

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League  X-523

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**Return to the Road of Lenin and Trotsky!**

## How the Bolsheviks Fought for Women's Emancipation

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Viktor Bulla

Petrograd, March 1917. Working women raise banner: "Comrade Workers and Soldiers, Support Our Demands."

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# Letters

Our Winter 1986-87 issue (No. 32) generated a great deal of correspondence, centering on Neanderthals, dogs, Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich—that is to say, prehistory and psychiatry. Our general policy on letters is to print as many as possible, based on editorial considerations including general interest and particularly controversial questions. We reserve the right to excerpt letters as necessary for space, and advise readers that a two or three page double-spaced typed letter has a far better chance of appearing uncut than a longer one. Cuts in letters are indicated by ellipses (...).

\* \* \* \* \*

## Blacks and the Civil War: The Fort Wagner Debate

Melbourne, Australia  
8 December 1986

The Editor:

I enjoyed reading your Winter '86-'87 edition [*Women and Revolution* No. 32], but I have a couple of points of clarification on some matters mentioned.

Re J.M. Robertson's theory being that perhaps semi-wild canines helped to protect early hunter gatherers by discouraging big cat attacks, I suggest he does some research on the matter. In fact leopards in both Africa and Asia are well known to enter villages to specifically take dogs, finding canine flesh a particular treat. I suppose that as a sacrifice inasmuch as humans are a second choice the dog does provide some manner of protection.

Another point I have is regarding the first all Black attack on Fort Wagner, S.C. in July 1863. This was a cynical use of gun fodder known to be a suicidal venture doomed to failure by the commander of the Union



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**54th Massachusetts regiment charge at Fort Wagner,  
18 July 1863.**

Forces. Those poor men never had a chance as Tubman pointed out. In fact the U.S. Army used racist methods right up to the 1960s a full century from emancipation.

By all means check my claims, I trust you are interested in getting the facts straight free from subjective emotional bias?

Keep up the good work.

Yours,  
James Walby

*W&R* replies: The famous Civil War assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina was carried out by the Massachusetts 54th, the first regiment of free Northern blacks, under the command of the young white abolitionist Robert Gould Shaw (see "Harriet Tubman: Fighter for Black Freedom," *W&R* No. 32, Winter 1986-87). The attack failed with heavy casualties, including Col. Shaw, who died on the field.

From the time blacks were first armed after the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, the Union treated them as second-class soldiers: they were segregated into separate regiments (this continued through World War II), paid less and often armed with inferior equipment. While they were used as shock troops in the war, as W.E.B. Du Bois has charged, how widespread this was is controversial; blacks also were often kept out of combat for menial tasks such as trench digging. Thousands of white troops also died in hopeless or failed assaults in this most destructive war in the Western world in the century from 1815 to 1914.

But James Walby does not understand the profound contradiction of arming black soldiers in time of war and then denying them citizenship—a contradiction particularly acute during the Civil War. As General U.S. Grant said about arming the blacks, "This, with the

# Women and Revolution

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emancipation of the negro, is the heaviest blow yet given the Confederacy...." Black men in arms terrified the slaveholders, who threatened to re-enslave or execute captured black soldiers and their officers. As a battle Fort Wagner was insignificant; but as a testament to the courage of the newly armed black soldiers it electrified the nation. It followed by two days the bloody anti-draft riots in New York City, where white mobs lynched at least a dozen blacks and burned down the Colored Orphan Asylum. The courage of the martyrs at Fort Wagner helped to turn opinion in the North strongly for emancipation. As the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass said of the Civil War, "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship."

Walby's points on dogs are taken up in our reply following the next two letters.

## Cats and Dogs

Toronto, Canada  
9 February 1987

Dear Comrades,

Apropos the early man/canine alliance, John Pfeiffer (*The Emergence of Man*, 1972) notes that the hunting territories of wolves/wild dogs and early man appear to be of comparable size ranging from 500 to 1500 square miles. It is not hard to imagine, over time, increasing congruence of dog/hominid hunting territories and the implications for familiarity leading to co-operation and semi-domestication.

Warmest greetings,  
Oliver

\* \* \* \* \*

Iowa City, Iowa  
1 January 1987

Comrades,

I would like to make a few comments, mostly about W&R 32. First of all, I am glad to see that you have finally (!) gotten off the back of Neanderthal man. You might note that in addition to the reasons for the brutish hunched appearance, that was attributed to Neanderthals you cited, also it is now well known that the skeleton that was used for the early attempts to determine their appearance was that of an elderly, arthritic (at time of death) individual, not a young, or healthy mature individual at time of death. You were correct to note that much about Neanderthals is currently under debate, this includes whether they have any living descendants. I do note however that (unfortunately) primitive cultures and people from these cultures do tend to enter history on the side of the oppressors, in the modern world, the capitalists. Examples are the San (bushmen) of Southwest Africa (Namibia) allied with South Africa, the Indochinese hill tribes, many of whom allied with United States Imperialism against the revo-

lutionary forces, and of course the situation in Afghanistan. The reasons are not obscure, I don't think, both in specifics and generalities.

I also noticed the letter of James M. Robertson to the Institute of Human Origins. As W&R has no association with the Institute of Human Origins that I know of, why is it there? The letter asks a speculative question, with no particular relevance to a scientific, Marxist, understanding of the development of human society, at least as raised. The letter neither presents nor interprets any real information on the relationship of the domestication of dogs to the development of human society, which would be potentially relevant. Nor does the author seem to be familiar with research on the question of the domestication of dogs, there is some. I assume that the James M. Robertson of the letter is the same as the James Robertson of the editorial board and the S.L. leadership. This of course raises the question of why should a member of the editorial board (or anyone else for that matter) be publishing their private, personal, correspondence in a party organ? He certainly has a right to write speculative personal letters to whom he wishes, or to write for non-party groups (who ever the "Prometheus Research Library" is). But this is just that, a personal matter (or a matter relating to another organization), not a party matter. One sign of the deformation or degeneration of a political (or any other) movement is when personal matters of a "great leader" suddenly become important, usually this is called a cult of personality. From what I know Jim has rendered valuable service in building the Trotskyist movement nationally and world wide. Let's not spoil it, that would be a lot of ground to have to cover again.

I thought that your article on Harriet Tubman was good. However some of the other articles in the issue

Gary Larson



"It's Bob, all right...but look at those vacuous eyes, that stupid grin on his face —he's been domesticated, I tell you."

# Letters

seemed hastily done and to have more to do with screaming at someone than providing good political reporting, analysis, and course of action. These comments are intended constructively, and I hope you take them that way.

In solidarity,  
Loren Schutt

*W&R replies:* It seems from the response generated by comrade Robertson's letter on dogs that the subject of early mankind's relationship with canines is of interest to many of our readers—which is why we printed the letter. The prehistory of man generally gives us a sense of what human beings are and are capable of—after all, today's "civilization" represents only a tiny fraction of the existence of our species. More specifically, the domestication of wild canines certainly did extend mankind's power over nature, a subject of some importance to Marxists.

What seems to upset Loren Schutt, however, is the fact that the letter raised a genuine question, speculating as to whether "adjacent semi-domesticated canine packs protected men from the bigger cats, especially at night." This isn't "the party line," but a hypothesis we thought appropriate to print in *W&R*, which we hope

can be in part a vehicle for some provocative and even speculative inquiry into varied fields. We think that not only our readers and sympathizers, but also our members and leading members have the right to raise interesting questions to which they may not have "the answer." It should be obvious that this is the polar opposite of a "cult of personality" (wherein any casual comment of "glorious leader" is taken as gospel). Perhaps the suspicious tone of Schutt's letter reflects some nasty experience with local Iowa City-type "gods that failed" of the petty New Left variety—it is certainly not our practice.

To clear up a few details: the Prometheus Research Library is the archival and research center of the Central Committee of the SL/U.S. It is also currently a sponsor of the Institute of Human Origins, which is a publicly supported foundation promoting original anthropological research which, to our knowledge, espouses that wing of anthropology which is secular and humanist.

Regarding Walby's "leopard snacks," it's a long way between Siberian wolf packs and half-starved little dogs in contemporary South American or Asian villages. Even so, small Indian wild dogs, which travel in packs of up to 30 strong, are avoided by all other animals, including even tigers, according to the *National Geographic* documentary "Land of the Tiger." The documentary also cited the case of one tiger which after killing 12 dogs was itself killed and eaten by a dog pack. In *Not from the Apes*, the renowned Finnish paleontologist Björn Kurtén notes that some predecessors of today's dogs were highly predatory. He also points out, "Hunting dogs attack and finally overpower tigers even though the dogs themselves may be killed in the fight."

It is all too common in academic fields, including archeology and anthropology, for people to jump on each other; we would like to avoid that style, better suited to a Saturday night wrestling match. Thus we would welcome some specifics on the research our readers have alluded to, in order to help correct or extend the hypothesis raised.

## On Freud and Homosexuality

Randwick, NSW, Australia  
30 January 1987

The Editorial Board  
*Women and Revolution*

Comrades,

Jack Shapiro does Freud a disservice by equating Reich's pathological anti-homosexuality with Freudian thought when he writes, "...Reich maintained the orthodox Freudian position that homosexuality is arrested development, the failure of the child to overcome primary narcissism..." ("The Trouble with Sexual Utopias," *W&R* No. 32, pg. 19).

Freud himself never considered homosexuality a

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**Sigmund Freud**

sickness and in fact consistently fought against this conception within the psychoanalytic movement and without.

In "Letter to an American Mother," in response to a woman so ashamed of her son's homosexuality that she cannot bring herself to mention the word, Freud states:

"Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function.... By asking me if I can help you, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place.... What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains homosexual or gets changed...." (1)

It is surprising that Jack Shapiro has not cited this letter, as it has been so widely publicised in the last fifteen years. Perhaps he is a practising psychoanalyst. Much less known is the debate which took place between Freud and Otto Rank on the one hand and Ernest Jones and the Dutch Psychoanalytic Association on the other, about "...the propriety of accepting as a member (in the Psychoanalytic Association) a doctor known to be manifestly homosexual. I advised against it..." , writes Jones.

Freud and Rank replied:

"Your query dear Ernest concerning prospective membership of homosexuals has been considered by us and we disagree with you. In effect we cannot exclude such persons without other sufficient reasons, as we cannot agree with their legal prosecution. We feel that a decision in such cases should depend upon a thorough examination of the other qualities of the candidate." (2)

Much earlier, in an interview with *Die Zeit*, dealing with the arrest of a Professor Beer for allegedly molesting two underage boys, Freud states:

"I am ever of the firm conviction that homosexuals must not be treated as sick people, for a perverse orientation is far from being a sickness. Wouldn't that oblige us to characterize as sick many great thinkers and scholars of all times, whose perverse orientation we know for a fact and whom we admire precisely because of their mental health? *Homosexual persons are not sick, but they also do not belong in a court of law!*" (3)

In 1930 Freud was a signatory to the "Appeal to the Penal Justice Commission Concerning the Repeal of the Law on Homosexuality," the infamous Paragraph 175 outlawing homosexual relations in Germany.

The Appeal states:

"This law represents an extreme violation of human rights, because it denies homosexuals their very sexuality even though the interests of third parties are not encroached upon. The most terrible consequence is blackmail, which the police officially expect as a matter of course and which drives many homosexuals to suicide. Penalization thereby directly aids and abets the felony of blackmail." (4)

I don't believe Freud's statements in defence of gay rights are in contradiction to psychoanalytic theory. The following passage from "Three Essays on Sexuality" is worth quoting in full:

"Psychoanalytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character. By studying sexual excitations other than those manifestly displayed, it has found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object choice and have, indeed, made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to a person of the same sex play no less a part, as factors in normal mental life... than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. On the contrary, psychoanalysis considers that the choice of an object independently of its sex—freedom to range equally over male and female objects—as it is found in childhood, in primitive states of society and early periods in history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both normal and inverted types develop. Thus, from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature." (5)

By developing theoretically what he observed empirically in the analysis of his patients, Freud postulated that the same mechanisms which operate in mental illness—psychosis and neurosis—in fact operate in everyday "normal" life.

Freud freed psychology once and for all of the "compulsory categorisation" of sexuality of the pioneers that went before him, such as Havelock Ellis. The socio-political manifestation of the theories of Ellis et al. was the sad dead-end of the Uranian movement, which categorised homosexuals as an historically lost "Third Sex" worthy of tolerance and compassion, but nonetheless an aberration.

Freud completely challenged and revolutionised human thinking about what is normal and abnormal sexuality. Juliet Mitchell puts it nicely:

"He realized that instead of a pool from which tributaries ran, the tributaries were needed in the first place to form the pool; these tributaries were diverse, could join each other, never reach their goal, find another goal, dry up, overflow and so get attached to something quite different...in childhood all is diverse or perverse; unification and normality are the effort we must make on our entry into human society." (6)

By extreme contrast, Reich's chemico-biological mechanicism classified only penis-in-vagina sex as normal: only then could a proper discharge of sexual energy take place and anything else represented a

*continued on page 11*

# Return to the Road of Lenin and Trotsky!

## How the Bolsheviks Fought for Women's Emancipation

On the second anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin announced, "In the course of two years of Soviet power in one of the most backward countries of Europe more has been done to emancipate women, to make her the equal of the 'strong' sex, than has been done during the past 130 years by all the advanced, enlightened, 'democratic' republics of the world taken together" ("Soviet Power and the Status of Women," *Collected Works*). This truth has a fundamental materialist basis. Only a socialist revolution, breaking the bonds of private property, can create the conditions necessary for the emancipation of women. It's more than ever true today: amidst the barbarous social decay of the imperialist "democracies" like the United States, where reactionary bigots target women's rights, even a mere statement of formal equality like the ERA can't make it into law.

