

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

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## Iranian Women Face Islamic Reaction

No to the Veil!  
For Workers Revolution!

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# No to the Veil! For Workers Revolution!

## Iranian Women Face Islamic Reaction

MARCH 15—While a banner headline in the *Militant*—newspaper of the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP)—idiotically proclaimed “Victory in Iran: Iranian Masses Show the Way for Workers Around the World” (23 February 1979), Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini set about demonstrating exactly what sort of “victory” it is that the Iranian masses have “won.”

In early March the first persons under the new regime to be sentenced to execution for violating Islamic law met death at the hands of a firing squad in Teheran. The men were accused of homosexual rape. The “revolutionary court” which tried the case also sentenced one of the alleged rape victims to receive 100 lashes! It has been reported, too, that several persons convicted of drinking alcohol and petty thievery have been flogged, in accordance with Islamic law. These beatings, too, were ordered by religious courts set up by the clergy outside the framework of civil law.

In a directive to Minister of Justice Assadollah Mobashari, Khomeini urged the removal of “all European criteria built into the judicial system.” In particular he demanded the elimination of appeals in the judicial process. “Every hearing,” he stated, “must end in a final, absolute decision in a single phase.” Khomeini has already abolished the Family Protection Act of 1975 on the grounds that it “contravened Islam.” This act had granted Iranian women the right under certain conditions to request divorce and had also restricted polygamy. Islamic jurisprudence allows a man to divorce his wife unconditionally and without recourse to a court of law.

On March 8—International Women’s Day—an estimated 100,000 Iranian women and some male supporters took to the streets of Teheran to protest the abolition of the Family Protection Act and to demand equal wages for equal work, a greater voice in government and the right of women to dress as they like—i.e., not to be shrouded and stifled under black *chadors*. Chanting “Down with Khomeini!” “We shall fight the veil!” and “Down with this dictatorship!” the women marched for four hours in a driving snowstorm from Teheran University to the offices of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan where they were finally dispersed by “Revolutionary Guards” who fired into the crowd. The demonstration, which came one day after Khomeini’s refusal to allow women workers to enter government offices without *chadors* (“Women must not come naked into ministries”), was the strongest show of opposition to him since his return to Iran. And the demonstrations continued.

It is actually embarrassing to have to argue with ostensible socialists that the program of the mullahs is not a progressive alternative to the bloody shah—particularly given the open and vicious oppression of women which is glorified in Iran today.

Not that this should come as a surprise. Khomeini has hardly concealed the fact that for the *ulema* (Muslim religious establishment) leading the fight against the shah “Our only reference is the time of the Prophet and of Imam Ali”; i.e., the 7th century! The aim of the mullahs is to reimpose fundamentalist Islamic law upon Iranian society and with it their authority and privileges as a caste.

Like the military dictatorship of the “soldier of Islam” General Mohammad Zia al-Haq in Pakistan, who on February 10 announced a series of measures to make laws in Pakistan conform to the tenets of Islam—including stoning to death for adultery, amputation of a hand for theft and 80 lashes for drinking—the goal of Khomeini and his followers is to purge Iran of “corrupt” Western influences. This is what motivated the countless attacks on cinemas, Coca-Cola trucks and cafes which occurred during last fall’s protests. While left-opportunist apologists for Khomeini depict these attacks as being directed against symbols of imperialist domination, they are, in fact, based on fundamentalist religious prejudices. A common belief among the shopkeepers of the bazaar, some of the mullahs’ most loyal followers, is that movies, radio and television are *haram*—religiously forbidden.

Khomeini’s movement translates these superstitious prejudices into a political program. The “Report of the Patriotic Muslim Students of Tabriz on the Tabriz

## Women and Revolution

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EDITORIAL BOARD: D. L. Reissner (editor), Helene Brosius, Helen Cantor, Liz Gordon, Elizabeth Kendall, Nancy Rossi, Michael Weinstein  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: Stephanie Peters

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Karen Wyatt

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Uprising" states: "Several cafes and sandwich shops were also named among the damaged shops. All of such cafes and shops sold alcoholic beverages. The fact that alcohol is an intoxicating agent and that the Quran has banned its consumption justifies the above actions."

### Thirteen Centuries of Islamic Subjugation

Central to the traditional Islamic order that the *ulema* is striving to resurrect is the segregation of women from public life. In an attempt to prettify such degrading practices as the veil, Khomeini claims:

"As for woman, Islam has never opposed her liberty. On the contrary, it has always been against the concept of woman as object and has restored her dignity to her.... But the regime of the Shah is attempting to prevent women from exercising their liberty by plunging them into immorality.... We wish to liberate women from the corruption that is menacing them."

—*Le Monde*, 6 May 1978

In fact, numerous Koranic passages proclaiming the inferiority of women can be found. *Sura* (chapter) 4:31 states: "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other.... So good women are obedient...." The "dignity" and "morality" of which Khomeini speaks are, of course, code words used by clerical reactionaries and others seeking to "protect" women from society by shutting them out of it.

In a collection of lectures published in Persian in 1975 Khomeini makes his restrictions on women entering the workforce much clearer than he does in his statements to the Western press. In the event that women do escape the confines of the family (even the

fanatics of Saudi Arabia, given a severe shortage of labor, have made a few concessions), Khomeini insists, "This would have to be done with a suitable kind of dress, a maximum of *hijab* [modesty] and separately from men wherever possible."

*Hejab*, the Muslim term for the practice of wearing the veil, is the symbolic assertion of the husband's or father's complete control of women outside as well as inside the home. In a practical sense it also prevents women from engaging in most physical activity.

In the mid-1930's Reza Shah Pahlavi, faced with an acute labor shortage, attempted to unveil Iranian women by force. This was an effort to attack ingrained social and religious institutions in the absence of fundamental change in the class structure of society capable of offering the masses a new world view to replace the old ideology and was met with massive resistance. Police on the streets tore off the women's *chadors*, with the result that women simply stayed secluded at home. But this gave rise to some peculiar problems:

"Since there were no showers in Iranian homes, women had to go to a public bath. The husband would put his wife in a large sack and carry her like a bale of cotton to the bath.

"I remember from my childhood when my father would carry his mother in the sack, empty his load in the bath and then come back for his wife, my mother. He once told me that Reza Shah's policeman had asked him what it was that he was carrying. He had improvised an answer: pistachio nuts. The policeman said, 'Let me have some,' and started tickling Granny. First she laughed, and then

*continued on next page*



International Women's Day 1979: Tens of thousands march through Teheran chanting, "In the dawn of freedom there is no freedom!"

## Iran...

she wiggled her way out of the sack and took to her heels.  
My father was arrested."

—R. Bahareni, *The Crowned Cannibals*

Despite the inevitable resistance, however, more and more women were encouraged to discard the veil. In fact, it is rather startling, after viewing endless contingents of black-robed Khomeini followers, to look at photographs of Iranian women's demonstrations in the early 1950's with not a *chador* in sight. Concomitantly, there was a sharp increase in the number of women industrial workers during this period.

Recently Iranian women have been increasingly returning to the *chador* which many of their mothers had discarded; university women wearing it over jeans and platform shoes are not uncommon in the massive religious demonstrations. In the "holy city" of Qom, where the Ayatollah Shariatmadari resides, wearing the veil is compulsory for women (even for foreign female reporters), and Muslim fanatics attack any woman whose *chador* is not sufficiently concealing.

While not yet daring to take this step in Teheran, Khomeini's followers in Tabriz, unconcerned with

presenting a "liberal" face to the bourgeois press, made the Muslim program for women crystal clear; chanting "Death or Hejab!" they attacked unveiled women. Shariatmadari, second only to Khomeini in the religious hierarchy, has also stated his program for "restoring" women's "dignity": a ban on pre-marital sex, coeducation, abortion and birth control.

The flavor of the deeply rooted domination of women in Iran is conveyed in this description of life in rural Azerbaijan (Iran's northwestern, Turkish-speaking province) by the schoolteacher and writer Samad Behrangi:

"The peasants are very prejudiced about the 'chastity of wife and children.' Because of this, the relation between woman and man is very limited. In school if the teacher asks the name of a student's mother or sister, he blushes and does not say anything. This he has learned from his father and other peasants who say it is not proper to mention one's sister, wife or mother's name.... Quarrels and fights have happened because of a 'bad glance' on someone's wife.... The relationship between wife and husband is based on suspected unfaithfulness of the wife, the deficiency of her brain, her degradation, and her servitude toward the husband.

"The peasant woman is not to appear in public eyes or to be consulted. She must go to the bath unseen by other people so that no stranger sees her face. At home she

## Death by the Sword of Islam

Those who still think that an "Islamic Republic" in Iran would be anything but a reactionary hellhole should take a good look at Saudi Arabia, dominated by the zealous Wahhabi Islamic sect. There women are veiled, forbidden to drive cars and since last summer forbidden to travel unaccompanied. Murderers are beheaded, thieves' hands cut off, adulterers stoned and anyone caught drinking alcohol publicly flogged—in the name of the Koran.

Graphic and horrible proof of Islam's cruelty toward women was provided by the public execution last year of a Saudi Arabian princess and her husband. While studying in Lebanon, Princess Misha of the House of Saud had met and later secretly married a "commoner" (no mere peasant, but the cousin of the Saudi ambassador to Lebanon), thereby incurring the fatal wrath of her grandfather Prince Muhammad Bin Abdul Aziz (nicknamed "Muhammad of the Two Evils" because of his terrible temper and his drinking problem). Although Saudi Arabia's supreme religious court refused to judge the case, it did not intervene to prevent Muhammad from taking his revenge. According to Islamic custom, a woman guilty of a sexual offense must be punished by her family to cleanse its honor.

The young woman's pleas for mercy—at least for her husband—fell on deaf ears. Muhammad dragged the princess and her husband out into the Jeddah marketplace where, before the other princesses and a crowd of onlookers, she was placed on a pile of sand and shot dead. Then her husband was beheaded by Muhammad's bodyguards—who because of their inexperience took six strokes of the heavy sword to finally hack his head from his body.

