

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

# The Workers' Advocate Supplement



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December 15, 1990

## Will Congress challenge the war drive?

*Based on an article in the Bay Area Workers' Voice, paper of the MLP-San Francisco Bay Area. On December 13, U.S. District Judge Harold Greene turned down the lawsuit referred to in the article, which by that time involved 54 Democratic members of Congress. He held that in principle Bush must seek authorization for war, but not necessarily in practice. On technical grounds he refused to grant an injunction preventing Bush from attacking Iraq without Congressional consent. Among his reasons was that only a fraction of Congress had made the request. The issues raised by the article remain important despite the lawsuit's dismissal.*

On Tuesday, November 20th, Rep. Ron Dellums along with 44 other House members filed a lawsuit challenging the right of George Bush to launch a war in the Middle East without the consent of Congress. After all, they argue, the Constitution says that Congress, not the President, has the power to declare war.

Dellums' lawsuit is a dud. It does nothing to challenge the U.S. war drive in the Middle East.

### The lawsuit isn't against the war

In fact, the lawsuit isn't against the war at all. It simply says Congress should be let in on the decision. In his *Statement of Concern* co-signed by 81 other members of Congress, Dellums put it this way:

"If, after all peaceful means to resolve the conflict are exhausted, and the President believes that military action is warranted, then ... he must seek a declaration of war from the Congress."

To reassure his House colleagues, Dellums wrote them a letter promising them that this was a lawsuit about constitutional procedure, not for or against war:

"Aside from the political question of what military action should or should not be taken in the Gulf, we as Members of Congress have a stake in seeing that the Constitutional process is observed." (This is the only emphasized line in Dellums' Nov. 15 letter to his colleagues.)

### Congress and Bush agree on the war buildup

But isn't something getting lost in all this claptrap about congressional powers and constitutional process?

Don't large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress agree with the war build up in the Persian Gulf? Haven't the leaders of both parties supported the dispatch of 400,000 troops to Saudi Arabia? Haven't they gone along with Bush's lies? Haven't they also done their bit to prepare a slaughter for "American", that is imperialist, interests?

The irony is that hawks like Republican leaders Lugar and Dole have been pushing hardest for Congress to meet and take a stand on the war. They also, like Dellums, talk about congressional responsibility. But unlike Dellums, they aren't spinning fairy tales that a congressional debate will

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produce an anti-war stand. Lugar and Dole are more real. Their intent is to put Congress on record behind Bush and the war drive.

The Democratic leaders like Nunn and Mitchell agree with Bush on the blockade of Iraq. But they are nervous too. They are worried about the consequences of war, and may demand more time for diplomatic maneuvering and economic blockade. And they know that down below the winds of anti-war feelings are blowing. If they blow hard enough the Democrats may trim their sails and pass some toothless resolution.

Toilet paper is more useful than such resolutions. Remember what happened in Nicaragua. Reagan carried on the contra war as he liked, while Congress looked the other way [despite the famous "Boland Amendment" by which Congress supposedly blocked aid to the contras].

### **Fight Bush, expose Congress, to hell with all the war makers!**

Ron Dellums isn't the only one. Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark and a number of other big names are being dragged before TV cameras and anti-war rallies to preach the gospel of congressional powers. This is poison for the anti-war struggle.

To fight against the war we have to fight the war makers. We have to fight Bush, the Pentagon and the oil corporations. We have to expose Congress, packed with

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fine ladies and gentlemen who are in the pockets of big oil, arms contractors and other money interests who hope to make big bucks out of a war. These are not the "representatives of the people", as Dellums, Clark and other liberals want us to believe. They are capitalist politicians, and imperialism is their game.

Fighting against this war is serious business. It can't be fought with patty-cake legal games between Congress and Bush.

It needs to be fought with mass action. Demonstrations in the streets. Rallies and militant protests. Courageous actions by the young working people in the military, like marine corporal Jeff Paterson who faces court martial for refusing deployment to Saudi Arabia.

**U.S. imperialism, get out of the Middle East!** □

## **Racism at the U of Illinois**

Continued from page three

hours later and at least gave the appearance of acceding to some of their demands. Stukel promised to take action against those carrying out racist attacks and he agreed to move the Black Cultural Center to a more central location on campus. The administration has scheduled a meeting on December 3.

It remains to be seen how this will go. It's quite possible that the university has no intention of carrying out any demand. December 3rd is at the end of the fall semester when many students have already left, making it possible for the administration to escape immediate mass actions if it doesn't keep its promises.

These events at UIC are not an accident. Black, Latino and other minority student face racist attacks at campuses across the country. This is part of the general racist offensive of the rich and their government that's been rolling back the clock and trying to steal the gains of the great mass struggles of the '60's.

Furthermore, these attacks are taking place at a time when the number of Black and Latino students attending colleges and universities is falling. At U of I Black student enrollment is almost half it's highest level. Of 25,000 students only 9.1% are Black and 8.7% Hispanic.

The racist attacks at UIC and the whole racist offensive must be opposed. We cannot rely on the university administration, the government or the politicians to fight racist attacks. It's time to renew the militant anti-racist traditions of the past. Students at the U of I have embarked on this path. Let us broaden and deepen this struggle! □

# School news in brief

## Los Angeles teaching assistants strike

Some 9,000 L.A. Teacher Assistants (TAs) have gone on strike, and rightly so. The TA's are fighting for job security, district-paid health benefits, paid sick days, and broader career opportunities. They also demand just compensation for their bilingual skills, which are quite important for L.A. educators.

Teachers of the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) should back the demands of the TA's. They should not forget that during the 1989 teachers' strike many TAs put their jobs on the line by joining and honoring picket lines. Now is the time for teachers to find the most creative ways to back the TAs' strike. But the UTLA leaders have not called for solidarity actions. Why? Because they are beholden to Democrats, and a few Republicans, who sit on the school board, stepping and fetching for Superintendent Anton, and cry "We can't find the money" or "The recession has arrived and we want the TAs to be more patient."

(Based on the November 22 leaflet by the L.A. Supporters of the MLP.) □

## Students fight cutbacks at Los Angeles City College

A demonstration against cutbacks at Los Angeles City College grew to about 100 people on October 8. They marched around the campus shouting "What do we want? Education! When do we want it? Now!" and "No more cutbacks! Save our schools!" The mainly Latino, Asian and African-American students demanded the reinstatement of canceled classes. A few teachers also spoke in solidarity, risking their own jobs. Supporters of the Marxist-Leninist Party took an active part in the march and distributed 250 leaflets that declared "Don't sacrifice for the rich!" □

## Education through starvation: "Learnfare" in Wisconsin

In early November, a federal court gave the go-ahead for Wisconsin to resume a "learnfare" program which cuts welfare benefits to families if their children skip school. By last June, this program reduced welfare payments to 12 percent of the 13,000 families in Milwaukee subject to potential penalties. The program had been temporarily suspended because of inaccuracies in the truancy monitoring system.

Let's see if we've got this straight. Some poor students cut classes. So what do the authorities recommend? Starving the families of the truants!

Evidently if poor people face complete ruin this will improve the educational climate. Why, it is so simple! No need to waste money improving living conditions. (Just pretend living conditions have nothing to do with educa-

tional success.) And why throw money down a rathole like improving the crumbling educational system in the inner cities? Foolhardy!

The federal and state government and Milwaukee school board has opted instead to spend some \$4 million to create a new police apparatus for identifying families with truants so they can slash the crumbs the families get from welfare. Now this is money well spent!

The government officials are so taken with this program they plan to extend it from truant teens to all truants who are at least six years old. They promise, however, that in this case the families will be allowed to continue to eat if they go to counseling sessions.

This is the reality behind the bourgeoisie's sentimental sermons about "strengthening family values." Once again they have no answers to social problems except police measures and lashing out at the poor. □

## Protests against racism at the University of Illinois at Chicago

*The following is excerpted from an article in the December 3 issue of Chicago Workers' Voice, paper of the MLP-Chicago. The lead article was "Protest U.S. war drive in the Persian Gulf!" and called people out for a demonstration on Dec. 8.*

Anti-racist protests broke out at the University of Illinois at Chicago last month. Students came out in anger over a number of recent racist attacks on Black, Latino and other minority students. On October 7 several racists kicked the door of a Latina student yelling "You're Mexican, aren't you?" On October 16, five white males grabbed a Black student from behind while yelling racist epithets. When she reported this to the housing front desk she was told there was nothing they could do as she did not know the identity of her attackers. On October 27 a white female student was pushed to the floor after she confronted racists writing their despicable graffiti on a bulletin board. Black and Latino students have had racist comments hurled at them while walking across the campus. Other outrages included racist graffiti in the elevators, swastikas and KKK signs posted on the doors of minority students in the dorms, and racist comments on the answering machine of a Black student.

In a heated meeting on November 16, 250 students protested these events. They spoke out against Interim Chancellor James Stukel for dragging his feet in investigating these events. Mr. Stukel did not even attend this meeting. Later that day students held a sit-in in front of his office.

On November 19 students held another sit-in in front of Mr. Stukel's office. Chancellor Stukel originally stormed away from meeting with the students. But he returned two

Continued on page 2

# Strikes and workplace news in brief

## 'Job security' contract in auto brings plant closings

The ink was hardly dry on the new "job security" contract when GM announced the permanent shutdown of nine plants. Four of the plants had already been closed, eliminating 9,000 jobs. But GM had called them "idled" to get around the language in the last contract's "moratorium on plant closings." In the new contract there is not even the fraud of a "moratorium," so GM felt free to now declare the plants closed. GM also confirmed that it will close another five factories over the next two years, eliminating 11,000 more jobs.

In addition, GM and Ford announced they will "temporarily close" 21 plants in November and December, affecting more than 52,000 workers. In the last five years, GM has slashed 125,000 jobs. It is continuing its previously announced goal of cutting at least another 60,000 jobs over the next several years.

The leaders of the United Auto Workers promised that its new contracts with GM, Ford and Chrysler provided the best job security ever. But, while there are some increases in benefits for temporary layoffs, the agreement is actually helping the auto billionaires eliminate more jobs. □

## "New Directions" confused

Don't expect any help in fighting the UAW bureaucrats from "New Directions." That is the organization of dissident union officials that has claimed it would defend the auto workers. But its second annual conference, held in Chicago November 2-4, showed that New Directions doesn't know which way to turn.

The head of New Directions, Jerry Tucker, claimed that its official position was to "vote no" on the auto contracts. But another major New Directions leader, Don Douglas, president of Local 594 in Pontiac, called for ratification of the contracts. Tucker didn't chastise Douglas, but declared that his actions should not only be tolerated, but welcomed. And so New Directions turned out to be completely impotent in fighting the UAW top leaders.

It is little wonder that this conference was only half the size of the first conference. New Directions is not a real opposition. It is just another group of bureaucrats who are trying to keep the rank and file on a string. □

## Red Cross strike

Some 200 Red Cross strikers and their supporters held a mass rally November 11. They have been on strike since

November 5 in Huntington, Charleston, Parkersburg and Beckly, West Virginia. Last spring, the workers organized and won recognition for a union. Now they are fighting for a wage increase and against concessions in holiday pay and vacation time. Thirty percent of the workers make less than \$5 an hour. □

## Missouri meatpackers on strike

About 650 meatpackers have been on strike against Wilson Brands in Marshall, Missouri since September 22. Wilson makes sausage patties for the McDonald's chain.

