

The ORGANIZER

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Women's Liberation—A Revolutionary Struggle Against Capital

by Anna Gold

There have been some profound changes for women in the average US home, and even TV advertisers have had to sit up and take notice. All the way from men selling soap powders and Campbell soups, to women climbing out of race cars to praise STP, the product pushers are telling us something that we've known for a long time now: traditional roles are changing. Women aren't buying the "weaker sex" rap any more.

The changes are demonstrated in other ways that have more significance than the concessions that manufacturers make to sell their products. For the first time in history more than 50% of women have joined the workforce, and they are breaking into traditionally "male" and higher paying jobs in ever greater numbers.

Both men and women from all walks of life are identifying with the demands for equality for women — equal pay for equal work, the right of women to control their bodies, their right to protection from physical abuse, the need for training to insure that women can work all jobs, and so on. Childcare is no longer seen as a demand that concerns only women. There is an increasing understanding throughout society that men need to participate in a full and responsible way in family life as well.

STRUGGLE INTENSIFYING

These changes haven't happened without a fight. If anything, the struggle has intensified over the past year. While the movement for the democratic rights of women has broadened, the opposition has also steeled itself for the struggle. While superficial changes are now considered acceptable, such as "non-sexist" ads, clearly the ruling class has every in-place.

That's why Patsy Fleming, a Black single mother was forced to resign from her post as Executive Director of the White House Conference on Families in June of this year. That's also why Carter fired Bella Abzug from her position as co-chair of the National Advisory Committee for Women after she criticized Carter's budget priorities. It's OK for women to talk about "women's issues", but it's certainly not acceptable for them to attack a bloated military budget. That's men's business!!

In fact, if we evaluate the score card for the past year we are forced to conclude that at best the struggle between reaction and the progressive movement for the democratic rights of women has been a draw. Yes, there have been victories, perhaps the most significant of which was the extension of the ratification deadline for the Equal Rights Amendment. Pregnancy disability benefits were finally mandated by Congress, and new HEW guidelines were adopted which take steps to protect women from sterilization abuse. In several important cases the courts restored custody of their children to Lesbian mothers. In Oregon the first voter referendum on denying public funds for abortion was defeated.

And in many ways, perhaps most importantly, the women's movement has taken serious steps to forge alliances with labor and with civil rights activists. In April of this year the president of the National Organization of Women (NOW) became the first women's leader to address the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades National Conference, and a number of labor and civil rights organizations have taken a clear stand in support of the ERA. On October 8, 1979, NOW decided to support federal representation for the District of Columbia, a long-time demand of the Black liberation movement.

However, the defeats were significant as well. Though the deadline for the ERA was extended, the amendment was turned down in two states during the recent elections. Funding for abortions continues to be virtually non-existent for women on public assistance and daycare centers have been mercilessly closed down. Rape has been the fastest growing crime in the US, and the high incidence of wife abuse is only now coming to full light.

Women haven't fared much better at work. They continue to earn an average of 60% of what men earn. Only 11% of women workers are in unions as compared to 27% of working men. Union leadership is still for the most part white and male, and even the ILGWU, with 80% women membership, has no top woman official. The Bakke and Weber anti-affirmative action cases have threatened the opportunities of all women, and have had an especially disastrous effect on minority women.

Reaction has indeed been organized and visible in the last year. It has focused its energies on attacks on abortion, the ERA, the gay rights movement, affirmative action, and the cost of social services, to galvanize support for a reactionary anti-working class program. In New York, the Right-to-Life Party won the third spot position in the recent elections, underlining the danger of underestimating the force of this current.

CAPITALISM AND MALE SUPREMACY

The New Right's focus on turning back the gains made by the women's movement over the last decade is no accident. Phyllis Schlafly, Anita Bryant, and Martin Mullen are mouthpieces for the most reactionary sectors of Big Business. They express, in the most direct way, the interest the capitalist class has in maintaining the inequality of women.

Women provide unpaid labor in the home, raising a new generation of workers. Women form part of the reserve army of labor — employed in the lowest paying jobs — hired in boom times, let go in hard times. The social and economic position of women is a source of massive profits for the monopoly capitalists. This inequality has a political significance and is a source of division within the working class, crippling its ability to mount a united fight.

