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THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY: A RE-EVALUATION

by Rick Feinberg, Chicago Branch

In our discussions of the women's liberation movement we take as a starting point the evolutionary framework expounded by Frederick Engels, in The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, which in turn is based on the work of the pioneer American anthropologist, Lewis Henry Morgan. Yet in going over the work of these two theorists I am struck by two things: a) the sophistication of their argument given the time at which they were writing, and b) the extent to which many of their fundamental conclusions about the history of human society seem untenable in the light of ethnographic data uncovered since their day.

I do not at present have the time to consider in detail the entire problem and all its nuances, but I would like to raise a few of the basic objections in summary form. I raise these points not out of idle scholasticism, but because I believe that if we take a position on a major issue and make an intensive effort to publicize that position on the widest possible scale it should be based on the fullest and most accurate knowledge available at the present time. Since anthropology is a subject I happen to know a little about, this is an area in which I feel I may be able to make some contribution.

My hope is not that this document will pronounce any definitive conclusions, but that it will stimulate discussion and encourage deeper and more extensive investigation of material relevant to this important question. If my contentions are accurate it is important that we correct our positions and analysis; if not I will be happy to be refuted and will consider this document to have been of some service in that it will have forced us to clarify and sharpen our position.

Before getting into the heart of this document I would like to say a few words about the question of matriarchy.

It is true that in many primitive societies women enjoy a much higher position in a number of respects than they do under capitalism. But Evelyn Reed says that matriarchy was not the mirror image of patriarchy, and in fact she contends that in "matriarchal" society there was complete equality between the sexes. However, in current usage the morpheme "archy" seems to imply some sort of rule or precedence as in "hierarchy." Leaving aside the

question of whether it is possible to say that there is complete sexual equality when there is a sharp division of economic labor and in many cases of religious and political responsibilities, if there is complete equality between the sexes then women did not rule nor did they have any form of precedence over men. Consequently, if there was complete equality we are not dealing with matriarchy. We may be dealing with matrilineal descent, inheritance, or succession to title, or with matrilocality residence. None of these necessarily means gross inequality between the sexes, but neither does any one of these necessarily imply another, and they certainly do not carry any necessary implication of matriarchy. But far more important than terminology is the question of whether there ever was a discrete stage in human social evolution where the women exercised the dominant political control. This, of course, leads into the whole question of evolutionary stages, the history of the family, and so on. I shall concentrate primarily on Morgan's views with respect to the history of the family, but to place this in perspective I would first like to discuss the route by which Morgan arrived at his ultimate conclusions.

While in law school Morgan became friends with a young Seneca Indian named Ely S. Parker. As a result of this acquaintance he helped the Senecas in a legal battle with the Ogden Land Company, and in a gesture of gratitude for his services he was adopted into the tribe. As he learned to speak the Iroquois language and became familiar with their customs he noticed that they classified kinsmen in a way which was very different from the system employed in western society. Where we distinguish terminologically between father and father's brother, mother and mother's sister, and between siblings and cousins the Iroquois did not make any of these distinctions. Later he coined the term "classificatory" to designate this type of system, while calling ours "descriptive."

When several years later Morgan met some Ojibwa Indians on a trip to the mid-west he was surprised to learn that although they spoke a very different language from that of the Iroquois and had a very different form of social organization (e.g. while the Iroquois had a system of matrilineal descent the Ojibwa were patrilineal), the pattern according to which they designated kinsmen was

almost identical.

As a result of this discovery Morgan postulated that kinship systems were extremely stable, and that all American Indian groups shared the same kinship system. At the time he was interested in demonstrating that the Indians had come originally from Asia, so he sent letters to missionaries and colonial administrators around the world, asking for information on kinship and social organization of the native people in their areas on the assumption that the Indians would most likely have come from that area whose kinship system was closest to theirs. When he found that the Tamil in India had a system which very closely resembled that of the Iroquois he felt both his method and his hypothesis had been vindicated.

In the course of this endeavor, however, he discovered that the Hawaiians had a kinship system which was even more strongly "classificatory" than that of the Iroquois. In the Hawaiian system the only differentiation between relatives at the parents' generation was on the basis of sex, so that the father, father's brother, and mother's brother were all called makua kane or "male parent" while the mother, mother's sister, and father's sister were all termed "female parent" or makua hine.

At first this puzzled Morgan until he came up with the explanation that this system reflected a state of "group marriage" in which a group of brothers was married to a group of sisters. Since a child in such a situation could not know who was his "real" biological father he applied this term to the entire set of brothers who were married to his mother, and since a man could not be certain whether he or one of his brothers was genitor of the child of any of his wives he called all their children "son" or "daughter." Since this hypothesized group marriage appeared to be the polar opposite of monogamy practiced in the most advanced western societies he assumed Polynesia to represent the lowest form of society which had not yet become extinct and postulated a more or less smooth line of development with the form of the family becoming ever closer to ours as one moves through history to societies with increasingly complex modes of technology and political organization.

This scheme was a brilliant construction given the data Morgan had to work with, but based on current information the problems are manifold.

The first question is the purely

logical one that while Morgan's explanation of Hawaiian kinship terminology may be plausible enough with respect to the father-child relationship it does not seem very likely that mothers would have the same problem in identifying their own children. The argument could be shifted a bit to contend that kinship ties were so strong that a woman treated her sisters' children as her own, with terminology following from these rules of behavioral practice. But if we accept this we have an explanation of classificatory kinship systems which does not require an assumption of group marriage and which is more consistent since it can apply to the mother's as well as the father's side.

The problems, however, do not stop here. While it is true that Polynesian kinship systems are strongly classificatory, every field worker who has spent time with them affirms that children in fact do distinguish behaviorally between their biological parents and parents' siblings, and that they have words or phrases by which they can distinguish them terminologically as well when they desire to do so.