The strikers are fighting against unsafe working conditions, company harassment, and takebacks. Wilson wants to cut pay and medical benefits, and institute a rigid attendance policy. Current working conditions are horrendous. For example, workers are forced to pack 28-pound boxes of neck bones at the rate of 70 an hour. And, at the beginning of a shift, up to 10 workers may sign up to use the restroom between break periods—however, the workers can only sign up every other day. □

## Navistar workers strike in several cities

Since the beginning of November, about 8,000 workers have been on strike against Navistar International, the largest manufacturer of medium and heavy-duty trucks in the USA. Picket lines have been set up in Dallas, Atlanta, Chicago, Baltimore, Indianapolis, and Springfield, Ohio. Navistar International used to be called International Harvester. □

## Delta Pride strike enters 8th week

As December opens, 850 catfish workers are holding fast in their strike against Delta Pride in Indianola, Mississippi. Several solidarity rallies have been held as far away as Atlanta and Chicago.

The mostly black women workers are demanding a pay raise to \$7.50 an hour. Many now make only \$3.90 per hour.

But pay is not the only issue in this strike. The workers are also fighting what they call "slavery time" working conditions. Some are expected, for example, to fillet 15 fish per minute. Repetitive motion injuries abound, such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

As well, the workers are treated like dogs. For instance, they are only allowed to use the toilet on the job six times a week. □

# The pro-establishment clinic defense conference

NOW opposes militant clinic defense, and local NOW chapters have more than once issued statements denouncing the militant clinic defense activists as "violent" or red-baiting them. NOW instead calls for reliance on the police and courts and on repressive laws. If they have to shout a slogan, they would prefer it to be "boys in blue, we love you". No matter how many times the police sit on the hands and allow the clinics to be closed for hours at a time, NOW issues statements about how effective their collaboration with the police has been.

So why was NOW hosting a clinic defense conference in Washington on the weekend of Oct. 19-21?

This was a clinic defense conference with a twist—it was opposed to clinic defense. It redefined clinic defense as anything but militant defense.

## The clinic defense conference in March

The roots of this conference go back to the national clinic defense conference in Detroit of March. At this conference there was discussion of militant tactics. And during discussion there was criticism of NOW. The Washington Area Clinic Defense Task Force (WACDTF) opposed its "nonviolent" philosophy to militant clinic defense, was upset at criticism of NOW, and first began to float the idea of another conference which would have a different orientation. It aimed to prevent the consolidation of a militant line among clinic defense activists.

And here it was, in October, co-sponsored by the WACDTF and NOW.

## At the October conference

This conference laid stress on simply supporting the clinic directors. If they tell you to shut up and leave things to your better, why then, that's what you are supposed to do.

The conference put emphasis on injunctions and the fine point of civil litigation. NOW believes in and trusts bourgeois law and order. It supports repressive laws against demonstrations, as well as use of the notorious RICO act. So the conference put emphasis on the legal and technical aspects of clinic activities.

The conference prettified the police. The description for one workshop had to admit that "All too often, local police departments will insist that they 'can't take sides' during a clinic blockade." What a polite way to describe the frequent police collaboration with OR. But this workshop wasn't for denouncing the police for obstruction, or for drawing the conclusion that it wasn't the police, but

the masses, who would defend the clinic. It was simply a matter of "Making police responsive", as the name of the workshop went.

The conference's goal wasn't to arouse the enthusiasm of the working masses, and it didn't even have a workshop on the cuts in health clinics and other miserable conditions forced on working and poor women by the current capitalist crisis.

The conference was interested in "creative" tactics, but the establishment-influenced circles have their own idea of these tactics. One idea from Huntsville is to direct homeless and pregnant women who wish to have and keep their baby to Operation Rescue, and these women are to tell OR "support me, as you say you will". Of course, this means helping OR try to develop a few circles of grateful supporters, if it decides to gain influence by helping a few people. But it is easier for the bourgeois women's groups to have OR deal with the poor than to actually concern themselves with such issues.

This conference sought to ignore the very existence of activists opposing their policies. It didn't discuss the different stands in the movement. It was taken for granted that everything should be subordinated to the pro-establishment figures, the owners of clinics, the lawyers, the police, etc. Their attitude to the few militants that attended was a condescending "little girl, you are out of your league", in the words of the NOW leader from Los Angeles.

## The flasco of accommodating NOW

This conference showed how wrong the March clinic defense conference was to keep quiet on the different trends on the movement, and how wrong it was not to answer the denunciations of mass struggle from the various NOW chapters. NOW didn't grow more civilized. It has instead sought to stifle the movement, destroy all militancy, and isolate all militants who object.

At the March clinic defense conference the majority was willing to criticize various NOW actions, but didn't want to consciously build a trend opposed to NOW. (This majority formed the National Women's Rights Organizing Committee.) It thought it sufficient to engage in some militant actions that went beyond what NOW would do, while seeking an accommodation with NOW, and even welcoming to the conference Karen Sundberg, a Detroit NOW leader who had compiled a statement against the clinic militants. It thought it could unite with the right-wing of the conference, that was opposed to any "NOW bashing" as it called it, without clarifying things in front of the activists. Our

Party was alone at the conference in advocating that NOW's attacks on the movement should be answered clearly and that the activists had to build a trend consciously distinct from NOW's trend.

And what was the result of seeking to accommodate NOW?

Several of the groups that attended the March clinic defense conference also had representatives at NOW's conference. Our Party had one comrade who put forward the path of militancy and openly opposed NOW's policies. But the other groups from the March clinic conference had a different idea about this NOW conference. The clinic defense groups that had opposed "NOW-bashing" were happy with the framework of the conference. The representatives of the Trotskyist RWL, which was the largest force in the majority at the March conference, put forward a list of general demands which it thought the clinic movement should support, but did not denounce the NOW policies but instead found some encouraging signs. This means that not only is the NWROC in crisis, but it doesn't even see

what's wrong when NOW tries to hasten it into irrelevancy or dissolution.

At this point, mass clinic defense is at a low point. This is due in large part to the OR thugs giving up many of their direct blockades. This has made it all the more necessary not just to "keep the clinics open" but to make a political statement against OR and to organize a movement among the masses. But NOW's answer is a sigh of relief at the ebb in mass struggle, and to make their own political statement by backing the police, and courts, and bourgeois politicians. The answer of real supporters of working women's rights has to be to orient themselves to the masses, to confront OR's continuing actions, and to develop work on issues of concern to the masses. Not supporting bourgeois politicians but creating an atmosphere of contempt for them. Not relying on law and order, but developing the initiative of the workers and poor. Not uniting with the establishment groups, but developing the trend opposed to them. □

## The results of NOW's electoral strategy

The National Organization for Women and other pro-establishment women's organizations have recommended that the pro-choice movement put its faith in electing pro-choice politicians. They say that the polls say that pro-choice is overwhelmingly popular, and hence it will be easy to punish any politicians who dares oppose abortion rights. All one has to do is vote for politicians who support women's rights.

So what happened when NOW tried this strategy in the last election?

### Endorsing the politicians of the capitalist offensive

The first thing that happened is that they endorsed establishment politicians, usually Democrats but occasionally Republicans. They didn't fight for candidates who stood for the interests of women's rights, for help to the masses, etc. They simply chose among the candidates committed to carrying out the bourgeois offensive of cutting social programs, stepping up the law and order campaign, and otherwise pushing the masses to the wall. The candidate could stand for cutbacks so severe that they would close medical services for the working masses, and still be accounted "pro-choice" by the bourgeois feminists.

1990 was a year when hatred for politicians was rising. There was discontent at the corrupt politicians feathering their own nests while the banks collapse and the country decays. The anger at incumbents showed this mass discontent, even though it can't change anything so long as it is directed at incumbency and not at the class policies of the

politicians. And in such a year, NOW again championed that all that was needed was to find a few good politicians. As the figleaves dropped from the bourgeois politicians, NOW itself volunteered to do the job. Why, a politician finding himself on his political death-bed could do a last minute conversion and get a NOW endorsement, as Celebreeze did in his losing gubernatorial bid in Ohio.

### What happened at the polls?

But did NOW and NARAL and the Feminist Majority succeed in decisively influencing the elections?

Not particularly.

Some pro-choice candidates won, some lost. And many candidates who were endorsed as pro-choice were hardly sincere about it.

Meanwhile the election as a whole didn't show any change from corruption as usual. There were no big shifts, and the politicians were confirmed on their course of militarism, repression, and pushing the burden of the economic crisis onto the masses.

This was the result that NOW and the bourgeois feminists waxed enthusiastic about after the fact. For example, Kate Michelman, executive director of NARAL, enthused that "The three most coveted prizes in yesterday's election, governors' seats in Florida, Texas and California, shifted from anti-to pro-choice hands and each of those prizes was wrapped in pro-choice votes." (*New York Times*, Nov. 8)

Well, take California. In this supposed great victory, the lukewarm supporter of abortion rights Dianne Feinstein

was defeated by Republican Pete Wilson. Wilson, by the way, voted just before the election to sustain Bush's veto of the civil rights bill. (The Senate failed to override the veto by one vote.) This racist is the great prize NARAL is chuckling over. Meanwhile, social cutbacks in California are devastating health clinics for the masses of poorer women.

Apparently, no matter who won the election in California, Michelman would have claimed it as a victory. Such love for the politicians!

Meanwhile Texas and Florida were ordinary bourgeois politics as usual. It makes little sense for Michelman to claim them, especially as she discreetly ignores those races in which the candidates she favored lost.

### Fiascos for NOW

Actually, there were some notable fiascos for NOW and the bourgeois feminists in the elections.

In Massachusetts, NOW tried to influence the governor's race. First they dealt with the Democratic primary. They sacrificed every consideration but finding a supposedly electable pro-choice candidate. First they endorsed one candidate after another in the Democratic primary, but ended up without any endorsement at all when the notorious John Silber was nominated. They still campaigned for the Democrats in general, but were left speechless between Silber and the moderate Republican Weld. Weld was more-or-less for abortion rights, but also for tremendous cutbacks that will adversely affect the masses of women. Weld won the election.

In Michigan, NOW was for the incumbent, the Democrat, James Blanchard. Blanchard was running against a bitterly anti-abortion ticket. He was also heavily favored to win the election.

But Blanchard was so conservative that he didn't want to campaign in heavily Democratic Detroit—too poor and black. That might upset the voters he wanted to appeal to. As a result, he lost the election by a handful of votes. This was due in large part to a big campaign to cut taxes at the expense of social programs by Republican candidate Engler, which cut into the business-oriented support Blanchard was seeking. But Blanchard still would have won except for low voter turnout in Detroit.

Since NOW was pro-Blanchard, it is worth noting that if they had campaigned in Detroit, and been able to mobilize ordinary people, it might have made a difference. But NOW didn't want to campaign in Detroit any more than Blanchard. Its electoral strategy consists simply of denigrating anything but voting, and then leaving everything to the politicians. The electoral strategy is not a strategy of going among the widest masses, but of abandoning them.

In Ohio, the bourgeois pro-choice groups endorsed the Democrat candidate for governor Celebreeze, who had had a miraculous conversion to the pro-choice position just prior to the elections. Celebreeze lost.

### A policy of demobilizing the people

These election results showed that the bourgeois pro-choice groups accomplished nothing. Their main electoral activity was to use talk about the elections to justify their opposition to mass militancy. They sought to have activists ignore the actual harmful stands of politicians and cheer on the establishment politicians, even those who are known for stands that directly harm the masses of working women. Their real activity in the elections was not to terrorize reactionary politicians, but to preach to the establishment that they are loyal and fight hard to keep the masses in line.

As well, the results refute the view of the bourgeois women's groups that because the polls say people overwhelming support abortion rights it is easy to win capitalist elections. One group even put "80%" into its name to flaunt that 80% of the population supported the pro-choice stand. The implication is that bourgeois politics would be a breeze.