*Women and Revolution* here reprints three early Soviet decrees addressed to the emancipation of women. Codifying the hard-fought gains of the Bolshevik Revolution, these decrees laid out a perspective for the introduction of new social forms to replace the institution of the family and to draw women into the socialist construction of society. As Lenin said in November 1918, "The experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it. The Soviet government is doing everything in its power to enable women to carry on independent proletarian socialist work" ("Speech at the First All-Russia Congress of Working Women," *Collected Works*).

### Women in the Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution was sparked by the working women of St. Petersburg, when, 71 years ago, they celebrated International Women's Day with a spontaneous strike and march through the streets. Thousands of women standing in bread lines joined them; hastily improvised red banners rose above the crowd, demanding bread, peace and higher wages. Years of imperialist war had brought the mammoth social tensions of tsarist Russia, where modern capitalism existed superimposed upon entrenched medievalism, to the breaking point.

The Bolsheviks had long been active in organizing Russian proletarian women. The journal *Rabotnitsa* (*The Working Woman*), founded in 1914, was only one means by which the Bolsheviks sought to win the ranks of working women over to revolutionary socialism. Social backwardness and poverty in Russia before the



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**Petrograd: 18 June 1917 mass demonstration was a sea of Bolshevik slogans. Signs call for: "Power to the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies" and "Down with the Capitalist Ministers."**

revolution fell doubly hard on its women: even many of the minimal gains which capitalism had made possible in the more advanced industrialized countries of Europe did not exist in semi-feudal Russia, where serfdom had been abolished a mere 56 years earlier. Family life lay in the grip of the Orthodox church and its priests; religious prejudices were deeply rooted in poverty and ignorance. Peasant women in particular toiled under indescribably primitive conditions, culturally so impoverished that in 1897 the illiteracy rate was as high as 92 percent.

The Bolsheviks understood that the oppression of women could not be legislated out of existence. The family as the capitalist economic institution for raising the next generation could not simply be swept away by decree. It had to be *replaced* with socialized childcare and housework to remove the burden of domestic

chores from women, enabling them to participate fully in social and political life. Such a revolutionary restructuring of society could occur only with large-scale industrialization, necessarily years in the future. While fully committed to this revolutionary program, the Bolsheviks were handicapped by terrible objective conditions. For the first few years of Soviet rule their meager resources were absorbed by the Red Army's drive to defeat the imperialists and White Guards who launched a counterrevolutionary war against the young workers republic.

**Sweeping Away the Filth of Tsardom**

Once in power, the Bolsheviks moved immediately to end all the old legal impediments to women's equality. Women were given the vote, at a time when only Norway and Denmark had legalized women's suffrage. Marriage and divorce were made a simple matter of civil registration, while all distinctions between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" children were annulled. In 1919 the Communist Party created the Department of Working Women and Peasant Women, *Zhenotdel*, for special work among women, which included organizing over 25,000 literacy schools.

In 1920 the Soviet government legalized abortion and made it free. The People's Commissariat of Health pressed for development of and education about birth control methods, which barely existed in Russia at that time, while discouraging abortion as a threat to health in this age before antibiotics. Even more crucial was the workers government's commitment to eliminating the poverty which drove many women to abortion for sheer lack of ability to provide for their children. The Bolsheviks' aim was to build childcare centers and socialized dining halls to enable women to work knowing their children would be well cared for and fed; single mothers were to receive special help. Despite the severe objective limits facing Soviet society, the birth rate went steadily up and the infant mortality rate steadily down.

The workers revolution in Russia, in sweeping away the rotten filth of tsardom, also abolished in December 1917 all the old laws against homosexual acts. As Dr. Grigorii Batkis, the director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, pointed out in "The Sexual Revolution in Russia," published in the Soviet Union in 1923:

"Soviet legislation bases itself on the following principle:

*"It declares the absolute non-interference of the state and society into sexual matters so long as nobody is injured and no one's interests are encroached upon....*

*"Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality—Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called 'natural' intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters."* [emphasis in original]

**The Fight for Women's Rights in Soviet Central Asia**

Nowhere was the condition of women more downtrodden than in the primitive Muslim areas of



**Bolsheviks organized working women through journal *Rabotnitsa* (The Working Woman). Editorial board in 1917.**

Soviet Central Asia. The Bolsheviks believed that women, having the most to gain, would be the link that broke the feudal chain in the Soviet East, but they could not with one blow abolish oppressive Muslim institutions. The Bolshevik approach was based on materialism, not moralism. The Muslim bride price, for example, was not some sinister plot against woman-kind, but had arisen as an institution central to distributing land and water rights among different clans (see "Early Bolshevik Work Among Women of the Soviet East," *W&R* No. 12, Summer 1976, for a fuller discussion).

Systematic Bolshevik work among Muslim women was only possible in 1921, after the end of the bitter Civil War. Dedicated and heroic members of the *Zhenotdel* donned veils in order to meet Muslim women and explain the laws and goals of the new Soviet republic. Special meeting places, sometimes "Red Yertas" or tents in nomadic areas or clubs in cities, were a key way for the Communist Party to begin to win the trust of these women. Such clubs followed Lenin's policy of using Soviet state power to carefully and systematically undermine native tribalism by demonstrating the superiority of Soviet institutions. The tremendous productive capacity of the Soviet planned economy provided the services, education and jobs that finally decisively undercut the ancient order and liberated women from their stifling subjugation.



**Russia Must Win Afghan War! Spartacist League hailed Soviet intervention against Afghan counter-revolutionaries in Spartacist (Winter 1979-80). Gorbachev's threat to pull out today means a bloodbath for fighters against feudal reaction, especially Afghan women (at right, with rifles).**

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Today the condition of women in Soviet Central Asia is centuries removed from the oppression their sisters across the border in Afghanistan still face. We said "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" because the 1979 Soviet Army intervention against murderous Islamic counter-revolution (whose rallying cry is keeping women under the veil) posed the possibility of a revolutionary transformation of this hideously backward country. Under the protection of the Red Army, the women of Afghanistan have been taught to read and write, and a majority of university students are now women and girls; many hold jobs outside the home; and there are 15,000 women in the Afghan army, defending their new freedoms.

**Return to the Road of Lenin and Trotsky!**

Many of the gains made by Soviet women under the Bolsheviks were subsequently reversed by the Stalinist political counterrevolution. In 1936, abortion was made



E.P. Dutton

**Tadjik mountain women learning to read at early Soviet school.**

illegal. (It was again legalized in 1955.) Divorce became difficult to obtain, co-education was abolished, homosexuality was again outlawed. As Trotsky said, "The actual liberation of women is unrealizable on a basis of 'generalized want.' Experience soon proved this austere truth which Marx had formulated eighty years before." The cruel Civil War decimated the proletariat in the young workers state. Most fundamentally, failure to extend the Revolution internationally strengthened the Stalinist bureaucratic caste in the isolated Soviet Union. Workers democracy was smashed. The Leninist internationalist program was abandoned in favor of the search for "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, while domestically the Stalinists sought social props and ideological justifications for bureaucratic rule. Exploiting social backwardness to strengthen their grip over society, the Stalinists rehabilitated the family as a useful institution of social conservatism and control.

Trotsky denounced the Stalinist bureaucracy in "Thermidor in the Family" (*The Revolution Betrayed*):

"These gentlemen have, it seems, completely forgotten that socialism was to remove the cause which impels woman to abortion, and not force her into the 'joys of motherhood' with the help of a foul police interference in what is to every woman the most intimate sphere of life....  
 "Instead of openly saying, 'We have proven still too poor and ignorant for the creation of socialist relations among men, our children and grandchildren will realize this aim,' the leaders are forcing people to glue together again the shell of the broken family, and not only that, but to consider it, under threat of extreme penalties, the sacred nucleus of triumphant socialism. It is hard to measure with the eye the scope of this retreat."

Despite these counterrevolutionary measures, capitalist private property has not been restored in the Soviet Union. The tremendous productive capacity of the Soviet planned economy has opened opportunities for women—in education, jobs, social services—which capitalism can never provide. We defend the USSR today unconditionally against imperialism, because the fundamental gains of the October Revolution remain; it is a society based on production for social needs, not capitalist profit. At the same time we

call for political revolution to re-establish workers democracy and to return the Soviet Union to the liberating goals and program of Lenin and Trotsky.

Today there is great interest in the Soviet Union, in part because of the visible difficulties of American imperialism, but also because of Gorbachev's promises of *glasnost* (openness). Yet this "enlightened bureaucrat" will never tell the truth about the revolutionary work of the Bolshevik Party. Between that tradition and today's bureaucracy lies the gulf of the bloody political counterrevolution carried out by Stalin.

To appease the nuclear nuts in the White House, Gorbachev appears willing to pull out of Afghanistan. The Kremlin bureaucracy's willingness to abandon Afghan women to illiteracy, the veil and chattel slavery

starkly exposes the gulf separating them from the Bolsheviks, who understood that the question of women's liberation was key, above all in such backward, feudal areas.

In imperialist countries like the United States, only the abolition of private property will make women's emancipation a historical reality. It will take a socialist revolution in the U.S. to win the basic rights and social institutions the Bolsheviks fought for in the early years of the USSR. Given the tremendous productive capacity of U.S. industry and a far higher level of culture than that which the Bolsheviks inherited from the tsar, we have no doubt that the American workers government will be able to quickly implement such far-reaching social programs. For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

# Soviet Measures to Liberate Women

## Decree of the People's Commissariat of Health and Social Welfare and the People's Commissariat of Justice in Soviet Russia

During recent decades the number of women interrupting pregnancy by abortion has risen both in the West and in our country.

The legislation of all countries combats this evil by severe punishment of the women undergoing abortions as well as of the doctors performing them. To date this method has succeeded only in making the operation illegal, performed in secrecy, and in making women the victims of ignorant quacks or unscrupulous doctors who turn a profit from abortion. As a result, 50 percent of these women become seriously ill and 4 percent of these die from the consequences of the operation.

The Workers and Peasants Government regards this phenomenon as a terrible evil for the entire society. The Workers and Peasants Government sees the consolidation of the socialist order and agitation against abortion among the broad masses of the female working-class population as the way to successfully combat it. It combats this evil in practice with the most far-reaching protection of mothers and children, hoping that it will gradually disappear. However, as long as the remnants of the past and the difficult economic conditions of the present compel some women to undergo an abortion, the People's Commissariat of Health and Social Welfare and the People's Commissariat of Justice regard the use of penal measures as inappropriate and therefore, to preserve women's health and protect the race against ignorant or self-seeking profiteers, it is resolved:

I. Free abortion, interrupting pregnancy by artificial means, shall be performed in state hospitals, where women are assured maximum safety in the operation.

II. It is absolutely prohibited to perform this operation without a doctor.

III. Midwives or "wise women" who break this law shall forfeit their license to practice and be handed over

to the People's Court.

IV. Doctors performing this operation in their private offices for personal gain shall also be brought before the People's Court.

## Women's Work in the Economy

### Women as Participants in the Construction of Soviet Russia

#### Resolution of the Eighth Congress of Soviets

Considering that the primary task of the hour is raising the level of industry, transportation and agriculture; that women comprise more than half of the population of Soviet Russia—women workers and peasants; that implementing the proposed unified economic plan is only possible by involving all the female labor power: the Eighth Congress of Soviets resolves that:

a) Women workers and peasants are to be involved in all economic organizations which are working out and realizing the unified economic plan; likewise in factory administrations, in factory committees and in the administration of the trade-union organizations.

b) For the purpose of reducing the unproductive work of women in the household and in child-care, the Eighth Congress of Soviets requires that the local soviets encourage women workers to support, with their initiative and activity, the reforms of social institutions, the beginnings of communist construction, such as organizing communal dwellings and workshops for washing and mending laundry in city and village, organizing squads of cleaning women, creating foster care centers, communal laundries and dining halls.

The Eighth Congress of Soviets charges the newly constituted Central Executive Committee of the Soviets to immediately begin working out measures aimed at reducing the unproductive work of women in the household and family, thereby increasing the supply of

free labor power to raise the people's standard of living and augment the productivity of the Workers Republic.

### Social Institutions for the Relief of the Housewife Communal Kitchens in Moscow

The Russian Soviet bodies are committed to the opinion that the traditional housework performed by the mothers of families in individual households must pass over to socialized institutions. This is both in the interest of women, who squander their time and energy in arduous, grinding, unproductive tasks, and in the interest of society, which can make full use of women's talents and accomplishments in the economy and culture. In Moscow there are at present no fewer than 559 communal kitchens in which hot midday and evening meals are prepared daily for 606,100 adults. The children take their meals in the childcare and educational centers where they have found places or which they attend during the day.

Compare the blessings of "orderly conditions" in the states that are still capitalist with this result of "Bolshevik chaos"! Part and parcel of these "orderly conditions" is the fact that in all major cities, in all industrial centers, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands go without a warm midday meal every day and in the evening in an uncomfortable home they choke down a meal their harried wives have prepared hurriedly and with insufficient means. Increasingly, women in the proletariat and also in the petty bourgeoisie must contribute to the family's income. The double burden of working for a living and running the household rests on her. Meals in common—insofar as they occur at all—unite an overtired mother, a husband who is often grouchy because he does not find at home what he

seeks, and children whose eyes and clothing bespeak their lack of care and attention.