In Morgan's defense, we might point out, he did not claim that group marriage necessarily still exists in Polynesia. Rather, he asserted, Hawaiian kinship terminology reflects a prior state of group marriage, and thus we could argue that the behavioral and terminological distinctions Polynesians make between parents and parents' siblings are changes which have come about since the decay of group marriage in that part of the world. If this is in fact the case, however, we should be able to find in societies more primitive than the Polynesians' patterns of both kinship terminology and behavior that more closely approximate a state of group marriage than anything to be discovered in Hawaii.

Morgan evaded this problem by assuming that there was no society extant which was more primitive than those of Polynesia, but this was based almost entirely on his kinship data. If his evolutionary framework were correct we would then expect to find in Polynesia extremely primitive hunting and gathering peoples with highly egalitarian modes of political and social organization. Yet in fact we find settled villages of sophisticated agriculturists and highly centralized, hierarchically stratified political systems. On most islands the chiefs were surrounded by sacred tapus, held absolute political power, had commoners executed on the smallest whim or as punishment for the slightest insub-

ordination, and frequently held title to all the land, which was used by the commoners strictly at the chiefs' discretion. The Tongan system of landholding and tribute payments reminds one of nothing so much as Japan of the Samurai period or feudal Europe.

If, on the other hand, we examine such primitive hunters and gatherers as the Australian Aborigines, the Shoshonean Indians of the western United States, Africa's Kalihari Bushmen, or the Andaman Islanders, groups which if judged on the basis of technological or political development are clearly among the most primitive in the world, we find that they are strictly monogamous. Among the Eskimos not only is there monogamous marriage, but the system of kinship terminology is almost identical to our own. Yet this is precisely where, if Morgan were correct, we should find the most strongly classificatory kinship systems and the most promiscuous forms of marriage. Far from being diagnostic of a society's developmental status identical kinship systems have been found at many different levels of development. The most primitive societies are neither matrilineal nor patrilineal as they have no true descent group organization, no titles or offices to succeed to, and no permanent property to inherit. Most hunting and gathering societies live in patrilocal bands, while we know of none that are matrilocal. And they are all monogamous.

Before concluding I would like to refer briefly to the position of women in primitive society; a subject which I have already introduced with my comments on matriarchy. I will not go into detail, but will simply present a few examples to indicate how variable this is.

In Tonga a sister always outranked her brothers in ritual honors, but in domestic affairs a husband always had absolute authority over his wife and the mother's side of a person's family was considered inferior to the father's side. On the Polynesian island of Tikopia it is said that a married woman is tapu or sacred, which meant normally that no man might strike her except for her husband, but it also meant that no man but her husband could have sexual relations with her. While a married woman found to be having intercourse with another man would be severely beaten by both her husband and her own patrilineal kin the only sanction against adultery on the part of the husband was the anger of his wife. All Polynesian descent systems are

either patrilineal or bilateral with a bias toward patrilineal affiliation, and aside from those few islands which have had occasional female chiefs the political systems were in the hands of the men. Among the Navajo Indians of the Southwestern United States short term day to day decisions are made by the leading male of the extended family residence group, who also acts as the group's spokesman, but social organization is centered around the concept of motherhood and women because of their position in the social structure tend to have more influence with respect to matters of overall long-run import. Among the Zulu of Africa, on the other hand, it is said that the differences between women and animals is so minimal as to make them almost indistinguishable. In short the situation is extremely complex and although there are many cases for which it is true, when we say that women in primitive society had a much higher position than they do in our own it is a vast oversimplification, and in at least a few cases could hardly be further from the truth.

All this does not go to say that there were not societies in which women held a great deal of power, and it does not mean that there were no societies which were extremely egalitarian. There were -- and are -- both. It does not mean that there was no pattern to the development of human society, nor does it repudiate historical materialism. It does not even mean that group marriage cannot have existed, although if it did -- and I think there is evidence that it was in fact practiced at least sporadically in a few societies -- it was probably a later variant rather than the earliest form of family organization. And it certainly does not suggest that there might be any solution other than socialism to the problems of women in today's society. It does mean, however, that while Morgan raised many of the right questions and started us on our way toward solving them, his conclusions were far from adequate. While the roots of women's oppression may in fact lie in the rise of agriculture and animal husbandry with the consequent development of private property, this did not coincide with the abolition of group marriage and if anything it was the reverse. It does not mean that there are no satisfactory answers to be derived from anthropological study concerning the roots of women's oppression, but it does mean that a great deal more work is necessary before those answers can be attained. If this document helps to stimulate some of that work it will have served its purpose.

May 26, 1971

IN REPLY TO THE PARTY LEADERSHIP'S PERSPECTIVES

by Lauren Charous, Oakland-Berkeley Branch

According to the report given at the recent National Committee plenum by Comrade Jack Barnes, the SWP has the goal of becoming:

...a mass revolutionary socialist combat party on the Leninist model and it must be proletarian in composition as well as in program. That has always been our orientation, and that remains our orientation. But one small question comes up. How do we get there? (SWP Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 31)

Neither the National Committee Draft Political Resolution nor the report given by Comrade Barnes correctly answer this decisive question. Both documents misinterpret important historical lessons concerning the relationship of the party to the working class and the importance of a proletarian orientation for the vanguard party. Not only do the documents reflect a generally unserious disposition toward this subject but the practice of the party today as well as the projections made in the documents for future proletarian work are clearly insufficient to transform the current party into a party that is proletarian both in composition and in program. In sum, the evaluation of the current radicalization made by the party leadership and their projections of party work lead the party further and further astray from the Leninist model of party-building and towards a perpetual orientation toward the petty-bourgeois layers.