But bourgeois politics is known for demagoguery and the power of the monied interests, and the anti-abortion position has money and it drapes itself in various measures that are presented not as abolishing abortion, but simply restricting it. And some of these measures are either popular with the bourgeoisie or cater to confusions among the masses—for example, parental notification or consent laws. This is also shown by the same polls that NOW and others use to talk about their overwhelming support, which claim that a majority is against banning all abortions, but also against unrestricted abortion rights.

In any case, to rally the masses for abortion rights, requires going among the masses. It requires explaining the issues to the masses of workers and youth. It requires finding those actions that strike at the oppressive forces and rouse the enthusiasm of ordinary people. In the course of confronting the anti-abortion bullies, the masses can learn about the real features of these thugs and develop progressive convictions. And this must be reinforced by linking up the pro-choice movement with a struggle on the issues that vitally affect working and poor women—both other issues of women's rights and issues of defense of the workers' conditions against the bourgeois offensive, as this offensive bear especially heavily on women.

This type of campaign creates its own public opinion among the masses. It is not enough to sit in an easy chair and read polls, but one must undertake the type of action that changes the public opinion among the masses.

NOW's electoral campaign showed that it stands against mobilizing the masses in their interests. It endorsed candidates who stand for attacks on the conditions of the masses of women, if only these candidates paid lip service to "pro-choice". It denounced the very actions that reach the masses. And it preached politics-as-usual to an electorate that is increasingly cynical and upset about such politics. □

# The old class struggle will arise in modern clothes

*Fourth National Conference of the  
Marxist-Leninist Party, USA  
Fall 1990*

*The December issue of the Workers' Advocate reports on the holding of the Fourth National Conference and contains its resolutions on the current tasks of the class struggle. Starting with this issue, the Supplement will be reprinting a number of speeches from this conference and other materials useful for the study of the questions raised there. Below we include part of the opening remarks, and elsewhere in this issue we reprint two speeches on the struggle for women's rights.*

Comrades, welcome.

We meet today in the midst of major world events. The Fourth National Conference takes place as world events are bringing in a new situation, whether it is the alignment of the great powers in the world or the alignment of trends among the working masses. This situation is being ushered in a most painful way—not by revolutionary upsurge but by the collapse of the old and the victory chants of the reaction. Yet these events will lead to the class struggle coming forward in new and sharper ways.

One of these historic events has been the collapse of world revisionism. The stranglehold of revisionism over tens of millions of people has been broken. Not in a liberating way by a victory of a left upsurge by the working masses. Instead it is being done in the most painful way, with the euphoria over the free-market, with the so-called shock therapies being administered to the working masses of Eastern Europe, with the mass ingrained identification of revisionism and Marxism and the subsequent hatred for socialism and Marxism, and with the unleashing of national antagonisms, racism, and perhaps other catastrophes.

Yet sooner or later the revisionist bubble had to burst. However painful the process, the clearing away of the revisionist corruption, was necessary to clear the ground for a new development of struggle. We neither lament the fall of the revisionist regimes nor gloss off the difficulties of the period ahead, but search for the ways to help bring forward the new class struggles that are bound to come.

The masses will discover that the results of these current world events are by no means what the bourgeoisie promised them.

The bourgeoisie trumpeted the end of the cold war and the settling of various hot wars. But this has not brought an era of peace. Instead there is a massive war mobilization in the Persian Gulf.

The bourgeoisie trumpeted the victory of the so-called "free market". Yet developing economic crisis is putting a dark cloud over the masses in the U.S., while "shock

therapy" and the whip of starvation is being unleashed on Eastern Europe.

The bourgeoisie promised freedom, and there is the rise of racism, religious intolerance, the new attacks on women's rights, etc.

Against these events, will come a new mass resistance. Just as the events at the abortion clinics brought for a time a new development of the movement, just as the racist wave is bringing forward opposition, so will the present events of world history lead to mass desire for change throughout the world. The old class struggle will peak out, but in new modern clothes. The old struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the old struggle between reformism and the path of class struggle, is arising again in new forms.

And it will be up to the working class activists, up to the forces of workers' communism, to be the midwives that help the masses bring class issues to the fore. Reformism and liberalism would smother the independent voice of the masses. But despite them, communism will grow out of the most fundamental contradictions wracking this corrupt and outmoded capitalist society.

\* \* \*

This conference will deal with many of these developments. It centers on the women's movement and the study of Soviet history and socialism. And it will also contain reviews of our international work and of party affairs.

The pro-choice movement such as clinic defense has been one of the fronts where a movement arose that drew in new people. The bourgeoisie's fostering of "pro-life" attacks on the masses to develop a right-wing force backfired on them with the development of clinic defense action. The struggle against "Operation Rescue" gave an impetus to many activists that, for a time, drew them in practice beyond the ordinary bounds that the pro-establishment organizations would impose on them.

Inside this movement we saw the struggle that developed between political trends, and we participated as the independent voice of the masses. And left reformism proved incompetent to direct the clinic defense movement, and its role proved to be smothering the independent motion of the masses.

As well, there is not only the experience of this work, but judging where the struggle for women's rights will go as changed circumstances and changed tactics of the bourgeoisie affect it.

...

A center of the present world ideological struggle is on socialism. The bourgeoisie is crossing its fingers and hoping

that socialism is six feet under. The trends in Eastern Europe that hoped to establish a social-democratic socialism, or Swedish-style socialism, have been grievously disappointed. Socialism of the class struggle or capitalist domination, whether of the revisionist or "free-market" variety, is how life is posing the issue. And the contrast of revisionism to socialism and the analysis of the roots of revisionism remains one of the key questions before us and other contingents of workers' communism around the world.

Our party started some *time ago* a deeper study of soviet history and of socialism in general. This study is by no means finished: on the contrary, we are still in the midst of it, with a long ways to go. The accumulation of theory and factual material has taken in a number of unexpected turns on historical and theoretical questions of importance. At this conference, we will not be presenting conclusions, but outlining the developments that have occurred in the study.

[The speech continued onto the proposed agenda.] □

## The clinic defense movement and the working class trend

*Speech at the Fourth National Conference of the MLP, USA in Fall 1990. It has been edited for publication.*

Comrades, in the period since our Third Congress (of fall 1988) the pro-choice movement has been perhaps the most lively protest movement we have been involved with. In this speech I would like to cover, first, the objective development of the movement, and second, some issues of our work in the movement.

### The 1970s

The pro-choice movement of the last two years did not just spring out of nowhere. It has been a response to a bourgeois offensive against women's abortion rights, an offensive which has been escalating for a decade and a half.

Ever since the bourgeoisie was forced to grant women the right to legal abortion with the *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision of 1973, the right-wing of the bourgeoisie has been trying to take that right away. In the 1970s the anti-abortion movement was pushed by right-wing religious and political circles, and it was part of the political agenda of the right-wing crusade built up around Reagan and the Moral Majority.

In the late 70s a number of legislative acts restricted abortion rights. Most notable was the passage of the Hyde Amendment banning the use of federal funds for most abortions (which was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1977), and the subsequent elimination of Medicaid funding for abortions in thirty some states. Carter opposed abortion, but the Reaganites made it a crusade and gave vigorous support to the anti-abortion movement. As we have exposed in the *Workers' Advocate*, the right-wing of the Republican Party consciously used the abortion issue to recruit mindless foot-soldiers for the whole crusade against the working masses.

### Under the Reagan-Bush administration

With the support of the Reagan administration the anti-abortion fanatics became more aggressive in the 1980s. There was a dramatic increase in terrorism against women's health clinics and clinic workers. Scores of clinics were bombed. All around the country clinic workers and doctors were subject to death threats and harassment at clinics and at home.

In a number of rural states these terrorist tactics all but eliminated abortion rights for poor rural women. Doctors simply wouldn't take the risk of performing abortions. Meanwhile Ronald Reagan, who made the campaign against international terrorism the centerpiece of his foreign policy propaganda, blew kisses to the domestic anti-abortion terrorists. During the 1984 election campaign the Reaganites used anti-abortion thugs and religious fanatics as racist goons to disrupt their opponents' rallies and to attack black masses in the South. But the terrorism and

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bigotry of the anti-abortion fanatics only increased the pro-choice sentiment among the masses.

During this time, although pro-choice sentiment continued to grow, no really mass pro-choice movement broke out in the sense of what we have seen in the last two years. NOW (the National Organization for Women), NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League), and Planned Parenthood—the bourgeois-led women's organizations which pretty much had a monopoly of the field—were not oriented to building a mass movement to defend abortion rights. They confined their activities in the main to the bourgeois electoral arena and to lobbying congressmen and legislators. Occasionally they would organize a demonstration against an anti-abortion referendum or some legislation, but in the main their work among the masses was to distribute stickers saying "I'm pro-choice, and I vote".

### **The issue heats up in 1988-9**

Then, starting in 1988, the Reaganites made a big push on the abortion issue.

On one hand the Supreme Court, now stacked with Reagan appointees, signaled that it was considering whether to overturn or sharply curtail the *Roe vs. Wade* decision granting abortion. It announced it was going to review the *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* case, where a lower court had struck down a 1986 Missouri law. This law was aimed at banning almost all abortions, without directly saying so, by putting one restriction after another on them. In this way the Missouri legislature hoped to get around the *Roe vs. Wade* decision legalizing abortion rights. (In July 1989 the Supreme Court would uphold the Missouri law.)

On the other hand, the anti-abortion fanatics, especially Operation Rescue (OR), were unleashed to step up attacks on clinics with blockades to close them down. They began, in connection with the 1988 presidential campaign, first in Atlanta during the Democratic convention and later around the country. The capitalist news media promoted OR to the skies as supposedly a militant movement of the masses. They proclaimed that abortion would be the divisive issue of the 90s, similar to the movement of the 60s and early 70s against the Viet Nam war.

This frontal assault on women's abortion rights angered the pro-choice masses. They began to come out on the streets to oppose OR's clinic blockades. This provided a *focal point for mass* participation in the fight against the anti-abortion offensive. In many cities there was widespread sentiment to confront the holy bullies.

### **The liberals oppose confronting the right-wing bullies, but mass action develops**

But all over the country the leaders of NOW and NARAL did not want such a confrontation. They preached that pro-choice people should stay away from clinics and

let the police handle the situation. But even with NOW's reputation as the women's organization in the US, and despite its connections with the bourgeois media, it was unable to prevent people from going to the clinics.

I can recall going to the first clinic defense in Boston, which was at a clinic about a block from the downtown Park Street subway station. A lone NOW leafleter was standing at the station leafletting people—and telling them not to go to the clinic but to stay at Park Street for a NOW rally and picket. No one listened to her. 300 to 400 pro-choice activists, ordinary women and men who had heard about the clinic attack on the radio or from an ad hoc group of feminists and leftists, streamed past this lone NOW leafleter.

The issue was too hot. When OR launched a serious attack on the clinics in any of the bigger cities, it was impossible, if there was any left movement or history of a women's movement in that area, for anyone to prevent a clinic defense movement from emerging.

### **Clinic defense organizations emerge**

Thus, as the clinic defense movement developed, there was a certain rift or contradiction with the bourgeois leadership of NOW and the other pro-establishment women's organizations. In the cities where the demand for clinic defense was strong and NOW refused to organize it, or heavy-handedly tried to clamp down on militancy, activists looked to someone else to organize the clinic defenses. In those areas separate clinic defense organizations emerged.

But in general, these clinic defense organizations were initiated and dominated by left-reformists, including Trotskyists, revisionists and even straight-out Democrats. They tried to paper over or bridge the rift between NOW and the pro-choice activists, rather than developing a mass trend consciously opposed to the liberal bourgeois trend. In practice these opportunist forces played a centrist role between the bourgeois trend of NOW, NARAL, etc. and the building of an independent trend.