In Russia the working woman can throw off the burden of household obligations. She knows not only she herself, but, more importantly, her husband and children are better cared for than she could manage at home even with great energy and devotion. The home can now be a home in the most noble sense for husband and wife, for parents and children, a place to be together, for thinking and striving together, for enjoyment. Women have the time and leisure to learn, to educate themselves, to participate in all areas of social life, both giving and receiving. Oh, these Bolshevik "wreckers" and "destroyers"! Is that not what the philistines of all the capitalist countries are still prattling?

*Note on the documents:* The three pieces reprinted here are our own translations from the April 1921 issue of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (Communist Women's International), the official German-language journal of the Women's Secretariat of the Communist International. In *W&R* No. 9 (Summer 1975) we reprinted another version of the abortion legislation, which included at the end the signatures "N. Semashko, People's Commissar of Health; Kursky, People's Commissar of Justice." That was taken from the book *Health Protection in the U.S.S.R.* by N.A. Semashko, published in London by Gollancz in 1934. The date given for the decree on abortion in Semashko is 18 November 1920. Regarding "Women's Work in the Economy": the Eighth Congress of Soviets was held in Moscow from 22 to 29 December 1920. We were unable to find a date for the third piece; the Comintern women's journal did not give a source. ■

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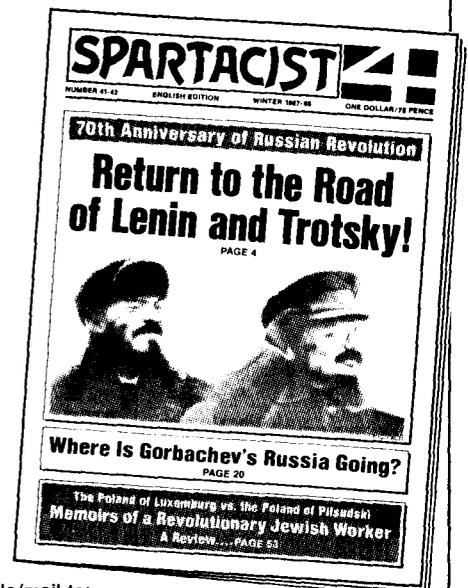
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# Letters

(continued from page 5)

short-circuiting of orgasm and was therefore abnormal, whether it be fantasy, masturbation or homosexuality. At various times Reich refused to accept homosexual patients, essentially because they were too far gone. One wonders what sort of "useful individual counselling" Reichian clinics would have provided to homosexuals in general and homosexual youth in particular.

It is worthwhile noting that Reich's views are quite consistent with those of the stalinising KPD in the late twenties and early thirties.

I hold many reservations on psychoanalytic theory and note the ease with which a crassly biological determinist form of psychoanalysis came to be extremely useful to the American bourgeoisie in the first Cold War. I agree with Jack Shapiro that in the final instance Freud was no revolutionary, but an historical pessimist. He merely revolutionised psychology.

However, it is important to preserve the materialist and scientific "core" of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis today is pretty arid, practically and theoretically. (7)

It remains for the Marxists to provide a positive account of what is best of psychoanalysis—"Why Freud was a great man and where he went wrong." Go to it, *Women and Revolution*.

Angelo Rubinetto

cc: SL/ANZ

- (1) *Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939*, E. Freud (ed.), Hogarth Press, London, 1961, pgs. 419-20.
- (2) Letter of Ernest Jones to Freud, 1 December 1921, and reply by Freud and Rank, dated 11 December 1921.
- (3) *Die Zeit* (The Times), Vienna, Friday, 27 October 1903, pg. 5.
- (4) Documents located in the Special Collections Section of Columbia University Library, first published in English in the Gay Liberation Journal *The Body Politic*, May 1977, pgs. 8-9.
- (5) Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, 1905, Discus-Avon, USA, 1962, pgs. 33-34.
- (6) Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, Allen Lane, UK, 1974, pg. 17.
- (7) For a tragi-comic account of the latter day psychoanalysts, see Janet Malcolm, *In the Freud Archives*, Alfred K. Knopf, USA, 1984.

*W&R replies:* Our article did not equate Reich's anti-homosexuality with Freud, but pointed out that Reich "went further than Freud and also identified homosexuality with political reaction." We agree that Freud personally did not consider homosexuality, or "inversion" as he termed it, an illness. In this he stands head and shoulders above most of the psychiatric so-called "profession": it took the American Psychiatric Association until 1973 to abandon its definition of homosexuality as an illness. However, orthodox Freudianism does indeed posit that homosexuality represents "arrested development," as the article stated. In fact, Freud commented (later in the same passage from *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* which Rubinetto quotes) that "In inverted types, a predominance of archaic constitu-

tions and primitive psychical mechanisms is regularly to be found."

Freud's central theory of neurosis and sexual "deviations" focused on the infant's experience within the patriarchal nuclear family (which he took as the historical norm for civilization). Freud's attempts to extend this theory back into human history and ground it in biology are admittedly thus not necessarily central to his clinical work; nonetheless, they do reveal a consistent thrust. A recent article by Stephen Jay Gould on "Freud's Phylogenetic Fantasy" (*Natural History*, December 1987) points out Freud was profoundly influenced by biological theories current during his lifetime (but since abandoned by scientists): first, that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny," or that the development of an individual child of an advanced species "recapitulates" in various ways the development of the entire species; and second, the Lamarckian belief that acquired characteristics are inherited.

These two theories provided the underpinning for Freud's "phylogenetic fantasy" (which he never actually published) that traumatic events in the European ice ages are reflected in modern neuroses. Freud speculated that homosexuality reflected the need to bond together of sons expelled from the primitive tribe by a castrating father: "It is very possible that the long-sought hereditary disposition of homosexuality can be glimpsed in the inheritance of this phase of the human condition." Gould notes further that this theory is fatally and falsely Eurocentric, since human evolution was shaped not in northern Europe but in Africa, and there is no evidence for such an organization of primitive society.

Certainly Freud never intended for his theories to be used punitively and vindictively to persecute people who deviate from the sexual "norm." For our part, as the Spartacist League noted this past summer in a protest to the U.S. Public Health Service opposing the U.S. government's disease exclusion provisions (which include bans for "sexual deviation"), we believe: "Homosexuality is neither a 'disease' nor a 'medical condition,' but simply one expression of human sexuality, which exists on a broad continuum." ■

## Editorial Note

Our Spring 1987 International Women's Day article on "Medicine vs. Anti-Sex Moralism," subtitled "A Tribute to Paul Ehrlich" (*W&R* No. 33), drew on several recent books. The publishers of *Paul Ehrlich, Scientist for Life*, by Ernst Bäumler, are Holmes & Meier, New York, New York. Additionally, Allan M. Brandt's *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (paperback published by Oxford University Press, 1987) is a valuable survey of this subject which we recommend. In general, as we refer to recent books in print which are not widely available and are of particular interest to our readers, we will attempt to give more information so you can order them. ■

# American Capitalism: Child Abuse, Inc.

"Save the children" has been the rallying cry of the Moral Majority bigots in the wave of reaction that has swept this country over the past decade. Under Democrat Jimmy Carter, Anita Bryant's anti-gay witchhunt was waged to "protect" children from homosexual schoolteachers. Under Ronald Reagan, the terror-bombing of abortion clinics was to "protect" the unborn. Several states have passed laws requiring parental consent for teenage abortion; they argue that only the "divine" intervention of the state can save the children. The drug witchhunt targeted athletes to ensure that kids had wholesome "all-American" role models. From the Meese police to bible-thumping fundamentalists to the feminists, the anti-pornography



W&R Photo

Spartacists at 11 October 1987 demonstration for gay rights, Washington, D.C.

bigots claim "impressionable" and "innocent" youth are "damaged" by photos of naked women. And hysteria over "child abuse" has spawned a five-year witch-hunt against day-care centers.

While Reagan urges a "rally behind family values" and New York governor Cuomo proclaims "the Decade of the Child," our rulers have inflicted enormous suffering on kids. The infant mortality rate has risen steadily since the 1970s—the United States now ranks 17th highest worldwide in infant deaths, above almost all other industrialized nations. Over 40,000 black babies die before their first birthday every year.

From infancy to adolescence, children are the largest section of the American population hit by the economic austerity enforced by both capitalist parties. One in every five lives in poverty. Hundreds of thousands go to bed hungry. *Three million* are homeless.

These "shelter children" live and die on the streets of cop-terrorized and crime-ridden ghettos, in filthy welfare hotels where they are preyed upon by junkies, pushers and pimps. Forced from one temporary shelter to another, they are often turned away from schools because they have "no permanent address."

In the wake of the Iran/Contragate scandals, Reagan has been dismissed as a hopeless lame duck by the bourgeoisie, but his "social agenda" still grinds along its reactionary tracks. American capitalism's conscious policy of running basic industry into the ground, while attempting to finance the bipartisan war drive against the Soviet Union with cuts in welfare, Medicare and school lunch money, still takes its deadly toll.

The purpose of the cynical "save the children" scam, beyond masking very real cruelty to children, is to enforce family discipline. A strong, authoritarian family unit serves to ensure obedience and compliance with our rulers' reactionary values. Just as the campaign to "Bless the Family" was the ideological counterpart to the Cold War in the 1950s, so today's attempts to bolster "family values" is necessary to gear up this population—which has had no taste for war since the U.S. military behemoth went down in the rice paddies of Vietnam—behind new imperialist adventures.

This reverence for the family reeks with hypocrisy. Families have been destroyed by waves of deindustrialization, slashing of social programs and all-sided attacks on the unions, the poor, blacks, the aged, the young, as millions of workers have been thrown on the scrap heap. An increasing number of households are headed by single parents—and not just in the rust belt or big cities. That most holy image, the good old "heartland of America" family farm, has long since been mortgaged to the bankers. Even as agricultural surpluses swell storage bins, financial ruin, hunger and suicide stalk America's dwindling farm families.

## "Sex, the Devil, and Day Care"

Recently in New York City the death of six-year-old Lisa Steinberg, found savagely beaten in her adoptive parents' apartment, has focused attention on the real brutalization and abuse of children, most of which takes place within the "sacred" nuclear family. But among the most bitter opponents of any laws against the physical abuse of children are the "spare the rod, spoil the child" Moral Majorityites. At the same time, it was the fundamentalist bigots who touched off the national wave of paranoia against day-care teachers amid lurid charges of sexual molestation and devil worship. Reminiscent of the Salem witch trials, this crusade has branded the working mother as "unfit" if she leaves her child in day care to go to work. Yet even before the "Reagan Revolution," the fall of real wages through union-busting, "givebacks" and budget slashing made it a matter of economic survival to have two incomes to support a family.

The witchhunt began in 1983 with the case of the McMartin Pre-School in Manhattan Beach, California. Three hundred counts of rape, sodomy and other



Mothers with their children at New York City-run shelter for homeless.

George Cohen/Impact Visuals

charges were brought against Virginia McMartin (the now 80-year-old and wheelchair-bound founder of the school), her daughter, her grandson and three other teachers. A mother alleged her two-year-old had been molested (she claimed as well that her dog had been sodomized by an AWOL marine and that her son had been molested by a Los Angeles school board member and three witches). In 1986 a former prosecutor admitted that the district attorney's office had deliberately withheld from the defense documentation testifying to the woman's mental instability. Charges have been dropped against most of the teachers, as a new Los Angeles district attorney admitted evidence against them was "incredibly weak."

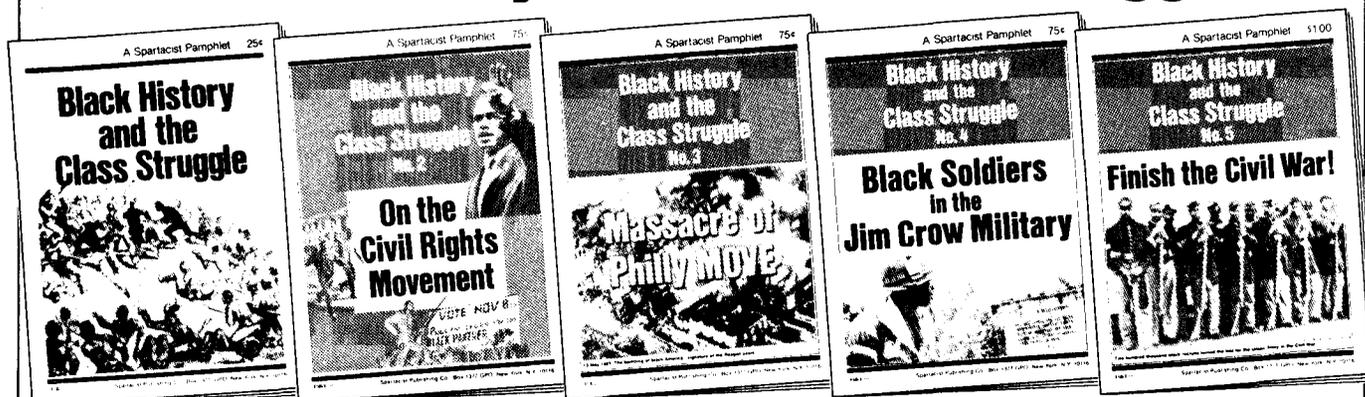
Today, five years later, Raymond Buckey and his mother Peggy McMartin Buckey are still on trial. The witchhunt atmosphere surrounding the case, includ-

ing stories of kids being forced to slaughter animals, steal corpses from graveyards and play "naked movie star" games, have made a fair trial impossible. The whole question of "child abuse" has become a political football, having nothing to do with protecting kids but a lot to do with creating a climate of fear of sex in general and day-care centers in particular as subversive, dangerous institutions. An insightful article in the *Village Voice* (29 September 1987), titled "Sex, the Devil, and Day Care," commented:

"...it seems that the weaker the family gets, the holier is its image.... The times demand a scapegoat, and what better one than day-care? If the private family is sacred, the public child-care center is profane. If stay-at-home mothers are holy, then the people they pay to take care of their kids when they escape from the house are witches."

