The Woman Question is a Class Question

THE LINE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WING ON I.W.W.D.

On Friday night, March 5, 1976 a forum was held on "Party Building and the Woman Question." The forum was sponsored by the Anti-Imperialist Coalition, consisting of the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers' Organization, Revolutionary Workers' League, Resistencia Puertorriqueña, the Revolutionary Bloc, Puerto Rican Student Union, and February First Movement. This coalition was formed in the heat of the class struggle, the struggle against revisionism, Trotskyism, and right opportunism, most particularly the right opportunism of the so-called "leading circle," the Workers' Viewpoint Organization. The activities of the Anti-Imperialist Coalition, most particularly the forum itself, were clearly indicative of the period we're in: the fight for the line and program of our party, calling for an intense struggle against opportunism as we implement our two tactical tasks, the unification of Marxist-Leninists and the winning over of advanced elements as the concrete form in which we fuse the communist and workers' movements to form our Bolshevik Party. Advanced elements, especially those from P.R.S.U. and F.F.W., were exemplary as they, under the guidance of the genuine wing, took the struggle for the party as their own, defending Marxism-Leninism-Ho Chi Minh Thought and battling all those who tried to distort it.

The forum itself was a continuation of the intense two-line struggle. After the speeches by P.R.S.U.-F.F.W. (of which we shall take key excerpts - look for the whole text in the next issue), the Socialists performed the party building song, placing special emphasis on the last stanza - "The party is built in the struggle against falsehood for the light." In the question-and-answer period, the line of demarcation was more clearly drawn. The Anti-Imperialist Coalition, led by the genuine communists, fiercely polemicized against the false bankruptcy of W.O.'s line on party building, which distorts the history of the communist movement, calls for conciliation with the bourgeoisie and its agents, and tries to resurrect the ghosts and monsters of Menshevism in the present period. Workers' Viewpoint Organization failed to defend their line, slipping and sliding, attacking advanced elements for raising questions about their muddled nonsense (P.M.M.), quoting out of context to prove their bankruptcy line, and finally storms out in a petit-bourgeois frenzy, like the sneaky traitors they are. It was clearly evident that Socialists are in the majority, that the genuine forces are what is growing in strength day-by-day, while the Marxist forces, beaten back by the defenders of Marxism-Leninism-Ho Chi Minh Thought, are losing ground, drowning in the putrid marsh of opportunism. The future is indeed bright for us; it is certainly bleak for the enemies of the proletariat from within and without. The following is the text of the presentation given by the representatives of the genuine wing on the "Woman Question and Party Building."

Comrades,

We must heighten our vigilance to the treacherous Menshevik line within our ranks, the line of class peace which threatens to corrode the Bolshevik Party we are in the process of forging.

The modern day Mensheviks want to separate every class question, including the woman question, from the most burning class question, the building of our Party.

To them the party is a lightweight thing; to them it is a by-product of the mass movement, which they are feverishly trying to build and worship.

Their focus is on the reform struggle - "we must win the advanced to lead these struggles for reforms" - they say.

The main proponents of the Menshevik line - the October League and the Workers' Viewpoint Organization and other hidden Mensheviks - although they have passed as mortal enemies, are fundamentally united on one thing - their hatred of the so-called ultra-leftists, the dogmatists who insist on raising the party in everything we do, who are "isolated" from the masses because in fact we are applying to the real world - the teachings of the Bolsheviks as to how to build a party - concentrating on the development of the Party itself - concentrating on the unity of Marxist-Leninists and the winning of the advanced to communism on the basis of a concrete analysis of concrete conditions.

The application of Marxism-Leninism-Ho Chi Minh

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brings with it an improvement in the position of women. The movement for the emancipation of slaves in ancient times, as well as the movement for the political emancipation of working women in modern times, had in its ranks only men, but also women—fighters and martyrs, who with their blood sealed their devotion to the cause of the toilers. Lastly, the present movement for the emancipation of the proletariat and the mightiest of all the emancipation movements of mankind—has brought to the fore not only heroes and women martyrs, but also a new socialist movement of millions of working women, who are fighting victoriously under the common proletarian banner.

