression and inequality are still to be found in their domestic responsibilities within the family which continue to burden them and them alone.

There is yet another important consequence of the continued existence of the family--that is the block which it presents to the transition to a socialist mode of distribution. This mode of distribution is characterized by the disappearance of the market. The existence of the market necessitates private consumption which in turn is accomplished through the individual units of the family and the domestic labour performed within it. The commodity requirements of each family unit retard the ability to allocate industrial resources to the production of other priorities. Production in bulk for socialized kitchens, child care centres, laundries, and so on, combined with the organization of labour within these services, and the efficient distribution of the goods, would effect simultaneously the spheres of production, distribution and domestic labour.

The continuing oppression of women through the maintenance of the family is of course not an autonomous nor determinant factor and must be understood within the total context of the deformation of the workers states. However, especially in the Soviet Union, the productive forces have been developed to the point where the socialization of domestic labour can be achieved on a very large scale, even if a socialist mode of distribution is not yet possible in a complete sense. This has not occurred because the maintenance of the family is directly in the interests of the bureaucratic caste and serves to block the transition to socialism. The negative role played by the maintenance of the family can therefore be turned into its positive corollary through the pursuance of policies leading to the liberation of women. The implementation of such policies can only be achieved by a fully conscious workers' vanguard which will not spring up completely developed the day after the seizure of state power. It must be developed today. Seen from this vantage point, the question of women's liberation acquires for us strategic implications which cannot be ignored.

**9** These strategic implications require that we combat the divisive consequences of female oppression in the working class at the present time. The special exploitation of women in the labour force, in combination with the continued existence of family structures and the surrounding ideology weaken the working class as a whole. The use of women as a cheap source of labour, the conservatizing influence of the family on both male and female workers, sexual stratification and sexism within the working class deeply divide it. The liberation of women is an important part of the transition to socialism, and the struggle for its achievement raises the political understanding of the working class as a whole. Thus the revolutionary marxist organization must do consistent work around issues of women's oppression regardless of the conjuncture. We do not organize and support struggles against women's oppression only to win women to the



revolutionary organization, but also to strengthen the struggle and organization of women themselves, so that they can fight most effectively. We will seek to politicize women's struggles on a clear class basis and move them beyond the boundaries of reformist projects, through raising various transitional demands and proposing revolutionary modes of struggle. There can be no question of "subordinating" the struggle of women to the struggle for socialism, because the struggles of women within the context of the overall struggle of the proletariat are a crucial component of the revolutionary struggle.

Further, to ignore the struggles of women can have disastrous consequences for the women outside the work force as well. Many women who are housewives or only casual labour feel the crisis of capitalist society acutely and are searching for solutions to it. They can form a source of support for ultra-right movements if the workers movement as a whole is unable to take up the struggles and needs of the oppressed, and those problems of women especially.

Just as we understand the importance of workers democracy in strengthening the working class in its fight against the bourgeoisie and in raising the political level of the working class to guard against bureaucratic degeneration after the seizure of state power, so we understand the importance of women's liberation in similar ways. The struggle for women's liberation before the revolution strengthens the working class by overcoming its internal sexual divisions, and raises its political level, ensuring that the struggle will continue as an important component of the transition to socialism. Bureaucratic degeneration is hindered by the active struggle of women against their oppression. The struggle for women's liberation plays a vital role in the struggle for the emancipation of humanity, and for this reason we will seek to strengthen it.

## B. The Womens Movement and the Vanguard

**10** The post-world war boom of capitalism provided the pre-conditions for the rise of a womens liberation movement. The expansion of the finance, service and public sectors, created a greatly expanded, structurally permanent place for women in the labour force. The 'technological revolution' created the need for women in the labour force. Thus in the 50's and 60's the universities were greatly expanded particularly in North America, both keeping youth out of the labour force for a longer period of time--creating a need for more women workers--and allowing a huge influx of women into the universities. The expansion of productive forces included an expansion in certain manufacturing and service sectors which to an important, although limited degree, rationalized domestic labour, allowing more flexibility for time required at domestic labour and the possibility of the woman taking a job outside the home. The rise in real wages of the working class during the boom and the general level of prosperity, particularly in North America, greatly effected the expectations of the working class family in terms of the necessities of life. Working class women had more of an option to work outside the home and were more and more required to work in order to maintain the living standards of



the family. Thus a redistribution of female labour time occurred with a much larger portion of it in the sphere of the labour force.