What women need is free, quality 24-hour childcare,

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enabling them to work while assured that their children are well cared for.

The government has poked its nose ever deeper into private homes, to coax and wheedle kids into "coming clean" about any sexuality within the family, including nudity. The result: families torn apart by social stigma, children ripped away from parents and relegated to state-run orphanages or welfare holding pens while waiting to take their chances in foster homes.

### Smash the AIDS Witchhunt!

Nor have children escaped the raging AIDS epidemic. First identified in the U.S. among gay men (still a majority of the victims), AIDS is spreading rapidly among users of intravenous drugs, disproportionately black and Hispanic, and their sexual partners. Passed to the baby through the mother (often little more than a child herself), the disease is destroying whole families in the big city ghettos of America. A recent study showed *one in 61* babies born in New York City in November had antibodies to the AIDS virus. This deadly disease has become a lightning rod for the most vicious racism and bigotry in this sick society.

Last year teenagers were added as a category to those at "high risk" of contracting AIDS. Adolescents necessarily make numerous sexual contacts; it's part of the process of puberty. Yet pious government officials respond only by pushing their own useless sermon: "Just Say No" to drugs and sex. The fundamentalist right, busy purging sex education from the schools, rants against telling youth about condoms. And in the name of the "fight against drugs," city agencies have in the past refused to distribute free sterile needles to drug users. On January 30 New York announced "an experimental plan" to give out needles to "several hundred" (!) addicts who have been trying to enroll in overcrowded methadone clinics. Applicants must give identification, including *fingerprints*; needles will be checked for alien blood when exchanged for new ones.

In the name of "morality," kids have been deprived of basic measures that might afford some protection, *guaranteeing* more transmission of a disease with no cure. As the inadequacies of medicine intersect the exigencies of social reaction, children get caught in a web of destruction.

### Breaking Away: Adolescents Abandoned

One 15-year-old girl in Detroit, asked her definition of the American dream, wrote, "To go to school and fenisch my Schooling whithout getting prenat" (*Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 1987). While ruling-class politicians decry the explosion of "out-of-wedlock" teenage pregnancies in the U.S., which has one of the highest rates in any industrialized country, the state's moralistic hypocrisy ensures more. As 50,000 "pro-life" fanatics marched in the capital against the 15th anniversary of legalized abortion, Reagan used a telephone hookup to proclaim his "moral mission." On January 29, the administration prohibited family planning clinics receiving federal funds (i.e., those that serve the young, poor and oppressed) from providing not only abortions but *counseling* on abortions.

The fears of the Detroit teenager are fast becoming the rule in the U.S. for all but the privileged offspring of the upper classes; for most others, there are few options—unless it is to join the army to be cannon fodder in imperialist war. It's a widely admitted scandal that the public schools aren't teaching kids anything. This is even more so for black kids in this capitalist society, which enforces blacks' position as a race-color caste relegated to the bottom of the economy. The inner-city ghetto schools are prisons where the cops and courts "keep order." For these kids, ignorance is reinforced by the destitution, poverty, crime and wasted lives that surround them. In Detroit, mass layoffs and plant closures have robbed a whole generation of the hope of any future. Even the kids have guns, and they use them to shoot each other...if the cops

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## Africa: U.S. Anti-Abortion Policy Murders Women

*The Reagan administration's policy of withholding funding from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) "keeps Africa's hospital beds filled with victims of botched abortions," according to Randy Rockney, a doctor who spent six months working in a mission hospital in Kenya. The following excerpts from his letter printed in the New York Times (9 September 1987) give eloquent testimony to the horrible effect of the U.S. government's anti-woman policies. The U.S. fundamentalist bigots have forced their moral views on "Third World" women, who must now suffer and die for a religion they don't believe in. For free abortion on demand! For free, quality health care!*

Abortion is illegal in Kenya, but it is widely practiced because the fertility rate is the highest in the world, and because family planning services, though promoted by U.N.F.P.A. activities, are not universally available and are often thwarted by husbands and other

men in an extremely male-dominated society.

Before my experience in Africa, I had never witnessed the results of a back-alley abortion, but there the consequences were commonplace. On my second night on duty, I was summoned to attend a 23-year-old woman "whose condition had changed." I arrived to find her dead from an overwhelming infection, the result of an illegal abortion. Earlier that day, while doing everything possible to save her, I saw her cervix, which looked like hamburger. Hers was not an isolated case.

Perhaps the cruelest and most devastating legacy of this Administration will result from policies like withholding contributions to the U.N.F.P.A.... The so-called right-to-lifers are seeing to it, with the Administration's backing, that the illegal, unsafe abortion industry in places like Kenya continues to thrive. Their apparent goal is to insure that life in overpopulated countries like Kenya be nasty, brutish and short. ■

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don't get them first. Against the backdrop of the glittering Renaissance Center a young black wears a cap reading "Shoot me. I'm already dead."

And the capitalists' response? More prisons! "Ungovernable" and "disobedient" kids are sent to detention centers "for their own good." Most are not convicted of any crime—they are there because they have defied conventional sexual morality, run away from home, refused to go to school. There they are more likely to be beaten and raped than "rehabilitated." These kids have even fewer rights than adult prisoners.

Some of these kids are indeed "incorrigible." Yet they are America's true native sons. And the "right to life" cabal screams for the death penalty as America leads the world in the legal execution of juveniles. In the 37 "death penalty states" children from 17 to as young as *ten years old* can be legally executed, and many states have no age limit at all. At least 32 children were on death row as of October 1986. As "A Child's Christmas on Death Row" in *Class-Struggle Defense Notes* (No. 6, November 1987), the newsletter of the

Partisan Defense Committee, said:

"It is not an accident that the most militarily powerful imperialist nation, alone among its rivals, feels the need to institutionalize this legal arena of death. As financial collapse threatens economic collapse, as every progressive social struggle seems to threaten its reactionary hold on the 'free world,' the U.S. rulers want a population which would not flinch from the children's compound of Treblinka. Any American who thinks he lives in a civilized society, let him look to death row where children wait to die. Anyone who thinks the men who run this society are too civilized to plunge the world into nuclear fire and eternal, cold darkness, let him look to the execution chamber where juveniles are slaughtered."

We communists understand that it's going to take workers revolution to sweep away the capitalist system whose interests these reactionary rulers serve. And key to a socialist future will be winning over the youth themselves as revolutionary vanguard fighters. From the youth will come future leaders in the struggle for communism, creating a society in which new generations, in the words of Lenin, can "work under the new conditions, in a situation in which relations based on the exploitation of man by man no longer exist." ■

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# Leprosy and AIDS: Bigots Blame the Victims For Science, Not Superstition!

The United States is in the throes of a major health care crisis: deteriorating hospitals, shortage of trained personnel and millions without health insurance. For AIDS victims, the crisis is compounded by hysteria, which blames those afflicted and homosexuals generally as "guilty" for the spread of disease. Victimization of the sick highlights the impossibility of a scientific approach to medicine in this irrational capitalist society: what good are the advances of medical science when a patient cannot get medicine, a hospital bed or a doctor or nurse to treat him? This 20th century medievalism, bred of social bigotry, superstition and

(Penguin Books, New York), the stigma suffered by lepers is graphically described. "With his warning bell or clapper and his traditional cry of 'Unclean!', the haunting figure of the leper was fated to walk through history enduring not only the distressing disfigurements of his illness but also the rejection of whatever society he happened to live in." The great hero-king of Scotland, Robert the Bruce, is now believed to have died of leprosy. As the king he could conceal the fact and live without ostracism. But for others, "the medieval church went so far as to make provision for a special service to be performed 'for the seclusion of a leper' which was virtually a counterpart to the burial of the dead."

Fear of disease is today being manipulated in the service of racist reaction. Several years ago a radio station in San Francisco broadcast the fact that there were 200 lepers in California; there was an immediate public outcry to ban immigration from Vietnam. The new racist immigration law has increased the difficult conditions faced by "illegal aliens" in the U.S., and these problems are only compounded by measures like the viciously chauvinistic "English only" bill that is now California state law.

Leprosy is caused by a bacillus, *mycobacterium leprae*, which attacks the skin and nerves. Without treatment, its effects can be truly devastating: victims suffer infections and loss of sensation leading to blindness, loss of the sense of touch, paralysis and loss of limbs. But in 1950, scientists developed a new antibiotic which can cure this ancient scourge of mankind; other effective drugs have since been discovered. Leprosy is one of the least contagious infectious diseases known; over 90 percent of the population is naturally immune.

While in its early stages leprosy is completely curable, later stages can be controlled and made noncontagious. The horrible deformities can be entirely prevented with early and adequate treatment. Nevertheless, even medical personnel succumb to irrational superstition and sometimes refuse to treat patients. In 1983, research into leprosy immunology at a medical facility on Staten Island was canceled because of protests from the staff. Even in India, where there are four million lepers, medical schools give scant attention to this illness.

Leprosy survives (with an estimated 15 million sick) because so many people suffer in desperate, impoverished isolation, victims of malnutrition, unhealthy living and working conditions and lack of medical care. As far as is known, leprosy is spread only between humans, which raises the possibility of eliminating it through vaccination. While a vaccine is being tested, the long incubation period of the disease makes it difficult to identify and treat. Smallpox was comparatively easy to eradicate from the world because of a cheap, easily administered vaccine and because it is medically easy to locate victims and trace contacts. Fighting leprosy will take a lot of money, but the budget of the entire trop-

Lepers in Middle Ages were expelled from society, forced to carry warning bells. Lettering reads, "run good my gentyll mayster for god sake."



fear in conditions of social decay, has forced AIDS victims into the position of the lepers of the Middle Ages. In fact leprosy exists today (it's now called Hansen's disease) and fear of this ancient disease has actually deepened because of AIDS hysteria.

Last May in San Jose, California a wave of hysteria led to the cancellation of plans for an outpatient clinic to treat people ill with leprosy. Patients, mainly Asians and Mexicans, have been traveling hundreds of miles each week for treatment; officials wanted to establish more accessible health centers. But clinic employees, including nurses, threatened to walk out, and helped to organize a community protest against the plan. In a scene straight out of Leviticus, some 100 employees and residents packed a meeting, booing and jeering the scheduled speaker, a leprosy expert. One businessman yelled, "You better just leave your sick people wherever you get them from," while another man shouted, "...take 'em to the moon" (*San Jose Mercury News*, 7 May 1987).

In medieval Europe lepers were outcast from society, even in death, when they were buried in a separate "lepers graveyard." In a fascinating chapter in *The Ghost Disease*, by Michael Howell and Peter Ford



Kirk Condyles/Impact Visuals

**Homeless AIDS victim reduced to begging in New York City subway.**

ical disease program at the World Health Organization is less than the price of one single F-18 jet fighter plane. In 1955, India launched a short-lived campaign against leprosy which failed. In China, on the other hand, improved living conditions and an aggressive treatment program have cut the leprosy toll from 500,000 in 1949 to 200,000 in 1983. Hansen's disease will continue to conquer humanity until socialist revolution wipes out the poverty that breeds it.

**For Medicine, Not Moralism!**

Last spring, panic swept U.S. hospitals after three health care workers and a dentist were infected when open cuts on their skin were exposed to blood contaminated by the AIDS virus. So many doctors refused to care for AIDS victims that finally the AMA issued a ruling requiring doctors to treat them. Trade unions including AFSCME, the SEIU and the American Nurses Association asked the Labor Department's OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) to issue emergency regulations to protect workers against the AIDS virus (HIV). But the appropriate measures, such as the wearing of gloves when exposed to blood, are or should be standard practice in hospitals, as recommended by OSHA to prevent transmission of hepatitis B, another virus carried in the blood.

OSHA estimates that out of some five million U.S. health care workers, 12,000 contract hepatitis B and 200 to 300 die of it each year. (Only 12 people worldwide are known to have been infected with HIV as a result of exposure on the job, primarily through accidental needle sticks.) Unlike AIDS, hepatitis B is preventable through vaccination. It's a crime that hospitals have not implemented the unions' demand that the vaccine (about \$100 per dose) be made available free to all those at risk of exposure! The answer lies through class struggle to improve conditions for both the workers and the patients.

Health care workers who refuse to treat victims of

AIDS or leprosy or any other disease (hospitals used to refuse beds to syphilitics) are like the military officer who says, "I resign in case of war." In 1665, plague broke out in London and at least 68,000 died. William Boghurst, an apothecary who treated the sick, wrote of that time and criticized the many doctors who fled the city:

"Every man that undertakes to be of a profession or takes upon him any office must take all parts of it, the good and the evil, the pleasure and the pain, the profit and the inconvenience altogether, and not pick and chuse; for ministers must preach, Captains must fight, Physitians attend upon the Sick..."