This document has been written to analyze the mistakes in the party leadership's proposals. It will critically analyze the relationship of the party to the new radicalization and will also try to clarify the historical positions of the party on certain key aspects of its relationship to the working class.

THE CURRENT RADICALIZATION AND THE PARTY

Both the Draft Resolution and Comrade Barnes' report stress the "newness" of the current radicalization. They emphasize the ideological crisis of capitalism, the fact that previously quiescent sectors are entering into political activity and create the impression that the current radicalization is entirely unique and has decisively more social power than any which preceded it. While it is true that this radicalization is different from others

which preceded it, this does not mean that we should abandon the lessons of the past.

It is not at all unusual for the petty-bourgeoisie to move or to radicalize before the working class. The party traditionally relates to social movements against oppression among petty-bourgeois layers by attempting to give them the correct politics and recruit from them. When possible, it attempts to draw working class elements into their ranks. However, the party should always be aware of the limitations of the petty-bourgeois layers: their marginal social weight and their inability to carry out sustained action due to lack of consistent class interests and organizations. The party should not ignore the fact that movement among the petty-bourgeois layers weakens the "ideological glue" of society, and hence, prepares the way for our ideas. But the eye of the party must at all times be firmly fixed upon the class capable of dissolving the ideological glue and dismantling class society. For Leninists, there is only one such class -- the proletariat. It is for this reason the Leninist party adopts a proletarian orientation. For the party its relationship to the working class is a major question -- one that cannot be put off until the future.

What does a proletarian orientation mean in practical terms? Above all, it means a serious attitude toward penetrating into the ranks of the working class and intervening in its struggles. This orientation means the party must concretely lay out its intervention into the working class: the unions, the anti-war G.I. movement, and the working class women's movement. The Black, Chicano and Latino communities occupy a central position in this orientation not only because Black and Brown workers are already in motion, but also because of their key role in industrial production and their status as nationally oppressed minorities. This should be the orientation of the party today. Our relationship to the petty-bourgeois layers should be seen as supplemental to this orientation.

THE PARTY'S VIEW OF THE UNIONS

Unlike the last several political resolutions, this year's political resolution discusses the working class and trade unions at length. Let us examine the argument put forward in

the political resolution. In general, this analysis revolves around the increasing economic contradictions faced by American capitalism and the attempt being made by the ruling class to resolve their problems by increasing the rate of exploitation of the working class and submitting sections of the class to prolonged periods of unemployment and to falling real wages. In fact, the resolution goes so far as to state: "In the current turbulent political atmosphere such attacks can result in immense struggles and rapid radicalization of a decisive section of the American workers" (p. 5). The resolution also points out that an attack on the working class necessarily embodies an attack on trade union independence and militancy. This in turn increases the possibility of a mobilization of the rank and file in struggle against the ruling class and its labor lieutenants, the trade union bureaucrats. Lastly, the resolution discusses possible forms these struggles will assume and presents a program we can use to "educate the left-wing forces in the unions" (p. 21).

There is much of the analysis in the Draft Resolution that sounds good, and which by itself, is correct. But this discussion taken as a whole is superficial and defective. It fails to point out how the party will relate to the events which we predict are coming.

For instance, the resolution foresees the possibility of an explosion within the working class. However, it fails to explain how the party, which is today removed from the class, would relate to that explosion. No party can step in without previous authority at the critical moment and appeal to the workers to follow it. The party which aims to lead the working class must establish roots in the class long before that time. To be a party of leadership at the crucial moment, it is necessary to demonstrate leadership ability in the class before that moment. As Comrade James Cannon pointed out in Struggle For A Proletarian Party:

Our trade unionist wing in Minnesota has floated in recent years on the stream of success made possible by the heroic struggle of 1934, which were in turn inspired -- it should not be forgotten -- by the patient and stubborn theoretical and political work carried out in isolation by the leading cadre in the six years which preceded the 1934 strikes. (p. 94, emphasis added)

It is this key lesson of the past

that the party leadership glosses over today. While they do not say as much, it is evident from their entire analysis that they believe it is possible to reach the working class from the outside, that it is possible to link-up with the workers from the mass movements without going through the long slow process of building proletarian and union cadre. This explains why the leadership zealously tries to show how we can reach the working class from inside the petty bourgeois layers, how we can reach the Third World communities from the campus. To justify these positions the leadership must continually idealize the current radicalization and stress how new, big and different it is. Thus the Draft Resolution can call today's radicalization "bigger, deeper and broader than any previous" (p. 15), despite the obvious fact that this radicalization has failed to even politicize the decisive mass of workers. What inspires these intellectual gyrations on the part of the leadership is their desire to short-cut to the revolution over the head of the unions and the process of building proletarian cadre.

This desire is most evident in the concrete relationship of the party to the union movement today. The program proposed by the leadership is a necessary basis for carrying out our work in the unions -- but if we only have a program and no one to carry it out it remains an empty shell devoid of any real content. The party is not orienting comrades into key unions and plants. Comrade Barnes may state over and over again how when the opportunity presents itself, we send comrades into the industrial working class. But in practice, this is only a third-line priority. In a tasks and perspectives given before the New York YSA local by Comrade Peter Seidman which was selected for publication in the Young Socialist Organizer last October, the major task for comrades was seen like this: "Every comrade must think out how he or she can get a job on campus or return to school. We must concretely figure out how non-campus comrades can be involved in the work of campus fractions..." No mention was made of sending any comrades into unions. The current orientation of the party is clear: to take comrades, including those in unions, and to send them back onto the campus. This is backwards. We should be recruiting from the campus and orienting our recruits towards going into important unions and industries.

