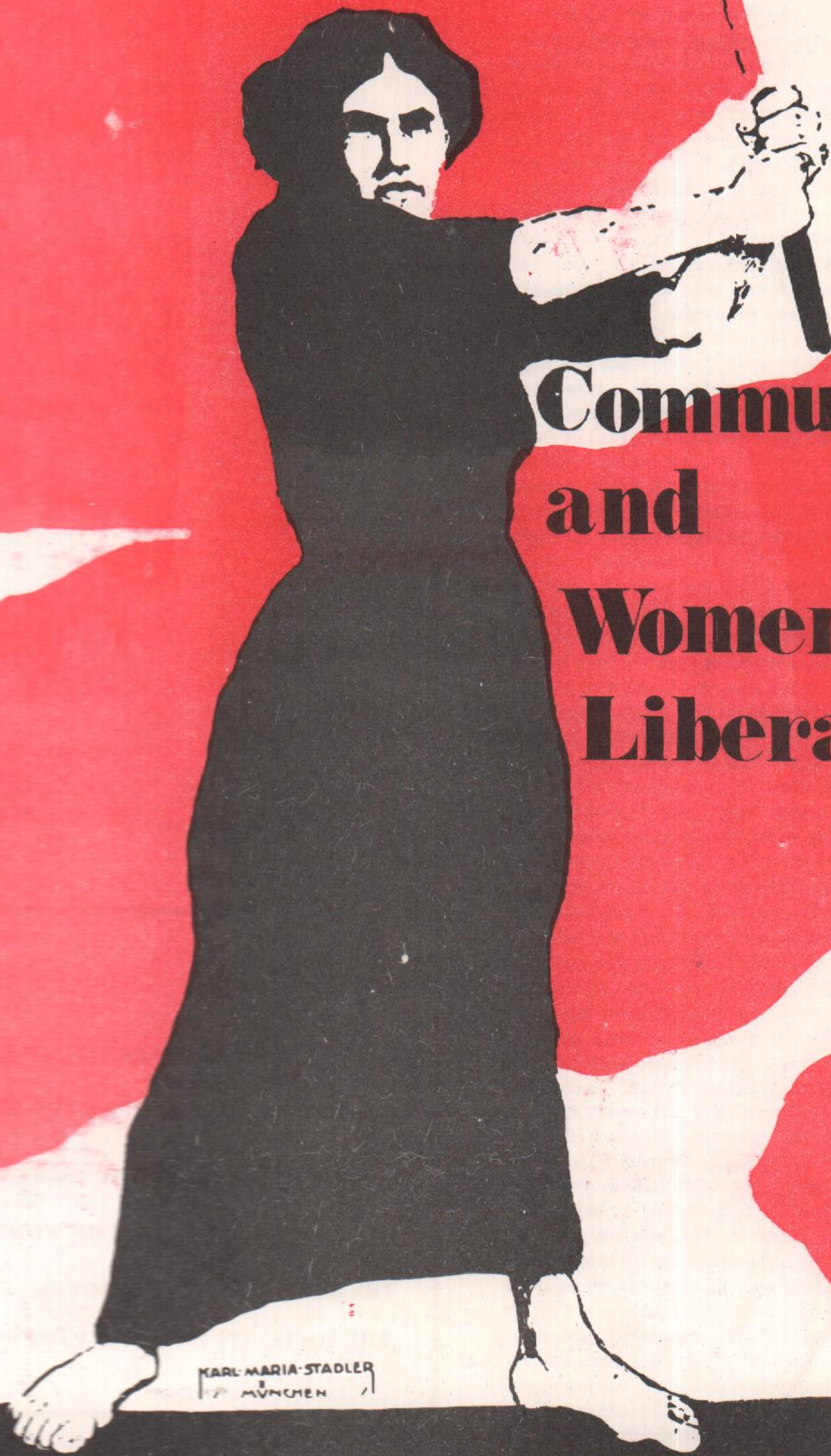


**workers  
power**



**Communism  
and  
Women's  
Liberation**

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MÜNCHEN

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## INTRODUCTION

Faced with mounting attacks on the rights and living standards of the working class, and in particular on working class women, women militants find themselves in urgent need of a new direction and new politics. In this collection of material most of which was previously published in *Workers Power* journals, we argue that only revolutionary communist politics can provide a way forward, developing the policies and forms of organisation which can serve not only to defend existing rights, jobs and welfare provision, but are also capable of achieving the cause of women's liberation.

Several key features of such communist politics will be found throughout the pamphlet. First, the impossibility of women's liberation being achieved within the capitalist system, which is explained in the document 'Communism and Women's Liberation'. This is vividly demonstrated in the current period, as employers and the government try to save their system at the expense of the working class: it becomes clear that the right to a job, to decent health care, to abortion and so forth cannot be guaranteed. The resources necessary to ensure the liberation of women through the abolition of domestic drudgery can only be provided by a society where the economy is planned and controlled by the working class. Our 'Action Programme for Women' therefore, includes demands around which women can unite to defend existing conditions, demands for basic legal and political equality but also provides the means to end the material basis of the oppression of women.

A second theme running throughout the pamphlet is the need to build a working class women's movement. We oppose the feminist strategy of forging an alliance of women of all classes. Although bourgeois women are oppressed as women, their overriding interests are the same as the rest of the ruling class—to save the capitalist system. In rejecting an all-class women's movement we have learnt from the experience of the working class women's movements earlier this century and from the work of communist women leaders, such as Klara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai, who vigorously opposed the feminists of the day. Those feminists argued that working class women should join the bourgeois led movements for suffrage and equality and did not need their own organisations independent of such a leadership.

The experience of this period was summed up in a resolution passed by the Communist International in 1921, which we reprint here. Today, we have no mass revolutionary communist party capable of immediately building a communist women's movement. We have to fight to rebuild a mass movement of working class women by uniting in action with all those prepared to fight for it. The core of such a movement will be women organised in the trade unions and workplaces who have the necessary strength to build it and hold it together.

Thirdly, we argue that such a movement cannot be built in isolation from the rest of the working class and its struggles. The real allies of working class women are not bourgeois women, but working class men: the working class is the only force capable of destroying the system which exploits and oppresses it. This means the hostility, prejudice and patronising attitudes of male trade unionists has to be challenged, so that the working class can mount a united opposition to ruling class attacks so that men and women can organise together to smash the capitalist system. The main enemy of women's liberation within the working class are the reformist leaders who want to maintain the present system and will therefore try to sabotage attempts by women workers to organise themselves. If these leaders are to be prevented from betraying the movement, the working class needs not only rank and file trade union organisation and a working class women's movement, but a revolutionary communist party whose clear aim is the destruction of capitalism.

The material in this pamphlet draws on a rich communist tradition—which must be rediscovered by a new generation of revolutionary communists. It draws on the experience of *Workers Power's* work in the trade unions, in campaigns like the *Working Women's Charter* and for abortion rights. It is for this reason that we reprint it.

# THE CAPITALIST CRISIS: working women first on the firing line

There should be no doubt about the seriousness and extent of the attacks currently being launched by the ruling class. Jobs, especially women's jobs, are being cut in both private and public sectors, the cutbacks in health and social services mean that work which women were previously paid for, like caring for the sick and young now has to be carried out unpaid in the isolation of the home. Patrick Jenkin—Tory Minister for Health and Social Security—spelt out the Tory Government's intentions clearly when he declared:

*"I am convinced that a mother is by far the best person to look after her young children."*

With nursery and welfare services cut back the Tories are moving to restrict the rights of those women who manage to hang on to their jobs. The Employment Bill with which the Tories intend to shackle the unions, contains provisions which severely limit the protection of individual working women. It will help to make Jenkin's dream come true... if we don't stop it.

Despite the talking out of the Corrie anti abortion Bill, abortion rights remain under threat and facilities minimal.

These are not temporary or unusual measures which we can expect to be reversed when things 'get back to normal'. These are the normal responses of capitalism to its own inevitable problems. Ensuring that women's first duty is seen as being that of housewife and mother, capitalism (which uses women workers as a source of cheap labour to be shunted in and out of the workforce as profit requires) is able to make sure its labour force is produced and serviced with meals, clothes etc on the cheap, in the home, and is also provided with a cheap extra labour force made up of women.

This has been clearly demonstrated in the period since the Second World War; at the end of the War, women were thrown out of paid production work and the facilities such as communal laundries and nurseries were withdrawn. As capitalism expanded and a new labour shortage developed, women were drawn into the workforce again but most of the jobs were low paid. (By 1968 women still earned less than half the average male wage). A large number of jobs were part time and job security was precarious—for instance, women engineers in Birmingham in the period 1959 to 1966 suffered a redundancy rate three times that of their male colleagues. Employers and government alike were keen to maintain the oppression of women through their position in the family. The level of facilities provided in the war years was never reached again, all the 'liberal' supporters of the welfare state like child care expert John Bowlby and educationalists such as Newson were keen to point out that the reforms they proposed were aimed at supporting the role of the family and the position of women as mothers first and foremost.

As the period of capitalist growth came to an end in the 1970s, and sharper crises re-emerged, the use of women as a reserve army of labour became even more apparent. Certainly, women's employment overall continued to grow—between 1974 and 1978, total female employment rose by 145,000

while the number of men at work fell. But this expansion was only in the state and 'service' sectors—clerical work for instance—in manufacturing industry, particularly during slump, women's jobs have been the first to go. In the recession period of 1974-5 women were thrown out of work at twice the rate of men. Part-time workers have been particularly hard hit: between 1974 and 1979 in electrical engineering there was a 40% job loss for women part-time workers, compared to male workers loss of 5%.

The prospects for women workers in the 1980s are even worse. Cutbacks in the public sector combined with changes in technology affecting clerical workers means there will be no cushioning affect. Between 1974 and 1978 the official rate of unemployment amongst women rose three times as fast as amongst men. The defence of each and every job is essential.

Just as the Tories are consciously fuelling the recession and attacking trade union rights, so they are consciously leading the drive to force women back into the home.

They have to bolster the importance of the family, so central to bourgeois ideas. Women's large scale entry into the workforce, the rise in militancy and consciousness meant that a lot of traditional assumptions began to break down. Even a magazine like 'Woman's Own'—not usually noted for its radicalism—has in the last few years published surveys showing a huge number of women, officially counted as housewives, are actually in search of work and of child care facilities. 70% of parents of under 5s want increased provision. But Jenkins ideas are part of the predominant and prevailing ideology—that of the bourgeoisie. There is every danger that his ideas will strengthen their hold as ruling class propaganda continues and as jobs become scarcer—making the 'Women Out First' solution seem an attractive option to trade unionists, and particularly to the labour and trade union leaders.

It is important to remember that it was not the Tories who started the attacks on women workers and housewives, or who renewed the propaganda for 'traditional' ideas. In this, as in so many other ways, the last Labour Government paved the way. Before the May 1979 election, we wrote in Workers Power Paper No 6 assessing Labour's record:

*"Although Labour's Act established the principle of equal pay for equal work, women's average earnings remain only 63% of men's. On equal opportunities, although the number of women at work has risen this is largely due to an increase in chronically low paid part-time working. In every economic down turn women are expelled from production much faster than men. In 1974-5 the rate of unemployment among women rose twice as fast as that of men. The real number of unemployed women remains hidden because many do not register.*

*The promised improvement in training opportunities for girls has vanished as proper apprenticeship schemes have contracted, replaced by inadequate job programmes to disguise youth unemployment.*

*What of the promises of better social services for women?*

*Savage public expenditure cuts have closed hospitals, ended nursery expansion before it had hardly begun, prevented much needed expansion of ante- and post-natal care and the building of out-patient abortion clinics. Many jobs held largely by women in the health and education sectors have been axed or converted into insecure temporary or part-time posts. With hospital closures the burden of caring for the elderly and the sick increasingly falls upon women. Equal pay and opportunities are a hollow mockery when nursery and after-school provision is missing."*

The Labour Party's leaders work within the constraints of capitalism and are committed to maintaining it. They share the same basic assumptions as the Tories. Remember Callaghan's 'family man' election campaign and his proposal for a Ministry of the Family! The reforms they introduced came only as the result of intense pressure from women trade unionists and activists. When the bosses cannot afford those gains won in struggle and dictate an attack on women's jobs, wages and rights they will take back with one hand what they gave with another. Remember it was a Labour Government that started the cuts in social and welfare spending.

Because reformism does not challenge capitalism but only objects to its worst excesses, such ideas can even be easily adapted to give a radical gloss to the attacks through supporting 'the working class family' developing 'community care' and so forth.

Of course, now they are back in opposition, we can expect a growing pretense from these leaders that they are really on the side of the oppressed. This comes particularly from the left of the party. But where were these Labour stalwarts when Corrie's Bill got its second reading? Large numbers even voted for a reduction in the time limit on abortions during the third reading, using the excuse of moderating the Bill. Left leaders like Benn can now be found on platforms like the National Abortion Campaign rally in February 1980, full of rhetoric, but unwilling to lead the campaign for a three-line whip to enforce Labour Party policy against restrictions and for legislation for abortion on demand. No trust must be put in these fair weather friends.

But despite the current Tory attacks, despite the teachery of the Labour leaders, the basis for a fightback exists. The unprecedented rise in women's employment brought with it a new militancy, awareness and increased expectations. Women now constitute approximately 42% of the workforce. One result of this was the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement based largely on better paid white collar women workers and students demanding equal opportunities. Another was the growth of trade union membership and struggle amongst working class women. In 1962 17.5% of the total affiliated membership of the TUC were women; by 1978, the figure had reached 28%. From the 1968 Ford Sewing Machinists strike onwards, the movement for equal pay, against low pay and for trade union rights developed apace, affecting previously non-militant sections such as clothing workers in Leeds, the night cleaners, black women at Imperial Typewriters and Heathrow Airport. In the 1974-76 period especially, a series of important struggles took place around the implementation of equal pay, the implementation of the full £6 under the Labour Government's pay policy, and against the growing number of redundancies. During the last year, many similar small disputes occurred, for instance, the revolt of women against appalling wages and conditions in unorganised workplaces that produced the long and bitter unionisation battle at Grunwick and then continued at Chix in Slough. Women workers were involved in the public sector disputes, engineering strike and they played a major role in the national steel strike.

In all these struggles, women workers have come up against tremendous problems: the difficulty of organising because of the double burden of work in the workplace and at home, lack of cooperation or hostility from their husbands, opposition from fellow trade unionists and most particularly from the trade union leaders. These difficulties are reflected in the level of participation of women in the unions and positions held by women. Women delegates to the TUC conference have continued to make up less than 10% of the total. NUPE, a union in which women make up 62% of the membership, has only 8

women on its executive of 26. Women, and their interests, remain grossly under-represented at all levels of union organisation.

Women militants are only too aware of the difficulties facing them in male dominated branches and in trying to get more involvement from fellow women, whose time is precious and who have never been encouraged to think of union business as their business. But something they have been less prepared for is the hostility of the trade union bureaucracy. Time and time again, when women have tried to unionise their workplace, they find the local union office indifferent and unhelpful. The list of struggles that the bureaucracy has undermined is endless.

The magnificent struggle for equal pay waged by women workers at Trico lasted for 21 weeks. It could have been won in a few weeks, but the women found that not only did male fellow trade unionists cross their picket lines, but the AUEW leadership, which made a great show of being on their side, failed to enforce proper blacking of the wiper blades.

Grunwick workers who received support for their picket line from trade unionists from all over Britain, nevertheless found their struggle sold out in the end as APEX leaders insisted on dropping the mass picketing.

Left wing leaders like Arthur Scargill were quite prepared to take the glory for supporting these women by bringing Yorkshire miners to picket lines. But in the crucial fight—fighting the APEX leadership and the failure of the TUC to support all-out blacking of Grunwick supplies—he was notably silent.

The women workers at Chix who fought for over eight months for union recognition found that the GMWU leaders were prepared to sell 28 jobs in return for recognition.

A survey of disputes in the last year tells the same story: at Trafford Carpets, the GMWU insisted on taking an equal pay case to ACAS and lost. At Selected Toys, Didcot TGWU officials insisted on a return to work, leaving victimised women outside. Looking back to the public sector battle during the winter of 1979, we saw the union leadership refusing to call into action much of the women membership who were in the lowest paid jobs and were amongst the angriest workers. Women workers in Hackney showed what could have been achieved by taking the conduct of the dispute into their own hands, sending out pickets to other parts of London and holding out for the full £60.

It is this kind of militancy that scares the pants off the union leaders. They are quite happy to get more women in the union—as long as women workers self activity does not challenge their own position or the status quo. They oppose, or try to divert and contain, all activity from the rank and file which provides such a challenge. They perform the same sort of role for capitalism as the labour leaders do (although they are more subject to rank and file pressure), acting as policemen for the bourgeoisie inside the working class. They are particularly frightened of women workers, not just because of sexist attitudes but because women workers so frequently take disputes further and faster forward than the bureaucrats can tolerate being less hidebound by traditional trade union methods. The experience of the last years show us that breaking through the barriers in the way of self organisation and militancy, and illusions that the union officials are on their side, is more difficult for women workers, especially since women usually bear the full brunt of any hardship involved in a dispute, they still have to run the home, provide the meals etc. But once those barriers are down—as the determination to fight on at Chix shows—women's militancy terrifies the trade union leaders.

It is no accident that the occupation tactic has been frequently used by women workers, from Fakenhams, through a number of the 74-75 struggles, as at Personna and during the last year in wage disputes—to prevent lock outs as at Reynolds in Manchester and by laundry workers in Stockport and Bolton during the public sector dispute.

All too often, we hear complaints from the union leaders, and unfortunately from union militants affected by sexist prejudice and years of traditional reformist thinking and practice, that women militants can't be trusted to run their own affairs because they are 'too inexperienced' or 'don't understand proper procedures'. Against this, we point out that the 'proper proced-

ures' usually mean delivering the conduct of the dispute into the hands of the sell-out merchants.

## BREAK THE HOLD OF THE BUREAUCRATS

How is this bureaucratic stranglehold to be broken? How are women workers to take their full place in the union and fight successfully for their interests? Not only does the women militant come up against sexist attitudes, she finds herself faced with a rigid conservatism, a desire to stick to accepted practices and a belief that change can come about only gradually. This infects men and women workers alike; in fact, women workers, often the most militant in struggle are as a result of their oppression the most conservative in normal times. Even more so working class women, isolated from the workplace who (with no collective experience capable of challenging the lies of the press and media) can often provide foot soldiers for press orchestrated anti-strike campaigns.