—quoted (with original spelling) in "Physicians, AIDS, and Occupational Risk," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 9 October 1987

Care for the aged and ill is supposed to be a hallmark of humanity; indeed, anthropologists cite evidence indicating the intelligence and humanity of those people. Although medical technology is far from having all the answers, it has made it possible for our species to control many diseases which have been hideous scourges in past centuries, smallpox not the least. Quality health care for all is objectively within the reach of material possibility, but not within the framework of this capitalist system, which cannot provide the necessities of life to its citizens even though the productive capacities and technology exist to feed the hungry across the whole planet. Even on the level of ideas, the need of the system's apologists to justify the exploitation and brutal oppression of the masses leaves increasingly little room for a rational approach to anything, including science and medicine. ■

**Build the Partisan Defense Committee!**

The Partisan Defense Committee is a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal defense organization in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League. The PDC champions causes and cases in the interests of working people everywhere, including the urgent campaign to free Mordechai Vanunu, who faces the death penalty in Israel for exposing the extent of the Zionists' nuclear arsenal. The PDC is fighting to save framed-up MOVE supporter Mumia Abu-Jamal, now on death row in Pennsylvania, and to abolish the death penalty. The PDC continues its fight to free former Black Panther leader Geronimo Pratt, Ramona Africa and other MOVE prisoners, and sends monthly stipends to these and other class-war prisoners, including British miners still in Thatcher's prisons. We urge you to become a sustaining contributor to the PDC. Send a donation of \$5.00 or more and receive a year's subscription to the PDC's *Class-Struggle Defense Notes*, which details these and many other urgent cases. Write to: Partisan Defense Committee, P.O. Box 99, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

# Race, Sex and Class: The Clash Over The Color Purple

By Don Alexander and Christine Wright

"Well, you know wherever there's a man, there's trouble."

—Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

"Why do you always feel the need to castrate the black man?"

—Ishmael Reed, *Reckless Eyeballing*

When *The Color Purple*, Stephen Spielberg's film of Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, was released in 1985, it roused loud debates among blacks, picketing and furious letters to the editor across the country. Painting a compelling picture of a terribly abused black woman in rural Georgia between the two world wars, the film really hit a nerve; the controversy quickly got much bigger than the novel. While debates raged in community meetings, feminist supporters of Walker and her liberal and black nationalist critics took up their pens to wage a feud which still soaks up gallons of ink.

Many of Alice Walker's critics accuse her of presenting an image of the black male as a violent monster. Walker has responded that black men don't want to face her "truth-telling." As Marxists, we find what amounts to a highly literary contest for the status of "most oppressed" somewhat beside the point. None-

theless, the furor over *The Color Purple* has raised some basic questions about the clash of race and sex in this deeply bigoted, anti-sex society, not least about the explosive tensions between black men and women bred by the destruction of the fabric of life through poverty and oppression.

*The Color Purple* tells the story of Celie and her struggle to survive and defeat a series of physical and psychological assaults by men. She is raped repeatedly by her father, who gives away her two children against her will. She is married off to a man (Mister) who only agrees to take her if he gets the cow too. Mister treats her worse than a dog, beats her, and has kids as rotten as you can get. As she is later mocked by her husband, "Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam... you nothing at all." Then, through her relationship with Mister's lover, the blues singer Shug, Celie finds love and sexual pleasure, leaves her husband, goes into business making pants, discovers she is heiress to a fortune and is eventually reunited with her children, who have been raised in Africa by her missionary sister, Nettie.

Alice Walker's novel begins as a masterly evocation of Celie's nightmarish oppression through a series of letters in Celie's own words. But this artistic promise is betrayed to Walker's feminist agenda at the end of the book, which degenerates into a hokey miracle solution: Walker's "message" is that black women, how-



Kruiwich/NY Times



K. Kelly Wise

Authors  
Alice Walker  
and  
Ishmael Reed  
square off.

ever rotten and wretched their lives may be, can "make it." Celie embodies the liberal idealist myth that sheer individual will—and in her case, rather unbelievably good luck—can break the chains of oppression.

The novel largely ignores the social misery of the black sharecroppers in the rural Jim Crow South, and fails to so much as hint at the convulsive social struggles in the U.S. in the 1930s. The one exception is Celie's daughter-in-law, Sofia, who is destroyed when she tries to stand up to the white boss. Even then, no one else attempts to combat the vicious racism; Walker is already laying the basis for a retreat into "personal liberation." The novel also describes Nettie's experiences as a missionary in Africa, where she witnesses the destruction of tribal life by imperialism. All Walker can counterpose to this brutality is black Christian missionaries and throwbacks to such vicious, anti-woman tribal practices as ritual sexual mutilation.

Walker's brand of bourgeois feminism, which she calls "womanism," celebrates goeey, mystical "female bonding" not one whit different from the standard line in *Ms.*, where she served on the editorial staff for years. Bourgeois feminism, preoccupied with the career advancement of female yuppies and closing porn shops in Times Square, cannot address the very real sexual and racial oppression of black women.

### Who's Afraid of Alice Walker?

Most critics of *The Color Purple* enthusiastically embrace the liberal lies disguised in it. (Although the controversy exploded when Spielberg's movie was released, it's important to differentiate between Walker's novel and Spielberg's unintended parody.) Walker has been accused of reinforcing racist stereotypes because she wrote about a black woman who had been abused, raped and beaten by black men. There has also been a disgusting, moralistic streak in the outcry over *The Color Purple*, centering on opposition to Walker's sympathetic portrayal of black lesbianism. Black journalist/TV host Tony Brown, sounding like a Moral Majority Reaganite bigot, claims that anyone who liked the movie was either a "closet homosexual, a lesbian, a pseudo-intellectual or white."

Certain layers of the black establishment intelligentsia denounce as "racist" anything that presents black people in a negative or critical light. But this is another liberal lie just as dangerous as Walker's. Blacks are by no means exempt from social backwardness, such as anti-abortion and anti-gay bigotry. The real point (and Walker herself has made this point in previous novels such as *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*) is that terrible poverty and oppression breed personal cruelty and degradation such as that described in *The Color Purple*. For example, in the eloquent film *Nothing But a Man* (1964), a spirited young black man, Duff, lives in a small Alabama town, where he is targeted by the racists for his independence and sense of pride. In one of the key scenes in the movie, Duff, blacklisted and unable to support his family, goes home to his wife feeling humiliated by racist mistreatment. Thinking that he sees his failure as a man reflected in his woman's eyes, he turns on her in rage, and their marriage is almost destroyed. *Both Duff and his wife are victims of the*



Dorothea Lange

**Georgia, 1937: Stark poverty of black rural life in Jim Crow South.**

racist system which denies the black man his dignity.

When Richard Wright's *Native Son* was published in 1940, controversy broke out over his gripping portrayal of a brutalized and alienated young black man whose poverty and desperation turn him into a vicious anti-social criminal. Wright, influenced by the Stalinist Communist Party in the late '30s and early '40s, had been disturbed that even "bankers' daughters" were weeping over his earlier short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children*. As he said, "I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears." And so Wright brought his readers face to face with the starkness of brutal racial oppression in the U.S., implicitly suggesting that there was no room for sentimental liberal drivel.

While Walker seems to have even the bankers' granddaughters bawling, many of her critics are no different from Wright's. Such critics want to perpetuate the myth that blacks owe their condition of savage oppression to the fact that they "don't stick together"—another version of blaming the victim. These critics seek merely to uphold the "respectable" image of the petty-bourgeois black establishment, personified by the "black family life" portrayed on TV's *The Bill Cosby Show*. And guilty liberals—both white and black—cannot acknowledge the truth about racist



Sigma

James Baldwin, renowned author of essays and novels, including *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, died 1 December 1987. Like Richard Wright and many other contemporary black writers, Baldwin has significantly enriched our understanding of the actions, thoughts and dreams of men and women. Baldwin lived and worked during a period of mass struggle against social oppression. In the 1950s he denounced the anti-Communist McCarthyite witchhunt; in the 1960s he was an organizer as well as propagandist in the civil rights movement; and he was a strong critic of the U.S. war in Vietnam and of discrimination against homosexuals. Without his artistic imagination and vision, we would all be the poorer.

America: the ugly degradation of brutalized ghetto life that strips its victims of their dignity and humanity.

### Clash of Race and Sex

Of all Walker's critics, the novelist and poet Ishmael Reed has made the best case against *The Color Purple*. Moving beyond concerns with mere image, Reed has raised some of the hard questions, and for this he has been smeared as a "misogynist" by the feminists. But Reed, whose seven novels are brilliant parables against American racism, is no more a misogynist than Walker is a racist. What the feminists can't stand is that he has got their number: drawing a simplistic sex line in society can put you on the wrong side on some funda-

mental questions. It simply is not woman-hating to point out that Walker's man-hating is relentless. As Celie says to Mister, "You a lowdown dog is what's wrong.... It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body is just the welcome mat I need." And Celie berates her stepson, "If you hadn't tried to rule over Sofia the white folks never would have caught her."

Reed's barbed and effective satire of feminism, *Reckless Eyeballing*, is the story of Ian Ball, a black dramatist who has been "sex-listed" for his play about a black woman who likes having sex (with men). To make peace with the feminists Ball writes a new play in which the body of a young black man, lynched by a racist mob for ogling (called "reckless eyeballing" in the South) a white woman, is exhumed so he can be tried for his sexist crime, which the feminists denounce as equally as bad as the murder.

Those who think Reed is exaggerating should think back about ten years to Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, one of the bibles of contemporary American feminism. As part of her thesis that rape (or the threat of rape) is the main way that all women are controlled by all men, Brownmiller reviewed the famous case of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old black youth who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 for whistling at a white man's wife. This monstrous racist murder was a touchstone on the race question. But as a feminist, Brownmiller disgustingly insisted that Till and J.W. Millam (one of the murderers) had something in common: "They both understood that... it was a deliberate insult just short of physical assault, a last reminder to Carolyn Bryant that this black boy, Till, had in mind to possess her." As a result, Brownmiller says, "Today a sexual remark on the street causes within me a fleeting but murderous rage." Brownmiller's sex-war politics put her in bed with a racist lynch mob.

In the course of *Reckless Eyeballing*, successful black woman playwright Tremonisha Smarts (who some say was modeled after Alice Walker) was accosted by a man who:

"tied her up, and shaved all of her hair off. His twisted explanation: this is what the French Resistance did to those women who collaborated with the Nazis. The man had said that because of her 'blood libel' of black men, she was doing the same thing. Collaborating with the enemies of black men."

The horrifying racist murder at Howard Beach in December 1986 inspired Reed to make his definitive argument against Alice Walker and other black feminists in an essay serialized in the *Amsterdam News* in January-February 1987. But when Reed takes his argument out of the realm of fiction, where poetic license allows him to get at a core of truth, he goes astray. Citing the fact that Jon Lester, the teenager who led the lynch mob that murdered Michael Griffith, was said to be "real emotional" about the film *The Color Purple*, Reed argues that the description of black male violence incites race-terror. He claims that black feminism's "group libel campaign" against black men "is the kind of propaganda spread by the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party." Reed has a point when he describes his "justifiable paranoia"—he knows it could

have been him killed on that highway in Queens. (As black comedian Godfrey Cambridge said, "Paranoia is the occupational disease of black people.") But the strutting little Mussolinis in Howard Beach could care less what black men do to black women in Harlem, and to lay the blame on "bad propaganda" is a dangerous trivialization of the real threat the race-terrorists pose.

It is, however, to Reed's credit that in the days of the black nationalist anti-Semitic demagogue Farrakhan, *Reckless Eyeballing* savagely denounces anti-Semitism. The book's title page quotes an epigram: "What's the American dream? A million blacks swimming back to Africa with a Jew under each arm." Characters in Reed's novel include a psychotic New York City cop notorious for blowing away blacks and Puerto Ricans, and a Jewish writer who is beaten to death by a mob at the mythical Mary Phegan College. (Mary Phegan was in fact a young white woman murdered in Georgia in 1915; a Jewish businessman, Leo Frank, was framed up for the crime and lynched. The racist upsurge led to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.) Reed uses such themes to calculate by sex and ethnic group the chances of being murdered in the U.S. As the critic Darryl Pinckney said: "Reed's subtext might be that the rape of black women and the lynching of black men are part of the same historical tragedy" (*New York Review of Books*, 29 January 1987). As a vivid picture of the viciousness of social relations in the United States, *Reckless Eyeballing* is eons ahead of *The Color Purple*—and a much better read, too.

### The Talented Tenth Squares Off

In a certain sense, the literary debate over *The Color Purple* reflects the careerist interests of the black intelligentsia, struggling over shrinking economic opportunities in the absence of any movement for radical change. Thus Walker can snipe at black men from her sanctuary at *Ms.*, the darling of white bourgeois feminists, while Reed raves that there is a publishing conspiracy against black male writers. (We thought this was even nuttier than it is, until we tried to buy his books and discovered they were all out of print!) While seemingly Reed and Walker are at loggerheads, they have at bottom the same program. Walker envisages a female Horatio Alger; Reed sees the "solution" in independent black art. Both posit individual struggle within capitalist society, which necessarily pits one section of the oppressed against another. Their message is, "see, you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps," ignoring the fact that the majority have no boots.

What lies behind these squabbles is the frustration of the "talented tenth"—the tiny selection of minority people who have been able to integrate into the professional layers of American society. In the face of the swift elimination of the token and reversible gains of the civil rights movement and in the absence of any mass struggle for social change, such debates among the black intelligentsia take on the air of a dispute over the shrinking job market.

