

Women and Revolution



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International Women's Day:

A Proletarian Holiday

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Garment workers during 1919 strike.

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International Women's Day: A Proletarian Holiday

Bourgeois feminists may celebrate it, but March 8—International Women's Day—is a *workers'* holiday. Originating in 1908 among the female needle trades workers in Manhattan's Lower East Side, who marched under the slogans "for an eight hour day," "for the end of child labor" and "equal suffrage for women," it was officially adopted by the Second International in 1911.

International Women's Day was first celebrated in Russia in 1913 where it was widely publicized in the pages of the Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, and popularized by speeches in numerous clubs and societies controlled by Bolshevik organizations which presented a Marxist analysis of women's oppression and the program for emancipation.

The following year the Bolsheviks not only agitated for International Women's Day in the pages of *Pravda* (then publishing under the name *Put' Pravdy*), but also made preparations to publish a special journal dealing with questions of women's liberation in Russia and internationally. It was called *Rabotnitsa* (*The Working Woman*), and its first issue was scheduled to

"Under the lead of the Third International, the day of the working women shall become a real fighting day; it shall take the form of practical measures which either solidify the conquests of Communism... or prepare the way for the dictatorship of the working class."

—Alexandra Kollontai

appear on International Women's Day, 1914 (see "How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women: History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*," *Women and Revolution* No. 4, Fall 1973).

Preparations for the holiday were made under the most hazardous conditions. Shortly before the long-awaited day the entire editorial board of *Rabotnitsa*—with one exception—as well as other Bolsheviks who had agitated for International Women's Day in St. Petersburg factories, were arrested by the Tsarist police. Despite these arrests, however, the Bolsheviks pushed ahead with their preparations. Anna Elizarova—Lenin's sister and the one member of the editorial board to escape arrest—single-handedly brought out the first issue of *Rabotnitsa* on March 8 (or, accord-



ing to the old Russian calendar, February 23) as scheduled. Clara Zetkin, a leading figure in the German Social Democratic Party and in the international working women's movement, wrote:

"Greetings to you on your courageous decision to organize Women's Day, congratulations to you for not losing courage and not wanting to sit by with your hands folded. We are with you, heart and soul. You and your movement will be remembered at numerous meetings organized for Women's Day in Germany, Austria, Hungary and America."

—Quoted in A. Artiukhina, "Proidennyi Put'," *Zhenshchina v revoliutsii*

By far the most important celebration ever of International Women's Day took place in Petrograd on 8 March 1917 when the women textile workers of that city led a strike of over 90,000 workers—a strike which signaled the end of the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty and the beginning of the Russian Revolution. One week afterward, *Pravda* commented:

"The first day of the revolution—that is the Women's Day, the day of the Women Workers' International. All honor to the International! The women were the first to tread the streets of Petrograd on their day."

As the position of Soviet women degenerated under Stalin and his successors, as part of the degeneration of the entire Soviet workers state, International Women's Day was transformed from a day of international proletarian solidarity into an empty ritual which, like Mother's Day in the United States, glorifies the traditional role of women within the family.

But International Women's Day is a celebration neither of motherhood nor sisterhood; to ignore this fact is to ignore the most significant aspects of its history and purpose, which was to strengthen the ranks

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Foundations of Communist Work Among Women: The German Social Democracy

PART 1: 1875-1900

"The beginnings of the class-conscious organized proletarian women's movement in Germany are indissolubly bound up with the coming into being and maturing of the socialist conception of society in the proletariat, with the process of its being welded together as a class, politically and socially represented by a class party which is ideologically and organizationally sound. The beginnings of the women's movement are a part, and in fact a very characteristic part of this entire path of development, giving an index to its increasing depth. The first efforts to gather proletarian women on the ground of the proletarian class struggle take place especially in close connection with the rising trade union movement. They are consequently social-democratic in essence, for in contrast to other countries, as in Great Britain, the trade unions were summoned into life by political parties."

—Clara Zetkin, *Zur Geschichte der proletarischen Frauenbewegung Deutschlands* (1928)

Between 1875 when it was founded and its historic betrayal over support to the imperialist war in 1914, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) became the recognized theoretical and organizational leadership of the world proletarian movement. During those years it succeeded in fusing the Marxist theoretical approach to the woman question with the strategy and tactics which continue to this day to serve as models for communist work among women. Far from occurring spontaneously, this fusion was the product of some 40 years of arduous struggle by and within the German party in the course of its pioneering work among women.

Debates on the woman question were intricately tied to industrial/political developments in Germany (and thus all of Europe), as well as to the many-sided factional struggle which festered within the German party as early as the 1890's.

Germany's industrial boom in the second half of the 19th century, which coincided with its national consolidation under the chancellorship of Otto von Bismarck, brought whole new layers of the population—including women—into industrial production for the first time and placed the woman question in the

forefront of the young socialist movement. These were the years when both the SPD and the Free Trade Unions (which were allied with the socialists, as opposed to the company unions and non-socialist unions) developed into mass organizations.

Bismarck attempted to disguise his fundamentally reactionary and repressive regime with a few fragments of democratic reform and social welfare legislation. But the Reichstag, aptly dubbed by Wilhelm Liebknecht "a fig leaf for absolutism," possessed no political power. The so-called "universal" suffrage which Bismarck enacted excluded broad sections of the proletariat, including, of course, women. Laws of Association severely restricted the operation of political parties (and were particularly enforced against radical parties); women and youth were forbidden to join any political parties or, until 1890, any trade unions. The labor movement was thus required from its inception to participate in a struggle for political democracy as a precondition for its very existence. This fact put the Social Democracy in the leadership of the greater part of the union movement in the early years.

In 1878, only three years after the founding of the SPD at Gotha, Bismarck enacted the Exceptional or Anti-Socialist Laws, which illegalized the organiza-



Clara Zetkin:
leader of SPD
work among
women.

tion, forcing it underground, while allowing individual socialists to run for office and sit in the Reichstag. During the 12 years that the laws were in effect, 1,500 persons were imprisoned and 900 deported. This period of clandestine operation proved to be one of great expansion for the socialist parties (as well as for the trade unions). Electoral support for the SPD

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...German Social Democracy

grew from a half million votes in 1877 (nine percent of the total vote) to one and a half million in 1890 (20 percent of the total), despite Bismarck's attempts to upstage the Social Democrats with wide-reaching social security reforms during the 1880's. But the organizational preconditions for the degeneration of the SPD were laid in this period when its only public manifestations were the Reichstag fraction, functioning almost autonomously from the party leadership, and the trade unions.

The Anti-Socialist Laws were especially repressive toward women. For instance, when, in the mid-1880's, clubs for the "self-education of women" were established by women close to the SPD (the first "special work among women"), an extraordinary decree was passed outlawing such groups. However, the political victimization of the *entire* workers movement was sufficiently severe to foster a close political working relationship between the men and women within it, born of shared oppression and shared aspirations.

The early battles over the rights of German working women were fought out not in the feminist movement, which limited itself to bourgeois demands, but in the embryonic socialist parties and trade unions. Working-class women were therefore traditionally



VERLAG KURT DESCH

From left: Dr. Friedrich Simon, Frieda Simon, Clara Zetkin, Engels, Julie and August Bebel, Ernst Schaffer, Regine and Eduard Bernstein.

bound up in the struggle of the working class as a whole against capitalist oppression.

Questions posed by the growth of the female proletariat, such as those dealing with protective labor legislation for women, the role of the family in society and women's suffrage, had been hotly debated within the German socialist movement since the 1860's, particularly between the Marxian and the Lassallean wings, which fused in 1875 to form the SPD.

Ferdinand Lassalle's "socialism" was a society based on state producer cooperatives which were to be achieved by the introduction of democracy (i.e., universal suffrage) and a unified Germany under the Prussian sword. Clara Zetkin made a fundamental criticism of the Lassalleans in her book, *Zur Geschichte der proletarischen Frauenbewegung Deutsch-*



August Bebel

SCHOCKEN BOOKS

lands, which exposes, at least partially, the reason for their inability to come to a correct position on the woman question. Commenting on the "iron law of wages" theory mechanically upheld by the Lassalleans, she said:

"Marx recognized it neither as 'iron' nor as a law. It was more a stumbling block for the Lassalleans than an asset. Lassalle had attempted to prove by means of it that the continuing rise in the income of the proletariat above and beyond the absolute minimum for survival was impossible under the wage system. Occasional adherents of Lassalle may have maintained, following this, that wage-earning by women did not signify a continuing improvement in the position of the proletarian family, but rather merely the competition over the 'wage fund' by labor power that was in itself cheap for the capitalist. The position of women could only be improved through the improvement of workers, that is, through abolition of the wage system. This assertion is based on a correctly felt but incorrectly proven historical truth: that, as the liberation of the proletariat is possible only through the abolition of the capitalist productive relation, so too the emancipation of women is possible only through doing away with private property. However from this truth it is still a long way to the fundamental exclusion of women from all political and economic movements."

At its Sixth General Meeting in 1867 the Lassallean General German Workers Association adopted the position that:

"The employment of women in the workshops of modern industry is one of the most scandalous abuses of our time. Scandalous, because it does not improve the material situation of the working class but makes it worse, and because the destruction of the family in particular reduces the working class population to a wretched state in which even the last remnants of its ideal possessions are taken from it. This gives us all the more reason to reject the current efforts to increase even further the market for female labour. Only the abolition of the rule of capital can ensure the remedy, through which positive organic institutions will abolish the wage-relationship and give every worker the full proceeds of his labour."

—Quoted in Thönnessen, *The Emancipation of Women—The Rise and Decline of the Women's Movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933*

At the same time, the Lassalleans raised a demand for wages for housework and, flowing from this, issued a call for male workers to *strike* to keep women out of industry in order to keep men's wages up, in the hope that this would economically strengthen the family and thus encourage women to marry instead of going to work.

The Marxians themselves did not have a clear view of the woman question at each historical moment. Marx correctly analyzed the necessity of female labor for the capitalists:

"In so far as machinery does away with the need for any considerable expenditure of muscular power, it becomes a means for the utilization of workers with comparatively little strength, and those whose bodily growth is immature but whose limbs are all the more supple. The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first word in the capitalist utilisation of machinery! This mighty substitute for work and workers speedily transformed itself into a means for increasing the number of wage workers by enlisting all the members of the working-class family, without distinction of sex or age, to them under the direct sway of capital. Forced labour for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of free labour in the domestic circle, carried on for the family itself, and within moderate limits."

