

EXPOSE THE E.R.A.

In the past few years, the bourgeoisie has been drumming up a big fanfare around the Equal Rights Amendment, after it has been buried in the dead file bins of the Congressional office for the past half century. The ERA was ratified by Congress in 1972 with the support of a broad spectrum of the bourgeoisie. Both conservative and liberal politicians are clearly lined up solidly behind the ERA, including South Boston's fascist Louise Day Hicks to New York's liberal Congresswoman Bella Abzug. The liberal politicians and the trade union bureaucrats of the AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers are uniting with a whole host of sham socialists, social-feminists, revisionists and opportunists from the ranks of the communist movement to rally support for the ERA in the name of eliminating discrimination against women!

Why is this assorted pack so desperate in pushing the ERA? What is the working class stand on this issue? To answer these questions, we must analyze the ERA in light of the historical facts.

During the 19th century, the US was marked by the rise of capitalism and intensification of the exploitation of the working class. Women workers, particularly those in the garment and textile industries staged militant struggles against the bourgeoisie. Similarly during the first decade of the 1900's, as US capitalism developed into monopoly capitalism - imperialism - the exploitation of the working class was further intensified. This was met with strong resistance from women workers. For example, in 1908, thousands of women workers among the 23,000 textile workers in the Lawrence mills battled company thugs and the National Guards in a strike to fight against speedups and wage cuts in one of the greatest pages of our working class history.

One response of the ruling class to this rising militancy of working women was to promote debates on the women's voting rights amendment to the US Constitution. This was passed in 1920. And this act succeeded to divert a sector of the women's movement - the working women's movement - away from its correct path. The petty bourgeois sector, determined by its class nature, fed the illusion of the Voting Rights Amendment and put out demands for the ERA. These petty bourgeois forces were first represented by the National Women's Party. However, the ERA campaign, then as well as now, has never been able to rally the vast majority of working class women and oppressed nationalities.

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ERA: A BOURGEOIS TRICK TO DIVERT WORKERS' MOVEMENT

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Now some fifty years later, it is clear that the heralded Constitutional Amendments themselves neither facilitated the liberation struggles of Afro-Americans since the Civil War, nor furthered the liberation course of women since women got their right to vote. Conditions for working women have only gotten worse daily.

In the past two years, the workers' resistance to the capitalist economic crisis has been spreading far and wide. Thousands of women workers have been in the forefront of major struggles like the Farah strike and the Oneida strike and countless community struggles. These instances once again sparked off the petty bourgeois - based feminists, including those that call themselves "socialists" and "communists" to jump out, lining up support for the ERA. They claim that all classes, all women and men must support ERA to "fulfill the American dream".

The National Women's Organization (NOW) -- a bourgeois and petty bourgeois women's organization, for example, recently called for the ratification of the ERA to help "complete the American revolution and make it a revolution for men and women". And the New York Coalition for Equal Rights, one of the largest coalitions in support of the ERA in the country said, "By its adoption New Yorkers can remind the nation that America was founded on principles of individual worth and dignity."

Within the communist movement, the ERA has become a crucial polemical question. It is one of the first real tests of Marxist-Leninists on the women's question, on which the movement as a whole is still relatively primitive. The ERA will help to deepen the understanding and draw a line of demarcation between the opportunist trend and the genuine Marxist-Leninists within the communist movement.

To understand the ERA, we have to concretely analyze the meaning of pushing for 'Constitutional Amendments' in this age of dying imperialism, the nature of bourgeois reforms and tricks in this period, and how fascism is fed by liberalism under the guise of reforms.

In the U.S. today where bourgeois democracy is highly consummated, to demand constitutional reforms (as distinct from concrete legislation such as specific protective legislation) that only grant abstract principles of equality is nothing but reactionary! We must put the ERA in the proper historical perspective of time, place and condition in 1976 and the U.S.