Many new people joined the clinic defense movement and, like most of the new people who took up the pro-choice cause, they were politically inexperienced. They resented NOW's opposition to the clinic defense actions; they often resented the arrogance of many NOW leaders; but frequently they regarded NOW as simply stuffy, weak sisters fighting the same enemy, however ineffectively. They did not see that NOW's sabotage of the clinic defense movement came from its bourgeois class basis and policy. They did not see the need to be independent of the bourgeois political parties, and in fact not a few were pulled into campaigning for "pro-choice" bourgeois politicians.

Thus it was natural that new pro-choice activists who wanted to defend the clinics would find reasonable the centrist stand of the clinic defense organizations dominated by the opportunist forces. The weakness of such a stand

was shown by what happened in Boston. NOW was astute enough to change its tactics in that city, call clinic defense actions, and posture a bit, while still trying to hold back the confrontations at the clinics and channel everything into liberal politics centered on the Democratic Party. This sufficed to block the attempts of the Maoist RCP (Revolutionary Communist Party) and the trotskyists to float a clinic defense organization.

### Centrism

The centrist forces retarded the political development of the new pro-choice activists under their influence. They generally opposed the raising of political slogans at clinic defenses, and sometimes opposed raising any slogans at all under the NOW-type excuse of not disturbing the patients—as if any patients could get through unless the OR blockades were broken. Ironically, while the clinic organizations arose because of the mass sentiment to defend the clinics, the centrist tactics held back the development of mass resistance. For example, consider the tactics of BACAOR (the Bay Area Coalition Against Operation Rescue) in the San Francisco Bay Area, where thousands joined the clinic defense movement. BACAOR, in agreement with NOW, split the activists up fifty to a hundred to a clinic waiting for OR to attack, and they opposed concentrating everyone on the hit clinic once OR had attacked. This not only discouraged most people from staying in the movement, but it was also an obstacle to the majority of activists gaining much experience in the confrontations with OR.

The opportunist organizations advocating centrist policies did not want a complete break with NOW. They might complain about this or that policy of NOW, but they discouraged an open fight with NOW. They put hopes in NOW, or they oriented activists to look towards NOW as a source of numbers. Not only did they promote illusions in NOW, they promoted illusions in the trade union bureaucracy and other reformists.

For example, the Trotskyist RWL (Revolutionary Workers League), in the clinic defense organizations that it dominates such as CDAR (Committee in Defense of Abortion Rights) in Detroit and Ann Arbor, as well as at the national clinic defense conference in March, promotes the present-day unions as the way to draw the workers into the pro-choice movement, and play down the contradictions between the workers and the pro-establishment trade union hacks. In practice, their idea of drawing in the masses reduces to nothing more than sucking up to the reformist networks in this country. RWL's program for the NWROC (the National Women's Rights Organizing Committee, which resulted from the March clinic defense conference) plays down the contradictions that have arisen between the clinic defense activists and the bourgeois-led women's organizations, and the existence of different trends in the pro-choice movement. It emphasizes a laundry list of demands. Many demands may be OK but they are put

forward in a way that papers over the controversies in the movement, and avoids the most vital things needed to help the movement go forward.

We recently had a chance to see how this laundry list approach worked in practice. For example, we had a comrade who went to the NOW's misnamed clinic defense conference in Washington D.C. this October; it should have been called the anti-clinic defense conference. RWL also was there. What their representative did at this conference, rather than opposing NOW's clinic defense policy of relying on the police, blocking militancy, and liquidating mass action, was to put forward various demands in a general way.

### Growth of the clinic defense movement

Nevertheless, despite all the sabotage of the clinic defense movement by NOW and despite the centrist policies that retarded the political development of the activists in the clinic defense organizations and their contact with the masses, the intensity of OR's attacks and the wide media coverage of the abortion rights controversy fueled a growth of the clinic defense movement in both numbers and militancy, at least through the first nine months of 1989.

The clinic defense movement formed the most militant contingent of the much broader pro-choice movement and the still broader pro-choice mass sentiment. Clinic defense won the sympathy of and encouraged the wider numbers of pro-choice sympathizers. Meanwhile, around NOW's call for the April ninth demonstration in Washington, D.C., pro-choice meetings and rallies were organized on college campuses throughout the country. There were also local rallies and demonstrations. Activists went after the anti's (anti-abortion bullies) by picketing or disrupting their recruiting meetings, and demonstrations against leading figures of the anti-abortion movement such as Randall Terry and Joseph Scheidler.

Although NOW pushed bourgeois electoral politics on April ninth, the sheer size of that pro-choice demonstration gave further impetus to the clinic defense movement and to pro-choice activities. For example in Boston, three weeks after the April ninth demonstration, OR attacked a clinic. This time, instead of three or four hundred people showing up to counter OR, there were between a thousand and fifteen hundred.

Then on July third the Supreme Court handed down the Webster Decision giving states the right to restrict abortion rights. It provoked outrage among working women and many men across the country. In many cities there were large and quite militant demonstrations denouncing the decision. In Boston the next day, the spontaneous fight with the police, and the march, and the overwhelming response of onlookers who burnt flags at the fourth of July celebration on the Esplanade, illustrated the depth of pro-choice anger. And suddenly thousands of politicians across the country decided to present themselves as "pro-choice".

in order to garner votes.

OR, which had been declining and becoming demoralized under the blows of the clinic defense movement, launched a new spurt of activity—but it was met by even more militant clinic defenders. It was during this period that some of the most bitter battles were fought.

### A shift in tactics

Yet the bourgeoisie was beginning to shift tactics in the wake of the Webster Decision and the mass response. The mainstream bourgeois began to feel that OR's spectacular clinic blockades were counterproductive in a period of considerable mass arousal against the anti-abortion offensive. Mainly OR was producing a bigger clinic defense movement. And if the police had to defend OR all the time it would only politicize the pro-choice movement. And so the bourgeoisie began to pull on an already demoralized OR's leash. OR was slapped with injunctions, restraining orders and fines. In Boston, where the police had protected OR quite militantly for months, they stood aside and let the pro-choice demonstrators kick their butts.

As a result of the pressure of the clinic defense movement and the shift in bourgeois tactics, OR declined precipitously. By early 1990 its paid office staff dropped from twenty-one to three. It no longer launched weekend clinic blockades in the big cities. Instead it preferred smaller pickets that harassed women going into the clinics and surprise weekday sit-ins at clinics with small forces, and it shifted much of its operations to smaller cities.

But this does not mean the attack on abortion rights has gone away or that there no longer is an issue of clinic defense.

Since the Webster decision many politicians have been promising that abortion rights are safe with them. But, in fact, the government has been picking away at abortion rights through the state legislatures and through budget cuts. And the Supreme Court has become even more reactionary.

While the government chips away at abortion rights from above, the bourgeoisie also keeps the anti-abortion movement alive, although presently on a somewhat shorter leash. It uses the anti-abortion fanatics to keep up pressure on the masses, and it keeps them in reserve to use in the future for further assaults. While OR has declined it has not gone away. Randall Terry has declared 1990 as a year of rebuilding and '91 or '92 as the year of the next offensive. Even now OR is launching some fairly intense attacks in smaller towns. And the Catholic Church has stepped up its own organizing of anti-abortion actions and prayer rallies in front of clinics and remains single-minded in the pursuit of this anti-woman crusade. It has even hired a public relations firm. Meanwhile, from OR to the mainstream anti-abortion groups, there is greater talk of the legitimacy of using violence to close clinics, and terrorism against clinics and clinic personnel is on the rise.

### NOW sits on the movement

At the same time NOW and other bourgeois-led women's organizations have become even more opposed to the clinic defense movement and to mass demonstrations. In the height of the ferment following the Webster decision NOW struck a militant pose and called for a national demonstration in Washington for November. A section of NOW reflected the mass anger in its own way and pushed the call for a women's party through the NOW convention. But NOW's leaders simply used this as a ploy for demanding a bigger role in the capitalist parties, particularly the Democratic Party. Meanwhile within a couple of weeks Molly Yard was touring the country calling on people to vote for the "pro-choice" politicians of the Democratic and Republican Parties. At a rally in Boston, one of the bourgeois women's leaders harangued the crowd—don't bother coming out to the rallies if you aren't registered to vote. For NOW, talk of a third party and campaigning for capitalist politicians continues to go hand in hand.

For the establishment women's leaders, everything was to turn on the state to state electoral arena. In agreement with Planned Parenthood and NARAL, who were even more to the right, NOW canceled the march aspect of its November 12 demonstration and turned it into a electoral rally. When OR turned in large part from trying to close clinics to harassing clinics, those NOW chapters that had at one time participated to a certain extent in clinic defense generally turned to open opposition to any confrontations at the clinics at all, and instead supported at most passive escorting.

Nor has NOW shown any more interest in calling national demonstrations. At its recent clinic defense conference, the leader of the San Francisco Bay Area NOW chapter raised a proposal for another national demonstration, only to see the national NOW leadership drop the issue like a hot potato. Everything is to be channeled into tailing the capitalist politicians, and they achieved pathetic results. Even some bourgeois commentators are talking about how the issue of abortion, which a year ago was trumpeted as the deciding factor, proved a dud this time.

NOW is sitting like a dead weight on the pro-choice movement. And this policy is giving the bourgeoisie space to continue chopping away at abortion piecemeal from above, and it allows the anti-abortion movement to try to regroup without mass confrontations.

### The crisis in clinic defense

Meanwhile the clinic defense organizations dominated by centrist policies are in crisis. They have not found a way to react to the anti's shifting from clinic closings to the less dramatic tactic of harassment pickets and "prayer rallies" and the pressure of NOW's further turn to the right. They have carried out some actions to confront the anti's harassment pickets, and we have lent our influence

in this direction. There have been some demonstrations against anti-abortion leaders and anti-abortion legislation. But generally they are stagnating and collapsing.

Thus today the pro-choice movement is going through very difficult times. At this point things are too much in flux to make hard predictions. But this much is for sure, the struggle that is still going on should not be abandoned. We must pay attention to the sparks of struggle and conflict that emerge and develop our tactics accordingly. We must pay attention particularly to those aspects of the struggle for women's rights that have an oppositional edge and that generate a rift between the masses and the pro-establishment leaders, such as the clinic defense movement did.

In the next section of this speech I would like to deal with some issues about our work in this movement.

### The Party turns to the abortion issue

First of all the party's work on abortion rights did not begin in 1988. At the beginning of 1985 the *Workers' Advocate* published a big article denouncing the anti-abortion movement as a major front of Reaganism. It pointed out that it was not only an assault on working and poor women's rights but the bourgeoisie was using it as a means of building a fascist corps in service of the whole Reaganite offensive. The *Workers' Advocate* called on the working class to oppose the anti-abortion movement and defend abortion rights in particular and the rights of working women in general. This article sparked considerable discussion in the party, and this helped refine the Party's views and increase the general awareness of the importance of the struggle over abortion rights. From this time on the *Workers' Advocate* kept up a continual denunciation of activities of the anti-abortion movement and increased coverage in general of the Reaganite assault on women's rights. It also paid more attention to criticizing the pro-establishment views of NOW.

Between 1985 and '88 there was a pro-choice rally or demonstration here and there, and our branches could link up with them, but there weren't many of these actions. There was some ferment, but there wasn't much of an active movement drawing in new people, as there would be later. But because of the preparatory work by the *Workers' Advocate* and the local branches, when the abortion rights issue sprang onto the center of the national stage in the summer and fall of 1988, our party was ready to jump into the fray.