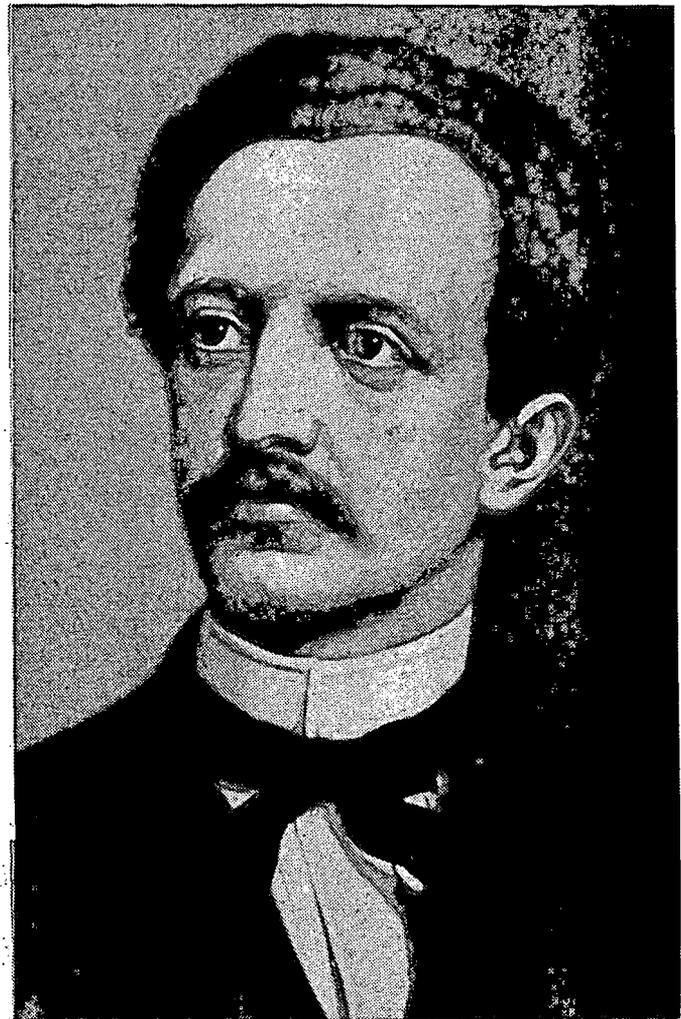
—Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I

Furthermore, he had commented in the *Communist Manifesto* on the "nauseating" "bourgeois phrase-making" about the "intimate relations between parents and children," and had derided the hoax of bourgeois marriage and the family, saying: "Just as in grammar two negatives make an affirmative, so we may say that in the marriage mart two prostitutions make a virtue" (*The Holy Family*). Nevertheless, the embryonic German section of the Marxist International Workers Association (First International) published the following in a discussion document of 1866:

"The rightful work of women and mothers is in the home and family, caring for, supervising, and providing the first education for the children, which, it is true, presupposed that the women and children themselves receive an adequate training. Alongside the solemn duties of the man and father in public life and the family, the woman and mother should stand for the cosiness and poetry of domestic life, bring grace and beauty to social relations and be an ennobling influence in the increase of humanity's enjoyment of life."

—Quoted in Thönnessen, *The Emancipation of Women*

The desire of socialists to protect women from the real brutality of the factory and confine them to the "cosiness and poetry" of the home is understandable. During this period of rapid industrial expansion in Germany, working conditions, particularly for unorganized women and children, were abominable. And while parents worked, proletarian children were left to raise themselves on the streets. High infant mortality, crowded city housing, disease and starvation were the hallmarks of emergent capitalism. Furthermore, the influx of women, who normally received lower wages than men for the same work, presented a clear and immediate threat to the workers' movement. Therefore, although the integration of women into industry was later to become an unquestioned position in the



Ferdinand Lassalle

THE CENTURY COMPANY

Marxist-Leninist program, its correctness appeared less than obvious at the time.

Marx had argued in *Capital* that:

"However terrible, however repulsive, the break-up of the old family system within the organism of capitalist society may seem; none the less, large-scale industry, by assigning to women and young persons and children of both sexes, a decisive role in the socially organized process of production, and a role which has to be fulfilled outside the home, is building the new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes."

—Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I

It was this materialist analysis, which saw beyond immediate conditions and recognized that *wage labor opened the door to the only real possibility of fundamental social change through the wielding of industrial power*, which enabled Marxists over a period of time to develop a correct revolutionary perspective, whereas the positions of the Lassalleans remained grounded in the bourgeois prejudices of the day.

Protective Labor Legislation

The question of protective labor legislation for women in many ways paralleled the dispute on the

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...German Social Democracy

integration of women into industry. Here again, the facts were that conditions of work among women were inferior even to those of men at the time. Women, who possessed few skills and little education and who had been schooled in docility since infancy, were susceptible to the worst exploitation. Thus there developed a widespread demand for special protective labor laws for women workers—a demand which was quite radical in that it was a direct challenge to the employers' right to determine the conditions of work.

At the Eisenach Conference of 1869 the question of protective laws was discussed in the newly founded Social Democratic Labor Party, the first organized Marxist group in Germany. Led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht, in opposition to a Lassallean tendency within the party, a successful struggle was waged for the restriction of female labor and the prohibition of child labor. While this still did not represent a revolutionary stand on the subject, it nonetheless recognized that the drawing of women into the labor force was progressive—the question for socialists after this time was *how* to do it.

At the unification of the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers at Gotha in 1875, a program was adopted representing a compromise which generally favored the theories of the Lassalleans over the Marxians, but which was closer to the Marxist position in favor of protective legislation on child and female labor. This remained the official position of the SPD until its legalization with the expiration of the oppressive Anti-Socialist Laws in 1890.

At the Halle Party Conference of that year, the leaders of the party's work among women—Emma Ihrer, Luise Zietz and Clara Zetkin—put forth a position *rejecting* special privileges for women while *demanding* protection for *all* workers. But this position, which correctly resolved the question of protective labor legislation for women, was rejected by the party.

Women's Suffrage

The suffrage issue was particularly important for the socialist movement in Germany because of the arbitrary and class-oppressive suffrage laws which remained in force until 1918. Even as late as 1908, when the SPD won six seats in the Prussian Diet for the first time, the six socialist deputies were elected with 600,000 votes while 418,000 votes gained the Conservatives 212 seats!

But even on the suffrage issue, there were years of dispute before the position of clear and unequivocal support for women's suffrage emerged. The Lassalleans had held a position in favor of equal and direct suffrage for *men* from the age of twenty. At the Eisenach Conference in 1869, the Marxist proposal of voting rights for "all citizens" was defeated.

At the Gotha unification conference six years later, Bebel and Liebknecht fought vigorously for equal suffrage:

"Admittedly, opponents of female suffrage often maintain that women have no political education. But there are plenty of men in the same position, and by

this reasoning they ought not to be allowed to vote either: The 'herd of voters' which has figured at all the elections did not consist of women. A party which has inscribed 'equality' on its banner flies in the face of its own words if it denies political rights to half the human race."

—Quoted in Thömmessen, *The Emancipation of Women*

Liebknecht's amendment was voted down, but a proposal for "general equal and direct suffrage with secret and obligatory voting for all citizens over twenty years of age" was incorporated into the program. This formulation neatly skirted the issue of whether or not women were part of the citizenry. Finally in 1891 the positive and unambiguous support of the SPD for women's suffrage was proclaimed in the Erfurt Program, which included a demand for "universal, equal and direct suffrage, with secret ballot, for all citizens of the Reich over twenty years of age without distinction as to sex." It further demanded:

"... the abolition of all laws which discriminate against women as compared with men in the public or private legal sphere, free educational materials, and free care for those girls and boys who, because of their abilities are considered suitable for further education."

—Quoted in Thömmessen, *The Emancipation of Women*

After 15 years of struggle, the party had finally taken a strong stand in favor of women's emancipation, but the Erfurt Program in which it appeared also encapsulated the growing political rifts which already had begun to divide the party. The revolutionary-sounding theoretical section of the program was barely reflected in the essentially reformist programmatic section. As became clear later, the right wing of the party viewed the suffrage issue merely as an aid to its parliamentary aspirations. Women's suffrage, which was for revolutionists a means of educating the whole class for revolutionary struggles, was for the revisionists simply another vote-getting gimmick within the bourgeois order.

Clara Zetkin

An outstanding milestone in the clarification of the SPD's position on work among women was Clara Zetkin's pamphlet, *The Question of Women Workers and Women at the Present Time* (1889), which synthesized the key components of the Marxist position on this widely disputed question. The positions which she set forth—above all her insistence that the socialist women's movement could not exist outside the socialist workers movement as a whole—were later adopted by the Third International in 1919-22 and remain fundamentally the positions of Marxists today.

Zetkin's pamphlet—which argued that "women must remain in industry despite all narrow-minded caterwauling; in fact the circle of their industrial activity must become broader and more secure daily"—was grounded in the writings not only of Marx, but also in the Marxist position on the woman question set forth in August Bebel's *Women and Socialism* (1878) and Frederick Engels' *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). She demonstrated how industrialization was already forcing cap-



VERLAG KURT DESCH

Wilhelm Liebknecht with his wife Eleanor, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx.

italism to take over some of the functions of the family (education, for instance), but she insisted that only socialism could guarantee the possibility of the socialization of *all* essential family functions and thus lay the basis for the liberation of women.

Against those who objected that female labor should be abolished because it was harmful to women, Zetkin argued that the expulsion of women from industry was a reactionary proposal which would result in their relegation to their previous position of powerlessness and that the destructive effects of labor on women would be overcome only through its socialization, i.e., through socialist revolution. Toward that end, she maintained, the industrialization and education of women as part of the organized working class was *essential*:

"The organization and enlightenment of working women, the struggle to attain their economic and political equal rights is not only desirable for the socialist movement. It is and will become more and more a life-and-death question for it, the more the further

development of industry forces men out of production, the more the huge army of the female proletariat swells. A socialist movement that is carried out not only by the male proletariat but by the millions of industrial women workers as well, is bound to be victorious, to lead to the political and economic liberation of the whole working class twice as fast."

—Clara Zetkin, *The Question of Women Workers and Women at the Present Time*

In 1891, the year of the Erfurt Conference, Zetkin and Emma Ihrer became the editors of a special SPD newspaper addressed specifically to the question of women's emancipation. It was called *Die Gleichheit* (*Equality*). The editors wrote that *Die Gleichheit* would:

"... fight with all energy and sharpness for the full social liberation of the world of proletarian women, because this is possible only in a socialist society. For only in such a society, along with the disappearance of the property and economic relations presently dominant, will the social contradiction disappear between those who own property and those who do not, between man and woman, between intellectual and physical labor. The elimination of these contradictions can however only come through class struggle: the liberation of the proletariat can only be the work of the proletariat itself. If the proletarian woman wants to be free, she must join forces with the common socialist movement.... But the characteristic standpoint, the standpoint of the class struggle, must be sharply and unambiguously emphasized in an organ for the interests of proletarian women. And this must be done all the more sharply, the more the bourgeois women's righters make it their business, by the use of general humanitarian phrases and petty concessions to women workers' demands for reform, to throw up obstructions in the world of proletarian women and to seek to draw them away from the class struggle. But the schooling of proletarian women precisely for the class struggle will also in the future continue to be the foremost task of *Die Gleichheit*."