Another indication of a lack of real practical consideration of how

the party relates to union work can be found in the statistics presented in the National Membership Survey (Internal Information Bulletin No. 1 in 1971). The survey includes information on: the ages of members and of leadership, duration of membership, sex, cities of residence since joining, previous political affiliation as well as some party-youth statistics. It prominently includes statistics showing how many years college education members have had, a vital statistic for any working class organization. It does not include any membership statistics dealing with job categories or union affiliations. This should only serve to underline a lack of serious concern for this work by the party.

The party leadership may make frequent references as to the importance of building left-wing formations in the unions, but these remain either empty allusions or routinized formalisms in the absence of a clear-cut proposal on how to carry the work out. If the party takes this area of work seriously, then why don't the majority of branches have trade union fractions? Why is there no nationally organized ongoing intervention into unions like the UAW? Or even the AFT where we do have a significant number of comrades? There are a few comrades in the party doing valuable union work individually, and even some branches which carry out good work, but in the main our union work is not carried out on a systematic national basis. The party is not an association for free-floating union activists. The party would not propose having comrades free-lance on the campus or have individual branches go their own way in antiwar work. The party always sets up clear guidelines for work and organized fractions for interventions. Why does it do less with respect to union work?

The basic evaluation of the argument advanced in the Draft Resolution is that: "There has been no major challenge to the bureaucracy as a whole at this stage, there is not yet discernable any organized tendency toward the formation of a left-wing in the union movement..." This implies that we can safely wait until a major challenge is posed and then move in. This is totally false. We must not wait for a major challenge to the bureaucracy to develop before we decide to enter into the ranks of the workers. We cannot wait until the bureaucracy "as a whole" is under attack. We must help create that challenge. We must be there, as we are anywhere else, to give political leadership. We must be there if we intend to recruit the militant, conscious workers. We must be there if we intend to help build

rank and file support for the anti-war movement and for Third World and women's struggles.

The formation of union caucuses around issues such as racial oppression and discrimination against women workers is indeed a healthy manifestation of the current radicalization, but this imposes even larger demands upon the party. It is our role in those situations to broaden and deepen those struggles and to help coordinate the various layers of the working class. Our role is crucial; only we have the understanding of these struggles and are able to see their true potential and how they may best be developed.

The party cannot and should not respond subjectively to the political backwardness of the mass of workers. In an article which appeared in the Socialist Appeal of June 30, 1939 Comrade Cannon took up this problem in an article entitled, "On the Relation Between Mass Agitation and Trade Union Work:"

Trade Union work requires patience, endurance and skill. In very few unions, at present, is it possible to unfold the whole program of the Fourth International. In many unions, dominated by red-baiting bureaucrats, it is necessary for revolutionary militants to refrain from exposing themselves to expulsion by advertising their political affiliations. Revolutionary trade union work, as a rule, in America is quiet, mole-like, unspectacular. To carry on such work unflinching; to work in the unions in piecemeal fashion for parts of the program while holding fast to the party, which in its general agitation expounds and defends the program as a whole; to be attentive to the smallest union issues of the day without succumbing to opportunism; to entrench one's self and be in a position to influence the whole union when the time for action comes — these are among the sternest and most important revolutionary tests today.

Such tasks require courage, persistence and prudence. It is easy to shirk them, or to fail miserably in their performance. We know such cases, and the super-radicalism of the delinquents is poor consolation to the party which needs influence and support in the unions more than it needs anything else... What the party needs is militants who know how

to dig deep in the unions and stay there, gather a circle of sympathizers and supporters about them, and transmute their personal influence into party support in the trade union movement.

The party convention should emphasize this necessity once again. There is no room for two opinions on this question. (all emphasis added)

The party leadership makes a point of stressing the differences of this radicalization with those of the past. One of the most important of these differences, we are told, is that new forms of struggle have already emerged among the sectors now in motion. The implication is that we cannot be sure that the unions will be the vehicles of the working class radicalization, but that totally new forms may arise in the working class too. Now Trotskyists are not at all hostile to workers creating forms of struggle other than the unions. On the contrary, we recognize, in the Transitional Program amongst other places, that other forms of organization are clearly superior to the unions at various times in the class struggle. But it is necessary to keep three things in mind:

1) No new forms of struggle may immediately and spontaneously occur in the coming upsurge. It will therefore be necessary for us to be in a strong position in the unions in this event.

2) Even if new forms do emerge, this does not in any way imply that there are new roads we may take to the proletariat which remove the necessity of being in the working class and in the unions before the upsurge. As the Transitional Program states: "A correct policy regarding trade unions is a basic condition for adherence to the Fourth International. He who does not seek and does not find the road to the masses is not a fighter but a dead weight to the party" (p. 57). Furthermore, it may well be the case that the new forms which emerge are not better than the unions or that they serve to de-rail the struggle. We must not accept everything just because it comes wrapped in a label reading "new." At times, our role is to criticize and suggest alternatives. Our role is to be with the class and to help guide the development of the best forms and methods of struggle.

3) The Draft Resolution states: "As the Transitional Program points out, when masses of workers radicalize,

in addition to struggling to transform the unions, they will have to construct and utilize organizational forms like strike or factory committees, councils, or political organizations that are distinct from the official union organizations" (p. 21). This is correct; a major upheaval within the working class makes the construction of such alternate organizations a historical necessity. But that does not mean any of this will happen by itself. This observation neglects to point out the most important lesson from the Transitional Program -- the role of the Trotskyist movement in creating those new forms. Thus the Transitional Program states:

Only with the help of such systematic, persistent, indefatigable, courageous agitational and organizational work, always on the basis of the experience of the masses themselves, is it possible to root out from their consciousness the traditions of submissiveness and passivity. (p. 24)

In this regard Trotsky stated: "Our tasks don't depend on the mentality of the worker. That is what the program should formulate and present before the advanced workers." (Discussions With Leon Trotsky On The Transitional Program, p. 2)

The proposals made by the leadership with regard to union work find a unity in their lack of seriousness, their failure to be real prescriptions for action and in their presumption that the party will find some new road to the proletariat outside of the trade unions and a proletarian milieu.