It is precisely to combat this situation facing women militants that we present our 'Action Programme for Women', around which a working class women's movement can be built.

The increased militancy of women workers in the 60s and 70s forced their wages up, but women remained in the lower paid jobs and are now in danger of losing what limited gains were paid. As a percentage of men's earnings, women's earnings reached a high point in 1976 under the impact of the struggles around Equal Pay, threshold payments, and the £6 limit—hourly earnings in 1976 for full time women workers were 78% of men's. But by 1978 this figure had dropped back to 70%. This has led to certain sections of the women's movement notably feminists around the Communist Party, to criticise free collective bargaining as discriminating against women. Such ideas are reactionary. They would lead to suggestions that some sections of the working class should 'hold back' so that women can catch up. Trade Union bureaucrats and labour leaders often latch on to this 'fair deal for the lower paid' when they are appealing for restraint. Tory governments too use these divide and rule tactics. Any holding back by better paid and organised sectors only plays into the hands of the ruling class.

The demands around wages in our programme, by contrast, show a way of uniting the class. The demand for the minimum wage and for wage rises to be inflation proofed are ones which benefit the low paid but can be fought for by all sections. Included in the demand for the sliding scale of wages (wages to rise in line with inflation) is provision for committees of workers and housewives to calculate the real cost of living for workers, rather than using the phoney index of the government. This would be an important way of involving women workers and full time housewives in the day-to-day activity of unions and workplace organisation.

In the present period of rising unemployment, fighting for 'A Woman's Right to Work' is essential. 'Women Out First' solutions are not usually openly admitted or advocated by union activists—but are accepted in a disguised form by the shedding of part-time or temporary workers. In preparation, it is important to fight for the unionisation of such workers, like those on twilight shifts, the election of shop stewards to represent them, fully participating in shop stewards committees, the holding of regular meetings in work time, the enforcement of agreements treating twilight shifts as full shifts and extending full job protection to part-time workers. Our slogan of opposition to all redundancies—for work or full pay should include a fight for the guaranteed maintenance of existing employment levels before the introduction of new technology.

For women workers to fight successfully around such demands, thorough going change is needed in the unions and in methods of struggle. For instance, the trade union leadership sell-outs point to the need for rank and file control of disputes with elected strike committees, mass meetings, regular report backs and so forth. So often, the full participation of women in strike situations is difficult because of family

pressures. We have to demand the union concerned organise suitable creche arrangements, solidarity and defence from fellow trade unionists on 24 hour picket lines is important.

But women workers cannot hope to control the conduct of disputes unless they firstly win wider support, waging a long term battle in the unions for their interests. Our slogan of 'Open the Unions to Women Workers' is part of the wider battle to transform the unions into fighting organisations, wresting them from the hands of the bureaucracy. The idea of women's caucuses has grown in popularity on the left in recent years, but it can be wrongly used, drawing women away from the main body of the union and its concerns. This can result from the feminist perspective of limiting women's involvement to 'women's issues', and leads to ghettoisation. Nevertheless, Workers Power fully supports the idea of women's caucuses. They are necessary to build women's confidence and involvement, but rather than being limited to talking shops, we seek to make them fighting bodies committed to action.

We also fight for official measures of positive discrimination and official recognition of special bodies for women members; although the bureaucracy will attempt to make these bodies ineffective, we seek to make them centres for organising struggle.

Thus we support the setting up of special committees, with the aim of organising action in pursuit of women's interests and with direct voting representatives on union bodies at all levels and the right to submit motions to conference. In order to ensure such special committees can develop and that all women can become involved, it is necessary to build women's sections in every union, which have the right to hold their own conferences but which are a recognised part of the whole union. This, although women's sections were created initially in the craft unions to restrict the participation of women workers, Workers Power opposed the dissolution of the AUEW Women's Section, arguing instead for its full democratisation and integration into the union. Similarly, we argue for the transformation not abolition, of the Women's TUC, an increase in its powers and representation on the General Council, its opening to shop floor delegates.

Women's sections and committees should have direct and accountable representatives on leading committees, but for the meantime we defend the existence of the specially reserved 'statutory women' places as a necessary measure of positive discrimination.

Many Trades Councils now have special women's sub-committees, but in many areas these have been kept passive and powerless. They also tend to be dominated by white collar unionists. Workers Power argues that these committees should be open to workplace representatives and should be campaigning bodies taking up all aspects of women's oppression and exploitation, in particular having an orientation to manual women workers.

Positive discrimination bodies are furthest advanced in white collar unions such as AUEW TASS, ASTMS and NATFHE which have special advisory committees set up as a result of pressure from women militants. Here, our task is to fight against the bureaucratic control of these committees and make them policy making rather than merely advisory bodies. The large concentration of women workers in public sector manual unions and their growing militancy show that they will be important in building a working class women's movement, but centrally placed are women in manufacturing industry, traditionally ignored by both the women's movement and the left.

A working class women's movement based on the workplace and union, where the necessary power and organisation can develop, would draw in women in the home, breaking down their isolation. Workers Power advocates a concentration on the workplace, but this does not mean ignoring community based struggles, in which working class women can play a crucial part. Such struggles can provide a way for housewives to break through the stultifying isolation of the home; it should also be remembered that most workers of working age are both housewives and waged workers. Women on the Glandaff estate in Pontypridd in 1929, fought a successful and

militant battle over heating costs, drawing support from local trade unionists.

Building links between local unions, workplace organisations, and the community is essential if successful fights are to be waged against public expenditure cuts and rent rises. Fighting cuts committees can link together different struggles which would be often small or isolated—the retention of crossing attendants, keeping open a nursery class. They must also draw in union delegates from industry; industrial action will be needed to defend threatened services. Labour councillors have to be

put on the spot by these campaigns and forced to commit themselves to action to defend services and oppose rate and rent increases, to cancel the vast interest repayments that Councils make to the banks and finance houses. But these bodies should not be allowed to control the movement, otherwise they will stifle it and sell it out. Rank and file involvement must extend to women on estates, involved in nursery campaigns and so forth. Tenants committees should have street and block representatives so that the women responsible for the family budget keep control.

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# Women's Liberation and the Working Class

## Women's Oppression and Class Society

The systematic social oppression of women has its origins in a very early period of human development. Its roots lie however, not in some 'natural' or biological division between the sexes. There is no intrinsic connection between women as child-bearer and her unequal position relative to men. The reason for women's age-old condemnation to child-rearing, domestic tasks, and exclusion from control of all the key areas of society lies in the period when class antagonisms based on the emergence of private property broke up the primitive community. The male-dominated class societies or patriarchies seized from women the control of their own fertility, cast onto them the whole responsibility of childrearing (up to the age of 'manhood') and created a family within which women's productive labour was at the disposal of the 'patriarchs'. These basic features of women's oppression continued through the various modes of production - barbarism, slave-society and feudalism. Custom and later law sanctified and enforced the enslavement of women. In these societies the patriarchal family emerged as the basic production unit. In subsistence economy and petty commodity production the whole family unit organised productive labour, though in both agriculture, food processing and manufacture, women had specialised roles. The appearance of mercantile capitalism accentuated and developed this specialisation allotting to women whole areas of domestic manufacture.

Industrial Capitalism profoundly revolutionised the nature of human production and therefore the form of women's oppression. The family ceased to be the basic unit of production - being replaced by the capitalist factory and farm. The dynamic socialised production of capitalism broke up, with blind ruthlessness, the old form of the family. The skills gained in household work and in domestic manufacture, the super-exploitation and flexibility made possible by their oppression, made women an ideal major component of the workforce in emergent capitalism.

For the new proletariat, the family was restricted to the function of reproducing the workforce and reproducing labour power. Within this family, where husband, wife and

even the children from an early age were wage labourers, and where 'property' was restricted to the basic necessities for subsistence - important differences emerged with the family of the bourgeoisie, based as it was on the control of women's fertility necessary for the preservation of property rights. The proletarian household had a more 'communal' appearance. However, under this appearance of equality existed continuing factors of inequality - the insecurity and lower income of the woman proletarian, her intermittent condemnation to childbearing and child-rearing and the burden of domestic toil. Thus the proletarian household was and is partly a negation, partly an expression of the bourgeois family. That in the last analysis it is the bourgeois aspect which predominates is due materially to domestic slavery and ideologically to the fact that the ruling ideas in any epoch are the ideas of the ruling class. Under Imperialism, where a substantial upper stratum of the proletariat requires the income and security of a 'comfortable petit-bourgeoisie' - the features of the bourgeois family are greatly strengthened. This link with the bourgeoisie is *weakened* by women's presence in production, and by every reform tending towards socialising child-rearing and domestic toil, but it can never be finally severed under capitalism. However, capitalism's need to use women as part of the proletariat - as 'free labour' undermined the basis for systematic legal inequality, which had existed whilst the family was *the* productive unit. Thus during the great bourgeois revolutions which broke the economic and political fetters of capitalist production, and which proclaimed the 'Rights of Man' saw also the proclamation, at least as a democratic ideal, of the Equality of Women. The continuance of legal restrictions on women, their right to own and dispose of private property, their right to vote, hold state office, to marry, to divorce, to gain admission to education and the professions, to freely utilise all those methods available for control of their own fertility - were and are in clear contradiction to the proclaimed ideals of bourgeois democracy. The claiming of these 'equal rights' was, and is, the basis of the bourgeois women's movement. However, the bourgeoisie, once it had used democratic ideology to lead other classes in society against the feudal aristocracy and thereby achieved its own emancipation, turned to bolster its position as ruling class. It thus attempted to deny to subordinate classes, particularly the working class, the use of democratic liberties which might

assist the latter in its struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. Thus from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards the working class became the spearhead for all democratic struggles. This was no less true of the struggle for women's rights. Whilst a minority of bourgeois women, and larger numbers of women from the lower middle class organised to claim equal rights only the working class unequivocally embodied in its demands these basic democratic rights. The onset of the Imperialist phase of capitalism, with its tendency to militarism, Bonapartism, and Fascism, accentuated the role of the bourgeoisie as the enemy of women's rights. Conversely it underlined the fact that the only class whose objective interests commit it directly to the maintenance and extension of women's rights and whose class organisations possess the fighting strength to achieve this is the working class. Therefore we fight for each and every one of these basic democratic rights seeking to draw into this struggle the class organisations of the proletariat, utilising all the tactics of the class struggle and mass action.

### Capitalism's Systematic Oppression

However the emancipation of women cannot be achieved simply by the granting of Equal Rights. The roots of women's oppression under capitalism do not lie, as the bourgeois feminists claim, in political inequality. There is a basic contradiction between the formal democratic equality of women and the systematic social inequality to which the nature of capitalism condemns women. The social root of this oppression lies as we have seen in the condemnation of women to domestic slavery within the family. Women are condemned to the roles of child-rearer and principal performers of the labour necessary to reproduce labour power, cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping, care of the aged and in short, housework. Capitalism excludes this work from the system of productive labour. It is unable to permanently and systematically socialise it because a) its performance can never be made into productive labour ie a source of surplus value, and therefore would have to be paid out of a tax on surplus value and b) because capitalism is a crisis-ridden system and cannot permanently retain in production all those capable of work and women make up a (concealed) part of the reserve army of labour - the unemployed - this drain on surplus value would be crippling.

Women perform these tasks, within the framework of the family, for a subsistence received from the male proletarians' wage. As capitalism provides no adequate security outside the family, this institution appears a fortress in a world whose fundamental feature is insecurity. Capitalism's inability to socialise child-rearing and domestic labour commits it to presenting this specific historic form of the relationship between human beings enshrining the oppression and exploitation of women as the Natural Order of Things. The sexuality and labour of women is presented as *naturally* at the disposal of men. From this flows the hypocritical dual standard of Morality under capitalism - women's sexuality becomes not free expression of their personality but an *object* of men's pleasure. This involves a consistent psychological and physical degradation of women and an attempt via the church, education, culture, advertising etc to convince men that their superiority is inevitable and natural and convince women that they must submit to this. This results in the sexual stereotypes and the branding of sexual and social behaviour outside of these as abnormal, unnatural etc. It is the basis of the oppression of men and women gays and of the grotesque psychological traumas associated with the contradiction between the stereotypes and the reality of human relationships - from this flows the physical violence, rape, assault etc to which women are subjected.

Women are either excluded from social life, locked away in the domestic household, or where they are involved in social labour, they are directed into areas of work closely allied to the domestic economy and its skills. Thus 'women's work' is predominantly in the fields of retail distribution, clothing, catering, care of the ill and the aged, cleaning etc. Where women work alongside men in factories and offices, they tend to be restricted to the unskilled, semi-skilled and low

paid sectors. Their education and training is designed to reinforce and prolong this 'specialisation'. Above all the family is presented as the *centre*, the first responsibility of women, to which wage work is subordinated. In the isolation of the private household, women become the victim and the agent of dominant ideology of capitalist society. This is the source of women's tendency to conservatism, to their domination by the reactionary ideology of the church and the state.

### Women's Liberation and Socialism

For women to achieve full political and economic equality with men, the full socialisation of child-rearing and domestic toil and the equal involvement of women in social production is necessary. This is inseparable from the overthrow of private ownership in the means of production. Then and only then, will it be possible, on the basis of planned economy to systematically eradicate all the aspects of women's oppression, legal, economic and political. To initiate this process the seizure of state power by the working class armed and organised into workers councils and the suppression of the resistance of the exploiters is necessary. Tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat related integrally to the expropriation of the capitalists are the socialisation of domestic labour, the drawing of women into production and the involvement of women in political life at all levels. The revolutionary communist party, the trade unions and a mass working class women's movement must play the central role in rallying and educating women for these tasks, and in struggling against the backwardness of male workers. The liberation of women will not be finally achieved until the last vestiges, the last elements of 'superiority' or submission disappear in men and women alike - it is a task which will not be achieved 'at a single stroke' but will continue until the state and class disappear with Socialism and Communism.

But this means neither accepting oppression and exploitation in the interim, nor women waiting until the male working class liberates them by abolishing capitalism. Women, not struggling for their liberation, are not merely absent from the class struggle, they are a powerful factor fighting on the side of the bourgeoisie; at the most elementary level, in every strike, in elections etc. women unconscious of their own oppression are a force for inertia at best and for open reaction at worst. (eg the press-sponsored 'Cowley wives' the reactionary mobilisation of women in Chile etc.) Working class women are central to the struggle for the emancipation of both women and the working class - they are the most oppressed section of their sex and their class. Amongst women they have the most radical direct interest in the overthrow of the roots of their oppression in capitalism - they cannot be for long diverted into *restricting themselves* to equal rights, opportunities or utopian schemes for sexual or psychological liberation. In the working class, they have no aristocratic craft privileges, no comfortable skilled status and high wages to reconcile them to capitalism - yet this intense experience of oppression is not *enough* to locate working class women as the spearhead of the struggle. The working class is the first exploited class capable of ending all exploitation not only or not even because it is the most oppressed and exploited, but because capitalism itself organises it at the centre of socialised producing enabling it to become conscious of itself as a class, to organise against and overthrow the capitalists and reorganise production. Women form a part of the working class with precisely this potential. Though capitalism has never been able to draw *all* proletarian women into production, though it has been able to use women as a reserve army of labour, to be thrust back into the home in times of capitalist recession and crisis, women do form a vital component of the workforce and it is this section, partially released from the stultifying effects of domestic isolation who can act as the vanguard of all proletarian women. First, therefore, we turn to those sections of women workers organised in the trade unions.

### Women and Capitalism in Crisis

Capitalism is a crisis-ridden system from its inception. Imperialism increases the scale and depth of these



crises from which it can emerge only at frightful cost to the working class and oppressed peoples and strata - a cost paid in terms of unemployment, dramatic cuts in living standards and carrying the threat of fascist barbarism and war. In such periods the gains made by working peoples and the oppressed are savagely clawed back at the cost of untold misery. This occurs on one condition - that the working class leading oppressed peoples and strata is unable to resolve capitalism's crisis at the expense of the bourgeoisie by seizing state power and organising the economy to meet human need. After the second Imperialist holocaust, Imperialism was able, with the collaboration of the reformist Labour, Social Democratic and Stalinist Parties, to overcome the post war crisis and stabilise the metropolitan economies for over twenty years. Now however a new period of crisis has hit the major Imperialist economies.

The effects of periods of capitalist stability and crisis on women are profound. During the Imperialist wars (in 1914-18, 1939-45,) the military mobilisation of the male labour force necessitates the temporary waiving of the restriction of women to the home - public canteens, creches, laundries are provided. Women are admitted into engineering and skilled occupations normally reserved for men. The first Imperialist war was closely followed in Europe by a crisis and therefore by attempts to reverse the 'liberalising' tendencies of the war and its aftermath. The second world war was not followed by such a crisis - indeed it saw a dramatic expansion of the economy - an expansion on a scale that required the drawing of women into the labour force on what appeared to be a permanent basis. At the same time, the expansion of the production of domestic appliances, convenience foods and the various provisions of the welfare state released many women from domestic drudgery sufficiently for them to take part-time or full-time waged work. Educational expansion and the rapid growth of the number of white collar office workers expanded the opportunities for women from the working class and lower middle class. To facilitate women's entry into industry and commerce and to avoid the inconvenience to employers that unexpected pregnancies involved, the government encouraged and tolerated the wider availability of contraception and even abortion. Ideologically this was accompanied by a 'liberalisation' of the norms of bourgeois morality to divorce, job opportunity, pay etc. None of this was granted without organised pressure - from women and from the Labour Movement. But it was granted as compatible with capitalism's long term interest within a perspective of permanent expansion and boom.