That Western imperialism's diplomats, concerned with oil imports, scraped and bowed before this act of "native culture" is to be expected. But for ostensible socialists to turn a blind eye to Islam's barbaric

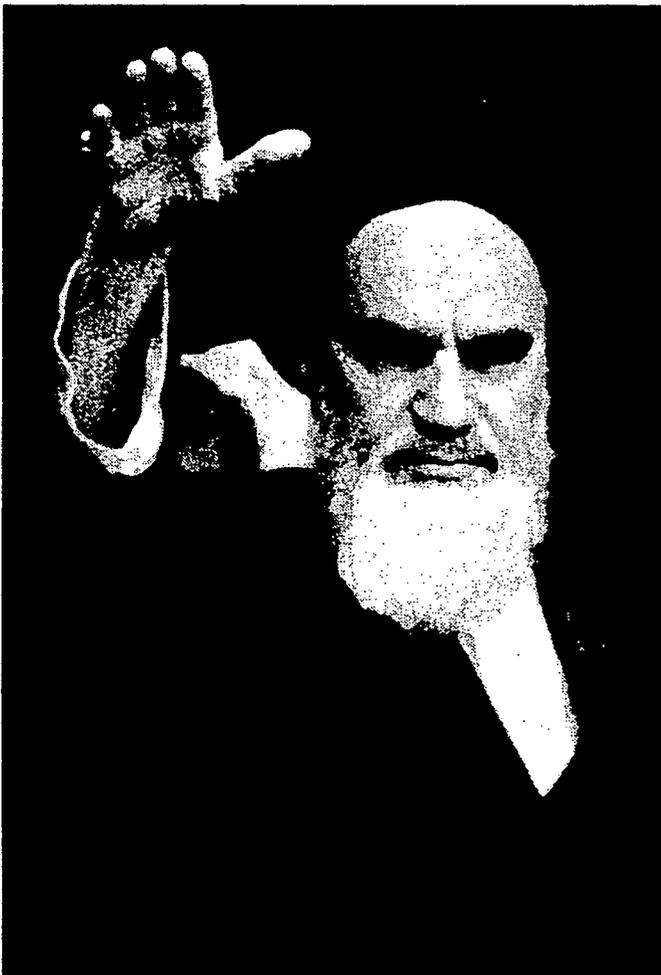


London Express

**Koranic "justice": Saudi Arabian bodyguards hack off head of Princess Misha's husband (Inset) in front of onlookers in Jeddah marketplace.**

oppression of women is an unforgivable crime against masses of people.

Princess Misha's bloody fate should be a warning to all who pretend that the chant of the Iranian mullah-lovers—"Death or the Veil!"—is a mere rhetorical flourish. In power, these religious fanatics are already *doing* what they threaten, as they have in Saudi Arabia.



Der Spiegel

**Clerical reactionary Khomeini is in no sense a progressive alternative to the bloody shah.**

must fear the man.... When the daughter reaches the age of two or three, she also has to wear a veil and hide her face from strangers and avoid them. She must speak little in front of her father and brothers, eat little at meal times, not speak at all in front of guests, stand up when her father or brothers come or leave, not touch food before them, pray and fast regularly; in short she must imitate her mother."

—"Women in Iran," *International Socialist Review*, April 1971

Nor is such backwardness confined to rural areas. In the most modern Iranian schools it is still taught that because a woman's brain weighs less than a man's her intellectual capacity is inferior to his.

In many parts of Iran the bride must produce the *dastmal-e zofa*, a blood-stained handkerchief, in order to prove her virginity. The handkerchief is passed through the bedroom door and examined by the wedding guests assembled outside to prove that the girl is from a decent family. The girl's mother keeps the blood-soaked handkerchief for years. If the bride cannot produce it, she faces immediate cancellation of the marriage contract, possible execution or at least banishment from her village to one of the larger cities, where she will likely become a prostitute.

As the Iranian poet Reza Bahareni points out, the Persian language reflects the historic subjugation of Iranian women. As in many languages, a husband

"gets" or "takes away" a wife, while a wife "goes" to him. A man "fucks" (*kardan* or *gua'eedan*) a woman but the reverse is never applied to the woman. She "is fucked." In the words of Bahareni, "She is the passive verb of society." Incidentally, this critical distinction between active and passive sexuality carries over into male homosexual relationships as well. While it is considered a matter of mortal shame for an Iranian man to admit that he has been the object of a homosexual act (i.e., has played the "female" role), it is not uncommon for men to brag about being the doer of the act. There is no volume of Iranian history in which pages are not dedicated to sex between kings and young boys.

When a man marries he immediately becomes a patriarch and the head of the family. On the wedding night he is called *shah-demad* (the shah-groom); in the province of Azerbaijan he is called *khan-demad* (the khan-groom). "Thereby," says Bahareni, "the Shah has parcelled out his supreme power to the groom, the husband and the father of the family." As the shah's word was the law of the land, so the husband's word is the law in his house.

As it is not proper to mention the name of one's wife in public, other designations are resorted to which make her even more invisible than the veil:

"They use the word *manzel*, which is the Arabic word in Persian for 'house.' They say, for instance: 'My house told me you had come looking for me, but I wasn't home.' Or sometimes they use male names, such as Hassan or Hossein, or even insignificant objects such as shoes and hats. My father used to call my mother *bashmagh*, the Turkish word for 'shoes,' in the presence of other men. It sounded very funny: 'Tell shoes to bring a cup of tea for Mr. Mohammad.'"

—R. Bahareni, *op. cit.*

The role of Islamic religious doctrine in creating such a system of institutionalized sexual repression has long been debated. Veiling the face is a practice which existed long before the birth of Muhammad, and certain Muslim reformers—citing the fact that Muhammad forbade female infanticide, restricted the number of wives allowed to Muslim men and made divorce easier—have attempted to claim that in principle Islam stands for the equality of women. The "Prophet's" supposedly enlightened attitude toward women has even been defended on the grounds that he advocated that genital mutilation of women should consist *only* of cutting off the labia minora rather than also cutting off the labia majora and the clitoris. He reportedly counseled an early circumcisor of women, "Reduce, but do not destroy."

In *From Darkness into Light* Badr ol-Moluk Bâmdâd, who was president of the Civil Rights Committee of the High Council of Iranian Women, recounts some unsuccessful attempts of women merely to vary the color of their *chadors*:

"Shams ol-Haya Mansuri [headmistress of a secondary school for girls] and her five colleagues at Shiraz disliked having to shroud themselves in black and decided to change the color of their *chadors*. They reasoned that if the purpose of veiling was to cover a woman's face and figure, the color of the cloth did not matter. Each of them made herself a dark-colored taffeta *chador*, and one day

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# Heroic Class Battles in Textile

## Communist Organizing in the 1920's

While the recent appearance of such documentaries as "Union Maids" and "With Babies and Banners" has focused attention on the important role of working women in the labor upsurge of

### Book Review

#### *A Radical Life*

By Vera Buch Weisbord

Don Mills, Ontario: Indiana University Press, ©1977.

the 1930's, Vera Buch Weisbord's *A Radical Life* sheds some light on their participation in the less well-known struggles of the previous decade.

The period was particularly repressive. With the failure of the German Revolution in the early 1920's, capitalism had taken a new lease on life, and the tide of workers revolution had begun to ebb. In the United States the newly formed Communist Party (CP) was initially driven underground, and important strikes, such as the steel strike of 1919 and the railroad shopmen's strike of 1922, were crushed. Employers went on a major offensive to restore the "open shop." The existing industrial unions, including those of the garment workers and particularly the coal miners, were all but destroyed. Membership in the craft-based American Federation of Labor (AFL) fell from over four million in 1920 to under three million by the end of the decade, while communists and other militants were viciously purged. The unorganized masses—including most women, blacks, immigrants, unskilled and semi-skilled workers—were simply ignored by the AFL bureaucrats. The tiny Communist Party alone spoke in the interests of these most oppressed and exploited.

Under these extremely difficult conditions, the massive proletarian uprisings in the textile industry (a major employer of women) led by the CP are



Photo Int'l Newsreel

**The 1926 textile strike in Passaic, N.J. involving 20,000 workers put the Communist Party on the map of the U.S. labor movement.**

exceptionally powerful and dramatic episodes in the history of the workers movement which, to this day, point the way to the militant class-struggle methods necessary to organize the unorganized and most oppressed workers.

Weisbord, who was a member of the Communist Party, was a leader of two of the most important textile strikes of the decade—at Passaic and Gastonia. But although she was a competent trade-union militant and

organizer, she never matured as a political leader either within the party or subsequent to her departure from it. Thus, while her impressions are interesting and often sensitively drawn, they reflect her inability to understand the political forces which were shaping the struggles in which she was involved and, in particular, to understand the qualitative changes which the CP was undergoing during this period of transition from Leninist internationalism to Stalinist "socialism in one country."

In *A Radical Life*, the revolutionary Communist International (Comintern) under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky in the early 20's is jumbled together with the later Comintern in the period of its Stalinist degeneration when its policies in the trade unions and elsewhere were at every point subordinated to the zigs and zags of bureaucratic expediency.

To the extent that Weisbord attempts to present any political analysis, it is the familiar anti-communist one of a sinister Kremlin dictatorship destroying everything it touches. As for American CP leaders, they are presented as a gang of hardened political cutthroats interested not in working-class struggle but only in ingratiating themselves with Moscow at the expense of their rivals.

But such a one-sided, negative view of the CP makes little sense even within the framework of Weisbord's own narrative of the textile strikes. Anyone familiar with the housebroken, reformist CP of today will appreciate the striking dichotomy between this party which puts its confidence in capitalist politicians and courts and the one that led the heroic battles of Passaic and Gastonia.

The theme to which Weisbord continually returns is her allegation that political battles within the Comintern were both destructive and necessarily counterposed to a perspective of doing mass work. In fact, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the very opposite was the case. For example, one of the most important struggles of the early Comintern was against such ultraleft tactics as keeping communist parties underground on principle. The Comintern position was codified in Lenin's polemic, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, directed at subjectively revolutionary elements who did not understand the need to utilize such tactics as participating in reformist trade unions and struggles around partial demands. The debate on the application of this position to American conditions was finally resolved at the meeting of the American Commission of the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922, which determined to take certain steps to ensure that the young American CP would begin to sink roots in the working class. The Workers (Communist) Party was established as a legal party that openly directed its propaganda to the American proletariat. At the same time, communist work was undertaken within the AFL unions. This important background, which Weisbord does not discuss, is the starting point for making sense out of the rapidly changing policies of the CP and Comintern during this period.

### Twenty Thousand Textile Workers Revolt in Passaic

The 1926 strike in Passaic, New Jersey, put the

Communist Party on the map of the labor movement. The strike, involving some 20,000 textile workers, lasted fully 11 months and was undoubtedly the most dramatic labor struggle of the decade. The length of the conflict alone testifies to the extraordinary determination of the strikers and the confidence they had in their leadership.

Although she had been a member of the Communist Party and a member of the party's teachers fraction in New York for some years—intermittently because of bouts with TB—Passaic was Weisbord's first real taste of class struggle. She was assigned initially to the task of teaching English to the immigrant workers—Passaic at that time was the third city in the U.S. for illiteracy in the English language—but gradually her work broadened considerably and she ended up by coordinating the work among the women strikers, who made up half the workforce. (Textile was euphemistically known as a "family industry," meaning that wages were so low that it was not uncommon for husband, wife and child to labor in the same mill, barely making enough together to scrape by.) Special meetings were held to draw women into the strike work, and several clubs were formed attached to the CP-linked United Councils of Working Class Women. The women strikers at Passaic were drawn into all phases of the battle—not only organizing the children's kitchens and a good part of the relief activities, but marching on the picket lines with their male comrades.

It was in Passaic, also, that Vera Buch met Albert Weisbord. The campaign to organize the textile workers of Passaic and the surrounding mill towns had been initiated by the independent United Front Committee (UFC) of which Albert Weisbord was the leader. A young Harvard Law School graduate who had joined the Socialist Party (SP), Albert Weisbord became the director of the SP's youth group and in 1922 its national secretary before joining the Workers (Communist) Party in 1924. Shortly thereafter, he plunged into organizing textile workers.