The situation varied greatly from city to city. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, and Philadelphia there was an intense and sustained struggle to defend the clinics from repeated OR blockade attempts, in which OR usually had some degree of police protection. In the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Boston there was a large clinic defense movement and a large pro-choice movement in general. In Detroit the clinic defense and pro-choice movements were much smaller but just as militant. In

Chicago, New York, and Buffalo, clinic blockades were less frequent and the clinic defense and pro-choice movements relatively smaller. In Seattle the anti's rarely attacked the clinics, and thus a pro-choice movement in response never really got going. Everywhere but Boston and Buffalo, the main actions were called by clinic defense organizations dominated by opportunist political forces with centrist policies. As you can see, the situation was indeed quite varied. Nevertheless there were certain common features and certain common questions were raised by the situation.

### Into the clinic defense movement

Wherever possible our branches threw themselves into and pushed forward the clinic defense movement. It was here that the direct confrontation against the anti-abortion movement was taking place, and that the right-wing crusade was being defeated in its attempt to pose as the voice of the people. It was this that formed the heart of the pro-choice movement. And this was the most oppositional front of struggle, the front where the masses could learn the most about the state and the different political forces.

Generally that section of the pro-choice movement that participated in or sympathized with clinic defense tended to develop some contradiction with NOW and the bourgeois women's organizations. The question we faced was how to approach the clinic defense activists, how to encourage their development into an independent trend separate from the bourgeois stands and politics of NOW and the reformists, how to foster their political education, and how to encourage these activists to link up with the working masses.

In general our tactics have been 1) to push forward mass militancy, and 2) to clarify the different class stands and develop the political differentiation between trends. We have supported the confrontations with the anti's and the police, worked to draw the masses into militant clinic defense, drawn out the class political content of the anti-abortion offensive, and exposed and denounced NOW's role in holding back the pro-choice movement as a whole and sabotaging and attacking clinic defense actions.

In Boston, once NOW decided to join the clinic defenses; they adopted the tactic of having a "pro-choice presence", and trying to get people to stay on the opposite side of the street from OR, which they did in conjunction with the police. We fought this policy by raising militant slogans and leading contingents across the street to confront OR. Eventually even NOW had to join us across the street, while still keeping people back and promoting waiting for the police to clear out OR. While the police dilly-dallied, we raised slogans like "They couldn't keep it closed without police protection" and "Who will keep the clinics open? We will! We will!" Step by step the militancy of the movement rose. At the same time we developed agitation against NOW's policy of holding back militancy and explaining why the state was protecting OR, and why we needed to defend clinics and abortion rights with mass

active resistance.

Boston NOW tried to limit the size of the clinic defense actions by refusing to publicize clinic actions in advance, instead giving people the advice to stay by their phones waiting for calls, call which often never came. We fought to draw the masses into the movement by leafletting widely, even at NOW rallies, and posterizing for clinic defenses at hospitals, factories, and at transit stops. In the Bay Area comrades countered BACAOR's and NOW's policy of splitting the pro-choice forces up at scores of clinics, and we issued leaflets calling for people to concentrate at a definite site and then go to the hit clinic. Also, when the comrades found out where the hit clinic was, they would send people to other clinics and organize them to go to the hit clinic. BACAOR's practice often ended up hinging on the determined actions of a few organizers, who went to every confrontation and did some militant, praiseworthy things, but who often held back the bulk of the pro-choice forces around BACAOR from these same confrontations and actions. Our comrades put forward that, instead, the clinic defense movement should be built on the basis of mass political confrontation with OR.

In every area our branches were the ones who brought to the clinic defense and rallies those banners and placards that denounced the anti-abortion crusade as part of the capitalist offensive against the masses. (As well, at times it fell to us to be the ones to encourage the use of any placards at all, and we would bring signs with the most basic slogans to distribute, so that the people would know that the activists were demonstrating on the pro-choice side.) We encouraged the shouting of slogans, and we also used slogans and songs to get the political message out, and one comrade was inspired to write a short story on these issues. The various branches and *Workers' Advocate* put out materials exposing the pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist nature of the anti-abortion movement. The branches and *Workers' Advocate* summed up the clinic defenses and other pro-choice events in newspapers and leaflets, giving a picture of the sweep of the movement and its level in any particular area, and drawing out the role of the police, the politicians, and the different political trends. These articles were widely read in the movement and often, after a period of work, we were looked to for this reporting. This work contributed to the militancy and consciousness of the movement.

### The polemic with NOW

Our party alone has kept up a running polemic against NOW both in a national newspaper and local leaflets and articles. NOW has not been able to carry out a single act of sabotage of the movement without our Party exposing it in our press and or carrying on verbal denunciation among the masses at pro-choice events and clinic defenses. We have exposed the racist and anti-working class nature of NOW's alliance with the population control people. We have kept up a running exposure of how their policy of

backing the bourgeois politicians is weakening the movement.

There are other left groups who complain about this or that policy of NOW, and have run some polemical articles in their national newspapers with a certain criticism of NOW. But we are the ones who took the polemic to the masses, who held that it was important to discuss publicly, and among the pro-choice activists and demonstrators and among workers and students, that NOW follows a bourgeois class policy and that the movement should be built on an independent basis. And we are well known throughout the movement for this stand. Given the inexperience of the new activists, the limits to how far the struggle has developed, and the diehard orientation towards the reformists on the part of the opportunist organizations, we cannot expect masses of activists to take up a determined struggle for an independent movement any time soon. But people have been thinking over what we have to say.

### Work with the clinic defense organizations

Outside Boston and Buffalo, our branches have generally been in areas where there is a clinic defense organization or coalition separate from NOW or the other bourgeois-led women's groups, and these organizations have been dominated by groups following a centrist or left-reformist policy. While our direct party work in the movement, at actions, and among the working masses, remains primary, branches have supplemented this with work with these organizations. As we said before, although they are dominated by opportunist groups and sometimes only a handful of unaffiliated people attend their organizational meetings, they have the following of clinic defense activists. These clinic defense organizations are generally loose, so that anyone pro-choice is free to attend, and our comrades have been able to attend many meetings and raise our views and proposals without tying our hands to what the centrist leaders will agree with and without getting bogged down in coalition politics.

We take a serious attitude towards these meetings and put forward careful proposals about a movement where we ourselves are taking part, but that does not mean subordinating ourselves to these clinic defense organizations. Generally, it is not a question of formally being in or out of these organizations, but all active forces can attend. On the other hand, comrades in Los Angeles did directly join PRO-ACT (Progressive Action for Reproductive Rights), the centrist-dominated clinic defense organization that arose when NOW clamped down on the local pro-choice militants and the Fund for the Feminist Majority clamped down on the militants in the Clinic Defense Alliance-Los Angeles. Our comrades joined PRO-ACT as it emerged, and as long as it was active and alive, they worked in it, and combined work around PRO-ACT with their own vigorous and independent work.

In the meetings of these clinic defense groups we have advocated appealing to the working masses directly. We

have made concrete proposals for strengthening actions, about how to draw in the working masses, about how they should be organized so as to make a political statement for the pro-choice stand and defeat not just OR's blockades but also OR's political objectives.

We have also discussed the experience of local actions and the role of the police and the bourgeois forces. We have raised the issue of NOW's anti-movement policy, and called on the clinic defense activists to reply to the NOW statements denouncing them and to draw a line between their policy and NOW's. We have advocated that the movement rely on its own strength and appeal directly to the masses, and not rely on or have illusions in the union hacks, the so-called community leaders, or the bourgeois women's movement.

Some of our proposals have been accepted. For example, CDAR in Detroit recently discussed what type of action to have against Michigan's parental consent law. MLP comrades put forward that there should be an action aimed at appealing directly to the masses, and not just an event for the media. CDAR agreed to hold two events, one of which was a march through the Gratiot Farmers Market. Of course it fell to our party to do most of the work for this march, as the Trotskyist RWL, which dominates CDAR, didn't have their hearts in it because they were counting on a rally in downtown Detroit, at a deserted location, which would be a media event held with NOW participation. The march through the Farmers' Market, which was full of working people, was well received. But the downtown rally with NOW, which RWL was so hot about because they thought NOW would draw bourgeois press coverage, was attended by only a few NOW members and was boycotted by the press. So much for the view that subordinating oneself to the bourgeois forces will get you rich quick.

By carrying out an independent policy in the clinic defense movement, by taking every opportunity to discuss this policy with activists, and by pointing out the fiasco of centrist policy, we have worked to strengthen the pro-choice movement and clarify political issues among the new activists.

### **On the ebb in clinic defense**

This brings us to another problem that we are grappling with. How can links be maintained with the new militants now that clinic defense activity is declining and the pro-choice movement as a whole is at a much lower level? Given the shift in tactics by the bourgeoisie and the government, and given the fact that OR has shifted from the more dramatic attempts to blockade clinics to harassing them, there would be a decline in the clinic defense movement no matter what. Fighting the anti's when there are 20 or 30 picketing a clinic is a lot less comprehensible to the masses than fighting to keep the doors open. So in other words, even without the sabotage of NOW, this movement would have declined somewhat. But on top of the other factors, NOW and the other pro-establishment

women's organizations are exerting heavier pressure against any militant clinic defense activity, and they are sitting like a lead weight on any other mass actions for women's rights.

In this situation our branches have adopted a number of tactics to keep up the militant side of the pro-choice movement. We have sought to keep up militant clinic defense as far as possible, and we have opposed the policy of NOW and many of the centrist leaders of turning clinic defense movement into a passive escort service. In Chicago, ECDC (the Emergency Clinic Defense Committee) was asked to hold weekly counter-pickets against the anti's by a clinic director whose clinic has been targeted every Saturday for over a year by the anti's. Our Chicago comrades supported ECDC taking up this defense and advocate making it into a militant denunciation of the anti's. This confrontation has deflated the anti's, but this weekly effort, at a time when the movement is at a low level generally, has been hard to maintain. In Detroit comrades have also advocated that CDAR counter the anti's at their harassment pickets whenever possible. They have also advocated in the struggle against the parental consent law that CDAR organize demonstrations and distribution among the masses. In Buffalo comrades were able to join the escort movement and for a while develop a trend of confronting the anti's more militantly at the clinics. The MLP-Boston has begun calling counter-demonstrations with some success against the joint Catholic Church/OR prayer rallies held in front of the clinics. It has also been carrying on a running polemic against NOW's liquidation of clinic defense and mass demonstrations in favor of a disastrous bourgeois electoral drive, where NOW supported first this and then that candidate for Massachusetts governor and was finally left without anyone to endorse when the Democratic Party nominated the notorious John Silber, the man who hates blacks, and protesters, and women. But even then, NOW continued to organize in favor of the Democratic Party.

It has been correct to keep up clinic defense as long as possible. This has been the part of the struggle that has had the most oppositional edge and that has given most opportunity to the masses to put their stamp on the movement. It is difficult for the new activists, or for us, to have the same impact in the electoral or legislative battles that come up. The initiative tends to pass to those who can run candidates, and running independent candidates is not practical at the moment. Thus the bourgeois women's groups are more on their home turf, the whole atmosphere is less confrontational, and the tendency is to speculate on which bourgeois candidate to support. Mostly on such a front we have been limited to general agitation and exposure.

But there have been some other forms of the movement, such as demonstrations against leading anti-abortion movement figures and fund-raisers, where militancy can arise and which we have supported and sought to develop. But with the general decline of the pro-choice movement these actions too have declined a lot.

In general the pro-choice movement is in a period of ebb. In this situation we stood against the rush to abandon struggle, and we have experimented with various forms to maintain the militant wing of the movement. We have discussed the ebb with activists and sought to show the class and political forces involved. And by our activities we have raised the prestige of the party among a section of the militants. But we have not found any magic forms for reviving the movement. The movement may go to sleep for a while despite our best efforts. It is correct to work to maintain contact with the militant section of the pro-choice movement. It is correct to champion the movement even in its period of ebb, and to keep up such actions as are possible. But our branches have also correctly been careful not to exhaust our forces in a moralist battle to maintain the movement beyond what objective conditions will permit.

