

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

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## Islamic Fundamentalists Vow to Kill Woman Writer — Defend Taslima Nasrin! —

### Women and the Permanent Revolution in Bangladesh



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Rahman/AP

Dhaka, April 1994—2,000 demonstrate against fundamentalists' attempts to shut down "foreign" agencies supporting clinics and schools for girls.

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# Dale Ross

## 1942–1994

### First Editor of *Women and Revolution*

Dale Ross, editor of *Women and Revolution* from its beginning in 1971 through issue No. 19 (Fall 1979), died in California in January 1994 at age 51. Using the name D. L. Reissner in public writing and speaking during her 13 years as a supporter of the Spartacist League, Dale was a key member of the leading body overseeing the party's work in the women's arena, including research on the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International's work on the woman question during its revolutionary years. She quit the SL in 1983, becoming demoralized during the bleak years of Cold War II and, to our knowledge, thereafter kept her distance from left-wing political activity.

Spartacist supporters first met Dale in San Francisco Women's Liberation in 1969, where she was won out of a "small group" called "The Furies," which grew into the Socialist Workshop. The meeting proved serendipitous for both. The SL's Trotskyist explanation of the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution propelled Dale, engaged in writing her doctoral dissertation on women in the Russian Revolution, on the road to becoming a revolutionary. Her original research enriched the SL's analysis of how and why the Stalinist political counterrevolution trampled on the Bolshevik program for the liberation of women.

Dale was one of the first from the women's liberation movement who broke with their middle-class backgrounds



W&R Photo

to become Marxist revolutionaries and Spartacist supporters. In her application for membership, dated 5 April 1970, she wrote:

"Coming out of a thoroughly bourgeois and virtually apolitical background, I arrived at socialist and later Spartacist positions not through active participation in working class struggles, but via a slow, roundabout intellectual route and particularly through the study of history."

The women's liberation movement crystallized out of the New Left beginning in the late 1960s. The amorphous New Left of radicalized, petty-bourgeois youth contained many subjectively revolutionary elements looking for a way to end U.S. imperialism's dirty war against the Vietnamese Revolution, to liberate black people, and to rebel against the stifling stranglehold of "the establishment." The prevailing New Left notions of "personal liberation" and separatist "vanguards" of the oppressed, each seeking its "own" liberation, led, under the pressures of this capitalist society and in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, to the fragmenting of the movement into its sectoralist parts. The women's liberation movement grew in part out of a revulsion against the male chauvinism of the New Left milieu, where women were often relegated to sexual roles, typing and making the coffee. Radicalized women began to generalize their personal experiences into a political appreciation of the subordination of women in society.

Intervening to win the most subjectively revolutionary women to a socialist program, the SL fought inside the women's movement against "lifestylism" and sectoralism, arguing that the subjugation of women did not derive from men, women's psyches, biology, particular elected officials or bourgeois political parties. We identified class society itself—centrally the institution of the family—as the source of the oppression of women, and insisted that only a socialist revolution could lay the groundwork for eliminating this oppression.

The second-class status of women in the Soviet Union, the one example of a successful proletarian revolution,

# Women and Revolution

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Commission for Work Among Women**

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loomed as a giant question mark for activists looking to Marxism for answers. The largely white, petty-bourgeois women's liberationists tended to dismiss the fact that the abolition of capitalism in the USSR had laid the basis for the elimination of the family by providing rudimentary necessities like health and childcare, jobs and housing, to an extent unimagined in the capitalist West. They were unable to explain the contradiction between the Bolshevik program for the emancipation of women and the reality under Stalinism, which had rehabilitated the oppressive institution of the family.

In 1970, the Socialist Workshop published Dale's paper, "How the Russian Revolution Failed Women," which presented a Marxist understanding of the woman question under Stalinism. Her doctoral dissertation, "The Role of the Women of Petrograd in War, Revolution and Counter-Revolution, 1914-1921," sharpening and deepening her work, was accepted at Rutgers University in May 1973. Through letters, news reports and other accounts, Dale brought to life the vigorous initiatives taken by the Bolsheviks in the early years of the revolution as they made "under the most desperate conditions, a truly heroic attempt to replace the principal institution of women's oppression—the family—with an extensive system of social welfare." She concluded:

"An understanding of the degeneration of the Revolution and the degeneration of the social position of Soviet women begins with an appreciation of the backwardness, poverty and isolation of the Soviet Union in the post-Revolutionary period. The Bolsheviks who led the October Revolution realized that without the outbreak of proletarian revolutions in the technologically advanced countries, the Revolution in Russia was doomed. With the failure of these revolutions,

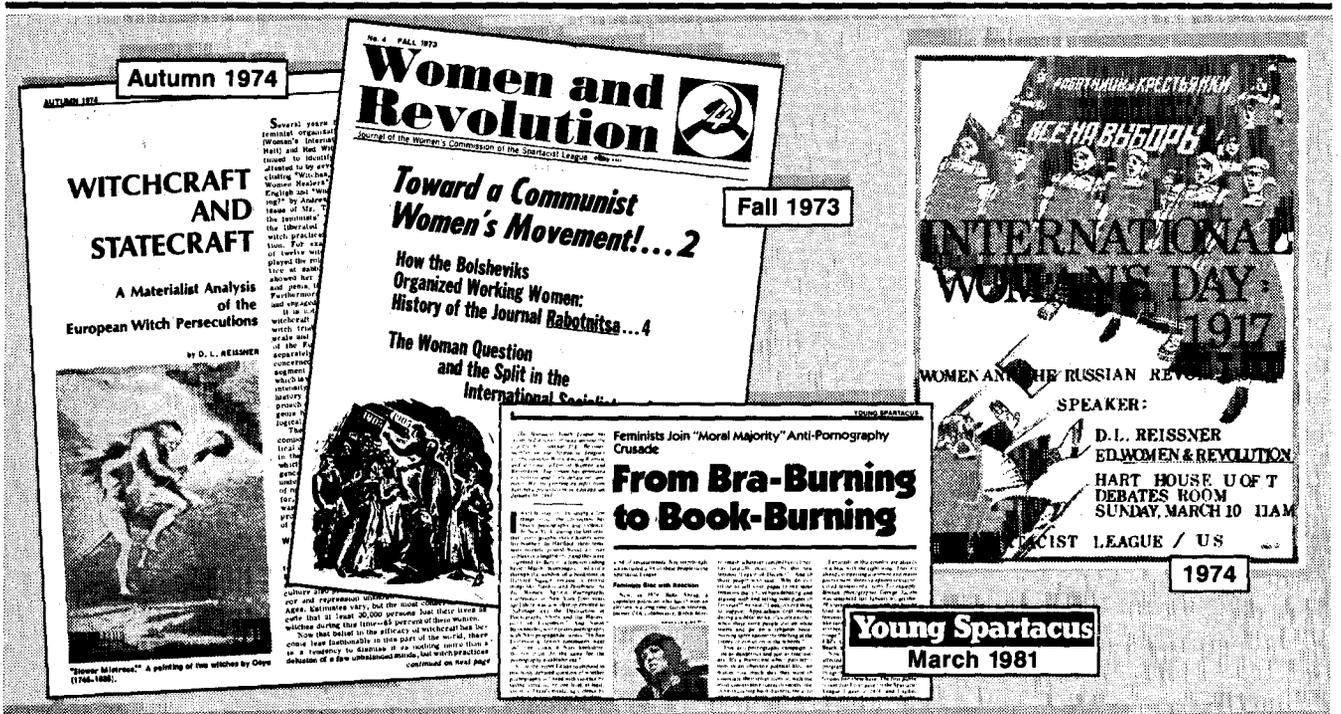
Russia remained too poor to carry out its own programs with regard to women, as it proved too poor to carry out its programs for the society as a whole. This economic basis of 'generalized want' made possible the emergence of a privileged, conservative bureaucratic caste in the Soviet Union which made a virtue of every necessity and called each defeat a victory."

Dale's work was incorporated in the SL's first major statement on the woman question, "Toward Women's Liberation" (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 17, August-September 1970).

**Communist Work Among Women**

In 1971, the Socialist Workshop changed its name to Revolutionary Women of the Bay Area and, linked to similar groups in Boston, New York and Austin, Texas, published *Women and Revolution* No. 1 under Dale's editorship. *W&R* Nos. 2 and 3 included "Thesis for the Communist Women's Movement" from the Third Congress in 1921, a handbook for Leninist work among women, which was particularly formative for the Spartacist position on the need for special work among women, including transitional organizations and special women's journals. In our introduction to part two of the document we wrote:

"At the First All-Russian Congress of Working Women and Peasant Women in 1918, the question of separate women's organizations to deal with women's needs was raised, but it was resolutely opposed by the delegates on the grounds that working women had no problems to solve which were fundamentally distinct from those of the working class as a whole. This view was upheld at the Third Congress of the Comintern, but in view of the continuing oppression of masses of women, resulting in their backwardness, it



Dale Ross' contributions to our party included editing *Women and Revolution*, and writing and speaking on a broad range of subjects, from women in the Russian Revolution to the bourgeois feminists' support for government anti-sex censorship.

was considered necessary to establish special sections of the Party under the direct control and responsibility of Party committees for intensive work among women. In this way, the Party as a whole took upon itself the crucial task of combatting the oppression of women, rather than leaving the work to 'independent' women's organizations or to caucuses within the Party composed of the women comrades only."

The SL conducted an intense internal discussion on the tasks of the party in the women's arena, seeking to codify a Leninist, interventionist approach. Studying the lessons of past Marxist practice, we uncovered and revived the program and methods of work among women developed by the pre-World War I German Social Democracy and by the Bolsheviks and codified by the Communist International. The Third National Conference of the SL in November 1972 voted to establish a Central Committee Commission for Work Among Women, whose main task is to publish *W&R*. Centralized under party control, *W&R* moved to New York, with Dale as editor. In *W&R* No. 4 (Fall 1973), we explained that the party's obligations on this question were not simply dependent upon a transitory "Women's Liberation Movement":

"As revolutionists, we were compelled to intervene in the women's liberation movement both because we sought to honor our obligation to be what Lenin termed 'a tribune of the people'—an organization responsive to the real needs of all the oppressed—and because this work was strategically important both in order to develop revolutionary class consciousness among the mass of oppressed women and in order to raise the general level of consciousness in the class itself on this issue."

In New York as a member of the Women's Commission,

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Dale remained *W&R* editor until her move to Chicago in 1980. Her articles spanned a wide range, including the intriguing "Witchcraft and Statecraft: A Materialist Analysis of the European Witch Persecutions." *W&R* Nos. 10 and 11 (Winter 1975-76 and Spring 1976) carried her "Bolshevik Work Among Women" in two parts. She became one of the party's most effective and entertaining speakers. In 1980, following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Dale made an International Women's Day tour under our banner, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" She noted, "This was probably the first instance of a shooting war in modern history which was ignited specifically by the question of women's liberation." But where were the feminists? As with Iran, where the left tailed Khomeini's reactionary "mass movement," the feminist establishment found a cause that superseded their feminism—anti-Communism. In counterposition, Dale stated, "In Afghanistan today the Red Army alone stands between women and the perpetuation of feudal and pre-feudal enslavement."

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the SL intervened in the array of "radical feminist" circles and trade-union-oriented, reformist organizations such as the Congress of Labor Union Women. But as the New Left radicalization ebbed under the impact of bourgeois anti-Soviet reaction in the early 1970s, anti-Communist, liberal establishment feminists like the National Organization for Women jumped on the reactionary bandwagon. In a memorable talk in January 1981, "From Bra-Burning to Book-Burning" (published in *Young Spartacus* No. 89, March 1981) Dale denounced the chill of Cold War II sweeping across the country in the aftermath of Afghanistan. Among the feminists, this found expression in such Moral Majority diversions as "Take Back the Night" demonstrations and anti-porn protests, mimicking the government's anti-sex witchhunt against gay people, *Playboy* and X-rated movies. Dale spoke of this:

"The first public forum that I ever gave for the Spartacist League...I talked about the role of women in the Bolshevik Revolution. We like to talk about the Bolshevik Revolution, because it is our model for the future.... We like to argue about what kind of program and strategy and tactics can win power for the working class because...that's what we're all about. We *do not* like to talk about whether or not government censorship is a good thing or a bad thing. We don't like to talk about whether or not there should be separation of church and state. Or whether women should have to wear veils or not, because we think that these issues were settled a couple hundred years ago. It was the French Revolution."

The anti-Communist climate and relative passivity of the working class during this period took a toll on the SL—a loss of cadres. After a period of demoralization, Dale quit the SL in January 1983. For a brief time, she ran with a bunch of embittered, anti-Soviet quitters, some of whom later became the so-called Bolshevik Tendency.

Dale did her best, most creative work as a member of our party. "Women's Revolutionary Manifesto" in the first issue of *Women and Revolution* expressed the commitment Dale later abandoned, but which we continue to uphold:

"Our path lies clearly before us. Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it." ■

# Letters

## On Language and Liberation

We print below an excerpted exchange between a reader of *Women and Revolution* and a member of our editorial board.

Montréal, Québec  
[undated, received July 1994]

To whom it may concern,

As a recently new reader of the Spartacist League's journal "Workers Vanguard" as well as the journal (of the Women's League of the SL), "Women and Revolution," I am very inspired, encouraged, and impressed with your organisation's anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic integration with very clear Marxist principles which seek to destroy a class-based, capitalist society and the inequities it creates. I, however, am puzzled by something I noticed in "Women and Revolution" which, though seemingly trivial, is I think very important to any Marxist publication and especially one which chooses to focus on the "woman question."

I noticed that throughout "Women and Revolution" you consistently use the term "mankind" as opposed to people or humankind. While I anticipate your defense of this practice to claim that language or terms are a mild bandaid (or not the true problem) rather than a solution to sexism, I have a few reasons why I think language is an important issue in battling sexism.

First, language is not solely a means of communication. It is also an expression of shared assumptions and transmits implicit values and behavioural models to those who use it. Therefore, to use "mankind" implies that people are men—this renders women invisible in a very literal and symbolic way and serves to perpetuate an androcentric society.

Secondly, since language both reflects and creates social norms and values; that is, "if it plays a crucial part in social organisation it is instrumental in maintaining male power..." (Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* [1985]) and Marxists, in deconstructing sexism as an integral tool of capitalist oppression, must study its workings carefully. While, obviously, gender-neutral language will not eradicate sexism, it is a very important aspect in social transformation. To say something is not worth implementing because it does not provide complete success instantly, is like saying that since international expansion is integral to a successful Marxist revolution, it is not worth starting a movement or mobilization in one country.

Finally, if indeed "mankind" means everyone and language or terms are trivial, then why all the resistance to changing it? If you were to substitute "womankind" for "mankind" or "she" for "he," your readers would assume you meant only women and would (with reason) question your motives. If it is truly not a "big deal," then why the insistence on continuing a practice which perpetuates sexist and androcentric images and values?

While I understand your organisation's focus is class-

based, I assume, by your journal "Women and Revolution" as well as your anti-sexist stance in all your activities, that eradicating sexism both as a special oppression and as a tool and product of capitalism is an important issue for you. As a result, considering my argument outlined above, I urge you to contemplate your use of the term "mankind" and the larger issue of language in general.

Sincerely,  
Jasmine C.

\* \* \* \* \*

Vancouver, British Columbia  
27 August 1994

Dear Jasmine,

Thank you for your interesting letter to *Women and Revolution* forwarded here by my colleagues in New York. I assure you, political debates about language are not trivial. We share an understanding that opposition to all forms of oppression is integral to the Marxist program which indeed seeks to destroy "class-based capitalist society and the inequities it creates." And that is the framework in which I will address your concerns about *W&R's* use of language, especially words like "mankind."

It's true that changing language is not a "solution to sexism." It's not even a "mild bandaid." But this is not why we oppose "political linguistics." Rather, the sustained effort by feminist linguists to change language with the aim of partially or wholly addressing social inequities, embodies a political program that is counterposed to the necessary *social struggle* against social, racial and sexual oppression. It is based on the false premise that by changing how people speak, we can change how they act. This is idealism: proceeding from what is in people's heads, their ideas and the language in which they express those ideas, rather than the social reality that creates and conditions the ideas. As Karl Marx said, "'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act."

Language mirrors social reality and is a vehicle for communicating ideas, a powerful instrument of human culture. It can as easily convey a liberating revolutionary program as a reactionary one. But language doesn't create social reality, or as you say, "social norms and values."

We disagree with Deborah Cameron that language is instrumental in maintaining male power, and with Dale Spender, another feminist linguist, that language causes women's oppression. Women's oppression is deeply rooted in the institution of the family, economic unit and guardian of private property in capitalist society. It's really not a matter of words and ideas and language. It is capitalist exploitation and private property that are central to the maintenance of women's oppression. Our struggle as communists is to transform that social reality through proletarian socialist revolution.

That said, I agree that language can have a political



Central Museum of the Revolution, Moscow

Women activists in the Bolsheviks' commission for work among women, the Zhenotdel, in 1924 in Kirgiz. Teaching women to read was a basic task of the revolution in backward areas. 1920 poster says, "Knowledge breaks the chains of slavery."



program. Two examples will illustrate this. When anti-abortion terrorists hurl words like "baby killer" at women seeking abortions and the doctors performing them, this is an *action program for murder which is being carried out*. Racist epithets and code words for terror against blacks, Asians and Jews can incite pogroms and lynching. But stopping that race-terror is not a matter of linguistics but of mobilizing the integrated working class in action to stop the Klan and Nazi fascists.

Until 1977 we didn't use "gay" to refer to homosexuals, except in quotes, because we did not consider gay as a neutral or conventional synonym for homosexual. But we began using gay because, while homosexual was and still is an adequate term, it became impossible to refer to a whole range of cultural/political activities without use of the word gay. Yet it still does not refer to homosexuality in all contexts (ancient Rome, for example, or Iran where homosexuals are anything but gay). Nor does it describe a variety of sexual orientations and interests (e.g., lesbian women and bisexuals). American author Gore Vidal's elegant solution was to speak of "same sex sex" which is both accurate and explicit. We explained our political rationale when we announced the style change in *Workers Vanguard*:

"The term was promoted by and gained public currency in the last decade due to the gay liberation movement. The general program of the gay liberation movement is not so much fighting for democratic rights for homosexuals as the affirmation of 'gay pride.' As a political rather than purely personal statement, 'gay pride' represents a sectoralist outlook fundamentally hostile to Marxism and detrimental to the struggle for a united mobilization of the working class and all defenders of democratic rights against discrimination and social oppression....

"Our resistance to using the term gay was also derived from opposition to New Left moralistic idealism in general, one aspect of which has been a tendency to reject the conventional terms relating to oppressed social groups in favor of new terms, often quite artificial in appearance (e.g., chairperson). As Marxists we oppose such termino-

logical liberationism and maintain a conservative attitude toward conventional usage. Thus we used Negro rather than black until Negro generally acquired an obsolete or derogatory meaning and black became conventional usage. We still do not use the term 'Ms.,' a form of address closely associated with feminism and based on an amalgamation of traditional aristocratic-derived, sex-defined terminology (as opposed to the democratic 'citizen' or the communist 'comrade')."