Despite initial early successes, the Passaic strike faced

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W&R Photo

Vera Weisbord interviewed by **W&R** at her home in Chicago, 1978.

## Textile...

considerable obstacles. The employers launched a massive counteroffensive, including a police raid of union headquarters, arrests of union leaders and injunctions banning picketing, demonstrations and rallies of strikers. Meanwhile, the AFL bureaucrats did their best to undercut the strike. On July 1, 1926 AFL head William Green announced in the name of the AFL Executive Council: "The leaders of the United Front Committee are prominently identified with the Communist movement in the United States.... The membership of organized labor should not contribute funds to be used for the purpose of advancing the cause of a dual organization or to pay the salaries of Communist leaders who are seeking the destruction of the American Federation of Labor and the substitution of a Communist organization."

From the inception of the strike, the UFC had demanded that it be admitted to the AFL. In August the AFL, feeling some pressure from its ranks, offered to take in the strikers on one "small" condition—that Albert Weisbord (and the CP) step down from the leadership. The CP, feeling that the UFC was unable to win victory alone, capitulated to these conditions and, what was worse, hailed the AFL's entrance into the strike as a "victory." The AFL signed a disastrous settlement, and within a few months most of the workers had quit the AFL.

*A Radical Life* conveys Vera Weisbord's understandable bitterness over the CP's capitulation but very little comprehension of what motivated it. She seems never to have grasped the fact that the CP's policy in the strike—including both its earlier reluctance to raise recognition of the UFC as a strike demand and its later readiness to turn over the strike to the AFL—was largely due to a rather rigid formulation on independent unionism. When the early Comintern had spearheaded the struggle against ultraleftism in 1922, including the refusal of radicals to work in the AFL, the CP leadership—and particularly William Z. Foster, who headed up the party's trade-union work—tended to fetishize this into a policy of "boring from within the AFL," rejecting any opportunity to organize new unions, even where the AFL was nonexistent or very weak. In fact, as the Passaic strike was being fought, Foster was in Moscow at the Sixth Plenum of the Comintern, which was at that time in rapid motion to the right and busy capping a policy of making unprincipled blocs with reformist trade-union leaders

by forming the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee, to which it clung even after the British General Council of the Trades Union Congress betrayed the British general strike of 1926. Not surprisingly, Foster was able to win a victory for his policy with the decision of the Sixth Plenum that "secessionist movements and the formation of parallel trade unions should not be instigated or encouraged in any form."

## Gastonia: Anti-Unionism, Anti-Communism, Racism

Passaic and the bitterly fought miners strike of 1928 were Vera Weisbord's principal training for her next major venture—the Gastonia strike of 1929, which she co-led along with Fred Beal.

There was probably no other section of the country in which it was less likely for communists to exercise leadership over workers than the Piedmont region of North Carolina at the peak of the open-shop era of the 20's. The area was viciously anti-union, a fact which has not changed substantially in the last 50 years (North Carolina today is the least unionized state in the U.S.). In addition, the region was virulently anti-communist and a stronghold of white supremacy.

It was thus a formidable task that the Communist Party faced. The Gastonia strike occurred just as the Comintern was marking a lurch over into the ultraleft policies of the Third Period, in which reformist union leaders and social democrats were written out of the workers movement as "social fascists." The American CP now adopted a policy of building independent "red" unions, not only in areas where workers were largely unorganized, but also where there were existing trade unions. From this strategy flowed a whole series of sectarian policies, including a rejection of the united-front tactic, as well as a tendency to engage in adventurist actions in which small "red" unions or the CP itself attempted to take on the class enemy without the backing of the masses of workers.

The Gastonia strike was organized through the National Textile Workers Union (NTWU), the independent union set up by the CP in 1928, of which Albert Weisbord was national secretary. Although it did not have any substantial contracts with employers, the NTWU nonetheless enjoyed real authority, and its leaders were known even among many of the southern workers for their courageous history in fighting to organize the unorganized.

One of the immediate problems confronted by the CP strike leaders in Gastonia was the issue of racism. At a large meeting held the first day of the strike, before Vera Weisbord arrived, the white workers insisted that a rope be stretched the length of the room, separating them from the blacks. This reprehensible policy, which was initially acquiesced to by Beal, repulsed most of the black workers. The racist policy was subsequently reversed under pressure from NTWU leaders, and the NTWU courageously proceeded with organizing black workers into the union on an equal basis. Vera Weisbord describes, for example, how Ella Mae Wiggins, a widowed white worker with several children who was later murdered by thugs, carried out the

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Photo Int'l Newsreel

**Women strikers resist National Guardsmen during the Gastonia strike, 1929.**

organizing of a contingent of black workers in Bessemer City. In contrast, the AFL textile union bent over backwards to accommodate the racial prejudices of numerous white workers in their southern organizing.

On June 7 Police Chief Aderholt and four cops tried to invade the tent colony where the strikers had been relocated after being evicted from their company-owned homes. A confrontation ensued, and Aderholt was shot and killed. This unleashed a reign of terror in Gastonia, complete with kidnappings and beatings of strike organizers, along with, later, the murder of Ella Mae Wiggins. Sixteen NTWU members, including Vera Weisbord, were arrested and charged with the murder of Aderholt. The defense won a change of venue to nearby Charlotte, which was a slight advantage. Even here, though, a lynch atmosphere prevailed. The *Charlotte News*, for example, called for an "impartial" trial in the following terms:

"The leaders of the National Textile Workers Union are communists, and are a menace to all that we hold most sacred. They believe in violence, arson, murder. They

want to destroy our institutions, our traditions. They are undermining all morality, all religion. But nevertheless they must be given a fair trial, although everyone knows that they deserve to be shot at sunrise."

After a series of legal maneuvers and a trial that attracted nationwide attention, seven men were sentenced to jail terms. All of them eventually jumped bail, several finding refuge in the Soviet Union.

There is much that can be criticized in the CP's leadership of the Gastonia strike. Accounts in the *Daily Worker* so exaggerated the Gastonia events that they frequently had to be withheld from the strikers, and Young Communist League (YCL) leaders recklessly boasted of their intention of building chapters in Gastonia. Nonetheless, these mistakes probably did not materially affect the outcome of the struggle. What really stood out in Gastonia, as the then-Trotskyist *Militant* noted at the time, was the courageous battle waged by the CP in defense of the most oppressed workers, in distinction to the reformist neglect and treachery exhibited by the AFL hacks.

However, the *Militant* did raise trenchant criticisms of the CP's defense policies in Gastonia. In line with the sectarian methods of the Third Period, the CP turned down offers for joint defense activities from other workers organizations, weakening the struggle against the frame-ups and seriously jeopardizing the defendants. It was, in fact, the nationwide mass outcry of protest around the Gastonia lynch trial, which was raised *in spite of* the CP's refusal to undertake joint defense work with other groups, that saved the defendants from death.

**Sectarians on the Fringes of the Left**

In 1928-29, the divisions which had long existed within the Communist Party finally took on definite political shape. In that year James P. Cannon attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Here he read Trotsky's "The Draft Program of the Communist International; a Criticism of Fundamentals" and for the first time began to fit the American troubles into an international framework. The Cannon group was soon expelled and formed the Trotskyist Communist League of America (CLA). The followers of Jay Lovestone, who had previously led the American CP, were unseated with Stalin's rapid shift to the left into the Third Period and expelled in 1929. The Lovestoneites moved quickly to the right toward social democracy. Many, like Lovestone himself, became vicious anti-communists. The Fosterites became the official Stalin-backed American CP.

The Weisbords were formally affiliated with the Lovestone faction, and they were driven out of the party soon after the Lovestoneites were expelled. For the next few years, they oscillated politically between the Lovestone group and the Trotskyist CLA. At one point Albert Weisbord traveled to Europe to talk to Trotsky and declared that he was in agreement with the International Left Opposition, and both Trotsky and the CLA patiently attempted to open a path toward collaboration with his Communist League of Struggle (CLS)

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## Textiles...

grouping in order to test the basis for a possible fusion.

Albert Weisbord had real credentials as the leader of the Passaic battle, and Cannon generously acknowledged that he was a "first-class strike leader." At the same time, however, his political development was dangerously one-sided. He lacked the experience—and what is more important, the disposition—to be part of a collective communist leadership. He was particularly disdainful of the leadership of the CLA, many of whose outstanding cadres, like Cannon, not only had years of experience as leaders in the workers movement but had demonstrated real courage and principle in turning their backs on what could have been relatively comfortable lives as CP functionaries to embark on the lonely and hard struggle for Trotskyism. In a recent interview with *Women & Revolution*, Vera Weisbord still expressed this disdain for Cannon, dismissing him as a factionalist:

"Cannon came to visit, and we never had any opinion of James P. Cannon.... His performance in the ILO [International Left Opposition] was as a factionalist. Albert was never a factionalist in the party. He did his work full time. Cannon's work in the party was factionalism...and his personality was nothing to arouse great enthusiasm."

But as the *W&R* interviewer pointed out, the real difference between the Weisbords and Cannon was over the question of mass work vs. propaganda work.

The Weisbords put forward the workerist argument that the main problem with the CP was that it did not orient to the masses, particularly the unorganized workers, and they argued that this should be the main activity of the American Trotskyists. In fact, the opportunities for such work in the U.S. were extremely limited by the objective situation in the 20's and the early days of the Depression. It would be difficult to argue seriously that the CP could have qualitatively expanded its trade-union work beyond the important struggles it carried out among the unorganized textile workers and in such unions as the coal miners and garment workers, and it would have been doubly foolish for a small propaganda group like the CLA with under 200 members to have dissolved itself in such work.

More importantly, the Weisbords' mania for "mass work" served to obscure for them political issues within the communist movement. Since, as far as they were concerned, the CLA, the Stalinists and the Lovestoneites all had a deficient position on what they regarded as

the central issue, i.e., "mass work," they refused to draw any fundamental political distinctions among them.

Trotsky supported Cannon's position, and Cannon went on to build the Socialist Workers Party. Albert Weisbord, who was constantly admonished by Trotsky for his "one-sided, artificial, and terribly exaggerated" criticism of the CLA, proved impossible to integrate into the Trotskyist movement. Trotsky concluded that despite some of his better qualities, Albert Weisbord "at the same time represents the purest example of a sectarian. He is utterly incapable of preserving proportions, either in ideas or in action." Even when he was ostensibly pursuing a course of fusion with the CLA, he could never rise above such maneuvers as attempting to call meetings with the CLA membership behind the backs of the CLA leaders. Thus, the Weisbords' flirtation with Trotskyism was a brief one, not unlike a number of dissident communists at the time who could not accept the political discipline required by the Left Opposition.