With the decline of the movement from its peak of a little over a year ago, our branches and the *Workers' Advocate* have had more time to develop not only pro-choice agitation directed at the workers, but also agitation on other issues of women's rights. We are particularly interested in other issues facing women workers. This leads us to the next issue I would like to deal with, and that is our work directly in the working class.

### At the workplace and community

Comrades, our work in the class is our basic work. And as with every political movement we take part in, we have attempted to mobilize the workers to participate in this movement together with us. We want to bring the workers class into politics, for them to gain experience, and for them to put a proletarian stamp on the movement. From the beginning our branches distributed leaflets and other literature at factories and other workplaces, explaining the importance of fighting the anti-abortion movement and of defending abortion rights and all rights of working women. We have stepped this up over the last year with a steady stream of pro-choice agitation in the workplaces, using calls for movement events, reporting on clinic defenses and other actions, contrasting the police treatment of strikers and the kid glove treatment of the holy bullies i.e. we sought many different angles for arousing interest among the workers.

Comrades in San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, and Detroit used a special mini-pamphlet on "Why the workers should defend abortion rights". This is a special kind of literature that is not tied to one particular event, but is longer term and explains the basic principles. It was developed for distribution in working class neighborhoods, factories, and the areas around clinics. The Chicago Branch also organized an International Women's Day March in the Latino working class Pilsen area. Through our leaflets posters and verbal agitation we attempted to draw workers from our work places into the actions. Only a few workers have actually come. But given the long-standing non-political atmosphere that has been promoted among the

American working class and the present low level of the class struggle in general, the response has been good, if we compare it to other movements in the recent past.

And although few workers actually came out to the clinic defenses and other events as a result of our workplace work, we did find tremendous interest in discussing the movement. I know for myself that nearly everyone on my shift would question me about every clinic defense, demanding a blow by blow account of what happened. Workers followed the abortion rights issue in the bourgeois press and would initiate discussion denouncing the anti's. A large section of workers sympathized with the struggle, and many would offer to help comrades with shift swaps and in other ways so that the comrades could attend demonstrations. In general we found wide interest and concern among the workers.

As the mass activity in the pro-choice movement has declined in the past year, the *Workers' Advocate* and our branches have looked at ways to use the general ferment that the pro-choice struggle has generated on women's rights to develop agitation on other issues facing women workers. For example, there are the issues of child care at the work place, sexual harassment and discrimination, black and latino infant mortality, cuts in health care, etc. This work is not yet linked up with any ongoing struggles. Moreover, so far in most areas it has been fairly sporadic in local leaflets due to the press of other work and our small forces. Only the *Workers' Advocate* has been able to keep up this agitation consistently. Nevertheless this agitation has generated a lot of interest among the workers. Moreover, this agitation helps prepare the party for organizing these struggles among working women when the objective conditions ripen, just as the pro-choice agitation in *Workers' Advocate* since 1985 prepared us for the current pro-choice movement.

\* \* \*

Work in the pro-choice movement has proved to be an important link with the masses in this period of overall stagnation in the class struggle. We have put a lot of effort into the pro-choice struggle. Although mass motion towards an independent movement has been quite limited in this period, yet this struggle has in turn been a source of energy and enthusiasm for our revolutionary work in general. It has in particular increased the interest and consciousness of the whole party on issues concerning the women's movement. Not only has there been excitement at being on the front lines of clinic defense, but the party has increased its agitation on other issues facing working women. There has been a party-wide study of the theoretical issues concerning the oppression of women and of the history of the communist movement in the U.S. and elsewhere in organizing working and poor women. And the pro-choice struggle has prepared us for the outbursts that are bound to erupt against the growing oppression of working women engendered by the current capitalist offensive. □

# The women's movement in the 1960s and 70s

*The following speech was delivered at the Fourth National Conference of the MLP, USA in Fall 1990. It has been edited for publication.*

Comrades, let's discuss the history of the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s. Recently we carried out a study of that movement. And, although there are many comrades whose experience we were not able to collect, and there are still many particulars that we do not know, nevertheless, we were able to pull together a picture of some of the basic struggles that this movement waged and the basic political trends within it.

## It arose with the struggle of working women

The first thing I want to point out is that the women's movement did not arise with Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963 or with the formation of the National Organization for Women in 1966. Rather the first mass actions began when working women launched organizing drives and strikes in the textile mills, hospitals, the migrant fields, and elsewhere in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Throughout the 1950s—and continuing through the 1980s—women poured into the work force in unprecedented numbers. And there they faced the rotten low pay, discrimination, and other evils afflicting a super-exploited section of the working class. And more, once work was done, women still faced the double burden of household drudgery, the responsibility for child care and cooking and laundry and more.

This situation—where women were drawn together in large numbers and faced their grinding oppression no longer as isolated domestic servants but collectively—it was this situation that led to the first impulse to mass struggle by women.

Initially, this movement was closely related to the movements of the black people, the Puerto Ricans, and the Mexican nationality people. The dynamic struggles of the oppressed nationalities gave an impulse to the workers movement, and the first organizing drives were fought and won chiefly by black, Puerto Rican and Mexican nationality women.

Comrades may remember some of the famous struggles. Like the series of strikes by hospital workers in New York City from the late 1950s on, which led, by 1965, to the organizing of 30,000 mostly black and Puerto Rican women workers, and then spread to organizing drives among hospital workers throughout the rest of the country. Or the five-year farmworkers strike, in which women played a huge role in picket line battles and in leading other mass actions.

Or the strikes at Farah Pants and the Oneita Knitting Mill which led to the rapid organization of mostly black and Chicana women workers at dozens of other mills around the south.

This is where the struggle began, among the oppressed nationality women. But through the 1960s and 1970s it spread to other sections of women workers—to the garment sweatshops and the hotels, to teachers and office workers, and more. In 1954, women workers counted for only 16.6% of all union members. But with the spread of the movement by the mid-1980s women workers made up over a third of all union members. Working women had given an important push to the whole workers movement.

Although the first strikes were chiefly directed at organizing the unorganized, the struggle quickly spread to other issues as well. Through the 1960s and 70s the struggle built up with battles for equal pay and eventually for comparable worth; for sick pay, paid maternity leaves, employer-paid child care; against doing personal favors for bosses, sexual harassment, and unfair firings; for jobs, against discrimination in hiring and promotions, and to defend protective laws and extend them to men; and so forth.

It should also be pointed out that the movement of working women began mainly outside of the big trade union centers. The official policy of the AFL-CIO bureaucrats was that women were "unorganizable," and they refused to lift a finger to help the women workers. The first organizing drives were initiated, instead, by reformist unions (like Local 1199 in New York and the United Farm Workers) which had been spurned from the AFL-CIO in the anti-communist witch-hunts of the 1940s and 50s. Then, in the 1970s the struggles were largely spurred on by leftists. It was not the union bureaucrats, but leftists, who organized among working women. In the 1970s at least 10 independent organizations were formed which initiated the organizing drives and other struggles and which, as they grew, were eventually co-opted by the official union bureaucracy.

So the women's movement actually began at the

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workplaces with the struggles of working women, and this was a vital part of the women's movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Political activists—women's liberation movement**

The second point is, that while the first impulse to struggle came from working women, the movement was broadened and grew into what became known as the women's liberation movement because of the activity of the political activists.

Through the 1950s and 1960s women took a major part in all the important mass movements—along with the workers' movement and the welfare rights movement, they were activists in the anti-racist movement, the anti-war movement, the student movement, and so forth. And from the experience they gained and the lessons they learned, they had begun, at least by the mid-1960s, to agitate inside these movements for a fight against particular features of the oppression of women, and by the end of the 1960s for the building of a women's liberation movement.

It is important to understand that the time in which the women's movement flowered—that is, at the very end of the 1960s and the early 1970s—was a time when the mass movements had turned to sharper militancy. Black rebellions had erupted in the big cities around the country. Draft resistance had turned to street battles against the police to shut down recruiting centers. Building occupations, torching ROTC offices, and so forth was all the rage on college campuses. And a general revolutionary movement had emerged. It was in this situation that the women activists posed the issue of a fight for the liberation of women from imperialist oppression, as it would be put at the time.

The movement took a multitude of forms and fought on a wide range of issues.

It linked up with the welfare rights movement, and joined the welfare mothers' militant sit-ins which, on at least two occasions at the end of the 60s, sparked off several days of black rebellions.

It organized women's marches against the imperialist war on Indochina and raised demands for women within the anti-war movement. It is notable, for example, that probably some of the biggest fights for childcare—including the mass takeover of university buildings to establish childcare facilities—took place as part of the wave of struggle that brought out over four million students to fight the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in the spring of 1970.

The movement also brought out tens of thousands of people to fight for abortion rights in marches all around the country in the early 1970s and held mass protests against forced sterilization and other attacks on minority women in the mid-1970s. Probably, the biggest single action was the Women's Strike for Equality on August 26, 1970 which brought out some 70,000 people in cities around the country to fight for abortion on demand, and which also

demanded 24-hour childcare centers and equal opportunity in education and jobs.

As well, the movement re-established the celebration of International Women's Day with big marches of thousands and thousands of people in many cities in 1974 and 1975.

And it linked up with the working women's movement, helping them to organize and fight on the job, and drawing many young women workers into the political struggle against the war and racism, for childcare and abortion rights, and for liberation.

So the women's movement was inspired by the other militant mass movements of the 1960s and was closely associated with them. It broadened and spread to take up a series of vital issues confronting women—drawing large sections of young women, working women, and also young men into struggle. And it posed the question of not only a fight against certain particular features of women's oppression, but also a revolutionary struggle for the liberation of women from all oppression.

### **Bourgeois feminism**

This gives you some picture of the women's movement of the 1960s. But the story is far from complete unless we deal with the political trends within the movement and the fight between these trends.

Speaking broadly, we can talk of essentially three trends in the women's movement. They were bourgeois feminism, radical feminism, and the left-wing of the movement.

First, consider bourgeois feminism. This trend did not come out of the struggles of working women or out of the other mass movements of the 1960s, but instead came directly out of the bourgeoisie, especially from the Democratic Party.

Although there were a whole slew of bourgeois women's organizations formed in the 60s and 70s, probably the first and most significant was the National Organization for Women. And to provide a picture of bourgeois feminism I will briefly describe the beginnings and the role of NOW.

NOW emerged out of President John Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women. In 1966, while attending a conference of state commissions, about two dozen upper class women—politicians, lawyers, professors, business women, and union bureaucrats—formed NOW when they became discontented over the slowness with which the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was opening the doors to women. But this discontent was not with the whole system of oppression. Rather NOW stated its goal in establishment terms. Their aim, they declared, was simply to "take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now..."

NOW's first campaign was against sex-segregated want ads. This campaign reflected motion against job discrimination that was growing among working women. But NOW twisted the sentiment to divert the motion into a bourgeois direction—declaring in the language of rising professionals and business persons that they were opposing the

discrimination because it was "a handicap to their position in the business world."

Gradually NOW took up other issues. And, faced with a growing tide of struggle among students and working women, it eventually even called some mass actions. The biggest was the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality which demanded abortion rights, childcare, and equal opportunity in education and jobs. This action, in which all trends participated, made NOW's reputation and created illusions that it really might fight.

But for NOW, mass marches were largely seen as simply media extravaganzas or electoral rallies. Mass action was always subordinated to NOW's principal tactics of lobbying Congress, electoral cretinism, and small media stunts.