—WV No. 168, 29 July 1977

We also don't use "choice" to refer to a woman's right to abortion. "Choice" is insisted upon by the petty-bourgeois feminists of CARAL in Canada, and NOW and NARAL in the U.S. They speak of "a woman's right to choose" and call out the well-worn slogan, "Control of our bodies, control of our lives." Posing the struggle for abortion rights as a matter of "choice" is the political program of the petty bourgeoisie. It intentionally masks reality. Abortion is a medical procedure. It is a democratic right, and should be available free and on demand. For teenagers and for poor, minority and working-class women the decision to have an abortion is an often painful economic or medical necessity. A "choice" perhaps, but not one freely made. The "pro-choice" feminists appeal to their well-heeled sisters in the bourgeoisie who in any case can always afford abortions. They call on Clinton's cops to defend the clinics in the U.S., while in Canada

they also preach reliance on the state, especially if the attorney general is an NDP [New Democratic Party] social democrat. In the context of medicine-for-profit, these feminists will not fight for free abortion on demand. And nothing less than that will provide "choice" for the vast majority of working-class women.

Now to the thorny question of "mankind." In flipping through *W&R* I see a variety of words and expressions to denote the whole of *homo sapiens*, men and women: mankind, human beings, humanity, humankind, people, all people, women and men. "Mankind" is not inherently anti-woman. Its dictionary definition is "the human species...human beings in general." "Humankind" has a similar meaning: "the human race, mankind." By the way, in French "mankind" translates as "l'humanité," a feminine noun, while the German word is more akin to the English: "die Menschheit," also a feminine noun. As for "man," the *Oxford English Dictionary's* first definition is "a human being (irrespective of sex or age)" and their historical backup is this piquant quote from a 17th century writer: "The Lord had but one paire of men in Paradise!"

I'm sure you would be interested in the question of language in Japan. This is a very hierarchical country where women's oppression is profound and permeates every aspect of social life, including language. At an early age boys learn to add a particle at the end of a sentence to indicate their definite opinion, while girls are taught to add other particles which convey hesitation, deference and politeness, literally codifying and enforcing female inferiority and oppression. A Japanese grammar tells us that "Some of these particles are used exclusively by male or exclusively by female speakers, so they also function to mark the speaker's sex." This is an example of "conventional usage" that our comrades in Japan would avoid and in an egalitarian workers' Japan it would quickly disappear.

After the 1917 October Revolution the Russian language

changed considerably, becoming both simpler (fewer letters in the alphabet, for example) and more egalitarian. In tsarist Russia, the familiar second person singular (you/ty) was used by the nobility towards servants, peasants and workers, but the latter were expected to respond in the more respectful mode of the second person plural (you/vy). This reactionary social convention was overthrown first in the army and in the factories. Leon Trotsky described the new, revolutionary order in the Red Army:

"Of course, Red Army personnel may use the familiar form in speaking to one another as comrades, but precisely as comrades and only as comrades. In the Red Army a commanding officer may not use the familiar form to address a subordinate if the subordinate is expected to respond in the polite form. Otherwise an expression of inequality between persons would result, not an expression of subordination in the line of duty."

—*Problems of Everyday Life*

After the Stalinist political counterrevolution the bureaucracy fostered a recrudescence of the old tsarist forms of address. In his decisive analysis of Stalinism, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky voiced his outrage at the reemergence of this practice:

"How can they fail to remember that one of the most popular revolutionary slogans in tsarist Russia was the demand for the abolition of the use of the second person singular by bosses in addressing their subordinates!"

Contemporary feminism has had some impact on the language, but this has not translated into even token improvements for women in the realm of social equality, abortion rights, jobs, or an amelioration of the unremitting violence that so many women so routinely face. Even as the bourgeois media, employers and governments implement "gender-neutral" language, we are witnessing a real degradation of women's rights and lives. This is a product both of the capitalist economy utterly going down the tubes, and of the social counterrevolution in the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. And "gender-neutral" language can express reactionary, anti-woman bigotry. I heard a really horrifying example of this on the radio the other day. A professor at a provincial college is accused of sexual harassment. In the radio interview, he used quite "correct" language to say that women belong at home and blacks have low IQs!

I agree with your arguments against those who say that something is not worth implementing because it does not provide complete success instantly. Thus we struggle for abortion rights and mobilize ourselves and others at the besieged clinics. We fight for full democratic rights for gays and lesbians. We oppose the ruling class' anti-sex crusade, which hits women and gays most viciously. We seek to mobilize the multiracial working class to struggle against the racist immigration laws. We've organized numerous integrated working-class actions which have stopped the fascists from marching. In all the battles in defense of workers and the oppressed, we aim to lay bare the inner workings of capitalism and to link such struggles to the necessity for the working class to take power in its own name. That's when we can begin to lay the material basis for the true liberation of women and all humanity.

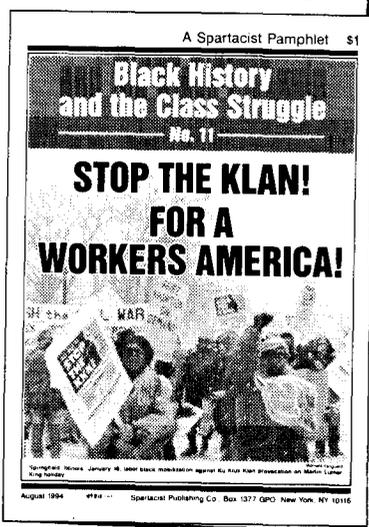
Communist greetings,  
Miriam McDonald  
for Women and Revolution

## Black History and the Class Struggle

### No. 11

#### Partial contents:

- Revolutionary Consciousness is Key—A Proletarian-Centered Strategy to Fight Fascism
- Abolish the Racist Death Penalty! Mobilize to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!
- Anti-Semitic Bigot and Preacher of Black Capitalism—Farrakhan is Bad News for Black People
- Clinton Whips Up Hysteria Over "Assault Weapons"



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## Social Democrats Cave In to Clerical Reaction

# The Working Class Must Take Up the Fight for Women's Rights!

We print below an October 1994 supplement, translated and abridged, of *Platforma Spartakusowców*, newspaper of the Spartakusowska Grupa Polski, section of the International Communist League, on the fight for women's liberation and abortion rights in Poland. In the September 1993 elections for Poland's parliament, working people, women and youth registered their verdict on four years of Solidarność counterrevolution with a resounding thumbs down. In a dramatic vote, two parties associated with the former Stalinist regime, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish Peasants Party, won over a third of the popular vote and a majority in the Sejm, the lower house of parliament. But while the

## Poland

SLD was voted in as a protest against the miseries of capitalist restoration, it too is unabashedly committed to capitalism and admonished its members against taking part in "anticlerical activities." The Spartacist Group of Poland warned at the time that the SLD's promise in advance "not to do anything without prior consultation with the IMF" underlined that there was nothing for the working class to vote for in the elections.

To win the Polish working class to the active defense of the rights of women and all the oppressed, the revolutionary vanguard must lead the way as the "tribune of the people"—championing the struggle of all the exploited and oppressed to defeat the source of their subjugation, class society.

\* \* \* \* \*

Women's right to abortion is among the key social questions in Poland since the restoration of capitalism in 1990 spearheaded by the clerical-nationalist Solidarność, the instrument of the Vatican, the CIA and the imperialist bankers of Wall Street and Frankfurt. As we wrote in *Platforma* No. 4 (Summer/Fall 1993), "Nothing more clearly demonstrates the reactionary nature of the capitalist counterrevolutions which have swept across Europe and the former Soviet Union than the degradation of women." Over the past year in Poland, that degradation has accelerated as a consequence of the harsh ban on abortion, generating raw hatred against the church hierarchy and its political agents. The struggle against the draconian abortion law has polarized Polish society, and is potentially explosive in the context of an ongoing wave of workers strikes against IMF-dictated immiseration.

The Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)-dominated coalition government—with Peasant Party head Pawlak appointed



Warsaw, April 1992—Cops attack students protesting obligatory religion classes in Polish schools.

**For Free Abortion on Demand!  
For the Separation of Church and State!**

prime minister—was voted into power by a population which saw a vote for the ex-Stalinists as a protest against capitalist “shock therapy” and the oppressive dictatorship of the Catholic church. Once in power, the SLD stalled on its promise to amend or soften the abortion ban until the last hour in order to preserve its deal with Lech Walesa. Even in the aftermath of an election which eliminated *all* the overtly Catholic parties from the Sejm, SLD parliamentary leader Jozef Oleksy whined, “It wouldn’t be reasonable to raise the standard of militant atheism” (*Le Monde*, 6-7 March 1994). Finally, to pull in the popular vote in the June local elections, the SLD passed an amendment allowing abortion “for social reasons.” When Walesa predictably vetoed the amendment and the Sejm failed to overturn his veto with the needed two-thirds majority, the mealy-mouthed SLD hid behind this legalistic façade, with Oleksy openly admitting that this might be a better outcome in order to stave off war between the president and the parliament. The church has always been a bulwark of Polish capitalism, and the SLD’s commitment to keep Poland “stable” for capitalism beheads it before clerical reaction.

### Anti-Abortion Witchhunt Kills Women

In a short time, the consequences of this woman-hating ban on abortion have been dramatic and shocking, as priests in every pulpit, confessional, church, in every town and small village across the country, decry the “sin” of abortion and birth control. Many doctors will not prescribe contraception for fear of being ostracized by the church. Priests fulminate against known opponents of the abortion ban, as in the case of Professor Zofia Kuroatowska, a Freedom Union senator who fought for a liberal law in the previous parliamentary term. Wanda Nowicka, chairman of the Federation for Women and Family Planning, pointed to the appalling extent of the church’s intervention: “We get calls from desperate women who have been told by their priest that they have to take out their intra-uterine device before coming to ask for abortion” (*Warsaw Voice*, 29 May 1994).

When Professor Waclaw Dec, head of the Institute of Gynecology and Obstetrics in Lodz, explained on TV how doctors help some women by altering medical terminology to fit the law in order to perform abortions in state hospitals, he was threatened with criminal prosecution and the loss of his medical license. We in the Spartakusowska Grupa Polski say, get your bloody, sanctionious hands off Professor Dec!

It is only through the humane and defiant actions of doctors like Dec that some women can still get affordable, safe abortions. But the enormous anti-abortion pressure on doctors has resulted even in suicide in the tragic case of a woman doctor in Czestochowa. She performed an abortion on a young woman in dire financial straits, five or six months pregnant. Upon complications the doctor immediately rushed her patient to the state hospital where her life was saved. Fearing a trial and consequent ban on working in her profession, this woman doctor took



Gamma

**Lech Walesa and allies in the Catholic hierarchy. Walesa’s “Solidarność” clerical-nationalist movement fronted for imperialist drive to restore capitalism in Poland.**

her own life. The patient said later: “I wanted [the abortion] earlier, but everybody refused...” (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 6 April 1994).

There are countless tales of other victims of the ban, like that of a 16-year-old girl who wound up in the hospital after giving birth alone and in secret and then reportedly killing her baby and hiding the body under her bed as a “shameful secret.” In the last year 56 cases of infanticide were discovered, including the body of a baby found at a rubbish dump in Gniezno. Such tragedies are the sharp edge of what this pitiless anti-woman law means. This year, a mere 777 legal abortions were performed, compared with 11,000 the year before, while the number of miscarriages rose by 1,225 after years of decreasing. The birthrate has been declining rapidly since the counter-revolution, while 153 newly born infants were abandoned in hospitals.

Reportedly the price for an illegal abortion in Warsaw has risen from 3-5 million zlotys before the abortion ban to 13-25 million (\$535-1,028). “Today all the people know, that this law hits only the poor,” commented *Gazeta Wyborcza* (5 April 1994). Wealthier women can go abroad, as customers of a new branch of services known as “abortion tourism.” What’s necessary is *free abortion on demand*, as part of free, quality health care for all!

### For the Separation of Church and State!

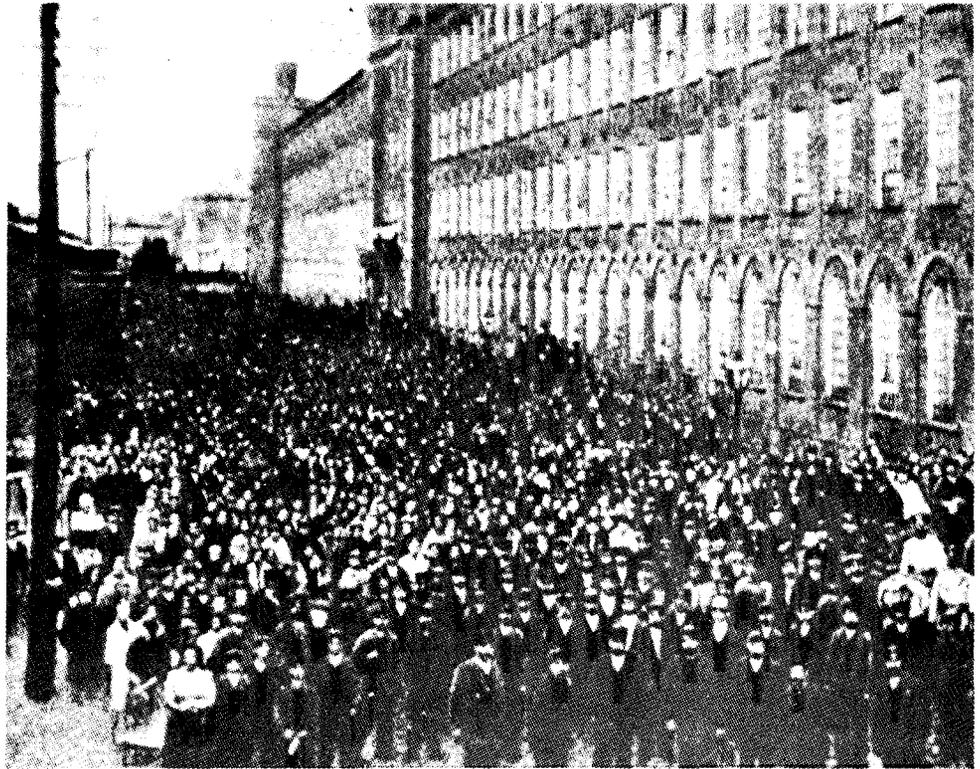
Since *Solidarność* assumed power, the church’s political influence has permeated Polish society. Religion classes have been reintroduced, while priests participate in school staff meetings. The church gets unlimited airtime on radio and TV; you can’t turn on your TV without seeing the clerical collar on some chat or political debate show. Parish priests decide what should be on display at local newsstands, often dictate who should be principal of the local school and instruct people from the pulpit who they should vote for.

In Poland today there’s a feverish rush by the church to get the concordat with the Vatican, formalizing the



Verlag Kurt Desch

**The heroic revolutionary tradition of the Polish working class: Rosa Luxemburg, leader of revolutionary workers parties in Poland and Germany. Striking factory workers in Lodz during 1905-06 revolution in Poland.**



Harvard University

church's role in the Polish state, ratified before parliament votes on a new constitution which might weaken clerical influence. The bishops and cardinals are lashing out at the parliament with the old accusations of "godless Communists." The SGP says: Scrap the concordat! Priests out of the schools and out of our bedrooms! For the strict separation of church and state!

### **Stalinist Betrayals Paved the Way for Capitalist Counterrevolution**

The fundamental cause of the capitalist counterrevolution across East Europe and the ex-USSR was the cumulative effect of the military, economic and political impact of world imperialism on the bureaucratically ruled workers states. In Poland, the strength of the Catholic church left the country especially vulnerable to an internally generated counterrevolution. It was the Stalinist predecessors of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SdRP), the mainstay of the SLD electoral bloc, which left the power of the church intact under the previous deformed workers state.

The bankruptcy of the former Stalinist regime was nowhere more evident than in the fact that it drove the mass of the historically socialist Polish proletariat into the arms of clerical-nationalist Solidarność and finally handed power to it. Committed to the dogma of "socialism in one country," Stalinism encouraged the forces of nationalism and reaction which would one day sweep away the deformed workers state. When Gomulka was restored to power on a wave of workers' unrest in 1956, among the first acts of his "Polish road to socialism" was to grant greater powers to the church. At the same time, the liberalizing Stalinist regime passed the immensely popular Abortion Admissibility Law, which was immediately

bitterly targeted by clerical anti-Communism. While the Stalinists were able to point to abortion on demand as proof of their professed policy of emancipating women, they undermined the gains of women under the planned economy by glorifying the "socialist family."

The Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky proclaimed among its basic goals an end to the oppression of women, the oldest and most deeply rooted form of subjugation in human society. The early Soviet state sought to replace the institution of the family with socialized child care and housework, which would enable women to fully participate in social and political life. But the desperately poor workers state, weighed down by centuries of tsarist backwardness and with an economy wrecked by imperialist war and counterrevolutionary invasion, lacked the resources to carry out this program. Dragging the liberating goals of communism through the mud, Stalinism proclaimed this defeat a victory; as a partial consequence, abortion was made illegal in the USSR in 1936. As Leon Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

"The revolution made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called 'family hearth'—that archaic, stuffy and stagnant institution in which the woman of the toiling classes performs galley labor from childhood to death.... The triumphal rehabilitation of the family... is caused by the material and cultural bankruptcy of the state. 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."

The international Spartacist tendency (iSt, now ICL—International Communist League) warned in September 1981, when Solidarność consolidated around its overtly

capitalist restorationist program, that Walesa, Thatcher and Reagan's "union" was an instrument of clerical reaction and capitalist counterrevolution. Our women's journal, *Women and Revolution*, dedicated its Spring 1982 issue to the revolutionary heritage of Rosa Luxemburg, who as a woman, a Jew and a communist was everything that *Solidarność* hates. In "Solidarność: A Man's World," we noted:

"Only socialised property relations can lay the basis for women's liberation and a proletarian political revolution would stand four-square on defending and extending those gains into the full social and political liberation of women that Stalinism prevents. *Solidarność*, behind the Black Virgin of Czestochowa, the crowned eagle of Pilsudski and with the blessing of the pope, has set its face on reversing them."

### Fake Lefts Tail Imperialist Cold War Onslaught

In stark contrast to the ICL's opposition to *Solidarność*, those who occasionally masquerade as "socialist" defenders of women's rights were *on the other side of the barricades*, backing this counterrevolutionary instrument of imperialism and the Vatican to the hilt. This was true not only of "third camp" social democrats like the Cliffites (whose Polish group, *Solidarność Socjalistyczna*, bows to Walesa and Co. in its very name), but of a whole range of ostensibly Trotskyist tendencies, including the Morenoites (who support the Grupa Samorządność Robotnicza, GSR), Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat (represented in Poland by *Dalej!*) and the British Militant (affiliated to *Ofensywa*). Tailing Western Cold War social democrats like Mitterrand, the German Social Democrats and the British Labour Party, who enthusiastically backed the imperialist anti-Soviet war drive, the fake lefts supported the most reactionary anti-communist and anti-woman movements.