—Thönnessen, *Die Frauenemanzipation*

The following ten years were enormously successful for the SPD and for its work among women, in particular, but its functioning was overshadowed by the growing political differentiation within the party which was to lead, in 1914, to an open split. Thus the party's intervention into the mass movement through the medium of *Die Gleichheit*, although congruent with the theoretical position of the party, contradicted the main momentum of the party leaders under Karl Kautsky, who sought to appease the purely parliamentary and trade-unionist appetites of their constituency. For a shift was taking place toward ever more confidence in the possibility of effecting fundamental social change through parliamentary activity. Since the party's base rested mainly on the northern industrial proletariat and its trade-union leadership, there was strong pressure for concessions to pure trade unionism. Furthermore, during this period, membership in the trade unions was quickly outdistancing that of the SPD. In accordance with the "two pillars" theory (that the trade unions deal with economic issues and the party handles "political" questions), the trade unions adopted a politically "neutral" stand. It was only in the next decade that this illusory compromise broke down as the trade-union leaderships demonstrated their fundamentally reformist intentions. The party leadership under Kautsky, forced to choose, capitulated.

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The central leadership of the work among women, notably Zetkin, fought the rightward drift of the party majority. Throughout this period, and in fact until 1916 when Zetkin was finally removed from editorship, *Die Gleichheit* was continually attacked by the right wing for being too theoretical, too inaccessible, not "popular" enough. Attempts were made to liquidate the paper and print instead a Sunday supplement dealing with women, written to be "understandable to all." Zetkin, Zietz, Ihrer and others in the left wing argued that the paper was not intended to be a family newspaper, but an instrument for the theoretical instruction of revolutionists; that it was a form of special work among politically conscious women primarily directed at female members and sympathizers of the SPD. Year after year, the leftists blocked these attempts to "simplify" (depoliticize) the newspaper, and managed to resist liquidation until 1916, two years after the decisive political betrayal by the party majority.

It is notable that the growing revisionist currents within the party were considerably weaker among readers and supporters of *Die Gleichheit*. When the Socialist Caucus of the SPD voted for war credits in

1914, *Die Gleichheit* went into open opposition. It was a measure of the systematic political education that had been carried on and the intransigent leadership of the party's work among women that most of the experienced comrades involved in this work did not side with the reformist SPD majority. From this point until Zetkin's final removal as editor, *Die Gleichheit* was known as the international women's publication opposing the imperialist war. It served as one of the few voices of the antiwar left wing of the Second International and—through ties with left-wing socialists in Russia, Austria, England, Belgium, the U.S. and elsewhere—became a political lifeline for many women who later found their way into the Third International. ■

* * *

The second part of this article, dealing with the period 1900-14 and focusing on the establishment of a women's section of the party, the struggle against feminist currents within the party and the widening rift which finally split the party in 1914, will appear in the next issue of Women and Revolution.

International Women's Day Forums



AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS

Garment workers during 1919 strike.

NEW YORK

"Forward to a Women's Section of the Vanguard Party"

Wednesday, March 5
7:30 p.m.

Columbia University
Hamilton Hall—Room 304
Speaker: Kay Blanchard

HOUSTON

"CLUW: Feminism and Reformism vs. Class Struggle in the Trade Unions"

Week of March 10—call
926-9944 for date and time
Sundry School
University of Houston
Speaker: Sue Shepherd

PHILADELPHIA

"From Feminism to Marxism"

Saturday, March 1
7:30 p.m.

Germantown Community
United Presbyterian Church
Green and Tulpehocken Sts.
Speaker: M. Salzberg

CLEVELAND

"From Feminism to Trotskyism"

Tuesday, March 11
John Carroll University
Wednesday, March 12
Case Western Reserve
Times, rooms to be announced for both
Speaker: Diana Miller

WASHINGTON D.C.

"From Feminism to Marxism"

Friday, February 28
7:30 p.m.

American University
Hurst Hall—Room No. 2
Speaker: N. Gerard

BERKELEY/OAKLAND

"International Women's Day: A Class Struggle Perspective"

Saturday, March 8
7:30 p.m.

U.C. Berkeley
Room to be announced
Speaker: Bonnie Breen

Rally: Friday, March 7/Noon
U.C. Berkeley, Sproul Plaza

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International Women's Day...

of the revolutionary proletariat. Unlike the pre-war Mensheviks who wanted to conciliate the feminists of their day by limiting the celebration of International Women's Day to women only, the Bolsheviks insisted that it be a holiday of working women and working men in struggle together. As Nadezhda Krupskaya wrote in the lead article of the first issue of *Rabotnitsa*:

"That which unites working women with working men is stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common needs, their common condition, which is struggle and their common goal. . . Solidarity between working men and working women, common activity, a common goal, a common path to this goal—such is the solution of the 'woman' question among workers."

Today the Bolshevik program for the full emancipation of women is carried forward by the Spartacist League. We are proud to publicize the real history of International Women's Day, a part of our revolutionary heritage, and we will celebrate it with public forums around the country presenting the Marxist analysis of women's oppression and the program and strategy to smash it.

As we deepen our influence in the working class, we look forward to celebrating future International Women's Days not only through the dissemination of propaganda, but also through the initiation of the full range of activities traditionally associated with this proletarian holiday—*general strikes, insurrections, revolution!*

Forward to a Women's Section of the Reborn Fourth International!

For Women's Liberation through International Proletarian Revolution! ■

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Women and Revolution

DEFEND EDELIN! FOR FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND!



TIME MAGAZINE

Boston demonstration in defense of Dr. Edelin

On February 15 Boston physician Dr. Kenneth Edelin was convicted of manslaughter for performing an abortion. This decision, which is certain to make abortions more difficult to obtain—especially after the first twelve weeks of pregnancy—will principally affect working-class women. While the money and influence of the affluent will continue to buy them the best and safest medical care available, greater numbers of the poor will be forced to resort to dangerous and illegal back-alley abortions.

Following Edelin's conviction, a demonstration in his defense, involving some 2,000 people was organized overnight. The Spartacist League participated with banners calling for free abortion on demand and free quality health care for all, denouncing bourgeois "justice" and calling for a workers government and women's liberation through socialist revolution. The SL defends women's right to abortion at any stage of pregnancy.

Defense attorney William Homans stated that the case will be appealed on the grounds that racial and religious prejudice prevented Edelin, who is black, from receiving a fair trial in Boston, where one of the jurors was heard to say, "That black nigger is guilty as sin."

The "right-to-life" forces in Boston—the same reactionary elements which oppose integration in the schools and social welfare programs—are a well-organized pressure group. Together with their co-thinkers throughout the country, they have switched their tactics from agitating for repeal of state laws legalizing abortion to the mounting of a national campaign for a Constitutional amendment to make abortion illegal. The Edelin case is therefore only an early skirmish in what promises to be a protracted war.

While realizing that people will get fair trials only in the revolutionary tribunals of the future workers state, *Women and Revolution* calls upon all workers to rally to Dr. Edelin's defense, i.e., to the defense of working-class women.

Fidel Castro on "Proletarian Chivalry"

Setting out to prove that he is not only a scholar, but also a gentleman, Dr. Castro addressed the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women which met in November on the subject of "proletarian chivalry, proletarian courtesy, proletarian manners and proletarian consideration of women."

Arguing that women must be accorded "certain small privileges and certain small inequalities" *because they bear the burden of motherhood* [!] Castro scolded those of his countrymen who fail to relinquish their seats to women on buses.

Cuban women who, according to Castro's own figures, comprise only 15 percent of industrial and administrative leaders and six percent of party cadres, do not need "small privileges" and "small inequalities." They need full *social emancipation and complete equality* with men in all spheres of life. But they will



Castro at Federation of Cuban Women Congress.

not get these things from the Castro regime. (For a full analysis of why not, see "Women in Castro's Cuba," *Women and Revolution* No. 6, Summer 1974.) Like all deformed workers states, Cuba cannot and will not liberate women from the oppression of the family. The touching reverence for motherhood with which Castro's speech to the Federation of Cuban Women was drenched only underlines the reactionary and totally anti-Marxist character of the family code enacted last year

Letter

25 December 1974

Women's Commission

Dear Comrades:

I think our reply to Rosemont's letter on surrealism is wrong. The particular sentence I object to the most is: "The revolution will once again create its artistic analogue which will dig deep into the unconscious for the imaginative material connected to the living struggle." Earlier we say: "The surrealist movement existed in the twenties and thirties as an artistic analogue of the great social upheavals of that period."

First, on the "artistic analogue." According to our reply surrealism is the analogue either of "the revolution" or of "social upheavals" generally (which would include fascism). If we accept the latter view, then the example of how the surrealists "expelled" Salvador Dali from their movement for saying fascism and surrealism were compatible, as an example of how progressive this shows the surrealists to be, collapses, or proves at most that surrealism is inconsistent. Calling surrealism the analogue of the revolution implies that there is some organic, necessary connection between the *content* of surrealism, its ideology and aesthetics, and Marxist politics. It is essentially an *accident* that the leaders of surrealism (Breton) identified themselves with Trotskyism. That is, some leading artists in that movement were interested in politics. For reasons outside of their aesthetic commitment, for broader social reasons, they chose to defend Marxism. In the specific and narrow case of what particular politics individual artists hold, I think this is true for all artistic movements in any period. Cezanne, probably the most influential "revo-

lutionary" artist of his day, was a Catholic anti-Dreyfusard. Many Italian Futurists identified with fascism. Look at the split between Rivera and Siqueiros in Mexico—and Siqueiros' art is if anything more "radical" in aesthetic terms than Rivera's. One can find the roots of the Russian Constructivist movement not in the revolution, but in the aesthetic theories and movements of Western Europe in the preceding decade.

Of course certain artistic styles have been associated with events like the Russian Revolution, but there is no particular organic or necessary aesthetic reason for this, but rather historical accident. And of course a revolution can be a great inspiration to creativity—but the *forms* this creativity takes will have most probably already been determined by other forces, by different laws than those of the political process.

Secondly, what is this stuff about creating art "which will dig deep into the unconscious for the imaginative material connected to the living struggle"? If it's in the unconscious, how is it "connected to the living struggle"? I would prefer to leave such "dialectics" to the Stalinist apologists for Socialist Realism, who are anyway more skillful at using it. Furthermore, the sentence implies we think art, to be really profound, has to be "connected to living struggle" in some way. How was Cezanne's painting connected to "living struggle"? Or the Constructivists, for that matter, despite the political identification of the individual artists in the movement?

Comradely,
Helen Cantor

which places great importance on the family as the "natural nucleus of social development."

Incidentally, not even Renee Blakkan of the Maoist *Guardian*, who enthusiastically supports both Castro's male-chauvinist speech and the new family code could bring herself to endorse the fact that Cuban childcare centers are all staffed by women, a situation "explained" in a recent issue of *Granma Campesino* which stated that "with her innate tenderness, woman is the best suited to care for children." (For a discussion of why Maoists *must* defend the oppressive nuclear family, see "Maoism and the Family," *Women and Revolution* No. 7, Autumn 1974.) "While the revolution

is smashing many myths about women and men," Blakkan lamented, "it is still fostering this one" (*Guardian*, 15 January 1975). Needless to say, any squeamishness on this one small point in no way deterred her from reporting that the integration of Cuban women into all areas of society is taking a "great leap forward."