The position of women under contemporary capitalism is characterized by a fundamental contradiction. While the immense growth of the productive forces demands female labour outside the home, the capitalist relations of production precludes the socialization of domestic labour. Women have been both **allowed and forced** to labour outside the home, while maintaining their old role inside it, and this has produced **their dual role as wage and domestic workers**. The contradictions which flow from this dual role are the major factors underlying the fissures spreading through the bourgeois family and the rise of the woman's liberation movement. Modern capitalism has developed the means whereby the time for domestic labour has relatively decreased at the same time as it leaves the responsibility for that labour to the woman. While the large number of wage-earning women has produced a growing change in consciousness among many workers, it has not had the effect of decisively challenging the economic primacy of the male. Female wage labour and the status which flows from it is still seen as secondary because the male's wages are generally much higher than the female's and this combines with the ideological mystification of female labour as a "supplementary wage" (except of course single-parent situations). Married woman's entry into the workforce has cut across the atomization of her isolation in the home but her primary role as wife and mother has remained unchanged. Little is left today of the ideological glorification of woman's domestic role--the refuge from the harsh commercial world--which prevailed in earlier periods of capitalism. So woman is left with an enormous work load, growing integration into social and economic life and no ideological or material rewards. Such a condition was bound to produce a revolt--and indeed the revolt began--the first post-war women's movement of the late sixties.

**11** Although it was the entry of women into the labour force on a permanent, massive basis that provided the general preconditions for the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), the prolongation of the capitalist boom and resultant quiescence of the working class meant that the movement per se was largely restricted to university educated women in North America. These were the women who were most ideologically conscious and sophisticated and who had the most intense political relationship with the other political events of the sixties--the youth radicalization generally, the black, student, and anti-war movements specifically. There were differences between the Canadian and American movements, the reasons for which remain somewhat murky, but both shared some common characteristics. Both came out of the new left and expressed its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the new left attempted to respond to the various questions posed by North American capitalist society, and to the various failures of the traditional left. On the other hand, given the tremendous poverty of socialist political traditions and poles, it threw the baby out with the bathwater. Faced with the affluence, racism, parochialism, sexism and cultural conservatism of the North American working class, the new left initially questioned and rejected the old parties and their forms of Marxism and Leninism. The failure of the

working class to radicalize and show its potential--as it did in Europe--meant that these conclusions were not reversed.

The woman's movement grew out of a deep dissatisfaction with the new left itself. Despite the rhetoric of liberation, women played a subordinate role in the political movements and their oppression became highly visible to them. In Canada, the movement was led from the beginning by women who identified with socialism; whereas in the States, feminism was the dominant current from the beginning. However, even the socialist leadership was not able to prevent the strategic impasse which brought about the collapse of the movement.

The non-democratic structures of the new left political organizations were recognized as oppressive to women but the answer of the women's movement was a further step along the same line--they horizontalized their organizations completely in an attempt to create real equality. The women's groups were then left with no means by which to solve the problems arising from uneven development of political skills, neither in terms of political accountability nor in terms of moving beyond the political level of the lowest common denominator. The main ideological position of the movement even for most of the socialist women can be summarized in the slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful", i.e. that the oppression of women and therefore their united action against it was the binding cohesive communality over and above all other differences and all other oppressions. This position, combined with the move to consensus politics inside the collectives provided the crucial roadblock. Political differences arose naturally in the course of the life of the movement but without the political and organizational means to solve them. Although broad agreement existed within the unitary organizations as to what constituted women's oppression, the question of how to fight it finally shattered the movement.