"Compared with this mighty working women's movement, the recent developments of the bourgeois women intellectuals is a child's game, invested as a pastime."

These historic struggles led by working women continued and continue to this day, as can be seen in examples of Farah and Ouda, striking that were led by oppressed nationality women. As Chairman Mao says, where there is oppression, there will be resistance.

In our commemoration of IWW and developing our political line on one of the burning class questions, the women's question, we need to deepen our understanding of the oppression of women in general and the oppression of women in the U.S. in particular. Developing political line on the women question also means getting a better understanding of the character of the struggle, better defining what special work among women means in this country. It means putting forth demands that serve the correct democratic demands of women in the struggle for economic and social equality.

Political line which represents our concrete analysis of burning class questions, is hammered out in the heat of class struggle. It is this struggle that forges iron unity and not sham unity—and that brings the line and action of the Party into being.

Now let's turn to the historical development of the oppression of women.

The woman question is a class question. Working women are oppressed based on class and sex. Oppressed nationality women suffer triple oppression—class, nationality and sex.

The oppression of women goes back to the historical development of classes, where at one time the woman held a principal role in production under primitive communism on equal part with men.

Under primitive communism women were held in a dominant position due to their importance in the society. Why? Engels says that:

"According to the materialist conception, the dominating factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of means of existence; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species."
"In primitive communal society, woman were the dominant figure in both aspects of society. They were producers of life as well as producers of food." But with the development of private ownership of the means of production and consequently the development of exploiter and exploited, masters and slaves, bosses and proletariat, in other words, classes, women became subordinated to men. Thus the resolution of the woman question internationally is a component part of the class struggle against U.S. imperialism and Soviet Social Imperialism.

Under capitalism, working women serve as a reserve army of labor. Not only reserves but an integral and growing sector of the working class.

"Working women are not only reserves, however. They can and must become—If the working class carries out a correct policy—a real army of the working class, operating against the bourgeoisie."

How does the bourgeoisie use women as a reserve?

If the economy booms or there is a need for extra workers because of war production, as in World War II, women are called on to fill the gap. This has proven time and time again that women can do all of the jobs in modern industry—from laborer to welder. But, as soon as the need diminishes, they are pushed back into unemployment or lower paying jobs. This was the fate of thousands of working women after World War II.

There have been a growing number of women who have joined the ranks of the industrial proletariat. Women working in industrial jobs is in the interests of the entire working class. All attempts by the bourgeoisie to get them to fight against the right of women to jobs must be turned around and aimed back at the bourgeoisie.

As women are increasingly moving from mere household work to socialized labor, it becomes easier for them to define their enemies and friends in the struggle to overcome the oppression of women. On the job they begin to realize, under the leadership of communists, that the source of male supremacy is not their husband or brother or men in general.

Being on the job, she will have a better understanding of the fundamental differences in the problems she has with her husband/brother as opposed to the problems she has with her boss, with the factory owners, with the store owners, the landlord, with the bourgeoisie.

Engels says: "The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to house work which is private. The emancipation of women only becomes possible when women are enabled to take part in production on a large scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree. Working class men and women realize this is in their interests."

Presently, with the large number of lay-offs, war, forces, as well as some honest, genuine forces who believe are making a right deviation, are calling for the support of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Let's take a look at this so-called Equal Rights Amendment. This bill is a conscious plan of the bourgeoisie to eliminate gains from the working force, under the cloak of "equality criteria" for both sexes, split the working class, and divert the struggle of the working class and women into reformism.

First, the ERA is a reform and we will put forth our view of this reform and analyze the ERA in light of that view.

Our attitude towards reforms is expressed by Lenin in Marxism and Reformism. He says:

"Unlike the anarchists, the Marxists recognize struggle for reforms, i.e., for measures that improve the conditions of the working people without destroying the power of the ruling class. At the same time, however, the Marxists wage a most resolute struggle against the reformists, who direct or indirectly, restrict the aims and activities of the working class to the winning of reforms. Reformism is bourgeois deception of the workers, who, despite individual improvements, will always remain wage-slaves, as long as there is the domination of capital."