THERE IS NO SHORT-CUT

The deviation from a proletarian orientation undertaken by the party leadership has forced them to develop new theories explaining how a mass revolutionary workers' party will develop in this country. Central to their theories and their analysis of the "new" radicalization" is the role played by various social sectors and layers. The anti-war, Third World liberation, student, women's liberation and gay liberation struggles have become the components of the movement for socialist revolution. The workers' movement is only a secondary movement. Comrade Gus Horowitz is very explicit on this point in his centerfold article which appeared in The Militant of May 28, 1971. Speaking of such movements as the women's liberation movement, the struggles of oppressed nationalities for self-determination, the gay liberation movement and the revolution in

culture he says: "Thus these new movements are not unimportant or peripheral to the socialist revolution but at the center of its advance" (emphasis added). The movement of class-conscious workers as workers presumably stands somewhere off on the flanks during the revolution. moving

For the leadership the power of these movements makes it no longer necessary for the party to bring Bolshevism directly to the workers. No, the party can now do proletarian work indirectly. That is, we can build and lead the student movement, the gay movement, etc. By building these, ultimately the party will link-up with and absorb all the workers. In this inverted view of the Leninist conception of party-building, to go directly to the working class is both sectarian and opportunist. As Comrade Barnes remarks of attempts to go into the working class:

What they all come down to are subjective and arbitrary short-cuts by a handful aimed at bridging the objective gap between the pace and characteristics of the radicalization of decisive sections of the working class and the growing radicalization of other oppressed sectors of the population. (p. 32)

Before discussing this approach in depth it is necessary to make clear to the party membership exactly who is short-cutting on the road to the coming American revolution. In his article in the 1939 Socialist Appeal Comrade Cannon takes precisely this point under a section entitled, appropriately enough, "There Is No Short-Cut:"

...With others, impatience to reach the agreed-upon objective is giving rise to ideas which are false in conception and which, if adopted by the party, would have fatal consequences.

One of these false ideas born of impatience is the idea that we can find a short cut to a mass movement over the head of the trade unions. I mention this first because it is the most fundamental and the most dangerous. (emphasis added)

Generally speaking, the leadership's approach to mass work stands the party's traditions on its head.

The relationship of the mass movements and trade union work is not a minor question -- it is fundamental to an understanding of why the party must have a proletarian orientation

and what such an orientation consists of. Our party has always been very clear on this score. Comrade Cannon in the same article says:

Mass agitation in general must be conceived, organized and developed, not as a substitute for the systematic penetration of the trade unions but as a supplement to it. Woe to the party that despairs of the trade unions and turns away from them! The harder such a party works and the more hysterically it shouts the sooner it will wear itself out.

* * *

Mass work has many forms. It is necessary to combine them in such a way that each separate division serves the others. The modern proletariat is accustomed to act through its organizations. Most basic and fundamental of these are the trade unions. A party which aims to lead the working class must acquire a strong base of support and a leading influence in the unions.

...the impatience of some comrades for action is leading them to flirt with the most grotesque ideas in this respect, ideas which they may consider "new," but which in reality are as old as the Marxist struggle against anarchist adventurism.

These quotations more than indicate the attitude of the party in the past on the question of the importance and definition of a proletarian orientation. They are clear in describing how mass work should relate to that orientation. In the past, the party put as its primary concern relating to the workers' organizations and taking the party's program to them. The Draft Resolution advances the view, however, that our intervention into the class is not necessary and forwards a dual theory to explain how workers will join in this radicalization.

The first of these is the absorption theory. This theory says that the SWP will absorb workers by gaining the leadership of all social movements except the workers' movement. This will happen because, as the document says: 22% of the work force is under 24, thus giving us the youth; 28% of those between 25 and 34 have gone to college, which gives us the college crowd; 40% are women and 11% are non-white. The document goes on to state: "These bare statistics alone indicate the potential these movements have in attracting and influencing the body of American workers." (p. 10) If we

win the leadership of all these social movements, so the argument runs, we will have absorbed up all the workers. No wonder Comrade Barnes, in his presentation of the NC resolution ridiculed those who want to go to the working class as the "miss-the-boat tendency." The party leadership is not worried about missing the boat; they intend to build a giant sponge capable of absorbing the ocean of workers.

There are several things wrong with the absorption theory. First, it assumes that necessarily the workers will be radicalized through their identification with these various movements. For example, that those workers between 25 and 34 who have gone to college will identify with and support the student movement. Second, it assumes that the workers will act primarily through these movements rather than through their class organizations. There is little empirical evidence for either of these two assertions.

Another major defect of the absorption theory is that it looks at the statistics as bare facts without the benefit of a clothing of Marxist analysis. It equates sections of the workforce on a numerical basis. But what we should be interested in is social power and weight. A statistic such as "11% of the workforce are non-white" is totally misleading from this vantage point. The 11% of the workforce are concentrated in the industrial plants where they constitute a much higher percentage of the basic industrial proletariat. Therefore, this 11% of the workforce have a social weight far greater than their numerical percentage of the population and workforce. For this reason alone, Black and Brown workers play a decisive role in the revolution.