The strategic impasse of the women's movement, as with the new left as a whole, must be attributed most fundamentally to the continued quiescence of the working class, which did not even begin to pose itself as the agent of social change. Consequently, it would be entirely wrong to say that with a correct revolutionary leadership, the entire movement would have been won to a revolutionary perspective, or even the majority taken to a qualitatively higher stage. But a correct intervention could have won the best elements to revolutionary marxism, clarified the political causes for the decline of the movement and left a very different attitude towards the left in the contemporary milieu. If the balance sheet of the WLM does not take into account the failures of the left political organizations, the real lessons of the experience cannot be properly drawn. A rhetorical adaptation by the NDP and CP was made but WLM activists in their own ranks were recruited by and large after the demise of the movement. The development of Maoism through this period is a complex one and cannot be taken up here. In any case, the most important organization to intervene within the WLM was the Trotskyist organization--the League for Socialist Action (LSA) both because of its active response to the movement, its continuity in women's liberation work and the legacy of its practice in the present situation.



First it is important to stress the positive aspect of the energetic response made by the LSA to the development of the movement, and to clarify that many criticisms made of the LSA were reflections of the backwardness and anti-communism of the movement, e.g. those criticisms relating to the fact that its female comrades were members of a 'male-dominated vanguard organization', that they caucused before meetings, held common positions etc. Nevertheless the LSA made some very serious errors, which are related to two basic problems: **first a misestimation of the period of decline of the WLM; and second a wrong conception or absence of conception of the vanguard within the WLM.** The LSA intervention based on these errors combined with gross organizational manoeuvring, such as stacking meetings and splitting when in a minority, have left serious aversions to Trotskyism amongst many women who were, and are still, active. During the period when the contradictions in the WLM were exploding, when it was reaching its impasse, the LSA decided that the solution was to transform the broad, multi-issue movement into an abortion movement on a national scale.

The LSA concluded that the slogan "Free Abortion on Demand" was at too high a political level for the masses of women at whom they aimed their "mass action strategy", because it combined the concept of free medical care with the unequivocal right of women to control their own reproductive functions. They substituted "Repeal the Abortion Laws" and "A Woman's Right to Choose" in an attempt to draw in larger numbers of women. Unfortunately, there was no movement, mass or otherwise, and this orientation placed them squarely in opposition to the most advanced elements in the milieu. In their attempt to somehow revive and broaden the WLM, the LSA took a rightist opportunist position on abortion, adapted to the most backward feminist elements and saw the more advanced women as opponents--sectarians who would derail the movement.

This perspective had disastrous consequences. Militants who knew that women's oppression was not confined to her inability to procure abortions; who understood that it was women's right and not a legal question first; that militant action was necessary to win any important demand, but who did not understand why the impasse of the WLM had been reached, were left without any answers to their questions. They were completely alienated and proceeded to make their own equations: the LSA= male vanguard politics=detruction of the movement. A further consequence was the rejection by many left women of the importance of the issue of abortion itself. The fears of women today with regard to Trotskyist organizations are not solely a reflection of their backwardness but indeed of their fundamental distrust of the previous practice of the LSA. A correct revolutionary marxist intervention would have provided an explanation of the irresolvable contradictions of the movement, given the objective situation, the necessity to continue to work for women's liberation through mobilizations **around specific issues with a class struggle perspective**; and the importance of a Leninist organization for women who wanted to see any fundamental change in women's condition. The vanguard of the movement--women who were subjectively revolutionary--would have responded much more positively to this and much would be different today.

**12** By 1971 the organized movement was over. Its activists went the various ways of other political activists from the late sixties: some dropped out of politics completely to seek individual solutions; others had drawn certain political conclusions which led them to join or participate in forming far left organizations, a few were absorbed by the NDP and liberal feminism and a significant number continued activities within a women's milieu.