But we must say in passing that even during the heyday of the civil rights movement the reality of sexual oppression was never addressed. The ensuing black

power movement was often hostile to women's liberation. SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael (now Kwame Ture) gained notoriety with the statement that "the position of women in the movement is prone." At their international headquarters in Algiers, the Cleaver wing of the Black Panther Party idealized the nationalist regime in Algeria—where women were still shrouded in the veil. One writer who recently summed up this period stated, "Too often male Black Power advocates from activists to scholars wanted their female kin to get out of the white man's kitchen and back into their own."

The solution lies in the smashing of *class exploitation* by a revolutionary workers vanguard party drawing all the specially oppressed strata—blacks and other minorities, women, youth, etc.—into a united assault on racist, sexist capitalism. It is precisely the lack of mass



Workers Vanguard

New York, 12 January 1987: Labor Black League and Spartacist supporters protest at whitewash "trial" of cop Sullivan, killer of black grandmother Eleanor Bumpurs.

social struggle under revolutionary leadership which today allows the fundamentally *despairing* ideologies of black nationalism and feminism to flourish among those who see themselves as spokesmen for the oppressed. Walker and Reed, in their different ways accepting the basically hopeless framework of the capitalist status quo, see black women's progress as necessarily coming at the expense of black men—and vice versa. Only an anti-capitalist perspective provides the basis for uniting all the oppressed in a fight for freedom at the expense of the class enemy which aims to keep us divided and in chains.

### Capitalism and "American Apartheid"

In the 1980s the harsh realities of a decaying class system have become ever more bleak. Especially for blacks, capitalism has less and less to offer. The unemployment rate has soared with the closing of giant industrial plants in the Midwest, which once provided decent union wages and basic social power to a crucial component of the working class. Funding for education has been slashed, while segregation in schools and



Mottren/Boston Globe

**Boston, 1987:** Unionized room attendants stood up to racist Copley Plaza hotel bosses, refused to mop floors on their knees. United labor action was key to this victory over wage-slave masters yearning for "good old days" of plantation.

in housing has increased. Blacks are not safe in many neighborhoods throughout the U.S. as lynch mob terrorists are emboldened by racist government policy. "Political power" for blacks has come to mean more black elected officials, who the Democratic Party has deemed useful to preside over the deterioration of the big cities, where they exact racist cutbacks and enforce "law and order." Philadelphia mayor Wilson Goode, whose police firebombed an entire black neighborhood in order to wipe out eleven MOVE members, including five of their children, is no more a champion of black rights than New York's fascistic Ed Koch.

With the exception of a very few who have "made it," the hellish conditions are compounded for black women through sexual oppression. Unskilled black women remain confined to the lowest-paying, most menial jobs, earning starvation wages as maids, laundresses and waitresses. Black women are made to bear the brunt of devastating cutbacks in social welfare. In the U.S., twice as many black girls are pregnant before the age of 18 as whites, twice the number of black infants die. The American bourgeoisie has long upheld the lie that ghetto poverty and degradation are the fault of the "deviant" promiscuous black "matriarch." In 1969 Daniel Moynihan argued that the black "matriarchy" was responsible for the breakdown of the black family and suggested that young black men should learn the right values by joining Uncle Sam's army. Over the years the black woman has been variously stereotyped as a presumed tower of strength, a sexless and obese mammy, a promiscuous baby machine, an emasculating fiend.

Yet the picture for black men is not much less bleak. The unemployment rate in big cities for a young black man is 50 to 60 percent. There is also the problem of "permanent unemployability"—e.g., black industrial workers, "last hired, first fired," who under today's conditions will never be rehired. Women account for two-thirds of all the professional jobs held by blacks: black women are seen by racist employers as docile,

non-criminal, non-militant, non-violent, an upgraded version of what used to scrub floors; whereas that young black man in a suit who seems articulate and ambitious is suspected of being Malcolm X in disguise. In the 3 December 1987 *New York Review of Books*, the article "American Apartheid" describes the grim reality:

"...black men are more likely [than whites] to be in prisons or the military, or die at an early age. The fact that upward of 20 percent are missed by the census would point up their lack of stable jobs or even settled addresses. Moreover, of those black men the census manages to reach, fewer than half have full-time jobs."

It all comes home to roost in the black family. In a society which defines manhood as the ability to support a family, black men are often denied that very ability. "Single-parent households" are growing throughout the U.S., a phenomenon which affects blacks more heavily but by no means exclusively. Over 56 percent of black families are headed by women. Capitalist society needs the institution of the nuclear family not only to produce the next generation of wage laborers, but as an important force for social conservatism. At the same time, capitalist decay *undermines* the family through grinding poverty and oppression. The family is the main social institution by which women are oppressed. But in the absence of alternatives, those who fall *outside* the classic pattern of the family have nothing at all. Thus, this vicious racist system cannot but lead to embittered personal relations between men and women. Out of this rises the frustration which takes *The Color Purple* controversy out of the literary realm into the community, where it exploded in angry debates.

In this sense, Alice Walker triumphed as an artist: the depth of the controversy shows that she began to lay bare a painful reality. The solution to the reality she and Ishmael Reed have described in their novels lies not in the realm of art or bourgeois politics, but in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society. ■

# The Lindy Chamberlain Case: Anti-Woman Witchhunt in Australia

"Is our society unique in its hatred of women? I don't think so. Here is a friend telling me of the seven months that he was in Saudi Arabia. On a Friday afternoon he was standing outside a palace beside a parade ground, and there were Indians who, as indentured labour, are the bottom of the pecking order, digging a hole. He watched. Then a couple of tip trucks came and they tipped out loads of bricks. People began to drift in from all over the place, and, suddenly, there was a large crowd. Then a van came and brought a woman. They threw her down the hole, and the men stoned her to death. She was a prostitute. Hatred of women. In Australia we have to do it in some kind of legal way. That is what we did to Lindy Chamberlain."

—Australian writer Morris Lurie, quoted in *Men on Women*, Kevin Childs, 1986

Lindy Chamberlain's baby daughter Azaria was carried off and killed by a dingo (a large, wild dog) at a holiday campground near Ayers Rock in central Australia on 17 August 1980. The child's body was never found. As if this tragedy were not enough, the grieving mother was victimized by a spiraling state and media witch-hunt that became a bizarre national obsession, as the media whipped up tales of gruesome death at the foot of "The Rock," a monolith jutting out of a vast, barren plain, steeped in thousands of years of Aboriginal mythology. Dragged through endless inquiries and inquests, framed up and convicted for the murder of her daughter, Lindy was jailed for three years. In jail she gave birth to another daughter, who was taken from her.

This past summer—after seven years of agony—she and her husband, Michael, were granted an insulting "pardon" by the Northern Territory (NT) government—for something they didn't do! A growing pub-



Women's Day [Australia]

**Lindy Chamberlain and her daughter Kahlia, who was born in jail.**

**Bourgeois press sensationalized prosecutors' lying witchhunt.**

lic campaign by witnesses and supporters, including the powerful book *Evil Angels* (available in the U.S. from Summit Books, New York) by Australian lawyer and novelist John Bryson, was beginning to embarrass the national and local Northern Territory governments. The discovery of a piece of the baby's clothing, which the prosecution had claimed never existed, in early 1986 compelled the NT government to release Lindy and call a Royal Commission to quell the outcry. Presided over by Justice Morling (infamous for his anti-union acts, including fining the meat workers union \$1.7 million, and for the deportation of Tamil refugees), the inquiry found that there was "insufficient evidence" to convict the Chamberlains—while whitewashing the state prosecution and exonerating the cops. The case captured headlines from Saudi Arabia to New York, and a film starring Meryl Streep is soon to be released based on Bryson's book.

### Anatomy of a Frame-Up

Bryson thoroughly proves Chamberlain's innocence. He carefully reconstructs the night at Ayers Rock, demonstrating that many witnesses (some of whom launched a vigorous defense campaign on her



Auscapes/Jean-Paul Ferrero

**"White Australia" chauvinism exploded in bizarre excesses, including "The Dingo Is Innocent" slogans. Beer-swilling tourists swarmed over Aboriginal sacred site of Ayers Rock, sentimentalizing "cute" dingoes; camp ranger feared a tragedy, as predatory dingoes (shown here with kangaroo kill) were allowed close access to campgrounds.**

behalf) knew the baby had been taken from the family tent by a dingo. The camp ranger, Derek Roff, who had been warning the government of increased dingo attacks on children, felt his worst fears fulfilled. The black trackers, too, who followed the dingo prints from the tent until the tracks were lost in the footprints of the 300-strong search party, had been expecting something like this to happen, as dingoes became less frightened of the tourists who threw them scraps of food.

The basic facts surrounding Azaria's death were quickly submerged in a police, court and media witch-hunt. An initial inquest in Alice Springs found that the baby had been killed by a wild dingo; the coroner sharply criticized the NT police force and condemned "months of... probably the most malicious gossip ever witnessed in this country." Stung by this challenge to its authority (and doubtless worried about the reputation of Ayers Rock as a money-making tourist attraction where white Australians could swill beer on Aboriginal sacred sites and get sentimental about the "cute" dingoes), the Country-Liberal Party government swung into a new "investigation" of Azaria's death. In September 1981 a secret meeting was organized by government officials including NT Police Commissioner McAuley, where British "forensic expert" James Cameron presented his opinion that the baby had been decapitated, thus providing the excuse to open a second inquest. Des Sturgess, now notorious as Queensland's anti-gay and anti-woman Director of Public Prosecutions, earned his laurels setting up the murder charges against Lindy Chamberlain. In 1982 she was convicted for murder and sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor, and her husband Michael was convicted as accessory after the fact.

"This is a somewhat extraordinary case when you consider the various things that were absent that one would normally get—the absence of motive, admission, body and weapon," noted dissenting judge Lionel

Murphy in the High Court's 3-2 rejection of Lindy's appeal against her conviction. In fact, the NT cops and state prosecution simply manufactured the following incredible story and maintained it for nearly seven years: Lindy, carrying Azaria, takes her young son to the tent, puts him to bed, then takes Azaria to the family car. She changes her clothing, slits the baby's throat, probably with scissors, cuts the baby up, stuffs the pieces in a camera bag, again changes her clothes, returns to the general company with a can of baked beans and informs Michael of what she has done. All this in the space of five to ten minutes!

*Evil Angels* exposes the prosecution's parade of "forensic evidence." The star "forensic expert" Cameron claimed there was an adult handprint on the baby's jumpsuit: a mark since proven to be simply dirt! The prosecution's local forensic expert, Joy Kuhl (rewarded for her services with a job in the NT government), maintained that a spray of blood on the floor of the Chamberlains' car proved that the baby was killed in the car. Kuhl's famous "arterial spray" turned out to be *soundproof* used in manufacture!

The Australian gutter press whipped up a national obsession with the case. Young women paraded outside the Darwin courthouse during the murder trial wearing T-shirts proclaiming, "The Dingo Is Innocent." When Lindy was released from jail, one T-shirt read, "Watch out Kahlia, Mummy's coming home" (Kahlia is the Chamberlains' youngest child). Bryson captured the mood engendered in much of the population, quoting a taxi driver pronouncing with deliberation, "They ought to burn the bitch."

The media campaign to crucify Lindy Chamberlain fed into the mean-minded bigotry and prejudice that gives capitalist Australian society its nasty small-town quality. That the Chamberlains are members of the Seventh Day Adventist church, a small and devout millenarian sect which has suffered victimization for

practicing vegetarianism and celebrating Saturday as the Sabbath, made them easy targets. From the beginning, picking up on tidbits fed to them by the cops, the yellow bourgeois media created a garish circus of rumor and malice, all lies: the name Azaria meant "sacrifice in the wilderness"; she was spastic; she was the baby of an illicit affair; she was regularly dressed in black. The media witchhunt was replete with sensational stories of devils and bizarre black rituals: a baby's coffin in the Chamberlains' house; a passage in the family Bible detailing an ancient sacrifice marked in red. The small coffin in fact was an anti-smoking prop used by Michael in church meetings, the red mark from the Bible was color transferred from an illustration on the facing page. Complementing the medieval hysteria was an endless stream of gruesome reports: blood in camera bags, cars, on clothing; conjecture about quantities of blood spilled, how far blood would spurt, the variety of ways to decapitate a baby, *ad nauseam*.

### Witchhunting and Anti-Woman Bigotry

In the solitude of her prison cell Chamberlain expressed her grief at the loss of her infant daughter, writing the moving lines:

"Not a day has ended  
With the fading of the light  
That I have not remembered you,  
Azaria, goodnight."

But in front of the Salem-style witchhunters Lindy Chamberlain was stoic and dignified. She was vilified by the media because she would not cry, and because she would not smile. Her stony appearance in the courtroom was portrayed as cold unrepentance. Her attention to dress, covered by the media with all the small-mindedness of the social pages, was seized upon to complete the picture of a cold, calculating murderer. Little matter that she had nothing to repent; that her "emotionless" exterior was evidence of her resilience and self-respect in the face of the massive campaign against her. Bryson describes Joy Kuhl, glorying in the media limelight, peddling her bigoted attacks on Lindy to journalists during the murder trial: "All the time, she was there behind me. Staring. She just stares. She is, you know, a witch. I could feel her eyes burning holes through my back."