As communists, it is our duty to fight for real reforms. How do we determine real from false reforms? We must look at (a) whether the reform would divide the working class; (b) whether or not it provides for better conditions for the working class to wage struggles, and (c) whether or not it is something the working class fights for.

There is one additional quote from Lenin in Once Again About the Gerry Cabinet that expresses our views:

"We pursue an independent policy and put forward only such reforms as consciously and positively favorable to the interests of the revolutionary struggle, that enhance the independence, class-consciousness and fighting efficiency of the proletariat and the working class."

Always hypocritical, and always conceal some bourgeois of police snare, he made innocuous."

"The most effective way to secure real reforms is to pursue the tactics of the revolutionary class struggle. Actually, reforms are won as a result of the revolutionary class struggle, as a result of its independence, mass force and steadfastness. Reforms are always false, ambiguous and paraded within the frame of Zubevisim; they are real only in proportion to the intensity of the class struggles. By means of our slogans we show the proletariat and the bourgeois we weaken the cause of revolution and consequently, the cause of reform as well because we thereby diminish the independence, fortitude and strength of the revolutionary classes."

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS REFORMS CONCRETELY APPLIED TO ERA

We oppose the ERA because it is a false reform. It is a reform that the capitalists should lead a struggle for it to be passed.

A. The ERA would not provide for better conditions for the class. In fact, the ERA would take away certain existing protective laws that now exist for women. These laws should not be taken away but extended to men as well.

B. The ERA would promote bourgeois democratic illusions. People have been fooled to think that ERA puts that equality of sexes can come about through passage of laws. Laws have already been passed—Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the 13th, 14th, 15th amendments.

The ERA says "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied on account of any State or sex." Passage of the ERA will not be doing anything about equality. The bourgeoisie pushes ERA on the one hand while at the same time pushing for the passage of Title 20 which would cut out day care centers and other programs needed by working women. Communist forces who push for the passage of the ERA are promoting bourgeois illusions, siding with the bourgeoisie, and acting against the
interest of proletarian revolution. Struggle for ERA diverts communists from work we should be doing amongst working class women, from taking up the issues facing the class and working class women.

Lenin says: 

"Participants in all emancipation movements in Western Europe have long since, not for decades but for centuries, put forward the demand that obsolete laws be annulled and women and men be made equal by law, but none of these movements has come into being. None of the advanced republics have succeeded in putting it into effect, because wherever there is capitalism, there is private property in land and factories, wherever the power of capital is preserved, the men retain their privileges.

The ERA is not being pushed by the working class nor nor historically. The ERA has historically been a demand pushed by petty bourgeois feminists. It has never been nor is it now a real issue of the working class. It has been an issue in Congress since 1923 and has failed to pass Congress for the past 47 years. Revival of the movement for the ERA can and should be a part of the new movement, led by liberal bourgeois and petty bourgeois feminists. Lenin explains the role of the liberal bourgeoisie - "The position of the liberal policy is the aim of the liberal policy in the bourgeoisie, Pannekoek says, 'is to mislead the workers, to cause a split in their ranks, to convert their fight for the ERA into a fight against a monopotent, always monopotent and ephemeral, sham reformism.'

The petty bourgeois feminists push reforms as the road towards equality. Pushing blind faith in the system. Seeing the principal contradiction between men and women. Reformist solutions to exploitation.

The ERA divides the working class. It pits men against women. It leads to seeing men as a problem of inequality and not capitalism. It takes the focus from the bourgeoisie to men as the problem.

A concrete manifestation of the way the ERA divides the working class is the fact that there has been a close of right-wing reaction to the ERA, similar to the reactionary opposition to taxing andrun control. This is a clear example of how the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie-led women's movement supporting the ERA, pushes the way for fascists, by playing into the hands of the reactionaries, who have used this struggle to raise that women's issue. Unconsciously, this would lead to some women not wanting to work, which holds back the development of women, which serves to retard the development of women as one of the revolutionary forces necessary for proletarian revolution.