The new period of crises on a world scale presents a sharp alteration of perspectives for the ruling class. Not the extension or even maintenance of reforms but their curtailment and contraction is now official policy. Incomes policy and inflation cut real wages. Cuts in public spending hit at housing, hospitals, nurseries and schools injuring women as workers through the loss of jobs in these services means heavy and heavier burdens in the home, caring for the young, the sick and the elderly. Unemployment strikes particularly sharply at women - often unorganised or weakly organised to resist redundancies. Women are losing their jobs twice as fast as men. Even in strong unions the 'first in last out' principle works to women's disadvantage, given their child-rearing breaks in employment. The attitudes of male trade unionists - 'women out first', 'women only work for pin money' often blocks the use of the full strength of the union to fight women's unemployment. The present extremely limited and circumscribed right to abortion is under constant attack and has become the focus of 'woman as mother' agitation from that fountain of obscurantism and women's oppression, the Catholic Church. Yet the last ten years has seen such a tremendous awakening and renewal of agitation amongst women. This has taken two forms - not organically connected - the Women's Movement and the involvement of working class women in trade unions and trade union struggles. The former has affected mainly lower middle class and white collar working class women and has centred its struggles on questions related to women's oppression via her sexuality. The latter has on the other hand been limited largely to

questions of equality of pay and conditions, unionisation and resistance to unemployment. An area of partial overlap is in the field of hospital and nurseries closures.

As we have seen, women in socialised labour outside the stultifying isolation of the home, have the potentiality for vigorous struggle: the Ford Machinists, the Leeds Clothing workers, the Night cleaners, hospital workers and Trico, have over the last years shown tremendous ferocity in struggle. These workers hold the key to the building of a mass movement of working class women.

If the onslaught of the ruling class against women engendered by the deepening crisis is to be resisted. If the working class is to mobilise to defeat the overall attack and mount a counter-offensive, both the women's movement and the trade unions cannot be left as they are - they need to be radically restructured and ideologically transformed. This will not be done by abstract theorising but by fighting to win working class women active in the trade unions, and socialist women active in the women's movement to a common Action Programme which links the fight against the attacks of today to the inseparably linked goals of the emancipation of the working class and women. To this end we have drawn up the outlines of what we consider forms the basis for such an Action Programme.

### The Women's Movement and Working Class Women

But a programme is nothing if it is not the rallying point for a movement - a strategy nothing without an army. It is essential to build around such a programme a Mass Working Class Women's Movement. How does such a movement relate to the Women's and Trade Union Movements of today? The women's movement of the 70s contains a whole spectrum of tendencies. Socially its strongest roots are amongst the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia. As a result both bourgeois Feminism and revolutionary communism are in a tiny minority within it.

There are two major tendencies in the Women's Movement in Britain today: Radical (or revolutionary) Feminism is explicitly anti-marxist in that it rejects the class struggle replacing it with a struggle by all women against patriarchy. Socialist-Feminism whilst it recognises the necessity for socialism to liberate women makes a number of fundamental mistakes. Firstly it accepts the integrity of the 'women's movement', i.e. of an all class alliance involving bourgeois and petit-bourgeois feminists. In fact the former are enemies and the latter unstable allies of working class women. Secondly, it is unwilling to orient centrally to working class women in general and to organised women in particular - mistaking this orientation for Economism; thirdly it insists on the political autonomy of this all-class movement, i.e. of its independence from the marxist class programme as embodied in a revolutionary party. Within Socialist Feminism there are therefore strong exclusionist tendencies with regard to the left groups. These tendencies are fuelled and exacerbated by the appalling record of some of these left groups, sexist attitudes, real economism etc., features which characterised groups like the SWR and IS (now SWP). The IMG (British section of the USFI) on the other hand has abandoned the Marxist position on women's liberation in the direction of espousing the 'political and organisational autonomy of the Women's Liberation Movement' is the abandonment of both the Marxist programme - justified on the excuse that the WLM is a 'social' rather than a 'political' movement - and an abandonment of proletarian women to an auxiliary role within it.

The attempt to either preserve the 'Women's Movement' as a whole as an ally of the working class or to develop socialist feminism as a 'class struggle' leadership of the Women's Movement is doomed to failure. Women are not as the IMG claim, an ally of the working class. Half the working class are women. Women are not a separate class like the peasantry, whose attachment to private property but hostility to feudal landowners makes them a potential ally, but not a part of the working class. Women - no less than men - are divided into classes and whilst working class women will support democratic rights fought for by bourgeois women

(provided they do not conflict with the immediate or strategic goals of the working class) they will not join in one movement with these 'enemy sisters'. Women from the petit-bourgeoisie or the petit-bourgeoisified intelligentsia are a different matter - these must be won to the programme of linked emancipation of the working class and of women, to orientate to and involve in working class organisation - parties and unions and to build a mass working class women's organisation. If feminism however socialist, whilst it clings to the idea of a non-class women's movement, is incapable of mobilising working class women, so is the perspective of 'women's trade unionism' or of a movement built on economic militancy alone, such as the SWP envisages. Trade unions are essential defence organisations for the working class under capitalism but divorced from politically class conscious leadership, they tend to restrict themselves to the 'more easily' organised workers and these tend to be skilled or semi-skilled *male* workers. Moreover under Imperialism a powerful and reactionary bureaucracy has established control of the unions, severely limiting and trying to extinguish democracy within their ranks. This bureaucracy has settled its social question via high salaries, permanency of office and integration to the lower levels of the capitalist state. Hostile to the overthrow of capitalism they are also hostile to the emancipation of women. All this makes the unions organisations which in their structure and in the attitudes of their officials *and their members*, mirror many of the sexist attitudes of male chauvinist bourgeois society. Mere involvement of women in trade union struggle or in the hidebound bureaucratic structures of the unions are incapable of substantially altering this situation.

If women are to join and play an active role in the trade unions to be fully involved in the struggle for their immediate demands and final emancipation, and those of the working class as a whole it is necessary to adopt a fighting strategy and specific forms of organisation to overcome the bureaucrats and transform the backward attitudes of male workers. Women in the trade unions must have the right to caucus separately at every level - not in order to split men and women workers but in order to work out their demands, plan their interventions in meetings, choose and prepare candidates for positions in the unions. This right to caucus must exist without detriment to women's full rights as trade unionists - too often women's sections or women's conferences including the Women's TUC have been used to isolate women, used as an excuse to abrogate their rights. Women's caucuses, conferences and the Women's TUC (which must be won from the bureaucrats' stranglehold, democratised by making its voting basis a lay delegates one) must have the right to present and prioritise their motions and resolutions to the appropriate TU body on which they should have an allocated representative, without prejudice to women standing for other posts.

Union meetings in worktime on full pay is a demand which is not only vital to women given their family commitments but will immeasurably strengthen union democracy and strength for male workers also. To achieve these aims unofficial caucuses must be built to fight for them. These women must work in the closest collaboration with any rank and file anti-bureaucratic opposition in the union. It is the duty of the latter to assist women to win the right to caucus, to support women workers' demands on pay, conditions etc. On the question of conditions, rank and file and women's caucuses must fight to commit the union to free creche facilities under shop steward and users control, to positive discrimination in favour of women in all apprenticeships, training schemes under trade union control.

#### **For the Rebirth of a Mass Working Class Women's Movement**

There is, in fact, a tradition of organisation of working class women independent of the bourgeois women's movement which has been obscured by the degeneration of the Social Democratic and 'Communist Parties' into reformism. Before World War One, the Social Democratic women's movement, influenced by the pioneer Marxist work of Engels and Bebel and led by figures like Clara Zetkin, stood on the left wing of Social Democracy, and played an

important role in opposing the war (whilst bourgeois feminists almost to a woman became rabid chauvinists). The same current later contributed to the founding of the Communist International and Communist Women's Movement. After the departure of the revolutionary working class women, the reformist Social Democratic women's movement, withered into a pale copy of the Liberal Women's Rights Movement.

The Russian Revolution, and the workers' state which it created, immediately granted women all the political rights so long promised, and so often withheld, by bourgeois society; freedom of divorce, abortion etc. It also systematically, within the objective limits of civil war, famine and economic devastation, set about releasing women from domestic slavery. Its gains here were necessary limited, but still placed it ahead of any capitalist state in the world. The triumph of Stalinist reaction put this process of liberation into reverse, the family was actively restored to its central function of reproducing labour power and surrounded by a 'socialist' halo. Restrictions on abortion were re-introduced, the role of motherhood glorified and gays persecuted. The world influence of stalinism within the workers' movement helped to blight and destroy the Communist Women's Movement, founded in the early 20's, so that by the Second World War, hardly a trace of it survived.

#### **THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY**

It is to this tradition of the German and Russian revolutionary working class women's movements that we look - not because we can slavishly copy all their positions and actions, but because they present an invaluable experience of working class women's leadership in the struggle for the emancipation of all women. It is also necessary to reassert the marxist positions developed in those movements against the capitulation of social democracy and stalinism to bourgeois positions on women. We fight today for the rebuilding of such a mass movement of working class women.

This mass working class women's movement must be rooted in the unions, in the workplace, but its fighting strategy must by no means be restricted to economic issues or to the sectional interests of 'working women' alone. Its programme must be one of struggle against all aspects of the oppression of women under capitalism - against all attacks on abortion and contraception rights, against the physical violence suffered by women, battery and rape, against all the effects on women of a capitalism in crisis, rising prices, rents, the closure of hospitals and nurseries etc. A working class women's movement would give a lead in these struggles. Such a movement would be involved to the hilt in all the mass working class organisations - Labour Party, Trade Unions etc.

Within this movement revolutionary communists should fight for their programme and for leadership against the reformists, feminists and centrists. But the movement should be organisationally independent, having its own democratically elected leadership. Revolutionary communists have nothing to fear from such democracy. To the reformists and centrists and 'Socialist Feminists' we say, 'Join us in the struggle for a working class women's movement - let us put the correctness of our politics to the test in action, in the struggles of, and alongside, working class women.' To women from today's 'Women's Movement' we say, 'You will find no tendency more intransigently dedicated to the struggle for women's freedom. We will not yield an inch to economism, to male chauvinism in the unions but, we insist, only the mass forces of working class women provide a basis for winning the final and complete liberation of women.'

For marxists a coherent strategy for the seizure of power by the working class - a programme - is inseparable from organised militants fighting for that programme and applying it tactically - a party. The question of women's liberation is itself an integral part of that programme and women communists an integral part of the party - both in its leadership and rank and file cadre. Such a party must fight

sexism in its own ranks, amongst militant workers and in the working class at large. To do this it must take special measures to strengthen and support women within the party and the class. The right to caucus, the provision of creche facilities etc. are vital to this end. Whilst these rights must be guaranteed, we reject absolutely the view that the democratic-centralist party is inimical to the full participation of women, that women must organise separately and exclusively 'their struggle' because they alone have subjective experience of their oppression. Whilst the latter is a vital component of working out strategy and tactics, women's oppression and its relationship to class society was not discovered by subjective experience alone (any more than was working class exploitation). It was, is, and will be analysed by scientific work for which the party as a whole is the necessary vehicle.

Since correctness, both in the struggle for women's liberation and for socialism, is verifiable only in practice, the practice of organised masses, party struggle, is vital. Thus, in a mass working class women's movement parties should openly struggle, subjecting themselves of course to the norms of democracy. Those groups who, on the pretext of non-sectarianism or respect for the autonomy of the Women's Liberation Movement, disguise their members as 'individuals', arouse only suspicion and mistrust. Therefore, we state openly and clearly our positions as a group, deceiving no one.

We fight for:

**A WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT and for a REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST TENDENCY IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT'**



For Working Class Power and Women's Liberation

# **An ACTION PROGRAMME for Women**

World capitalism has entered into a new and deep period of crisis. Twice within the last decade serious recessions have thrown millions of the world's workers out of employment. The intervening years between these recessions were not ones of boom and expansion but of relative stagnation and inflation, pressing hard on the real wages and on the social services of workers and their families. With renewed capitalist crisis, with the sharpening of the rivalries between the major powers has come an intensification of the struggles of the pauperised and cruelly oppressed masses of the Third World—the countries exploited by the major imperialist powers—the USA, the Western European states and Japan. Within the Imperialist countries themselves, the class struggle has attained new levels of intensity. The threat of a third world war—a holocaust which would dwarf the misery and destruction of the previous two, looms up before us. The bourgeoisie in every country is driven by its crisis to force the working class to pay the cost. It strives to claw back the gains made in the 50s and 60s, to create a massive pool of unemployed, to break the power of the trade unions and to reduce the share of wages and social services within the social product—to drive up the rate of exploitation, to boost profits.

Women, particularly working class women, both as housewives and as wage earners, feel the effects of this crisis with particular force subject as they are to a dual oppression—in the home and in the workplace. Capitalism attempts to deprive them of their jobs, to drive them back into the home to take on—unpaid—all the tasks of child rearing, nursing the aged, cooking and cleaning for the male work force, tasks which the economic developments of the preceding decades had partially lightened.

The renewed period of crisis has sharpened the crisis of the workers organisations—the trade unions and political parties. In the struggle to resist the bosses offensive the chronic inabil-

ity of the reformist bureaucracies to lead the working class to victory has become more and more obvious. The marxist programme for women's liberation is an integral part of the strategy for resistance of the working class as a whole, a strategy that urgently poses the question of working class power.

## **FOR A WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

The root of women's oppression under capitalism lies in her condemnation to the role of unpaid domestic labourer and child rearer within the family, a unit which whilst it is isolated from social production, nevertheless performs an indispensable function for capitalism—that of maintaining and reproducing the present and future work force. The primacy of the home, with its privatised and isolating effects excludes or severely restricts women's participation in social life, in work, in trade union or political activity. Her 'servicing' role to the predominantly male work force makes her 'the slave of a slave'.

However, capitalism also uses women as a secondary element within social production. Turning her child bearing and rearing role against her at work it condemns the majority of women to low paid, highly insecure jobs. They are encouraged to enter waged work as cheap and easily manipulated labour in times of crisis. Thus women form an easily concealed part of the unemployed—the reserve army of labour. Within production they are systematically super exploited and largely restricted to 'women's jobs'—i.e. jobs connected in some way with the caring and servicing tasks of the household.

On the basis of the privileged position of men within the home and in production and on the basis of the home's isolating effects on women arises an ideology (a set of ideas, attitudes and indeed the formation of the personality) which justifies women's 'inferiority'. Women themselves are the victims of this ideology and via child rearing are its agents. The family is the source of women's liability to conservatism, to being dominated and manipulated by husband, employer or priest. The oppression and exploitation of women is enshrined as the natural order of things—sanctified by church and state. Women's sexuality becomes a mere object of men's pleasure whilst her child bearing becomes a matter for the decision of state and the church. Hypocritical glorification of the role of wife

and mother conceals the sordid reality for women of chronic dependence on and exploitation by men, which on occasions turns into outright physical violence (wife battering, rape etc).

Yet because capitalism provides for no systematic security outside the individual home (even less for women than for men), this prison appears as a fortress against a hostile world. Capitalism, whilst it has freed women from many of the degradations of previous social systems, is incapable of fully liberating women, of giving real social equality.

Only socialism, where the productive forces are democratically planned, can organise collective responsibility for the domestic labour performed privately by women under capitalism. Only the socialisation of privatised domestic work and childrearing will release women from their centuries' old oppression and thereby lay the basis for them to achieve full equality with men. The utopian demand for wages for housework only serves to reinforce women's oppression in the family and hinder the struggle for women's emancipation.

The only class that can lead the struggle for socialism is the working class. Its most basic interests, the crisis ridden nature of capitalism which continually brings insecurity and the loss of previous gains, again and again drives it onto the road of a decisive struggle for power with the capitalist class. This despite the integration or betrayal of its leaders—sometimes for long periods. The historic interests of the working class lie in the overthrow of capitalism whose unplanned and chaotic production for profit presents an insurmountable barrier to the liberation of women from domestic slavery. A planned economy for human need is the material prerequisite for socialising child care and housework and drawing women into full and equal participation in all areas of social life.

Expanding capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s, anxious to exploit women's labour, was prepared (under pressure from women and the workers movement) to expand welfare and social services in order to enable women to take their place in the labour force.

That period is now over. Everywhere the employing class is devising and forcing through new measures to increase the exploitation of the working class. Capitalism, on a world scale, has dramatically increased the ranks of the unemployed, cut back on social and welfare spending, fostered divisions in the ranks of the workers movement in order to solve its crisis.

It is women workers who are being forced to bear the brunt of these attacks. Faced with shrinking markets and order books the employers are driving women out of the workforce. Women are losing their jobs twice as fast as men.

In order to direct public expenditure to more profitable ends the employers have systematically attacked social and welfare spending. Public spending cuts not only threaten the jobs of women workers they also force onto women the burden of caring for the sick, the old, and the young.

In order to solve their crisis the employers are seeking to drive women back into the home. The glorification of the family, of motherhood, myths such as 'A Woman's Place is in the home' and 'Women only work for pin money' are the ideological tools used to help achieve this. They have the added advantage for the employers in that they serve to fragment and divide the workers movement, often setting male labour against female labour in the face of unemployment and uncertainty.

Spearheaded by the Catholic Church the ideological offensive against women's rights and equality has sharpened dramatically during the last years of capitalist stagnation and crisis. A woman's right to control her own fertility — only very partially protected by existing legislation and provided for by a woefully inadequate health service — is under attack. Such attacks can only increase unless the reactionary offensive is defeated.

Women have fought back against these attacks. The Trico strike for equal pay, the leading role played by women in struggles against hospital closures show this to be the case.

They have struck, occupied, marched to defend their jobs and social service provisions. This militancy gives the lie to the claim that women are 'naturally' passive or indifferent to trade union and political struggle.

But the Trade Unions record of support for these struggles is lamentable. Here, as in the general class struggle the trade union official bureaucracy, has made its peace with capitalism.

The Trade Union leaders have refused to put the weight of the Trade Union movement behind struggles to protect women's jobs and rights. The Trade Union bureaucracy remains the entrenched enemy of the liberation of women within the labour movement.

But not only the official labour movement has failed women. Trade union branches, shop stewards committees still remain largely inaccessible to women workers. The demand for 'women out first' often raised in the face of threatened redundancy shows that the workers movement has not yet organised to prevent the employers solving their crisis by driving women back into the home.

But there is no solution for women in turning their backs on the workers movement. While women workers bear the brunt of the attack, unemployment, wage controls, declining social and welfare services are not simply women's problems. It is not only women workers who have seen their jobs and living standards cut by a treacherous Trade Union bureaucracy.