Most graphic of all was Afghanistan, the only instance of a contemporary war in which a central question was the enslavement of women. When Moscow intervened militarily in 1979 to prevent its left nationalist client state from falling to the Islamic reactionaries armed and organized by U.S. imperialism, the ICL raised the slogans: Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend the social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples! In contrast, practically the entire left internationally—from Mandel to Moreno to Cliff—dutifully fell in behind imperialist chiefs Reagan, Thatcher and Mitterrand in denouncing Soviet "expansionism" and calling for the withdrawal of Soviet forces.

Those who cheered for *Solidarność* in 1981, denounced the Red Army in Afghanistan and stood on Yeltsin's barricades in 1991, actively tailing forces of counterrevolution, certainly can't fight the consequences of the restoration of capitalism, including the attack on abortion rights. In the run-up to the 1992 vote on the abortion bill, these groups all tailed the campaign of Zbigniew Bujak (from the Party of Labor, a left split from *Solidarność*) and Barbara Labuda (from the *Solidarność*-derived Freedom Union) for a popular referendum, spreading illusions about parliamentary solutions and channeling social anger into an impotent dead end. Now that the amendment has failed, this strategy is once again being pushed.

In contrast, we Trotskyists fight to mobilize the social power of the proletariat on behalf of all the oppressed. During the December 1992 miners strike, we issued a

leaflet supporting the strike and calling on the workers to take up the struggle against all manifestations of capitalist counterrevolution, including rising anti-Semitism and anti-Roma (Gypsies) racism and the growing attacks on women. Indeed, while the strike was not directed against the abortion ban, its political impact on the fragile bourgeois state succeeded in forcing the Sejm to postpone the debate on the anti-abortion law, demonstrating the power of the proletariat to combat capitalist reaction on all fronts. For this the GSR denounced the SGP for seeking to introduce "secondary" questions like the fight to defend abortion into the workers movement, a grotesquely backward attitude echoed by the rest of the left.

### For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Internationally in the post-Soviet New World Disorder, women's right to abortion is on the chopping block in country after country. West Germany's gobbling up of the East German deformed workers state—where the position of women was in important respects the most advanced in the world—has meant massive unemployment (particularly among women), the elimination of inexpensive childcare, and the replacement of the DDR's free abortion and contraception on demand with the anti-abortion decree of the Fourth Reich.

We Trotskyists understand that the call for free abortion on demand as part of free, quality health care, for the separation of church and state, must be raised as part of a program of struggle for women's liberation through socialist revolution. The only social force able to fight effectively for this purpose is the working class. Virtually since the restoration of capitalism, Polish workers have shown their muscle in strike action time and time again, from the 1990 rail workers strike to this summer's steel strikes. This willingness to fight must also be channeled to social questions. A concrete example of this proud tradition where the working class used its social clout to defend women was in fact one of the first actions led by the party Proletariat of Ludwik Warynski, the first Marxist party in the tsarist empire:

"In 1883 the party was the life and soul of a real mass movement occasioned by an insolent decree of the Warsaw police chief, placing women factory workers on a par with prostitutes by forcing them to subject themselves to humiliating examinations. An appeal issued by the *Proletariat* stirred up the working masses. In the weaving mill at Zyradow 6000 workers went on strike. Although they were bloodily suppressed by the military, nevertheless the opprobrious decree had to be withdrawn, and the workers gained the consciousness of their first success against the absolutist regime."

—Paul Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg*

A major part of rebuilding that tradition means forging a Leninist-Trotskyist party, the champion of the aspiration for liberation of all the oppressed in capitalist society: women, gays, national and religious minorities, the youth. The emancipation of women is integrally bound up with the struggle for a global communist order overcoming all forms of national and racial inequality, and guaranteeing the freedom of all individuals to maximize their capabilities on the basis of mankind's collective control over the forces of nature. ■

## Islamic Fundamentalists Vow to Kill Woman Writer

# Women and the Permanent Revolution in Bangladesh

It's a 20th-century heretic hunt: Taslima Nasrin, a 32-year-old Bangladeshi woman writer, is targeted for death by mullahs and for prison by the government seeking to appease the religious reactionaries. The crime she is accused of is "blasphemy," "insulting Islam"—and so she is charged as a criminal by the Khaleda Zia government. Why? Because as a writer she is a passionate advocate of women's freedom and a hard opponent of the murderous communalism tearing apart the subcontinent. For this the fanatics of the Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami have declared a *fatwa* (religious edict) against her and put a price on her head. In August 1994, after months spent hiding in darkened rooms from the mobs howling for her life, Nasrin fled Bangladesh for asylum in Sweden, with the assistance of PEN, the international writers organization. Her case is still pending in the Dhaka courts.

Taslima Nasrin is a lightning rod for the storm of reaction stirred up by the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union, which has jacked up imperialist exploitation and rivalries. Over the last few years, social turmoil has boiled over in Bangladesh, and reaction aimed at women, workers and intellectuals has skyrocketed. Amid the general crisis, Nasrin's writing has been the target of the mullahs' wrath—for its outright challenge to male dominance, its explicit sexuality, and its blunt critique of Islam. Her 1993 novel *Lajja* (*Shame*) sparked volcanic eruptions of fundamentalist terror, prompting the government to ban the book outright.

Nasrin takes up her pen to protest the squalor and brutish oppression of one of the poorest countries on this planet. Exploited and dismembered by the British colonialists, today Bangladesh is at once dominated by imperialist finance capital and subject to the tyranny of religious obscurantism and backward "customs." Capitalist exploitation manipulates the ancient traditions and taboos. In this largely rural and agrarian country, with few roads and poor communications, punished by floods and storms, millions live no better than beasts of burden, and the number of landless peasants grows at a rate of 10 percent a year. That terrible life falls even harder on women. Locked away in *pardah* (seclusion), largely illiterate, the chattel property of their fathers or husbands, women in Bangladesh are overworked, malnourished and subject to rape and death in times of war or communalist terror.

Nasrin's case raises questions far beyond the important democratic issues of women's rights, freedom of speech



Graham Turner

## Defend Taslima Nasrin!

and the separation of religion and state. Addressing the profound oppression of women and the religious and national hatreds, her writings inevitably, and unintentionally, raise questions that only a revolutionary socialist program can answer. And it is these questions which neither her liberal defenders nor her enemies want to touch. Class society itself feeds the oppression of the masses of the Indian subcontinent at the behest of Wall Street, the London bankers and the IMF.

The imperialist hypocrites in the West exploit Nasrin's case as part of their propaganda mill touting the putative



Saigado/Magnum

**Women workers at Bangladesh textile factory. Imperialist ventures in South Asia like this are creating a female proletariat with revolutionary potential.**

superiority of the “democratic” West as against the “barbarian” Third World. They protest to the Bangladesh High Commission; bourgeois newspapers print frightening photos of bearded fanatics demanding Nasrin’s death. But they are silent on the women workers who have taken to the streets to defend her and to demand a decent life for themselves.

In France, Nasrin’s case is being used to build support for anti-Islamic racism. The Mitterrand/Balladur/Pasqua government has tightened racist barriers to immigration and sought to make North African workers, a key component of the working class, scapegoats for capitalist unemployment. In October 1994, when two of her books were to be published in French, the French government would grant Nasrin only a 24-hour visa, saying it could not guarantee her safety. On a visit to France in late November 1994, Nasrin was insulted by the glitterati who came to sip white wine and be seen at a “fete” supposedly called in her honor. Meanwhile, the right-wing slander machine went into action, its skills sharpened by the anti-Communist witchhunt which targeted, among others, another woman writer: East German leftist author Christa Wolf. Columnists in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* slandered Nasrin as a liar out to vent her hatred of men and dirty the reputation of “democratic” Bangladesh.

The descendants of the “White Man’s Burden” imperialists in London pretend to forget that political oppositionists to their colonial regime in India were locked up for making a speech. Nor do they mention that the established Church of England has decreed a *Christian* blas-

phemy law, which was used as recently as 20 years ago against a gay magazine. We Marxists insist that religion is a private affair and fight for the separation of state and religious institutions—be they church, mosque or temple. At the same time, we are militant atheists who fight *all* religious obscurantism and its rationales and trappings of oppression and superstition.

The stranglehold of religious reaction in Third World areas like the Indian subcontinent is maintained by world imperialist domination. The weak “national bourgeoisie,” intimately tied to imperialism and threatened by its “own” proletariat, cannot take up the democratic tasks, such as breaking the hold of the feudal past over the oppressed peasantry, and the separation of state and institutionalized religion, formerly associated with bourgeois revolutions. Against Stalinists and petty-bourgeois nationalists, Trotskyists uphold the program of Permanent Revolution: the overthrow of imperialist domination through workers revolution uniting all of the oppressed, including the mass of peasant toilers, behind a Leninist vanguard party, the tribune of the people. Such a party will mobilize the revolutionary determination of the women toilers of the East as did the Bolsheviks in 1917, when they threw off the chains of tsarist society and broke the power of the Orthodox church.

### **New World Disorder Heretic Hunt**

A qualified doctor and trained anesthetist, Taslima Nasrin first achieved fame in 1991 with her anthology, *Selected Columns* (see “Vladimir Lenin,” page 19). In these



Reuters

**Dhaka, 29 July 1994—  
Nearly 200,000 Islamic  
fundamentalists march  
in Bangladesh capital  
demanding that Taslima  
Nasrin be hanged.**

essays (which have not appeared in English), all religion—but especially the major religions of the Indian subcontinent, Hinduism and Islam—comes under sustained and withering attack. The campaign against her was whipped up by clerics who formed a “Taslima Nasrin Peshan Committee” (“Committee to Grind Down Taslima Nasrin”). Maulana Azizul Haque, the mullah who called for her execution, proclaimed that Nasrin “is worse than a prostitute.” “She demands ‘freedom of the vagina’.... This is against the Koran and Allah, it is blasphemy” (*Guardian* [London], 10 December 1993).

A second fatwa against Nasrin was announced in March 1994 after an Indian newspaper quoted her as saying, “the Koran should be revised thoroughly” in regard to women’s rights. In her corrective letter to the *Calcutta Statesman*, Nasrin wrote: “I hold the Koran, the [Hindu] Veda, the Bible and all such religious texts determining the lives of their followers, as ‘out of place and out of time’.... We have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want to progress” (quoted in the *London Independent*, 25 May 1994). A reward of 100,000 taka (\$350) was placed on her head. On July 29, nearly 200,000 Islamic fundamentalists marched, demanding Nasrin’s death. Meanwhile, the Khaleda government confiscated her passport for a time. Mobs have surrounded her father’s house in Mymensingh, chanting, “Hang Taslima.” Her father, Dr. Rajab Ali, says, “I’m proud of my daughter and her courage. She speaks the truth.... Women are sold here for taka, for money” [emphasis in original].

Nasrin’s defiance of the injunction that “the female voice should not reach male ears outside the household” is explosive. Her case resonates powerfully across the subcontinent in the face of the alarming revival of *sati* in India (the religious practice of burning widows to death on their husband’s funeral pyre), dowry burnings (where women are killed to make way for a new wife with dowry), and the punitive Haddood ordinances in Pakistan which, for example, throw rape victims in jail for “adultery.” Throughout the region, violence against women has targeted in particular those who dare transgress relig-

ious and caste separation by taking as lovers or husbands men outside their own group. Nasrin’s courage is motivated by a deep commitment to fighting women’s oppression:

“Why shouldn’t I write about what I’ve seen? I’m a doctor.... Do you know what it’s like to see a woman crying out in the delivery room when she gives birth to a girl, terrified that her husband will divorce her? To see the ruptured vaginas of women who’ve been raped? The six- and seven-year-olds who have been violated by their fathers, brothers, and uncles—by *their own families*? No, I will not keep quiet. I will continue to speak out about these women’s wretched lives” (emphasis in the original).

—*The New Yorker*, 12 September 1994

In Bangladesh Nasrin’s case was cold-shouldered by some fellow writers and so-called women’s activists. Carping that she is a publicity seeker and complaining that “Nasrin has gone too far,” avowedly secular writers and activists retreated before the anti-woman onslaught. Grotesquely, some even blamed her for the escalating violence and murders of women by the fundamentalists. This reeks of elitist class prejudice and resentment that the comfortable niches of these well-off layers have been upset. The petty-bourgeois feminists and fake leftists fear Nasrin precisely because in touching the explosive questions of women and religious bigotry, she threatens to disturb their happy pipe dreams of an orderly, liberal capitalist development in Bangladesh.

### **1992: Communalist Slaughter Engulfs Indian Subcontinent**

The focus of the mullahs’ murderous wrath, *Lajja* depicts a Hindu family attacked by Muslim bigots in Bangladesh. Following the communalist slaughter at Ayodhya in India on 6 December 1992, the Muslim majority in Bangladesh went on a binge of retaliatory terror against the Hindu minority there. 60,000 copies of *Lajja* had been sold by the time the Bangladeshi government banned it in July 1993. More of a political polemic than a work of art, *Lajja* expresses Nasrin’s horror at the failure of secularism

## Interview With Taslima Nasrin

*The persecution and hounding of Taslima Nasrin is an atrocity which it is the duty of the international workers movement to protest. As we said in "Islamic Fundamentalists Target Bangladeshi Writer," "It takes more than just obvious, elementary decency for any individual to take a stand like Nasreen has done in situations like Bangladesh today: it takes courage, especially if you are a woman, expected—in Nasreen's words—to remain 'veiled, illiterate and in the kitchen'" (Workers Hammer No. 139, January/February 1994).*

*When the campaign against Nasrin escalated over the summer and fall of 1994, "Islamic Fundamentalists Vow to Kill Her—Defend Taslima Nasrin!", prepared by Women and Revolution, was carried in publications of the International Communist League around the world. It was also translated into Bengali. The Partisan Defense Committee in the U.S.; Britain and Australia sent telegrams of protest to the Bangladesh High Commission, demanding: Drop all the charges against Taslima Nasrin! For safe passage to the country of her choice!*

*On 5 November 1994, Women and Revolution interviewed Taslima Nasrin by phone in Sweden. We print below an edited transcript of the exchange of views between Nasrin and W&R editor Amy Rath.*

\* \* \* \* \*

**Women and Revolution:** I wanted to express my appreciation in getting this opportunity to speak with you, solidarizing with you in your struggle against the reactionaries and the government of Bangladesh, which has capitulated to the pressure of the fundamentalists against you. The Partisan Defense Committee sent

protests to the Bangladesh government, when you were in hiding, for asylum and safe exit out of the country.

**Nasrin:** I am grateful to you and many organizations that believe in human rights and freedom of expression.

**W&R:** How would you describe yourself and your work? How would you define yourself politically?

**Nasrin:** I have seen that women are oppressed by religion, by society, by state and by tradition, so I have written against all types of oppression. I feel a responsibility to say something for women and against the system. Mostly I write against all types of discrimination based on race, gender and religion.

I am not a political person, I am just an ordinary person, a physician, born in a Muslim family. My father has a scientific outlook, so I was allowed to go for higher study. As an honest human being, I have seen a lot of discrimination in society, so I have taken up my pen to protest. I was not involved in any politics or any social organizations. I was alone, and I am alone now today, because I have seen that what I believe in my heart very few persons can share with me.

**W&R:** Do you think it was your experiences as a doctor which led you to become a writer?

**Nasrin:** No, I started writing when I was a schoolgirl. I continued when I was a medical student and when I was in service on the job.

**W&R:** Women in Bangladesh have been under escalating attack from the mullahs, from Islam, who are defending the traditional society. I have read of cases  
*continued on page 22*

in Bangladesh, and reveals her nationalistic illusions about the nature of that society. Yet Bangladesh, like India, was never a secular society.

The slaughter at Ayodhya was set up by Hindu fascists celebrating *kar seva*, a religious ceremony, on the ruins of the Babri Masjid (the mosque that stood on that site). Within little more than a week, the death toll officially stood at over a thousand, undoubtedly much more in reality. Muslims were the first targets of the Bharatiya Janata Party/Vishwa Hindu Parishad communal thugs, but not their only victims. Since 1992 attacks on lower-caste Indian populations and national minority groups have increased. The Ayodhya events exposed yet again the myth of secular-democratic India, touted for decades by Congress leaders and echoed by the Stalinist Communist Parties, and revealed the powerful force of Hindu and Hindi-language chauvinism that is a foundation of Indian capitalist society.

In India the Hindu BJP/VHP communalists and fascists attempted to use *Lajja* for their own ends, stoking the

fires of anti-Muslim pogroms. The BJP/VHP have campaigned for the forcible eviction of "illegal" Muslim Bangladeshi "infiltrators" (Hindu Bangladeshi refugees are welcomed). Nasrin herself says, "I am very pained at what is happening with my book in India. I condemn the politics of the BJP and the Jamaat-e-Islami equally" (*India Today*, 31 October 1993).

The roots of communalism on the Indian subcontinent lie in Britain's conscious "divide and rule" policies over two centuries of colonial rule. In 1905, the British viceroy Lord Curzon, who carried out the first partition of Bengal, wrote, "It is our main object to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.... The Bengalis who like to think themselves a nation, and dream of a future, when the English will have been turned out...of course bitterly resent any disruption."

Playing upon national, religious and caste disunity, the British, forced by mass struggle to grant independence, engineered the severing of India to create the Muslim-dominated state of Pakistan. During the 1947 Partition,



India Today

**Hindu fascists storm Muslim mosque in Ayodhya in December, 1992. Nasrin's anti-communist *Lajja*, written in the aftermath of the Ayodhya slaughter, was banned by the Bangladesh government in conciliation of Islamic fundamentalists.**

an untold number of people were killed or driven out in an orgy of religious communalist bloodletting. The India and Pakistan division was born out of the defeat of secular-democratic aspirations in the anti-colonial struggle.

*Lajja* portrays the deep bitterness and betrayal felt by its central characters, whose Bangladeshi patriotism and secular beliefs are shattered by the eruption of communalism and the ever-present discrimination against minority Hindus. *Lajja* reads like a primer of Bangladeshi politics, tracing through decrees and newspaper articles—and repeated anti-Hindu pogroms—the drive toward an Islamic republic in Bangladesh. For example, under the force of discrimination, the country's Hindu population has decreased from 28 percent in 1941 to 12.1 percent in 1981.

The novel centers on the impact of anti-Hindu bigotry on Suranjan, a young Bangladeshi of Hindu background. With no credible force fighting the terror against Hindus, Suranjan, a Communist Party activist, disintegrates into anti-Muslim hatred, culminating in the rape of a young Muslim prostitute in revenge for the destruction of his sister Maya. *Lajja* captures, too, the bankruptcy of the Communist Party: when Suranjan goes to the party headquarters on the first day of the violence, his "comrades"

mutter vaguely about his safety and try to persuade him to return home, but in reality they too have fallen under the sway of Muslim communalism.