This episode is only briefly and superficially touched on by Vera Weisbord in her final two chapters, which chronicle the entire period from Gastonia to the present. In fact, there was very little to write about. The small CLS grouping in New York dwindled, and the Weisbords moved to Chicago where they continued to sneer at the "petty-bourgeois intellectuals" led by Cannon. But in 1934 it was Cannon's organization, armed with the Trotskyist program—not the workerist Weisbords—which led the great Minneapolis general strike and sank real roots in the American working class. The Weisbords, who understood little and cared less about political program, faded into sectarian oblivion. Ironically, in 1937, the year of the Flint strike and the sit-downs that built the CIO, the Communist League of Struggle, which had harped on the issue of "organizing the unorganized" ad nauseum, passed out of existence. Already, the Weisbords had moved significantly from Leninism/Trotskyism, and shortly thereafter were to support the imperialist world war as a defensible war against fascism. Although they remained on the fringes of the left, doing some work around the civil rights movement, they have not been active as communists for years. Albert Weisbord, who spent his final years pursuing linguistic studies at his Group Language Institute, died in April 1977.

To today's union bureaucrats, labor lawyers and liberal do-gooders, the events of Passaic and Gastonia must appear inexplicable. Why, after all, should the downtrodden mill workers stand by their communist leadership, throwing up their own heroic figures like Ella Mae Wiggins in the face of massive red-baiting and terror campaigns? And indeed the labor fakers, conditioned by years of groveling to the bosses and capitalist politicians, have not the slightest inkling of the enthusiastic response which a bold and militant policy is capable of evoking in the most oppressed workers. But today, as well, it is only such class-struggle policies, first implemented by the CP of the 20's and now exemplified by the program of the revolutionary Trotskyism of the Spartacist League, that can break the bonds of the hundreds of thousands of working men and women in the textile industry. ■

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# Anti-Sex Drugs Deform Male Prisoners

The ghastly treatment of political dissidents in the Soviet Union whose punishment is disguised as therapy for psychological disturbance has quite rightly aroused massive indignation. The sinister psychiatrist in a long white coat, needle ready to inject rebels with mind-numbing drugs, has become a stock figure in the Western press accounts of repression in the USSR. But the West has its own men in white coats dispensing equally horrifying prescriptions for "difficult" cases.

It was recently revealed in the [London] *Sunday Times* (12 November 1978) that prison doctors have been routinely injecting male "sex offenders" in Britain with drugs since the 1940's—not just tranquilizers but female hormones (primarily estrogen), which, among other unpleasant side effects, causes the men to grow female breasts which then must be surgically amputated! One doctor, commenting on this well-known effect, said, "It is no use embarking on estrogen treatment unless there is a surgeon at one's elbow...." At least two men taking the drug have died of breast cancer.

When first introduced in the 1940's, estrogen pills were given to men convicted of rape, child molesting, incest, exhibitionism or homosexuality; i.e., a giant grab bag of socially defined "deviant" behavior, jumbling together the psychopathic and unsavory

along with the unexceptionable and private. The aim of this treatment—the destruction of the men's sexual desires—was achieved, but the pills also produced nausea and intense pain in the stomach, chest and testicles. The current technique involves implanting estrogen pellets under the skin, where the drug is slowly released over a period of months.

It is anyone's guess what idiot, bureaucratic illogic is used to justify years of insane drug-torture of helpless men locked away in prison and already isolated from their victims. But those prisoners who acquiesce to this program in the hope of impressing the parole board with their cooperative attitude are frequently left deformed and pain-ridden.

But even if the physical side effects were removed, the concept that sex crimes (and who judges what is a crime?) are simply the result of too much male libido and that chemical castration is a solution remains a monstrous inanity. The "castration-for-rape" feminists (like the Islamic fundamentalists espousing cutting off the hands of thieves), who want to "make the punishment fit the crime" through mutilating the criminal, belong in the Dark Ages.

Yet it is precisely this reactionary concept which was uncritically supported in a recent "Scenes" column in

*continued on page 21*

## Lesbian Mother Wins Custody Case

On January 17 the Michigan Supreme Court granted to Margareth Miller custody rights for her 13-year-old daughter, Jillian. Miller's victory came after two-and-one-half years of court battles in which she was repeatedly declared an "unfit mother" because she is a lesbian. In the original decision, handed down in Oakland County Circuit Court, Judge Frederick Ziem stated that although Jillian preferred to live with her mother, "an 11-year-old child cannot know what is in her own best interests." Ziem admitted that the mother's homosexuality, which he denounced as "immoral," was a "major consideration" in his ruling. The Supreme Court decision—which overturned four rulings by two lower courts—stated that the mother's sexual preference should not have been a major consideration in awarding custody to the child's father.

The Spartacist League hails Miller's victory in her fight against the vicious suppression of her democratic rights. Miller herself was surprised by the Supreme Court ruling, which was made in the same state where 50 members of the State Assembly put forward a symbolic resolution thanking Anita

Bryant for her "moral conviction" and "righteous campaign" against homosexuals. The Michigan Supreme Court's explicit rejection of sexual preference as a factor in the Miller case is significant and may help to set a precedent in similar cases. It is a victory for all those who defend the democratic rights of homosexuals. But we cannot put our faith in the courts which hypocritically uphold or deny democratic rights at the whim of the bourgeoisie. Only after a protracted and expensive battle of two-and-a-half years and after proving herself a "model parent" did Margareth Miller win her case.

Democratic rights of homosexuals—and of all the oppressed—must be defended by the organized working class. They will be fully secured only by a working-class revolution to overthrow capitalism which will lay the basis for replacing the oppressive family structure on which it rests.

The Margareth and Jillian Defense Committee is still \$6,000 in debt as a result of the case. Donations may be sent to: Margareth and Jillian Defense Committee, 3407 Michigan Union, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

W&amp;R Photo

## Spartacist Candidate Discusses '78 Campaign:

**“For a  
Socialist Fight  
to Save  
New York!”**



**Stamberg ran a highly visible and aggressively socialist campaign which emphasized that the future will be decided not at the polls but on the battle lines of the class struggle.**

Last fall the Spartacist League ran an election campaign in New York City's Greenwich Village-Chelsea area for the New York State Assembly. Our candidate, Marjorie Stamberg, ran on the Spartacist Party ticket and on the program of revolutionary Trotskyism against incumbent liberal Democrat William Passannante. The campaign, whose main theme was "For a Socialist Fight to Save New York!" renounced reformist "tax-the-rich" gimmicks while squarely addressing the need for a struggle led by the labor movement to break the grip of capital over New York's workers and poor.

The highly visible and aggressively socialist campaign, which included soap box rallies all over the district, mass distribution of literature, and radio and press coverage, emphasized that the future will be decided not at the polls but on the battle lines of the class struggle. Nonetheless, it was gratifying that many voters in the 64th Assembly District voted Spartacist. Stamberg received 3.2 percent of the vote overall, and up to 10 percent in several Election Districts—an exceedingly good showing for a revolutionary socialist

candidate. Particularly satisfying was the fact that the SL's candidate got twice as many votes in this district as did either of the gubernatorial candidates of the major reformist parties—the Communist Party (CP) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Stamberg, a 34-year-old labor militant, was active in SDS and the civil rights movement in the mid-1960's, writing for both the Guardian and the Washington Free Press, and later became a leader of the feminist Oakland Women's Liberation. She spent nine years as a telephone worker, many of them as a leader of the Militant Action Caucus, a class-struggle oppositional grouping in the Communications Workers of America.

Today Stamberg is a staff writer for the SL's Workers Vanguard. In the following interview with Women & Revolution, Stamberg discusses the central issues and lessons of the campaign.

\* \* \* \* \*

W&R: Why did the SL choose to run at this particular time, and on what basis was the State Assembly position in New York City chosen?

**STAMBERG:** In the first place, unlike the reformists of the SWP, running for election is not the main thing we do. We are not an electoral party as such, but a revolutionary party. We do work in the trade-union movement, on campuses, in the women's arena and so forth. We would like to run more, but being a small party, we have to pick our issues and areas very carefully.

For instance, we would have liked to run in Boston in 1974 during the busing fight or in 1975-76 in the New York City elections in the middle of the default crisis. This was a period when you had massive layoffs and the slashing of services, when every sector of the population had a felt need and desire to fight back against the cutbacks. It was a situation where a class-struggle leadership in the trade unions could have led a city-wide general strike, a political strike against Democratic Party rule, and could have pulled out every section of

**"...we wanted to run against the most liberal Democrat we could find...."**

the minority population behind it, overcoming the disastrous polarization that has existed since the 1968 teachers' strike between the black masses and the labor movement. But, once again, the union bureaucracy lay down and died.

Unfortunately, we were not able to run a candidate in those situations. So, when we were discussing whether to run in New York in 1978, we got a funny kind of reaction from some comrades who said, "It's not Boston '74 or New York '75—there are no issues." Well, it quickly became obvious that it is not that there are not issues in New York City today, but rather that New York City is a monster! It is here in the financial capital of U.S. imperialism that the nightmares of capitalism exist in their most exposed forms. Every question in New York City—from the charred remains of the South Bronx to the fear and violence on the subways—leads one to recognize the urgent need for a socialist revolution. The patent absurdity of a reformist solution is obvious.

We chose the assembly post because we are a small party and don't now have the forces to run around the Adirondacks petitioning for some office like governor, but at some point we will do that. It is relatively easy to get on the ballot to run for assembly.

Also, we wanted to run against the most liberal Democrat we could find. People asked us on the

streets, "Why do you want to run against William Passannante? He's got a 90 percent ADA rating. He's for all these good things. He's for gay rights." Except it turns out he voted for the Emergency Financial Control Board, which put the unions into receivership to the

**"...we might have been running in Greenwich Village for a minor assemblyman's post, but, you see, we were running as bolsheviks"**

banks for 19 years! But *that* vote wasn't even considered in the ADA ratings, which shows you how the liberals see these things.

We got a funny response to our campaign from a little Shachtmanite group, the League for a Revolutionary Party, which kept looking for different reasons why it couldn't support us. First the Shachtmanites said, "Aha! You're running in this petty-bourgeois district, Greenwich Village, and therefore we can't support you." When we pointed out that tens of thousands of workers also lived in this district, they declined to support us on the grounds that these were "labor aristocrats"; i.e., highly paid and privileged workers. Now, there were a couple of really "principled" reasons why they

wouldn't want to support us; that is, we defend the Soviet Union against imperialist attack, which they don't, and we call for the defense and extension of busing in Boston, whereas they capitulated to racist, separatist sentiment there, abandoning the struggle for the democratic right to integrated education. But they didn't want to fight on those questions, so they came up with this cretinism to avoid the issue of our campaign.

Well, we might have been running in Greenwich Village for a minor assemblyman's post, but you see, we were running as *bolsheviks!* We were running on a platform for revolutionary politics, regardless of the particular neighborhood or post. That's something that a

socialist ought to be able to understand.

**W&R:** You have referred to using the electoral arena as the Bolsheviks did, as a platform for putting forward the revolutionary program. Could you tell us a little more about Bolshevik electoral policy and how it applied to your own campaign?