The rebirth of a broad movement of women struggling against their oppression, which dates from the late 60s was a tremendous step after decades of demoralisation and apathy. At the same time there appeared a new combativeness among working class women who started to join Trade Unions in larger and larger numbers. But the dominant ideologies within the women's movement has been Feminism and Reformist or Centrist socialism. But the strategy of feminism has been to gloss over the class differences amongst women in favour of building an 'all class' women's movement. This has resulted in the feminist movement restricting itself to utopian schemes for sexual or psychological liberation, and fighting for single issue reforms, turning its back on the struggles of working class women and the working class in general. Working class women are central to the emancipation of both women and the working class — they are the most oppressed section of their sex and their class. They alone have a radical interest in the overthrow of the roots of their oppression in capitalism.

We must build a working class based women's movement. Such a movement must base itself on those women best organised at work and in the Unions to lead a struggle, drawing in housewives to rank and file labour movement bodies, by building estate based women's committees of action around amenities, prices, rents and support for local Trade Union struggles, winning industrial support for women's battles in the factories and offices and on the estates. The backwardness of male workers, their traditional failure to support the struggles of women make it necessary for women to organise together at the workplace, on the housing estates to lay the foundation for a fighting women's movement. That women's movement must ensure 1) that the workers movement takes up and fights for women's demands; 2) that women gain the confidence to take the lead in struggles and to build unity in action with working class men; 3) that it fights alongside all those in the workers movement who are struggling to overthrow capitalist exploitation and oppression — to take the unions out of the hands of the Trade Union bureaucracy.

Such a Working Women's Movement must have a clear programme:

## OPEN THE UNIONS TO WOMEN WORKERS

The Trade Unions have not ensured the full participation of women workers in their organisations. Many women see Trade Unions as the exclusive domain of the male 'breadwinners'. This idea is reinforced by male Trade Unionists hostility to women workers. This has led to some women scabbing on many strikes and men scabbing on women's struggles as at Trico. For women with domestic commitments, union meetings held outside work

time with no creche facilities are impossible to attend. Therefore we must fight for:

- 1) Union meetings in work time and on full pay.
- 2) For the right of women to caucus in the unions.
- 3) For democratic women's sections in the Unions ensured of full rights to put resolutions guaranteed of full discussion in branches, districts and conferences.
- 4) Positive discrimination in favour of women as shop stewards and Union representatives.
- 5) Full Trade Union membership rights for unemployed women and housewives.
- 6) Trade Union organisation of homeworkers.
- 7) For the right of gays to caucus in the unions.
- 8) Creche facilities for pickets provided by the Union.

## FIGHT UNEMPLOYMENT

The employers have launched an attack on women workers. As workers who are not well organised or supported by male workers they are extremely vulnerable to redundancy. Part-time workers (the majority of them women) and 'twilight shift' workers are usually the first workers to be threatened, and often employed in increasing numbers to replace well-organised full-time workers.

The fight against redundancy is a fight to challenge the employers right to deploy labour and organise production as they choose. It necessitates the struggle to secure *workers control* of hiring and firing, of the speed and pace of work, of the length of the working day. We must fight for:

**A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO WORK** – for clear opposition to capitalism's attempt to solve their crisis by pushing women back into the home.

For the extension of full job protection to part-time workers.

Full protection of all existing jobs before new technology is introduced.

### AGAINST ALL WOMEN OUT FIRST 'SOLUTIONS'

It is especially important that these two demands are campaigned for at a rank and file level where demands for women out first are often voiced.

### AGAINST ALL REDUNDANCIES – CUT THE HOURS AND NOT THE JOBS

Work sharing under trade union control with no loss of earnings.

For immediate ban on all overtime, for a 35 hour week with no loss of pay to force the employers to take on more labour.

**OPEN THE BOOKS** – direct action to abolish business secrecy.

**DIRECT ACTION TO STOP CLOSURES** – occupation to seize all factories and plant in firms declaring redundancies. Occupation to demand nationalisation under workers control of all firms announcing sackings.

**FOR WORKERS SELF-DEFENSE** against inevitable attack and provocation on the picket line.

For solidarity with all workers in struggle.

## AGAINST THE CUTS

As unpaid domestic workers, forced to care for the sick, the elderly and young, women are being made to pay the price for the dismantling of the NHS, the closure of nurseries and schools, the cutback in the housing programme. Those social services are already woefully inadequate. We must fight the cuts while demanding a massive expansion of welfare and social service provision under Trade Union control.

1. Direct Action to Stop the Cuts
2. No Trade Union participation in the implementation of the Cuts: no acceptance of speed-up, increased work load, no covering for unfilled vacancies.

3. For Trade Union industrial action in solidarity with all struggles against cuts.

**Restore all Cuts in Social Spending: For a Programme of socially useful Public Works under Trade Union Control.** For that programme to ensure that women will be able to play an ever fuller role in social and political life as well as providing more jobs for women.

- 4) To ensure the provision of 24 hour nursery and creche facilities under Trade Union control.
- 5) For the provision of state funded refuges, open to all women, under Trade Union and resident control.
- 6) To ensure the provision of free laundry and restaurant facilities.
- 7) Direct action to win free abortion, contraception and sterilisation on demand on the NHS. For the provision of adequate and sufficient day care centres to make this possible.  
Against Enforced Sterilisation.
- 8) Expansion of gynaecological provision and for the right of women to be treated by women if they wish.

### Force Local Authorities to refuse to implement the cuts

We must campaign to force the Labour Councils to refuse to implement the cuts, to refuse to pay the crippling interest payments due to the banks and finance houses, to deliberately overspend on social and welfare provision.

Opposition to rent and rate rises.

**Nationalise the Banks and Finance Houses:** with no compensation: cancelling the crippling debts of the local authorities immediately.

### FOR ALL SOCIAL SPENDING TO BE PROTECTED AGAINST INFLATION BY A SLIDING SCALE OF SOCIAL EXPENDITURE.

## WAGES AND EQUAL PAY

Women earn just over half the wages of men. The 'equality' legislation introduced by the Labour Government has not altered that. It does not cover all-female work forces or jobs where fewer than six women are employed. Legislation cannot alter the fact that women are concentrated in unskilled, low paid work. The reliance of the Labour Government on anti-working class tribunals to defuse the militancy of the working class to fight for equal pay failed. Women fought back and won equal pay through their militant actions. While supporting any amendment to the legislation to patch up the loopholes exploited by the bosses the only way equal pay can be won is by action by the working class as at Trico. We fight for:

### A MINIMUM WAGE

### EQUAL PAY NOW

**For the Sliding Scale of Wages:** Guaranteed monthly rises equivalent to the rise in the workers cost of living index – 1% for 1%. We must fight actively to draw housewives into the calculation of all workers wage demands on the basis of a

### WORKERS COST OF LIVING INDEX

### WORK OR FULL PAY

**100% LAY OFF PAY** – workers should not bear the cost of strikes

### OPPOSITION TO ALL FORMS OF INCOMES POLICY:

Opposition to all productivity deals

For full rates for part-time workers and premium rates for 'twilight' workers.

## ANTI UNION LAWS HIT AT WOMEN

The Tories anti-union laws strike at all workers, but they hit working women particularly viciously. Women workers are disproportionately concentrated in small, poorly organised firms. Their employers are often viciously anti-union and determined to exploit their female workforce as cheap labour.

These workers, as the strikes at Trico, Grunwick and Chix have shown, need the solidarity and assistance of other well organised sections. They need mass support on the picket line and the blacking of suppliers, distributors and transport and retail outlets. All such solidarity action is illegal under the Tory laws. Other measures, hitting at maternity leave and the redress due for unfair dismissal, are aimed specifically at women. Women must play a leading role in the fight against these shackles—

### **FIGHT THE TORIES ANTI-UNION LAWS**

For mass pickets and solidarity action in defiance of the laws. Strike Action in solidarity with workers victimised by the courts.

**For A General Strike to Smash the Laws.**

### **THE GENERAL STRIKE**

The bitterness of the class battles ahead will mobilise the working class in decisive clashes with the bosses and their government. As in 1972, 1974 and 1980 the objective need for a class wide use of the strike weapon—the general strike will be posed. In a general strike, communists argue for councils of action, consisting of workplace delegates to direct the struggle—for a national Action Council made up of delegates from the local bodies. Women will be mobilised as never before by a general strike. It is vital to organise neighbourhood and tenants committees involving shop workers, housewives etc., to ensure the distribution of food. These committees must have delegates on the action councils. Women too must be involved in the workers defence squads. The action councils must ensure the formulation and inclusion in the broadening demands of the whole class of all the necessary measures to advance the position of women.

### **FOR THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EQUALITY OF WOMEN**

**Positive discrimination for women in all apprenticeships, training schemes, skills and trades under trade union control.**

For the extension of protective legislation where appropriate to cover men. No dismissal during pregnancy, and no loss of benefits during pregnancy. Adequate paternity leave. A minimum of 26 weeks paid pregnancy leave. The right for either parent to take a year's paid child care leave after birth or adoption. For 12 weeks paid leave if child is still born. Maternity benefits to cover all women regardless of hours worked or length of employment. The right for either men or women to paid leave to care for sick dependents. Adequate child benefits non-deductible from other benefits and protected from inflation by automatic increases.

All protective legislation under TU control to ensure that it is not used as grounds for discrimination.

Equality of women in tenancies, mortgages, pension schemes, taxation, passports, care, control and custody over children including lesbian mothers, social security payments, insurances and supplementary benefits, hire purchase agreements.

Against discrimination and victimisation on the grounds of sexual orientation.

### **Solidarity with all Oppressed**

In the struggle against their oppression women must support the battles of all oppressed and exploited against our common enemy — the capitalist class.

1) We must support in all ways possible those struggling for national independence against Imperialism; most immediately and sharply for us this must mean solidarity with those forces in Southern Africa and Ireland struggling to free themselves from the yoke of Imperialism, an active struggle to build meaningful links with and support for women engaged in those struggles.

### **2) FIGHT RACISM AND FACISM**

The continuing crisis of capitalism has seen the employers play a racist card to divide the working class and blur the causes of the crisis. Black and Asian women are particularly

oppressed both as women and as workers and as victims of racist and fascist attacks. We fight for the right of black and Asian women and ethnic minorities to caucus separately. We fight all forms of racist and fascist attack and oppose all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race. We oppose all forms of immigration controls — these particularly affect non-British women coming to Britain.

The Tory Immigration Law blatantly discriminates against the right of dependents of black and Asian women from joining their families in this country.

### **FOR A WORKERS UNITED FRONT AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM.**

### **NO PLATFORM FOR FASCISTS.**

### **DRIVE THE FASCISTS AND ACTIVE RACISTS OUT OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT.**

### **AGAINST ALL IMMIGRATION CONTROLS.**

### **FOR A WORKING CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

The existing organisations of working class women—the women's sections in the Labour Party, the women's sections in the unions, the unions with a large women membership, women's sub-committees of Trades Councils, should take up the struggle to form a mass working class women's movement organised in the factories, shops and offices and on the Council estates. To this end these bodies should be democratised and turned outwards to working class women in struggle. The Women's TUC should be turned into a conference of lay delegates, with representatives on the TUC General Council and with the right to place resolutions on the agenda of the Trades Union Congress. Such a mass movement of women should be open to all political tendencies within the workers movement and should publish a mass circulation women's paper. Revolutionary communist women would, of course, fight for the programme and for leadership within such a movement.

### **The Fight Against Reformism**

The seriousness of the renewed period of economic crisis with its attendant threats of war threatens of all the gain made by women and the working class in the last quarter century. Women must be mobilised to play a full and active part in the struggles that the bosses offensive is generating. If the socialist revolution is the only goal that can both ensure past gains and open the road to full women's liberation, then we must recognise that millions of women—working class, lower middle class, members of the 'intelligentsia' do not see or accept this. Some, sunk in their oppression, act as blind voting fodder for the Tories. Large numbers of working class women and women from the 'intelligentsia' (students, teachers etc) however, have made an elementary break with the bosses and look towards the Labour Party for the defence and extension of women's rights within capitalism, seeing it (perhaps with the aid of 'pressure' from the women's movement) as adequate to changing things for the better. We believe this is wrong. Firstly, even in the 'long boom' (50s and 60s) the Labour and Trade Union leaders paid little or not attention to women and their needs. The largely student, white collar, lower middle class 'women's movement', rank and file revolts of women workers forced these conservative bureaucrats to take some half hearted measures in favour of women (Abortion Act, Equal Pay etc). But what they gave with one hand, they took back with the other—massive cuts, mounting unemployment, closed hospitals, declining wages for the low paid, rendered many of these gains hollow for most working class women.

Labour Governments have shown themselves to be 'bosses

governments' with perhaps a more liberal coloration than the Tories. But a serious and lasting extension of reforms within capitalism is not possible in the coming period. Indeed the clawing back of past gains is the policy vital to the British ruling class. It will pursue that policy through its open and willing agents the Tories or through the Labour and Trade Union leaders. The latter will be more or less shamefaced, more or less willing, but within the vice of the bosses state and without the direct intervention of a conscious and organised working class, they will use our own organisations against us. The central task in the coming years is to overcome the crippling hold of these leaders, to transform and where necessary replace these organisations. If this is not done the working class in general, and women in particular, will go down to defeat. A new revolutionary communist leadership must be built, a party, which must win the allegiance of the working class in struggle.

To those millions of our fellow workers who do not yet accept this we have to say—put the Labour and trade union leaders to the test **in action**. Demand of these leaders—in opposition and whenever they form a government—the demands you see as vital, including those most important to working women. But above all organise yourselves for direct action. If the leaders sell out and betray they can then be replaced by a new revolutionary leadership and working men and women can march forward to working class power and women's liberation.

Labour leaders hold office in many of Britain's towns and cities. We demand of these leaders on the Local Councils to:

(1) Refuse to implement the cuts—deliberately overspend to maintain and expand social and welfare services—schools, nurseries, and housing. Refuse to pass on cuts via rate or rent increases. Mobilise the trade unions, council tenants and organisations of militant women to defy the Tory attacks. Local Labour Parties should place all their facilities at the disposal of workers in struggle.

(2) We demand that the Labour leaders in Parliament commit a future Labour Government to:

1. Guarantee a Woman's Right to Work: Nationalising with no compensation all firms declaring sackings and redundancies, recognising workers control in the plant concerned.
2. Stop the Cuts: Institute a programme of public works under TU control to ensure:
  - i) Free nursery and creche facilities (24 hour);
  - ii) Free laundry and restaurant facilities;
  - iii) Free abortion and contraception on demand
3. Repeal of all anti Trade Union legislation.
4. Nationalise the Banks and Finance Houses with no compensation.
5. Guarantee the Sliding scale of wages.
6. Ensure positive discrimination for women in training and education.
7. Repeal of all legislation discriminating against homosexuality and lesbian mothers and adoption rights.
8. Adequate child allowances and the extension of protective legislation.
9. End all legal restrictions on women's equality.
10. End immigration controls.
11. For the full legal protection of women against sexual violence and assault and for the election of judiciary

#### WORKING CLASS POWER AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

The struggle for the defence of existing gains or for the extension of the social and economic conditions of women brings sooner or later a clash with the forces of the bourgeois state—the guarantor of capitalist exploitation and the oppression of women. This oppression can be broken only by the overthrow of this state with its army, police, judiciary and bureaucracy. The class power of the workers (the proletarian dictatorship)—women and men, exercised through workers councils, consisting of delegates elected from the factories, offices, shops and housing estates and enforced by an armed

workers militia—is the only state power that can initiate the building of socialism. Its immediate measures would centre on the expropriation of all the large scale industries, their concentration in the hands of the workers state, the initiation of a plan, the development of workers control by a series of stages into workers management. The large stores would be transformed into cooperatives including both shop workers and consumers. On this basis the task of freeing women from domestic slavery can take on a planned and organised character—can become an essential policy of the workers state. Child care, washing, cooking, cleaning, can become the equal responsibility of all with the maximum provision of facilities (nurseries, play centres, cleaning equipment, laundries, medical centres, accommodation for the old, the disabled etc.

With the abolition of the profit system all will be able to engage in socially useful labour and thus the hours devoted to it for all can be drastically and progressively reduced. The direct democracy of the workers councils will allow and encourage millions of women to participate to the full in social and political life **for the first time**. On this basis the struggle via education, **via the self organisation of women**, will progressively obliterate all the remaining prejudices, degradations and deformations which add up to the 'human nature' created by the oppression of women.

Corresponding to the transition from socialism to communism (the period of the progressive withering away of the state as a means of coercion, or an 'apparatus' separate from or above society) will be the period of the emancipation of women their progressive achievement of real and full social equality. The enormous gain to humanity in terms of the liberated energies and creativeness which women will contribute and the elimination and abolition of the violence and internecine conflict which has warped and stunted the human personality (both male and female) is incalculable.

## CLASS STRUGGLE

Available from Workers Power,  
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# The Comintern Theses

on

## Work Amongst Women

The Comintern Theses on women adopted at the Third Congress in 1921 represent the codification of the experience of the Marxist women's movement up to that time - particularly that of the German Social Democratic women's movement. The international socialist women's movement grew up alongside the socialist parties and Trade Unions, a movement of theoretical uncertainties and organisational variety strongly influenced by feminist ideas. The German Socialist women's movement with their paper *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), which became the international organ of the movement, took the lead in the process of clarification and unification of the movement - developing a Marxist analysis of the women's question. It is a tribute to the sound theoretical and organisational work conducted, that women Social Democrats took the lead in opposing their parties' support for the war. *Die Gleichheit*, before Clara Zetkin was forced to resign as editor, was internationally recognised as the organ of women opposed to the war, the German Socialist women took the lead in organising the International women's conference at Berne in 1915 (an action not only "outlawed" by the Social Democratic Party committee but also reported to the Government by them) which declared its opposition to the war. By 1921, the best elements among Social Democratic women had rallied to the banner of the Third International, while the Second International rapidly relegated the women activists in the party to the sphere of community and social work. The Comintern Theses re-stated the Marxist analysis of women's oppression, distinguished the socialist from the bourgeois feminist positions and outlined the aims and methods of Communist work amongst women. We reprint these theses not because we believe they contain the last word possible on the subject but because in the present ideological flux in the women's movement, the position of Communism before the Stalinist 'counter-revolution' is a vital rallying point for all those fighting to build a communist women's tendency in the working class.