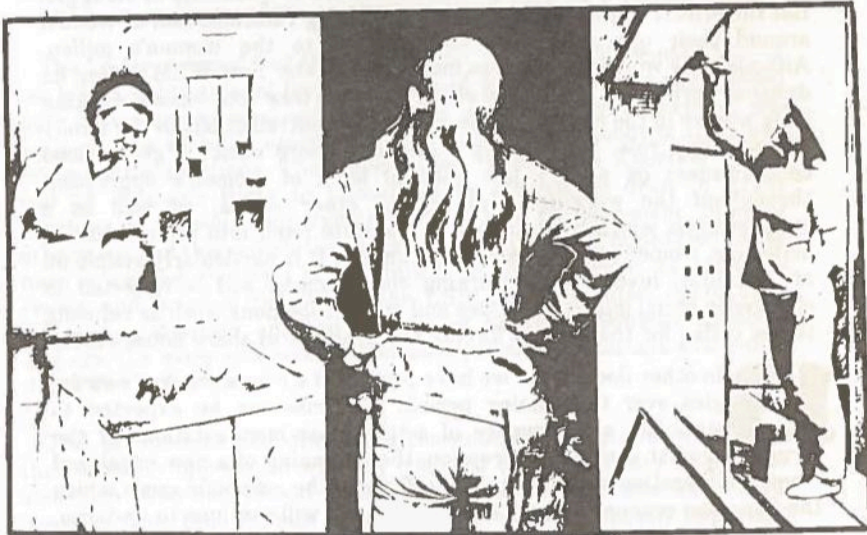
The milieu was/is composed of women's centres for consciousness raising and self-help projects, university study courses, bookstores and so on. It continued to attract individual women who were coming to understand their oppression; it has been dominated largely by radical feminists and to a lesser extent by feminist reformists. This latter current is presently growing given the failure of the inward turning self-help projects to provide practical answers to questions of struggle. But the effects of the WLM and the continuing radicalization of women around their oppression are not confined to the women's milieu. Although the working class was indifferent to the first WLM during its dynamic periods, an ideological effect began to take root among working class women in the context of the increasing contradictions in the family and woman's role. We can say that today there exists a generalized consciousness on a very low political level of women's oppression throughout the working class and in other strata, as well as a consciousness which is beginning to translate itself into some forms of action e.g. women's caucuses in trade unions. It is particularly visible on an individual level among working class women and is reflected in changes in social mores, attitudes and minor rebellions, such as refusing to get coffee for the boss or forcing the husband to share housework.

**13** In other documents we have projected a rise of worker's struggles over the coming period. This rise can be expected to stimulate a resurgence of active mass manifestations of the struggle against women's oppression--the beginning of a new organized women's liberation movement. The effects of the economic crisis which the Canadian economy is now undergoing, and will continue to undergo, will further exacerbate the contradictions in women's dual role. More and more married women are being forced to find jobs outside the home at the same time as they are less able to find jobs. The reduction in the real wages of the working class will increase the time required for domestic labour--mending clothes instead of buying new ones, eating out less often, compensating for the lack of available childcare, etc. Cutbacks in state expenditure particularly in the fields of social service, education and health care will have manifest effects on a radicalization of women--few job possibilities for university-educated women, rotten working conditions for teachers, nurses, etc., and deteriorating quality of life which affects women more acutely than men since they have to make the major adjustments as housewives. Finally, the decreased capacity of the bourgeoisie to make concessions to the working class will force women workers into struggle.

The future radicalization, itself a product of the general crisis of bourgeois society, will be decisively affected by the movement of the working class into the political arena. Hence we can predict with some certainty, a new rise of the women's movement, but on a different social and political basis from the late sixties. On an international scale, we have witnessed the rise of the WLM in the context of the rise of



workers' struggles, and this would point to a similar development in Canada. But we need not look only to other countries for signs of a future movement. In Canada, several factors provide a broad base for a recomposition of the WLM: the mass consciousness, albeit at a low level, in the working class and other strata; the beginnings of an organized expression of that consciousness in the trade unions and the continuation of organized activity within the communities. The more profound structural effects of the capitalist boom in North America and the more developed crisis of bourgeois social relations indicate an even more powerful resurgence of the movement here. The emergence of the movement will take place in a period of growing class polarization, and consequently it can be expected to polarize in a parallel way to the society as a whole. Given the potential for politicization, the militants who will form the backbone of the new movement will form an important component of the broad vanguard.