Closely connected to the absorption theory, but much more prominent, is the "look for" theory. This theory holds that sooner or later the workers will begin to "look for" a party. They will gaze about, quite lost, till they catch sight of the SWP leading other movements. Immediately the workers will join the party because they will "sense" that a party that can lead students, gays, etc. is the party for them. As the Draft Resolution states:

The key to becoming a mass working-class party...lies in the recruitment of politicized workers to a party that has proven itself in the political and social struggles that are occurring, that has geographically spread and grown to a size that it is seen as a

revolutionary alternative...

...Workers become politicalized by the struggles they engage in, and radicalized by the important social and political issues facing the country and at the center of the radicalization. As this occurs they begin to look for an alternative political organization. (p. 27, emphasis added)

This "look-for" theory is nothing new and was rejected by our movement over thirty years ago. Trotsky spoke against it as follows: "It is not enough to offer the masses a new address. It is necessary to seek out the masses where they are and lead them. (Trotsky On The Trade Unions, p. 55, emphasis added). Comrade Cannon in the Socialist Appeal was just as direct:

We hear it said nowadays that the unions are too slow in responding and that we must go directly to the masses. The masses it seems are something entirely outside the unions with their seven million or so members. The masses are presumably only waiting to hear from us and are ready to act without the formality of organization.

SOCIAL WEIGHT AND THE PETTY-BOURGEOISIE

In order to make these theories palatable to the party, the leadership has had not only to significantly alter the Leninist norms of party-building, but to go to all lengths to attest to the mass character and importance of these movements. As the logical conclusion of such a posture, the party has gradually adapted itself to these movements and lost its critical faculties.

One manifestation of this stance is evident in the Draft Resolution itself where it says: "In all stages of building the mass revolutionary and socialist party its cadres must be alert to recognize and embrace the new forms of struggle and the demands of oppressed groupings that appear as the radicalization develops."

The lack of a critical stance is quite obvious here. The party is told that it must embrace the new forms of struggle and the demands of the oppressed. No exceptions are even hinted at, no attempt made to carefully evaluate each separate "new" development. This is wrong. It is most certainly not a must for the vanguard

party to embrace all new forms of struggle and all the demands of the oppressed. We do not "embrace" all social struggles let alone their specific forms and demands. Our attitude should be one of support to movements which have a progressive class character. One which attempts to give and instill in the movements the correct politics and which attempts to recruit to the party their best elements. The party may entirely politically support a social movement without embracing the specific tactics and demands made, no matter how "new" these are. The party may politically support a social movement without sending many of its cadre to work in that milieu. What is essential for the party, above all, is to maintain a critical appreciation as to the real meaning of these struggles, their possibilities and pit-falls. Our role is not always to "embrace" and build movements. Our decision to intervene should be based on the political significance and social power of the movement and by its relationship to our other work.

The abandoning of a critical appreciation of these movements has found its reflection in the development of a thoroughly uncritical and adulatory stance. For the party leadership, all social movements are important. Their size, social composition, relation to the means of production mean nothing so long as they are vocal. Thus according to Comrade Barnes, for the party to assess the importance of the gay liberation movement, the party must leave aside: "...all barren speculation as to things like whether many gay workers will come out..." (p. 29)

This statement is amazing. The leadership is now able to speak of "mass movements" without even worrying about how many "masses" are involved, not to speak of the social composition of the movement. This position has its difficulties. After all, are not over fourteen million workers in a mass movement called the trade union movement? Why not "embrace" them? Why not "embrace" all the anti-war G.I.'s? In order to explain and justify their abstention from these proletarian movements, the leadership has to imbue the petty-bourgeois layers with all sorts of magical qualities and indulge the party in flights of fancy.

This is most obvious in our campus work. The YSA leadership and many prominent party spokesmen have developed an evaluation of the events of last May which is completely unbalanced. Their panegyrics to the May events, unfettered by any appraisal of the contradictory aspects of those

events, serve to foster dangerous illusions as to the extent and power of the student movement. They feed the prejudices of the petty-bourgeois student youth, both in and outside of our party, as to its social importance and potential power. Statements which claim that May came "close enough to let the ruling class see the outlines of a social revolution in this country" (YSA, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 4) are among the more outlandish representatives from this category of analytical thought.

The duty of the party after May was to draw a balance-sheet of the experience for the benefit of the youth. The positive aspects of May should not be ignored. But the party has only summed on one side of the ledger, the credits. The party must also point out the contradictions embodied in May, its negative features. After all, does not talk of a "major social crisis" in the absence of active struggle by the working class reveal the backwardness of class struggle in the United States and its uneven development as much as showing the growth of the new radicalization? Is it not irresponsible to speak of a generalized social upheaval when May only represented, according to even its most generous interpreters, the "first significant break" in the trade union bureaucracy (a dubious assertion at best)? To fail to mention these contradictions is to miseducate comrades as to the nature of class struggle, its forms in a real pre-revolutionary situation, and the relative importance of the working class as opposed to the students.

This type of evaluation is consistently made in other areas of our work also. As a whole these evaluations tend not only to distort reality but to miseducate comrades as to the criteria and method used by Marxists to understand the class struggle. The uncritical and unbalanced approach used there stands in stark contrast to the careful methods of scrutiny used by Lenin and Trotsky to assess all the positive and negative aspects of historical events. Moreover, such evaluations consistently gloss over the question of class with respect to these movements. Leading comrades consistently confuse the number and combativity of the student movement with their social weight, power and composition in class terms.

THE WORKING CLASS AND OUR OPPONENTS

The Draft Resolution and Comrade Barnes plenum report level tremendous criticism at our opponents for their

orientation toward the working class. Neither of the documents attacks our opponents for the programs which they take to the workers, programs which are wrong and which if accepted by the working class will lead to catastrophic defeats. No, the center of the attack on our opponents is on the fact that they wish to go to the working class.