The state of Bangladesh was created in 1971 after the Awami League led a revolt of the former eastern province of Bengal against domination by Pakistan. The Indian army, with the connivance of the bourgeois nationalist Awami League, took control of the fighting—in part in order to eliminate Pakistan as a threat to its hegemony in the region by making Bangladesh into a client state. It also aimed to prevent the contagion of a class-struggle revolt growing in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal and elsewhere and to crush the left-nationalist guerrilla groups active in the war, like the Mukti Bahini. The just aspirations of the Bengali masses for self-determination were decisively subordinated to the class interests of the Indian bourgeoisie. The leftist parties played truly perfidious roles. The Stalinist Communist Party of Bangladesh and the Maoist National Awami Party both supported the Awami League and the Indian army. Beijing-line Maoists opposed the Bengali independence struggle as simply "counterrevolutionary," even before it was subordinated to the drive for Indian expansionism, because China was allied with Pakistan as part of its Stalinist, anti-Soviet nationalist policies.

The Trotskyist Spartacist League defended the Bangladesh struggle for national liberation until it was militarily subordinated to the aims of the Indian bourgeoisie. Then we called for *revolutionary defeatism* on both sides, meaning that the soldiers of both the Pakistani and Indian armies should turn their guns against their own ruling class. As we wrote at the time, "In the era of imperialism only proletarian revolution offers the masses a road forward. For the Bengali masses only the international client relationships of their masters will change through an Indian victory" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 3, December 1971).

*Lajja* expresses pessimism and despair, ending with the family's decision to emigrate to India. Nasrin proposes no answers. Indeed, within the framework of nationalism and capitalism, there are no answers. As Marxists, we know that explosions of religious fanaticism and pogroms have to be ruthlessly suppressed. But the capitalist rulers can only institute a white (counterrevolutionary) terror, one that will inevitably set one community against another. In the subcontinent, it is the relatively small but strategically placed and combative proletariat which can crush the marauding communalists by carrying out a workers revolution. As we pointed out after the bloody Ayodhya events in "Hindu Fascists Whip Up Religious Slaughter," the workers:

"...have a special and immediate interest in crushing these vermin, since the workers are frequently drawn from local and migrant minorities. In the great industrial cities like Kanpur, Bangalore, Bhopal and Lucknow, the proletariat should defend the Muslim quarters from the communalists and the chauvinist police rampage, just as the Bolshevik-led workers defended the Jews in tsarist Russia from the Black Hundreds. They should also deal with any Islamic fundamentalists who simply want to reciprocate the crimes of the Hindu extremists."

—*Workers Vanguard* No. 567, 15 January 1993

All the warring communalist outfits on the subcontinent are united in their belief in the subservient role of women. As *Lajja* makes clear, women are always the target of the

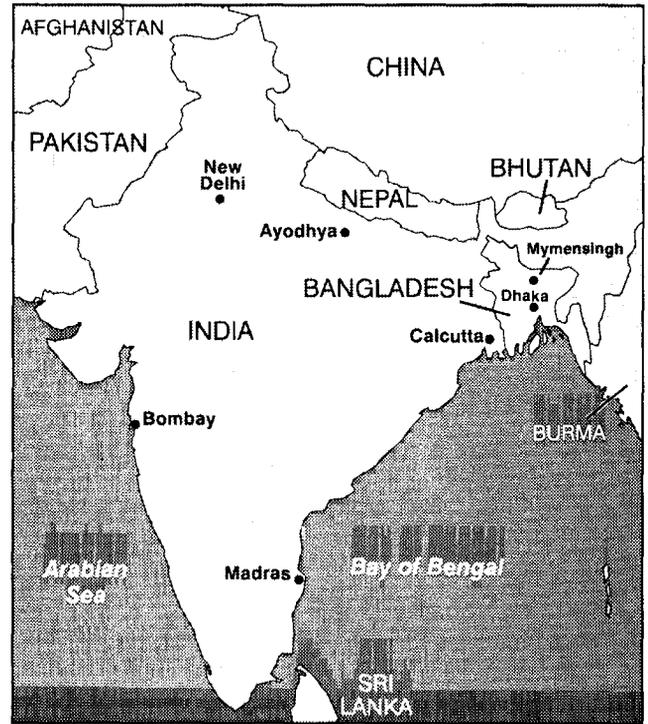
communalists' deadly intent, victims of rape and murder. In the "national liberation" struggle against Pakistan, 200,000 Bengali women were systematically gang-raped by the West Pakistani army and cast out by their own families and villages. The Jamaat-i-Islami reactionaries who today target Nasrin actively collaborated with the Pakistani army; in the aftermath they were in the forefront of the repudiation and massacre of these women victims of the Pakistani army's barbarism.

**Murderous Anti-Woman Campaign**

The protracted uproar over *Lajja* and Nasrin is one event in a general political crisis in Bangladesh, where the weak Khaleda Zia government is hanging on to power by a thread. While the government and the Islamic zealots have been at loggerheads, they join together to direct deadly vengeance against any opposition to the social status quo. Even the "secular" opposition conciliates the religious reactionaries: the Bangladeshi Left Democratic Front, a coalition of leftist parties, which seeks to lure the Awami League into an anti-fundamentalist alliance, did not hesitate to condemn Nasrin for making statements against the Koran.

Universities are a major battleground, where the student arm of the Jamaat, the Islami Chhatra Shibir (Islamic Students Group), has launched an offensive in which more than a score of its opponents have been killed, leftists tortured, and women gang-raped. Journalists protesting the fundamentalist attacks have been targeted: as of August 1994 more than 150 had been arrested. Three senior editors of the influential Bengali daily *Janakantha* were arrested for publishing a "blasphemous" article. A couple of days before the arrests, a mob firebombed the newspaper's offices.

Women activists, feminists and women village workers have been prime victims of a murderous campaign. *Fatwabazi* (issuing of *fatwas*) has spread through rural Bangladesh as women are stoned, caned, set ablaze for running afoul of the local mullahs. Between January and



W&R Map

March of 1994, 110 schools where girls are taught were burned down in a campaign orchestrated by mullahs. Other women working for non-government women's aid organizations have been divorced by their husbands on order of mullahs. Writing from India, a *W&R* correspondent reported a number of atrocities:

"1. Noorjahan (22) a resident of the northern district Maulvibazar of Bangladesh was declared guilty of promiscuity as she had not got 'proper divorce' from her first husband and married a second man. The mullah of the local mosque who declared her guilty had a personal grudge against her in fact. He himself wanted to marry her but she chose some other fellow. So she was placed on a high place and 101 stones were thrown at her. Villagers watched the scene in silence. Wounded and insulted, she ended her life by taking poison...."

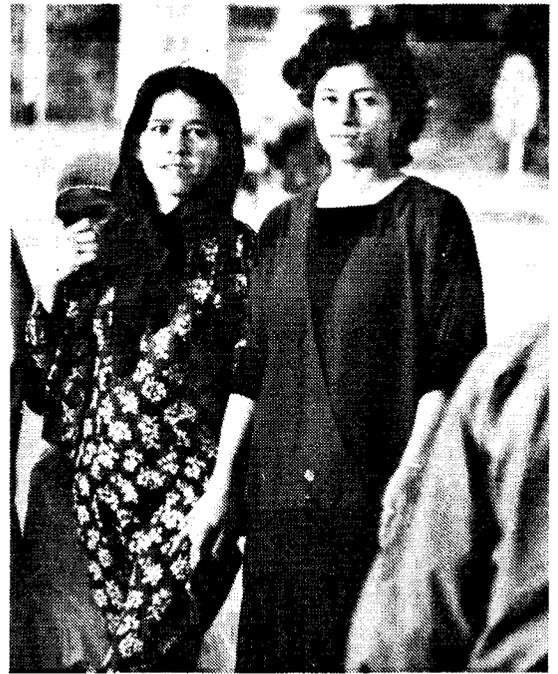
"3. Firoza Khatun of the village Kalikapur in the district of Satkhira in the southern part of Bangladesh—age 16—was tied to a bamboo post and pricked with sticks 101 times for developing intimacy with a man belonging to a different religion. She too ended her life by taking poison."

Underlying the campaign against women by the Islamic fundamentalists and the government is the perceived shift in social patterns within the society, intersecting the very roots of women's oppression in the institution of the family and property relations. In rural Bangladesh, impoverishment and landlessness have subverted the material bases of traditional village hierarchy. Indicative of the nexus between landlord, moneylender and mullah is the fact that the Grameen [Rural] Bank, which has extended credit to millions of poor rural women, is a notable target of the fundamentalists' ire. In the last 20 years, there has been a marked rise in women's participation in the workforce. Desperate rural poverty has forced many women to abandon their housebound role and search for work. Divorce rates have soared as has the number of lone women fending for themselves. The changing role of women has infuriated



Depardon/Gamma

**Left-nationalist Mukti Bahini (above) and other guerilla groups active in Bangladesh liberation struggle were crushed by Indian army.**



Workers Vanguard/Le Boichevik photos

**Women's rights was a key question igniting Afghanistan civil war launched by U.S.-backed tribalist reactionaries against Soviet-sponsored Kabul government in 1979. Women fought to defend right to cast off veil of oppression, as shown above in contrasting pictures from Kabul in 1989.**

and spurred religious leaders to defend "tradition."

An example of this is the clash over birth control. The most densely populated country on earth (except for the territory of Hong Kong), Bangladesh has halved its birthrate over the last 20 years through a World Bank/IMF-funded campaign to promote contraception. But the fall in the birthrate contradicts a basic principle of demography which associates a drop in family size with a rise in the general standard of living or amelioration in the condition of women. Certainly women will avail themselves of accessible birth control for self-evident reasons of ill health and poverty. But because usage of birth control has risen without the improvement in the status of women which makes such use socially acceptable, it has sparked an intense backlash by the mullahs. Changes in the family and in sexual morality are perceived as threats to the institution of the family and to religion, thus undermining the foundations of rural class structure.

In the Third World countries burdened by centuries-old "customs," even basic questions of democratic reform can be explosive, not least because women's subordination in the family has decreed them as the "bearers" of the traditional culture to the next generation. But to unleash the tremendous revolutionary potential of the fight for women's emancipation requires the leadership of a genuinely communist workers party, armed with a broad new vision of a social order of equality and freedom. The fight for the basic needs of the vast mass of Bangladeshi women—an end to forced marriage and the seclusion of *purdah* and the veil; freedom from poverty and legal subjugation; the right to an education and decent health care, including abortion and contraception—is an attack on the foundations of the capitalist social order and poses nothing less than socialist revolution.

Of special significance in this respect is the fact that

in Bangladesh the garment manufacturing industry now accounts for nearly 54 percent of total export earnings. For the first time, the traditional exports of jute and tea have been supplanted by an industrial product ([London] *Guardian*, 25 May 1993). Some 80 percent of manufacturing industry workers are women, grossly underpaid, and the great majority of them unmarried and from villages.

The experience of factory life can spark a new working-class consciousness. Already the women garment workers have joined the battle against the fundamentalists. On June 24 in Dhaka, 500 women garment workers armed with sticks mobilized in opposition to a strike call by the fundamentalist Islamic Morcha, the aim of which was to pressure the government to arrest Taslima Nasrin and punish her by death. As the *Sri Lanka Island* (26 June 1994) reported:

"Witnesses said police pushed rival activists apart when members of the Islamic Constitution Movement (ICM) came face to face with women workers from garment factories. "The mullahs and the women were almost in a battle when the police intervened. It could (have been) a hell of a fight,' one police officer said....

"They (mullahs) want us to stay under veils and starve. Such fatwa (preaching) violates our fundamental rights and we must resist them,' one woman said."

These women garment workers are a living refutation of the cowardly feminist claim that Bangladesh is "too backward" for Nasrin's explosive writings. On the contrary, her very popularity shows that there are many, not least these courageous proletarian women who faced down the mullahs' wrath, who are open to the boldest of ideas.

Like the women workers whose demonstrations sparked the 1917 Russian Revolution, Bangladeshi women workers are a powerful force in the struggle for emancipation, and many of them would become cadres of a Bolshevik

# Vladimir Lenin

## by Taslima Nasrin

Women and Revolution is proud to print below a translation from Taslima Nasrin's Selected Columns (1991) of an essay about Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Nasrin—whose political views reflect a blend of radical secular humanism, feminism, nationalism, and Marxist influences—laments the destruction of the Soviet Union and sees Lenin as a sort of tragic individual whose cause has “fallen.” The capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR was a world historic defeat for the international proletariat. But we in the International Communist League do not mourn the self-destruction of Stalinism, which long ago shattered the party that Lenin built and for decades besmirched the banner of communism with lies, betrayal and defeat.

For the ICL, Lenin's importance centers on his role as the leader of the class-struggle vanguard party which led the working class to power in Russia in 1917, and as a founder of the Communist International in 1918, the worldwide party of revolutionary socialism. Leninism is today, as it has been since 1917, the guide to revolutionary action. For Leninists, which today means Trotskyists, the liberation of women is inextricably linked to the struggle of the world working class to overthrow the capitalist system.

This article—untitled in the original—was translated from Bengali by a supporter of our organization. The quotes from Lenin are from the English editions of the works cited.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a human being born into this world who did not wish to see any inequality between rich and



P.A. Otsup

V.I. Lenin, 1922.

poor, men and women. There was once a person born in this world, one worthy of remembering at dawn. That person had said, “The chief task of the working women's movement is to fight for economic and social equality, and not only formal equality, for women. The chief thing is to get women to take part in socially productive labour, to liberate them from ‘domestic slavery’, to free them from their stupefying and humiliating subjugation to the eternal drudgery of the kitchen and nursery” (“On International Working Women's Day,” 4 March 1920).

A person was born into this world, and that person had said, “Education, culture, civilisation, freedom—all these high-sounding words are accompanied in all the

*continued on page 24*

workers party committed to working-class revolution. As capitalist competition careens out of control, women workers have entered onto the stage of history for the first time. What's needed is a combat vanguard party to organize and lead the felt discontent of the masses of exploited and oppressed to fight for a socialist revolution.

### Religious Reaction, Tool of Imperialist Domination

Religion and exploitation go hand in hand. In the 1950s, arch-Cold Warrior John Foster Dulles urged U.S. imperialism to make common cause with the “religions of the East” against “Communist atheism and materialism.” As the forces of counterrevolution in the deformed workers states geared up across Europe in the 1980s, the Catholic church was a main player. From Iran to Algeria to Turkey and Egypt, plebeian frustration over the desperate conditions produced by imperialist capitalism has provided

fertile ground for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. It's a reflection of despair and reaction, which both emotionally and in its sociological base has much in common with religious Zionism. Though looking to the past, the fundamentalist wave is a response to the oppressive conditions of the late 20th century. Its present rise as a mass movement is the reactionary reflection of both the absence of a communist alternative and the manifest dead end of nationalism.

As leftist journalist Paul Trewhela wrote in *Searchlight South Africa* in his article “Islam, South Africa and *The Satanic Verses*” at the time of the Salman Rushdie affair (reprinted in W&R No. 37, Spring 1990):

“The high tide of Islamic reaction is the result of the absence over decades of any international politics that would address things by the root.... It is a form of anger at this world that serves only to strengthen its chains. Indignation at insults, at oppressiveness, at impoverishment is turned, not against the axes of power, but against an incidental target. As with



India Office Library and Records, London

**Painting shows the Mogul emperor, in fact controlling little real power, granting sovereign rights over Bengal to Robert Clive, the representative of the British East India Company, 1765. British colonialists exploited religious and national divisions to bolster their imperialist profit system.**

religion, such politics is a medium in which the powerless are for a period of time permitted to indulge in the illusion of power, in order to subjugate themselves the more effectively."

The anti-woman logic of capitalist counterrevolution was grimly prefigured in the war in Afghanistan between the CIA's *mujahedin* tribal reactionaries and the Soviet Red Army. The pro-Moscow, modernizing Afghan nationalists who took power in Kabul in 1978 sought to partially emancipate women from their subjugation in traditional Islamic society symbolized by the *chador*, the head-to-toe veil. They reduced the bride price to a nominal sum and opened schools to teach young girls to read. These measures incensed the landlords, tribal chiefs and mullahs, who, backed by Washington, Khomeini's Iran and Zia's Pakistan, launched a *jihād* against the "godless Communists" in Kabul.

When Moscow intervened militarily in 1979 to prevent its client state from falling to the Islamic reactionaries armed and organized by U.S. imperialism, the international Spartacist tendency (now International Communist League) raised the slogan: Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend social gains of October Revolution to Afghan peoples! We recognized that it was only the Soviet military intervention which opened the road to the liberation of the toilers in this backward, feudal-derived country.

Far from seeking to annex Afghanistan, the Kremlin oligarchy fought the war halfheartedly. As part of Gorbachev's global appeasement of Western imperialism, in early 1989 Soviet forces were pulled out of Afghanistan unilaterally, paving the way for a bloody onslaught against Afghan workers, women and leftists.

Now the U.S.-supported cutthroats are running the country, and thousands of women have been tortured, raped and murdered. A recent report by Amnesty International tells how one 16-year-old girl "was raped...after armed guards entered her house and killed her father for allowing her to go to school" (*Independent*, 16 December 1994). Amnesty International further comments, "Most Western governments sent enormous supplies of arms and military facilities to Afghanistan during the Cold War and they now remain silent while those same arms are used to kill unarmed civilians."

Imperialist silence on the atrocities in Afghanistan only shows yet again that whether they are hostile to a particular Islamic fundamentalist regime, as opposed to other forms of Third World bourgeois regimes, is entirely a matter of political expediency. The U.S. was effectively neutral in the war between Khomeiniite Iran and Ba'athist Iraq. U.S. imperialism fought the Gulf War on the military side of the fundamentalist Saudi monarchy against the secular nationalist Iraqi regime of Sadaam Hussein.

That religious fundamentalism is quite compatible with Western imperialist domination is especially clear in the case of the Indian subcontinent. Britain had had a bourgeois revolution, albeit incomplete, and the resulting capitalist state represented progress over European feudalism. But contrary to Marx's expectations in the early 1850s, British rule in India did not undermine Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist traditionalism. Subsequently, Marx and Engels repudiated their earlier position that the advanced countries show the backward countries the image of their own future. To bolster their own profit-making system, the British Raj propped up the traditional authority of the Indian potentates while manipulating and aggravating religious communalist enmities.

Christianity and Judaism also preach, in their many variants, stifling moral codes seeking to uphold the patriarchal family, the main social institution oppressing women. But sections of Christianity and Judaism, religions with roots in pre-capitalist society, adapted to conform with rising industrial capitalism and the bourgeois-democratic nation-states where they existed. The radical democratic principles of the Enlightenment were the ideological reflection of historic material advances over a backward, feudal society. But as a religion Islam has not had to adapt, largely because it remains rooted in those parts of the world where imperialist penetration has reinforced social backwardness as a prop to its domination.

### **The Bolshevik Revolution and Central Asia**

One of the great achievements of the Russian Revolution was the liberation of women in Central Asia. In these feudal or pre-feudal, generally Islamic cultures, the lot of women was frequently inferior to that of livestock.