While a rise in worker's struggles will be the central factor stimulating the reemergence of the WLM its organizational and political character will be determined by the level of consciousness of its activists, and to a lesser extent, by the legacy of the last WLM. The dangers of the canalization of the WLM into 'acceptable' reformist channels are indeed great for several specific reasons including: the weakness of socialist traditions, the absence of influential revolutionary organizations and the strength of liberal feminism and the concurrent capacity of the bourgeoisie to co-opt certain manifestations of revolt. The response of the union bureaucracy and the NDP, which will accompany any mass development, will also direct anger in reformist directions. Such attempts are already visible in the trade union formations being initiated by the bureaucracy on the one hand, and the state's initiatives around International Women's Year on the other. However, these actions are a double-edged sword. International Women's Year and the trade union alliance (now Organized Working Women (OWW)-ed) for example, stimulate a certain politicization and activity which can backfire on their

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initiators. This has already occurred with respect to International Women's Year. And most importantly, the new union or para-union formations open the ground for a class struggle approach to women's liberation.

**14** Within the unions we can expect a process of differentiation at the base and in the bureaucracy. As well as a bypassing of established structures, the bureaucracy particularly in the public sector will be forced to take up certain women's struggles or demands in terms of organizing the unorganized, equalization of pay and can be expected to give a token support to daycare struggles and abortion. However, the sexism and reformism of the bureaucracy and the majority of the working class is bound to produce different organizational forms. The Trade Union Women's Alliance initiated in Toronto is an example of one variant: a cross-union women's formation initiated by the bureaucracy. The platform of this formation and others like it will no doubt be a reformist one but the relationship of forces between the bureaucrats and rank and file women involved can be much better than in a union per se. Women's caucuses inside the unions but affiliated to the cross-union formations and/or women's caucuses in conjunctural mobilizations around key questions will also increase as the struggle develops.

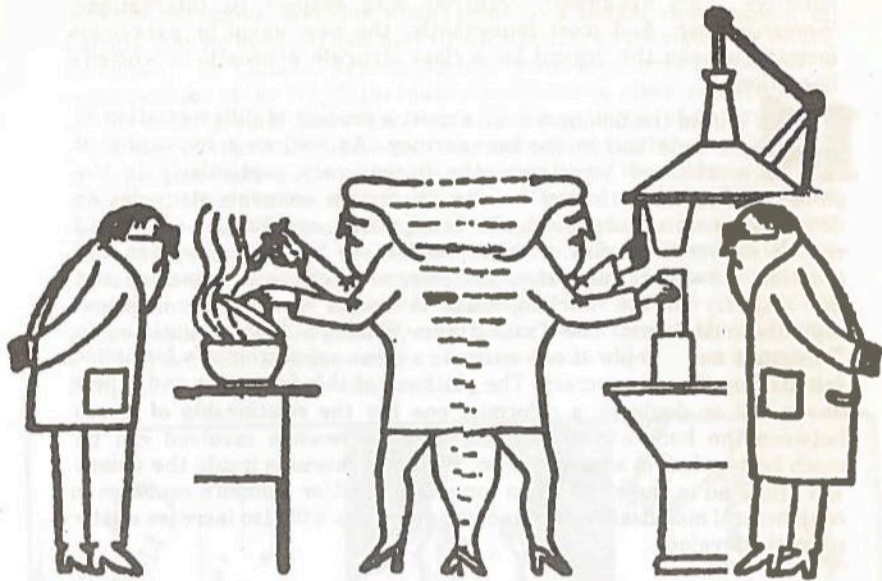
However, given the reformism of the trade union bureaucracy and of the NDP, struggles around abortion, childcare, equal pay and equal work campaigns and certain strike support work will be organized outside of the framework of the organized workers' movement. Conjunctural formations around specific issues (abortion, International Women's Year) or longer term formations such as exist in Toronto on daycare, as well as the continued existence of study groups and self-help projects are examples of what can be expected in the next period.