The excerpts below are from Fidel's speech to the Federation of Cuban Women, later reprinted as "The Revolution has in Cuban Women Today an Impressive Political Force" (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974).

"... there is something that we must bear very much in mind: that the struggle for women's equality and full integration into society must never be converted into lack of consideration for women; it never means the loss of habits of respect that every woman deserves (*Applause*). Because there are some who confuse equality with rudeness (*Applause*).

"And if women are physically weaker, if women must be mothers; if on top of their social obligations, if on top of their work, they carry the weight of reproduction and child-bearing, of giving birth to every human being who enters the world (*Applause*), and if they bear the physical and biological sacrifices that those functions bring with them, it is just that women should be given all the respect and all the consideration they deserve in society (*Applause*).

"If there is to be any privilege in human society, if there is to be any inequality in human society, there must be certain small privileges and certain small inequalities in favor of women (*Applause*).

"And I say this clearly and frankly, because there are some men who believe they have no obligation to give their seat on the bus to a pregnant woman (*Applause*), or to an old woman, or to a little girl, or to a woman of any age who gets on the bus (*Applause*). Just as I also understand it to be the obligation of any youth to give his seat on the bus to an old man (*Applause*).

"It is this sense of the basic obligation we have toward others: on a bus, in productive work, in the truck, others always have to be given special considerations, for one reason or another.

"It is true with women and must be so with women because they are physically weaker and because they have tasks and functions and human responsibilities that the man does not have (*Applause*).

"For this reason we appeal to our teachers, we appeal to parents, we appeal to our youth organizations and our Pioneers, to give special attention to this type of behavior in children, to this type of behavior in our youth.

"Because it would be very sad if, with the Revolution, there wasn't even the recollection of what certain men in bourgeois society did out of bourgeois or feudal chivalry. And instead of bourgeois and feudal chivalry, there must exist proletarian chivalry, proletarian courtesy, proletarian manners and proletarian consideration of women (*Applause*).

"And I say this with the certainty that the people understand it and share it, with the certainty that every mother and every father would like their son to be a chivalrous proletarian (*Applause*), that type of man who is respectful of women and considerate of women, capable of making a small sacrifice that dishonors no man but on the contrary exalts and elevates him (*Applause*)."

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This issue of Women and Revolution, which makes its appearance on International Women's Day, is an especially appropriate place to make available to our readers some information regarding work among women currently being undertaken by our comrades in other sympathizing groups of the international Spartacist tendency.

The two articles which follow were forwarded to us by comrades in the Middle East and Australasia. "The Oppression of Women in Israel: Toward a Bi-National, Class-Conscious Socialist Women's Movement," is translated from the January issue of Israeli Spartacist. "As Debate Polarises National Women's Conference 'Socialist Feminist' Illusion Collapses" is an abbreviated version of the article published in Australasian Spartacist (No. 14, November 1974). The National Women's Conference on Socialism and Feminism on which it reports was one of the largest, if not the largest, women's movement conference ever held in Australia, and, as the article indicates, our comrades' intervention had a considerable impact on it.

We hope to publish many more articles on Spartacist work among women around the world in the coming period. Forward to a women's section of the reborn Fourth International!

The Oppression of Women in Israel—

Toward a Bi-National, Class-Conscious Socialist Women's Movement!

The oppression of women in Israel is fundamentally the same as the oppression of women in all capitalist countries: woman's primary role is as the mainstay of the nuclear family, which reproduces labor power at very little cost to the capitalist. She is thus discriminated against in employment (last hired, first fired) and wages (according to a 1973 study by Shulamit Aloni, the average, full-time yearly income of Israeli women is 42-67 percent of that of Israeli men), and suffers from the culturally and psychologically deforming effects of the capitalist male-chauvinist ideology that seeks to prevent her from entering fully into social life and creative activity—lest it interfere with her "natural" tasks of childbearing and housekeeping.

At the same time, the situation of women in Israel has the characteristic deformities of clericalism and Zionism. The Neanderthal attitudes of the religious Jews toward women is notorious. A proposal by the government in 1971 that young women, exempt for religious reasons from service in the military, be called up for alternative national service, e.g., in hospitals, created a furor in Orthodox and Hassidic communities. Thousands showed up to wail at the Wall, and synagogues were covered with posters urging parents to "lay down their lives" rather than yield (*The Times*, London, 26 November 1971).

A conference of National Religious Party rabbis at the time produced this succinct statement of clerical reactionism from one Rabbi Chaim David Halevi:

"It is written in *Psalms*, Chapter 45: 'The King's daughter is all glorious within.' It means that the place for every respectable young woman is within the home, under the supervision of her father, until she is married. No authority over her apart from her father or husband can be tolerated."

— *The Times*, London, 26 November 1971

The familiar sight of Orthodox women walking in the street, with heads covered, long sleeves and skirts well below the knee is a constant reminder of the puritanism of the Orthodox and the virtual enslavement of religious women. Any woman who ventures into Mea Shearim, clothed differently is subject to a storm of verbal and sometimes physical abuse.

Women and Jewish Law

Rabbinical law is replete with codifications of the enslavement of women. If a woman's husband disappears and she cannot prove he is dead, she is not free

to remarry. If he dies, she must obtain "release" (*halitza*) from his brother (by law she now belongs to him) to remarry. The religious practices of the Orthodox also confirm the inferior status of women: women sit in a segregated section (*ezrat nashim*, or "women's service") of the synagogue (except during their monthly cycle when they are considered "unclean" and therefore unfit to enter), are not counted as part of a *minyan* and cannot read from the Torah in religious services. (See, for example, "Women Under Jewish Law," *Council Woman*, magazine of the National Council of Jewish Women, April 1966; and "Woman's Role and Jewish Law," *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1972.)

In Zionist Israel, however, Rabbinical law is not simply visited on the unlucky few. All questions pertaining to marriage and divorce are applicable to every Jewish citizen. Civil marriage is not recognized by law—only marriages performed by rabbis. Civil marriages that have taken place outside Israel are recognized as legal here; thus, those with money do not have to put up with the rabbis. Similarly, money makes it possible to get around the Rabbinical laws governing divorce and remarriage. As is always the case, the working class and poor must suffer while the upper classes can do as they please.

The only women who do not have to follow the Rabbinical laws are Arab women; Eretz Israel is, after all, the State of the Jews. Thus, while liberal bourgeois politicians have from time to time tried to have laws passed limiting the power of the rabbis (no attempt is made to separate church and state completely, of course, as this would be tantamount to negating Zionist ideology), the Arab women are left to the mercies of Moslem traditions which are as reactionary, if not more. While statistics abound on the situation of Jewish women, there has been little research done on the situation of Arab women. One of the few such pieces of research (*Family Planning in the Arab Village*, Jerusalem Academic Press, 1973) presents the scarcely astonishing information that, in the village surveyed, half of the women and one-third of the men knew nothing about birth-control methods and that "a considerably higher proportion of women than men report [that their family used]... induced abortion as a means of birth control." No statistics are given in the report on incidents of injury or death resulting from such induced abortions.

There is no systematic dissemination of birth-
continued on next page

...Women in Israel

control information in Israel. Information and devices are available upon request from the various health services which, vastly inadequate as they are, are virtually unavailable to Arab women who do not belong to the Histadrut or to any of the political parties and religious organizations offering alternative (membership) health services.

The Feminist Movement

Not surprisingly, the small petty-bourgeois women's movement in Israel has focused on the condition of Jewish women and, especially, upper petty-bourgeois women. Every other person in Israel claims to be a "socialist," and these women are no exception. However, the ideological leadership of this movement is in the hands of bourgeois political representatives, notably Shulamit Aloni and Marsha Friedman, both members of Knesset from the small, liberal-bourgeois Civil Right Party. An examination of the statements of Friedman and Aloni reveals very little "socialism."

American-born Friedman (leading light of the current movement to legalize abortion) recently wrote an article in *The Jerusalem Post* ("A Role for Americans in Israel," 21 November 1974), significant for its expression of American/Israeli chauvinism and adherence to the illusions of great American "democracy":

"...growing consumerism in Israel has created a rather healthy respect, perhaps even envy, for American material wealth. For another, America has, since the war, become not only our staunchest, but virtually our only ally; everything we left behind [in the U.S.] is bad, and there is much worth trying to imitate. America is a highly pluralistic society, it has a genuinely and vigorously free press; it has a fine history of social and political rebellions; and it is a country in which protection of individual rights is guaranteed [perhaps American minority groups, women, workers and communists would take issue with this...] by one of the finest constitutions ever written....

"...We need not apologize for the fact that our ideas and ideals are American—the heritage of Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine are nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, they are not very different from the heritage of the Second Aliya."

Shulamit Aloni, the grey eminence, as it were, of the Israeli women's movement, speaks for the liberation of women clearly from the point of view of the petty bourgeoisie and chauvinist Zionism. In an article in *Israel Magazine* (April 1971) she bemoans the fact that existing laws providing for the equality of women in all political, social, economic, legal and cultural matters (as set out in Israel's *Declaration of Independence*, *Basic Policy Statement* and early legislation) have been repeatedly abused or ignored. While she pays lip service to the plight of working women for whom there is no free childcare or household help, she continually emphasizes the discrimination against upper-class women, e.g., women make up only 12 percent of Israeli university faculties, only 7 women sit in the 120-member Knesset, and women are grossly under-represented in the ranks of capitalist management (*New York Times*, 18 June 1973).

That she is most sensitive to the condition of well-to-do women is obvious in statements like the following:

"Thus the Israeli woman, like her American counterpart, pushes aside all youthful enthusiasm and ambition to develop an active personality and instead copies the model with which she is presented—an agreeable, beautiful doll and cheap servant. One day, when the children have grown up, she comes face to face with the emptiness and looks for fulfillment in language courses, ceramics and art circles, volunteer work and charity, wrapped around a cup of coffee watching a fashion show."

—*Israel Magazine*, April 1971

The majority of Israeli women in 1971 were not in such a luxurious position; today with the escalating price rises, repeated devaluations of the pound and other aspects of the economic crisis, such words are obscene.

For Aloni, there were better times than today for Israeli women:

"The first years of the State were the halcyon times for Israeli women. Progressive legislation gave expression to their achievements during the pioneering period and promised further positive developments."

—*Israel Magazine*, April 1971

And what were the "pioneering" achievements Aloni refers to?—The victory of the Zionist policy of "conquest of labor" where Jewish women and men worked side by side in the fields after they had forced Arab laborers, women and men, out of their jobs.—The victory of the Zionist policy of "conquest of land" where women carried arms along with men in the expulsion of the Palestinians, women and men, from their homes. It is true that Jewish women were much more equal to Jewish men in Israel's "pioneering" days. However, the progress of these "pioneers" occurred via the op-

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pression of the Palestinians, female and male alike.

Aloni continues:

"However, new winds were blowing. The religious establishment was gaining strength. In the eyes of the religious group woman's place is in the home, raising children and providing her husband with services."