Dedicated and courageous members of Zhenotdel (the Communist Party's Department of Working Women and Peasant Women) carried out systematic work among Muslim women, acquainting them with the new Soviet laws and programs. This work was linked to a campaign designed to bring women into production and political life. But it took a couple of decades before the productive capacity of the planned economy had developed sufficiently to provide jobs, education, medical care and social services on a scale wide enough to undercut primitive Islamic traditions. And by this time the Bolsheviks' revolutionary program had long since been supplanted by Stalinism's nationalist ideology and counterrevolutionary glorification of the family.

The Russian Revolution created the objective preconditions for the liberation of women. But in the name of "socialism in one country," the Stalinist bureaucracy dragged those liberating goals through the mud, culminating in the capitalist counterrevolution which for working women has brought unemployment, loss of childcare and attacks on abortion rights and health care.

It was the Bolsheviks who recognized that in backward regions like Central Asia, the fight for the emancipation of women was a great motor force for revolution. In 1924 Trotsky wrote about Muslim women of the Soviet East:

"The Eastern woman, who is the most paralyzed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of slaves, she, having at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak, will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress. She will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas and new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the Revolution and for the ideas of Communism than the awakened woman worker."

The deadly campaign directed at Taslima Nasrin highlights the fact that the struggle for women's liberation on the Indian subcontinent is inseparably tied to the fight against religious obscurantism, caste-based bigotry and bloody communalism. *For women's liberation through socialist revolution! For a socialist federation of South Asia!* ■

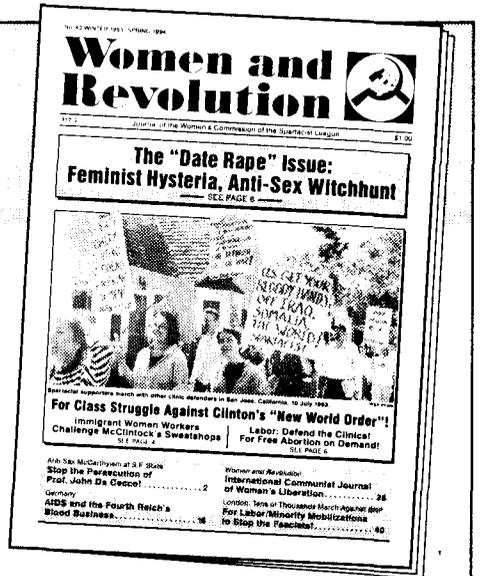
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# Interview...

(continued from page 15)

of stonings of women, beatings, and burning of girls' schools, and a backlash against the government's birth control program. You are a symbol of changes which are a threat to the traditional society—and that's why the mullahs have started this campaign against you.

**Nasrin:** It is true, the fundamentalists will never allow women's progress, and women have been waking up to read my books. The fundamentalists are afraid of me, so they try to stop my writing, they try to kill me.

**W&R:** Can you tell us any more about what's been going on in Bangladesh around the question of women?

**Nasrin:** They have pronounced *fatwas* on many women, and they committed suicide; they announced that women should not work outside the home, and they have been burning the non-government organization girls' schools, because they do not want women to be educated, self-reliant, or to have economic freedom. They started to campaign against me in 1990. They filed many cases against my books, and they started demonstrations, meetings, processions against me. They burned my books, they attacked me physically at the book fair, and they demanded my execution by hanging. Three religious leaders put a price on my head three times. The government did not take any action against them.

This summer, when the fundamentalists became infuriated, the government filed a case against me under a law more than 100 years old, a British colonial law. The case says that I deliberately and maliciously harmed the religious feeling of the majority of people. The situation is so dangerous that this summer I had no alternative but

to go into hiding, because if the government did not hang me, they will kill me by Islamic law. Prison was not safe for me, because any fanatic policeman, any fanatic prisoner could kill me. So I went into hiding, a terrible experience, for 60 days. The situation was so bad that I had no alternative but to leave my country. Now I am in Sweden, and I do not know when I will be able to go back to my country. I heard today that my lawyer tried to dismiss the case, but the court gave a decision that the case will go on. I do not know what will happen.

**W&R:** We heard about a demonstration in support of you in Bangladesh last June of 500 working women from a textile factory in Dhaka.

**Nasrin:** I have read in the newspaper that women from a garment factory and a few women's organizations came out to support me. Many progressive people came to protest the fundamentalists, because hundreds of thousands of fundamentalists came out almost every day. One time there were 200,000 people in one meeting. They manipulated a general strike, all over the country, and formed a special squad only to kill me.

The problem in our country is that working women have no education. Many working women organized a supporter group for me, but I have heard that when they started to protest, the owner of the garment factory tortured them, so they had to stop. Many of them were fired from their job.

**W&R:** The working women of Bangladesh see you as working for them, it appears. In an article from *The Island*, which is a Sri Lankan paper, one of the demonstrators against the mullahs is quoted saying, "The mullahs want us to stay under veils and starve. Such preaching violates our fundamental rights and we must resist them." The working women in this case understand that your fight is in their interests. I know you have described yourself as a socialist.

**Nasrin:** I have told you that I was not involved in any political parties. But, in a simple way, I believe that everybody should have equal rights, equal property, food, clothes, everything—nobody should own big property, nobody should starve. It is my innocent belief. But I do not know much about politics. From my little brain, what I have seen in this society, the discrimination, the inequality, the injustice, I have protested. I like to protest, I think I should protest.

**W&R:** That is very clear in *Lajja*, where you describe your hatred for all forms of discrimination.

**Nasrin:** Yes, I have shown that Suranjan has an ideology. He was a member of the Communist Party, but one day he destroys himself, to see the inaction of the state in society when they do not control the communalism.

**W&R:** One of the things that I very much enjoyed of yours was the column that you wrote about Lenin. I wondered if you had any comments about it.

**Nasrin:** I consider that it is very simple. I did not find anything wrong in Lenin, in what Lenin has done, what Marx has said, what others have said. I think their ideology is correct. But maybe some leaders did not apply it properly. It does not mean that Lenin is wrong or that Marx is wrong.

## Militant Labour's Touching Faith in the Capitalist State

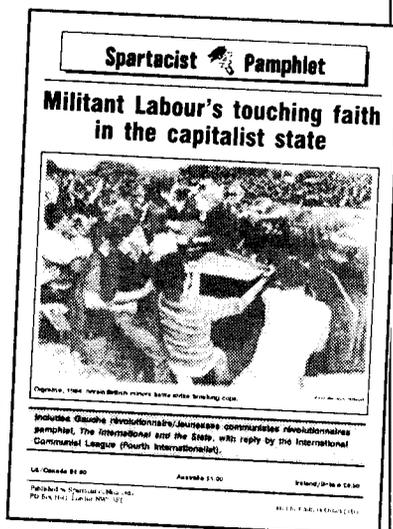
This pamphlet counterposes the revolutionary politics of the International Communist League to the reformism of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) led by the Militant Labour organization in Britain.

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**W&R:** We are Trotskyists, supporters of Lenin and Marx as socialists.

**Nasrin:** I was surprised when I came to Europe that so many people hate communism—I do not know why. In our country nobody hates communism. They have little support, yes. But in India, in Calcutta, they have more support.

**W&R:** In Afghanistan, in the late '70s and early '80s, the war that happened between the Red Army in support of the progressive nationalist government in Kabul against the *mujahedin* was a very important world event. The *mujahedin* were funded by the CIA and the American imperialists, and the fact that they won and the Red Army was pulled out by Gorbachev, which we call a betrayal, laid the groundwork for the rise of fundamentalism around the world, certainly including in Bangladesh.

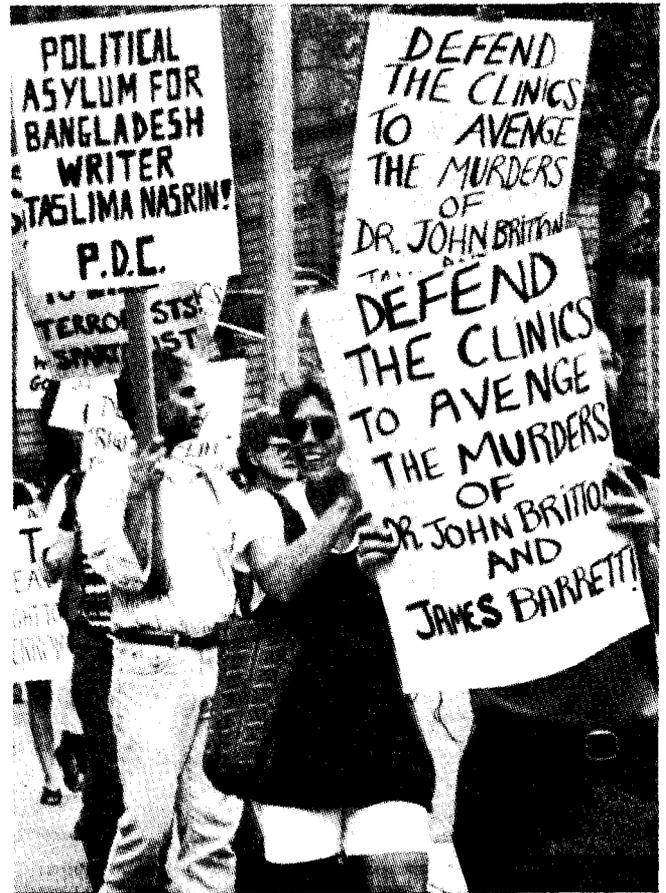
**Nasrin:** I do not know the cause of the rising of fundamentalism, but it is growing all over the world. They get support from the Bangladesh government, and they get money and support from rich Muslim countries. The fundamentalists are gaining strength, they are multiplying in numbers, and they are producing more religious schools. From poverty, from deprivation, from frustration, many young men are joining fundamentalist parties.

**W&R:** We believe the fall of Eastern Europe and the USSR meant a terrible defeat for women, who lost abortion rights, their jobs, their day care, and access to free education. In Poland the Catholic church was a spearhead of counterrevolution. In the United States, the fundamentalists are bombing the abortion clinics, harassing women seeking abortions. Recently, the Vatican joined with the fundamentalist Islamics against the Cairo conference on family planning. Religious reaction is far from limited to Islamic countries, but is a sinister force throughout the world.

**Nasrin:** Yes, I think it is one of the causes of fundamentalism rising. Capitalism and fundamentalism have a close relationship. When communism fell, the situation became bad for women. Women became prostitutes, sexual commodities.

**W&R:** We had a unique position when Khomeini came to power in Iran. A lot of the left supported him as an anti-imperialist. We did not agree with that, but called for "Down with the Shah! Down with the mullahs!" and said that however popular the Islamic movement in Iran was, that did not mean that it was something to be supported by revolutionaries. We said that instead what was necessary in Iran was to have a revolution led by the proletariat, which would overthrow the capitalist system itself, the bulwark supporting religious institutions. We were considered unusual and shocking for taking this point of view, but it is very fundamental to what is happening now that there has been such a rise of religious reaction around the world.

**Nasrin:** We fought for secularism and anti-colonialism in Bangladesh in 1971, but the fundamentalists were few. Now they are more, and the military government has changed our constitution to put Islam as the state religion. All the political parties are with Islam, only to get the vote. The leading party in 1971 is now also using Islam



Workers Vanguard

**Spartacists join August 1994 protest in New York against murder of abortion providers in Florida. Religious reaction fosters anti-woman bigotry and violence worldwide.**

in their propaganda. The opposition party, which is secular, announced: We are against Taslima, we hate atheists; in the name of God, Taslima should be punished. They used the same language as the fundamentalists. All religion-based politics should be banned from the world.

**W&R:** What force do you see in bringing that about? As revolutionary socialists, we believe in building a world party of revolution.

**Nasrin:** I think we need this type of organization, because the fundamentalists are becoming stronger, and so we need a strong fight against them. If I get many people to support me, we can fight them. But the main problem is that progressive people are afraid of fundamentalists.

**W&R:** Some of the feminists in Bangladesh have said that you were too extreme. I don't agree with that at all; I wondered what you would say in response to them.

**Nasrin:** There are a few leaders that use this type of language, but not all the women's organizations. Last 8th of March [International Women's Day], many women's organizations arranged a march and they used my slogan, that it is my body and I have the right to my body and mind. Fundamentalist newspapers accused them of being supporters of Taslima. The main problem is that all Western journalists go to collect comments from a few known persons, but they should go to the ordinary

women who support me very much.

The leaders say out of jealousy: Nobody knows us, but everybody knows you—we are working for 30 years, you started work only two or three years ago, and you are working with your writing, but we go in the field. I told them that I am a writer, I have seen that I can reach many people by my writing. They accuse me of being too strong, but I think fundamentalists are strong. We should fight in a strong way, not in a mild way, not in a compromising way. They believe that women's rights are possible under the Islamic way, so I will never agree with them. I will never think that under any religious system women can get any freedom or right. I think that every woman is oppressed by every religion.

**W&R:** Do you have any statement that you would like to make?

**Nasrin:** It is very true that under communism women can get freedom as human beings. But we should fight against all types of inequality and injustice, and we should especially work for women. I think that many communists in our country believe in religion and lose their support from educated persons because they compromise with the religious system. So I think that they should not compromise and should fight against all ignorance and superstition, all darkness and blindness, which is in religion.

**W&R:** We see that as part of fighting for socialist revolution.

**Nasrin:** Everybody can fight to reach the same goal, but in different ways. I am fighting not on a political level, but what I have seen in this society. I think that your destination is the same, to give freedom to women, or to give equal rights, food, happiness to every person. But my way is different, I don't have your political commitment. I am committed to removing discrimination from society.

**W&R:** I admire your courage and the staunch way you have fought for your views. Thank you. ■

## Lenin...

(continued from page 19)

capitalist, bourgeois republics of the world with incredibly foul, disgustingly vile, bestially crude laws that make women unequal in marriage and divorce, that make the child born out of wedlock and the 'legally born' child unequal and that give privileges to the male and humiliate and degrade womankind" ("Soviet Power and the Status of Women," 6 November 1919).

That human being had furthermore said: "Down with this lie! Down with the liars who speak about freedom and equality for all, while there is an oppressed sex, oppressing classes, private ownership of capital and shares and people with bursting bins who use their surplus grain to enslave the hungry. Freedom and equality for the oppressed sex! Freedom and equality for the workers and labouring peasants! Struggle against the oppressors, struggle against the capitalists, struggle against the kulak profiteers!" (*ibid.*).

There was a human being born into this world, and that being had said: "Bourgeois democracy is the democracy of pompous phrases, solemn words, lavish promises and high-sounding slogans about *freedom and equality*,

but in practice all this cloaks the lack of freedom and the inequality of women, the lack of freedom and the inequality for the working and exploited people. Down with this foul lie! There is no 'equality', nor can there be, of oppressed and oppressor, exploited and exploiter. There is no real 'freedom', nor can there be, so long as women are handicapped by men's legal privileges, so long as there is no freedom for the worker from the yoke of capital, no freedom for the labouring peasant from the yoke of the capitalist, landowner and merchant" (*ibid.*).

Today a few uncivilized and insane people in this world are trampling and dancing on that estimable figure, after having felled him to the ground. Blinded by the illusion of luxury and dazzle, these lunatics are now throwing away sculptures of that great person. They are lowering, with nooses around the necks of these statues, all honored memories. They are hurling "equality" to the ground, they are bringing down "freedom." Oh trampled Lenin, you had said, "Women's incipient social life and activities must be promoted, so that they can outgrow the narrowness of their philistine, individualistic psychology centred on home and family." Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, you had said, "Don't twitter like a bunch of chatterboxes, but speak out loudly and clearly like fighters should. Show that you can fight" (Dr. Clara Zetkin's "My Recollections of Lenin").

O great sage Lenin, we were indeed learning to fight. We were speaking out against the capitalism that pushes women into 'domestic bondage,' against that capitalism which drives woman into prostitution. We were fighting for liberation from "household slavery"; we had united heart and soul with you, bearing the same aim in view; we had believed "she continues to be a *domestic slave*, because *petty housework* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery" ("A Great Beginning," July 1919). We were dreaming of the liberation of woman from this regimen. The demented rulers and their countless rapacious followers are tugging viciously at all our dreams, all our desires, all our liberties, with a rope tied around their necks.

Once upon a time, in some countries of the world, there existed a system of state rule known as socialism. Socialism is now in disarray, crippled—I have not calculated how much damage this has inflicted on civilization and humanity, by how much it has escalated the fearful danger of dreaded imperialist aggression against the Third World; only this I know for sure: woman has lost heavily. A policy or ideal for women's political, economic and social liberation has died a merciless death.

Now languishing in the dust is Lenin—Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Now he is being toppled, demolished from head to toe. Against the transformation of woman into a commodity, against the prostitution of woman, against the petty, trivial domestic slavery of women, the most outspoken voice in history was the voice of Lenin, the most hardworking hand was the hand of Lenin. Worthless people are today trampling on that history—I cannot tell how much loss this means, and to whom, but the loss to women is greatest.

We women today bow our heads, in silent sorrow, for fallen Lenin, for the fallen cause, for fallen equality. ■

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Capitalist Rulers Say:  
"No Sex, No 'Foreigners'"

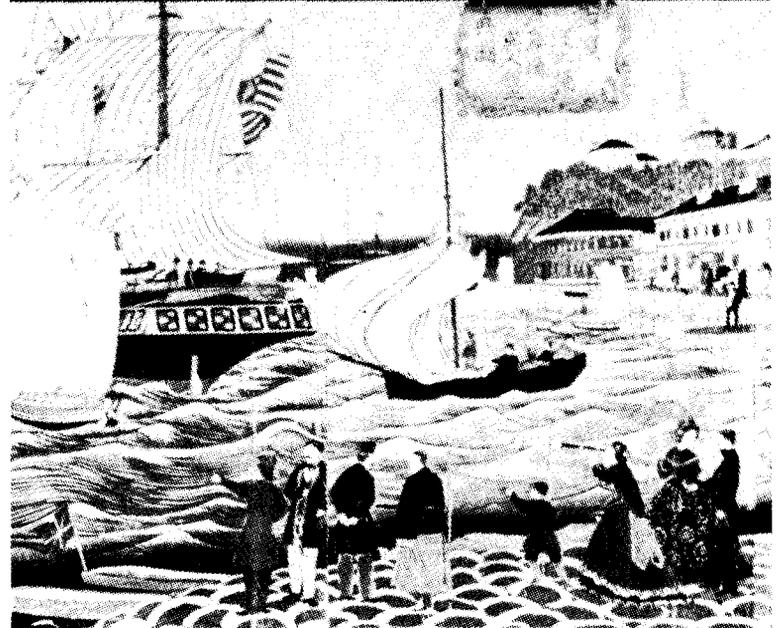
# Japan's Answer to AIDS: Greed, Racism, Neglect

## ICL Intervenes at International AIDS Conference

*Women and Revolution* reprints below a leaflet issued by the Spartacist Group Japan, in Japanese and English, at the Tenth International Conference on AIDS held in Yokohama, Japan in August 1994. While the media splashed stories about Crown Prince Naruhito, accompanied by the Princess, "speaking out" on the scourge of AIDS, the reality of AIDS in Japan is bigotry against gays, racism against "foreigners," exclusion and deportation of HIV-positive people, neglect of thousands of hemophiliacs infected by tainted blood which the government allowed to circulate, and vicious persecution of prostitutes.