**STAMBERG:** It was very exciting to research the work

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W&R Photo

**The Stamberg campaign brought soapbox campaigning back to New York City politics. Here Stamberg discusses issues while member of Militant-Solidarity Caucus (National Maritime Union) takes microphone to speak in her behalf.**

## Campaign '78...

that was done by the Bolsheviks in the tsarist Duma, although, of course, the conditions under which they worked were very different from those of bourgeois democracy. When the Bolsheviks were an illegal, underground party in Russia, their only public, legal, overground members were the elected representatives to the Duma. So they had an enormous task, because not only did they have to put forward the kind of struggles that would be an inspiration and rallying point to the workers, but in a very direct way they were also the link to the underground and the trade unions.

The very first day that the Bolsheviks were elected, an enormous strike erupted all over St. Petersburg to show support for the Bolshevik fraction. Badayev, a member of the Bolshevik fraction, told the story of how every morning when he awoke the flights of stairs leading to his apartment would be lined with people waiting to talk to him about how somebody's brother at the front was in trouble, somebody's sister was having problems with factory conditions, another was in jail and so on. The Bolsheviks took this job seriously at all levels.

At the same time, when Badayev went to Lenin to seek his advice on what bills the Bolsheviks should introduce in the Duma, Lenin said, "You had better introduce a 'Bill' stating that in three years time we shall take you all, blackhearted landlords, and hang you all

**"I handed in an undated resignation from the post for which I was running to the Central Committee of the Spartacist League...."**

on the lampposts. That would be a real 'Bill.'" It's a story we told a lot during the campaign, which expresses the difference between our campaign and the others, like the CP and SWP.

We realize, as did the Bolsheviks, that there is an enormous pressure toward capitulation to bourgeois parliamentarism by any candidate. So we revived an old Bolshevik custom: I handed in an undated resignation from the post for which I was running to the Central Committee of the Spartacist League which it could have activated at any point if I had betrayed the revolutionary working-class program on which I campaigned.

**W&R:** What was the most interesting political opportunity afforded by the campaign?

**STAMBERG:** As an electoral candidate, I was able to participate in a debate with the SWP and the CP which was sponsored by the Marxist Education Collective, mainly about Crown Heights. The eruption of violence in Crown Heights had polarized the city and had dramatically posed the question of revolutionary leadership.

The incident which had sparked the intercommunal hostility was the killing of Arthur Miller, an aspiring black Democratic Party politician and small business-

man from the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn. Miller was strangled by the cops in front of scores of witnesses in broad daylight. The situation escalated when two days later a black teenager was savagely beaten by a vigilante squad of Hassidic Jews, reacting to black lumpen violence against their people, and it culminated in an enormous march of the black community on a Hassidic synagogue.

The killing of Arthur Miller could not have been a clearer case of vicious police brutality. There should have been a united protest of *all* the Crown Heights residents against the cops, but instead the situation was exploited by the black Democratic Party politicians who, for the sake of political expediency, took the heat off the cops and turned the anger of the black population against the Jewish community. And the SWP and the CP, in particular, *helped* the black Democrats and covered for the Reverend Daughtry in his poisonous assault on the Hassidim.

Crown Heights posed a question for the left: What do you do when the black population thinks the Hassidic community is the Ku Klux Klan and the Hassidim see the blacks as Cossacks rehearsing for another pogrom? Well, the reaction of communists ought to be to say "No!" to ethnic vigilantism, no matter who practices it, and to unite people around a struggle against the *class* enemy. As I said at the debate, "There is nothing in a communist program that calls for marching on a synagogue!" But this is exactly what the so-called left did. Both the CP and the SWP actually supported a pogromist march on that synagogue! Had we the forces, we would have tried to prevent the march, under the slogan "Not black against Jew, but class against class!"

As a comrade at the debate pointed out, the worst aspect of the situation in Crown Heights is that all the people in leadership were pushing for a race war, with the CP and SWP and most ostensible leftists egging them on—and in a race war the black population will lose! This is the reality of racist America.

**W&R:** The SWP candidate for governor, Diane Feeley, ran as a "socialist-feminist," and SWPers Sharon Grant and Ken Miliner ran for congress as "black candidates." But unlike other leftists who played to special sectors of the population, you did not run as a "woman candidate."

**STAMBERG:** That is a pretty central difference that came up again and again during the campaign. We are not feminists and we are not nationalists. We believe that the logic of both black nationalism and feminism leads to *opposition* to working-class struggle. The SWP has long had a formulation that "consistent feminism leads to socialism." This is simply an excuse for not fighting for Trotskyism in that milieu. The struggles of various minorities can be successful only if they can transcend their particular interests and become part of the struggle of the entire class. Otherwise, these various sectors will find themselves fighting each other for a bigger share of a shrinking pie—as in Crown Heights.

I listened to Diane Feeley a lot during the campaign, and she sounded to me like a representative of the bourgeois feminist National Organization for Women (NOW). There was hardly a shred of even lip service to

socialist ideas in what she said; her politics were only a shade to the left of the liberal bourgeoisie. On WNCN radio she was asked about her position on New York's abortion laws, and she said essentially that they are fine. Neither the SWP nor its front groups like the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) ever fought for free abortion on demand. Abortion in New York is neither free nor safe nor easily accessible, but the SWP sees nothing wrong with it.

TV and radio interviews are hard. You look for openings where you can bring out your full political program and get away from some of the municipal stuff. But Feeley was on Channel 13 during the campaign, and they asked her directly, "The SWP is a Trotskyist party; what does that mean?" And she said, "We think some of Trotsky's ideas were good." "Some"—I'll never forget that!

We went to a number of women's groups during the campaign, including the Chelsea Women's Center, and it was just a parody of what the women's movement was like in the 1960's—real *déjà vu*. They had a meeting to discuss a large feminist conference of superstars which had recently taken place and which many women had disliked. But the "discussion" could never get beyond disputes over how there couldn't be any agenda because it might oppress somebody and the usual bitter anti-leadership, anti-political, anti-male, anti-decision-making vituperation. But the fact that today virtually all

you have is the bourgeois NOW and these pathetic and ineffective organizations is partially the responsibility of organizations like the SWP which never tried to win women to a revolutionary socialist perspective.

W&R: While the woman question was not a major issue in your campaign, you did devote a great deal of time to

**"We got up in Sheridan Square and said that there is no such thing as 'gay power,' that the spirit of Anita Bryant is unfortunately greater than the spirit of Stonewall...."**

the question of democratic rights for homosexuals, and you linked both the woman question and the gay question to the institution of the family. Despite the fact that you ran against a liberal Democrat who claims to support gay rights, you did exceedingly well in those areas of the district which are predominantly homosexual. How do you analyze this?

STAMBERG: Well, it certainly was not because we capitulated to "gay liberation" politics. We got up in Sheridan Square and said that there is no such thing as "gay power," that the spirit of Anita Bryant is unfortunately greater than the spirit of Stonewall, and  
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## Spartacist Party's Fighting Program

New York is falling apart, and only a fight by the powerful NYC labor movement can save it. But the union bureaucrats, in a treacherous alliance with their phony "friends of labor" Democrats, helped the banks loot the city. Labor must break with the Democrats, and dump the bureaucrats who tie the workers to the parties of big business.

A vote for Marjorie Stamberg and the Spartacist Party is a vote for the working class against the Democrats. We offer the plain truth, not reformist schemes to "change priorities." The capitalist class and its political parties got us into this mess, and it will take a socialist revolution to get us out.

**Build a workers party to fight for a workers government!**

**Launch a NYC labor offensive against the bankers war!**

- Jobs for all—30 hours work for 40 hours pay!
- Victory to the press strike!
- Abolish the Taylor Law!
- Restore and expand social services—Free quality health care, mass transit, education, housing!
- Rebuild this decaying city—For a massive public works program: Billions for the subways and a West Side superhighway!
- Smash Big MAC/EFCB—Take back the unions' pension funds! Wipe out the debt! Expropriate the banks!

**Labor: Lead a united struggle to defend and extend democratic rights for all!**

- End discrimination in schools, housing, jobs!
- Pass the ERA! Democratic rights for homosexuals—Pass Intro 384! Down with the Bakke decision!

**Defeat the racist "law and order" campaign!**

- Down with the death penalty and the liberals' racist "crime package"!
- Stop the cycle of ethnic vigilante terror! Jail the killer cops!

**For working class internationalism!**

- Down with Carter's anti-Soviet "human rights" crusade! Defend the USSR against imperialist threats—For workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy!
- Smash apartheid in South Africa!
- Stop the deportations—Full citizenship rights for foreign workers!
- Independence for Puerto Rico!

The future of this city will not be decided at the polls but on the picket lines and battle lines of the class struggle. It is to this struggle that the Spartacist Party is dedicated, and to the construction of a mass workers party to lead it.

# Stamberg: "Consistent Feminism Leads to... Strikebreaking"

[Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard*  
No. 218, 3 November 1978.]

On Tuesday, October 24, Marjorie Stamberg, the Spartacist Party candidate for New York state assemblyman in the 64th A.D., was interviewed and talked with listeners for approximately two hours on the 'Round Midnight radio show broadcast by WBAI. In response to a question on the Spartacist attitude toward feminism, from a listener who identified himself as a supporter of the Socialist Workers Party, Stamberg answered:

We believe that the sex line is not the fundamental division in society—the class line is. We have forged our work in the women's movement by fighting against the strategy of feminism and to link the fight against the oppression of women to the workers movement. Let me give you some examples of this. You see I spent many years in the women's movement myself and I considered myself a feminist for many years, and part of my being won to a Trotskyist program had to do with my experiences trying to organize working-class women to a feminist strategy....

My experiences are similar to those of a number of people of my generation who went through various kinds of struggles in the New Left and the women's movement. I joined SDS in 1965 and was active in the New Left until approximately 1969. At that point I moved to Oakland, California where I began to work with a group of women there that was interested in doing working-class organizing. We looked at the women's movement and found that it was pretty petty-bourgeois...and we said, well, what's wrong with the women's movement is that it has a middle-class program, and if you want to change that what you ought to do is go out and get yourself some working women to join it.

At that time we had a kind of Maoist strategy that "the correct politics flows through the blood of true proletarians." So we went into the phone company to organize the operators, which is where most New Left feminist types went when they wanted to try out their strategies in the working class. We also at that time had a position similar to that of the Socialist Workers Party, which says that consistent feminism leads to socialism. We did not have that formulation, but we had a similar one: "If you organize women around their oppression they'll come to a full understanding of the social struggle." It's been around that strategy that the SWP has cynically organized in the women's area.

So we went into the phone arena. And in the telephone workers union, the CWA, in Oakland there existed, at the same time as our feminist group, a caucus called the Militant Action Caucus which was politically supported by the Spartacist League. For about three years we fought out our feminist strategy and our nationalist strategy.... We fought



W&R Photo

**New York City, 4:00 a.m.: 10 phone lines of radio station WBAI are jammed.**

these political questions out with the Militant Action Caucus and we really came to no decision for quite a while until the class struggle heated up in 1971. Then there were a series of strikes against the phone company and we were able to test our strategy out in action against the revolutionary strategy of the Spartacist League and the class-struggle politics of the Militant Action Caucus MAC.

