

THE WOMAN QUESTION IS A CLASS QUESTION

March 8th is International Working Women's Day. This day commemorates the struggle of working women against exploitation and oppression the world over. International Working Women's Day originated in NYC in 1909 when women garment workers demonstrated and fought for better working conditions, shorter hours, benefits, and higher wages.

"During the rise of industry just before WWI--when this country rose from the stage of capitalism to expanding as a world-wide system of imperialism--the sweatshops were filled with thousands of women working under intolerable conditions in basements, broken-down tenements, no ventilation, working as many as 14-20 hours a day. These being the conditions, in NYC's east side, there occurred a tragic fire at the Triangle Waist Co. where 146 women were burned to death. In response to this and other such tragedies and conditions, tens of thousands of women organized strikes demanding an end to oppressive herd-like conditions, against child labor, for shorter work days and higher wages."

("In Commemoration of International Women's Day," Palante, Vol. 1, No. 4)

We have seen historically that working women in the struggle against the particular oppression of women have never divorced the struggle of women into a separate movement but have seen it as part of the overall class struggle, a struggle of the working masses against capitalism. (This has been evidenced, for instance, by the role played by Chicano and Mexican women workers in the struggle for unionization against Farah.)

"Women have always been oppressed, but the question of women as a major social problem was raised only under capitalism. It forced women to step out of their houses and, as there is nothing sacred under capitalism, it made a market commodity of women who became an object of bloody exploitation. Women being twice oppressed under capitalism, became doubly exploited. Under these circumstances the problem of women

could not but emerge as one of the most pressing problems of the time."

("The Struggle Against Revisionist Tendencies in the International Women's Movement," Problems of the Struggle for the Complete Emancipation of Women, State

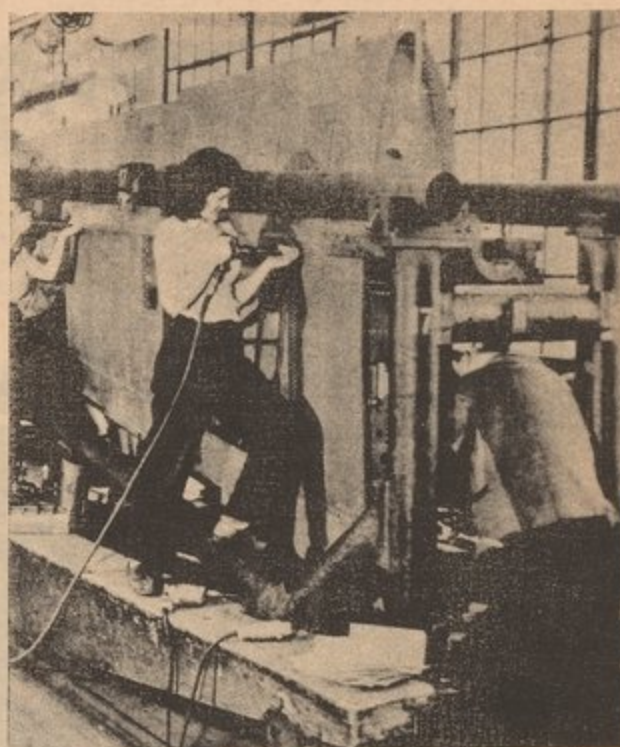
University of Tirana, Albania, 1973)

REVISIONIST AND FEMINIST LINES WITHIN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The women's movement in the U.S. has been led mainly by petty-bourgeois and bourgeois women. Contrary to the Marxist position that the historical roots of women's oppression go back to the emergence of private ownership and classes, the women's movement has taken on a feminist character--that is, seeing the principal contradiction as between men and women and not between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This line thus diverts the women's movement away from the main objective, socialist revolution, which is in the interests of the working class as a whole. The feminists then conclude that the struggle of women is for "equality" with men, glossing over the class question, thus leading to pure reformism (such as support for the ERA, which we will get into further).

The revisionists, on the other hand, spearheaded by the "CP"SU and their puppets, the "C"USA, have abandoned the Marxist-Leninist principles on the woman question, as they have done on all questions. Their anti-Marxist lines have manifested themselves in keeping women away from production and confined to household duties, and by diverting the attention of women away from the struggle against imperialism.

On May 12, 1968, for instance, the "Nedelya," a Soviet weekly, stated that the majority of women should be removed from production work, that "at the present economic stage it would probably be more reasonable to leave women free at home to look after their children." They try to justify this by saying that the Soviet economy has greatly raised the family status, so that women should no longer take part in production. The revisionists say that the main task of a woman is to rear children and take care of herself since she is a delicate creature, a symbol of beauty destined to be an "ornament" for man or a means to fulfill his desires. The revisionists state further that the Soviet



Trabajadoras en una factoria durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial

economy no longer needs women's productive ability. They stated in their "Nedelya" magazine, "As may be seen, during the first decade our country demanded the participation of women in production. Today, however, this necessity does not exist."