Aloni rails against the growing influence of the rabbis, but she does not explain why this occurred—because the answer lies in the very definition of the Zionist state.

Free Abortion on Demand!

The current activities of the Israeli feminists—the circulation of petitions and the writing of letters to Knesset members for the legalization of abortion—flow from the bourgeois, Zionist politics of Friedman/Aloni. To demand legalized abortion without demanding that it be free is once again to ignore the welfare of working and poor women, especially Arabs.

The argument that legalized abortion would be widely accessible because it would become part of the medical services is faulty on several grounds. First of all, it would not be accessible to Arab women who, as noted above, are generally ineligible for membership in these services. Secondly, it is entirely possible that abortion could be considered a special medical service not covered by the membership plans (this is currently the case with dental care, which is entirely private).

Furthermore, there is no free, quality medical care in Israel. All of the plans require monthly payments of approximately IL 35-50 per person, which is no small additional expense in these times of inflation and growing unemployment. In addition to not being free, these services (especially the most widely used one, Coupat Holim, affiliated with the Histadrut) are notoriously inadequate; the newspapers repeatedly carry horror stories of the injury done to patients through inadequate care and abuse. Everyone knows that people with money seek out private medical care.

It is necessary to call for *free* abortion on demand that is not tied to the existing medical plans. This naturally raises the question of overall medical care. We must demand that all medical services be free, i.e., nationalized, and be made widely available to all, Arab and Jew alike.

Marxists support the legalization of abortion, as we do all democratic rights. A revolutionary Marxist member of Knesset would vote for such legislation, at the same time raising the demand that it be free and that all medical care be free.

We sharply condemn the opponents of legalization—whether it be for "moral" reasons (which translate into support for the oppression of women), reactionary religious "principles" or for Zionist-patriotic reasons (more Jewish children—the Israeli state offers a monetary reward to any Jewish mother who has ten children). More often than not, opponents of legalized abortion subscribe to all of these attitudes, as exemplified by the remarks of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Shlomo Gorem, speaking on the radio program, "Make Yourself a Rabbi." Gorem characterized abortion as an act bordering on murder as well as an action seriously damaging to the Israeli state. He pointed out that, according to statistics, 53,000 abortions are carried out each year, meaning that, since the establishment of

Terms:

- 1) *Mea Shearim*—section of Jerusalem, a self-imposed ghetto of Orthodox Jews.
- 2) *minyan*—quorum of 10 necessary to begin synagogue services.
- 3) Second *Aliya* (immigration to Israel)—Pre-World War I immigration wave, the "old guard" and future leaders of Labor Zionism, e.g., Ben Gurion and Weizman.
- 4) IL 35-50—"IL" equals Israeli lira (pounds). At current rates, \$6-8.
- 5) *mitzvah*—religious duty.

the Israeli state, one million children have been "murdered." His reactionary ideas were even more fully expressed in his words on birth control:

"According to the Rabbinical laws, there is no reason why a young woman may not take birth-control pills, provided that the couple has obeyed the *mitzvah* of bearing children and has at least one boy and one girl. All of this is conditional, of course, on the husband's approval. On the other hand, a woman who uses pills is violating national security because the Israeli state needs a larger population in order to exist and defend itself."

Women who want abortions and birth control are not criminals. The real criminals are the likes of Rabbi (ex-Israeli Army General) Gorem who seek to enslave women in the service of the oppressive Zionist state.

Toward a Socialist Women's Movement

But the Israeli women's liberation movement cannot fight for the rights of working, poor and Arab women because it is tied to bourgeois, Zionist leadership. What is needed is a movement for women's liberation that is independent of the bourgeoisie, that has a binational, working-class orientation and a proletarian program.

Such a movement would point out that while all women in society are oppressed, the class division is more fundamental than the sex division, and only through the victory of socialism can women become fully emancipated. In Israel, the question of the national oppression of the Palestinians is crucial—in the struggle for the liberation of women as in the struggle for workers power. The question of Arab women is almost never mentioned in Israeli feminist literature or even in conversations with the would-be "socialist" women's liberationists.

It is not only true that a working woman has more in common with her husband than with a female employer or Shulamit Aloni, but because of the intense national oppression of the Palestinians, any Arab woman feels greater ties with Arab men, rich or poor, than with any Jewish woman. A revolutionary approach to the woman question must seek to overcome these national barriers by fighting for the right of the Palestinians to return and for their right to national self-determination.

It is also necessary to combat Arab nationalism
(continued next page)

...Women in Israel

(which, if it gains the upper hand, will become nothing more than "Palestinian Zionism") by insisting on the recognition of the right to self-determination for the Hebrew-speaking nation. Only through working-class unity that transcends national and sexual divisions can the emancipation of women be achieved.

The ostensible Trotskyist left in Israel has a poor record on the woman question. Workers Alliance (the only existing united Lambertist-Healyite "section" of the mythical "International Committee") has simply ignored this question, consistent with its tail-ending of backward social consciousness in the working class. The Mandelita Matzpen-Marxist has not had a great deal to say or do about this question. To the extent that Matzpen-Marxist has mentioned it in print, it has been consistent with the petty-bourgeois radicalism of Pabloism, seeing feminism as "progressive" and not fighting for a class line on the woman question.

Women's Liberation and Communist Tradition

The emancipation of women was considered of the utmost importance by Marx, who noted that all social progress could be measured by the degree to which women had become emancipated. Lenin, along with Clara Zetkin and others, was among the strongest

fighters for the creation of a women's section of the Third International. In *Women and Society*, Lenin noted that there "can be no socialist revolution, unless a vast section of the toiling women takes an important part in it." Trotsky in the *Transitional Program* strongly advocated an orientation to "the most exploited layers of the working class... the women workers" who, in the fight for communism, would provide "inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness and readiness to sacrifice."

The fight for the genuine emancipation of women has been carried on historically by the Leninists and Trotskyists. Bourgeois and petty-bourgeois feminism have never been able to do more than struggle for rights for some "sisters," inevitably lining up against other "sisters." The opportunist "Marxists" of all stripes have either considered the woman question to be not very important or have tailed existing petty-bourgeois feminist forces. The Spartacist League stands in the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky in the fight for women's emancipation on a revolutionary proletarian program.

FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND!

FREE QUALITY MEDICAL CARE—FOR ARAB AND JEW ALIKE!

FOR COMPLETE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE!

TOWARD A BI-NATIONAL, CLASS-CONSCIOUS, SOCIALIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT! ■

As Debate Polarises National Women's Conference

"Socialist Feminist" Illusion Collapses

The 5-6 October National Women's Conference on Feminism and Socialism, intended to reconcile and unify the two, was almost from the start polarised over precisely the issues which *counterpose* socialist and feminist ideology: the class analysis of society and the nature and sources of women's oppression. The organisers of the Conference, especially the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), had hopes that it would result in greater integration of reformist varieties of socialism and the feminist ideology of the established women's movement. The impulse for such an integration comes from two sources. Feminism has proven unable to develop a coherent theory of women's oppression, or account for developments in the class struggle, resulting in unclarity among many women in the movement on its direction. On the other hand, various left-wing reformist or centrist organisations have attempted to capitalise on this development by trying to absorb feminism as a constituent part of reformism. Another development represented at the Conference was a new growth of radical feminism, similar in kind to the trend which appeared earlier in the US epito-

mised by the Redstockings Manifesto.

... Often considerable hostility from feminists met most speakers who discussed socialism and the working class—so much so that even a very much feminist "socialist" such as Socialist Workers Action Group (SWAG) member Janey Stone had to point out that after all it was a feminist *and* socialist conference, and socialism was *supposed* to be discussed. From the beginning, the greatest hostility was directed against members of the Spartacist League, the only tendency to attack the ideology of feminism openly as a fetter on women's liberation, and to call for the fight against women's specific oppression to become an *integral* part of the class struggle of the proletariat against capitalism. The feminists objected to "divisive" ideological or programmatic debate, and instead wanted the Conference to focus on personalist, subjectivist expressions of "sisterhood". They correctly saw that the Marxist analysis of women's oppression—that it is not the central axis of society and not independent of capitalism, but rather a form of oppression derived from and a necessary part of class society—is incom-

patible with their desire to unite all women *as women* across class lines. This quickly became the main line of political struggle.

Because of this polarisation, the "socialist feminists" of the Socialist Workers League (SWL)—the co-thinkers of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the United States—the CPA and the Socialist Workers Action Group (SWAG) had little impact as the two counterposed ideologies they attempt to reconcile clashed. Frustrated, they have attempted to blame not the feminists who interjected, booed and sometimes tried to shout down speakers, but the SL which was guilty of fighting for its program. One of them, Janey Stone, wrote:

"The division in the conference was intensified by the extremely sectarian behaviour of the Spartacist League, who made no attempt to build the movement, but rather took the conference as an opportunity to present their politics as loudly, frequently and antagonistically as possible. Unfortunately, their intention of polarising the meeting was quite successful and they can be blamed for alienating many women from socialist or even pro-working class concepts."

—Red Ink, 9 October 1974

For SWAG it is indeed "extremely sectarian" to argue for Marxism. . . . Stone omits to so much as mention what the views of the SL are, much less argue against them. It is this fear of political struggle which characterises the behaviour of SWAG, and carries with it a threat of political suppression: it is not the "behaviour" of the SL but its politics that she objects to. It was SWAG which for the same implicitly anti-communist reasons forced the political exclusion of the SL from the Melbourne Working Women's Group in April 1973 (see *Australasian Spartacist* no. 6, March 1974..

. . . All of the "socialist" feminists supported the exclusion of males from attending the Conference. This policy is an essential component of feminism, which holds that working women have more in common with bourgeois women than even with those working-class men who support their struggles. It is also advanced as a means to "protect" women from male domination; instead, it accepts the male-chauvinist premise of female passivity and inferiority. Males who are sympathetic with the aims of women's liberation should not be excluded. Women militants can and must offer political leadership to women and men, and the women's liberation movement should define itself on the basis of class, not sex.

. . . The disastrous implications of feminist separatism emerge most clearly in proposals to "feminise" the unions and the workers' movement", in the words of Amalgamated Metal Workers Union (AMWU) shop steward Aileen Beaver. Beaver's paper, "Feminists, Workers and Unions", is the best example, endorsing steward Aileen Beaver. Beaver's paper, "Feminists, Workers and Unions" . . . [amounts] to a call for dual unions for women workers and "positive discrimination in favour of women". Her basic proposals were at least tacitly accepted by every left-wing group present, excepting only the SL. Two key proposals on the organisation of women's groups or caucuses in the unions based on sex and preferential treatment for women workers, were explicitly advocated by the

Communist League (CL), SWL and SWAG as well as the CPA.

. . . Not only would these measures hinder the class struggle, but they would *directly interfere* with the immediate struggle against sexual discrimination, male chauvinist prejudice, and the domestic slavery of women in the family. The sexual divisions within the working class are consciously promoted by the bosses and supported precisely by the backwardness of male workers influenced by bourgeois ideology. It is the traditional *isolation* of working-class women from the struggles of the class that is one of the greatest bars to the class consciousness of both male and female workers. Women workers were initially *barred* from all-male craft unions, and had to fight for union recognition, while one of the bureaucracy's greatest betrayals has been its refusal to organise women workers.