Furthermore, NOW was also hesitant to actually campaign on what it called "controversial issues"—like abortion rights. Although it took a stand for abortion rights in 1967, this only came after a big fight in which a large right-wing split off from NOW. And even after it took this stand it hardly campaigned for abortion rights. In a few states it waged some legislative struggle, but in many of those cases the call for abortion rights was closely connected to campaigns for repressive population control. And by 1971, when it went wholehog into work for an electoral bloc around George McGovern, NOW refused to support pro-choice demonstrations altogether.

In fact, NOW called virtually no mass actions after 1970. It subordinated every issue to electoral campaigns and its legislative drive for the Equal Rights Amendment—and it showed an employers' hostility to working women's interests by often offhandedly denouncing all protective legislation for women as the source of job discrimination.

Such is the nature of NOW, which was probably the most left of all the bourgeois feminist organizations.

## Radical feminism

NOW's bourgeois orientation turned off many working women and activists in the mass movements. And another trend, radical feminism, emerged late in 1967 posing as an alternative to bourgeois feminism.

It should be noted that many people called themselves radical feminists in 1960s simply to define themselves as radicals, or to the left of NOW and other bourgeois feminists. But when we speak of "radical feminism" we are not talking about this wide use of the term. Rather, we are speaking of a particular political trend in the women's movement which evolved a distinct theory and organizational principles.

Radical feminism emerged from two sources—from New Leftism and from the left wing of NOW. But while breaking from New Left organizations and from NOW, radical feminism never really broke from the essentially reformist and left-reformist politics of these trends. In practice its role turned out to be to block the gravitation of women activists toward Marxism-Leninism. And, in the final analysis, it acted as a bridge to bring women back to

NOW and into the fold of the Democratic Party.

Let me just note a few of the essential features of radical feminism.

The first thing that marked radical feminism was its hostility to the growing militancy in the mass movements. Its first actions were to split women off from anti-war rallies and into separate "women's actions," and to split from "male-dominated" organizations to form separate radical feminist organizations. This was done in the name of opposing "male chauvinism" in the movement. But—while there were many just criticisms of the opportunist male leaders which we agreed with—the radical feminists did not propose a more militant and correct course for the movements. Rather, they tended to oppose the militant motion that was then developing.

Let me give you a typical example. While summing up the development of the women's movement up to 1975, one of the founders of New York Radical Women named Jo Freeman argued,

"Only draft resistance activities were on the rise [when radical feminist groups were first formed], and for women whose consciousness was sufficiently advanced, this movement more than any other movement of its time exemplified the social inequities of the sexes. Men could resist the draft. Women could only counsel resistance."

Freeman hides the fact that it was exactly at that moment that draft resistance had turned from "counseling" and individual acts of conscience, to fiery mass actions to shut down military recruiting stations—mass actions in which women were on the front lines side-by-side with men. While claiming to denounce "machoism" and "inequality" in the mass movements, the radical feminists were in fact hostile to the growing militancy and were splitting the movements.

As well, the call of the radical feminists' for "separate" women's organizations did not mean they were concentrating on drawing more women into mass struggle against the system. The radical feminists organized almost no mass actions. Instead, they pushed for the building of consciousness raising groups and alternative, self-help institutions.

They claimed that the consciousness raising "rap" groups were political and would draw women into mass struggle. But they didn't. In fact, their theory for building these groups made them sound more like therapy sessions for, as the Manifesto of New York Radical Feminists put it, "constructing alternative selves that are healthy, independent and self-assertive..." Regarding such sessions as politics meant turning away from mass actions, demands on the system, and collective organizing towards, in the final analysis, personal introspection. In practice, even radical feminist leaders like Jo Freeman eventually had to admit that most of the women from the consciousness-raising groups went passive or a few joined NOW.

The radical feminists also tended to counterpose the construction of "alternative," self-help institutions to building mass struggle. Naturally in any truly big mass

movement there will be the building of alternative institutions of various sorts. Some may play a positive role, some negative. Each one has to be analyzed in particular. The problem is the view that self-help and alternative institutions suffice for liberation, which means casting aside struggle, the mass movement for change, and the holding of political protest and looking more and more for a personal form of liberation. Alternative institutions are thus converted by this view into an alternative to the mass movement and the struggle against the oppressor, which is exactly what radical feminism tended to do.

Another outstanding feature of the radical feminists was their hostility to Marxism-Leninism and a class analysis of the oppression of women. Typical of their view is the *Manifesto of New York Radical Feminists* which states, "male chauvinism is primarily to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, and that only secondarily does this manifest itself in economic relationships. For this reason we do not believe that capitalism, or any other economic system, is the cause of female oppression, nor do we believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of a purely economic revolution."

Given this analysis, it is little wonder that they drew the conclusion that the chief struggle was to smash the nuclear family. In fact, of the few small actions radical feminism ever organized, a number were at marriage license bureaus where they declared, "We can't destroy the inequalities between men and women until we destroy marriage."

The result of the analysis and political stands of radical feminism is that they simply became politically impotent and increasingly irrelevant. To have any effect in the world, the radical feminists found they had to join up with the actions of NOW. And by the mid-70s you find the radical feminists praising NOW and increasingly joining back up with it. Thus, when all is said and done, the actual role of radical feminism was to block the attraction of Marxism-Leninism to increasingly radicalized women and to bring a section of the movement back into the arms of bourgeois feminism.

### The left-wing of the movement

The other big trend in the women's movement was the left-wing, the wing which tended to oppose both the bourgeois feminists and the radical feminists.

Now when we talk of the left-wing, we are talking about a really wide grouping that emerged at the end of the 1960s and extended at least through the mid-1970s. It took a multitude of different forms—women's caucuses inside mass organizations and left groups; mass organizations for particular struggles like abortion rights or workplace struggles; separate women's liberation collectives; women helping to form Marxist-Leninist groups, and so forth. As well, there was a whole series of particular trends within this left-wing—everything from New Leftism to revisionism, Trotskyism, neo-revisionism, and Marxism-Leninism. And on any question and any particular struggle there was a wide

range of views corresponding with these trends.

But, in general, we can speak of a left-wing because at that time you had large numbers of women, who were part of the mass movements, and becoming radicalized, and increasingly interested in what they regarded as Marxism-Leninism. And this left-wing has certain positive features to it.

In the first place, it was always part of the mass movements against the imperialist war, against racism, and so forth, and worked to build a women's movement that would be closely linked with the other movements. It was this wing of the movement that was chiefly responsible for the role of the women's movement in some of the biggest and fiercest actions against the war and for organizing mass actions for childcare, for abortion rights, and so forth. In this, it waged a sharp fight against the splitting of the movement by the radical feminists, and it also criticized NOW's emphasis on legalism and electoral cretinism.

The left-wing also tended to give a class analysis of the oppression of women and to see socialist revolution, or at least anti-imperialist revolution, as essential for the liberation of women. It definitely saw the fight against women's oppression as a fight against imperialism. It had particular enthusiasm for national liberation struggles and tended to promote the fighting women of Vietnam and China as role models. In this, it also waged sharp fights against the radical feminist theories of "personal liberation" and tended to oppose the reformist, bourgeois approach of NOW.

As well, the left-wing tended to be oriented towards the working masses. It linked up early on with the welfare rights movement; it began work to organize working women; and it tended to fight on issues that it saw as being important to working and poor women. Probably some of its clearest criticism of NOW and the radical feminists was over their failure to fight for working and poor women.

These were some of the positive features of the left-wing. But there were also widespread weaknesses and errors, which were more ingrained for being championed by various opportunist trends that worked within or crystallized out of this left-wing. These shortcomings undercut or weakened the leftward motion of the women. On this I would mention just a couple of particular questions: the attitude towards NOW, and the attitude towards the trade union bureaucracy.

### Accommodation with NOW

While there was hostility towards bourgeois feminism in general, and NOW in particular, there was a lot of confusion about how to oppose the reformism of the bourgeois feminists and a failure to appreciate the need for a consistent fight to build a militant trend separate from NOW.

From early on, socialist feminists from the New Left more-or-less viewed NOW as just another wing of the movement which fights in its way while we fight in ours.

It saw no need for any struggle against NOW. Others like the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) simply joined NOW, tailed after it, and only criticized it when NOW failed to support their latest pet project. And later on, as NOW grew more important, other trends like the *Guardian* newsweekly openly praised NOW for "struggling hard around particular demands" but just not going far enough. Meanwhile, the October League talked about the "class struggle inside NOW", rather than NOW's overall class stand, and tended to criticize NOW only for narrowing things down to single issues instead of fighting on many reforms at once.

No one carried out a systematic exposure of NOW, and the general tendency was to fail to understand the role of reformism in undermining the struggle. This was a serious weakness in the movement which still plagues us today.

### Accommodation with the union bureaucracy

A second weakness was the attitude towards the trade union bureaucracy. As I mentioned before, it was really the leftists who in the early 1970s formed the groups aimed at organizing working women and building the struggle at the workplaces. During this period there was much anger at the official trade union bureaucracy, which basically sat on its hands doing nothing for women workers. And the general tendency in the left-wing was to work for organizational forms independent of the union bureaucracy.

But as the women's movement grew, and there was increasing success in organizing drives, the union bureaucracy shifted and accommodated itself to the increasing activity among working women. And as the union bureaucrats became active in trying to spread their influence, confusion set in as to how to deal with them.

Some trends in the left-wing—like the New American Movement (NAM), the CPUSA, the SWP, and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP)—simply tailed after the union bureaucrats and became their foot soldiers in organizing drives. Other trends in the left-wing continued to criticize the top union bureaucracy, but instead of building independent organizational forms, groups like the October League and various Trotskyists tended to restrict the struggle to a fight within the union apparatus or bureaucracy—as shown by their expectations for the Coalition of Labor Union Women, which was a creature of the union bureaucracy. So these trends too ended up constantly trying to push the union bureaucracy to the left instead of mobilizing working women to take a stand independent of the union bureaucracy. Eventually, even the independent organizations that had been established simply merged into the official unions or collapsed.

This accommodation towards the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, especially when it shifts from open hostility to reformist posturing, is a weakness that also still plagues the movement today.

### ACWM(M-L)

In this discussion of the left-wing of the movement there is one final organization I should mention—and that is the American Communist Workers' Movement (Marxist-Leninist). [The ACWM(ML) existed from 1969-73 and was a predecessor of the Marxist-Leninist Party. It gave rise to the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists, or COUSML, in 1973. The MLP itself was founded on January 1, 1980.]

Now the ACWM(M-L) had not developed particular tactics on various issues of the women's movement (just as it did not have such tactics on a series of other fronts). In general, however, the ACWM(M-L) strongly opposed the separatism of the radical feminists while, at the same time, it was sympathetic to many of the correct criticisms of the male leaders of the opportunist groups and of male chauvinism. As well, the ACWM(M-L) worked to draw women into all of the important mass struggles of the day, and made a big point of promoting women fighters as revolutionary models that should be emulated.

The ACWM(ML) held that the vital necessity was to rebuild a genuinely communist workers' party, and that women communists as well as men should be involved. It went into the women's movement in various cities to argue for the establishment of a revolutionary working class party. Frequently, this involved its comrades in sharp clashes over politics. In the late 1960s and early 70s there were many anti-party prejudices in activist circles and groupings. In the radical feminist circles there was fervor against "male-dominated organizations" and "male philosophers", and this at times found an echo in the left-wing of the movement as well. The ACWM(M-L) vigorously defended party concept and sought to rally the activists to the need for party-building.

In continuing this work, certain internal differences occurred in the COUSML. A leader of the organization, and a few comrades around him, at one point deviated towards reformism. With respect to the women's movement, this led this grouping to undermine the fight for party concept and pander to the feminist prejudices found in a section of the women's circles in Chicago. [This clique abandoned the COUSML and communist work in 1975.] A revolutionary stand in the women's movement could not have been maintained without the fight against this reformism, and without in general maintaining an active internal ideological life of the organization.