It is clear that an autonomous women's movement is on the agenda. Given the history of the last one and our general analysis of the characteristics of Canadian political life, the variant of a regionally structured WLM, developing unevenly, with a platform addressing various aspects of women's oppression is most likely. Our attitude towards this development is a positive one: we welcome and support it, just as we do all struggles of oppressed groupings against their oppression, and we understand its strategic importance. The objective basis for the WLM lies in the reality of women's oppression—they have the right to self-organization, a right which they must exercise in struggle if their liberation is to be achieved. Our task, regardless of the form the movement assumes, will be to strengthen its anti-capitalist dynamic, to aid in the construction of an anti-capitalist current, and to win its vanguard to revolutionary marxism. In Canada, given the various possibilities for canalization and co-optation, this is a particularly important task.

**15** Women will be an important component of the emerging vanguard, and not simply because of their social weight. The intersection of women's consciousness and class consciousness is a powerful impetus to a political rupture with bourgeois ideology and reformism. Because the oppression of women is so thoroughly rooted in every aspect of bourgeois society, such consciousness calls into question

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the whole fabric of bourgeois society. The specific effect of women's oppression on the radicalization of women workers is clear. A woman involved in a trade union struggle is immediately faced with the reality of her oppression as a woman in terms of the sexism of the organized labour movement, the sexual stratification of the labour force and the objective limitations placed upon her to participate in the struggle. In order to fight her special exploitation as a worker she is forced to struggle against her oppression as a woman. The intersection of trade union consciousness and developing women's consciousness can be a strong politicizing factor but it is by no means automatic. However, the oppression of women has a contradictory effect on the radicalization and politicization of women workers. On the one hand, the intersection between the oppression and special exploitation of women can produce a politicization. On the other hand, the effects of women's role place real limitations on this potential. The primary obligation of the family, women's socialization for their role, the instability of most women's jobs situations place real blocks to the radicalization and militancy of women workers. The intervention of revolutionary organizations concentrating on the intersection between women's oppression and exploitation and their roots in capitalism will be an important factor in this politicization.

Because women are oppressed within the trade unions as well as in the family and on the job, the development of women's consciousness can easily lead to anti-bureaucratic sentiment, if the right connections are made. In addition, it is clear that a new awareness of women's oppression often leads to a questioning of authority relations generally, to the questioning of the sexual division of labour, and the reflection of those divisions within the labour movement. When these ideological factors are combined with the situation of so many women in newly proletarianizing and semi-professional layers, layers undergoing a change in forms of organization and struggle, the possibilities for

political rupture among women are intensified.

Finally, given the high cultural level of the Canadian working class, the complex of questions surrounding women's liberation--the family, sex roles, etc--will be of concern to a large component of the vanguard as it emerges--to males as well as females. The capacity of the RMG to achieve its strategic project of politicizing the vanguard and polarizing it towards revolutionary marxism will be significantly affected by its work within the women's movement.



## Conclusion

★ This document is essentially a **programmatic** one. Its analysis and political positions demarcate the Revolutionary Marxist Group from other political tendencies on two sides. First, it demarcates us from those women who maintain that the oppression of women can be solved by reforms in the context of the present social order, or those who see women's oppression as autonomous from other oppressions, and therefore resolvable autonomously from the struggles of the working class as a whole. Second, it demarcates us from both the Communist Party and the Maoists, who defend the existence of a bureaucratic caste which continues to oppress women, and who, through their idealization of the family, essentially negate the real locus of



women's oppression. Consequently, they are unable to offer a solution to it. If we were to summarize our entire position within one slogan, we would say:

**Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution: No Socialism without Women's Liberation.**

Socialism is a long way in the future. So is the full liberation of women. But we must fight today. We must fight to improve women's conditions as much as possible, and through that process ensure that a consciousness of women's oppression becomes a generalized and integrated part of the political understanding and aspirations of the working class as a whole. We must work to build a women's movement so that women can have the means to struggle for their liberation and to carry that fight forward to its completion.

