Women's Liberation—A Revolutionary Struggle Against Capital

by Anna Gold

There have been some profound changes for women in the average US home, and even TV advertisers have had to sit up and take notice. All the way from men selling soap powders and Campbell soups, to women climbing out of race cars to praise STP, the product purveyors are telling us something that we've known for a long time now: traditional roles are changing. Women aren't buying the "weaker sex" rap any more.

The changes are demonstrated in other ways that have more significance than the concessions that manufacturers make to sell their products. For the first time in history more than 50% of women have joined the workforce, and they are breaking into traditionally "male" and higher paying jobs in ever greater numbers.

Both men and women from all walks of life are identifying with the demands for equality for women—equal pay for equal work, the right of women to control their bodies, their right to protection from physical abuse, the need for training to insure that women can work all jobs, and so on. Childcare is no longer seen as a demand that concerns only women. There is an increasing understanding throughout society that men need to participate in a full and responsible way in family life as well.

STRUGGLE INTENSIFYING

These changes haven't happened without a fight. If anything, the struggle has intensified over the past year. While the movement for the democratic rights of women has broadened, the opposition has also stepped itself for the struggle. While superficial changes are now considered acceptable, such as "non-sexist" ads, clearly the ruling class has every intention.

However, the defeats were significant as well. Though the deadline for the ERA was extended, the amendment was turned down in two states during the recent elections. Funding for abortions continues to be virtually non-existent for women on public assistance and daycare centers have been mercilessly closed down. Rape has been the fastest growing crime in the US, and the high incurrence of wife abuse is only now coming to full light.

Women haven't fared much better at work. They continue to earn an average of 60% of what men earn. Only 11% of women workers are in unions as compared to 27% of working men. Union leadership is still for the most part white and male, and even the ILGWU, with 80% women membership, has no top woman official. The Bakke and Weber anti-affirmative action cases have threatened the opportunities of all women, and have had an especially disastrous effect on minority women.

Reaction has indeed been organized and visible in the last year. It has focused its energies on attacks on abortion, the ERA, the gay rights movement, affirmative action, and the cost of social services, to galvanize support for a reac tion anti-working class program. In New York, the Right-to-Life Party won the municipal election in the mayoral race, undercutting the danger of underestimating the force of this current.

CAPITALISM AND MAN SUPREMACY

The New Right's focus on turning back the gains made by the women's movement over the last decade is no accident. Phyllis Schlafly, Anita Bryant, and Martin Mullen are mouthpieces for the most reactionary sectors of Big Business. They express, in the most direct way, the interest the capitalist class has in maintaining the inequality of women.

Women provide unpaid labor in the home, raising a new generation of workers. Women form part of the reserve army of labor—employed in the lowest paying jobs—hired in boom times, let go in hard times. The social and economic position of women is a source of massive profits for the monopoly capitalists. This inequality has a political significance and is a source of division within the working class, crippling its ability to mount a united fight.

The subordinate position of women in the home and family and the unequal position of women in the labor force are bound together. The economic dependency of women, isolated in the home and excluded from most jobs historically, provides the basis for women being relegated to the status of second class citizens on the job. At the same time, maintaining discrimination against women with relation to work and production is necessary in order to keep women in an inferior position in the home.

Given this it is clear that the New Right's concern with affirming the values of the traditional family is not a matter of sentimental attachment to the "good old days". The right to abortion, that is, the right of a woman not to have a child, is a focal point of this attack in large part because of capital's requirement that women must be first and foremost bearers and rearers of children.

It is also clear that the New Right's rhetoric and anti-feminist backlash which is often couched in abstract moral terms (right to life) or focused on trivial social questions (cr-odd bathrooms) is really about maintaining the power and profits of the capitalist class.

Because oppression of women is a necessary feature of capitalist rule, it fol (continued on page 2)
Women's Liberation

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Inows that women's liberation can only be realized by its overthrow and the building of socialism. For this reason it is impor-
tant that working class women provide leadership for the movement — for only conscious women from the working class can lead the movement in maintaining the capitalist system.