Our leaflet exposed the criminal greed and prejudice of the Japanese bourgeoisie to thousands of conference attendees at both the official proceedings and various "alternative" conferences, where talks by medical researchers, AIDS patients, gay and community activists, prostitutes and caseworkers were held. The only left group with an organized presence, we intervened with a program to mobilize the power of the working class, led by its vanguard party, to fight for free quality health care for all. By the week's end, "Spartacist" was synonymous with "the socialist leaflet." The leaflet was also distributed at Japan's first Gay Pride Day two weeks later, when on August 28 in Tokyo nearly 1,000 gays and their supporters marched for three hours in a sweltering sun.

The leaflet contains a few references which may not be known to our readers. "Yamato race" refers to the reactionary belief in the racial "purity" or "superiority" of the Japanese. During the late third and early fourth centuries, the Yamato became the hegemonic warrior clan in central Honshu (the Yamato basin), legitimizing its rule by claiming ancestry to Amaterasu, the "sun god-



**Official poster for 10th International AIDS Conference incites racist xenophobia: the engraving of "black ships" recalls U.S. Admiral Perry's 1856 "opening" of Yokohama harbor to foreign trade. Japanese government blames "foreigners" for the AIDS epidemic.**

dess." *Mizu shobai* translates as the "water trade," and refers to bars and entertainment establishments offering hostessing and prostitution. The *yakuza* is the Japanese equivalent of the mafia, and generally controls prostitution, drug trafficking and gambling in Japan. Politically it is heavily interpenetrated with the extreme right wing.

# スパルタシスト

資本主義の貪欲、偏見、怠慢—エイズの蔓延

## エイズに対する日本の「解答」 ノー・セックス、ノー・外国人

世界的なエイズの流行がアジアにも及んでいる。血液、母乳、母乳分泌を通じて感染する平均の病、エイズの蔓延は、アジアでは昨年一年間で8割に増し、約250万人に達した。厚生省は毎年2000年までにアジアのエイズ人は1000万人に達するといふ恐ろしい推計を発表しているが、この地域最大の経済大国である日本では、エイズは格別な注目を浴びていない。この地域最大の経済大国である日本では、エイズは格別な注目を浴びていない。この地域最大の経済大国である日本では、エイズは格別な注目を浴びていない。

エイズ蔓延は、治療を怠ることも、切実に求められている医療体制の整備も感じない保険会社や病院、雇用主、資本家政府のなすがままにされている。偏見と排外主義によって、エイズ患者、特に外国人と同性愛者の患者に対する偏見、差別などの攻撃の嵐が巻き起こっている。資本家による経済的貪欲さが顕微鏡化したのは、一連の血液銀行に絡むスキャンダルであった。血液銀行が何年にもわたって供給血液の検査を怠り、汚染された未処理の血液を供給した結果、日本の血友病患者の少なくとも40%がエイズに感染したのである。政府はHIV感染患者は数千人に過ぎないと主張しているが、医療関係者はこの数字をずっと高く見据えている。

### 新世界秩序とエイズの蔓延

エイズの蔓延と闘うために必要な社会資源を全て動員することにより、患者に人間の医療を施し治療を施さなければならぬ。しかし、日本の資本家階級は新たな大資本主義の再構築に没頭しており、エイズに対し効果的な対策を打つつもりもない。という



Reuters

Spartacist Group Japan's leaflet (left) issued at August 1994 AIDS conference. Right, people with AIDS and their supporters demonstrate at Yokohama conference against government bigotry and neglect.

The picture of the AIDS pandemic emerging from the Yokohama conference is somber. The World Health Organization estimates that at current trends some 30 to 40 million people will be infected worldwide by the year 2000. New strains of the virus have been discovered, emphasizing that new tests must urgently be developed and implemented internationally in order to ensure the safety of the blood supply. While little progress has been made in the difficult task of designing a vaccine or treatment to stop the virus, research efforts remain crippled by bigotry, neglect and greed. As WHO director-general Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima said, "fear, indifference and denial, along with poverty, have been our main enemy" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 August 1994).

The racism and anti-sex bigotry of this medicine-for-profit system means AIDS patients can't get the decent health care that could prolong their lives and make them worth living, and, at the very least, provide humane care for the dying. It will take a socialist revolution to fully use even today's medical knowledge for the benefit of all, and to pour all necessary resources into the scientific challenge of defeating this deadly virus.

\* \* \* \* \*

The worldwide AIDS epidemic has hit Asia with a vengeance. The number of Asians with AIDS, an incurable disease transmitted through blood, semen, breastfeeding or vaginal secretions, has increased eightfold in the past year and now stands at approximately 2.5 million. Health officials conservatively estimate that there will be 10 million Asian victims by the year 2000, and in the major economic and financial power in the region, Japan, AIDS victims are stigmatized, denied decent medical care, fired from their jobs, evicted from their apartments, threatened with deportation if they are foreigners, and abandoned by a government that does not want to recognize their existence. The racist and xenophobic Japanese bourgeois-

sie considers AIDS a "foreign" affliction, an attitude clearly expressed by Keigo Ouchi, Japan's former Minister of Health and Welfare, who said last year, "All the countries around Japan are AIDS countries"! But the lethal AIDS virus does not "respect" borders, and can only be fought by scientific means. Quality medical care must be provided to those who suffer from this horrible disease.

AIDS victims are at the mercy of insurance companies, hospitals, employers and the capitalist government that neither want to pay the bills nor provide the desperately needed medical care. The intersection of sex and disease has unleashed a barrage of hatred, prejudice and ostracism against AIDS victims, especially foreigners and gays. Capitalist greed and criminal avarice have surfaced in numerous scandals involving blood banks which, for years, refused to test the blood supply and regularly sold contaminated and untreated blood, resulting in the infection of at least 40 percent of Japan's hemophiliacs. The government claims that only a few thousand people have been infected with the HIV virus, but medical professionals put this figure qualitatively higher.

### The New World Disorder and the AIDS Epidemic

All necessary resources of society should be mobilized to combat the spread of AIDS, to ensure the humane care of the sick and to find a cure. But the Japanese capitalist class is preoccupied with recreating a new Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere and will not fight AIDS effectively, because their irrational social system is based on sexism, xenophobia and backward prejudices. The International Communist League has continually pointed out that the destruction of the degenerated Soviet workers state and the deformed workers states in East Europe was a terrible setback for the international working class. The New World Disorder, its growing interimperialist rivalry, trade wars and military buildup in preparation for the next imperialist world war, mean a frontal assault on



Katie/Gamma

**AIDS counseling of prostitutes in the Central African Republic. Racist imperialist indifference to global health problems like AIDS has impeded public health efforts to control or stop the virus through education and funding for health care.**

the living standards of the working class. War, unemployment, mass population dislocations, and tribal and nationalist bloodletting are on the order of the day.

Racist imperialist indifference to global health problems like the AIDS pandemic means tens of thousands of deaths. Meanwhile, millions of people around the world are dying every year of preventable diseases. Tuberculosis, once nearly eradicated in advanced industrial countries, is again on the rise there, while it continues to kill millions each year in the Third World. Diphtheria, which can be controlled by vaccination, has reappeared in Russia, and cholera, entirely preventable by decent sewerage systems, is ravaging the desperate refugees of the Rwandan civil war. The AIDS pandemic, like so many other questions of health, cries out for international cooperation for research and the development of treatments and a cure. But capitalism is riven by national antagonisms between competing national ruling classes, intensified today because they no longer need to present a unified front against the "spectre of Communism." The economic dislocation brought about by capitalist counterrevolution has destroyed the former cradle-to-grave free health care systems that, despite being of low quality and bureaucratically administered, treated medical care as a right not a privilege. Under capitalism, scientific AIDS research is fundamentally hindered by a system of medical care run for profit.

### **Xenophobia and Arrogant Indifference**

The Japanese ruling class uses the AIDS crisis to augment its xenophobic drive to deport immigrant workers and maintain the purity of the Yamato race. The cabinet didn't hold its first policy discussion on AIDS until 1987, and it was not discussed again for five years! In 1989 a draconian AIDS prevention bill went into effect that denies entry to foreigners who are "suspected" of engaging in activities that would spread AIDS. The bill requires doctors to turn in the names of those who test HIV-positive, and calls for mandatory testing, enforced by a ¥100,000 fine, of individuals who doctors "suspect" might spread the

AIDS virus. The government warns Japanese travelers about the dangers of having sex with foreigners and thinks the AIDS epidemic can be stopped at Narita airport.

The bourgeoisie's xenophobic and hysterical prejudices have had an effect on the general consciousness of the Japanese population. Public opinion surveys on AIDS continually exhibit scientifically ignorant views on the disease's transmission and reflect the ruling class' desire to quarantine, ostracize and neglect AIDS victims. An early poster advertising the Tenth International Conference on AIDS prominently portrayed Commodore Perry's "Black Ships," echoing the government's position that AIDS is a foreign disease. Many gay clubs and bars often exclude foreigners, while mainstream feminists rightly observe that salarymen who take "sex trips" to Southeast Asia are hardly immune from contracting AIDS, but have little to say about the vicious exploitation of immigrant Thai, Filipina, Chinese and Korean women in the *mizu shobai* trade run by the *yakuza* in Japan's major cities.

The Japanese government has only allocated a sub-minimal monthly stipend for medical and living expenses for victims who contracted the AIDS virus through blood transfusions. But for those who have been infected through sexual activity, especially undocumented immigrant workers, medical care is either heavily restricted or denied outright. The 1994 budget projects only about ¥10 billion to fight AIDS (a huge increase over previous allocations), but this is nothing compared to the projected ¥108 billion purchase of just two AWACS aircraft. Scientific research is mainly carried out by private corporations, but in the pharmaceutical industry R&D allocation for AIDS is a low priority. Health care for people with AIDS is just as abysmal. Many hospitals and doctors refuse to care for AIDS patients and a recent survey of 120 major hospitals revealed that only 13 percent were prepared to handle AIDS patients. The Life Insurance Association of Japan wants to refuse coverage to those who can't produce an HIV-negative medical certificate, while major corporations ponder the legal ramifications of firing employees who

test HIV-positive. Gay activists and prominent foreign AIDS victims have routinely been denied hotel and meeting room facilities as discrimination against gays escalates. These bigoted attacks on vulnerable sections of the population are intended to strengthen the repressive and intrusive powers of the state against the working people as a whole, and to thwart united class struggle by dividing the workers along ethnic and sexual lines. In its own defense, the labor movement must vigorously oppose all bigotry and discriminatory attacks on homosexuals.

**For Science, Not Bigotry**

In capitalist society everything connected with "public health" is infused with the prejudices of class, race and sex. But the answer to the AIDS crisis lies in science, not in hysterical bigotry, and certainly not in state criminalization, deportations or "malign neglect." Since the HIV antibody test became available, the International Communist League has opposed all attempts of any government to introduce forced testing—for anybody. We are for free, anonymous tests for all who want them and for mandatory testing of the blood supply. If an effective vaccine against AIDS existed, we would be in favor of the forced vaccination of the entire population, even by a reactionary capitalist government, in the overriding interest of stopping this disease.

In this chauvinist and conformist society, however, measures like forced testing and mandatory registration of those infected only exposes them to escalating bigotry. The bourgeoisie's conscious neglect of AIDS care and public education cannot be offset by courageous and tireless volunteer efforts. Many thousands of people are dying very miserably—we call for free, quality health care for all, trillions of yen for AIDS care, and the allocation of socially necessary resources to find some answers. As an immediate measure to prevent the further spread of

AIDS, we demand the *free distribution of condoms*, including in the schools, the decriminalization of drugs and the distribution of clean needles, as well as sensible, massive educational campaigns in questions of public health.

We do not have a patent solution to the problem of disease, and we do not pretend to be experts where scientific technology has not yet found a solution. But as Marxists we try to approach general social problems scientifically and rationally. And we fight for a society in which existing resources can be mobilized on the basis of what people need—for example, to fight disease, to educate the entire population—and not what is profitable for the pharmaceutical companies or what is left over after imperialist "defense" budgets rake off billions and trillions. This inhuman social system cannot be patched up to give it a "human face." Quality health care *for all* is within the realm of possibility, but not in the framework of the capitalist system, which cannot even give the population the necessities of life, although the productive capacity and technology exist to feed the hungry of the whole planet. What is necessary is the reorganization of society on a socialist basis to place knowledge and technology in the service of all.

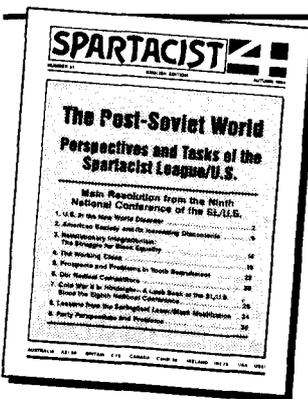
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- For Massively Funded, Internationally Coordinated AIDS Research!
- For a Revolutionary Workers Republic!

Spartacist Group Japan  
 Section of the International Communist League  
 (Fourth Internationalist)  
 August 5, 1994

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## Fake Left Buys Into "Family Values" Hysteria

# Down With the Anti-Sex Witchhunt!

The Republicans' "Contract on America" targets just about all of us, with assaults on the unions, civil rights, welfare, calls for more death sentences and general fundamentalist ranting. But it was the racist yuppie Democratic administration of Bill and Hillary Clinton that paved the way for the Republican "family values" sweep in the 1994 elections. If hoary old segregationists and all-purpose bigots like Jesse Helms and Newt Gingrich are riding high, it's the result of years of *bipartisan* social reaction. Seeking to bolster the oppressive institution of the family, the reactionary crusade has targeted sex in particular—through attacks on abortion rights, censorship of pornography, criminalization of private consensual sexual acts.

In the following pages we are reprinting articles opposing this reactionary onslaught and exposing the fake-left hypocrites and toadies who cheer on the capitalists' anti-sex witchhunt. *Workers Vanguard* (No. 602, 10 June 1994) printed NAMBLA spokesman David Thorstad's article, "The Death of Gay Liberation?" and the Spartacist League's protest of the Stonewall 25 Steering Committee's attempted exclusion of the North American Man/Boy Love

Association from the 1994 Gay Pride march on the United Nations. We include our 4 June 1994 letter, "Let NAMBLA March!", sent to SOS (Spirit of Stonewall), a group also defending NAMBLA. The third piece, "FSP: 'Family Values R Us'," is reprinted from *Spartacist Canada* (July/August 1994), publication of the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste, Canadian section of the International Communist League, and details the Freedom Socialist Party's hysterical espousal of the anti-sex repression which has swept American campuses in the guise of a crusade against date rape.

As always with signed articles, the opinions expressed in Thorstad's piece do not necessarily reflect our editorial viewpoint. Thorstad was briefly prominent as a spokesman for the Socialist Workers Party in the early 1970s, before resigning in disgust when the SWP abandoned its brief flirtation with the "gay liberation movement" (see "Gays and the SWP," *Women and Revolution* No. 24, Spring 1982). A former president of New York's Gay Activists Alliance (1975-76), Thorstad was a founding member of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights (1977), as



W&R Photo

## Stop Anti-Abortion Terror!

Murderous "Right to Life" terror struck again on 30 December 1994 when two clinic workers, Shannon Lowney and Lee Ann Nichols, were gunned down by an anti-woman fanatic in two separate incidents at abortion clinics in Brookline, Massachusetts.

On December 31, Spartacist supporters joined protesters on Boston Common to denounce this brutal outrage, and distributed a leaflet demanding, "What is necessary is a massive outpouring of outrage, mobilizing working women and their allies backed up by the social power of the labor movement, to defend the clinics, safeguard and expand a woman's right to all medical facilities and stop the murderous thugs cold."

No illusions in cops or troops! For mass mobilizations to defend the clinics!

well as co-author of *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*. In 1978 he was a founding member of NAMBLA. Our most significant difference is with Thorstad's longstanding "only gays can liberate gays" belief in the liberating potential of radical lifestylism, so characteristic of the early '70s New Left sectoralist movements.

The logic of New Left sectoralism has long since played itself out, as yesteryear's "gay liberationists" have become today's hard-nosed lobbyists, wheeling and dealing with bourgeois politicians and United Nations bureaucrats and letting cops march in their parades while seeking to exclude groups like NAMBLA. Thus, while we don't share Thorstad's sense of betrayal, we do appreciate his powerful indictment of the little would-be bureaucrats for Clinton and Reno, the mass murderers of Waco.

NAMBLA supports the sexual rights of gays and especially youth, and has therefore been repeatedly singled out for vicious attack by the government—and by other gay groups seeking "acceptance" from this racist, homo-

phobic society. As we said in "Stop the Witchhunt of Peter Melzer!" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 587, 5 November 1993): "The portrayal of NAMBLA as child molesters has nothing to do with the protection of children; rather it is part of a generalized campaign against sex aimed at the 'moral rearmament' of the American people which would bolster the *bourgeoisie's* authority. The guiding principle for sexual relations between *all* people ought to be one of effective consent."

Defense of NAMBLA should be an elementary act. But it seems it is left to us Marxists to point out that "an injury to one is an injury to all" is *not* just verbiage, but a guide to action. Events of this past summer proved that, in any case, crime doesn't pay: The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)—which voted to expel NAMBLA and other international groups defending youth sexuality this past June 23 in an attempt to placate Jesse Helms—was itself suspended from the United Nations on September 16.

# The Death of Gay Liberation?

by David Thorstad

The gay movement faces an old paradox. Just when it has attained a level of social influence greater than any achieved over the past century, it is losing its soul.

Gay leaders prefer political correctness to variety and ambiguity, sameness to difference. I myself yearn for the spirit of a banner I saw in 1971: "Love is a many-gendered thing."

Passionless bureaucrats on C-SPAN press a politics of victimization (copied from middle-class feminism) and a liberal strategy of expanding state protection of "gay people" rather than of liberating sexuality. Victimization is "in" these days—there's money in it; it can get you acquitted of murder. As a strategy for extending rights, though, it reminds me of the "Victim of the Press" button worn by the ex-homosexual zombies of Aesthetic Realism.

No talk here of empowerment or liberation (*passé* in these postmodern, post-everything times), rarely of repealing sodomy and other anti-sex laws, and never of laws that discriminate against youth. Rather than fight the anti-sex legacy of Judeo-Christianity, gay leaders seem to ignore it, even embrace it.

Oblivious to the source of gay oppression in institutions like the family, gays lobby the state to bless their unions—and stage a "mass wedding" in the nation's capital fit for the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The state is using AIDS to reimpose coupledness and control over sexuality, and how do gay leaders respond? By embracing monogamy and marriage—this despite the fact that half of straight marriages fail, and monogamy is a bit player in the mammalian heritage (fewer than 3 percent of mammals are monogamous).

## We Are Family—or wannabe.

Hundreds of thousands marched in gay pride in Washington in April 1993. The event became a virtual love

fest for President Clinton—before the blood had dried on his and Janet Reno's hands after their incineration of the Waco dissidents (among whom 25 children). That numbing act of police-state terrorism and child abuse gave little pause to gay leaders, who were enthusiastic vote-getters for the principle-less draft dodger turned mass murderer.