Bourgeois democracy is divided into 3 epochs. The first epoch marked the rise of the bourgeoisie, an epoch of bourgeois-democratic movements against moribund feudalism. The second epoch is one marked by the full rise and beginning decline of the bourgeoisie, when bourgeois democracy is making a transition from progressive towards reactionary character politically. This is also the period when Marxism began to grow and started to muster its forces. The third epoch is the period when capitalism has reached

its highest stage, monopoly capitalism or imperialism. It is the period comparable to the U.S. from early 1900 to the present, when bourgeois democracy has fully turned into its opposite, has become thoroughly reactionary, and like now, serves to usher in fascism. Today, U.S. imperialism is not only decaying, parasitic and moribund, it is on the eve of proletarian revolution!

The revisionists always laud "democracy" in general and in the abstract without placing it in proper historical perspective and concrete class interest. They do exactly what Lenin accused the revisionists of his time of doing: "plodding along in the rear of the bourgeoisie, abandoning the standpoint of present-day democracy /Social-Democracy in Lenin's time or socialism -- Ed./ and shifting over to that of the old (bourgeois) democracy" ("Under A False Flag". 1915. Collected Works, Vol. 21) to straitjacket that which is on the rise, vital and vibrant, the proletarian movement. Illustrating to comrades how Marx applied this standpoint and method during his time, Lenin said:

"At the time of the old (bourgeois) democracy Marx and Engels were working on the problem of the desirability of success for which particular bourgeoisie; they were concerned with a modestly liberal movement developing into a tempestuously democratic one. In the period of present-day (non-bourgeois) democracy, Potresov is preaching bourgeois national-liberalism at a time when one cannot even imagine bourgeois progressive movements, whether modestly liberal or tempestuously democratic, in Britain, Germany, or France. Marx and Engels were ahead of their epoch, that of bourgeois-national progressive movements; they wanted to give an impetus to such movements so that they might develop "over the heads" of the representatives of medievalism.

Like all social-chauvinists, Potresov is moving backwards, away from his own period, that of present-day democracy, and skipping over to the outworn, dead, and therefore intrinsically false viewpoint of the old (bourgeois) democracy. (Lenin, "Under A False Flag", Collected Works, Vol. 21. Emphasis original.)

For that reason, in relation to the present-day liberal, imperialist democracy, 'Constitutional Amendments' like the ERA is exactly this "...pure democracy (that) ... when the moment of revolution comes, acquires a temporary importance ... as the final sheet anchor of the whole bourgeoisie..." (Engels, "Letter to Bebel", 1884.)

As Lenin put it: "Pure democracy..." above time, place and condition "... is the mendacious phrase of a liberal who wants to fool the workers." (Lenin, "Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky", Collected Works, Vol. 28.)

"Let the liars and hypocrites, the dull witted and blind, the bourgeoisie and their supporters hoodwink the people with talk about freedom

in general, about equality in general, about democracy in general.

We say to the workers and peasants: Tear the masks from the faces of these liars, open the eyes of these blind ones. Ask them:

'Equality between what sex and what other sex?

'Between what nation and what other nation?

'Between what class and what other class?

'Freedom from what yoke, or from the yoke of what class? Freedom for what class?'

Whoever speaks of politics, of democracy, of liberty, of equality, of socialism, and does not at the same time ask these questions, does not put them on the foreground, does not fight against concealing, hush-up and glossing over these questions, is of the worst enemies of the toilers, is a wolf in sheep's clothing, is a bitter opponent of the workers and peasants, is a servant of the landlords, tsars, capitalists. (Lenin, "Women and Society". In The Woman Question, p. 59)



GASTONIA TEXTILE STRIKER FIGHTS NATIONAL GUARDSMAN, 1927

THE ERA IS A TRICK, NOT EVEN A REFORM

On the question of bourgeois reforms, Lenin warned that the "liberal bourgeoisie grant reforms with one hand and with the other always take them back and reduce them to naught, use them to enslave the workers, to divide them into separate groups and perpetuate wage-slavery. For that reason, reformism, even when quite sincere, in practice becomes a weapon by means of which the bourgeoisie corrupts and weakens the workers..." (Lenin, "Once Again About the Duma Cabinet", Collected Works, Vol. 11. Emphasis added.)