In the past, many issues have been violently debated among women's liberationists, often leading to an inability to work together. As a result, a potentially great collective strength has been fractured and diffused. In the future, debates will be just as hot. It is therefore crucial for the women's movement to adopt forms of organization and struggle which are democratic, and which can harness the enormous pool of energy and commitment which will develop. Experience has shown that a democratic procedure is the only way to do this. It can bring together a variety of political currents, organized tendencies and many independent women under a common set of demands which unite all the forces at the same time as it allows all participating forces the right to express their own views in their own name. A refusal to work together will only weaken our collective strength. But if we do not adopt democratic forms, we will end up with the same result: alienation and exclusion of important forces.

For the RMG the following points are central to the fight for women's liberation today. They do not comprise our entire program. That is contained in the preceding document. They do represent a short outline of what we believe to be the central issues confronting women, and a conception of how best to fight for them:

\*Free abortion on demand, universal contraception, no forced sterilization.

\*Free 24 hour quality childcare.

\*Equal pay and equal work; equal work is essential to women, given that 'different jobs' are paid different wages, and are the biggest reason for the wage differential between male and female workers. Furthermore, no worker receives the full value of the work that she/he performs, and we have no interest in continuing to propagate that myth. That is why we will argue against the slogan 'Equal pay for work of equal value.'

\*Against sextyping of any kind; streaming in the schools and other related educational 'methods'; streaming and sex-typing in the workforce and so on.

**22** \*Against the oppression and repression against gays.



\*Organize the unorganized, with special efforts to organize women workers.

\*For a sliding scale of wages to fight inflation; for a sliding scale of hours to fight unemployment.

\*For the socialization of housework. Although we can only talk about the possibility for the full socialization of housework after capitalism has been overthrown, we can begin to show today what this can mean, by demanding a series of partial measures whenever they become appropriate. For example, quality meal at school to cut down on time for meal preparation, or free laundries for work clothes at the expense of the employer.

\*We will propose an orientation of linking up with trade union and working class women and their organizations, and we will stress the importance of providing solidarity to worker's struggles more generally, because of our assessment of the centrality of the proletariat's struggle



in the process of women's liberation. We will try to show the importance of a revolutionary perspective for the solution of women's problems.

\*We will propose militant actions--demonstrations, rallies, strike support, and so on--around questions of key conjunctural importance. We will try to show why militant forms of action are superior to petitions and lobbying, even where they do not exclude such activities. We will argue against any reliance on 'parliamentary solutions' stressing that concessions and reforms are always the product of struggle.

\*We will propose forms of organization which bring unity in action with the right of independent propaganda for political tendencies, with full democratic and representational procedures.

## Who we are--

The Revolutionary Marxist Group and the Groupe Marxist-Revolutionnaire are sister organizations in Canada and Quebec. Composed of workers and students, all identify ourselves with all of the struggles for human emancipation against the capitalist system which exploits and oppresses us--with the struggles of the working class, of women, of national and racial minorities. In this battle to fundamentally transform society, it is the working class which must play the central role. We are members of the Fourth International, a world-wide organization of revolutionaries in over fifty countries, who work together on the basis of a common programme, in the common project of advancing the socialist revolution. Unlike the NDP, we do not believe that capitalism can be reformed--it must be overthrown and in its place, a socialist society can be built. Unlike the Communist Party, we do not believe that socialism reigns in the Soviet Union. For us, socialism means a qualitatively better society than capitalism--a society in which all are free from economic privation, from national, racial and sexual oppression, and in which we can exercise an infinitely superior form of political freedom based on workers democracy. We stand firmly for the right of the Quebecois nation for self-determination, and we believe that the unity of the working classes of both English Canada and Quebec against capitalism is an indispensable tool to the liberation of both. As small organizations, we have no illusions that we are the party of the working class, but our project is to help in the creation of this party, and we welcome a dialogue with all militants who are seeking solutions to the problems of struggle.....

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