Flush from a meeting with Commander in Chief Clinton a week before the march on Washington, Human Rights Campaign Fund executive director Tim McFeeley voiced confidence that Clinton would rip up the ban on gays in the military by July: "It's not just what the President said, but how he said it. It's a feeling you got by looking into his eyes" (*New York Times*, 18 April 1993). McFeeley expressed similar sappy certainty on Donahue. All that gay money donated to big-business bimbos (instead of being used to fight gay oppression) was about to pay off. Clinton nevertheless opted for continuing a discriminatory policy.

Gay leaders argue that since "lesbians and gay men" (*p.c.* nomenclature nowadays) fought so well in the U.S. war against Iraq, they deserve recognition as cogs in the war machine. As we prepare to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, one of their main goals is to get the state to welcome same-sexers as servants of the New World Disorder. Proud out-of-the-closet patriotism.

Despite their rush to embrace the military issue, no gay leaders invoked history's most renowned example of same-sex military heroism—the "sacred band" of Thebes. That would not have been *p.c.* since the Theban Band involved men and youths, and pederasty is a secret not to be told. (These days, only androphilia is *p.c.*)

On one level, surely, gay men and lesbians who are fighting to be in the military are extending the civil rights of all of us. Their contribution to sexual liberation is more iffy. And the morality of militarism is never questioned.

Can this be what Stonewall was about?

The first group to emerge from Stonewall—the Gay



W&amp;R Photo

**NAMBLA marched with "Spirit of Stonewall" up Fifth Avenue in June 1994, in defiance of gay establishment organizers' attempt to exclude them from Gay Pride events.**

Liberation Front—struggled against the Vietnam War. It was exhilarating to see the GLF banner waving in antiwar demos. Today, gay leaders wave the Stars and Stripes and hope to bring gay pride along in the next bombing raid on Third World babies. In this respect, little of the Stonewall spirit survives.

Hoping to appease the Christian right and the Clinton administration, gaycrats from Barney Frank on down join Jesse Helms in calling on the International Lesbian and Gay Association to expel the North American Man/Boy Love Association—the only U.S. group active in the ILGA for more than a decade. But heterosexual supremacists object to *all* varieties of homosexuality, not just this or that subgroup.

On January 26, 1994, the U.S. Senate unanimously (99-0) adopted a Helms amendment to withhold \$118 million from the United Nations unless the ILGA expelled NAMBLA. Not a peep from the gay establishment against this antigay Republicrat diktat—for which, in fact, they paved the way.

Pat Califia has observed that boylovers and SMers face the brunt of anti-sex repression—thereby winning for the broader movement the elbowroom it enjoys. That is why NAMBLA and SM figure prominently in right-wing religious propaganda. But don't expect the gay establishment to acknowledge this. To them, "An injury to one is an injury to all" is a mere phrase.

In England, the gay movement has been campaigning to lower the age of consent to 16 for male-male sex. (It is already 16 for straight and lesbian sex.) On February 21, activists stormed Parliament when it adopted a "compromise" age of 18! In contrast, in the United States—where the age of consent varies from 14 to 18 in states where sodomy laws have been repealed (you can't do it legally anywhere else no matter how old you are)—gay leaders have agreed not to challenge whatever the arbitrary age happens to be.

Lowering any of the ages of consent would advance the civil rights of youth and their (often older) lovers. But the new homophile establishment will have none of it. For them, pederasty remains taboo and anathema. Peri Jude Radecic, executive director of the National Gay and

Lesbian Task Force, recently stated: "Lowering age of consent laws has never been and never will be a part of the mission of NGLTF" (*Village Voice*, 8 February). The gay movement in England fights to lower the age of consent, but in the United States, *never*?

New York's Gay Activists Alliance (from which NGLTF was an elitist offshoot in 1973) and other post-Stonewall groups in the United States, Canada and Europe opposed age of consent laws on the grounds that they protect no one; rather, they criminalize *consensual* sex (the best kind).

Stonewall meant struggle. It meant putting your livelihood on the line. It meant irreverence, pride in outsider status, youth sexuality, drag, sexual ambiguity. It meant rediscovering gay history. It meant solidarity with gay prisoners and anyone who is oppressed.

Solidarity—there's a concept that now counts for less. When was the last time you heard a guppie call for freeing gay prisoners? Their silence may suggest that there aren't any, but thousands of gay men call a U.S. jail home because of sexual activity that was no less consensual than anything Radecic, McFeeley or Frank engage in.

A 14- or 15-year-old has as much right as they do to sexual pleasure with the partner of his or her choice and should not need the imprimatur of the state or any gay/lesbian Pope. In Minnesota, where the age of consent is a ridiculous 18, lesbian directors of an antiviolence agency have called for locking up any gay man who has sex with a youth under 18! That reflects an antigay male agenda, in which yelling "child abuse" is a way to increase funding. "When they lay those dollars on you, your soul goes" (Malcolm X).

Gay liberation is falling victim to its success. With growth have come middle-class efforts to get into the mainstream, to win a place at the hot table (two current clichés)—even if this means anathematizing pederasty, a ubiquitous same-sex variant. This is a form of self-hatred.

The loss to AIDS of many sex radicals has also been a heavy blow, from which gay liberation will not soon recover.

Fighting discrimination is necessary. Civil rights and sexual freedom issues have always coexisted; they complement each other. Personally, I have felt more discrimina-

tion from other homosexuals than from straights—in 1989, for example, when New York’s Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center refused to rent space to NAMBLA for a concert by America’s greatest living poet, Allen Ginsberg (boylover and NAMBLA supporter).

Your case against discrimination is weakened if you yourself discriminate.

Man-boy love has been a player in gay liberation since the mid-nineteenth century. The first gay magazine in the world, *Der Eigene*, celebrated boylove and anarchism. Pederasty is the form that homosexuality most commonly has taken throughout Western—and not only Western—

culture. It is inseparable from the high points of Western civilization (Ancient Greece and the Renaissance). It lies close to the roots of gay liberation.

Attempts to purge it resemble those in the early 1970s to shove drag queens aside—despite their role in Stonewall. The aim is to corral rebellion, to allow the Republican party to set the gay agenda, to deny homosexuality. This is not the spirit of Stonewall.

In all cultures and in all historical periods, men and youths have been getting it on, because they are naturally attracted to each other. Efforts to deny this, and to demonize man-boy love, are grotesque. ■

# Protest “Stonewall 25” Exclusion Let NAMBLA March!

4 June 1994

Spirit of Stonewall Organizing Committee  
Boston, MA

Dear SOS:

The Spartacist League condemns the vicious exclusion of NAMBLA by the Stonewall 25 Steering Committee from the upcoming Stonewall 25 national march in New York City on 26 June 1994. When the Steering Committee voted to ban from the march all “organizations advocating...the repeal of age of consent laws without adequate protection of youth, or those advocating...the sexual abuse of youth,” it was singling out, and slandering, the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) and all others who oppose the oppression of young people

in this society. As Marxists we oppose the regulation of private consensual sexual acts, which are nobody’s business but the persons involved.

By its action the Steering Committee shows that it has signed on with the government’s anti-sex witchhunt—a campaign aimed at instilling conformity to Christian, puritanical, bourgeois morality. The state’s persecution of NAMBLA is part of an attempt to assert its prerogative to legislate sexual norms as against all those it considers “deviant,” a category which includes all gays and lesbians and many others as well. By building a “family values” gay pride march, the Steering Committee fuels a reactionary climate where pregnant teenagers need “parental consent” for abortion while hysterical charges of “sex abuse” result in the persecution of day-care workers and

## Women and Revolution



—Spring 1982

### Drop the Charges Against NAMBLA!

18 February 1982  
NAMBLA  
Box 174, Midtown Station  
New York, New York 10018

Dear NAMBLA:

The Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth League protests and denounces the vicious state witchhunt unleashed against your organization this past...

deadly dangerous, in fact—of these is: “We demand that the vast amounts of money used for this purpose [to harass and prosecute NAMBLA] be used instead to investigate and prosecute the hundreds of thousands of unsolved murders and violent assaults on children, women, people of color and lesbians

### BC Partisan Defense Committee

CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES

#### Hands Off NAMBLA!

#### Stop the Witchhunt of Peter Melzer!

The morality vigilantes are at it again. Their latest target is Peter Melzer, a tenured teacher of physics at the Bronx High School of Science, who is a member of the Steering Committee of...

Peter Melzer has been a teacher for 31 years without a single complaint lodged against him, and his association with NAMBLA has been known to school officials since 1984. But he became the object of unwanted notoriety in March of this year when ABC-TV’s...

## WORKERS VANGUARD

—7 February 1992

—5 November 1993



Workers Vanguard

SL defends NAMBLA against government snoops who want to regulate private, consensual sexual acts.

teachers—a campaign which began with the witchhunting of homosexual teachers. To exclude NAMBLA from a gay pride march is therefore to enlist in the crusade to persecute gays in the name of "saving children."

The Steering Committee's despicable action can only encourage the very forces responsible for the repression and oppression of gay people and youth, and those forces are sinister indeed: In 1992, following an "exposé" by KRON-TV in collusion with the SF cops, NAMBLA members were threatened at their press conference by a demonstration of child abuse "survivors"—joined by a gang of skinheads carrying the Confederate flag of slavery. On the East Coast, Bronx High School of Science teacher Peter Melzer is threatened with the loss of his job solely because of his beliefs and association with NAMBLA.

The Spartacist League cannot, however, endorse SOS's call (dated 3 April 1994). Signers of the call are being asked to support not just basic rights of NAMBLA and others to march, but also a series of political demands. Central to its political thrust is support to gay sectoralist lifestyle, embodied in the demand that "the gay and lesbian movement...return to its roots" in the Stonewall 1969 rebellion. As against "lifestyle" advocacy as a road to sexual liberation, we Marxists believe that the oppression of women and gay people in this capitalist society stems fundamentally from the institution of the family, which is bolstered by the state and organized religion. Sectoralist, gay lifestyle politics cannot address the material cause of gay oppression. In divorcing the goal of fighting for full rights for gays from the liberation of the working class and all the oppressed from capitalist exploi-

tation, gay sectoralist politics can only tail the Democratic Party of war and racism. The Steering Committee's action is the logical result of seeking a space within the capitalist system, but toeing the "family values" line of the bourgeois establishment can never win "respectability" for gays and lesbians, who are by definition anathema to the religious-inspired right wing.

From its inception the Marxist movement has championed the rights of homosexuals; Oscar Wilde was defended against persecution for homosexuality by the most authoritative journal of the Second International, *Die Neue Zeit*. Within the framework of fighting for socialist revolution to lay the basis for a new society in which the full expression of the individual (sexual and otherwise) will be possible, we stand against all state interference in private matters of sexuality. Trotskyists have always opposed the "family values" conservatism of the anti-Marxist Stalin, as they also fought his bureaucratic usurpation of soviet power and the resulting counterrevolutionary international program. We call for abortion rights for young women as part of free, quality health care, including contraception, for all. Advocating the concept of effective consent in sexual matters, we denounce the reactionary "age of consent" laws which seek to strait-jacket the sexuality of young people.

Let NAMBLA march!

Fraternally,  
Amy Rath for the Spartacist League

cc: NAMBLA  
Stonewall 25 Steering Committee

# FSP: "Family Values R Us"

In capitalist society, where the many are exploited to enrich the few, those on top must have ideological devices to keep those on the bottom cowed and subservient to the rule of capital. For decades, "godless Communism" served as the all-purpose bogeyman to regiment the population to stand on guard in defense of "the free world." But, as American author Gore Vidal aptly noted in his 1979 essay "Sex Is Politics," when the threat of external "enemies" failed to rouse "a howl of manly rage, particularly from ladies at church receptions," the powers that be reverted "to the tried-and-true hot buttons: save our children, our fetuses, our ladies' rooms from the godless enemy."

Today, there is a crusade for "family values," against pornography, abortion, Woody Allen, homosexuality, for that matter any sex outside of "holy matrimony." As they increasingly grind down and impoverish the working class and oppressed, the rulers cannot tolerate the "liberties" of a restive population. The purpose of the anti-sex

witchhunt is to bolster the bourgeois status quo and the repressive institution of the family, the main source of the oppression of women and a key conservatizing prop which serves as an ideological transmission belt for the

**Decades of homophobia and sexism turn malignant**  
**Trotskyist League maintains gay order on lesbian and gay members, new pro-date rape campaign launched**

The steadily anti-gay anti-feminist Trotskyist League (TL) has finally found its U.S. main...  
 Trotskyist League maintains a strict discipline in lesbian and gay members. It wants its precinct filled with military "comrades" — those ultraright fanatics whom they don't ask, don't tell, police's referred to the position of their heterosexual members. But, in reality, the TL's deeply worried that they will lose easy credit from the banks of the labour movement if they permit their members to come out. They designate the cause of social harm by attacking them and passing the homophobia and sexism of labour's privileged upper crust.

Recently, the TL and the Spartacist League announced their pro-date rape poster campaign and Revolution No. 42, Summer 1993. They charge women who protest general sexual harassment and assault, and other non-consensual acts, will do nothing to correct identifiable physical damage and "antiseptic hygiene" and "antiseptic witch-hunters."

The combination of the TL's "back class" rule and its truly deranged pro-date rape poster are meant to send a harsh message to women and persuade their position in the movement to prove according to the TL, the only women and gay people to participate in the social struggle are militant, unoppressed proletarians prepared to submit to all sorts of sexual indignities dictated by straight supremacist radical men.

The anti-sexism, anti-gay TL program sends a parallel message to straight men in the movement: they will be homophobic, and a little bit of a gay hater, it's OK to be homophobic and a little bit of a homophobic because the TL and the Spartacist League will defend you.

TL's separate male club suits are effectively closing the doors to women with their carte blanche demands of the feminist movement. The TL's stepped-up campaign against female comrades for the same physical quality and dignity of women and gays in every sphere is objectively counter-revolutionary.

With chattering backwords, the TL and Spartacist aggressively attempt to discredit and defeat the leadership of women and gays in the struggle for socialism. They "promise" women's liberation will be achieved after the socialist revolution. But their betters, women and the sex war, the TL fails to recognize that there will be no socialist revolution without the complete leadership of proletarian women, peasants, and people of colour. It is precisely these sectors of the working class who have the guts and determination to stand up against all forms of sex war, racism, sexism and oppression of the capitalist system who are doing so.

Down with TL and Spartacist ultraright! They are betters on the movement for socially significant sectors without mass movements for equality and dignity for the entire working class.



Clara Fraser takes aim at sexism on the Left.

Coley/Freedom Socialist

Off the deep end with Clara Fraser (shown here in a Freedom Socialist photo).



"values" of the capitalist rulers.

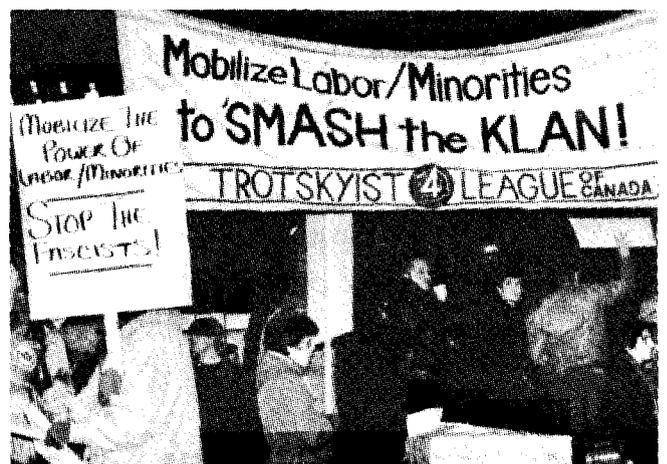
Sex is a potent weapon in the bourgeoisie's arsenal because it engages explosive fears and prejudices. Yet today the erstwhile "sexually liberated" feminist bra-burners join the bible-thumping right wing as reborn Torquemadas burning issues of *Playboy* and preaching "politically correct" sex, particularly evidenced in the "date rape" hysteria that has swept the campuses.

Naturally, as communists, we oppose the bourgeoisie's "family values" campaign. Although this would seem unremarkable, it has our fake-left opponents howling. For a decade and a half they stood with their own rulers (in the name of "anti-Stalinism") in imperialism's fight to destroy the Soviet workers state and recapture it for capitalist exploitation. Now these "radicals" and "socialists" are lining up behind the campaign to defend "our ladies' rooms from the godless enemy."

The most hysterical proponent of this view is surely the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). Our *Women and Revolution* article "The 'Date Rape' Issue: Feminist Hysteria, Anti-Sex Witchhunt" (No. 43, Winter 1993-Spring 1994) has them raving like Vyshinsky, Stalin's chief prosecutor at the Moscow Trials. At a March 4 Trotskyist League forum in Vancouver to commemorate International Women's Day, two male members of the FSP handed out a leaflet headlined, "Decades of homophobia and sexism turn malignant: Trotskyist League maintains gag order on lesbian and gay members, new pro-date rape campaign launched." And from here the lies simply gallop along.

The slanders are so deranged that responding would be more vexatious than trying to answer the question "when did you stop beating your wife?" Nonetheless, we can't help but note that it takes a truly fevered brain to claim, as the FSP leaflet does, that our organization, which stands virtually alone in defending the rights of the North American Man/Boy Love Association, is "worried that they will lose respect from the Archie Bunkers of the labour movement."

It is a measure of how much leftists in North America imbibe the preachments of their "own" ruling class, that our organization is attacked for opposing the "moral"



Spartacist Canada photos

**The Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste of Canada raises the call to unite labor and minorities to smash racist provocations. On 22 January 1994, over 3,000 unionists, minorities and students rallied against fascists in Vancouver.**

strictures of the capitalist state! As we noted in our W&R article:

"The 'date rape' hoax is a cynical and dangerous business because it invokes government authority to intervene as moral arbiter in our most intimate affairs and fuels a state-sponsored campaign of sexual regimentation in the service of bolstering the reactionary institution of the family. While Marxists cannot decree either a just or a pleasurable solution to the ambiguities that arise out of the intersection of race, sex and class in this capitalist society, we can and do oppose all attempts to fit human sexuality into legislated and decreed 'norms.' Back-alley abortions, prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, physical and sexual violence and racial oppression are the sordid reality behind 'public morality.'... To create genuinely free and equal relations between people in all spheres, including sex, requires nothing less than the destruction of this class system and the creation of a communist world."

In its only semi-genuflection toward a political polemic against our organization, the FSP's leaflet (which is otherwise simply a raving screed) declares, "the T.L. fails to recognize that there will be no socialist revolution without the commanding leadership of proud, defiant women, lesbians, gays and people of colour." Actually, there will be no socialist revolution without the leadership of a revolutionary workers party, one that in Lenin's words is

a "tribune of all the oppressed." The axis of struggle which does not figure in the FSP's kaleidoscope of the oppressed is *class*. It is the multiracial working class—including, of course, millions of women, gays, lesbians and other oppressed—which has the social power to overthrow capitalism.