And just as the movement for the de-
mocratic rights of women must focus its blows against its actual enemy, capital-
ism, so the movement as a whole must understand the suicidal nature of the divi-
sions within it. Until the working class itself is both consciously anti-sexist and anti-racist, both the movements for equal-
ity and the broader struggle against cap-
italism will be significantly blocked.

THE ROAD FORWARD

Now, if we analyze events of the re-
cent period of the basis of this under-
standing, it becomes clearer why the "New Right" has been relatively suc-
cessful in blocking a more rapid advance by the forces fighting for the equality of women. Essentially, while the last year has seen significant advances, the organ-
ed women's movement remains signifi-
cantly isolated from the broader workers movement. This isolation is tremendously aggravated by the historic failure of the broad women's forces to seriously take up the particular needs of minority groups, especially women.

The isolation of the organized women's movement from the labor move-
ment has, of course, two sources. The first is that women have been treated as women in a consistent way and have often turned their backs on both the women's movement and the civil rights movement. This fact is most graphically illustrated by the low level of unioniza-
tion of women, and also by the fact that the vast majority of union officials are white and male. This failure on the part of the labor movement in general has left it weak and divided.

But the women's movement also has played into this weakness, and has been more successful in part of its isolation from those forces which can insure a broader and more effective fight for women's rights. From those forces which can insure the expansion of power for women.

The PWOC is a communist organiza-
tion. It stands for Marxian-Leninist, the principles of scientific socialism. We are in active, autonomous organization of Black and workers who see the capitalist system itself as the root cause of the day-to-day problems of working people. We are committed to building a revolutionary organization that will lead the working class workers system and replace it with socialism.

We seek to replace the anarchic capitalist production with a planned econ-
omy based on the needs of working people. We want to end the oppression of national minorities and women, and make equality a reality instead of the hypocritical slogan it has become to the working class. We work toward the replacement of the old.

Large sections of the movement have focused more on the needs of leadership or on professional occupations, only paying lip service to the needs of working women and women's problems. Problems such as occupational hazards in the workplace, the need for affirmative action to insure upgrading into higher, classifications; the need for affordable, quality child care, and housing, and so on, have been slighted.

Most significantly, the broad orga-
nized women's movement has failed to take up the special needs of minority women, thereby isolating itself from the powerful movement of oppressed minori-

ties. Throughout our history Black and Spanish-speaking women have played a leading role in organizing unions, de-

manding decent housing and school-
ing for their families, and fighting against a system determined to crush them. Because today's women's move-
ment is predominantly white and mid-
dle class to a large extent explains its in-
ability to successfully resist capitalism's attacks on women.

Both the strengths and weaknesses of the broad women's movement were well illustrated by the historic massive march for the extension of the ERA deadline on July 9, 1979. The march received the support of portions of the women's movement as well as major civil rights organizations. These endorsements reflected the positive interest of such organizations as NOW towards building alliances and developing grass roots organizing.

However, the composition of the march was a graphic illustration of the road left to travel. While some labor and civil rights leaders were there, and large numbers of working women did march, the event was strikingly white, with rela-
tively few men present. The demands of the march were kept narrow by the lead-
groups which failed to consider the sit-
bakke with attacks on the ERA.

The anti-Bakke demonstration was a further testimony to the weakness of the alliance the organized women's move-
ment has with other movements. While numerous groups have made statements in support of affirmative action and even filed support briefs, they have been vis-
ibly absent from most legal mobilizations and organizations formed to fight the attacks. This absence is most distressing if we understand the particular importance of affirmative action for oppressed minority women.

The ability of the organized groups to mobilize large followings in the de-

development of the movement for the democratic rights of women is clear, and important steps have been already taken which reflect that understanding.

The desire to build alliances with the workers movement and with civil rights groups has begun to put into practice in a meaningful way. If these links are to develop real strength, the women's movement must take up as central the needs of working class and minority women. And as such a program becomes real, and as the three movements see their goals as directly linked with each other, the women's movement itself will gain the invaluable leadership of conscious working class and oppressed minori-

ty women in a leadership which will ensure the anti-capitalist understanding necessary for victory.

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