1. The Third Congress of the Comintern in conjunction with the Second International Women's Congress confirms the decision of the First and Second Congresses on the necessity for increasing the work of all the Communist parties of the East and West among proletarian women. The masses of women workers must be educated in the spirit of Communism and so drawn into the struggle for Soviet Power and into the construction of the Soviet Labour Republic. In all countries the working classes, and consequently the women workers, are faced with the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The capitalist economic system has got into a blind alley, for there is no room for the further development of industrial forces within that system. The general impoverishment of the workers, the impotence of the bourgeoisie to revive produc-



tion, the development of speculative enterprises, the decay in the production system, unemployment, the fluctuation of prices out of keeping with wages - all this leads inevitably to the deepening of the class struggle in all countries. This struggle is to decide who shall conduct, administer, and organise production, and upon what system that should be done - whether it should be in the hands of a clique of bourgeois exploiters, and be carried on, on the principles of capitalism and private property, or in the hands of the producing class and carried on, on a Communist basis.

The newly-rising class, the class of producers, must in accordance with the laws of economic production, take the productive apparatus in its own hands, and set up new forms of public economy. Only in such a way will it be possible to create the necessary impetus for the development of the economic forces to the maximum and for the removal of the anarchy of capitalist production.

So long as the power of government is in the hands of the bourgeois class, the proletariat has no power to organise production. No reforms, no measures, carried out by the democratic or socialistic governments of the bourgeois countries are able to save the situation. They cannot alleviate the sufferings of the working women and working men, sufferings which are due to the disorganisation of the capitalist system of production, and which are going to last as long as the power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Only by seizing the power of government will the proletariat be able to take hold of the means of production, and thus secure the possibility of directing the economic development in the interests of the toilers.

In order to hasten the hour of the decisive conflict between the proletariat and the degenerating bourgeois world, the working class must adhere to the firm and unhesitating tactics outlined by the Third International. The most fundamental and immediate goal determining the methods of work and the line of struggle for the proletariat of both sexes, must be the dictatorship of labour.

As the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is the vital question before the proletariat of all the capitalist countries, and the construction of Communism is the important task of those countries where the dictatorship is already in the hands of the workers, the Third Congress of the Communist International maintains that the conquest of power by the proletariat, as well as the achievement of Communism in those countries where the capitalist state has already been overthrown, can be realised only with the active participation of the wide masses of the proletarian and semi-proletarian women.

On the other hand the Congress once more calls the attention of all women to the fact that without the support of the Communist parties in all the tasks and undertakings leading to the liberation and enfranchisement of the women, this task is practically impossible of achievement.

2. The interest of the working class, especially at the present moment, imperatively demands the recruiting of women into the organised ranks of the proletariat, fighting for Communism.

The economic ruin throughout the world is becoming more acute and more unbearable to the entire city and country poor. Before the working class of the bourgeois-capitalist countries the question of the social revolution rises more and more clearly, and before the working class of Soviet Russia the question of reconstructing the public economy of the land on a new Communist basis becomes more and more vital. Both these tasks will be more easily realised, the more active and the more conscious and willing the participation of the women.

3. Wherever the question of the taking of power arises, the Communist parties must consider the great danger to the revolution represented by the inert, uninformed masses of women workers, housewives, employees, peasant women, not liberated from the influence of the bourgeois church and bourgeois superstitions, and not connected in some way or other with the great liberating movement of Communism. Unless the masses of women of the East and West are drawn into this movement, they inevitably become the stronghold of the bourgeoisie and the object of counter-revolutionary propaganda. The experience of the revolution in Hungary, where the ignorance of the masses of women, played such a pitiful part, should serve, in this case, as a warning for the proletariat of all other countries entering upon the road of social revolution.

On the other hand, the experience of the Soviet Republic showed in practice how important the participation of the women workers and peasants has been in the civil war in the defence of the Republic, as well as in all other activities of the Soviet construction. Facts have proven the importance of the part which the women workers and peasants have already played in the Soviet Republic in the organisation of defence, strengthening the rear; the struggle against desertion, and against all sorts of counter-revolution, sabotage, etc. The experience of the Workers' Republic must serve as a lesson to all other countries.

Hence, the direct task of the Communist parties: to spread the influence of the Communist Party to the widest circles of the women population of their countries within the Party; organising a special party body and applying special methods; appealing to the women outside of it, to free them from the influence of the bourgeoisie and the compromising parties, and educating them to be real fighters for Communism, and therefore for the complete enfranchisement of the women.

4. Putting before the Communist Parties of the East and West the direct task of extending the activity of the Party among the women proletariat, the Third Congress of the Comintern declares also to the women of the entire world that their emancipation from age-long slavery and inequality depends upon the victory of Communism.

What Communism offers to the women, the bourgeois women's movement will never afford her. So long as the power of capitalism and private property continue to exist, the emancipation of woman from subservience to her husband cannot proceed further than her right to dispose of her property and earnings as she sees fit, and also to decide on equal terms with her husband the destiny of their children.

The most definite aim of the feminists - to grant the vote to the women - under the regime of bourgeois parliamentarism, does not solve the question of the actual equalisation of women, especially of those of the dispossessed classes. This has been clearly demonstrated by the experience of the working women in those capitalist countries where the bourgeoisie has formally recognised the equality of the sexes. The right to vote does not remove the prime cause of women's enslavement in the family and in society. The substitution of the church marriage by civil marriage does not in the least alleviate the situation. The dependence of the proletarian woman upon the capitalist and upon her husband as the economic mainstay of the family remains just the same. The absence of adequate laws to safeguard motherhood and infancy and the lack of proper social education render entirely impossible the equalisation of women's position in matrimonial relations. As a matter of fact, nothing that can be done under capitalism will furnish the key to the solution of the problem of the relationship of the sexes.

Only under Communism, not merely the formal, but the actual equalisation of women will be achieved. Then woman will be the rightful owner on a par with all the members of the working class, of the means of production and distribution. She will participate in the management of industry and she will assume an equal responsibility for the well-being of society.

In other words, only by overthrowing the system of exploitation of man by man, and by supplanting the capitalist mode of production by the Communist organisation of industry will the full emancipation of woman be achieved. Only Communism affords the conditions which are necessary in order that the natural functions of woman-motherhood-should not come into conflict with her social obligations and hinder her creative work for the benefit of society. On the contrary, Communism will facilitate the most harmonious and diversified development of a healthy and beautiful personality that is indissolubly bound together with the whole life and activities of the entire society. Communism should be the aim of all women who are fighting for complete emancipation and real freedom.

But Communism is also the final aim of the proletariat. Consequently the struggle of the working women for this aim must be carried on in the interests of both, under a united leadership and control, as 'one and indivisible' to the entire world movement of the revolutionary proletariat.

5. The Third Congress of the Comintern confirms the basic proposition of revolutionary Marxism, i.e., that there is no 'specific woman question' and no

'specific women's movement', and, that every sort of alliance of working women with bourgeois feminism, as well as any support by the women workers of the treacherous tactics of the social-compromisers and opportunists leads to the undermining of the forces of the proletariat, delaying thereby the triumph of the social revolution and the advent of Communism and thus also postponing the great hour of women's ultimate liberation.

Communism will be achieved not by 'united efforts of all women of different classes', but by the united struggle of all the exploited.

In their own interests the masses of proletarian women should support the revolutionary tactics of the Communist Party and take a most active part in all mass-actions and all forms of civil war on a national and international scope.

6. Woman's struggle against her double oppression (capitalism and her home and family subservience), at its highest stage of development, assumes an international character, becoming identified with the struggle of the proletariat of both sexes under the banner of the Third International for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Soviet system.

7. While warning the women workers against entering into any form of alliance and co-operation with the bourgeois feminists, the Third Congress of the Comintern, at the same time, points out to the working women of all countries that to cherish any illusions of the possibility of the proletarian women supporting the Second International or any of the opportunistically inclined elements adhering to it without causing serious damage to the cause of women's emancipation - will prove infinitely detrimental for the liberating struggle of the proletariat. The women must constantly remember that woman's present-day slavery has grown out of the bourgeois order. In order to put an end to women's slavery it is necessary to inaugurate the new Communist organisation of society.

Any support rendered to the Second and the Second-and-a-Half Internationals hampers the social revolution, delaying the advent of the new order. The more resolutely and uncompromisingly the women masses will turn away from the Second and the Second-and-a-half Internationals, the more certain will be the triumph of the Social Revolution. It is the sacred duty of all women Communists to condemn those who flinch from the revolutionary tactics of the Comintern and to demand their expulsion from the ranks of the Comintern. The women ought to remember that the Second International never created and never attempted to create any organ whose task would be to carry on an active struggle for the complete emancipation of woman. The organisation of an international alliance of women socialists was started outside the Second International by the initiative of the men workers themselves. The women socialists who devoted themselves to work among women had neither representation nor a decisive vote in the Second International.

At its first Congress, in 1919, the Third International defined its attitude towards enlisting the support of women in the struggle for the dictatorship. On its initiative, the first conference of women Communists was convened in 1920 and an International Secretariat for work among women was constituted with a permanent representation in the Executive Committee of the Comintern. It is the duty of all class-conscious women workers to break unconditionally with the Second and Second-and-a-half Internationals and support whole-heartedly the revolutionary tactics of the Comintern.

8. The support of the Comintern by the women workers of all occupations should, first of all, express itself in their willingness to enter into the ranks of the Communist Party of their respective countries. In those countries and parties where the struggle between the Second and Third Internationals has not yet come to a head, it is the duty of women workers to support by all means, the party and groups that stand for the Comintern and carry on a relentless warfare against all vacillations and avowedly treacherous elements, irrespective of any authorities holding a different view. The class-conscious women who are striving for emancipation should not remain in any parties which have not joined the Comintern. Those who are opposed to the Third International are the enemies of the emancipation of women.

The place of conscious working women in Eastern and Western countries is under the flag of the Communist International and in the ranks of the Communist

Parties of their own countries. All wavering on the part of the working women and the fear to sever connection with the parties of compromise, and the hitherto acknowledged authorities, have a pernicious influence on the satisfactory progress of the great proletarian struggle, which is assuming the nature of an open and relentless civil war on a world scale.

#### METHODS AND FORM OF WORK AMONG WOMEN

Owing to all the above-mentioned reasons, the Third Congress of the Comintern holds that the work among the proletariat women should be carried out by the Communist Parties of all countries, on the following basis:

1. Women must be enlisted as full-fledged members of the Party, on the basis of equality and independence, in all militant class organisations, trade unions, co-operatives, factory committees, etc.

2. To recognise the importance of recruiting women into all branches of the active struggle of the proletariat (including military service for the defence of the proletariat) and into the construction of new forms of society and the organisation of industry and life on a Communist basis.

3. To recognise the functions of motherhood as a social function, promoting and supporting appropriate measures to aid and protect women as the bearer of the human race.

Being earnestly opposed to the separate organisation of women into all sorts of parties, unions, or any other special women's organisations, the Third Congress nevertheless, believes that in view of (a) the present conditions of subjection prevailing not only in the bourgeois capitalist countries, but also in countries under the Soviet system, undergoing transition from capitalism to Communism; (b) the great inertness and political ignorance of the masses of women, due to the fact that they have been for centuries barred from social life and to age-long slavery in the family; and (c) the special functions imposed upon women by nature- childbirth, and the peculiarities attached to this, calling for the protection of her strength and health in the interests of the entire community, the Third Congress therefore considers it necessary to find special methods of work among the women of the Communist Parties and establishes a standard of special apparatus within the Communist Parties for the realisation of this work. The apparatus for this work among the women in the Party should be the sections or committees for work among women, organised by all party committees commencing with the Executive Committee and ending with the city districts or village party committees. This decision is obligatory for all parties attached to the Comintern.

The Third Congress points out that, amongst the tasks set before the Communist Parties carried out through the sections are (1) To educate the wide masses of women in the spirit of Communism, drawing them into the ranks of the Party; (2) to fight against the prejudices of male proletarians towards the women, strengthening in the working men and women the consciousness of mutual interests of the proletarians of both sexes; (3) to increase the will power of the women by drawing them into all kinds and forms of political struggle, to awaken their activity and participation in the struggle against capitalist exploitation in the bourgeois countries by mass demonstrations against the high cost of living, against the housing conditions, unemployment, and in other revolutionary forms of the class war; the participation of the women workers in the construction of the Communist State and in the Soviet Republics; (4) to put on the order of business among the tasks of the parties and to pass rules tending to the direct enfranchisement of the woman, recognising her equality and the protection of her interests as the perpetuator of the race (5) to wage a well planned fight against traditions, bourgeois customs and religion, clearing the way for better and more harmonious relations between the sexes, protecting the physical and moral strength of labouring humanity.

The entire work of the sections or committees should be carried on under the direct control and responsibility of the Party Committees. A member of the local party committee should be at the head of such section or committee. Communists should be members of these committees or collegiums wherever it is possible.

All measures and problems of the committees or sections of work amongst women must not be handled by them independently, but in the Soviet Republics, through the respective economic and political organs (branches of the Soviets,

Commissariats, Trade Unions, etc) and, in the capitalist countries, with the support of the respective organs of the proletarian parties, unions, factory committees etc.

In all places where the Communist Parties exist illegally or semi-legally, the Party should organise an illegal apparatus for work amongst women. In all illegal bodies there must be at least one party member to organise the women for illegal work.

The present period requires that Trade and Industrial Unions should form the principal basis for work amongst women, both in countries which still carry on the struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist yoke, as well as in the Soviet Labour Republics.

The spirit with which the work amongst women should be imbued is that of the unity of the Party movement, of an intact organisation, of independent initiative and independent of Commissions and sections aiming at a speedy and complete emancipation of women, to be brought about by the Party. What should be striven after is not parallelism in activity, but assistance in the activity of the Party by means of self-development and initiative of the working women.

#### WORK OF THE PARTY AMONGST WOMEN IN SOVIET COUNTRIES

It is the task of the Sections of the Soviet Labour Republics to educate the masses of the working women in a spirit of Communism, by attracting to them to the Communist Party, to inspire and develop activity and self-reliance by drawing them into the work of constructive Communism and bringing them up as staunch defenders of the Communist International.

It is the task of the Sections to attract the women to every form of Soviet construction, including questions of defence, as well as all the economic plans of the Republic.

In the Soviet Republic the Sections should see that all the regulations of the Eight Congress of Soviets regarding the attraction of working and peasant women to the work of building up and organising public production, as well as their participation in the work of all those organs which direct, manage, control and organise production should be carried out. The Sections should participate through their representatives and through the Party organs in the elaboration of new laws and exercise an influence on the alteration of such as require much alteration in the interest of the enfranchisement of women. The Sections should take the greatest interest and show most initiative in the development of those laws which deal with the protection of the labour of women and children.

It is the duty of the Sections to attract the greatest possible number of working and peasant women to all election campaigns of Soviets, as also to see to it that working and peasant women are elected as members of Soviets and of Executive Committees.

The Sections should make it their business to assist in every way possible in making a success of political and economic campaigns carried on by the Party.

It is the task of the Sections to assist the growth of skilled women labour by means of professional education, as well as to facilitate the admission of the working and peasant women to the corresponding educational establishments.

The Sections should facilitate the entrance of working women into the Commission for the Protection of Labour in various enterprises, and should also accelerate the activity of the auxiliary Committees for the Protection of Mother and Child.

The Sections should make it their business to assist the development of all social institutions such as communal kitchens, laundries, repairing shops, institutions of social education, communal houses, etc., which, basing as they do the conditions of life upon a new Communist principle, ameliorate the difficulties which women experience during the transition period; assist their rapid enfranchisement and transform the slave of the family and the home into a free co-worker in the great social renaissance, a fellow creator of new forms of life.

Through organisers working amongst women elected by the Communist fraction of Trade Unions, the Sections should assist in the education of the Womenworkers, members of the Trade Unions, in the spirit of Communism.

The Sections should look after the due attendance of the working women at all general factory delegates' conferences.

The Sections should carry out a systematic distribution of auxiliary workers, for all Soviet, economic and Trade Union work.

The Sections must first of all take deep and firm root amongst the proletarian women, wage-earners, and organise propaganda amongst employees, housewives and peasant women.

To build up a firm connection between the Party and the mass of the people, and to spread its influence over the non-party members of society, and also to develop the method of education of the women folks in the spirit of Communism, by teaching self-activity and participation in practical work, the Women's Sections are to organise delegate meetings of women workers.

The delegate meetings are the best means to educate the women workers, and peasants, and to spread the Party influence amongst the backward masses of women workers and peasants.

These delegate meetings are formed from factory and shop representatives of a certain region, city or volost. In Soviet Russia, the women delegates are drawn into all kinds of political and economic campaigns. They are sent into different committees in industry, are invited to control Soviet institutions, and used for regular work in the Soviet Departments, in the capacity of clerks, for two months (Law of 1921).

The women delegates should be elected at general meetings of the Shop workers, of the housewives and employees, according to a certain rate of representation fixed by the Party. The Women's Sections are obliged to carry on propaganda and agitation among the delegates, for which purpose special meetings of women delegates are to be arranged not less than twice a month. The delegates are requested to make reports of their activities either in the shops where they work, or at meetings arranged in the city districts. The delegates should be elected for a period of three months.

Another form of agitation among the women is the organisation of large non-party conferences of women workers and peasants. Representatives to conferences are to be elected at meetings held for women workers - at their place of work, and for peasant women - in the villages.

The Section for work amongst women is charged to call the conferences, as well as to supervise their work.

In order to make the best use of the experience that the women workers have secured by participating in the work and activities of the Party, the Branches, and Committees carry on an elaborate campaign of propaganda by word of mouth and press. The Sections arrange meetings and discussion for the women workers at the shops and for the housewives at the city clubs. They exercise control over the delegate meetings and carry on house to house agitation.

To train active workers among the women and to widen their understanding of communism, the party must organise with the help of the Sections, special courses for work among the women, at each Party school or school for Soviet work.

## IN CAPITALIST COUNTRIES

The current tasks of the Committees or Sections for work among women are initiated by the circumstances of the period. On the one hand, the ruin of world economy, the rampant growth of unemployment, especially affecting the women workers and tending to increase prostitution, the high cost of living, the acute housing question, and the threats of new imperialistic wars; on the other hand, the unceasing strikes in all countries, repeated outbursts of armed uprisings of the proletariat, and the ever more violent civil war throughout the world, are the prologue to the inevitable world social revolution.