The Soviet revisionists also try to win women in their country and internationally to the bankrupt theory of "detente." Claiming that the nature of imperialism has changed and that wars are no longer inevitable, they push the slogans of "peaceful coexistence," "enlarged community," "love for our children," "leave aside what divides us and unite around what unites us." They are trying to cover up and deny the deep contradictions of the present epoch and wipe out any distinction between the oppressed and exploited and the oppressors and exploiters, while at the same time masking their own frantic preparations for war with the U.S. imperialists. Referring to the "CP" USA which echoes the Soviet revisionist line, we said last year:

"In looking at the line of the CPUSA(R), we have a prime example of the liquidation of the class content of the women's struggle for democratic rights. In doing this, they negate and want to gloss over the class struggle going on throughout the world, the sharp class antagonisms between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the struggle of the peoples of the world against U.S. imperialism and Soviet social-imperialism." ("In Commemoration of International Women's Day," Palante, Vol. 1, No. 4)

At the meeting of the Council of the Women's International Democratic Federation in 1962, the Soviet Revisionists came out in the open and attempted to divest the WIDF of its political character, struggling that it should not maintain a clear revolutionary stand towards international events, that it should not support national liberation struggles. The comrades of the People's Republic of Albania describe the revisionists' actions in this way:

"At the meeting of the Council of the WIDF (held in Berlin in 1962) they pretended that women 'do not know what imperialism is,' that it is 'an abstract notion,' that the fight against imperialism 'kept women away from the WIDF.' Nin Popova from the Soviet Union, said at this meeting, 'We should use such language that could attract women into the WIDF and not frighten them away.' 'In the documents of the Federation during these years they speak of creating from the present time a world without arms, without armies, without wars, they speak against any struggle and preach about peace, nourishing all kinds of pacifist illusions about imperialism,' ('The Struggle Against Revisionist Tendencies in the International Women's Movement.'")

The revisionists have treated the problems of women in the spirit of bourgeois pacifism. They publish magazines where they promote extravagant fashions, cosmetics, and advertisements.

We can see from all the above that these anti-Marxist views on the question of women represent nothing but the interests of the bourgeoisie and have nothin common with interests of the working class as a whole and women in particular.

MARXISM-LENINISM ON THE WOMAN QUESTION

The feminist and revisionist views on the question of women have nothing in common with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism which teaches us that the problem of women and their complete equality with men can only take place through socialist revolution. Engels has stated that:

"Women's emancipation, her equality with man, is impossible and will remain so as long as women stand aloof from social production work and confine themselves to private household work. The emancipation of women will be achieved only when they will take part in produc-

tion on a wide scale, on a social scale, and when they will devote only part of their time to household work."

(Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State)

Within the communist movement today, we can see clearly those opportunist organizations like the OL who have an opportunist line on the woman question and support the ERA. The ERA is an attack on working women, which then in essence, is an attack on petty-bourgeois women also. This bill, promoted by the bourgeoisie, is geared towards upper petty-bourgeois and bourgeois women. The bill puts women on a "totally equal" footing as men, negating the differences that do exist in the real world. This bill, under the guise of "reform," takes away the rights that working women have fought for and won--the right to maternity leaves, day care, equal pay for equal work, etc. Some aspects of the bill state that because men do not get pregnant, women should not have maternity leave, thus forcing women to go on welfare and stay home. Other provisions of the bill say that if a woman has the same job as a man and cannot physically carry out the work, she should be fired, that in case of divorce, the man does not have to provide alimony or child-support, again forcing the woman onto welfare.

This bill is being pushed and supported by the feminist women's movement. This is not to say that there are not certain just reforms that must be supported by communists, such as equal pay for equal work, free day care, free maternity care and delivery services, etc. But we must use these reforms to aid our revolutionary activity. This bill must be defeated, but it is not enough to leave it at that. As Marxist-Leninists we have the responsibility to put forward our program of how we will fight against exploitation and oppression of women.

In keeping with this, the PRRWO raises the following demands: jobs, not imperialist war, equal pay for equal work; full unionization of women; end discrimination in hiring, firing and promotion based on nationality, sex and age; end forced overtime and speed-ups; end forced sterilization; an end to testing of birth control on oppressed nationality women; end the triple exploitation of oppressed nationality working women; free child care services maternity leaves with compensation pay and free maternity care and decent delivery services; the right to free abortion; fight the fascist, degenerate, sexist and chauvinist culture; no prosecution and an end to slander of women who defend themselves against rape; the right of women to bear arms.