Let's look at what Comrade Lenin says on this front:

"To effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of men, it is necessary for the national economy to be socialized, and for women to participate in common productive labor. Then women will occupy the same position as men."

Again, at a time when thousands of women have been laid off, and the ranks of the unemployed are swollen, the bourgeoisie resurfaces the sham ERA.

The working class has never fought for the ERA.

The bourgeoisie re-raises it in order to cover their own more women. At the same time they use the ERA to capture the revolutionary sentiments of the working women and channel it into reformism and struggle against the proletariat. The fundamental fact that the source of the problem is the bourgeoisie's exploitation and oppression of the working class, and social and political oppression, is, Trotskyist and revisionist support the ERA. Also, within the revolutionary wing the ATM supports the ERA, which will be these comrades to take the correct class stand in opposition to the ERA and to repudiate their present position. Let the agents of the bourgeoisie who propagate the ERA be opposed and consciences of the proletarian struggle against the ERA. As communists we must uncover its treasonary and we must make it clear that the true struggle can only come about through the abolition of classes. Hence, women's liberation must be a component part of the proletarian revolution.

Let us take a deeper look at one of the spineless opportunist forces in the communist movement who is pushing for support of the ERA - KPD/ October League, Menshevik Liberal.

The October League's line on the Woman Question is a reflection of their overall right opportunistic line.

These Menshevik liberals have had to naturally battle the training of advanced working class women just as they battled and totally negate the women's leadership opportunities.

Instead of bringing scientific socialism to the spontaneous movement concentrating on winning over the advanced, the October League glorifies and worships the spontaneous petty bourgeois women's movement which they have been as a cadre pool, which has already been shown has not been a demand of working class women, and is not in the interests of uniting the class as a whole, but rather divides the class, weakening it from within, a result of the opportunists' and all reformists' role within the communist and workers' movement.

In not treating the woman question as a class question, the OL and MO and all opportunist try to sneak in the theory of humanism, cutting across class lines, by confusing the antagonisms between men and women. The bourgeoisie-led women's movement, which has been a nestling ground of decadence.

We can very clearly see the Red Stocking Manifesto, which brod petty bourgeoisie feminism - the petty bourgeoisie flirt which breathed a monopotent, always monopotent and ephemeral, sham reformism. From these same organizations' positions, or lack of positions against these parasitics.

The WO just recently was raising discussion over the "gay question," which, for genuine Marxists-Leninists and the proletariat, is no question.

At the same time, these phalisteries do everything in their power not to discuss the burning question of our day - the working class party building.

Why is this? Because the Menshevik-Liberals are catering to the most backward ideas of the masses, the petty bourgeoisie in particular, and have become totally divorced from the real questions facing the working men and the proletariat in general.

Rummaging out the party - the Bolshevist Party's basic line and program of action on all the burning class questions is beyond their interests, their capabilities, their desires, of passively crawling along at the tail of the mass movement, looking for the colored opportunist, numbers of bad intellectuals, numbers of women - all in an attempt to build themselves up - under the cover of "build the mass movement."

Concedes, time has come when we must rip off this mask of trachbery once again. We must make the Mensheviks stop using the masses to cover up their scheming, intriguing and conspiring. The truth is that they care as much for the masses as the bourgeoisie does.

In whose interest is it not to raise the party in all our activities, our propaganda, our agitation?

Who is it that fears more than anything else the coming into being of the nightingest weapon of the proletariat in its fight for proletarian revolution, consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the establishment of socialism and on to the complete abolition of classes?

Who is it that the OL and WO refuse to raise the woman's question in relation to the central tasks? Because linking the two is in the interest of the revolution, and opportunists, as lackeys of the bourgeoisie, will do anything to prevent the coming into being of the revolution.

Through numbers, they hope we will evolve out of the clutches of the banksters and corporations. Somehow pure and simple rubbish.

In fighting against the party, the OL and WO are no different than the Triangle Shirtwaist factory boss who locked the doors to prevent any kind of job action by workers. OL and WO and all Mensheviks are trying to put a dagger in the heart of the party - this is their treason.