The women's committees must put forward the most important tasks of the proletariat, fight for the unabridged slogans of the Communist Party, of the Communists against the bourgeoisie and social-compromisers. The committees must see to it that the women are not only registered as equal members of the Party, Trade Unions and other militant workers' organisations, which are waging the fight against all injustice or inequality of the women workers, but also that the women should be allowed to occupy responsible positions in the Party, Union or Cooperative on an equal basis with the men.

The Committees or Sections must facilitate the work of the wide masses of the women proletarians and peasant women in utilising their franchise in the interests of the Communist Parties during election to the parliament and to all the public institutions, explaining at the same time the limitations of those rights, in the sense of weakening the capitalist exploitation, promoting enfranchisement of women, and replacing parliamentarism by the Soviet system.

The Committees must also aid the women workers, employees and peasant women to take a most active part in the elections of revolutionary, economic and political soviets of workers' deputies, obtaining representation in them, awakening the political activity of the housewives, and carrying on a propaganda of the Soviet idea among the peasant women. The special concern of the Committees must

be the realisation of the principle of equal pay for equal work. It is the task of the Committee to start a campaign, drawing men and women workers into it, for free, universal, education, aiding the women to become highly qualified in their work.

The Committees should see to it that women Communists take part in the legislative municipal and other legislative organisations, in fact, wherever women have the right to vote.

While participating in the legislative, municipal and other organisations of bourgeois States, Communist women should strictly adhere to the tactics of the party, not concerning themselves too much with the realisation of reforms within the limits of the bourgeois world order, as taking advantage of every live question and demand of the working women, as watchwords by which to lead the women into the active mass struggle for these demands, through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Committees or Sections must explain the disadvantages and waste of the system of individual housekeeping, the bad bringing up and education of the children by the bourgeoisie, rallying the women workers to the struggle for practical improvement of the conditions of the working class, waged or supported by the Party.

The Committees must aid in recruiting the women to the Communist Party from the Trade Unions, for which purpose the Communist fraction of the Trade Unions appoints an organiser for work among the women, under the direction of the Party and the local branch. The entire work of the Committee must be carried on with one purpose in view: the development of the revolutionary activity of the masses and the hastening of the social revolution.

#### IN ECONOMICALLY-BACKWARD COUNTRIES ( THE EAST )

NOTICE! The work among the Eastern women being of great importance, and at the same time representing a new problem for the Communist Parties, the Conference deems it necessary to add to this thesis special instruction on the methods of communist propaganda among the women of the Eastern countries, appropriate to their local habits and conditions.

In conjunction with the Communist Party and Women's Section should do everything possible to achieve in industrially weak countries, the recognition of the legal equality, the equality both of rights and obligations, of women in the Parties, Unions and other organisations of the working class.

The Sections or Committees should carry on, in conjunction with the Party, a struggle against prejudice, religious customs and habits which maintain an oppressive hold upon the women; to achieve this, it is also necessary to carry on propaganda amongst the men.

The Communist Party, together with the Sections or Commissions, should carry out the principle of the equality of women in matters of education of children, family relations and general social life.

The Sections should look for support in their work, first of all, amongst the large classes of women who are exploited by capitalism in the capacity of workers in home industries, as labourers on rice, cotton and other plantations, and assist in the general establishment of communal workshops and home cooperatives; this applies especially to all Eastern peoples living within the borders of Soviet Russia; the Sections should also assist in the general organisation of all women engaged in plantation work with the working men united in Trade Unions.

The raising of the general educational level of the population is one of the best means of fighting the general stagnation of the country as well as religious prejudice. The Committees or Sections should, therefore, assist in the opening of schools for grown-ups and children, such schools also to be accessible to the women. In bourgeois countries, the Committees should carry on a direct agitation to counteract the influence of the bourgeois schools.

Wherever possible, the Sections or Committees should carry the agitation into the homes of the women and utilise the field work of the women for purposes of agitation. They should also organise clubs for working women, doing everything to attract to these clubs the most backward section of the women. These Clubs should represent cultural and educational centres and model institutions, illustrating what can be achieved by women for their emancipation through such means of self-activity as the organisation of creches, kindergartens, schools for adults and so forth.

Special clubs should be organised for nomadic peoples.

In Soviet lands the Sections, together with the Party should assist in the transformation of the existing pre-capitalist forms of production and economics into a communal form of production. They should be practically propagated, in a manner to

convince the working women, that the former home-life and home-production oppressed and exploited them, whilst communal labour will emancipate them.

With regard to the peoples of the East who live within the borders of Soviet Russia, the Sections should take care that Soviet legislation should equalise men and women, and that the interests of the women should be properly protected. For this purpose the Sections should assist in appointing women to the position of judges, and as members of juries in national Courts of Law.

The Sections should also get the women to participate in Soviets, taking care that working and peasant women should be elected into the Soviets and Executive Committees. All work amongst the women proletariat of the East should be done on a class basis. It should be the task of the Sections to expose the powerlessness of the Moslem feminists in the solution of the question of the enfranchisement of women. For enlightening purposes in all the Soviet countries of the East, the intelligent feminine forces should be utilised, as, for instance, women teachers and sympathisers, avoiding all tactics and vulgar treatment of religious faiths and national traditions. The Sections or Committees working amongst the women of the East should definitely fight against nationalism and the hold of religion on the women's minds.

All the organisations of the workers should, in the East as well as in the West, be built not upon the basis of defending national interest, but upon the unity of the International proletariat of both sexes striving for the same class aims.

#### PROPAGANDA AND AGITATION

In order to fulfil the principal task of the Sections, dealing with the Communist education of the large masses of the proletariat, and in order to reinforce this body of fighters, it is necessary that all Communist Parties of the West and of the East should realise that the principle of work among women is: 'agitation and propaganda by deed'.

Agitation by deed first of all signifies an ability to arouse a sense of independence in the working women, to eradicate the distrust in themselves and, by attracting them to the practical work of construction, to teach them by practical experience that every conquest of the Communist Party, that every action which is directed against capitalist exploitation, is one more step toward the improvement of the position of women. The method which the Communist Party and its Sections for work amongst women should use, can be expressed in the following words: 'From experience and action, to a knowledge of the ideas of Communism and of its theoretical principles.'

In order that the Section should represent organs not of verbal propaganda alone, but also of activity, it is necessary that they should work in contact with the Communist Fractions of the various enterprises and workshops, for which purpose the latter should supply an organiser for the work amongst the women of the respective enterprise or workshop.

The Sections should come into contact with the Trade Unions through their representatives or organisers, who are appointed for that purpose by the Trade Union fraction, and who should carry on work under the direction of Sections. Propaganda, by deed, of Communist ideas in Soviet Russia, signifies that all the women workers, peasant women, housewives and employees in all spheres of Soviet Life, from the army and militia down to every enfranchised Oblast (district) should be drawn into the work of the organisation of Communal Housekeeping . of establishing the necessary number of institutions for Public Education, institutions for the Protection of Motherhood, and so forth. A special task is to draw the labour women into the bodies that control, etc., the production.

Active propaganda, by deeds, in the capitalist countries, means first of all the enlistment of the women workers to take part in strikes, demonstrations and other forms of the class struggle, fortifying and enlightening the revolutionary will and consciousness; the recruiting of women workers to all sorts of Party activity their utilisation for purposes of illegal work, particularly in despatch service, the organisation of party 'Saturdays' or 'Sundays' at which all women sympathisers of communism, the wives of labouring and professional men, in this way learn to be useful to the Party. The principle of propaganda by acts and deeds is also aided by drawing the women into all political, economic or educational campaigns, from time to time carried on by the Communist Parties.

While organising the feminine forces for the Party the Sections must, first of all, leave deep and firm roots amongst the women workers, developing propaganda activity also among the housewives, employees and peasant women.

In order to carry out the work of propaganda by word of mouth, according to a plan, the Sections must arrange meetings in the factories and workshops, also open meetings for women workers and employees according to profession or location,



as well as general public meetings of housewives. They must see to it that canvassers and organisers are elected by the Communist groups of the Trade Unions, cooperative and industrial councils in capitalist states, and that women members are elected in all the organising controlling and administrative bodies of the Soviet institutions. In a word, the labour women must be elected to all organisations, which in capitalist countries must be used to revolutionise the exploited and oppressed masses, and assist them in their struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat; and in Soviet countries to such organisations as serve to defend and realise Communism.

The Sections must delegate experienced women Communists as workers or employees to enterprises where great numbers of women are employed. These comrades must settle down in large Proletarian districts and centres, as practiced with success in Soviet Russia. In the same way as the working women's organisations of the Communist Party in Soviet Russia organise meetings and conferences of delegates not belonging to any party, the Communist women's committees in the capitalist countries must convene public meetings of women workers, female employees of every kind, peasant women and housewives, to discuss various questions and needs of the day, and elect committees to serve as connecting links between their respective constituencies and the Communist women's organisations, and to attend to the questions raised. They should also send speakers representing their views to gatherings of opposing organisations. Public propaganda by means of meetings, etc., must be supplemented by constant and regular home propaganda.

Each Communist woman engaged in this work should have not more than ten women to visit at their homes, on whom she ought to call regularly at least once a week, and also on every occasion of importance to the Communist Party, or the Proletarian masses.

In order to promote agitation, organisation and education among the masses by written word, the women's Section of the Communist Parties are charged to work for the establishment:

- (1) of a central women's Communist journal in every country;
- (2) to secure the appearance of a woman's department in the Communist press, as also the printing of articles in the political and industrial papers. They must provide editors for such publications, and find adequate assistance for them in the ranks of professional and militant women. The Sections must publish and distribute simple, stimulating and adequate literature in pamphlets and leaflets. They must strive to make the best possible use of their members.

Women Communists should be sent to attend courses in Party schools in order to intensify their class consciousness and to prepare them for work among the masses of women. Special courses, lectures and discussions for women can be organised only in case of special conditions and urgent necessity.

In order to enhance the spirit of comradeship among male and female workers it is desirable not to organise separate course of schools, but to establish, in the general Party schools, sections for courses for work among women. The sections exercise a right to elect a certain number of their women members for attendance at the general Party courses.

Construction of the Sections or Committees of work Sections amongst the women must be organised by each Party Local Executive, District Executive and the Central Executive Committee of the Party.

Each country decides for itself the numbers of members in these Sections or Committees. The number of members of the Sections, who are paid by the Party, is also fixed by each party according to the possibilities.

The director or Chairman of the local Committees or Sections must be a member of the local Party Committee. Where this is not the case, the Director of the Section is present at all meetings of the Party Committee, with the right of decisive vote on all questions of the women's committees, and with a consultative vote on all other questions.

Besides the duties of the district Section or Committee above mentioned, the following tasks are also part of their work; to maintain connections between the Sections of one district with the Central Sections; to collect facts on the activity of the district Sections or Committees; to facilitate the exchange of material between the local branches; to supply the district with literature; distribute agitators among the districts; to mobilise the efficient party workers for work among women; to call district conferences of the women Communists, representatives of branches, with a representation of one or two from each Branch, at least twice a year; to call non-party conferences of women-workers, peasant women and housewives of a particular district. The members of the Section or the Committee are approved by the provincial Committee or the county Committee on recommendation by the Director of the Section. The director, as well as the other members of the county Committees and province Committees, are elected at the conferences of the county.

Members of the district or local Sections or Committees are elected at a general city, county or district conference or are appointed by the respective Sections in agreement with the Party Committee. If the director of the Section is not a member of the district Party Committee, he has the right to be present at all meetings of the party Committee with a decisive vote on all questions of the Branch, and with a consultative vote on all other questions.

Besides all the functions above mentioned, which are the duties of the district Sections, the Central Section must fulfil the following additional functions: instruct the Sections and their workers; investigate the work of the Section; take charge in connection with the respective organs of the party, of the transfer of workers from one Section to another; observe the conditions and development of work, consider the changes in the legal or economic situation of the women, through its representatives or appointees; participate in Special Committees, solving the questions of bettering the conditions of existence of working class, protection of labour, protection of childhood, etc., publish a central 'page' and edit periodical journals for women; call conferences of the representatives of all the district Sections not less than once a year; organisational excursions of instructors on work among the women of the country; take charge of the recruiting of women and of the participation of all Sections in all sorts of political and economic campaigns and demonstrations of the Party; send delegates to the International Secretariat of Women Communists; take charge of the annual International Women's day.

If the Director of the Women's Section of the Executive Committee of the Party is not a member of the Executive Committee, he has the right to be present at all the meetings of the Executive Committee, with a decisive vote on all questions concerning the Sections, and with a consultative vote on all others. The director of the Section or the chairman of the Committee is appointed by the Central Executive Committee, or is elected at the general Party Congress. The decisions and resolutions of all Sections or Committees are subject to the final sanction of the respective Party Committee.

#### WORK ON AN INTERNATIONAL BASIS

The direction of the work of the Communist Parties of all countries, uniting the women workers for the tasks set by the Comintern, and drawing the women of all countries and nations into the revolutionary struggle for the Soviet system and the dictatorship for the working class, on a world basis, is the task of the Women's Secretariat of the Comintern.

## We need your money

WORKERS' POWER is a small organisation with small financial resources. The high production costs of producing this magazine, of mailing and of meeting the day to day expenses of the organisation place a severe strain on the group and limit its ability to expand and develop.

We intend, in the future, to produce pamphlets, leaflets and a more frequent magazine. To do this will require a considerable amount of money. We, therefore, appeal to all our readers for donations and increased sales of the magazine. Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to WORKERS POWER.

Forward to Workers Power,  
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# THE MODERN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

## FEMINISM'S FATAL FLAWS

The analysis of the modern women's movement printed below represents positions adopted by the Workers Power group at its conference held in March 1980. They deal, in a necessarily condensed form, with the growth and development of the women's liberation movement in Britain and its counterpart in America, and the ideas and practice of all the main currents within them. This ranges from 'radical' and 'revolutionary' feminism, through 'socialist' feminism and 'materialist' feminism. Workers Power believes that a thorough assessment and evaluation of the Women's Liberation Movement today is essential in the forging and building of a mass working class women's movement. We do this, not because we believe the Women's Liberation Movement represents the way forward for working class women, but because the Women's Liberation Movement has had an impact amongst significant sections of the left, particularly amongst white collar women workers, students and intellectuals, and because its influence needs to be combatted systematically and seriously.

1. The modern women's movement which developed in Britain in the late 60s/early 70s was precipitated by the tremendous expansion of capitalism in the late 50s and early 60s. This growth led to a huge influx of women into higher education alongside the rapid multiplication of white collar and service jobs. This coupled with the abundance of consumer goods and increases in standards of living had a corresponding affect in the aspirations of petty bourgeois women to attain one of the bourgeois ideals—equality. It was these petty bourgeois women, who becoming disillusioned with capitalism's inability to deliver the goods, mobilised together to form the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). As capitalism moved into crisis in the early 70s women's inequality became more apparent and solidified the WLM into a distinctive movement. It was also given impetus by the movement in America where this process had happened earlier, affected by the late 60s student radicalisation, opposition to the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement and Black Power. In America, however, the WLM is composed primarily of bourgeois women, organised mainly in the National Organisation of Women (NOW), which is involved today in mobilising demonstrations and lobbies of Senators and Congressmen around the Equal Rights Amendment Bill (ERA).

Amongst working class women in Britain there was also a growing political awareness as women flooded into jobs created mainly by the expansion of the public sector. Important struggles took place over issues like equal pay, unionisation and wage demands. However the WLM has never organised around these struggles or attempted to draw working class women into their ranks. Today the WLM, including the Socialist Feminist current, remains unaffected by the struggles of

working class women.

2. The degeneration of the revolution in Russia and the growth of Stalinism on a world scale had prevented women from organising until the late 60s. The Stalinist counter revolution in Russia overturned all the gains women had made after the revolution. Motherhood was glorified, abortion made illegal and divorce more difficult. By 1943 co-education was abolished in favour of separate education designed to develop "*Boys who will be good fathers and manly fighters for the socialist homeland and girls who will be intelligent mothers, competent to rear the new generation.*" As the family unit became once more reinforced Trotsky described it as a massive defeat for women: "*the Thermidorian legislation is beating a retreat to the bourgeois models [of the family] covering its retreat with false speeches about the sacredness of the 'new family'.*" Stalinist parties all over the world adopted this attitude to women and dropped the woman question altogether. The experience of Stalinism and the popular identification of Russia with socialism turned the WLM away from the working class but also from the left in general. Sheila Rowbotham expresses this view when she says in her book *Beyond the Fragments*, "*It must also be admitted that the Bolsheviks even before Stalin, have a lot to account for, and that Leninism destroyed vital aspects of socialism.*"

3. The composition of the WLM in Britain is petty bourgeois and has remained so up to the present day. It is mainly white collar workers—teachers, social workers, students and the intelligentsia. The loose basis around which the WLM was developed, according to Juliette Mitchell was to:

- a. *develop a political challenge to the present social institutions and*
- b. *develop an organisation that in its form and content would eradicate the relevant faults of other preceding radical groups.*

The crucial aim of the WLM was to create a movement for *all women* regardless of class, based on the primary concept of sisterhood and opposition to male sexual oppression. Juliette Mitchell described it as "*a woman's movement which mobilises women on the basis of their own oppression and which is held together by the political solidarity of women—sisterhood—capable of unlocking and overthrowing all the structures which imprison women.*" And Shulamith Firesone in *The Dialectic of Sex* described it as "*the feminist movement is the first to combine effectively the 'personal' with the 'political'.* It is developing a new way of relating, a new political style, one that will eventually reconcile the personal—always the feminine prerogative—with the public, with the 'world outside', to restore that world to its emotions, and literally to its senses." It is this concept of sisterhood regardless of class that feminist women today are trying to reassert. Zillah Eisenstein, an American socialist feminist is attempting that in saying "*the feminist struggle begins from the commonality that*

derives from the particular rôles women share in patriarchy." [our emphasis] In other words women's *common* sexual oppression can be used as a basis for organising communally regardless of class divisions. It is this elevation of sexual oppression over and above class oppression on which capitalism is based, that has led *all* feminists from radical to socialist, to *reject* working class struggle or in the case of socialist feminists to stand passively aside.