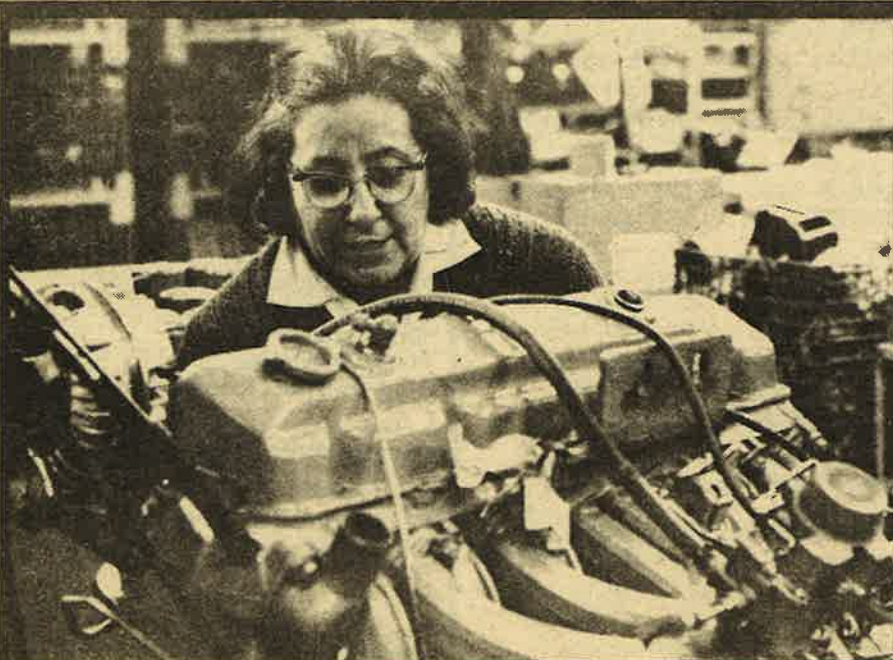
The subordinate position of women in the home and family and the unequal position of women in the labor force are bound together. The economic dependency of women, isolated in the home and excluded from most jobs historically, provides the basis for women being relegated to the status of second class citizens on the job. At the same time, maintaining discrimination against women in relation to work and production is necessary in order to keep women in an inferior position in the home.

Given this it is clear that the New Right's concern with affirming the values of the traditional family is not a matter of sentimental attachment to the "good old days". The right to abortion, that is, the right of a woman not to have a child, is a focal point of this attack in large part because of capital's requirement that women must be first and foremost bearers and rearers of children.

It is also clear that the New Right rhetoric and anti-feminist backlash which is often couched in abstract moral terms (right to life) or focused on trivial social questions (co-ed bathrooms) is really about maintaining the power and profits of the capitalist class.

Because oppression of women is a necessary feature of capitalist rule, it fol-

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Working women have played an important role in building this country and in fighting for the rights of all working people. International Women's Day on March 8th commemorates the struggles of women all over the world.

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Women's Liberation

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lows that women's liberation can only be realized by its overthrow and the building of socialism. For this reason it is important that working class women provide leadership for the women's movement — for only conscious women from the working class have absolutely no interest in maintaining the capitalist system.

And just as the movement for the democratic rights of women must focus its blows against its actual enemy, capitalism, so the working class as a whole must understand the suicidal nature of the divisions within it. Until the working class itself is both consciously anti-sexist and anti-racist, both the movements for equality and the broader struggle against capitalism will be significantly blocked.

THE ROAD FORWARD

Now, if we analyze events of the recent period of the basis of this understanding, it becomes much clearer why the "New Right" has been relatively successful in blocking a more rapid advance by the forces fighting for the equality of women. Essentially, while the last year has seen significant advances, the organized women's movement remains significantly isolated from the broad workers movement. This isolation is tremendously aggravated by the historic failure of the broad women's forces to seriously take up the particular oppression of minority workers, especially women.