This treason is clearly seen in the actions of the opportunists in the IWWD Coalition. The Coalition will be doing a sum-up of the history and struggles of the Coalition. The following is taken from a letter to the unanswerable question, "But and why?"
brief sum-up of the Coalition that will be deepened in the future.

The Coalition was started by a call from the IWWD to sum-up the Socialist Feminist Conference which they had attended. This was the plan for the start of the Coalition. In the initiation of the Coalition the IWWD invited the Trotts, the contrarians and revisionists, those spineless beings who had participated in the Socialist Feminist Conference and such. Organizations in the revolutionary wing were not contacted and from the jump plans for the IWWD were not viewed in the light of the crucial tasks of all genuine communists, party building.

When genuine Marxist-Leninists and advanced honest elements came into the Coalition heated class struggle was intensified. As the struggle against revisionism and right opportunist intensification, revisionists and opportunist forces, one by one left the Coalition. The Trotskyists left the Coalition. While these tracings to the class were in the Coalition we had to struggle with them in their raising only U.S. imperialism and not Soviet Social Imperialism for principles of unity in raising support for the EKA in separating the woman's question from party building and in wanting us to raise up democratic rights for women in the principles of unity and in wanting us to keep men out of the Coalition.

With the Trotts and Revisionists out, line struggle continued and intensified against right opportunist. The Coalition has summed up that right deviations have been the main ones made in the Coalition and the main reason WVO entered the Workers Viewpoint Organization. WVO hollered that left errors were the main danger in the Coalition, but we say No we make more right errors when we conciliate with your line at times.

What were the manifestations of the right line of WVO as seen in the Coalition.

First, as we said, their outlook on IWWD was never from the political task. Throughout, since we started, they belittled the role of the revolutionary wing and all genuine Marxist-Leninists and advanced opportunist forces. They did not and were not for giving Marxist-Leninist leadership to the Coalition.

They united with the revisionists from the start in their raising the question of left opportunism and then tried to get the Coalition to join the CP Coalition.

The WVO see themselves as the leading circle and in the Coalition they proceeded to do things on their own.

In divorcing the woman question from our central task of party building, the most burning class question, WVO in essence failed the woman question as a woman question. They were not interested in hammering out political line on the woman question. They spoke privately and together with workers and work the Socialist feminists. "We uphold our work with the revisionists in the "CP-USA Coalition last year," they cried. Not once did they speak about upholding any work among working class women.

With the intensification of struggle against right opportunism, WVO resorted to formalism and bourgeois maneuvering. For example, when WVO was asked to speak to their line on party building, they said we should deal with practical tasks and not party building.

Also, they packed meetings for votes since they thought not win the Coalition over through line struggle. Throughout the Coalition, they historically kept raising left dogmatism as the main danger in the Coalition, theoretically, typical of the petty-bourgeoisie. What were some of the things we put forth that they called left?

Those so-called left dogmas were good old Marx-Leninist principles.

They said it was left of us to keep raising propaganda as our chief form of work in this period. It was left of us to talk about principal focus on the class struggle and upholding Marxist-Leninists. WVO kept raising the question in the left to hide their raggedy line of build the mass movement. Tell word and stop hiding your raggedy line - people are becoming more and more aware of your bankruptcy. WVO, you raise the question of study but do you have your cadre read more than the premises?

We urge you to read Comrade Stalin, Vol. 5, The Party, Power and After Taking Power. Check it out. The principles we put forth that you call left dogmas are Marxist-Leninist principles.

WVO, listen closely to what you call this left stuff. Comrade Stalin said "The first period was the period of formation, of the creation of our party."

"The party confined itself to mapping the movement's strategic plan, i.e., the route that the movement was to take. The party reserves - the contradictions within the camp of the enemies inside and outside of Russia - remained unused, caused, owing to the uniqueness of the Party.

"In this period the party focused its attention and care upon the party itself, upon its own existence and preservation.

"The principal task of communists in Russia in that open and easy-coll共生 into the Party the best elements of the working class, those who were most active and most devoted to the cause of the proletariat; to form the ranks of the proletarian party and to put it firmly on its feet. Comrade Lenin formulates this task as follows: 'We are in the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism.'"