In the sixties, the giant momentum of the Afro-American Liberation Movement was able to force the bourgeoisie to grant reforms that marked an entire period: the 'Great Society' programs, 'Equal Opportunity' programs, bilingual educational programs. The working women's struggle has also been able to wrest similar gains from the

bourgeoisie: daycare, protective legislation on the job. Communists stand staunchly with these revolutionary struggles that have compelled the bourgeoisie to grant reforms. However, as communists, we must also expose that these reforms are thrown out by the bourgeoisie as "sham doles" to bribe and disintegrate the working class movement. In the sixties, the working class and the Afro-American Liberation Movement were disarmed by not having a vanguard communist party at their head.

Today, the subjective forces are still lagging behind while the national and student movements of the sixties have given way to a rising movement of the working class, the main force of the revolution. As the crisis of imperialism deepens today, what can the bourgeoisie do to maintain its rule? Historically, reform and repression are the two prongs of bourgeois rule. While the bourgeoisie is stepping up its use of repression, reform has been and still is the principal form of rule of the bourgeoisie. However, in this period that we outlined above, two major characteristics of today's reforms distinguish them from those of the previous decade: (1) reforms are increasingly used to pit workers against each other to usher in fascism; (2) today's reforms are becoming increasingly hollow and deceptive. Why? Look at the celebrated "reforms" of today -- the ERA, the forced busing plan, the community control plans, Title XX, etc. Do they bring any benefit to working people, however temporary? NO! These are subterfuges--tricks--pure and simple! The bourgeoisie is increasingly unable to afford crumbs to bribe the working class. More and more, they are resorting to subterfuges to nullify the reforms of the previous decade and to usher in fascism through whipping up national chauvinism and racism to split the working class. Let us analyze the ERA in this context.

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND THE E.R.A.

Protective legislation is the hard won gain of working women through the decades. Historically, it has brought women the eight-hour working day, special changing rooms, rest areas, on-the-job seating, improvement in work conditions such as regulating temperatures and ventilation, maternity leaves, etc. The bourgeoisie has always attempted and did succeed in some cases to subvert these gains of working women and to use them to discriminate against working women. Weight-lifting rules, overtime restrictions are used by the monopoly capitalists to keep women in lower paying jobs. Maternity laws are used to force women out of their jobs instead of protecting mothers and children. These same laws, though overall positive are often used to exclude women from disability pay or health benefits and to rob job security from working women. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was turned around by the bourgeoisie to take away protective legislation, as it has concretely happened in California. Now the ERA will complement the CRA in a concerted attack on special protection of women in the name of "equality between men and women". In the same way the ERA will also open the way for attacks on men workers by reducing wages and benefits of men instead of raising the wages of women. The ERA is even more vulnerable than the Civil Rights Act, affirmative laws, etc., to being turned around by the bourgeoisie to attack the working class because of its seemingly general, but actually sinister and concrete content. The bourgeois court and legislators are left completely free to interpret the ERA in any way that is favorable to the bourgeoisie!

There is another sinister aspect of the ERA that makes it an even dirtier trick. It is pumping a new lease of life to the bankrupt bourgeois feminist movement that says that men, and not monopoly capitalism, are the enemy of women. It pits working women against men and promotes the split within the working class.

REFORM STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION

Communists do take up the fight for each concrete gain of the working class.