Arthur Miller's famous play, *The Crucible*, an allegorical attack on the anti-communist witchhunts in the United States in the 1950s using the vehicle of the 17th century Salem witchhunts, describes precisely the campaign against Lindy Chamberlain. The main prosecutor, the deputy governor, rages against one of Salem's victims, Elizabeth Proctor (who like Lindy at the time of her trial was pregnant):

"Are you stone? I tell you true, woman, had I no other proof of your unnatural life, your dry eyes now would be sufficient evidence that you delivered up your soul to Hell! A very ape would weep at such calamity! Have the devil dried up any tear of pity in you?"

The rampant sexism in this remote white imperialist enclave made a woman of the calibre of Lindy Chamberlain a perfect target for witchhunting. The bourgeois media focused on the fact that Lindy is an

intelligent, assertive woman who has displayed enormous reserves of strength. These characteristics were regarded as a liability by her lawyers and journalists who followed the case. Bryson recreates a sharp discussion between Lindy and Kirkham, her lawyer during the murder trial:

"I know it's difficult for you,' Kirkham said, 'but you must hold your temper. You sound too harsh, too angry.'

"I am angry,' she said. 'What do you expect?'

"It's not going over too well with the jury. Try to be more,' he cast around, 'demure.'

"She was angry all over again. 'I am the way I am,' she said. 'The jury will have to get used to it.'"

It is precisely these qualities which were used to portray Lindy as an aberration in Australian society, where it is held that women should be dumb, passive subjects. The witchhunt of Lindy Chamberlain played a part in reinforcing the position of women as the core of the nuclear family—in this role women are to be subservient, not defiant and outspoken. The hypocrisy of bourgeois morality, which sanctifies the nuclear family, was sharply exposed in the state witchhunt of Lindy Chamberlain, which sought to destroy *her family*.

### Racist Attacks on Aboriginals

Hand in hand with the anti-woman bigotry went racism. Blacks, who comprise nearly half the NT's 130,000 population, are forced to live in apartheid-like conditions. The fact that there is no parole in NT is particularly directed against blacks. One of the first responses of the Alice Springs cops to the disappearance of Azaria was to raid the Aboriginal settlement at Ayers Rock. Bryson documents how the cops entered the home of Ada Nangala and Toby Nanyinga without a warrant, which is their standard operating procedure, and began searching the rubbish bin, looking for "evidence." Nanyinga protested, "You think I ate the child?"

From the first inquest on, the crucial evidence of black trackers was ignored. When black trackers finally took the stand again in the Morling Inquiry the prosecution attempted to ridicule them. A woman tracker, Barbara Tjikadu, who testified that the dingo she tracked from the Chamberlains' tent was carrying a baby, was repeatedly asked to admit that it could have been carrying a baby kangaroo. Her interpreter translated her impatient reply: "Mr. Adams," she said, "you are talking in your way using your language and you are talking about lies." When asked the same question yet again she eloquently replied, "Was a kangaroo living in the tent?" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1986).

### Down with the Witchhunting Hawke Government!

During the Morling Inquiry, Lindy Chamberlain launched an attack on the judicial system:

"I had sat on juries myself at that stage and I believed the police were honest and I believed you get in court and you tell the truth and an intelligent reasonable outcome was decided by intelligent people. Now I realise that parts of the truth are given, parts are withheld or selectively put over... sometimes for political,

sometimes personal, reasons.... The way it is now, anybody could be set up on anything."

—*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1987

The point is that we live in a bourgeois society where "justice" serves the ruling class, and the courts are primarily vehicles to keep everyone else in line.

The witchhunt of Lindy Chamberlain has been one of the more grotesque and vicious of the witchhunts which are a signature of the Hawke Cold War regime. Hawke's Labor government began its reign with the witchhunt of David Combe, ex-national secretary of the Labor Party under Whitlam, for his association with Soviet Embassy official Valeriy Ivanov. Maoist union leader Norm Gallagher was thrown in jail for contempt of court, a precondition for smashing the Builders Labourers Federation. High Court judge Lionel Murphy, a former attorney general in the Whitlam government who dissented in the frame-up of Lindy Chamberlain, was framed up himself for conspiracy to "pervert the cause of justice" and hounded to his death. Gay radio personality Bill Hurrey, the tiny Pedophile Support Group, and blacks at Toomelah in New South Wales have all, like the Chamberlains, been victims of frame-ups enforced by the state's cops and courts.

A climate of fear is being imposed in the service of regimenting the population behind Hawke's drive to war against the Soviet Union. Police and ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) phone tapping, trumped-up legal charges and attacks on the right of association and free speech are being used to cohere a docile and compliant population. Unions, minorities, damned near everyone has a stake in seeing this strong state drive beaten back and smashed.

What they did to Lindy Chamberlain and her family was a warning to everyone that the rule of the state is inviolable. Democratic rights, from the common law premise of innocent until proven guilty, to the right of free association and the right to organize and strike, are being thrown on the dustheap by the Hawke Labor government. The labor movement has the social power to fight back against the growing attacks on democratic rights. To defend its own organizations the working class must defend the rights of all the oppressed, and of all those, such as the Chamberlains, who suffer at the hands of bourgeois rule.

The Australian ruling class is venal and xenophobic, the fearful bourgeoisie of a white, sparsely populated, privileged enclave in Asia. "Little Australian" social-democratic nationalism is proud of its brutally sexist and self-indulgent philistine "national character." The total indifference of the trade-union bureaucracy to the witchhunt of Lindy Chamberlain is an indictment of Laborism's thoroughgoing male chauvinism. The kept union bureaucracy has never paid more than lip service to organizing the largely migrant women who slave in garment sweatshops and do long hours of piecework in their homes for a pittance. Nor have they fought for equal wages and employment opportunities for women workers. The Laborite bureaucracy is the chief obstacle to independent proletarian struggle, from the fight to defend democratic rights to the fight for the overthrow of oppressive and exploitative capitalist rule.

For Lindy and Michael Chamberlain the battle is not over. They are fighting for complete exoneration and compensation. The NT government, having spent millions to frame Lindy, is opposing compensation, saying outrageously that the Chamberlains have been making money out of the publicity! The Chamberlains must be exonerated and paid millions in compensation!

True justice for the years of state terror inflicted on the Chamberlains, and for all those who suffer at the hands of the state, will be the sweeping away of capitalist society and its replacement by the planned economy and state power of the working class which alone can provide the basis for justice and freedom. There is a vast reservoir of downtrodden, disaffected people who hate this society and would dearly love to see its demise—and from among the massively oppressed working women will come some of the greatest fighters for proletarian revolution. A racially integrated Trotskyist party, rooted in the proletariat and acting as the tribune of all the oppressed, will win to its banners the toiling masses and lead the way forward to a decent world. ■

—adapted from *Australasian Spartacist* No. 121, July/August 1987

## International Spartacist Tendency Directory

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Francene Keery

**Earthquake struck Mexico City on 19 September 1985, killing 20,000 and devastating garment industry. Bosses pulled out machinery, left buried women workers to die.**

## Mexico...

(continued from page 32)

Japanese) companies have "run away" to these free trade zones. And as the *maquilas* have spread, so has workers' resistance. Last September, a dramatic strike broke out at the Vestamex clothing factory in Ciudad Juárez, just across the border from El Paso, as workers occupied the plant, went on hunger strike and staged sit-ins in the capital.

The stirrings of revolt are being felt among the millions-strong Mexican proletariat. *Maquiladora* workers in Juárez, seamstresses in Mexico City join Volkswagen strikers in Puebla, teachers in Chiapas, telephone workers and electrical workers nationwide in a wave of labor militancy spawned by the desperate economic crisis. As the capitalist PRI (Revolutionary Institutional Party), which has ruled Mexico with a heavy hand for decades, prepares to "elect" as president the technocrat Salinas de Gortari, architect of the IMF bankers' austerity plans, insurgent labor comes directly up against the semi-bonapartist regime. Their struggles isolated by the CTM bureaucrats and ignored by the reformist, parliamentarist left, they urgently need the leadership of a proletarian Bolshevik party. With the Mexican economy increasingly dominated by the imperialist neighbor to the north, international solidarity is crucial to their struggle. Combative Mexican workers could spark labor struggles on both sides of the border.

### A Union Born from the Ruins

The earthquake struck Mexico City at 7:18 in the morning. Because it was so early, many lives in the center of the city were spared—an hour later and tens of thousands more would have died as government buildings and offices collapsed. So many garment workers died *because they were already at work*—that fact alone speaks volumes about the long hours and intense exploitation in this industry.

Their workshops dimly lit with bare bulbs, reverberating with the din of machinery, no running water in the bathrooms and no place to rest or eat, garment

workers in Mexico toil eleven hours a day to earn a total of \$3. The *costureras* (seamstresses) have had no insurance, no maternity leave, no protection against being fired without compensation, no one to defend their rights. The official labor movement divides the needle trades workers by "organizing" them in 300 separate unions, company by company. Today there are an estimated 700,000 garment workers in Mexico, and they are the lowest-wage industrial workers. The small sweatshop organization of the industry has meant a very patriarchal situation where women are treated like little girls and intimidated by both the bosses and the *charro* thugs.

It took the national disaster of the 1985 earthquake to expose the *costureras'* plight. With the stricken city full of reporters, "We became news," as they said. Lawyers, feminist groups, churches came forward to help. The new union first tried to reinstate 40,000 workers in jobs, but most of the fly-by-night operations just relocated to the far end of town. The union then demanded compensation for those left unemployed and for the families of those who had died in the earthquake. In their first mass demonstration that October, they delivered a petition to the women's representative of the CTM, demanding recognition of their union. When that didn't work, they marched on the presidential palace at Los Pinos.

By their first congress in May 1986, "19th of September" was on the map and had successfully settled 80 percent of their severance pay cases. As they wrote in their balance sheet, "The refusal of the bosses forced us to carry out mobilizations, marches, meetings, sit-ins, wall paintings, postering, exposés in the press, in order to pressure the bosses." In the course of their struggle, the *costureras* have raised demands going beyond simple trade unionism, declaring that "we have to see ourselves as a revolutionary force present in the first ranks of the struggle."

Working in the deathtrap of Mexico City, they are demanding purified drinking water in the shops, functioning toilets, and earthquake-resistant factory construction. They call for a union hiring hall, a sliding scale of wages, and "40 hours work for 56 hours pay." Most distinctive has been their fight against the oppression of

women both in the factory and the home, demanding decent housing for workers, childcare centers, public dining halls and laundries, low price grocery stores, and the right of "free and voluntary maternity."

Not surprisingly, the union and its members began to face stepped-up government repression. At the 1986 May Day march, where the seamstresses marched together with the other independent unions, special anti-riot cops blocked their contingents from taking part in the procession of state-controlled unions. The *Wall Street Journal* (16 January 1987) reported:

"At one dress factory in Mexico City last year, for example, 18 gunmen from the CTM showed up on the day of a union vote, brandished weapons, and terrified the women into voting for a PRI-affiliated union. At a men's underwear factory, two busloads of thugs rolled up the night before a certification vote, climbed to the roof, and pelted voting seamstresses with rocks."

Today "19th of September" is still extremely weak, with only 4,500 members and 13 contracts signed. While the union is now officially registered, the *charros* have not given up their attempts to co-opt it or wipe it out. Above all, these courageous proletarian militants who see themselves as "the voice of those who died in the earthquake" must understand that fighting sweatshop exploitation and women's oppression requires a struggle against the capitalist system itself.

### Class Struggle on the Border

The 210 *maquiladora* plants in Ciudad Juárez employ more than 110,000 workers, of whom 75 percent are women. Last September 21, the 1,600 men and women garment workers of Vestamex went on strike. Instead of going through an elaborate legal procedure of notify-

ing the government of intent to strike, they just took the plant. Police surrounded the factory and it was under siege for two days. The strikers threatened to set the plant afire if the cops attacked. They finally vacated the plant when the company agreed to demands for cafeteria and bus vouchers, and to sending the central issue—recognition of their independent union—to arbitration. When the company then fired 50 strike militants, several went on hunger strike, camping out on the steps of the cathedral.

In late November, the arbitrator ruled against their union, claiming there already was a union at Vestamex (a CTM outfit nobody had ever heard of, which had never held a meeting or election). As the Juárez weekly *Ahora* (4 December 1987) wrote, "Once more it was the voice of the state: no independent unions... especially in the *maquiladora* industry." The Workers Resistance Committees at Vestamex and the adjacent Camisas de Juárez held protest sit-ins at the state capital, Chihuahua, and in front of the National Assembly in Mexico City. After more than two months of hard struggle, the workers at Vestamex said "we're not giving up," and vowed to continue to fight politically.

The *maquiladora* industry has been bubbling with labor unrest. A meeting on organizing *maquila* workers was held in Chihuahua last August, which included workers fired in the recent Ford Hermosillo strike. The Vestamex struggle has been largely ignored by the various "independent" unions and the reformist left. The American garment unions (ACTWU and ILGWU) haven't lifted a finger to help, instead pushing poisonous protectionism, accusing Mexican workers of "stealing" American jobs. Along with university workers in Mexico City and a local human rights committee, the most notable support has come from the Union of Agricultural Workers of the Border (UTAF) and the Frontera Labor Support Committee across the river in El Paso, which have held forums and raised money for the Vestamex strikers.