. . . Another trend at the Conference symbolising the confusion wrought by the "socialist"-feminist contradiction, was represented by those who eclectically adopt redefined pieces of Marxist concepts in order to form a more plausible theoretical basis for feminism, similar to the theories of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. Characteristically, they define women as a class because of the work women perform as housewives. But this work is outside the productive process—and the *isolation* of women from collective production is at the historical roots of their oppression. However socially necessary, housework does not contribute to surplus value; and housewives' labour power is not exchanged as a commodity on the labour market. The family unit is not *economically* intrinsic to capitalist production, as are profit and wage labour. It is however, intrinsic to *private property*, and plays an essential role in the superstructure of capitalist society. Moreover, women certainly do not reproduce themselves as a social class—and the family serves *different* ends in different social classes: for the ruling class, the family remains essential for reasons having nothing to do with housework.

Deliberate confusion has been fostered by the "socialist"-feminists on the relation of women's liberation to the class struggle. It was often alleged that to see women's oppression as "secondary" and class oppression as "primary" meant ignoring the special oppression of women. Women's liberation is subordinate to class struggle only as the part is subordinate to the whole. Women *are* oppressed as women, including those who are members of the exploiting class. But to the extent that formal sexual equality is achieved under capitalism, the need only becomes clearer for a socialist revolution to achieve *real* equality, particularly for the masses of women who belong to the exploited classes. . . . The working class can achieve revolutionary consciousness and unity only by resolutely fighting against women's oppression and overcoming the capitalist-inspired racial, sexual, ethnic or national divisions, rejecting all forms of chauvinism. It is for these reasons that the Spartacist League is committed to the mobilisation of working-class women not just on the basis of their specific oppression as women but in struggle for a program to achieve workers' power: for a non-exclusionist, internationalist, communist working-women's movement. ■

Women's Studies Programs: Schools for Anti-Communism

Even in the late sixties, when flourishing feminism was able to inspire the serious political commitment of many misguided radical women, there were those whose primary attraction to "sisterhood" was the happy convergence they found of a popular movement with their own academic careers. For them, the struggle for the liberation of women was ultimately confined to the classroom.

The feminist clamor has by now subsided to a murmur—indeed, the entire utopian movement known as the "New Left" has vanished from the campuses with scarcely a trace—but the institutions which these academic feminists built—the women's studies programs—continue to stand.

The New Left had rejected the "old left" theory that the working class was the revolutionary agent of our historical epoch, that under the leadership of a vanguard party it and it alone could create a socialist society. Impressionistic and impatient, the New Left decided that the working class was irretrievably backward, racist and bought off by the capitalists at the expense of the "third world," and set out to find a substitute. (The feminists, who emerged from the New Left, further rejected the working class and the left in general because they were seen as sexist.)

But finding a replacement for the working class was not so easy. In the "third world," it was hypothesized, the starving peasantry would spearhead the attack against imperialism. But in advanced countries such as the United States the problem was a bit stickier as there was hardly a starving peasant to be found in all of Berkeley.

It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that the leading exponents of this profoundly petty-bourgeois movement should have reached the conclusion that the revolutionary vanguard in the advanced countries would be the "youth" and the "community"—that is to say, themselves. Naturally enough, they began organizing for the revolution by attempting to transform their own communities—i.e., the universities—from ivory towers into "red bases." And naturally enough, having surpassed the absurdity of Stalin's "socialism in one country" with "socialism on one campus," they failed. Far from changing the world, they found that they could not even change the universities. As it turned out, students were not the revolutionary vanguard that they had imagined, nor indeed were women. Confronted with these unpleasant realities, many retired from political struggle at an early age and turned instead to religion or drugs or mere cynicism.

For most, however, it was back to the school books. Reversing Marx's observation that philosophers have only interpreted the world, while the point is to change it, the motto of these disillusioned youth might have been: "If we cannot change the world, at least we can study it." It was in this context that women's studies

programs began to spring up phoenix-like from the rotting political corpse of the New Left.

The Matriculation of the Women's Movement

In their intellectual development, as in everything else, feminists saw men as the root of their oppression. Hadn't men too often been the professors? Hadn't men written most of the books students read in college? Even Marx and Engels were men. The conclusion: women need their own "separate space" to develop as intellectuals just as they need their own "autonomous political movement." That this conclusion might also pay off in hard cash and tenured positions did not detract from its appeal.

The university administrations were generally more than willing to agree that women needed "their own place"—some corner to play about in where they need not be judged according to the same standards as men. Thus the feminists and the university administration together institutionalized intellectual tokenism. By 1973 women's studies programs flourished on 83 campuses.

The obvious absence of women, as of minorities and of the working class as a whole, from the pages of bourgeois textbooks is not simply an indication that they have played no consequential role in history—although they have certainly been excluded from many important arenas of social life—but is also a real aspect of their oppression under capitalism. Socialists desire the most comprehensive and scientific study of society, in which the historic role of women will be accurately reflected. Our objection to women's studies programs, therefore, is not an objection to the subject in general, but to the reactionary and anti-communist use to which women's studies programs are put in the hands of the feminists and college administrators. Furthermore, with their ahistorical approach and their heavy emphasis on the subjective elements of women's conscious experience, they do not even provide a clearer understanding of women's oppression, much less a program for overcoming it.

What is it that they do teach? Women's studies courses have been from their inception extensions of the consciousness-raising groups which proliferated in the early days of the women's movement—only now accompanied by a grade. While some feminist academicians have now begun to specialize ("Women in Ancient Greece," "Shakespeare's Women," "Women in Film") the sharing of personal experiences continues to be the core of the programs today.

Infused with petty-bourgeois radicalism, these courses hold out to women the promise of self-fulfillment—of some solution to the problem of women's oppression outside the historic battle between the capitalist class and the working class which will improve the position of the *individual* woman. Even those instructors who identify certain institutions of capi-

talist society—the family, the church, the educational system, the courts—as perpetrators of the oppression of women reject the *only* means of overcoming this oppression: the decisive *smashing* of these capitalist institutions, through international working-class revolution and the construction of a socialist society. Instead, they channel women into self-help clinics, professional careers or more consciousness-raising groups.

"Socialist Feminists": Out of the Class Struggle, Into the Classroom

But what about the self-proclaimed Marxists in the women's studies programs? There are a handful of courses which study Engels or utilize excerpts from Lenin, and several which focus on "third world" nationalists such as Fanon. One such course ("Women in the Economy," Francine D. Blau, Trinity College) lumps together the Soviet Union, China and Israel as examples of non-capitalist economies. Another sees Chile, Cuba, Vietnam and China—but *not* the Soviet Union—as socialist countries.

In many ways the self-proclaimed "socialist-feminist" academicians, given the authority of their positions, are best able to mislead and deter from a revolutionary course of action the potentially revolutionary young women who look to them for leadership.

While according formal recognition to a class struggle (to be studied from afar) and idealizing working women—thus reflecting the currently fashionable turn in petty-bourgeois circles to workerism, the glorification of the present, often backward, consciousness of the working class—the "socialist-feminists" can offer no course of action whatsoever to these working women whose plight they lament. Instead, they share with cultural feminists the totally unwarranted assumption that revolutionary consciousness will develop automatically through a greater *awareness* of daily oppression.

Whatever other differences they may have, academic feminists—like all feminists—are uniformly opposed to authentic Leninism; it is the anti-communist tie that binds. Anti-communism has been a dominant theme within the feminist movement since its inception. Terrified of alienating any of their "sisters," the petty-bourgeois feminist leaders sought to exclude all political debate by systematically excluding *all* socialists who refused to conceal their politics. One charge after another was trumped up in order to cast them out—they were "too articulate," they "inhibited discussion," they "related to men" or they were "agents of male-dominated organizations" (a supremely sexist slander which assumes that in any sexually mixed organization the males automatically dominate). Despite the current vogue for "socialist-feminism," anti-communism continues to be a fundamental component.

The Spartacist League has encountered some of the most vicious incidents of this anti-communism within the Women's Studies College (WSC) at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where the SL has had a long history of left criticism of the WSC's politically reactionary practices. In 1971 the instructors in one of WSC's introductory courses were won away from the middle-headed feminist world view, which sees the major social distinction as sexual, to the clarity

of the Marxist analysis based on class, and to support for the SL. Their course, "Marxism and Women's Liberation," which offered a Leninist alternative to the prevailing WSC ideology, thereby exposing the latter as the left wing of bourgeois liberalism, was twice denied funding by the WSC, and the instructors were subjected to continual harassment by the feminist leadership. In December 1972 the SL was able to avert the political exclusion of these instructors and win the continuance of their course through a large mobilization of WSC students. But in the spring of 1974 Juliet Mitchell, "socialist-feminist" careerist par excellence, demanded the ouster of the teachers on the grounds that the "developed analysis" which they were putting forth in their classroom was preventing her own development as a Marxist (something certainly was). After a quick round of discussion, the feminist leadership decided that the course was politically hostile to feminist ideology and therefore violated the "principles" of the college. It was subsequently dropped.

Women's Studies and Affirmative Action

Women's studies programs have generally excluded not only political dissension, but also, of course, men. It is interesting to note in this regard that the argument made by the Buffalo WSC in favor of male exclusionism was based in no small part on an appeal to the concept of "affirmative action":

"At this moment, we are skeptical of any outside unit's ability to review our decisions about the participation of men in courses. Such a unit would have to be committed to affirmative action and take as its basic assumption that in order to build a sound women's studies program and in order to work towards ending sexism, there can be positive reasons for limiting the access of men to certain courses. We look forward to the time when the university has a single coordinated affirmative action office that could handle this matter. But before we would agree to review by such a body we would have to have proof of its commitment to affirmative action for minority groups and women."

—Memo, 19 November 1974

Women's studies programs are enthusiastic supporters of the government's Affirmative Action Program, which is a union-busting technique thinly disguised as the redresser of discrimination against minorities and women. Under the cover of some token jobs for the oppressed, the government moves against the independence of the trade unions—the only mass organizations of the working class—destroying the seniority system and dangerously undercutting the unity of the class through preferential hiring and preferential layoffs which force workers to fight among themselves for the inadequate number of jobs available. The intervention of the government—which is no friend of working women—threatens the only defense the working class has against the capitalist offensive.

Many of those who wanted the impossible for the universities—"red bases"—have now achieved the possible—feminist enclaves. This has been possible precisely because feminism is *not* red, but bourgeois. Reformist schemes, such as affirmative action, which rely on the intervention of the bourgeois government, are quite compatible with feminism. The women's studies feminists, in fact, prepare the scabs of the

continued on next page

Women's Studies...

future who will demand preferential hiring at the expense of the hard-won seniority system and cross picket lines because they have been taught that the interests of women are separate from, if not counterposed to, the interests of the working class as a whole.