So here's a couple of things that happened. The key thing that won me in that struggle away from feminism was that shortly before the CWA strike in the summer of 1971 the IBEW, which was composed mainly of male workers in the phone company, went out on strike and we were faced with a strange phenomenon. We saw that many of the women that my friends and I had recruited to women's consciousness-raising groups in fact crossed the picket line of the male workers, of the IBEW, using all the feminist arguments that we had recruited them to. They said, "Well, there's not very many women in the IBEW, and therefore it's all right to cross the picket lines." And they said, "Well, we really are the most oppressed, so it's all right if we cross the picket lines."

This really shocked us because we had been organizing women on a feminist strategy around their own oppression and it did not lead them to understand the need to forge real links with the rest of the class, but it led them to become *strikebreakers*. So that situation, combined with a few other experiences at that time, forced us to break empirically from our feminist politics in order to hold onto the class line. And it was through that strike that we gradually were won over to the class-struggle perspective of the MAC and the Trotskyist program of the Spartacist League. ■

## Campaign '78...

so on. We went to a number of gay groups and had intense political debate over the question of the passage of Intro 384, a simple statement of equality under the law for homosexuals in New York City. The Democratic-controlled City Council has been unable to pass it for the last eight years and last year failed once again. Yet you had all the gay groups in town, from the bourgeois Village Independent Democrats to the so-called gay socialists, trying to pressure the Democratic Party to pass it. We pointed out that the Democrats, led by Jimmy Carter, have a "human rights" policy which means support to the Shah of Iran, to Pinochet, to Videla. It means the continued oppression of minorities in the U.S. We said that the labor movement and oppressed minorities must *break* their ties to the Democrats and that the labor movement must campaign for democratic rights for homosexuals, since it alone has the social power to stop the Anita Bryants, the Briggses, the marauders in Central Park.

**W&R:** One of the central issues taken up in an interview you gave to *Gaysweek* is the question of homosexual oppression in Cuba.

**STAMBERG:** This raises a real problem—the legacy of Stalinism, which contributes to the vicious anti-communism in the United States. Everywhere I went people said to me, "Well, if you're a communist, are you going to put everybody in work camps? What are you going to do with the artists and writers?" Stalinism

**"Everywhere I went people said to me, 'Well, if you're a communist, are you going to put everybody in work camps?'"**

is associated with Leninism in the minds of the vast majority of the American people. It was certainly true of the guy who interviewed me for *Gaysweek*, who came thinking that a socialist candidate would be anti-homosexual because Stalinist regimes such as the one in Cuba persecute homosexuals.

When I said we defended Cuba against imperialism, he could not understand how I could be in favor of women's liberation and homosexual rights. The answer is that Cuba is *not* socialist—nor is China or the Soviet Union. They are what we call deformed workers states, and we fight for *political revolution* in them to oust the parasitic bureaucracies which rule over the workers and perpetuate all the old social divisions and inequalities inherited from capitalism.

The SWP has had a problem with Cuba and gay rights. You see, opportunism is not so smart in the long run. The SWP publicizes itself as a great champion of the oppressed and a great champion of democracy (even when it excludes us from its meetings), yet it is also the greatest cheerleader for Fidel Castro. It has been unwilling to fight for the program of political revolution or even to acknowledge that Cuba is a deformed workers state. Yet Cuban homosexuals are not even

allowed to teach in schools.

So, what can you say about an organization which claims to be in favor of democratic rights for homosexuals yet covers up for the Castro regime? It's pretty embarrassing for the SWP.

**W&R:** Unlike what you described about the conditions under which the Bolsheviks worked—and the same is true even of European politics today—there is not a very strong sense of class consciousness in the American working class. In the U.S. a candidate is seen as a rather disembodied personality who can say whatever he wants on any particular issue. How did the Spartacist League approach that problem?

**STAMBERG:** The proletariat in the U.S. certainly does not yet see itself as a distinct class. Thus, there is no mass labor party, no social democratic party. We repeatedly said that putting one solitary socialist in Albany wouldn't make much difference to the oppressed masses of this country, and we emphasized the need for New York's labor movement to break its crippling alliance with the bourgeois Democrats.

Running for local office posed the problem of applying the international Trotskyist program of the SL in a way relevant to New York, in particular. We had to take a stand on local issues, like Westway and gun control—we attacked the knee-jerk liberal attitude of opposing both. We posed the perspective of a struggle led by the labor movement to save New York from the overwhelming problems that beset it. But when you talk about expropriating the banks and withholding income taxes from the federal government, for example, you are going to see the IRS and Chase Manhattan coming back at you looking strangely like the U.S. Army marching in, and the question of class struggle is immediately posed.

So, we had to strike a correct balance between making our propaganda relevant to local issues and linking our program to the need for national—and international—working-class struggle against capitalism. I think we were successful. ■

### INTERNATIONAL SPARTACIST TENDENCY DIRECTORY

LIGUE TROTSKYSTE DE FRANCE  
Le Bolchevik, BP 42109  
75424 Paris Cedex 09, France

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/BITAIN  
PO Box 185  
London, WC1H 8JE, England

SPARTACIST LEAGUE OF  
AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND  
GPO Box 3473  
Sydney, NSW, 2001, Australia

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.  
Box 1377, GPO  
New York, NY 10001, U.S.A.

SPARTACIST STOCKHOLM  
Spartacist Publishing Co.  
c/o E. Davidson  
Fack  
102 60 Stockholm, Sweden

TROTSKYIST LEAGUE OF CANADA  
Box 7198, Station A  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

TROTZKISTISCHE LIGA,  
DEUTSCHLANDS  
Postfach 1 67 47  
6000 Frankfurt/Main 1, W. Germany

## Iran...

(continued from page 5)

they all put these on and went out together. They had scarcely walked any distance before such a terrific hubbub blew up that they had to run separately for refuge in nearby houses. They suffered injuries to their heads and hands and were obliged to give up their innovation. The experiment of changing the color of the *chador* was also tried in Tehran and there too the result was unexpected and unpleasant. The wife of one of the parliamentary deputies clad herself in a dark brown *chador* and in this garb attempted to enter ... the parliament house.... But no sooner had this woman with a slightly different-colored covering appeared than the other women at the gathering went for her. She was badly beaten up before the parliamentary ushers rescued her and took her aside.

"The colored *chador* did not, of course, differ from the black *chador* in shape and cut; it similarly enveloped the whole body and had a veil which covered the face. The motive for the color change, on which certain reforming women were so insistent, was primarily to get rid of the gloomy funereal spectacle which used to be presented by women walking in the street, and which used to draw jibes such as 'black crow' or 'ink bottle' from the men.... A secondary motive was to relieve the excessive heat which gathered under the black cloth in summer sunshine; with colored materials it would be less irksome. The opponents of this move feared that the change of color would lead to a change of form and to a gradual breakdown of the fence which they had built for the purpose of confining women. The slightest sniff of fresh air, so they thought, would upset women's obedience and subservience to the men."

### The Fraud of the "White Revolution"

The laws concerning the status of women passed in the name of the shah's "White Revolution" of 1963 (enacted to counter the threat of a "red" socialist revolution) made little more than cosmetic changes in the Islamic law code. Higher education was made coeducational (approximately 17 percent of university students are now female); women were drafted into the army and sent, as part of the literacy corps, to teach in villages; Western dress was officially approved and the veil discouraged. But these advances were generally limited to the upper classes and left the masses of Iranian women untouched. Moreover, the most elementary bourgeois democratic rights were never achieved by any women. To this day Iranian women still need their father's permission to marry and their husband's permission to take a job outside the home and to travel outside the country. Muslim women may not marry non-Muslims. In many cases a woman is counted as half a man. For instance, a woman inherits only one-half of what her brother does. Two women witnesses can substitute for one man witness and, in certain cases, such as divorce, no female witnesses are



Spare Rib

**Unveiled women demonstrate in Teheran for nationalization of Iranian oil, 1951.**

accepted at all. A wife can inherit at best one-quarter of her husband's estate, while guardianship over her children automatically goes to her husband's father rather than to her. By the government's own admission, 69 percent of all women and 92 percent of rural women are still illiterate.

According to Article 179 of the Civil Code, if a man discovers his wife in the act of committing adultery and murders one or both of the adulterers, he is not subject to any penalty. A man will receive only six months in prison at most for the crime of killing a man who has slept with his daughter, sister or mother with no intention of marrying her. If he only injures the man, he can expect to receive a sentence of eight days to two weeks.

Like Shi'ite custom, the shah's law code also sanctions the *sigheh*, a temporary "marriage" in which a liaison is contracted for a specified period of time in return for payment of a specified sum, after which the "husband" has no further obligation. *Sigheh* is used as a legalized form of prostitution-slavery, and small shopkeepers contract such "marriages" to get cheap labor. The Civil Code also sanctions polygamy—with the "consent" of the first wife—and makes divorce proceedings a matter for the courts (previously it was merely necessary for the husband to shout "I divorce you" three times).

The one major legal gain Iranian women made under the shah was the right to vote granted in 1963. This immediately drew the wrath of the mullahs, including Khomeini, and, together with the shah's "land reform"

project, sparked the clerical-led revolt of 1963. While suffrage under the shah's bonapartist dictatorial rule did not give women any real political weight, the view that women, along with criminals and the insane, are unfit to vote is an eloquent political statement.

In many cases the regime's "progressive" laws were not enforced. The Civil Code permits marriage for women 16 and older, but marriage at earlier ages remains extremely common. This is especially true in the countryside where in some areas girls from 10 to 14 years of age are frequently married off. But even in Teheran, thousands of women under 16 petition and obtain exemption from the law, while others falsify their ages or marry secretly.

Shortly before his departure, the shah sought to appease the mullahs by catering to their reactionary program, which meant in part reversing even the paltry reforms which had been enacted with regard to women. In August of 1978 the office of Minister of Women's Affairs was abolished. Before the shah fled, his creatures in the *majlis*, the sham parliament, were considering bills to lower the age of marriage to 15, to forbid women to serve in the armed forces and to make abortion a capital offense.

All "progressive" rhetoric to the contrary, the real attitude of the shah toward women was well summarized in his often quoted interview with Oriana Fallaci:

"I wouldn't be sincere if I stated I'd been influenced by a single one of them. Nobody can influence me, nobody. Still less a woman. Women are important in a man's life only if they're beautiful and charming and keep their femininity.... This business of feminism, for instance. What do these feminists want? What do they want? You say equality. Oh! I don't want to seem rude, but.... You're equal in the eyes of the law, but not, excuse my saying so, in ability.... You've never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great chef.... You've produced nothing great, nothing!"

—Quoted in R. Bahareni, *op. cit.*

### Stalinists Betray the Iranian Proletariat

The Spartacist League has for some time characterized social conditions in Iran as the closest analog today to the tsarist empire at the time of the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty. The extreme instability of the shah's Peacock Throne, propped up by the CIA and Western imperialism, has now been dramatically demonstrated. Yet there is no revolutionary party to lead the proletariat in Iran today. Instead, the shah's regime has been shattered by an outburst led and dominated by clerical reaction.

In large part responsibility for the current predominance of the mullahs and this extreme disorientation (at best) on the left rests with the Iranian Stalinists who have repeatedly betrayed the interests of the Iranian proletariat.