At a Martin Luther King Day labor rally in El Paso this year, Claudia María, a Vestamex worker, spoke passionately of conditions in the *maquiladoras* where workers are beaten on the shopfloor and jailed, how they must rent their tools...in U.S. dollars, although they're paid in pesos. Vestamex workers make the minimum wage, currently 6,460 pesos, or \$2.87 per day. These rates are among the lowest in the world, considerably lower than in Hong Kong, Taiwan or Singapore. Vestamex is owned by an El Paso company, Fashion Enterprises, Inc. The plant manager, Harry Whitley, formerly ran Acapulco Fashions, until that factory was struck in 1982. The company simply ran away, taking the machinery with them (although workers managed to hold some of it hostage). Vestamex is located in Parque Bermúdez, the giant industrial park named after its owner Jaime Bermúdez, the godfather of the *maquiladora* program in Mexico. Bermúdez is currently mayor of Ciudad Juárez, elected on the ticket of the "institutional revolutionary" PRI.

Bermúdez has created elite anti-riot police squads which are called out to ensure "labor discipline." As a Juárez reporter noted, "It's difficult for organization at the union level to exist between two *maquilas* in the



Nosotras

Evangelina Corona, general secretary, "19th of September" National Union of Seamstresses. Union symbol (right).



W&R Photo



Seamstresses' organizing meeting at "19th of September" union hall, November 1987. Union headquarters was built on the rubble of the earthquake where sweatshops had stood.

same park .... They don't permit anything inside: [militants] are blacklisted and they're punished for one year, so they can't get work." Nonetheless there have been strikes, and successful ones. In October 1986, 6,000 workers struck RCA, the oldest and biggest plant in Parque Bermúdez; the bosses settled quickly, fearing it would quickly spread to the other companies. In 1984 in Reynosa, further down the Rio Grande opposite McAllen, Texas, a strike by Zenith workers mushroomed into the first general strike of an export-processing zone in Latin America.

A compliant female workforce has been the cornerstone of the export-processing program. In this labor intensive industry, the "multinationals" feed off of "young blood" (*Sangre Joven*, the title of a book of firsthand accounts of conditions in the *maquiladoras*). And pregnancy is forbidden. Not only are pregnancy tests required for hiring, but an article in *Ahora* (3 April 1987) has exposed the barbaric practice being applied in some *maquilas* of Parque Bermúdez where women workers must show their menstrual blood in order to get their short-term contracts renewed:

"The women workers of these factories must sign a document in which they agree to turn over to a nurse the dirty sanitary towel on the first day of their period. The nurse and the doctor keep a list of the new women workers which includes the date of their period, and on the basis of this list, each month they go to the assembly line and request the sanitary napkin. The women workers say: 'It's loathsome, humiliating, because the nurse or the doctor accompanies the worker to the bathroom and there she must give them the soiled sanitary napkin in order to demonstrate that she isn't pregnant. Afterwards, they give us a piece of paper which we must also give to them, and if we don't do that, they fire us after three months'."

Under feudalism, the lord of the manor demanded the "right of the first night." And in many peasant societies, a newly married woman had to bleed on the sheets

to prove she was a virgin. Here in the most high-tech (and low-wage) center of the multinational conglomerates, there are practices that recall the Middle Ages!

### The Global Sweatshop

A 1984 public TV documentary, the *Global Assembly Line*, made in conjunction with the Labor Institute for Public Affairs, is a moving account of women toilers in the free trade zones of the Third World, from Mexico to Southeast Asia. In the Philippines, tens of thousands of young women have left the rice fields to swell the population of industrial zones. To survive, often more than ten young women share a single boarding house room, eating and living together. Women optical inspectors, using high-powered microscopes, work for eight hours without rest. "Sometimes we vomit, we faint and we get permanently blurred vision," says one Filipina worker. But Vincent Chuidian, chairman of the U.S. corporation Interlek and its local subsidiary Dynetics, talks openly of the brutal, calculated abuse of young women. In Hong Kong, he says, they have problems "getting girls to do scope work." But "not so in the Philippines":

"As a matter of fact, they like scope work, and they do diminish their eyesight if they don't follow normal procedure. But these girls are high school and college girls, they're in their teens and in their twenties, and they can take a lot of abuse. They abuse their bodies a lot."

In Sri Lanka, young women in the "free trade zone" slave for \$1 a day. When in 1984 garment workers at the Polytex factory launched a hard-fought and ultimately victorious six-month strike, supporters of the international Spartacist tendency raised an international campaign to aid the strikers. In the summer of 1984, women workers at Magnum garments in Ratmalana, Sri Lanka also struck—Australian unionists donated several

hundred dollars. *Women and Revolution* has defended fired strike leaders at Magnum garment (see *W&R* No. 33, Spring 1987).

In Mexico the *maquila* program was started in 1965, about the same time that thousands of unemployed Mexican workers were thrown out of the U.S. at the end of the *bracero* program for importing farm labor. As Guillermina Valdez Villalva, founder of C.O.M.O. (Center for Orientation of Working Women) in Ciudad Juárez, recounts in the documentary:

"When the plants first came to the city, we always expected them to hire the unemployed male. But very soon we discovered that... young women between the ages of 16 and 21 were the only ones hired."

Valdez Villalva went on:

"Why do these women age so rapidly? Some have spoken of real burnout. It may be the stress in the plant. It may be toxic materials. You're going to find all of



Workers Vanguard

**Striking cannery workers in Salinas, California, August 1987. Combative Latino workers in U.S. link Mexican and American proletariat. Full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers!**

these things combining to destroy the worker at a very young age. A woman was old by the age of 23 in the electronics industry, and in the textile industry it could go a little older until the age of 27."

In the garment factories, chronic occupational diseases include back problems, asthma, conjunctivitis, bronchitis and brown lung, in addition to high levels of gastrointestinal disorders, insomnia and menstrual irregularities stemming from the intense work pressures.

In the border regions of Tijuana and Juárez, multinational giants advertise "jobs for little ladies," picking young women for dexterity and timidity. A decade ago, the fate of these *maquiladora* girls was to become maids, wading across the Rio Grande each morning at dawn, facing deportation by the Border Patrol, to clean house and take care of somebody else's kids while leaving their own at home alone. Even today, maids earn much more than the assembly line workers. But thousands of women are now drawn into social

labor, and are awakening to class consciousness and awareness of their oppression as women. To mobilize this young, vital workforce requires a revolutionary party with a program for struggle against the all-sided oppression of women on the job, in the family and throughout society.

The *costureras* of "19th of September" do speak to these questions. In their first congress report they call for:

"Day-care centers, against violence against women in all places, for the right to freely decide maternity, to create a new relation between men and women, against the double shift [work at home and on the job] to which we are subjected."

But what would it take to achieve such deep-going social change? In Mexico there is a law stipulating that employers must pay a certain amount into a day-care fund. But where are the day-care centers? Even when there's a piece of progressive legislation on the books, the companies get around it by simply *firing women who get pregnant!* Particularly in these zones of government-sanctioned superexploitation, the capitalists' whole purpose is to suck out the maximum surplus value by driving the workers into the ground and then tossing them out. The fight for *free 24-hour childcare* must be part of a struggle to expropriate the capitalist class.

What does the "right to freely decide maternity" mean? It is nothing without *free, safe abortion on demand*. But to raise such a demand means confronting the Catholic church and ingrained social prejudice, for this demand goes to the nucleus of the oppression of women—the family. Marxists understand that the family exists within the framework of private property, as a bastion of social conservatism and unpaid labor to lower the cost of the reproduction of labor power. To eliminate the "double shift" oppression of women, to replace household drudgery with free laundries, public dining halls, childcare, to release women from domestic slavery and lay the basis for "new relations between men and women," requires a new egalitarian socialist society, where in the words of the *Communist Manifesto* "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

### Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

An important aspect in the development of the "19th of September" garment workers union has been the participation of feminist groups in the advisory committee, setting up a union school, helping to put out publications. The *costureras* have become the *causa* of the women's movement. Thus the American feminist journal *Sojourner* (February 1987) writes of the "unique multi-class women's alliance" that has emerged in support of the union. One of the groups most active has been the feminist newspaper *Nosotras*, published by Women in Union Action (MAS). In an article in the July/August 1987 issue, Sara Lovera, a *Nosotras* editor, writes that from her "feminist perspective" her union work developed along three axes: "independence from the state, political parties and the bosses."

There must indeed be a struggle for independence from the capitalists, their state and their parties. But



All Ceylon Commercial &amp; Industrial Workers Union

### Sri Lanka: Women textile workers picket Apparel Exports in Ratmalana, 1985.

what's needed is not a "multi-class alliance" but a *working-class* struggle for power. That requires above all the forging of a revolutionary Leninist-Trotskyist party which, by championing the struggles of all the oppressed as an integral part of the proletarian fight for socialism, can win to its communist program the most conscious elements of the movement for women's emancipation. And that party must be internationalist to its core. In Mexico, the many-million-strong proletariat is a sleeping giant which has been drugged by nationalism dressed in "revolutionary" colors.

The export of capital characteristic of the imperialist epoch has reached new heights as Midwest industrial areas become a "rust belt" and giant American corporations set up low-wage, high-tech, duty-free factories from Tijuana to Taiwan. An enormous percentage of American manufacturing has gone "off-shore." General Motors, for instance, has set up at least 23 *maquilas* in Mexico to manufacture components and is said to be planning a total of 50 plants by the end of 1990. The workers' struggle against these "multinational" business giants cries out for international solidarity *in action*, yet the American trade unions spew out the racist and chauvinist protectionism of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy. Tagging along behind them is the reformist Communist Party, USA, which fans the hysteria with headlines such as "Maquiladora: A Monster Devouring U.S. Jobs" and lauds Democratic Party politicians who accuse GM, Ford and Chrysler of being "unAmerican" for relocating in Mexico.

While these star-spangled reformists wrap themselves in the American flag, the urgent need is for common struggle of the Mexican and American workers against the common enemy! The Spartacist League/U.S. raises the call for full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers. Class-conscious workers in Mexico must likewise fight to defend Guatemalan and other Central American refugees. They must raise the call for military victory to Salvadoran leftists and to defend, complete and extend the Nicaraguan Revolution. The heavy

battalions of labor in Mexico are the key to workers revolution in the region. As we wrote in "Mexico Atop the Volcano" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 429, 29 May 1987), the "powerful industrial proletariat...is increasingly integrated in the economy of the North American imperialist colossus, including by the several million Mexican-born workers in the U.S. An internationalist leadership can mobilize this power in class struggle extending south to Central America and north beyond the Rio Grande."

Mexican women unionists have raised the banner of internationalism. Last year, the "19th of September" union marched on International Working Women's Day with a leaflet pointing out how this proletarian holiday grew out of the 1908 mass march by New York garment workers, followed the next year by a walkout that spread to the entire industry. That "uprising of the 20,000" by the girl strikers scared the pants off the garment bosses. Then came the terrible Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911, in which 146 young women were burned to death as flames engulfed the Lower East Side sweatshop in which they were trapped.

Like the tragedy of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, which spurred the growth of the American needle trades unions, the 1985 earthquake brought to light the abominable conditions of Mexican garment workers, sparking the organizing of this industry. And in the U.S., they're trying to turn the clock back to the turn of the century for Mexican garment workers in the sweatshops in L.A., Hispanic and Filipina women in San Francisco, Dominican and Chinese seamstresses in New York. Today more than ever the key is forging a world party of socialist revolution. The *costureras'* International Women's Day leaflet recalled the contribution of the revolutionary internationalist Communist Clara Zetkin and hailed that most important International Women's Day of all—8 March 1917, when the women workers of Petrograd took to the streets in a strike which signaled the onset of the Russian Revolution. The cause of the woman worker is the cause of all the workers and oppressed. ■

# Mexican Women Workers Arise Class Struggle in the “Global Sweatshop”

It was the 19th of September 1985. The earthquake that struck Mexico City, killing some 20,000 and leaving 100,000 homeless, devastated the garment district. Forty-three garment factories were destroyed, 1,600 women workers died. They were buried alive, trapped in squalid sweatshops that were not built for hundreds of people and heavy machinery. Some of the women had been locked in by bosses to stop them from taking breaks. Survivors formed brigades, clawing frantically at the rubble to rescue those trapped below. Then, as screams filtered up through broken concrete, the army roped off the area and the owners brought up trucks—to pull out the machinery, leaving the workers buried! Evangelina Corona, a seamstress with 23 years in the industry, will never forget the scene:

“When we watched the owners salvage their possessions before attempting to save our co-workers, it was as if someone had ignited a fuse in us. All of the impotence, abuse, rage and frustration we had held inside for years burst forth. We saw in that moment what we were to the owners—objects, and not even objects of value.”

—Dallas Morning News, 7 September 1986

The idea of a union of garment workers took root among the survivors camped out in tent cities amid the

rubble. Today Evangelina Corona is general secretary of the “19th of September” National Union of Seamstresses. It was truly, as they say, “a union born from the ruins.” Through strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations, these courageous women are fighting to organize tens of thousands of brutally exploited Mexican garment workers. They have struggled for recognition of their independent union against the combined onslaught of the sweatshop bosses, the bourgeois state and the “*charros*”—bureaucrats of the government-controlled CTM union federation, who function as labor contractors enforcing sweetheart deals with the owners.

Over the past five years, Mexican workers have seen their standard of living gutted, with real wages slashed by more than half. Now with triple-digit inflation, the October stock market crash and the collapse of the peso, they’re being pushed to the breaking point. But while the rest of Mexican industry has been devastated, along the 2,000-mile Mexico-U.S. border *maquiladora* factories have been booming in low-wage enclaves of young, mainly women workers producing for duty-free export. Hundreds of American (and now

*continued on page 27*



Ahora [Ciudad Juárez]

Rally in support of striking garment workers at Vestamex/Camisas de Juárez demands: “Freedom of organization in the maquilas, forward with workers resistance!”