4. In order to retain its all-class homogeneity the WLM has had to adopt a corresponding method. The WLM rejects the concept of leadership and structure equating these with 'male' forms of organisation. Instead their ideal form of organisation is small groups with no structure where each individual can participate. However most of these groups developed a hierarchy as the most dominant women took the lead and there was no structure to prevent this happening. The WLM conferences were usually turned into bear gardens of structurelessness, as vociferous minorities dominated the proceedings and prevented anyone else from speaking. Having no official leadership elected or otherwise, actually prevents the WLM from taking political positions that might result in dissension or splitting of the movement. The fragile homogeneity of an all-class alliance could only be preserved by preventing any debate on action, tactics and strategy being carried out in practice precisely through structure and leadership. But this could only be a temporary solution and today the WLM is suffering the inevitable fractures that capitalism in crisis with all its corresponding attacks on the working class, social services, education and democratic rights has brought to bear upon it.

5. The WLM prizes above all else its 'autonomy' from all other forms of political organisation—including trade unions, political parties of all persuasions, and, for some sections of the movement 'mixed' campaigns like NAC and WWCC. On the one hand this is directly related to the valid need for women to organise separately to raise their confidence and arm themselves to fight their oppression, but on the other, the WLM in refusing to forge links or alliances with other groupings has cut itself off from all other groupings in struggle. In building a working class women's movement it will be necessary to gain the support of working class men not to exclude them from all the structures of the movement. The raising of women's oppression to the fore within class society has created the corresponding emphasis on women as a class-in-themselves. And the turning away from alliances with trade unions, working class organisations and political parties is a reaction to the treachery of Stalinism on the woman's question, the refusal of the Labour Party to fight for women's rights and the inability of "Trotskyist" groups in the 50s, 60s and early 70s to even recognise such a thing as a woman's question, as well as the very real sexism within the working class.

6. The demands of the WLM have been built up over the years. These are based around equal pay, equal job and education opportunities, 24-hour nurseries, free abortion and contraception on demand, legal and financial independence, the right to sexual self-determination (which since the WLM Conference in 1978 heads the list); for an end to male violence against women. These demands incorporate both the reformism that lies at the heart of the WLM—demands for formal equality within existing society and the means to provide this—and feminism—an opposition to sexual oppression and an affirmation of sex-class struggle. These demands spell out neither a strategy for achieving women's liberation, nor a form of action to fight for them.

7. There are three distinct tendencies in the WLM today—radical feminists; revolutionary feminists; socialist feminists. The concept that links these groupings together is that of patriarchy. Radical Feminism has provided the theoretical basis for both revolutionary feminism and socialist feminism. Kate Millett and her book *Sexual Politics* (1969) provides the theoretical basis for radical feminism. In her writings Millett focuses entirely on the system of male domination and to the power relationships by which men dominate women. In her

view society is organised around two basic components: men dominating women and older men dominating younger. The differences between women themselves are insignificant compared to their subordination by men. These are only differences in 'class style'. The family is the basic unit of patriarchal society within which women are subordinated and children are socialised to enter their respectively sexually differentiated rôles. Although the form of patriarchy varies from society to society it is basic to all societies. Since all forms of economic exploitation etc are subordinate to women's sexual oppression by men through the family Millett is not concerned to discuss them. However, what distinguishes her theory from the revolutionary feminists is that she does not think that biological differences in the sexes cause men to *naturally* oppress women. But she doesn't explain what, in her view does. What is clear is that Millett has taken an entirely subjective view of society creating a 'theory' around a *description* of women's oppression within that society. Her distortion of reality arises because she has not looked for causes within society as a whole—material, ideological, historical, but taken individual consciousness as her starting point. The necessity for women to 'raise' their consciousness to the point where they become aware of their oppression by men is central to the practice of radical feminism. Radical Feminism's main political activity is to challenge the basis of the family by raising consciousness through consciousness raising groups of women, questioning heterosexuality and an emphasis on women's control of their bodies and fertility. The majority of the WLM still adhere to the theory of radical feminism.

8. Revolutionary Feminism grew out of radical feminism, emerging as a coherent grouping with its own conferences in 1978. The magazine *Wires* (available to women only) is the only authorised publication of the WLM other than *Spare Rib* and carried the more extreme feminist viewpoints like revolutionary feminism and 'Wages for Housework'. Revolutionary Feminism has its theoretical roots in Shulamith Firestone's book *The Dialectic of Sex*. The difference in Firestone's theory to that of radical feminism is that women's oppression is caused by biological gender differentiation. Women were created biologically "*different and not equal*" because they were at the continual mercy of their biology—menstruation, menopause, pregnancy, childcare, etc. "*The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution. The need for power leading to the development of classes [sex-class] arises from the psychosexual formation of each individual according to this basic imbalance.*" As long as women are at the mercy of their biology men will seize power, subordinate women. Women could only attain liberation by human reproduction being entirely confined to artificial means and "*The divisions of labour would be ended by the elimination of labour altogether [through cybernetics].*"

However, more important for us are the theoreticians of today's revolutionary feminists. In *The Need for Revolutionary Feminism* (Scarlet Women, 5:10) Sheila Jeffreys splits society into two distinct systems. First is the economic system which is based on the relations of production; second is the sex class system based on the relations of reproduction. These systems are autonomous and for women reproduction is their only concern since it is this that accounts for women's subordination by men's control and ownership of women's reproductive powers. In *Feminism and Socialism* (Scarlet Women, 5) Finella Mackenzie describes the ways in which reproductive differentiation gives rise to male power. This was because women's reproductive weakness enforced their dependence on men's greater strength who used this to seize power, leading to a sex-class system. These feminists do not think women's biology is *in itself* oppressive (which Firestone does) but that it becomes oppressive to women because of the *value men* place on reproduction and the necessity for them to control it. The precise form of control changes from society to society according to the economic, cultural and historical circumstances but the control itself is constant. This, then, is for them, the unchanging basis of society, patriarchy.

The practice of revolutionary feminists is to consciously analyse men as a *class* to be smashed. Their practice is entirely

oriented to developing women's consciousness of their 'class' oppression, through consciousness raising; organising to expose male power by activities around rape, sexual violence and violence in the family. An extreme demand has been for the castration of rapists. These women are entirely hostile to the left and class struggle but also to women who they associate with the left. The importance of revolutionary feminist theory is that it represents in an extreme form the basic mistake of feminism—that reproduction is an autonomous system within class society and that women are oppressed through men's seizure of their reproduction. But they find it impossible to concretise their theory by explaining what forms sexual differences take in different forms of society, including a non-patriarchal one (always assuming they think one could ever exist). Reproduction is reduced entirely to the physical act of bearing children—the social aspects of child rearing, domestic labour and women workers, are completely ignored.

If women succumbed to men's seizure of their reproductive power because of their biological weakness how could women ever overcome their weakness to overthrow male sexual oppression? They don't say.

### 9. Materialist Feminism

This is a theory developed by a French sociologist called Christine Delphy and represents a strand within radical feminism. She is attempting to develop a theory based on Marxist terminology in order to attack socialist feminism. Her aim is to create a material basis for reproduction as a distinct economic system within society *alongside* and *independent* of a productive system. She argues that women's oppression has a material basis theoretically and empirically distinct from capitalist relations of production—she calls this the domestic mode of production based on patriarchal exploitation within the family—men constitute the exploiters. The interesting aspect of Delphy's theory is that it represents the first attempt by a radical feminist to develop a theory for patriarchy that is *relatable* to capitalism without having to *subordinate* patriarchy to class society in any way whatsoever.

Within Delphy's schema most goods are produced in the industrial mode of exploitation but domestic services, child rearing and some goods are produced in the family mode. In feudal society the family produced more goods sold by the husband than in industrial society. Delphy is describing a primarily French situation. There many more women participate in agricultural work—producing poultry, pigs, eggs, milk etc—than is the case in Britain. Here this work is usually done in a packing factory. It would be very difficult to prove that British women produce goods through their work in the family. According to Delphy though, women who work are partially exploited in the industrial mode of production, and partially exploited in the family mode. She asserts that: "*marriage is the institution by which gratuitous work is extorted from a particular category of the population, women-wives. This work is gratuitous for it does not give rise to a wage but simply to upkeep. . . the same work acquires value—is remunerated—as long as the woman furnishes it to people to whom she is not related or married. The appropriation of their labour within marriage constitutes the oppression common to all women.*"

At one point she says: "*as a category of human beings who are destined by birth to become members of this class [women] constitute a caste.*" But she goes on to say "*to supply unpaid labour within the framework of a universal and personal relationship [marriage] constitutes precisely a relationship of slavery.*" So she is describing a quite different mode of production—slavery—and giving it equal weight to a capitalist system—yet which is able to exist *alongside* it. And how does she deal with the state? By describing it as both a class state and a patriarchal one. But if there are two autonomous productive systems in society how does one state manage to represent both systems at one and the same time? Engels in *The Family, Private Property and the State* outlines how the state developed

in class society "*placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it*" as a result of "*the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel.*" But Engels pointed out that the state represented the most powerful class as a means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class. "*As the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but as it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class.*" The only exception to this is when "*warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state, power, as ostensible mediator, acquires for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both*"—Bonapartist states, fascist states. In British and French society today the state represents the bourgeoisie in holding down and oppressing the working class. It would be entirely impossible for such a state with all its repressive apparatus—judiciary, police, standing army, and bureaucracy—to oppress the working class both men and women, and at one and the same time, represent the interests of men including working class men in economically exploiting women by holding down and oppressing *all women*. It would be a strange state apparatus that could repress and hold down a whole section of the working class in whose interests it was also acting, on a permanent basis.

In a fascist state, the state does politically oppress the class, the bourgeoisie along with all other classes, in whose economic interests, it is acting. This only occurs in extreme situations, where the bourgeoisie can no longer hold down the working class in any other way, but it is an inherently unstable situation. Political power will eventually be retained by the bourgeoisie or seized by the working class. It could not apply to a state apparatus through two distinct economic systems—feudalism and capitalism as Delphy suggests. The state apparatus would have to be completely transformed through a revolutionary upheaval—it would be impossible that a state acting in the interests of a patriarchal system could simply continue unaffected and become incorporated into a new economic system.

Delphy fails to provide an analysis of where patriarchy developed and for what *material* reason. Why did men seek to exploit women in that particular form? There is an implication here again that men simply seized power over women. In fact the work women do in the home—cleaning, child rearing, cooking, etc—has the main function of servicing and reproducing the workforce inside capitalism *for* the benefit of capitalist class exploitation. Such work produces use value. Secondly capitalism is the dominant mode of production within which all social relations are subordinate, including those within the family. It is dependent on a 'free' labour force exchanged (like goods) on a 'free' market. Economic slavery is dependent on the direct ownership of labour and would present a major contradiction in a society based entirely on 'free' market forces and 'free' labour. Although we describe women's work in the home as domestic slavery it is not an economic mode distinct from capitalism, nor can it be described as economic exploitation. Further, the development of class societies through to the imperialist stage of capitalism represents a dynamic of economic and class forces within societies based on class exploitation. Those developments and the great upheavals, both political and social, could not incorporate a timeless, unchanging mode of production completely autonomous from capitalism. Delphy's analysis ironically also leaves out a crucial area of women's oppression—reproduction. In her schema women's imprisonment in the home through her role as mother and reproducer of labour power is completely ignored. Women are oppressed entirely through their economic exploitation in the family.

Although Delphy has developed an analysis entirely at variance with the usual feminist emphasis on reproduction she shares many conclusions with mainstream feminism. To her all women are oppressed (albeit through gratuitous economic work in the home) and constitute a caste or a class. Thus women's oppression supercedes class divisions and represents an autonomous sphere in society. Men constitute an oppressor class. It is feminists like Delphy and Wages for Housework who

posit housework as the point of women's oppression that have been attacked by Joan Smith (SWP) for not taking reproduction as a starting point. Her position is dealt with elsewhere in this pamphlet.

#### 10. WLM Campaigns

The campaigns the WLM have initiated have all been reformist aimed at ameliorating women's oppression within capitalist society. It is ironic that however radical or revolutionary feminism appears in positing the sex-class war, the reformism implicit in the rhetoric is exemplified by feminist practice. Women's Aid, for example, set up with the aim of combatting male violence within the family, to allow women to gain independence, has become virtually incorporated into the social services structure of the state. Refuges have been set up all over the country, many of whom receive grants from local authorities and who can offer nothing but temporary relief to working class women battered by their husbands. Many of these women have returned to their husbands, feeling unable to cope with 'independence'. Pregnancy testing services, voluntary nursery groups offer nothing more than a welcome service to women, and enable capitalism to incorporate them as cheap welfare outlets to women who might otherwise have organised to fight for them as a right. A very real danger today is the WLM turning towards self-help abortion as a 'solution' to the attacks on abortion rights.

#### 11. Socialist Feminism

The theoretical basis of socialist feminism is the attempt to relate patriarchy to economic exploitation in capitalist society. Also to analyse the relationship between feminism and class struggle. At no point, however, have socialist feminists questioned the autonomy of the WLM. There are two main streams of thought in socialist feminist thinking (a) patriarchy as ideology and (b) patriarchy rooted in the social relations of reproduction.

#### 12. Patriarchy as Ideology

Juliette Mitchell is the main proponent of this theory. She argues that patriarchy is cultural and is represented by fathers (not men) who assumed power at the beginnings of human culture. This power is used by fathers, and their representatives to assert power over women. At the foundation of human societies there was an incest taboo and women were used as exchange objects. Patriarchy is thus universal to all human societies. In capitalist society the conditions exist to allow for the disappearance of the incest taboo but the structures have remained leading to women's oppression through their role as reproducers. There is therefore a contradiction between capitalism and patriarchy which could be resolved if women fight to eradicate patriarchy. A form of cultural revolution. Her conception of ideology is derived from Althusser where the economic, the political and the ideological exist in distinct spheres and in which the ideological has a relative autonomy from the economic base. This enables Mitchell to acknowledge that capitalist relations of production determine ideological forms but since she thinks ideology is relatively autonomous and most important for women, she ignores the relationship. Her view is that there is "an economic mode of production [and] . . . the ideological mode of reproduction."

And her theory of the incest taboo as universal to all societies is derived directly from Freudian psychoanalysis and is in contradiction to the conception of the family and women's oppression arising as a result of the development of private property put forward by Engels correctly. She is unable to explain why it was men who used women as exchange objects as a result of the incest taboo.

The journal *m/f* has recognised the contradiction in Mitchell's work that patriarchy is universal while class societies have changed and developed. They have resolved the problem by arguing that ideology and the economic base are totally autonomous, that production and reproduction are autonomous. However this is not economic as Delphy argues, patriarchy is ideological. However they provide no adequate explanation for how patriarchy survives without any relationship to an economic base.

Some socialist feminists have justified the theory by quoting Engels in the preface to the first edition of *The Family, Private Property and the State* where he says: "According to the materialist conception the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a two-fold character. On the one hand the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefore; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species." However this in itself is not sufficient to demonstrate that these spheres are *autonomous* or even to explain the *relationship* at all.

In the text of the book Engels is unambiguous in asserting that the family and women's oppression is tied to class society and economic property relations.

13. The other wing of socialist feminism sees women's oppression as lying within reproduction. Some view reproduction as autonomous within capitalism located in the ideological sphere. Others have analysed it as a distinct 'mode of reproduction'. Zillah Eisenstein, an American socialist feminist, has developed a theory to synthesise feminism with Marxism. Society, in her view, is split into two class forms: "patriarchy (as male supremacy) provides the sexual hierarchical ordering of society for political control and as a political system can't be reduced to its economic structure while capitalism as an economic class system driven by the pursuit of profit feeds off the patriarchal ordering. Together they form the political economy of the society, not merely one or another, but a particular blend of the two."

Having located women's oppression in the ideological sphere she says: "Ideology is used to refer to the ideas that protect both male and capitalist power arrangements." And in some cases (she doesn't specify which) ideology could be totally autonomous from the economic base, though in most cases they are in a 'dialectical' relationship. "For women, of course, the crucial one is to challenge the family, because it is the fundamental social and political organisation of the society which is sexual hierarchy itself. . . . Once the sexual division of labour is challenged particularly in terms of its connection to the capitalist order, one of the basic forms of the organisation of work (especially affecting the home, but with wide ramifications for the entire society) will be challenged."

She is dismissive of the working class "the existing conceptions of a potentially revolutionary proletariat are inadequate for the goals of socialist feminism. Second there are serious questions whether the potential defined in classical marxist terms would ever become real in the USA." She prefers to organise on an all class women's basis: "the feminist struggle begins from the commonality that derives from the particular roles women share in patriarchy." Her tactic for organising is "cross class organising" based on abortion, health care, rape and child care.

In socialist feminist writings these ideas occur again and again. In Britain, the practice of socialist feminists—concentration on theory, sexuality, rape, Women Against Racism and Fascism, Reclaim the Night—are a reflection of the emphasis on women's oppression through her reproduction. And a reflection of their innate disinterestedness in working class struggle. They consider the working class as an ally

only, in the struggle against women's oppression. Their major strategy is to build a socialist movement rooted in the WLM. In *Scarlet Women* the paper of the British socialist feminist current, in the definition of aims, the editors state "socialist feminism is a distinct revolutionary approach, a challenge to the class structure and to patriarchy. . . sisterhood is our defence against oppression, and as such is part of our revolutionary consciousness. . . socialists sometimes see the struggle as being about a change in the economic structure alone. For us the struggle is about a change in total social relations. . . what we are looking for is nothing less than a total redefinition of socialist thought and practice."

#### 14. Reproduction and Socialist Feminism

The various definitions of patriarchy that run through the feminist movement concentrate mainly around the problem of women's reproduction. But when discussing reproduction it is clear that there are two ways of looking at the question. First is reproduction narrowed down to the biological function of sexual relations and child bearing. Patriarchy was the seizure of control of women's physical reproductive powers. Thus the importance of regaining control over their bodies. Anne Torrode writing in *Scarlet Women* states: "The power of the ruling class rests on the continual alienation of the labour power of the working class and of the reproductive power of women. Just as its very existence as a class rests on that original alienation of female reproductive capacity."