Over the last several decades the Iranian working class has waged numerous militant strike struggles. During the early 1940's Iranian workers seized factories, called citywide general strikes and even organized workers militias—but the wretched reformists of the Stalinist Tudeh Party sold them out every time. The Tudeh Party consistently subordinated the workers' interests to the Soviet bureaucracy, which wished

above all to ensure control of oil concessions in northern Iran. During the 1950's the Tudeh Stalinists refused to back the workers' struggle for nationalization of the British-owned oil industry and were completely disarmed before the CIA-engineered overthrow of Mossadeq and the bloody repression which followed. The Tudeh Party was completely discredited when the USSR then struck a deal with the shah, sending him arms in return for natural gas.

Militants who in disgust with Moscow turned toward Peking ended up either as apologists for the Maoist bureaucracy's own alliance with the Peacock Throne or as "urban guerrillas" of Khomeini's "Islamic revolution." Their recent militant protests have been aimed at pressuring Khomeini to stop his fanatical attacks on "Marxism"—attacks which are a fundamental part of his program.

As for the Iranian student groups, most of them have shown themselves to be little more than radical nationalists, as indicated by their support of Koran-inspired attacks on "degenerate" Western culture. All too typical is this statement by the wing of the Iranian Students Association (ISA) which is supported by the Mao-cultists of the Revolutionary Communist Party:

"It is the absolute right of any peoples in the world to cherish and protect and uphold their cultural values AS THEIR OWN and to oppose in every way the imposition of alien cultural values on them. The destruction of pornographic movie theaters, liquor stores, Pepsi trucks and U.S. and European banks expresses this..." [emphasis in original].

While the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union (CISNU) Left Platform group is less inclined to launch frenzied attacks on Coca-Cola, it too subordinates the woman question to a bloc with Khomeini. The CISNU Left Platform group points out that the shah's "liberation" of women is a sham—but then accepts the wearing of the veil as a legitimate form of protest. It claims, "If there is a small minority of anti-progressive religious elements in the opposition, they do not in any way represent the majority of religious opposition." But this "small minority" includes supreme leader Khomeini!

### Socialist Workers Party: Best Builders of Clerical Reaction

The ultra-opportunist, reformist Socialist Workers Party has also ended up in the camp of the mullahs, despite its occasional (and increasingly feeble) pretense to Trotskyism. The mullahs possess the SWP's one criterion for support: "mass action in the streets." But the SWP's support to Khomeini does not sit well with its oft-proclaimed commitment to "consistent feminism."

Before the current outburst of Islamic fervor, the SWP's Iranian co-thinkers of the Sattar League (now fused in the Iranian Socialist Workers Party) saw the woman question as the key to socialist revolution in Iran:

"The heavy weight of the oppression of women in Iran gives their struggle an explosive character. Struggles that begin around the axis of the most elementary rights of women could rapidly expand to encompass the urgent and broad demands and needs of the proletariat and

*continued on next page*

## Iran...

peasant women. Religious superstition and all the backward hierarchic social relationships in Iran will be challenged by the growth of the women's movement."

—"Draft Political Resolution of the Sattar League," *SWP International Internal Information Bulletin*, July 1977

But when Khomeini emerged as the leader of an Islamic "mass movement," the woman question in Iran was suddenly "disappeared" from the pages of the SWP's publications. For months the SWP suppressed all mention of the mullahs' religious anti-Westernism and their calls for the restoration of the veil. Then, still seeking to ignore the hegemony of religious leader Khomeini in the upheavals, the SWP sought to paint the attacks on bars and movie theaters—dictated by the precepts of the Koran—as "anti-imperialist acts" reminiscent of the Cuban revolution's closing of casinos. Finally the SWP emerged as a public defender of the mullahs, though seeking to save face with the claim that clerical influence on the anti-shah forces would be transitory, just as a Russian Orthodox priest, Father Gapon (later suspected to be a tsarist agent), played a transitory role in sparking the Russian Revolution of 1905.

But Gapon's role was transitory because the movement he temporarily led was based on the proletariat and raised a full range of basic bourgeois-democratic demands. The 1905 Russian Revolution, which erupted spontaneously, was conditioned by years of organizing and propaganda by the Russian Social Democrats. In Iran today there is no revolutionary leadership. And Khomeini, patriarch of Iranian Shi'ism, heads a fundamentally petty-bourgeois movement imbued with a *reactionary clericalist* social program.

For the opportunist SWP, leadership and program are unimportant; the only thing that counts is movement—preferably "mass movement." The SWP will support anything that marches—no matter where it is going. We have no doubt that it will hail the women's demonstrations which began on March 8 against Khomeini and against the veil as victories and even claim a share of the credit for them. Yet only *four days* before, SWPer Cindy Jaquith, just returned from Iran, *defended the chador* as "a symbol of protest" and explained that it wasn't really as bad as people thought:

"You'll notice, I'm sure, from pictures that women do not cover their face. They kind of put it over their head, wrap it around them and march along and chant and everything, just like everyone else."

Now that it is popular for women to march *unveiled* and against Khomeini, the SWP will support them, just as last week it supported the marches of *veiled* women for Khomeini (this is the SWP's idea of "dialectics").

The SWP's objectivist concept that masses in motion must automatically lead to the development of revolutionary consciousness has blown up in its face before. In April 1977 it hailed the Muslim-led protests against the Bhutto dictatorship in Pakistan: "As the protests have continued to gain momentum, women have begun to participate in them, a significant

development in Pakistan, which is strongly influenced by orthodox Islam." In June it said: "A government formed out of the present upsurge would be under strong pressure to concede democratic rights." By July the SWP had finally awakened to the fact that the Zia coup had produced an Islamic fundamentalist military regime and was forced to admit: "...the whole repression is being carried out under an Islamic cover."

In contrast, the Spartacist League had warned that the proletariat had no interest in the victory of the reactionary anti-Bhutto opposition—just as we warned that toppling the isolated shah merely to replace him by a theocratic state would mean a severe defeat for the Iranian proletariat and for women's rights:

"The victory of a reactionary movement of Muslim traditionalism will represent a far-reaching historical defeat for communists, who seek a revolutionary emancipation from semi-feudal backwardness. The religious opposition stands on the heritage of the Middle Ages, opposed even to the paltry social advances for women in past decades....

"Placing themselves in the tradition of the Islamic religious leaders in the 1906 revolution against the monarchy, when they fought for a constitution and a parliament, Khomeini and Shariatmadari can pose as the champions of democratic rights against the shah's tyranny. Do not be fooled! Numerous cases of dictatorial Muslim states masked by forms of parliamentary democracy can be found, including Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia."

—"Down with the Shah! Down with the Mullahs! Iran in Turmoil," *Workers Vanguard* No. 215 (22 September 1978)

## Women and the Iranian Working Class

The shah was unable to grant democratic rights to women and to the national and religious minorities of Iran not simply because he was personally a rigid, dictatorial autocrat, but because the capitalist system he represented necessarily obstructs and retards social and economic development.

As long as these economic relations continue, any regime which comes to power must also fail to achieve even the most basic democratic reforms. The bourgeoisie in Iran is not in opposition to imperialism. On the contrary, it is already the junior partner of imperialism, encouraging vast and expensive technological projects while simultaneously repressing the population via army and police and maintaining the most reactionary aspects of semi-feudal society.

But even in those countries where the native bourgeoisie undertook struggle against foreign imperialism, such as Turkey and Algeria, women's rights were not achieved. In Algeria the veil became a symbol of resistance to French imperialism. The history of such bourgeois-led struggles confirms Leon Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution. In analyzing the tasks of a revolution in tsarist Russia, Trotsky insisted that the bourgeoisie was no longer capable of leading the bourgeois-democratic revolution. He concluded not only that proletarian power was necessary to attain basic bourgeois-democratic goals, including basic democratic rights for women, but that the proletariat would have to place its own socialist goals on the agenda if the revolution were to be successful. In order

to smash the vestiges of pre-capitalist oppression and colonial domination, the working class would have to uproot the entire bourgeois order which propped up these institutions.

The Russian Revolution did create these objective preconditions for the liberation of women. Nevertheless, the Bolshevik Party under the leadership of Lenin, which carried out systematic work among women after 1917 (see "Early Bolshevik Work Among Women of the Soviet East," *W&R* No. 12, Summer 1976), understood that Muslim institutions, as oppressive as they were, served real social functions and could not simply be abolished. Like the bourgeois family, they had to be replaced. Lenin warned against prematurely confronting respected native institutions, even when these violated communist principle and Soviet law. At the same time he made it clear that there could never be a reconciliation between communism and the Koran—precisely because the most basic rights of women would be sacrificed.

There has been a rapid entry of Iranian women into the working class, where they now constitute nearly a third of the total workforce. These women generally labor under very poor conditions, but despite their superexploitation and concentration in small, underdeveloped industries, their entry into the proletariat means access to social power and the ability to act collectively, as opposed to their existence as isolated individuals in the home. The teenaged women textile workers of Isfahan and Teheran have waged militant strikes in the face of brutal SAVAK repression in the last several years, reminiscent of the volatile role played by

women textile workers in the Russian Revolution. Recent strikes have also been waged by telecommunications workers, teachers and nurses—all with large components of women workers. The raising of demands for day care centers in some of these strike actions was an encouraging sign and represents a beginning of proletarian struggle for women's rights.

The Iranian masses today urgently need an independent, working-class revolutionary party, capable of struggling in its own name against the reactionary social program of the mullahs. In this task, the question of women's oppression will play a major role. We salute the masses of outraged women who took to the streets in defiance of Khomeini, in defiance of 1,300 years of brutal institutionalized repression, in defiance of those "leftists" who hail as liberators the clerical reactionaries who would keep women gagged, locked away and enslaved from birth to death. But unless the defiant women find a programmatic base of support in a class-conscious proletarian opposition to the mullahs, their militancy will be dissipated or smashed by the clerical reaction. In the context of the instability of Iranian society and the ascendancy of Muslim fundamentalism, there will be no return to the bureaucratic tokenism of the "White Revolution." Only the perspective of a new, socialist order can show the way forward for the militant women. It is as cadres of a vanguard party of the Iranian working class, armed with the fighting program of revolutionary Trotskyism, that the courageous women of Iran will win their liberation and the liberation of all the exploited and oppressed. ■

## Anti-Sex Drugs...

(continued from page 11)

the *Village Voice* (8 January 1979). Touting a "successful, inexpensive treatment for rapists," the column quoted Dr. John Money of Johns Hopkins University: "By administering carefully worked out dosages of a hormone called anti-androgen to rapists, you can revert their sex drive back to the prepuberty level..." Dr. Money has been striving assiduously to get this "miracle drug" introduced into the nation's prisons, so far to no avail. Says Dr. Money: "You see, we live in a strange Kafka-esque world ... many so-called humanitarians are against the use of anti-androgen because they feel I'm infringing on the civil liberties of these convicted men.... The forces of anti-science are just too strong now." The liberal *Village Voice* clucks sympathetically.