The FSP's politics have long been a pseudo-Marxist variant of the old New Left slogan "the most oppressed are the most revolutionary." Far from having anything to do with addressing the conditions faced by the most oppressed, this view is simply the expression of the discontents of the petty bourgeoisie. As we noted in our W&R article, "'Date rape' hysteria serves as a diversion from the *real* oppression and exploitation suffered by the vast majority of women in this country. Most working-class and minority women can't afford to go to college, but rather endure the constant menace of violence and rape as they go to and from backbreaking, low-paying jobs or to pick up their continually threatened welfare pittance."

To redress the conditions faced by these women—not least the masses of desperately impoverished welfare mothers who in and of themselves have no social power—requires revolutionary *class struggle* uniting the power of the integrated organized labor movement with all strata of the oppressed in common struggle to bring down the system of capitalist exploitation and degradation. To be sure, blacks, Asians, women and others in this racist society, who have the least to lose and the most to gain, will play a leading role in the fight for a socialist North America. And, noting their plurality in the population, "even" white men will have a role in such a revolutionary struggle.

### Trotskyism and the Fight for Gay Liberation

Why is the FSP going after our organization in such a heated frenzy? Over the years we haven't had much to do with their organization, nor they with ours. Indeed, the best they could dredge up of any significant intersection between our two organizations was a 1977 article from their press condemning the Red Flag Union, a group of gay militants who were won to communism and joined forces with the Spartacist League/U.S. This article was attached to their Vancouver leaflet.

This was almost *twenty years ago!* But the proverbial elephant never forgets. (FSP leader Clara Fraser turned her 1967 divorce proceedings into her own particular political *raison d'être* and has yet to stop harping about it.) Today, the FSP leaflet declares that our fusion with the RFU "exposes the unabashed homophobia of the T.L. and the Spartacist League"! To the FSP, it was a crime against nature that a group of serious gay militants would transcend their own personal oppression in favor of a proletarian revolutionary worldview.

The FSP shrieks that we maintain a "gag order" and "strict closet rule" on our gay and lesbian members. In a cover letter to their leaflet against us, mailed out to other left organizations, they ask for "comment on our enclosed outing of the Spartacists." Unlike the FSP which elevates sexual preference to a political principle, we believe that the sexuality of our members, or anyone else for that matter, is nobody's business but that of the indi-

viduals involved. Our party and all its members fight against the special oppression of homosexuals as a Leninist tribune of the people, mobilizing the working class to defend gay rights and to strike down the bourgeoisie's stultifying "moral" codes. In contrast, the oh-so-liberated FSP simultaneously preaches "outing" (a stupid and viciously vindictive practice which smacks of McCarthyite witchhunting), while joining the feminist anti-sex witch-hunt which openly appeals to the capitalist state to enforce its "moral" order. If that means censorship, that's fine with the FSP, which praises anti-porn queen Catharine MacKinnon's "trail-blazing legislation that attacked porn as sex discrimination" (*Freedom Socialist*, March-May 1994).

Although hardly the right-on r-r-revolutionaries they postured as, at least the New Leftists of the '60s/early '70s saw the liberation of their "sector" as a fight *against* the powers that be in this society. These days an entire petty-bourgeois "victim generation" look to the capitalist rulers for "salvation." Meanwhile, the aging New Left leftovers have gone from "give peace a chance" to "give war a chance"—calling for imperialist military intervention to bring "humanitarianism" and "democracy" to Haiti and Bosnia. This too is echoed by the FSP, who chastise U.S. imperialism for its "arms embargo which has left the Bosnians almost defenseless" and demand that it "be lifted immediately"!

### Liars and Liberals

For some months, the FSP's tiny Vancouver branch has been raving about the "testosterone politics" of the Trotskyist League. Why? Because we mobilized trade unionists, minorities, youth and other anti-fascists to stop the Nazis of "Canadian Liberty Net" last January 22, 1993. And the FSP? They stood on the side of the cops trying to stop a crowd of 500 anti-fascists who had sent a gang of fascist skinheads packing.

Most recently, the FSP was kind enough to overlook our supposed "macho" politics and write a letter in defense of the arrested Vancouver Six anti-fascists, whose number included several Trotskyist League supporters. Here they appeal to the very NDP government which prosecuted the anti-fascists to "join hands with all the targets of fascism, in a united front effort to stop the bigots in their jackboots"!

In its defense letter, the FSP humbly petitions the NDP Attorney General not to use the courts "to harass, persecute and prosecute activists fighting for a multi-cultural, non-sexist, pro-union, secular Canada." This description of our arrested supporters is rather at variance with the FSP's slanders of us in their "date rape" leaflet. Nonetheless, we must also save ourselves from this flaccid depiction of our politics. We are fighting for a *socialist* North America which will create the material basis to replace the patriarchal family, liberate women and do away with the inequalities and pathology of this decaying capitalist system. As we concluded our *Women and Revolution* article on the "date rape" issue: "In a classless society social and economic constraints over sexual relations will be non-existent, and in the words of Frederick Engels, 'there is no other motive left except mutual inclination.'" ■

# France...

(continued from page 40)

in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, the demoralized reformists of the Communist Party have joined with the racist social democracy, which all throughout Western Europe competes with the right-wing parties to "defend the nation" by presenting dark-skinned minorities as an enemy "stealing our jobs." In France, the reformists' disgusting refusal to oppose the government/media line that North African youth are "criminals" and "terrorists" sharply contrasts with the impulse of ethnically integrated youth who have repeatedly taken to the streets to protest racist cop killings and deportations.

Having long lost confidence in the ability of the proletariat to struggle, much of the so-called "far left" has also appropriated the racist line of French imperialism. The pseudo-Trotskyists of Lutte Ouvrière (LO) organized what even the fascists did not dare do: They set up a counterdemonstration at Lille (in the north of France) against high school students striking to defend 19 young women who had just been expelled from school.

To justify its ignominious action in Lille, the leadership of LO adopts the arguments about the "fundamentalist danger" in France—the same arguments made by Pasqua, minister of the interior, or by Le Pen, the fascist leader of the National Front. For years LO has shown a complete insensitivity to the special oppression which subjugates immigrant workers and their families; LO in fact insists that Le Pen is not a fascist promoting a program of racist terror and murder, but "just" a reactionary demagogue. But now LO has "discovered" that there are "fascists" in France after all—that is, teenage Muslim girls who wear the headscarf to school!

The Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires, while opposing the racist exclusions, does not say a single word against the veil, the symbol of the oppression of women. For them, the woman question doesn't exist. The JCR was incapable of responding politically to our leaflet, and "answered" by physically assaulting two of our comrades at the Tolbiac campus. These visceral opportunists cannot distinguish between political arguments and blows of the fist! We immediately opposed this gangsterism, putting up a wall poster at Tolbiac, "The JCR Can't Keep the Spartacist Youth Silent," and made it clear that we are ready to defend the principle of workers democracy.

## Down With the Racist Bayrou Edict!

Hundreds of youth are crying out in justified rage over the Bayrou edict prohibiting the wearing of the *hijab* in school. Hiding behind a cover of "secular education," this edict is a blatantly racist move, integral to the government campaign to scapegoat immigrants and their children for all the misery caused by the rotten capitalist system.

Two weeks after the Bayrou edict was issued, strikes are breaking out at the Saint-Exupéry lycée in Mantes-la-Jolie, following others at the Romain Rolland lycée in Goussainville and the Faidherbe school in Lille, where several girls who wear the *hijab* are threatened with expulsion. In Goussainville, four girls of North African origin, at first prohibited from entering the school by the principal,



Informations Ouvrières

**Militant Air France strikers blocked runways in Paris last October and backed down government, bosses and cops.**

are now spending their days in a study hall. While they wait for their fate to be decided, interminable meetings are held, purportedly to find an "arrangement" that will force them to "wear a less ostentatious scarf."

The ethnically integrated youth have mobilized against these racist moves by the Mitterrand-Balladur-Pasqua government, which, seized with "anti-Muslim" hysteria, has for months now been pursuing a veritable crusade against immigrants. The French state, which has never been able to swallow its humiliating defeat in Algeria in 1962, has suffered a series of defeats and retreats, from the victorious Air France strike to the CIP recall. It has tried to seize the offensive by whipping up an "anti-terrorist struggle," in effect an anti-immigrant terror campaign. Thanks to the belly-crawling of the "left" before this "anti-fundamentalist" campaign, this right-wing government has been able to establish a racist consensus and reestablish its authority in order to renew its attacks upon the working class and youth.

A workers movement worthy of the name would have demonstrated with all its might in defense of the North African community. But such a fight requires a revolutionary perspective to do away with "divide and conquer" politics. It was part and parcel of this racist campaign when the cops, under the authority of the Mitterrand-Pasqua laws allowing them to stop and search anyone, anywhere, any time, last summer picked up tens of thousands of people and arrested 500 "undocumented foreigners." This witchhunt for "clandestines" was obviously the main goal of this "security" operation—the name itself a take-off from the fascist National Front's watchword, "immigration = insecurity." A real revolutionary leadership would have mobilized the working class and youth around demands such as: *Stop the deportations! Down with the "clandestines" witchhunt! Everyone who made it into this country has the right to stay here! Down with all racist discrimination in employment, wages,*



Cambio 16

**French government's anti-drug witchhunt is a vehicle for cop terror against immigrants.**

housing, schooling and medical care! Revoke the "Nationality Code" and the racist Mitterrand-Pasqua laws! Down with "fortress Europe"! Defend the right of asylum! Full citizenship rights for immigrants and their families! Cops out of the ghettos! For worker/immigrant defense squads based on the factories!

The "anti-terrorist" hysteria has paved the way for other racist moves like the Bayrou edict, scandalously welcomed by the teachers union. This edict reinforces the stranglehold of religious obscurantism, especially on young women, and under cover of "defense of secular education" aims simply to expel youth of North African origin from school. These racist expulsions only send these girls back to the Koran schools (at best) or into the reactionary straitjacket of their families, where their lives will have the sinister stench of prison, leading to forced marriage, home confinement and one pregnancy after another until they are worn out. By expelling these girls, the capitalist state reinforces the fundamentalists' hold over them, isolating them from social life and placing them under the absolute control of the men in their families. If the state succeeds in expelling these girls from school, this further subjects the youth to the arbitrary acts of a reactionary, racist government. Where will it end? Will we have expulsions from school for being communists? For wearing Malcolm X T-shirts? For having green hair? What are these "ostentatious symbols that are in themselves elements of proselytism" that Bayrou talks about?

In a capitalist country like France, women have some chance of individual liberty and certain important democratic rights (rights attained in 1789 and through workers struggles): the right to vote, to education, contraception, abortion, etc. We defend these rights tooth and nail against all reactionary moves to weaken them. But where equality is concerned, capitalism offers to young women from an immigrant background, and to the women of the proletariat in general, only the right to be equally exploited. For Marxists, capitalism, however "democratic," is still a system whereby one class—the working class—is exploited by another—the bourgeoisie. It is based on the oppression of women within the family. The struggle

against all forms of oppression of girls and women is indissolubly linked to the fight against racist terror and segregation and for the integration of immigrant workers and their families, through class struggle, into the workers movement. The working class must fight for free, quality education for all, male and female, and open admissions to lycées, universities and other institutions of higher education, with state scholarships to make it possible.

This fight can only be carried out by mobilizing the working class, along with all the specially oppressed layers of society—women, youth, immigrants and children of immigrants, etc. Only the working class has the power to overturn the capitalist system: by stopping production and organizing strikes it can completely paralyze society. But to fight requires a leadership, because on the other side is an organized class with the firm intention to remain in power. What's needed is a party with a real class-struggle program that would seek to exploit victories like the Air France strike and the recall of the CIP bill. Such a party would link the current youth mobilizations to the struggles of the working class—their fathers and brothers at Renault and other companies.

But the youth who have mobilized against the racist Mitterrand-Balladur-Pasqua laws presently see behind their struggle a provocation by the Islamic fundamentalists. Given the daily conditions of racist terror and segregation facing this layer of the population, some could seek refuge and an illusory renewed dignity on the side of religious fundamentalism. If widespread, this would be a real catastrophe for the whole workers movement of this country. In fact, the fundamentalists only want to relegate women to their role of eternal slaves: the *hijab* is the symbol, the visible manifestation, of a social program of sinister reaction. We insist that the fundamentalists are dangerous enemies of the working class, women and the oppressed in general. From Iran to Afghanistan to Algeria, we have fought them fiercely, and we will continue to do so. We struggle against the fundamentalists whether they are burning schools in Algeria, throwing acid at women or pronouncing *fatwas* (religious decrees) of death for Taslima Nasrin and Salman Rushdie on charges of "injury to Islam."

We have always fought for the separation of church and state, of mosque and state, while the fundamentalists want to regulate every little detail of private life with their anti-woman, reactionary Koranic law. However, in France, where Islam can never be anything but a ghetto ideology that accepts segregation, the main enemy is not Islamic fundamentalism, but the imperialist, racist, anti-worker, anti-woman French capitalist state, which oppresses the working masses in Algeria, in Africa and here.

The youth fighting against the government's racist laws need a leadership to link their struggles to those of the working class. But the Communist Party, the same party that sent a bulldozer to wreck an immigrant hostel in Vitry in 1980, certainly won't mobilize against this racist campaign. Again, while hundreds of youth fight the racist laws of the Mitterrand-Balladur-Pasqua government, the fake-Trotskyist organization Lutte Ouvrière (LO) appoints itself the government's spokesman, applauding the racist expulsions while pretending that they "defend women." LO writes in its newspaper: "The real question, beyond the hypocritical smokescreen of speeches on tolerance, is women's oppression" (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 7 October 1994). LO distinguishes itself by its narrow economism and always refuses to put forward the least perspective of workers mobilization against the special oppression of women; it refused in 1979 to choose the camp of the Red Army in Afghanistan against the reactionary mullahs. Now in the midst of an "anti-Muslim" campaign, it "discovers" the question of women's special oppression. Not content with written support for this disgusting racist line in its newspaper, LO moves into action, organizing "a counterdemonstration with pertinent slogans: 'wearing the veil is oppression of women by men'" (*Libération*, 5 October 1994). LO finds itself on the side of the cops who try to break up student mobilizations. As if all these horrors weren't enough, LO hypocritically defends the classic democratic doctrine of the Rights of Man, writing, "The mullahs are the counterparts of the rabbis, the priests, who in no lesser fashion restrict the liberties not only of men but especially of women" (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 7 October 1994). But it's inconceivable in France to raise the question of expelling those who wear a cross around the neck and are attached to the Catholic church. This self-serving, hypocritical argument is LO's way of justifying its support for expulsions that will always be aimed at Muslims (therefore immigrants) and nobody else.

The Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR/JRE, French co-thinkers of the British Militant Labour opportunists), in numerous leaflets, proclaim their indignation over the racist expulsions—yet it's this same outfit that fights for unionizing "workers in uniform," which is to say...the cops! Although they claim to support the youth of North African origin, they consider the very cops who charge the youths' picket lines to be part of the workers movement. Since last summer the cops have acted as simple enforcers of Pasqua's racist campaign; in 1961



October 1994, Lille, France—Blocked by French police, young Muslim women protest racist government edict banning the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in public schools.

they massacred thousands of Algerians; and they charged worker/student demonstrations in 1968 while the demonstrators chanted, "CRS [riot cops] = SS [Nazis]." As the core of the state repressive apparatus, the cops are racist, anti-woman rabble whose daily work is to maintain the bourgeois order and carry out the dirty work of the capitalist state: breaking strikes, clubbing youth of immigrant origins, etc. Instead of fighting to sweep away the capitalist system, the JCR/JRE want to make of these cops "a mass ally of the working class." The main question is reform or revolution. The JCR/JRE leaflets do not call even once for workers mobilizations, for taking power and overturning the bourgeois system. "We must defend the right of everyone to go to school, defend the young women of the lycées and collèges who will be criminalized," writes the JCR/JRE, but they put forward no perspective of class struggle (*L'Egalité*, October 1994). The capitalist state cannot be reformed, it must be overthrown; and only by putting the working class in power and collectivizing the means of production can the whole human race enjoy a decent living, the benefits of scientific progress, the pleasures of life, etc.

For the past year the ethnically integrated youth and the working class have shown by their struggles that they are not ready to suffer the consequences of the crisis of capitalism with its procession of unemployment, poverty, racism and war. What has been missing in their struggles is a multiethnic, revolutionary, internationalist workers party to fight for a workers government that will put an end to this system based on oppression, by leading the international proletariat and all the oppressed in worldwide socialist revolution. We are fighting to build this party.

If you want to fight to end oppression, poverty, war, racism; if you want to fight to change the world: Join the Spartacist Youth.

Spartacist Youth Group of Tolbiac  
9 October 1994

## Government Anti-Immigrant Frenzy

# France: Racist Edict Targets Schoolgirls

As part of its anti-immigrant campaign, the French government in October 1994 issued the Bayrou edict banning the wearing of the *hijab*, the Islamic headscarf, in public schools, in effect excluding young women and girls of North African or Turkish origin whose religion requires that they cover their heads. This edict puts into place what the French state was unable to do in 1989 when three Maghrebian children were first banned by a school principal for wearing the *hijab* (see "Muslim Girls Banned from School in Anti-Immigrant Hysteria," W&R No. 37, Spring 1990). Outraged, hundreds of youth demonstrated against the blatantly racist move. We reprint below a leaflet written by the Spartacist Youth Group at the University of Tolbiac in Paris, France, the youth group of the Ligue Trotskyiste de France, French section of the International Communist League, which was distributed at mobilizations of high school students from Mantes and Goussainville, towns with large immigrant populations near Paris.

In the face of militant action by workers and youth, the weak right-wing French government, headed by conservative prime minister Edouard Balladur and "Socialist" president François Mitterrand, has been repeatedly forced in the recent period to recoil from implementation of its program of austerity and strikebreaking. At the end of October 1993, Air France strikers surged onto the runways of Paris airports, protesting threatened layoffs, and sent the French government reeling. For the first time in years, workers in Europe backed down the bosses' offensive. In March, the government backed off from its move to slash wages for young people after the proposed "Entry-Level Professional Contract"

(CIP), a sub-minimum wage for youth, sparked weeks of national mobilizations. More recently, a wave of strikes of public workers this fall again exposed the government's hesitancy in the face of militant working-class struggles.

But what is vitally needed is a revolutionary leadership to link the workers and youth of all ethnicities in a fight against the austerity drive triggered by intensified inter-imperialist rivalries in the so-called "post-Cold War world." In the absence of such a leadership of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie has successfully played the card of racism. The French government's only notable political success thus far has been in building a "national consensus" around scapegoating immigrants for capitalism's economic and social ills. In the wake of capitalist counterrevolution

*continued on page 37*



Le Bolchéviek

**Ligue Trotskyiste de France joins Paris demonstration, 10 May 1993, protesting French government's campaign against immigrant workers and their families. Banner reads, "For worker/immigrant mobilizations against Mitterrand/Balladur's racist war! Defend the immigrant neighborhoods!"**



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## Full Citizenship Rights for Immigrants and Their Families!