This work to rally activists to party-building was important, and not just because it helped bring some activists into the ACWM(M-L). It also helped to break down the pre-party collective mentality of the times and give impetus to the sentiment for party building that developed in the mid-1970s in a section of the left-wing of the women's movement.

### In conclusion

That completes our survey of the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s. This movement brought many gains to working women and played an important part in the revolutionary movement. Today, when women's rights are

under attack, it is useful to review the history of the women's movement, as we struggle to draw the masses of working women on the road to revolutionary struggle against the capitalist system. □

## Solidarity government sneaks religion into Polish schools

The Solidarity government of Poland is hailed in the U.S. media as the epitome of democratic freedoms. But in fact it is working to strip away a number of rights from the Polish people.

The government is considering a law to take away women's abortion rights. And now the government has implemented a plan to bring the Catholic religion directly into the public schools. And it hasn't even bothered with the niceties of parliamentary democracy in launching this new policy.

Under the new plan, priests and nuns of the Roman Catholic Church are allowed to teach religion in the public schools. Parents will decide whether their children in kindergarten and grade school will attend the special classes. High school students can decide for themselves. These religious classes will be held during the school day. As one priest said, "We can't have catechism after school, because children might prefer to play football instead."

This plan is being touted as a "voluntary" plan. But clearly parents will be pressured by church officials to sign their children up for the classes. And the children themselves will feel pressure to attend.

The plan is a desperate attempt to rescue the Church from the threat of being sideline and irrelevant. Poland is nominally 95% Catholic, and in the fight against the

bureaucratic state-capitalist order, the Church regained a lot of prestige by being active in the opposition. But only a minority of working class youth actually attend religious instruction. And a lot of the Church's dictates, such as on birth control, are widely flouted. By forcing children to attend religious classes as part of their everyday school life, the Church hopes to regain popular allegiance.

The Church has again shown that it only provides lip service to democracy. Already in Poland they have widespread privileges to promote their religion, but it doesn't work too well. So they want to step up the pressure.

Many Polish people have angrily denounced the plan. They are also asking why such a law was passed quietly by decree in the middle of summer vacation, without parliamentary debate? People of minority religions have also protested that they weren't properly consulted.

The new decree shows that the Solidarity government is learning well the ways of bourgeois politics. They came to power denouncing how the old government decided everything behind the backs of the people. But capitalist democracy doesn't change this, it only replaces who the behind-the-scenes power brokers are. Instead of the revisionist bureaucrats, now it's the Catholic hierarchy, the emerging big private capitalists, and the Western imperialist banks and governments. □

## On Red Dawn's views on permanent revolution and three worldism

In the September issue of the *Supplement* we printed material concerning three worldism and the views of the Trotskyist Tony Cliff.

The Swedish comrades of *Red Dawn* had reprinted Cliff's

pamphlet *Deflected Permanent Revolution* in their journal and recommended it as the answer to the problem of how to avoid "three worldist" praise of reactionary regimes and forces in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This was part of

their turn towards the Trotskyism and the IS Tendency.

Later they printed a letter they had received from a comrade of our Party criticizing Cliff's pamphlet, and their own theses in reply. This is reprinted in the September Supplement, along with information about *Red Dawn* being on the verge of dissolving itself into a left social-democratic party in Sweden called the "Workers List".

Below we carry some comments on their article "Some theses on the permanent and deflected permanent revolution--A short reply to the comrades of the MLP,USA".

(A) The Trotskyist trends are haunted by the specter of "three worldism"--the support of reactionary classes and governments, opposed to the actual progressive movement in their own countries, in the name of their supposed opposition to imperialism. The "IS tendency", for example, considered rendering "military, but not political support" to the bloody, reactionary Islamic Republic of Khomeini.

Such stands are not accidents, as can be seen today when U.S. troops are pouring into the Persian Gulf. One Trotskyist organization after another, differing in the particulars of their beliefs, are competing in rendering "military, but not political support" to the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. In the name of "defending Iraq" and of supporting an oppressed country against imperialism, they are defending this regime, which is fighting for nothing higher than becoming a regional power and reinforcing its tyranny over the masses.

Far from Cliff's "theory of deflected permanent revolution" being an antidote to three worldism, it has proven fully compatible with three worldism. The Trotskyists have fallen into utter fiasco on the issue of the dependent countries.

(B) *Red Dawn* barely admits at the end of its theses that "pablo-ism and other dogmatic trotskyst currents" are guilty of "tailing ... after the petty-bourgeois leaderships in the peripheral countries." While claiming that the "non-dogmatic" Trotskyism of Cliff is the antidote, they hint that Cliff might himself have a problem in not giving enough stress to the denunciation of state capitalism.

But such stress cannot in the slightest solve Cliff's problem with three worldism. Cliff and other Trotskyist currents share a common framework which allows them to denounce the ruling classes in an oppressed country as the worst dregs while rendering them support anyway. They use the formula of "military but not political support" to justify this hypocritical politics and pretend that military actions are one thing and "politics" another.

(C) Furthermore, according to *Red Dawn*, state capitalist regimes have not been set up since 1974 (see their *Resolution on imperialism, the struggle of the oppressed people and the tasks of solidarity work*, reprinted in the February 15 Supplement.) So they presumably don't regard the Islamic Republic as state capitalist. Thus denouncing state capitalism in a louder and louder voice could not ensure

one against the speculation that the Khomeini regime could have become a bastion of anti-imperialism.

*Red Dawn* simplifies the analysis of the regimes to simply state capitalism or dependent capitalism, and nothing else matters. So they don't have a framework for judging the actual political situation and mass struggles in these countries. So, for example, this eliminates any theoretical basis for distinguishing between, say, Nicaragua in the 1980s and Iran under the Islamic Republic. This eliminates any theoretical basis for supporting the Nicaraguan struggle against the U.S.-organized contras, while avoiding support to the Islamic Republic in Iran.

(D) By denouncing the very thought that the revolution could be at different "stages" in different countries or at different times, it denigrates the idea of the variety of conditions facing the revolutionary masses. It has reduced matters to generalities about the era of imperialism, state capitalism, an alleged change in world politics around 1974, etc. And by reducing matters to global considerations, it has denigrated the consideration of the internal class struggle. Such denigration is also one of the main points of three worldism.

(E) *Red Dawn* insists in their theses that it is "a vulgarization" to say that they "put purely socialist revolutions on the order of the day everywhere". In fact, their own founding resolutions for the Marxist-Leninist League of Sweden say that "the task put on the order of the day in the entire world by history...is to smash the chains of capital and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat." (See the *Resolution on imperialism* again, emphasis as in the original) And their resolution calls on the proletariat to take the lead in the struggle in the oppressed country and carry out "a victory which, in essence, regardless of form, thus would be of a socialist character."

(F) By automatically defining that the revolutionary process in all countries at all times of this era of imperialism has a socialist character, they have ended up watering down the idea of socialist revolution.

*Red Dawn* readily admits that there are different immediate tasks facing the revolutionary movement in different countries. But it jumbles them all together as "permanent revolution", insisting that "the permanent revolution is permanent simply thereby that it ties together different tasks, which...put tasks, slogans etc. looking different at the beginning and the end of the process."

*Red Dawn* calls for the same permanent revolution leading to the same dictatorship of the proletariat, all around the world, but at the cost of removing the content from this concept. The particular features of socialism can vanish from this concept of revolution. *Red Dawn* can and does, in its articles, describe the most different kinds of struggle as being of the same "permanent revolution." A national independence here, a democratic struggle there,

are all examples of the same process:

The revolution is not supposed to pass through different stages in different countries--"stages" are taboo. But it is supposed to undertake different tasks. However these tasks only "look different". The result is a theoretical framework that is confused and muddles everything together, rather than spurring on the revolutionaries to see the particular tasks of socialism.

(G) The result is that *Red Dawn* discusses varying tasks, but has no real framework for this. It considers them in a rule-of-thumb, eclectic way, saying one thing here and another there.

*Red Dawn* stayed aloof from the IS tendency's stand toward the Khomeini regime in Iran, but it couldn't discuss this openly, explain the source of IS's error, and how to avoid it.

(H) If one throws out the consideration of what stage the revolution is at, one is left with carrying out a socialist revolution independent of what conditions exist in the country. *Red Dawn* defends Cliff's view of throwing aside consideration of the objective basis of revolution. They say that "it is a vulgarization" to regard the attempt to carry out of a revolution without regard to whether the material conditions exist for it "as some arbitrary adventure".

*Red Dawn's* basic view on this is that "the spread of the revolution" will make up for the lack of objective conditions in a particular country. It insists as a general principle that "A revolution in one country can hardly avoid to unleash a chain of events in other countries too, as well as period of revolutionary upsurges..." But again and again countries have had revolutions which have had to resist periods of isolation.

*Red Dawn's* theory on this question evades a realistic consideration of the conditions facing a revolution. As well, it covers up the fact that revolution must spring from and be based on the internal conditions and forces of a country.

(I) Indeed, Cliff's theoretical framework makes it hard to see the role of the internal classes in the oppressed countries. This is why Cliff and *Red Dawn* sum up a whole series of revolutions as being simply the work of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. The major social classes drop out of their sight, and they describe the intelligentsia as having carried out the Chinese revolution and other major revolutions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

J. *Red Dawn* insists the epoch of imperialism "only leaves two main classes: the imperialist bourgeoisie (monopoly capital in the metropolises) and the international proletariat." Other classes "might play a vacillating role and perhaps be won as allied to the proletariat, but do not represent any solution of their own--these may be classes in but not for themselves."

In fact, the rise of capitalism, not imperialism, began the

polarization into two main classes, proletariat and bourgeoisie. This polarization exists in all countries where capitalism is spreading, including those in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Cliff's Trotskyist framework distorts these facts in two directions.

On the grounds that this is the era of imperialism, *Red Dawn* restricts the dominant bourgeoisie to "monopoly capital in the metropolises", thus leaving out the exploiters in Asia, Africa and Latin America, who are allegedly not classes "for themselves." This too ties in with the views of three worldism.

As well, on the grounds that there are only two main classes, *Red Dawn* slurs over the other classes and are unable to explain the role they play. This means giving an absurdly oversimplified view of the peasantry, the local exploiting classes in the dependent countries, etc. It results in turning class analysis into a cardboard parody, so general and useless that it cannot guide revolutionary tactics.

The ironic result of such oversimplified analysis is that, while proclaiming only the imperialist bourgeoisie and the proletariat as the main classes of interest, in practice it has led the IS tendency to lay great stress on the power and initiative of the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.

(K) *Red Dawn* seeks to shortcut the detailed examination of various issues with a few profound international generalities. But this can lead to absurdities.

For example, they insist that "the crisis period that imperialism entered about 1974-75" had the result "that state capitalism nowhere has been established after the above-mentioned time."

In fact, the various newly independent countries, and dependent countries overthrowing old tyrannies, have always had varying degrees of state capitalism and "free-market" capitalism. Different countries have had different mixtures, and 1974-75 was not a dividing line in this regard. The Ethiopian Dergue, for example, established a system with relatively more state capitalism after this supposed dividing line of 1974-75. The Afghan revisionist regime was also established after this dividing line.

(L) *Red Dawn's* theses reply to concrete points with generalities. They tend to repeat a whole history, from a) to z), and let the reader guess how to apply to the particular points that are at stake.

And these views turn out to be vague or even contradictory on concrete points.

What is the nature of the revolution in the oppressed countries? As we have seen, at one point, they say it is of socialist character, while at another they deny that it is purely socialist.

And what has been happening in the economies of the dependent countries? They say one must see that "its [state capitalism's] ability to achieve economic growth does not mean development of the productive forces." What does this mean? What is economic growth if not development of the productive forces? □