The Marxists are working tirelessly, not missing a single "possibility" of winning and using reforms, and not condemning, but supporting, painstakingly developing every step beyond reformism in propaganda, agitation, mass economic struggle, etc. ("Marxism and Reformism", in Against Revisionism, p. 164)

Not to do so is a "left" deviation of a "waiting for great days" approach to making revolution. The question is concrete analysis of the content of bourgeois reformist schemes in different stages of the development of imperialism. For communists in the immediate struggle,

...it is necessary to formulate and put forward all these demands not in a reformist, but in a revolutionary way; not by keeping in the bounds of bourgeois legality, but by breaking through it, not by confining oneself to parliamentary speeches and verbal protest, but by drawing the masses into real action, by widening and fomenting the struggle for every kind of fundamental democratic demand, right up to and including the direct onslaught of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, i.e. to the socialist revolution. ("The Socialist Revolution and Right of Nations to Self-Determination (Theses)", 1916, Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 22)



THE E.R.A. FEEDS THE FASCIST MOVEMENT

Because the ERA is a fake reform that pits men workers against women workers, it will serve to strip away whatever gains working class women have already won in past struggles. Moreover, because it is pushed by the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, who have actively promoted liberal moral decadence and promiscuity -- based on their class ideology of "free will," abstract "equality" and "democracy" -- the ERA is associated with moral decadence, with promiscuity and homosexuality. The right-wing fascist forces have thus demagogically exploited this issue, trying to gain a mass following by appealing to the puritanical but good working class instincts of resentment against social decadence, against broken families and doped-up kids. That's why the ERA has become a rallying point to provoke and create a massive right-wing fascist movement in some sectors of the working class.

The Anti-ERA movement has become the rallying point of the right-wing fascist organizations: the John Birch Society, American Legion, Daughters of American Revolution, the Right to Life and anti-abortion groups, and fundamentalist religious groups. Anti-ERA groups have sprung up across the country posing as the arch defenders of the genuine rights and dignity of the American women. Cashing in on the fears and insecurity of working women caused by the decaying capitalist system, these reactionary forces push the most fascist ideology on us.

They claim that the ERA will destroy the family, while in fact it is capitalism that is increasing its attacks on the working class family. They spread the lie that ERA will force women out of the home when women are being forced into wage slavery in order to support their families. They say that ERA will breed widespread homosexual marriage, when it is the bourgeoisie, through the liberals under the cloak of "freedom", that are actively promoting promiscuity and homosexuality, to the level of moral principles. And as another aspect of their reactionary dual tactics, they even resurrect feudal ideology and make it an ingredient of their eclectic fascist ideology. Phyllis Schafly, the head of the national STOP ERA and the leading mouthpiece of these fascist forces, said in her national campaign in 46 states: "The truth is that American women never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to 'equal rights' when we already have the status of special privilege?"

The fascist anti-ERA campaign has become the agent of the bourgeoisie in drumming up patriotism and myths of the "ideal American family." They appeal to the working class' genuine hatred and reaction to degenerate culture, pornography, promiscuity, and the growth of the gay and lesbian movement. These forces pump reactionary male supremacist ideology into the working class. The "Total Woman" program which teaches that "the sole purpose for the existence of women is to serve men", is promoted as the newest vogue. The outcry of these fascist forces to go "back to the home, back to economic dependence on marriage as the sole career for women, expel women from employment and give the jobs to men, produce more cannon fodder for war!" is nothing but out and out fascist ideology on the women question.

In the middle of this growing economic crisis where the working class -- especially the oppressed nationalities and national minorities, and women -- are hardest hit, anti-ERA forces act together with the bourgeoisie to push working women back into the home and out of social production. The drawing of women into industry has been the historically progressive role of capitalism, in the relation of women to society. As analyzed by Marx:

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution under the capitalist system of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons and to children of both sexes, creates a new economical foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relation between the sexes. (Marx, Capital, Vol. I, ch. 15)

But capitalism in the period of general crisis is moving in the opposite direction. It is no longer hunting for new reserves of labor power to exploit. On the contrary, it can no longer find employment for the existing labor force.

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Under these conditions, the right-wing fascist forces help to justify the bourgeois attacks on the right to free daycare, the right to abortion, and help to drive women out of the work force under a fundamentalist religious cover. They glorify the traditional ideas of "motherhood". Their religious mouthpieces preach reactionary ideas that "god planned for women to be under their husbands' rule." At the same time, the liberals come out in "defense" of women's rights demanding "compensatory" seniority for women and affirmative action programs that only provide token positions in high places for petty bourgeois women, without dealing with the demands for job security, decent living standards and working conditions for masses of working women and the entire working class. They help to lay the groundwork for women to fight with men for jobs, pitting women against men and helping to promote a split in the working class, diverting attention from the real enemy -- the bourgeoisie.