Nevertheless, women's studies must be distinguished from cop studies or ROTC, courses which train the armed agents of the bourgeois state and which socialists should mobilize to throw off campus wherever possible. Rather, women's studies departments, like history departments or political science departments, are simply part of the bourgeois educational machine. Were there to be an administrative attack against the democratic rights of radical, or even not so radical, teachers in any of these areas, the SYL would mobilize to defend them, as it did last autumn at Brooklyn College when it defended María Sánchez of the Puerto Rican Studies Department against undemocratic administrative measures. The leaflet which the Spartacus Youth League, youth section of the Spartacist League, distributed at that time made it clear that all forms of class bias and undemocratic practices, even those centering on intra-bureaucratic and departmental fights over promotion, must be opposed. At the same time, the SYL distinguished itself from reformist groups such as the Young Socialist Alliance and the Communist Party, which merely tailed Puerto Rican nationalism; the SYL raised demands for an end to the degree system, for open admissions to all educational facilities with state stipend and for student-teacher-worker control of the college.

The struggle for theory and intellectual clarity is necessary in the building of a vanguard party and the emergence of a class-conscious proletariat. But such clarity is to be found not in the feminist classrooms but in the heat of the class struggle. To say it another way, those men and women who would advance the struggle for women's liberation—which will be achieved *only* under socialism—must do so not as professors but as professional revolutionaries, as disciplined cadres of the proletarian vanguard party. ■

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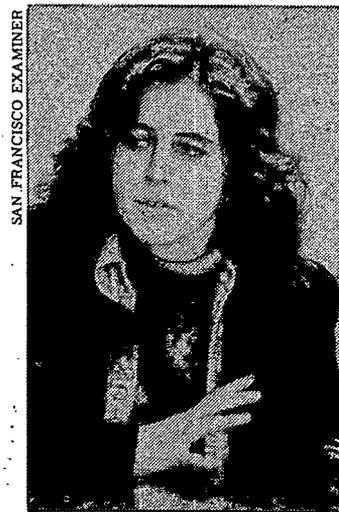
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TROTSKYIST EJECTED FROM UC-BERKELEY COURSE ON "OPPRESSION OF WOMEN"



Bonnie Breen

On January 28 Bonnie Breen, a junior at the University of California at Berkeley and a supporter of the Spartacus Youth League, youth section of the Spartacist League, was thrown out of an Asian-American Studies course on the oppression of women for raising political views which conflicted sharply with those of the course's five instructors.

The instructors, most of whom are supporters of the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB), an organization dominated by the right-Maoist Revolutionary Union, were shamelessly explicit that Breen's expulsion was an act of political repression:

"We're not basing ourselves on the legality (of excluding a student from class discussion)", said one of the teachers, Becka Wakefield. "We're basing ourselves on our political analysis of the reactionary role of Trotskyism."

—*The Daily Californian* (No. 98, 6 February 1975)

On February 4 Breen, after spurning an offer to complete the course by writing a term paper while staying away from class, confronted the teachers outside the classroom with other Spartacus Youth League supporters. Following a heated discussion, the students attempted to force the RSB's hand by voting (one vote short of unanimously) to readmit Breen into the class, but to no avail. The SYL set up an informational picket line and most of the students boycotted the next class in protest of the Maoists' undemocratic procedures. Totally oblivious to the growing sentiment on the campus against their heavy handed and cowardly exclusion, the RSB instructors readmitted Breen only at the insistence of department officials.

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tactics against what they perceive to be a racist, sexist, pro-company institution.

Unable to distinguish between the reactionary union leadership and the union itself—a defensive organization of the workers—they feel perfectly justified in using the "neutral" capitalist government through the Labor Department, NLRB and courts to attack the union. The current wave of court suits demanding preferential treatment for women and minorities with regard to layoffs reflects just this inability to recognize that there is a class line and that the unions—however reactionary their leaders—are on one side, and the corporations and their government are on the other.

It is the urgent task of serious militants within the UAW to struggle relentlessly against the special oppression of women. But all attempts to wage this struggle at the expense of class solidarity are doomed in advance to failure. Union-busting tactics and government intervention into union affairs are an attack on all workers—men and women alike. Militants must defend the independent organizations of the working class while at the same time mercilessly exposing the treacherous policies of the union tops and fighting to replace these bureaucrats with a new leadership which can unite the entire membership around a class-struggle program leading toward a workers government.

One model for such a principled, class-struggle approach is the Committee for a Militant UAW (CMUAW), a rank-and-file opposition group based in UAW Local No. 1364 at the Fremont, California General Motors Assembly Plant. *Women and Revolution* recently interviewed four women from the CMUAW.

Committee for a Militant UAW

Like many other auto plants, the Fremont GM plant began hiring women in 1968, and until recently women represented about 10 percent of the workforce there. On 13 January of this year GM laid off indefinitely the second shifts of the passenger and truck departments, eliminating several thousand employees, including all of the women workers.

National attention has been focused on these layoffs at this particular plant, primarily because of a controversial lawsuit charging GM with sex discrimination and demanding that GM keep women in the plant while male workers with higher seniority are laid off.

The lawsuit, filed last August by eight laid-off women from the Fremont plant, asks for two things: "(a) the recall and addition to the current work force at GMAD in Fremont of a number of women so that women would henceforth comprise at least the same percentage of the work force as they comprised immediately prior to the massive 1974 lay-offs at said facility and (b) that GMAD in Fremont develop and implement an affirmative action program requiring population parity for women to be fully implemented within four years of the date of the filing of this complaint."

The most vocal opposition to this suit has come from the CMUAW which charges that it represents an

attack on all workers and on the seniority system through the union-busting tactic of inviting the government to rewrite the union-negotiated contract. In opposition to the "women's lawsuit" and other schemes to invite the government to protect some workers at the expense of others, the CMUAW counterposes a united struggle of men and women auto workers against all layoffs. In their newspaper, *The UAW Militant* (Supplement, 11 December 1974), the CMUAW militants argue: "WE ARE NOT HELPLESS IN THE FACE OF LAYOFFS. One of labor's most powerful weapons comes from the UAW's own tradition: the SIT-DOWN STRIKE."

Despite the claim by an attorney for the suit that "we are not asking for phantom seniority, we do not want women displacing men," this is precisely what they are asking for. Embarrassed by the public criticism raised by the CMUAW, the suit's supporters have had to resort to deliberate falsification about the suit's aims. One leaflet distributed in the name of "the women who filed the suit and their supporters," claims, "We are not asking for 50 percent women in the plant within four years. Is it true that men will lose their jobs? In cases like this one, no court has ever ruled that men be bumped out of their jobs. Nothing in our lawsuit calls for this to happen." But in fact the suit does call for "population parity" within four years "without regard to workforce size at any time," i.e., 50 percent women within four years.

As the CMUAW predicted it would, the union has become a co-defendant with the company in the "women's lawsuit." Says CMUAW member Ruth Ryan:

"Under the pressure of our criticism, they had to put in a lot of lip service in their suit about how they're not going to lay off men, men are not going to lose their jobs and how they're not going to sue the union. Well in fact the logic of their case is they should be suing the union. The lawsuit itself says the collective bargaining agreement is the vehicle for discrimination. That means they want the collective bargaining agreement thrown out. So the judge rightly said 'what you're really doing is attacking the union,' and the judge added the UAW as co-defendant, which we predicted they would do, and they did. So now they're suing the union."

The UAW International leadership, after having tried to avoid taking a position for months, finally recognized the danger of the lawsuit and flew in a team of lawyers at the last minute. Instead of opposing the suit, however, they entered the case with a friend-of-the-court brief, asking for back pay for women who could prove they had been discriminated against by GM, as an alternative remedy. It was significant that the union's attorney insisted, however, that the UAW had no position on whether GM had ever committed illegal discrimination in the first place!

The CMUAW attacked the International's belated interest in the case and its refusal to challenge the right of the government to "come in and tear out pages of our contract, that we won, through collective bargaining, through strikes, through the struggles that built this union." A CMUAW press release asserts:

"We do not want this suit changed or added to by the International, we want it dropped. We do not recognize the right of any judge to rule on whether our contract shall stand or fall.... Further, it is the height of hypocrisy for the International to enter the case at

(continued on next page)

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this late date; the International has *never* taken up a fight against racial and sexual discrimination, and it has *never* waged even a token struggle against the massive layoffs now sweeping the industry...."

A petition circulated by the CMUAW opposing the suit received widespread support inside the plant. Signed by 700 workers (over half of whom were women or minority men), the petition stated:

"I. GM has traditionally discriminated against women and minorities in hiring. The UAW must be made to combat this practice.

"II. The court suit filed by eight women from this plant August 28, 1974 will not combat discrimination because it will weaken the union which is the only weapon we have. The suit will open the door to government interference, inviting the courts to re-write our contract and break the seniority system.

"III. Therefore, we call on the signers of this suit to drop the case, and we demand that the union fight all forms of discrimination, and mount a campaign to end layoffs, not just for women, but for all workers."

Stalinists Resort to Lying and Gangsterism

The principled class-struggle stance of the CMUAW has elicited a violent response from certain of its opponents, particularly Maoist supporters of the "women's suit." The suit's initiators and Maoist October League backers have resorted to outright lies and vicious red-baiting, including the slanderous assertion in the *Guardian* (22 January 1975) that on 11 January "SL members from the Fremont plant had been released from work by GM to take part in the [January 10 demonstration called by the Spartacist League in opposition to the court suit]."

Far from being intimidated or silenced by this smear campaign, however, the CMUAW militants have responded with an open letter to the *Guardian* which says in part:

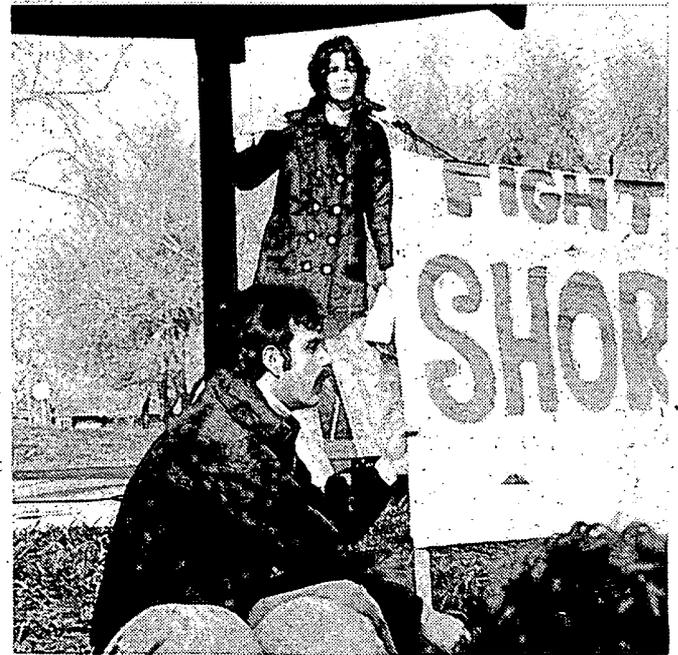
"To the Editor:

"The *Guardian* of January 22, 1975, carried an article on a lawsuit brought by eight women auto workers against GM at Fremont, California. This article was filled with distortions, slanders, lies and some of the most vicious red-baiting we have seen in a long time...."