The isolation of the organized women's movement from the labor movement has, of course, two sources. The trade unions have rarely taken up the needs of women in a consistent way and have often turned their backs on both the women's movement and the civil rights movement. This fact is most graphically illustrated by the low level of unionization of women, and also by the fact that the vast majority of union officials are white and male. This failure on the part of the workers' movement in general has left it weak and divided.

But the women's movement also has played into this weakness, and has been responsible in part for its own isolation from those forces which can insure victory. First the struggle has tended to be led by women from the middle class, who have shown a consistent blind spot towards the problems of the masses of working women.

Large sections of the movement have focused more on the needs of women in leadership or in professional occupations, only paying lip service to the needs of working women and women on welfare. Problems such as occupational hazards in the factory, the need for affirmative action to insure upgrading into higher classifications, the need for affordable, quality childcare, decent housing, and so on, have been slighted.

Most significantly, the broad organized women's movement has failed to take up the special needs of minority women, thereby isolating itself from the powerful movement of oppressed minorities. Throughout our history Black and Spanish-speaking women have played a leading role in organizing unions, demanding decent housing and schooling for their families and rebelling against a system determined to crush them. Because today's women's movement is predominantly white and middle class to a large extent, explains its inability to successfully resist capitalism's attacks on women.

Both the strengths and weaknesses of the broad women's movement were well illustrated by the historic massive march for the extension of the ERA deadline on July 9, 1979. The march received the support of portions of the workers' movement as well as major civil rights organizations. These endorsements reflected the positive shift in focus by such organizations as NOW towards building alliances and developing grass roots organizing.

However, the composition of the march was a graphic illustration of the road left to travel. While some labor and civil rights leaders were there, and large numbers of working women did march, the event was strikingly white, with relatively few men present. The demands of the march were kept narrow by the leadership, which failed to link the struggle against Bakke with attacks on the ERA.

The anti-Bakke demonstration was a further testimony to the weakness of the alliance the organized women's movement has with other movements. While numerous groups have made statements in support of affirmative action and even filed support briefs, they have been visibly absent from mass mobilizations and organizations formed to fight the attacks. This absence is most distressing if we

understand the particular importance of affirmative action for oppressed minority women.

The ability of the organized groups to mobilize large followings in the defense of women's rights has already been demonstrated. The direction now for the movement for the democratic rights of women is clear, and important steps have already been taken which reflect that understanding.

The desire to build alliances with the workers movement and with civil rights

groups has begun to be put into practice in a meaningful way. If these links are to develop real strength, the women's movement must take up as central the needs of working class and minority women. And as such a program becomes real, and as the three movements see their goals as directly linked with each other, the women's movement itself will gain the invaluable leadership of conscious working class and oppressed minority women — a leadership which will insure the anti-capitalist understanding necessary for victory.



THIRD ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

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Philadelphia Workers' Organizing Committee

Who We Are



of the few — the handful of monopolists — by the rule of the many — the working people.

The masses of people in the US have always fought back against exploitation, and today the movements opposing the monopolists are growing rapidly in numbers and in intensity. What is lacking is the political leadership which can bring these movements together, deepen the consciousness of the people, and build today's struggles into a decisive and victorious revolutionary assault against Capital.

To answer this need we must have a vanguard party of the working class, based on its most conscious and committed partisans, rooted in the mass movements of all sectors of American people, and equipped with the political understanding capable of solving the strategic and tactical problems on the difficult road to revolution.

The PWOC seeks, along with like-minded organizations and individuals throughout the US, to build such a party, a genuine Communist Party. The formation of such a party will be an important step forward in the struggle of the working class and all oppressed people to build a new world on the ashes of the old.

The PWOC is a communist organization, basing itself on Marxism-Leninism, the principles of scientific socialism. We are an activist organization of Black and white, men and women workers who see the capitalist system itself as the root cause of the day-to-day problems of working people. We are committed to building a revolutionary working class movement that will overthrow the profit system and replace it with socialism.

We seek to replace the anarchy of capitalist production with a planned economy based on the needs of working people. We want to end the oppression of national minorities and women, and make equality a reality instead of the hypocritical slogan it has become in the mouths of the capitalist politicians. We work toward the replacement of the rule

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