WVO, this is what we were putting forth, this so-called left left left as you call it. Study Stalin and not just the premises.

Let's see what else Stalin says -

"The second period was the period of winning the broad masses of the workers and peasants to the side of the vanguard of the proletariat.

"The Party's principal task in this period was to win the vast masses to the side of the proletarian vanguard, to the side of the Party, for the purpose of overthrowing the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, for the purpose of seizing power.

"The Party now no longer focused its attention upon itself, but upon the vast masses of the people.

This is what Workers Viewpoint puts forward now. WVO read Stalin, that was in the second period. In the period during the formation of the party we concentrated on winning the advanced and unifying Marxist-Leninists.

Workers Viewpoint - shame on you. Put the Anti-Revisionist Workers Viewpoint Down; study Stalin.

Study Marxist-Leninism. The problem may be that you consider this the second period and consider yourselves the party.

Workers Viewpoint, shame on you. You fit in the same mould as the OL Menshevik Libertarians who also see themselves as a leading circle and are now building the mass movements and not the party.

Both of you are spineless beings who refuse to struggle. You both refuse to engage in thorough criticism and are not a party.

Workers Viewpoint displayed a philistine attitude towards struggle as the struggles intensified in the Coalition and their opportunistic line was being uncovered.

As their tricks were exposed by the Coalition, the WVO failed to continue struggling and instead walked out of the Coalition, following the other spineless marsh forces they had brought into the Coalition.

The struggle with the marsh forces represented the struggle against the revisionist line on the woman question and all class questions that is being waged by genuine Marxist-Leninists.

The revisionists, spearheaded by the "CPSU and their puppets, the "CPUSA have betrayed the Marxist-Leninist principle on the woman question, as they did so on all. The anti-Marxist lines have manifested themselves in keeping women away from production and confined to households. The CPUSA have kept and kept women away from the struggle against imperialism.

The revisionists have treated the problems of women in the spirit of bourgeois pacifism. They publish magazines where they promote extravagant fashions, cosmetics, and advertisements.
At the Council of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), they put forward that "fighting against imperialism kept women away from the WIDF," that "we should use language that could spell women in the WIDF and not frighten them like a world without arms, without armies, without war," preaching peace thus nourishing illusions about imperialism thus liquidating the just struggles of the third world against U.S. imperialism and Soviet Imperialism.

Once again, at the opening ceremony of the International Meeting of Women in Minsk, the bourgeoise romanticists' line on the woman question came forward nakedly by P.M. Mashev, a candidate member of the politbureau of the "CP"SU, he said, "It is much more important to take care of our women, their health and strength, and to cherish such unique qualities of theirs as feminity, gentleness, delicate and subtle perception of the world, the inherent kindness and responsiveness of a mother's heart...Woman with her warm loving heart and gentle hands has been destined by nature for goodness, for creation, for peace." (Soviet Woman, No. V, 1975)

We must watch out for the opportunists as they will try anything to take the revolution off its course. For example, this past Wednesday the WVO, who left the Coalition saying they would do their own thing came crawling back asking to be a part of the Coalition and be on the forum. However, they wanted to be on the forum but were not willing to repudiate their raggedy line and put forth serious criticisms of their work in the Coalition. We told them NO, we did not just want numbers in the Coalition but honest forces. We told them they could come to the forum and put forth their position from the floor. We hope they don't punk out because we urge them to struggle to support that bankrupt line because its bankruptess will show itself.

We would like to end with an appropriate quote from Comrade Lenin from What Is To Be Done?

"We are marching in a compact group along a precipitous and difficult path, firmly holding each other by the hand. We are surrounded on all sides by enemies and we have to advance under their almost constant fire. We have combined voluntarily, precisely for the purpose of fighting the enemy, and not to retreat into the adjacent marsh, the inhabitants of which, from the very outset, have reproached us with the right deviations of the Coalition - the WVO."

"We must struggle tit for tat on all class questions. Tonight we must struggle tit for tat on all class questions."

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