CONCRETE MANIFESTATIONS OF EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION OF WORKING WOMEN AND OPPRESSED NATIONALITY WOMEN

Within the framework of women's oppression is the triple oppression of oppressed nationality women (class, nationality, and sex). Take unemployment for example. The unemployment rates put forward by the bourgeoisie in April 1975, for instance, (which we know are underestimated) showed the following. The unemployment rate nationwide for women (9.4%) is higher than for men (7.4%). The unemployment rate for oppressed nationality women was 13.5%, almost double that of women in general. Another example; a recent bourgeois study of the Puerto Ricans in New York, "A Socio-Economic Profile of Puerto Rican New Yorkers" --July 1975, reports in fact, that the participation of Puerto Rican women in the labor force has declined sharply. From 1960 to 1970, the citywide rate of women in the labor force moved up to 41% while the rate for Puerto Rican women fell from 38% in 1960 to 27% in 1970. From these facts, we can see the particular exploitation of both white and oppressed nationality women workers.

In addition, women of the oppressed nationalities have been used as guinea pigs in the area of birth control; the first birth control pill being tested on Puerto Rican women. Sterilization has also been used extensively in Puerto Rico, leaving one out of every three Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age sterilized. And we have countless examples of forced sterilization of Black women in this country, when it wasn't necessary. Forced abortions have also been used most specifically on women of oppressed nationalities, leading to deaths of women who had medical problems and could not have abortions.

TASKS OF COMMUNISTS

The central task of communists is to build a party in this country, a true Bolshevik party that will lead the masses to the destruction of the bourgeois state and to the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the present period, political line is the key link in party building, that is the application of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of the U.S. Our main tactical tasks, which must be carried out simultaneously, have been outlined--that is, to unite all genuine Marxist-Leninists and win the advanced over to communism, as we hammer out the party's basic line and program of action. We have also outlined the theoretical tasks for this period, the answering of a number of burning class questions--the woman question is one of these. The

continued on pg. 8

WOMEN

continued from pg. 6

struggle over the party's line and program includes the struggle for the correct resolution of the woman question, including opposition to the petty-bourgeois feminist women's movement.

We must see the relationship of women to the present period of party building that we are in. We must expose and defeat opportunists like the OL who, at a recent meeting in New York for the building of a International Working Women's Day coalition, said that "This has nothing to do with party building" to justify their

opposition to raising the burning class questions of the day to working women at the planned rally. They thus echoed the revisionist line of the "CPSU" on this question. We must train women as leadership. We must draw out advanced women through interjecting Marxism-Leninism into the women's movement, hooking up the struggle of women to the overall struggle of the international proletariat against U.S. imperialism and Soviet social - imperialism. The woman question is a class question and a component part of proletarian revolution.

From speech by P. M. MASHEROV, Candidate Member of the Politbureau of the CC CPSU, at the opening ceremony of the International Meeting of Women in Minsk

(Bourgeois line on the woman question from Soviet Woman, November 1975)

I recall having read some years ago an article in the "Literaturnaya Gazeta" under the impressive headline "Take Care of Men" by the Soviet demographer B. C. Urfanis. It aroused quite a stir, though far from all accepted the article's pronounced pathos. No man, naturally, would ever reject being cared for. But, frankly speaking, the more farsighted among them realize that it is much more important to take care of our women, their health and strength, and to cherish such unique qualities of theirs as femininity, gentleness, delicate and subtle perception of the world, the inherent kindness and responsiveness of a mother's heart.

If a child is not given enough love and kindness which, as you know, one usually gets from one's mother, such an individual can hardly be expected to undergo harmonious development. This, then, is a social problem and one of the most important aspects in the realization of our communist ideals.

This is also connected with one more aspect, that of a moral and psychological character. For even when enjoying equal

rights and material independence, a woman's well-being, her mental and physical balance, self-confidence depend to a very great extent on men's attitude to her at work, in social life and in the family. In our educational work, in the activities of our trade unions, the Komsomol, the school and labour collectives, we attach great importance to this aspect of the problem. Our socialist society is guided by the principle, that man's constant concern, respect and help are essential to woman everywhere and always.

Woman with her warm, loving heart and gentle hands has been destined by Nature for goodness, for creation, for peace. Peace, won by the Soviet people at the cost of enormous sacrifices, the gigantic scope of our plans for the future—all this makes peace especially desirable, and war and aggression especially hateful and intolerable to our people. The peoples of the Soviet Union—men and women alike—wholly and unanimously approve and support the peaceful foreign policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government.¹¹