This is the dialectics between liberal reformism and fascism. By promoting liberal promiscuity and decadence, liberalism helps to usher in fascism, first by feeding and nurturing the seeds of a reactionary women's movement, and secondly by whipping up male supremacist ideology, patriotism and fundamentalism. Dimitrov, the great anti-fascist fighter, warned of the danger of fascists using women as the social base for their rule:

While fascism exacts most from youth, it enslaves women with particular ruthlessness and cynicism, playing on the most painful feelings of the mother, the housewife, the single working women, uncertain of the morrow. ("Women and the United Front", Report to the 7th Congress, Communist International 1935, Red Star Press, London, 1974, p. 90)

The trade union misleaders have collaborated with the bourgeoisie in support of the E.R.A. to promote faith in

bourgeois democracy. For example, DC 37, in their Public Employee Press says "The N.Y. State Equal Rights Amendment is another step towards completing the unfinished task that began with the Declaration, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. It fills in the missing constitutional protection of equal rights under the law for both sexes and assures the elimination of practices which deny these rights. It is the legal, constitutional way of saying that we believe all people are created equal."

DEEPEN THE LINE STRUGGLE TO CORRECTLY LEAD THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

The "C" PUSA is opposed to the "current passage of the ERA in its present form" because it is not reformist enough. So they offer more concrete reformist programs that are totally devoid of class content. They proposed that a Women's Bill of Rights should be added to accompany the ERA. It includes such things as "universal daycare, strengthening and enforcing laws protecting the health of women, laws guaranteeing paid sick leave, etc., etc." According to the revisionists, these laws "are the only ways to guarantee full equality for women and to eliminate the present unfair discriminatory practices based on sex."!

The OL, as usual, blinded by abstract and formal equality and faith in bourgeois democracy is tailing the monopoly capitalist class and helping them to spread bourgeois democratic illusions among the workers. They do not understand the zigzags of bourgeois tactics and the bourgeoisie's use of reforms to divert the movement. They do not examine whether the masses of working women are behind the ERA but support it because it can "give women a somewhat better field to fight in." The masses of women do not want to fight in the courts, but on the jobs, in the streets for real equality.

The RCP, on the other hand, opposed the ERA. But what are the reasons for the RCP to oppose the ERA? They say the ERA "makes a show of granting token opportunity to women, especially executives and professionals, while actually robbing working women of protective legislation won through many hard fought battles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries." They too do not see the role bourgeois democracy plays. They are promoting more bourgeois illusions instead of exposing the hypocrisy and inconsistency of bourgeois reforms.

The RCP is totally blind to how liberalism is used by the bourgeoisie to feed the growth of fascism. They do not see that the ERA is a subterfuge, a trick and an attack on working women. They are against the ERA only because it does not promise "palpable results". seeing fascism only as repression leads the RCP to liquidate the struggle against the process of fascization in this period.

WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE REVOLUTION

We must examine the ERA in the context of this current economic crisis, the approaching danger of world war and fascism. The build-up for the bicentennial, the use of the subterfuges are all part of this process to disarm the working class, to strengthen the hold of bourgeois ideology to weaken our fighting spirit. We cannot support the ERA because it will strengthen the bourgeoisie. The passing of the ERA will not be a victory for the women's movement. We must fight for daycare, welfare, equal pay for equal work, right to jobs. To fight for equality for women, we must organize women as part of the revolutionary movement in this country, we must bring them Marxist-Leninist theory and struggle for a break from bourgeois ideology, win the advanced workers to communism and build the genuine working class Communist Party in the U.S. Only through proletarian revolution will women begin to obtain true equality!! ■