Insofar as our opponents want to go to the workers, they are right. The fact that our opponents go to the working class does not make going to the working class wrong. Many of our opponents claim to be Marxists, does that make being a Marxist bad too? We should not place pluses wherever our opponents or the ruling class places a minus. Lenin pointed out in Left-Wing Communism such undialectical methods were the hallmark of sterile sectarians and ultra-lefts. It happens on this question our opponents are right and the party leadership is wrong.

What we should attack our opponents for is for taking a rotten program to the working class. It is the politics that they have which makes them wrong, not their desire to go into the working class.

According to the Draft Resolution, our opponents are wrong because they:

...tend to approach the problem of building a mass party as if they already were that party whose central problem is the disposition of its mass force. We see ourselves as a Leninist nucleus concentrating on those essential cadre-building steps without which there will be no basis for the construction of a mass revolutionary workers party. (p. 18)

Outside of mis-stating our opponents position -- few of them are under the delusion that their central problem is the disposition of mass forces -- this statement contains a thorough misinterpretation of Lenin's position on party-building.

This attack on our opponents reveals very much about the leadership's conceptions of how to go about building the party. It implies that at the present time we do not have to worry about the disposition of our forces between the various classes. This is not at all what Lenin's position was:

Have we sufficient forces to direct our propaganda and agita-

tion among all the social classes? Most certainly. Our Economists, who are frequently inclined to deny this, lose sight of the gigantic progress our movement has made from approximately 1894 to 1901. Like real tailenders, they often go on living in the bygone stages of the movement's inception. In the earlier period, indeed, we had astonishingly few forces, and it was perfectly natural and legitimate then to devote ourselves exclusively to activities among the workers and to condemn severely any deviation from this course. The entire task then was to consolidate our position in the working class. At the present time, however, gigantic forces have been attracted to the movement. ("What Is To Be Done," Collected Works, Vol. 5, p. 429, emphasis added).

Lenin understood the necessity of basing the vanguard party on and in the working class first. Moreover, he saw this as a necessity in even a country so backward as Russia where the working class formed a much smaller proportion of the population and where industrial capitalism was not nearly so dominant as in the U.S. today. In addition, he did so in the face of active struggles initiated by non-working class elements in Russia. Lenin said that when the Social-Democrats had "astonishingly few" forces it was necessary to "dispose" of them in the right place. To Lenin, the right place was the working class. He condemned "severely" any deviation from that orientation. If, as the party leadership maintains, we are building a party "on the Leninist model," why do we depart from his methods on this particular question?

One thing that stands out in the leadership's conception of a working class orientation and mass work is that they are seen as mutually exclusive and contradictory. Those of us in the party who call for a return to a proletarian orientation see no such contradiction. For us, work in the proletarian milieu and among the workers in the factories is seen as the most important place to carry out our political work, such as anti-war, Black and Brown, and women's work.

THE MEANING OF A PROLETARIAN ORIENTATION

One of the gravest aspects of the documents presented by the leadership is their attempt to re-write the historic attitude that the party has taken toward a proletarian orientation.

The Draft Resolution states:

Thus recruiting, training, and assimilating such cadres are the indispensable preconditions for building a mass workers party. This has been the central task since the formation of the American Trotskyist movement and there are no general rules on the ways and means to be used to accomplish it. (p. 22, emphasis added)

The Draft Resolution is utterly and totally false on this question. The history not just of our party, but of the Marxist movement in general has concerned itself precisely with this question -- how to build the party. In our own movement, the Cochran and Shachtman fights, our work in the Minneapolis strike -- in fact, most of our history -- provide us with a wealth of material from which we have drawn general rules. Many of these precepts have been set down clearly in such works as What Is To Be Done, In Defense of Marxism, Struggle for A Proletarian Party, and Defending The Revolutionary Party and Its Perspectives.

Unfortunately, this "new-found" ignorance of our past takes on more concrete form in the documents submitted by the leadership. Both take issue with the importance of "proletarianizing" the party and the importance of the "class composition" of the party. In addition, Comrade Barnes appears to be mystified by the concept of "rooting" the party in key plants and doubts its efficacy. Let us take up these points in turn:

1) Proletarianization -- The Draft Resolution states:

The key to becoming a mass working class party, in composition as well as in program does not lie in such individual transformations. (p. 22)

This attitude stands in definite distinction to the viewpoint expressed by Comrade Cannon in Struggle For A Proletarian Party:

It must become obligatory for the petty-bourgeois members of the party to connect themselves in one way or another with the workers' movements, and to reshape their activities and even their lives accordingly. (p. 9, emphasis added)

The party at one time took a firm and resolute stand on this question. It

did this for two reasons. First, it became obvious that the recruitment of proletarian elements to the party, that is, the question of "becoming a mass working-class party," depended on the party being composed of working class elements. Otherwise, the party would not be able to reach the workers who were radicalizing -- it would remain removed from them. Trotsky was well aware of this problem:

Our party is not safe from degeneration if it remains a place for intellectuals, semi-intellectuals, skilled workers and Jewish workers who build a very close milieu which is almost isolated from the genuine masses. (Leon Trotsky On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p. 43, emphasis added)

If the petty-bourgeois in the party dominate its life, they objectively help to de-proletarianize the ranks. This is why the Transitional Program stresses the need for the workers in the party to "feel themselves to be the masters" (p. 58). Second, the petty-bourgeois elements in the party formed the most vacillating, inconsistent part of the ranks. They became transmitters of all sorts of alien class influences within the party, especially during times of retrenchment or social dislocation. As Trotsky pointed out in In Defense of Marxism: "...It must be underlined that the more the party is petty-bourgeois in its composition, the more it is dependent upon the changes in official public opinion." (p. 113, emphasis in original)

True, it is impossible to proletarianize the party mechanically and immediately. An attempt to do so, under the illusion that it is possible, would hurt the party. But no one wants to immediately and mechanically proletarianize the party. The party is being asked to start today to transform itself into what it wishes to become in the future. The gradual process of proletarianization must be begun today, not put off to some hazy point in the future. It is this process of proletarianization begun now which forms the necessary basis for future recruitment from the proletariat.