"... Although we have actively opposed the suit in the plant the article fails to mention us at all. Instead it attempts to identify us and the other workers who supported the demonstration as an 'outside' organization, thus providing anti-communists and reactionaries of all stripes with grist for their mills to discredit the class struggle program of legitimate union members.

"... members of the Committee for a Militant UAW can easily disprove the lie that we were 'released from work by GM' to take part in the demonstration. Members of our Committee and people from the Local 1364 Women's Committee asked the local President Vern Dias for official time off to attend the demonstration. Dias granted the request and official records will verify this—for those interested in verification...."

"We demand an *immediate retraction* from the *Guardian* of this attempt to red-bait and company-bait the members of the Committee for a Militant UAW and the other Local 1364 members who supported the anti-suit demonstration called by the SL."



WV PHOTO

Joan Putnam of CMUAW addresses January rally.

While the October League spreads its filthy lies, local supporters of the Maoist Revolutionary Union have resorted to the time-worn tactic of Stalinist gangsterism. At a recent demonstration at the plant for "Jobs or Income Now" called by the Local's Employed-Unemployed Committee, an RU supporter attempted to snatch away CMUAW leaflets. The CMUAW members defended themselves, and one of their supporters from the plant quickly dispatched one of the RU attackers. The ensuing fight broke up only when the RUsers realized that their gangsterism was being recorded for posterity by the surrounding television cameras.

CMUAW member Darlene Fujino pointed out that none of the RU supporters who attacked them actually worked in the Fremont plant, where the CMUAW has earned a good deal of support and respect. In fact, the CMUAW militants report that many workers have offered to defend them against any such attacks in the future.

This is not the first time that the members of Local 1364 have had to discourage RU supporters from physically attacking political opponents. At the October 1973 local union meeting, a motion was passed overwhelmingly which stated: "No member of this union shall attempt to prevent the sales or distribution outside the plant of the literature of the various labor-socialist groups, since this violates the basic traditions of this union of free and open discussion within the labor movement." Darlene Fujino and Joan Putnam (later founders of the CMUAW) had introduced this motion after RU supporters repeatedly attacked salesmen of the Spartacist League's *Workers Vanguard* and the Workers League's *Bulletin*.

The CMUAW insists that differences within the workers movement be resolved through open debate. According to Fujino, this view is widely accepted by their co-workers: "People understand that you can get in fights and you can change the shape of someone's head but you can't change his mind. As respon-

sible union members we need to discuss and argue out these differences, instead of coming to blows."

The Fight Against Women's Oppression

The CMUAW supporters have been critical of the role played by the local UAW women's committee. CMUAW member Ruth Ryan commented:

"The trouble with the local women's committee is whenever it dreams up a project, it's on the order of a fashion show or collecting canned foods for laid-off workers and other service activities. It did two good things—it opposed the women's lawsuit and it circulated a petition for a special union meeting to discuss layoffs, but the special meeting was again essentially a service to the membership. It invited a platform of unemployment officials, state senators, S.U.B. fund representatives, who were to answer questions from the membership. It wasn't any kind of strategy for fighting layoffs. In fact, it was kind of bitter when we turned the meeting toward that discussion—how to fight layoffs."

The CMUAW women feel that there is a role for a committee within the union directed at the special problems of women, but feel it should be made up of both men and women whose task would be to mobilize the entire union to fight women's oppression. They criticize the idea that only women should fight women's oppression and point to the absurdity of one such campaign organized by "left" supporters of the local bureaucrats:

"One of their demands was for more women's bathrooms and they fought and petitioned for this right down to the wire, right down to the March '74 layoffs when the entire second shift including all the women were going to be out of the plant. The week before the layoffs the October League supporters were circulating a petition for more women's bathrooms! The petition was just for women to sign—only 10 percent of the plant. And worse than that, they organized women to walk off the line—just women!—to go down to Labor Relations to demand more women's bathrooms!"

It is obvious that real power can be exerted only by a unified struggle, where the combined power of the workers can force concessions which benefit all of them. In this instance, the pitiful spectacle of these "leftists" relying on the separatism and feminism they learned in the petty-bourgeois women's movement is merely laughable; in other cases, such as the "women's lawsuit," it is dangerously anti-union and divisive to the unity of the working class.

The CMUAW puts forward a program to fight discrimination which can unite the class instead of dividing it. It calls for union control of all hiring through a union hiring hall, with all hiring to be done on the basis of "first come, first served" and with no preferential treatment for anyone, pointing out that special training and recruitment programs may be needed to prepare those who are traditionally excluded from certain job skills. It calls for all hiring into skilled trades apprenticeship programs to be done on the basis of plant-wide seniority, and for new skilled jobs to be opened up through abolishing forced overtime, offering early retirement at full pay and instituting a shorter workweek with no cut in pay. It demands free, 24-hour child care, controlled by the workers, the indefinite maintenance of recall rights by workers who are laid off to ensure that more-recently hired workers, such as women, will eventually regain

their jobs, and unlimited unemployment benefits while they are laid off. And instead of fighting over who will be laid off first, CMUAW calls for a common struggle against all layoffs through plant occupations and sit-down strikes:

"Even a modest, limited sit-in demonstration at the Fremont plant could succeed in forcing management to the bargaining table and wresting some concessions from them like unlimited recall rights and unlimited unemployment benefits.

"But its true value would lie in its potential for sparking full scale sit-down strikes throughout the industry, and occupation of plants slated to be closed, uniting all workers to fight their common enemy. If our local succeeds in setting an example of class struggle to the autoworkers in Detroit and elsewhere, we can set in motion the forces needed to reverse the layoffs and mount a nationwide campaign backed up by the entire labor movement, for a reduced work week at full pay, dividing the work among all available workers. "The auto companies will no doubt say they can't afford to keep us all working at full pay. The UAW must demand the companies' books and profit ledgers be opened to inspection by workers' committees. In the 1930's GM broke down and recognized the union rather than give in to this demand.

"We believe that the records of inefficiency and craze for profits to be found in the auto companies' books will amply show the auto owners to be unfit to run industry.

"For example, a syndicated columnist recently unearthed evidence that GM deliberately bought up and dismantled cheap, efficient mass transit systems in many major American cities in order to create a market for its high-profit, gas-guzzling buses and autos.

"To avoid further economic disasters, the organized working class will have to run production in a rational, planned manner for social use, not mad profits for a few rich men. We cannot allow the owners to idle plants and production while people need food, housing and transportation.

"Sitdown strikes clearly pose the question of who runs the factories—the owners or us. Clearly we cannot win this struggle in only one plant or even one industry. To end unemployment and inflation the trade unions must lead a struggle to expropriate the major industries with no compensation and run production under workers control.

"All of this requires that we have the leadership and organization to stand up to the intervention of the bosses' state whether run by Republican capitalists or Democratic capitalists. Labor needs its own independent workers party based on the unions to fight for the workers government we need to preserve and extend the gains of workers control of production. Never has the need been so great to build a class struggle alternative in the unions to lead such a fight."

—The UAW Militant, 1 January 1975

The CMUAW represents a hopeful beginning in the struggle to oust the present misleaders of the trade unions—who daily betray the needs of women workers and of all working people—and to construct a new trade-union leadership based on a class-struggle program. The fight against layoffs being waged by the CMUAW militants at Fremont provides a good model for their class brothers and sisters of the fight against women's oppression and for workers power. ■

* * *

For additional information about the CMUAW, write to: Committee for a Militant UAW, Box 19015, Oakland, California 94619.

Women in Auto

A Class-Struggle Program to Fight Layoffs

The opening years of this decade witnessed the hiring of women into heavy industrial jobs for the first time in a generation. For a brief period of industrial boom, the auto industry in particular found it convenient to comply with government guidelines against sex discrimination and began to hire women.

But the short period of expanding industrial employment came to a sudden halt as the economy began to falter; beginning with the ostensible "energy crisis" of late 1973. Faced with an imminent world trade depression and the accompanying plunge in sales, the auto industry resorted to sharp production cutbacks and massive layoffs. As entire shifts were thrown onto the streets, the low-seniority workers (among them nearly all the newly hired women) were the first to go. With layoffs in the industry reaching 30-40 percent at the beginning of 1975, many plants have reverted to their former all-male composition.

This is not the first time women have found themselves shunted in and out of the automobile plants. During both imperialist world wars, women were hired into the mass production industries to maintain a shrinking labor force as the draft pulled increasing numbers of men from the factories into the armed forces. World War II saw large numbers of auto plants converted to production of munitions, tanks and artillery. The percentage of women in auto and auto parts plants quadrupled during the war, and by 1945 female UAW membership had risen to 280,000—or almost 30 percent of the total (as contrasted with about 14 percent today).

As the war years came to a close, with the demobilization of troops, termination of war contracts and retooling of plants to peace-time production, women workers were laid off to make room for the returning men. Media propaganda campaigns shifted from the idealization of "Rosie the Riveter" to an emphasis on the virtues of domesticity and motherhood and the psychological damage suffered by the children of working mothers. Agreements between manufacturers and unions specified that wartime hiring practices were of a strictly temporary nature, and a wholesale purge of women from heavy production work was accomplished with the open or tacit cooperation of the union leaders.

Women and the UAW

As auto workers and as wives of auto workers, women have played a militant role in the history of the UAW. During the 1936-37 sitdown wave which built the UAW, women organized themselves into the Women's Auxiliary, a strike support group which provided food for the sitdown strikers and assisted in sound trucks and on picket lines. A smaller group of wives and women members of the UAW and other CIO unions,



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The Women's Emergency Brigade in 1937. The women carried the American flag, but they also carried sticks.

called the Flint Women's Emergency Brigade, played a more active role. Armed with big sticks, they did picket duty, leafleted National Guards who were called in to break the strikes, fought at the Chevy No. 4 plant when it was surrounded by 2,300 National Guards with machine-gun emplacements, fought again in the Battle of the Overpass during the Ford organizing drive (where they sustained the majority of the casualties), and ran a gauntlet of armed company thugs to smash windows at a Flint plant in order to ventilate a section where injured sitdowners had been overpowered by tear gas fumes.

These contributions of militant women in building and defending the early UAW were not matched by the union's defense of their rights. At the time of the Flint strike, women in the auto plants received \$18-25 a week for the same 45 hours for which male workers were paid \$35. It was not until the 1944 UAW convention that the union passed a motion in favor of equal pay for equal work.

Today, despite its pretense of concern, the UAW leadership continues to demonstrate a profound indifference toward the plight of more oppressed sections of the membership—women, racial minorities and foreign-born workers—thus laying the foundations for a pervasive cynicism toward the union on the part of many auto workers. One of the most destructive results of this cynical attitude is the willingness of some women and minority workers to resort to union-busting

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