We find Dr. Money and his *Village Voice* cheerleaders pretty Kafka-esque themselves. Apparently the real dangers of living in crime-ridden New York City, along with feminist propaganda which claims that rape is merely the logical extension of the male sex drive, have pushed significant sections of the liberal establishment over in to a 1984-ish world of mind—and sex—control. But despite the ravings of the nut-fringe component of the feminist movement which upholds lesbianism as a principle and sees all heterosexual interaction as rape

to a greater or lesser degree (see, for example, "The C.L.I.T. Papers, Feminism ad Absurdum," *W&R* No. 7, Autumn 1974), rape is simply not one end of a continuum that starts out with normal sexual behavior! It is a serious violent crime centrally involving the hatred/fear of women. It will certainly not be eradicated by doping up men in prison and forcing them to regress to prepubescent levels.

Incidentally, a survey of some of Dr. Money's literature reveals rather deeper and more sinister implications than the cheery little *Village Voice* piece implies. He tested his new drug not only on "sex offenders," but on men showing patterns of "violent behavior"—manifested not only in attacks on people, but also on objects! He complains that the main drawback of his approach is that the drug's effect only lasts so long as the "patient" takes it, and many seem—for some strange reason—to stop the treatments once out of the good doctor's clutches. If one could only find some permanent anti-erotic drug ... that, we presume, would be his idea of a real scientific breakthrough!

We do not underestimate the vicious, compulsive, violent and mortally dangerous acts to which desperate and twisted people resort. But chemical castration, like prefrontal lobotomies, particularly in the hands of a repressive and brutal capitalist state, is an equally vicious "solution" to the terror and crime bred by class society. ■

## Norma Rae...

(continued from page 24)

Golden Cherry Motel, where he encounters Norma Rae en route to an assignation with her current boyfriend.

The latter is your classic male chauvinist pig. She tells him not to expect her next time he is passing through. He calls her names, demands, "What the hell are you good for anyway?" and slaps her. As she hurries past Reuben's door with a bloody nose, he befriends her with a kind word and an icepack. Norma Rae's platonic friendship with Reuben is to become the catalyst for her transformation. They meet again at the local softball game, where Norma Rae is hassling with another former lover (and Reuben is spitting out his hot dog with the remark that it's "not Nathan's"). She asks him what he thinks of her and he replies, "I think you're too smart for what's happening to you."

How you respond to Reuben Warshovsky probably will depend on your tolerance for the self-mocking Jewish intellectual stereotype. Reuben is a self-avowed hypochondriac who talks about his mother more than about his girlfriend (a "lefto labor lawyer") and consumes club soda at the local bar. When Reuben and Norma Rae take to the back roads one Saturday to proselytize for the union, Reuben trips and falls in cow dung; later, making conversation with a group of old men whittling on the porch, he cuts his finger.

Like the socialist professor hero of "The Organizer," Reuben Warshovsky is a culturally alien "outside agitator" whose success depends on channeling the class instinct of a local militant to create a workers' leader. Yet in transforming Norma Rae into "our own Mother Jones," Reuben never talks politics to her; of his massive pile of books, he lends her only some Dylan Thomas poetry. She becomes a class-struggle heroine without ever articulating more than the liberal rhetoric of democracy and self-help: "The union's the only way we're gonna get our own voice and make ourselves any better."

At the first union organizing meeting, held at the local black church and attended by a racially mixed audience of about 30 mill workers, Reuben comes on more like a liberal-integrationist preacher from the old civil rights movement than a union organizer. He begins:

"On October 8, 1970, my grandfather, Isaac Abraham Warshovsky, died in his sleep in New York. The following Friday his funeral was held. My mother and father attended. My two uncles from Brooklyn were there. And my Aunt Minnie came up from Florida. Also present were 852 members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers... also members of his family. They had fought battles with him and bound up the wounds of battle. They had earned bread together and had broken it together. When they spoke, they spoke with one voice, and they were heard. And they were black and they were white. And they were Irish and they were Polish. And they were Catholics and they were Jews. And they were one. That's what a union is: one."

He goes on to tell the workers that textile is the only unionized industry in the country and therefore the company can deny "your health, a decent wage, a fit

place to work. I would urge you to stop them by coming down to the Golden Cherry Motel and pick up a union card and sign it." Finally he quotes from the Bible.

The appeal is one of abstract social justice. There is no mention of the possibility of company victimization or of plant closure. There is no talk of strikes or even of contracts. Evidently the mill workers are expected to battle for a union on the basis of vaguely integrationist and "progressive" sentiment, making no reference to the real problems of organizing in the open-shop Southern textile industry.

In general, Reuben doesn't have too much to say to the mill workers. His "line" starts with "Good morning" and usually ends there. But he has plenty to say to the



20th Century Fox

**Norma Rae becomes a class-struggle heroine but never acquires a class-struggle program.**

company. The first day that he turns up at the plant gate to give out leaflets, he has no real conversation with any of the workers (except to ask Norma Rae if her nose is better), but when the company guards bait him, Reuben is ready with a snappy answer: "We already got six of you boss men in civil contempt. Would you care to make it seven?" In the filmmakers' view, union organizing is clearly seen as an adjunct of the legal profession.

In his first confrontation with the company, Reuben arrives at the mill one morning to inspect the employees' bulletin boards. However bumbling he may be in private life, he is in his element now:

"The federal government of the United States in federal court order No. 7778 states the following: The union has the right to inspect the bulletin boards once a week to verify in person that its notices are not being ripped down."

Gloating that "no union organizer or known union member has been inside the fences of this plant for more than ten years," he proceeds through the plant escorted by management. When the bosses refuse to

move the union notice to eye-level, Reuben aggressively responds: "Why do you guys pull this horseshit? Now I got to go to the phone, call my lawyer and get him on your ass." The bosses, seething with rage but trembling at the prospect of a lawsuit, back down.

Norma Rae hesitates before joining the union; she is afraid she may lose her job. "No way," says Reuben. "You can wear a union button as big as a frisbee when you go to work.... There's not a goddamn thing they can do to touch you." Subsequently, when she has been fired and dragged screaming to the police station, he tells her:

"It goes with the job. I saw a pregnant woman get punched in the stomach on a picket line. I saw a boy of 16 get shot in the back.... And you just got your feet wet."

She quickly becomes the spearhead of the organizing. When the local minister refuses to let her use his church for an integrated union meeting, she holds it in her home. She organizes with energy and characteristic personalism: "Will you read one of these for me please," she entreats one man; "Now Doris," she says, "I want you to come on down to Golden Cherry and bring your peanut butter pie." Putting in long hours on clerical work in Warshovsky's motel room, she jeopardizes her relationship with her new husband (Beau Bridges).

Finally the company hits back, posting a racially provocative notice: "You black employees are being told that by going into this union en masse you can dominate it and control it as you may see fit...."

Reuben is ecstatic: "I love it when these pricks get mean. We can take legal action." He insists that if Norma Rae cannot steal the notice, she copy it down word for word. The company orders her to stop and finally demands she leave the plant. She refuses. When the security guards arrive, she scrawls the word "UNION" on a piece of cardboard and stands up on a table in the middle of the weaving room. The scene is charged with extraordinary power as the workers, one by one, turn off their machines in a spontaneous work action. The silence in the usually deafening factory when the last machine is down is the film's only hint that unions can be built through the concerted militant action of the workers.

But the movie can do nothing with it. Norma Rae, fired, leaves the mill. The film attempts to defuse the tension of the work stoppage with a scene of her struggling against the burly cops as they stuff her into the patrol car and haul her off to the station.

The film's climax, as befits its view of unionism, is the bargaining election. The workers wait anxiously in the heat as the ballots are counted. When the vote is announced—373 for the company, 425 for the union—pandemonium breaks loose. Outside the gate, Reuben and Norma Rae hear the triumphant chant of "Union, Union." Reuben knows his job is done. He bids Norma Rae a fond farewell ("Be happy. Be well."), gets in his car and drives away. At the point that a real struggle over wages and conditions should begin, the movie ends.

The ending, though unsatisfying, is not so unrealistic. In 1963 the Textile Workers Union embarked on a drive to organize J.P. Stevens, the country's second largest textile firm. In August 1974 the union won its first bargaining election, in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina. But the workers there are still working without a contract.

"Norma Rae" is most engaging as a portrait of a very appealing working woman of character and courage. As a film it has its flaws, most notably its sentimentality, some idiocies of dialogue and an old-fashioned sharp separation between sexual relationships and "pure" friendship. Politically it is a cruel joke, presenting the government rather than class struggle as the mechanism for trade-union organizing. To its credit, it treats the working people with sympathy and it presents social involvement rather than self-absorption (a la "An Unmarried Woman") as the means whereby the heroine discovers strength and purpose. ■

## SPARTACIST LEAGUE LOCAL DIRECTORY

NATIONAL OFFICE .....	(212) 925-2426
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W&R 18

# "Norma Rae": A Review

by Ellie Raitt



20th Century Fox

**Despite its liberal politics, "Norma Rae" is something unusual: a pro-working-class film whose heroes are a labor organizer and a union militant.**

"Norma Rae" is an often gripping story of a proletarian heroine. Set in a small Southern town dominated by a textile mill, the film depicts the arrival of a union organizer, Reuben Warshovsky (played by Ron Liebman), and the unfolding of his relationship with Norma Rae (Sally Field), a 31-year-old widow with two small children who works in the mill along with both her parents. Their efforts to organize a union among the socially conservative mill workers form the plot of the movie, but its substance is less concerned with this potentially explosive subject than with Norma Rae's discovery of her own inner resources through her deepening commitment to social justice as expressed in trade unionism.

The use of the political theme as a backdrop for exploring Norma Rae's evolution from victim to "free woman" is an implicit attack on "me decade" feminism which poses introspection, subjectivity and therapy as the road to liberation. So far so good. The problem is that wherever the film touches politics, the politics are fundamentally false. The filmmakers have worked hard to achieve a documentary effect in the in-plant photography, but the political world of the plant is a liberal fiction. The bosses (and cops) in this Southern company town have profound respect for the law and never overstep its bounds; nothing worse than a traffic ticket ever happens to Reuben Warshovsky. But the

central problem is the film's view of trade unionism as a kind of liberal ideology divorced from any hint of class struggle. There is no need for picket lines involved in the building of unions, only legal briefs because behind the union stands that well-known "friend of the working man," the federal government.

Norma Rae is an engaging character. Bright, pretty, spirited, she is also deeply frustrated, lacking an outlet for her energy and her anger. Since the death of her husband in a barroom brawl some years before, she has lived with her parents and her children (one of whom is illegitimate). Her sex life is a series of unsatisfying affairs with casual lovers who use and abuse her. At her job, her friends view her promiscuity with envious disapproval while the company calls her "the largest mouth" because of her complaints about working conditions. In an effort to buy her off, the bosses promote her to "spot-checker," which means following the other workers around with a stopwatch. Despite the pay raise, Norma Rae gives up "spot-checking" after her friends stop speaking to her.

Meanwhile, Reuben Warshovsky has arrived in town. Norma Rae meets him when he comes to the door of her house and tells her father, "I'd like to get me a room with a mill family.... I want to get to know some mill hands close up." Rebuffed, he sets up shop at the

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