The fact that women are oppressed through their position as reproducers of future labour power within the family is for socialist feminists a result of the loss of her control of her biological reproductive capacity. For us reproduction has a wider definition—incorporating both the biological act of child bearing and the social confinement of women to child rearing and domestic labour within the family which itself exists as a result of class society. Some socialist feminists have extended the notion of reproduction beyond the biological but have always blurred the distinction.

#### 15. Socialist Feminist Practice

Socialist feminists have approached political practice from the basis of a hostility towards left organisations and united front campaigns, creating instead duplicate organisations for women only. Over the last two years socialist feminists have concentrated on Ireland and Imperialism, racism and fascism and rape with the specific task of looking at the oppression of women under those circumstances. They have organised in small groups to deal with these questions from a mainly theoretical point of view. The next socialist feminist conference will be devoted entirely to studying women and imperialism and even to re-evaluate marxist theory of imperialism. During the Grunwick strike socialist feminists took an active part in the picket lines but politically raised only the problems Asian women as individuals faced against the sexism of male dominated trade unions and their husbands and ignored the very real problems Asian women were having in organising and taking an effective part in working class struggle.

The main activity of socialist feminists has been Reclaim the Night demonstrations. Our criticism of these demonstrations has been that they are utopian—the idea of eradicating rape and sexual violence and pornography under capitalism; they run the danger of being used by right wing moralists like Whitehouse and Longford to introduce censorship and impose a repressive code of morality on society; they can be used to create racial hatred—for example when they marched through a predominantly black area of Leeds. Socialist feminists place an emphasis on women's consciousness of her oppression as an

individual—resulting in an orientation towards housewives as being the most oppressed—viz the debate in the WWCC which the socialist feminists abandoned because of its orientation towards women in the work place. There is also a move back towards consciousness raising.

#### 16. Socialists Feminists and the Party

Sheila Rowbotham is an important example in giving a theoretical coherence to the hostility of socialist feminists towards the left. She rejects the methods of organising on the left and lays a particular emphasis on her dislike of the Leninist method of party organisation—she has a hatred of any form of leadership or hierarchy—in her view that must be in itself, oppressive. She remarks: "although Leninist and Trotskyist groups acknowledge the need to learn from the working class movement, I think that secretly they feel deep down they already know better" and "if you accept a high degree of centralisation and define yourselves as professionals concentrating above everything upon the central task of seizing power you necessarily diminish the self activity and self confidence of most of the people involved." In fact what she is saying apart from her subjective consciousness that that sort of organisation would suppress her own individuality, is that the seizure of power is not the central task. What then is? A gradual transition to socialism through the "creation of a new culture" with everyone working together as equals. It is this constant referral to building a transition to socialism through the resistance by individuals to capitalism built around their natural tendency to resist a society which "denied the possibility of creativity and love" which emphasises Rowbotham's reformism. She is hostile to any party that has a programme and strategy for working class seizure of power because it conflicts with her aim of testing out the values and ideas of socialism within capitalist society. She concretises this when describing the WLM: "the movement for women's liberation is part of the creation of a society in which there are no forms of domination, this society cannot be separated from the process of its making." Rowbotham believes that the WLM's method of organisation which she describes as 'participatory democracy' because it has "an approach to organisation which is prepared to test forms and discard and select according to the situation rather than assuming a universally correct code" can be applied to the left in general: "coming partly from the experience of feminist women's lives they reach continually outwards towards new forms of expressing defiance and resistance. This is a creativity which has not been shared within the Leninist and Trotskyist traditions." It is unfortunate that Rowbotham sees no need to go beyond defiance and resistance in the struggle for socialism.

For women Rowbotham urges the building of socialist feminist groups and to reject joining left groups. Socialist feminist groups "carries the hope of an integration of ideas, personal feelings and activity." Activity like anti-fascism, Ireland, legal repression, imperialism and self help groups—self help groups are part of a new socialist consciousness which raises "welfare control." To Rowbotham the building of socialist feminist groups with their own political aims as related to women, separate from the left, is crucial. Implicit in this is the danger of the attempt to build a political party for women. Rowbotham not only wants to build 'socialist' consciousness within capitalist society but for this to be achieved on an all-class basis—as an example she criticises the German socialist women's movement for refusing to organise with the bourgeois women's movement! As she herself puts it she would like to get back to the utopian socialists in the early 19th century, to Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, and the *Socialist League* in the 1880s. Engels made it clear in *Anti Duhring* why utopian socialism is itself utopian—an impossibility. Utopian socialism takes as its starting point the emancipation "not of a particular class [to begin with], but all humanity

[at once].” Utopian socialists “were utopian because they could do nothing else at a time when capitalist production was as yet so little developed. They necessarily had to construct the elements of a new society out of their own heads, because these elements were not as yet generally apparent within the old society. But since that time large-scale industry has developed the contradictions lying dormant in the capitalist mode of production into such crying antagonisms that the approaching collapse of this mode of production, is so to speak palpable. . . that the struggle between the two classes engendered by the prevailing modes of production and constantly reproduced in ever sharper antagonism has gripped all civilised countries.” A utopian socialist today is “like a person who, after the discovery and establishment of the laws of modern chemistry, attempts to restore the old alchemy and to use atomic weights, molecular formulas, the valency of atoms, crystallography and spectral analysis for the sole purpose of discovering—the philosopher’s stone.”

17. The thread unifying all the sections of the WLM, including the socialist feminists is the division of society into two distinct systems, economic and patriarchal. While the radical and revolutionary feminists ignore the economic system as male dominated and irrelevant, socialist feminists have attempted to link patriarchy and reproduction/domestic labour.

## Conclusion

The Women’s Liberation Movement can no longer be described as a movement as such, since it has not had a conference since 1978, nor is one planned. The Socialist Feminist Conferences now act as a substitute for them, with the consequence that Socialist Feminist Conferences have become less socialist and more mainstream WLM. As the crisis has intensified, socialist feminists have moved away from involvement in class confrontation and activity, towards theory, education and consciousness raising.

Many feminists have turned to the Labour Party as a solution to political involvement, believing that the injection of women’s issues into the Party will provide the pressure necessary to change a future Labour Government’s policies. Superficially, this may appear as a development of political consciousness and the acknowledgement of the necessity for class struggle, but in reality it represents an acceptance of the possibility of change being brought about by the Labour Party, a party which time and time again has proved itself incapable of representing the real interests of the working class. For these women, primarily white collar workers and students, whose involvement in the women’s movement often spans several years, the move into the Labour Party is an expression of defeat, of a cynical belief that the *only* way to engage actively in the struggles of the working class, now lies within the Labour Party. But this in fact leads away from the fight to build a working class women’s movement led and based on working class women organised in the workplace.

Other sections of the WLM have turned towards the ‘Women’s Aid’, ‘Rape Crisis Centre’, self-help type solution. But the problems of women’s liberation will not be solved through attempting to *alleviate* the worst burdens of women’s oppression. Only the struggle to build a working class women’s movement, united in action alongside working class men to smash the capitalist system, can lay the basis for the ending of women’s oppression, sweeping away her position as ‘the slave of a slave’.

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# SWP Debate on Women

## Economism tailing Feminism

In this article on the Socialist Workers Party and Women we analyse the two theoretical strands that provide the basis for the Socialist Workers Party's practice within Women's Voice. The importance of this task lies in the fact that the SWP has attempted to break from its old position, which viewed women simply as workers who were hard to organise, to develop a strategy for building a working class women's movement through Women's Voice. However, as we show in the article, neither of the two theoretical tendencies, led by Joan Smith and Lindsay German are able to develop a correct analysis of women's oppression, or the programme necessary in the fight to build a working class women's movement today. On the one hand Joan Smith finds it impossible to definitively break with feminism, while on the other Lindsay German cannot break with the SWP's politics of spontaneism.

A debate on women is raging openly in the publications of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). The issues and tempo of the debate have been forced by women who are active in Women's Voice and in disagreement with the general line of the SWP on work amongst women.

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) is becoming ever more fragmented into distinctly demarcated tendencies with Socialist Feminism and Revolutionary Feminism representing the two extreme wings. There has been no national WLM conference since 1978. Under the impact of the current capitalist crisis it is becoming more and more apparent to many women activists that the WLM as a whole cannot lay the basis for a mass women's movement based on working class women. The debate in the SWP, therefore, is taking place at a crucial time. It is essential to provide a political lead with the programme, strategy and tactics that can both answer the problem facing working class women and provide an alternative to the political stagnation and growing reformism of the WLM.

The positions of the major protagonists in the SWP debate—Joan Smith and Lindsay German—do not provide these answers. Each of them falls into major errors in their analysis of women's oppression and the struggle for women's emancipation.

Joan Smith is attempting to distance herself from the old IS/SWP tradition that simply saw women as workers who were hard to organise. The SWP leaders, traditionally viewing the world through the spectacles of militant trade unionism, ignored the specific oppression of women in capitalist society until the women's movement of the 1970s 'infected' their organisation with its concerns and aspirations. In seeking to break with the worst aspects of this tradition, Joan Smith has adopted many of the mistakes inherent in the feminist women's movement.

All feminists, be they 'socialist' or 'radical', adhere to a theory of patriarchy which locates the roots of women's oppression in the seizure of control of women's reproductive capacities by men. Some feminists see this as being inherent

in men's nature and unrelated to the economic relations of society. For them, patriarchy preceded class societies. Others regard women's oppression and patriarchy as 'ideological' and autonomous from the economic base of society.

Marxists have always argued that the root of the continuation of women's oppression in capitalist society does not lie in political inequality as the bourgeois feminists claim. Neither does it lie in a patriarchal system independent of capitalist relations of production as the radical feminists believe. It lies within the totality of capitalist relations, in the condemnation of women to domestic slavery within the family. Hence, for us, the centrality of one of the most crucial demands for breaking down women's isolation in the home—the socialisation of housework.

Joan Smith, while formally acknowledging that women's oppression was the direct result of the emergency of private property, class society and the family, falls into the feminist trap. She asserts that there are two distinct spheres within capitalist economy. These she describes as the Mode of Production (labour) and the Mode of Reproduction (the family). For her all women, regardless of class, are oppressed within the Mode of Reproduction and it is within this sphere that women should organise their autonomous struggle.

For Joan Smith, 'In all societies the mode of reproduction is i) the reproduction of the next generation and ii) the regulation of relations between the sexes.' [*Women and the Family, International Socialism 100*] Reproduction within the family is cheaper for capitalism and also essential in socialising and teaching children skills. Housework is not productive work and is distinct from production. But the jump she makes from that distinction to the identification of reproduction as an economic mode, a distinct economic sphere within capitalism, is unexplained. Nor does she explain the relationship of production to reproduction, only its distinction. This she defines as a contradiction: "Within the capitalist system there is thus a contradiction between the demands of production (women and the labour force)." (Here she incorrectly asserts that capital always wants to draft women into production, thus implying a constantly expanding capitalism—ed) and the demands of reproduction (women into the home)." [*ibid*] But in her analysis this supposed contradiction has no dynamic effect, it is static, effectively separating women from production and it does not reflect the fact that capitalist production is not constantly expanding.

Further, Smith's invention of a new economic 'mode' within capitalism is based on a mistaken understanding of the categories of Marxist economic analysis. To argue that reproduction of the proletariat is separate from, indeed contradictory to, the needs of the 'mode of production' reveals total confusion on the actual relationship that exists between the family and production.

Superficially, a worker's wages appear as payment for work done, but, as Marx showed, in fact they are the price for the reproduction and maintenance of labour power in the form of free labourers. Wages, therefore, are divided (normally within the family) between the 'personal' expenditure of the worker and the needs of the family. The precise proportions of this division are flexible—as is shown by capitalism's ability to provide, in socialised form, elements of the reproductive role of the family through hospitals, social work, etc. This is undertaken when capital is expanding and drawing women into production.

Thus, where Smith sees a contradiction between production and reproduction, there is actually only a historically determined division of labour serving capitalism's needs.

What Joan Smith is really driving at becomes clearer when she attempts to extend her 'Mode of Reproduction' to take in the public sector—particularly education and health. "Certain state activities become part of the mode of reproduction of society, such as education, health etc." She continues: "In the 20th Century the enormous development of productivity has given rise to a class of public servants. In the sphere of education 67% of these workers are women and in the sphere of health 75%. I would argue that these workers should not be classified alongside of other unproductive workers in the sphere of production. Instead they should be seen as workers

in the necessary base (reproduction) of the capitalist mode of production, engaged in the necessary reproduction of the working class." [ibid]

Of course, it is no coincidence that women do the 'caring' jobs in the public sector—it is an extension of the role in the family. However, this, and their low wages, are not simply an extension of their oppression. Workers in these areas exchange their labour power for wages. As Marx explained labour exchanged for revenue is categorised as unproductive labour. Their wages are paid out of surplus value created by productive workers and accumulated by tax on wages and profits. Marx himself characterised the labour of teachers as unproductive. To describe this labour as 'necessary' simply because it contributes to the reproduction of the workforce fails to distinguish between labour in the home which is not exchanged for a wage and labour in the public sector which is. Smith's analysis is an analysis of convenience, not a Marxist analysis. What about the male workers in these sectors—are they oppressed since their work enters this reproduction sphere?

Why does Smith develop this 'economic' analysis? Firstly, because it enables here to describe all women, regardless of class, as oppressed within the family itself. Secondly, because she can combine that with an orientation to working class women in the public sector.

Joan Smith, in her analysis of women and the family, presents a rationalisation of feminism. Women's oppression in the structures of the family overrides their exploitation in production—which she limits entirely to manufacturing work. The logic is the women's movement aimed primarily at women in the home and those carrying out the 'caring' jobs within the public sector, and it is precisely this autonomous movement focused on women within this separate economic mode that Joan Smith wants Women's Voice to become.

This analysis would seem to lead Smith logically to ignore women in manufacturing industries. She seems to imply this when she says, "it is possible to work (in the trade unions—ed) through the rank and file. It is possible to forge links between public sector workers (a majority of men)." [ISJ, p. 104] What Joan Smith ignores here, if she accepts her own logic, is that in the building of a women's movement, based on working class women, it is not simply numbers that are important but organisation, willingness to fight and economic weight within capitalism. That is why women workers in manufacturing industry must provide the basis for a mass, working class women's movement.

The logic of Smith's theory leads her to advocate a women's movement to "Unite all women—public sector workers, factory workers, women at home. Because capitalism oppresses all women the material basis for such an organisation exists." [ibid] She wants to build an organisation of 'revolutionary feminists,' all women, regardless of class, harnessed to a working class party to give it a class content. Why this should be organised separately from the socialist feminists is not clear. Its relationship to the revolutionary party is unclear and unspecified. The party (read SWP) is supposed to link the all-class women's movement to the working class, how we are not told.

Lindsay German thinks she has a clear idea of what women's oppression is all about. She thinks a women's movement is needed because, "the fundamental division is not between the sexes, but between those who produce the wealth in society and those who rob them of it. Of course, within such a society, women through their oppression are inferior to men (sic). That is why we need a women's organisation. A communist women's organisation." [Socialist Review 5]

Her aim is primarily party-building. But she recognises the existence of women's oppression (even if she can't analyse it) and that women, because of this, are difficult to recruit. Also ten years of the WLM and the development of socialist feminism with its attraction to many women who might otherwise have joined a left organisation, has forced her to look more seriously at the need for new methods of organising women. She attacks Smith's position only on the basis that Smith is advocating a separate organisation of women. For German, this

is to undermine the building of the SWP. She would prefer to see a women's organisation politically and organisationally tied to the SWP.

German's answer to feminism is that things have now changed. "In a period of crisis, a purely feminist solution is not enough. . . . socialism has to be the only way to achieve women's liberation. Whereas in the 1950s and 60s it was possible to campaign for equal pay, contraception, nurseries and so on as part and parcel of the increased living standards of workers, which capitalism was conceding, now one comes up against the arguments about national interest, women's place being in the home and so on. The only way to cut through that is to present the alternative of a planned socialist society." [ibid] However, when it comes to specific campaigns to "cut through" these arguments she talks only of campaigning on housing, unemployment, low wages, abortion and new technology. She offers no programmatic demands that could enable women to go forward from these struggles to a struggle for power and the overthrow of capitalism. The "planned socialist society" is only a utopian ideal in German's head. As such she offers no alternative to the perspectives of the feminists except joining the SWP.

Significantly, German is oblivious to the strength of reformism amongst working class women. "It's important to remember that the left in 1968 was very different from what it is now. The revolutionary left was at a much earlier and weaker stage of development and the CP was much stronger than it is now. It was the reformists who were dominant." German is not only blind to reality, that the forces to the left of the CP are minute and have no real influence in the working class, but also completely overlooks both the Labour Party and the role of the trade union bureaucracy. No women's movement built within the working class can ignore the hold of reformist ideas and the misleadership of the TU bureaucrats and Labour Party leaders both 'left' and 'right'.

In their own ways both of these warring parties bear the stamp of the politics of their parent organisation—SWP. The SWP's politics are formed in the mould of 'economism'—the belief that the economic struggle of the working class will, of itself, generate a socialist consciousness in workers. A party is needed to encourage and develop this struggle, tailoring its political programme to what is acceptable to workers in today's struggles.

The struggle for socialism is seen as a matter for more or less lucid portrayals of the ideal future, abstracted from, and of no immediate relevance to, the existing struggles of the class.

The trust in spontaneous struggle to generate political consciousness—the hallmark of the SWP—has taken a different form for the SWP women activists in the face of the women's movement of the 1970s. Breaking with the cruder economism of the SWP tradition they have, with more or less sophistication, adapted to and positively tailed the feminists. With German this takes the form of advancing and supporting the major feminist campaigns while arguing for their supporters to join "The Party". For Smith it takes the form of consciously theorising the need for an autonomous women's movement with an ill-defined relation to the party. As with the SWP in the trade union milieu, so both Smith and German tail the feminists in the women's movement.

Neither method will offer a way forward for the activists who look to Women's Voice to give a lead. German can offer nothing but a Women's Voice that is a stale appendage of the SWP. Smith can offer only a Women's Voice organisation that is inexplicably separate from the socialist feminists, incapable of challenging their perspective, while ultimately hamstrung by its ties to the SWP.