2) Class Composition -- Comrade Barnes states that the problem of class composition of the party will not be solved by individual transformations and casts doubt on the idea that the class composition of a small party is a central problem. The fact is that class composition is important in a small or a large revolutionary

party. The struggle with Shachtman yields ample evidence to attest to the fact that the class composition of the party is a key and at times the central concern of the party. A cursory examination of our party's history would yield many examples of this fact.

The Draft Resolution raises an additional point of interest in this regard. The document, in comparing this radicalization with that of the 1930's states:

The radicalization in the 1930's did not begin with the radicalization of the existing union movement, but outside of it. It did not begin with the radicalization of the industrial workers, but with the intellectuals, the students, the veterans, the unemployed and the farmers. When the industrial workers joined the struggle the radicalization gathered power... Neither the reformists nor the sectarians can grasp that today's radicalization is already the biggest, deepest, and broadest in American history... (p. 20)

In drawing this parallel with the 1930's the Draft Resolution makes some serious mistakes. For while the radicalization of the 1930's did begin in non-working class layers, it did not gather real social power until the industrial workers joined it. This is equally true today. This radicalization will not be the "biggest, deepest, and broadest in American history" until the industrial workers join in it. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out what difficulties the party did have in relating to the radicalization during the late 1930's. At that time, much excellent work was done in the working class and in the unions. But one major problem was precisely the inability of the petty-bourgeois party members to wrench themselves out of their habitual surroundings and go into the working class. During the discussions and debates which occurred at that time it became clear that these members, who had stayed apart from the working class during their whole time in the party, had degenerated despite their devotion to politics. It became clear that these members would never take a serious attitude toward proletarian work. Furthermore, the important place they occupied in party life hindered the recruitment of politicized workers. Is it necessary for the party to place itself in the same situation again?

Already there is evidence of the in-

fluence of petty-bourgeois attitudes in the party. The attempts of the leadership to make a virtue out of the necessity of turning to petty-bourgeois layers is one example of this. The adulations accorded to the petty-bourgeois layers in motion such as the student movement is another. The obvious reticence and reluctance of the party to leave its petty-bourgeois surroundings and to seriously undertake Black, Chicano and Latino work -- which would entail going into the working class -- is another.

How else can we explain that despite its repeated emphasis as an absolutely key part of our work, only a little more than one-half of the party branches are carrying out organized Black work? And only one-third of the branches have organized Chicano or Latino work fractions? How else explain that while we are busy "embracing," leading and participating in the gay liberation and student movements our intervention in the Black movement is characterized by the Draft Resolution as only "educating and propagandizing." Educating and propagandizing are of course necessary, but the point here is to realize where the party emphasizes the activist side of our work and where it emphasizes our role as careful, cautious reporters and educators.

The Draft Resolution pointed out that 11% of the workforce is non-white. But the statistic we should be really cognizant of, is that 95% plus of Blacks, Chicanos and Latinos are members of the working class. Once we understand that, it becomes clear that doing our Third World work at various privileged universities is insufficient. The party must concentrate its efforts in the unions, in the ghettos and barrios, in the junior colleges, in the vocational and high schools if we want to reach the vast majority of the oppressed minorities of this country.

3) Key Plants -- Comrade Barnes insists that before we go into the plants we must know exactly which are key plants. However, it must be pointed out that this frame of mind tends to be self-perpetuating. It is difficult to imagine how we will learn what the key plants are when we have no intention of going close enough to the working class to find out. Perhaps we will read about them in the papers after the big strike actions we foresee occur. Trotsky, we might point out parenthetically, was not bothered by such requirements: "We cannot devote enough or equal forces to all the factories. Our local organization can choose for its activity in the next period, one, two or three factories

in its area and concentrate all its forces upon these factories" (In Defense of Marxism, p. 108). In reality, every branch certainly has a good idea of the key plants, unions and industries in its area.

4) Rooting -- Comrade Barnes expresses certain doubts as to the efficacy of rooting in key plants and asks whether "rooting," "in and of itself give[s] you authority?" Obviously, without the correct program, without the party behind you, rooting does not mean anything. Comrade Barnes poses a fatuous question. The question should be whether rooting is an essential part of winning over the workers. The Transitional Program is quite clear about this:

Preparing for the revolution means to the sectarians, convincing themselves of the superiority of socialism. They propose turning their backs on the "old" trade unions, i.e. to tens of millions of organized workers -- as if the masses could somehow live outside of the conditions of the actual class struggle! They remain indifferent to the inner struggle within reformist organizations -- as if one could win the masses without intervening in their daily strife! (p. 56, emphasis added)

For those comrades, who like Comrade Barnes, do not even understand what it means to root the party in the key plants we commend the following lines from the 1940 convention resolution which summed up the lessons of the Shachtman fight:

...To achieve power, the revolutionary party must be deeply rooted among the workers, it must be composed predominantly of workers and enjoy the respect and confidence of the workers.

Without such a composition it is impossible to build a programmatically firm and disciplined organization which can accomplish these grandiose tasks. A party of non-workers is necessarily subject to all the reactionary influences of skepticism, cynicism, soul-sickness and capitulatory despair transmitted to it through its petty-bourgeois environment.

To transform the SWP into a proletarian party of action, particularly in the present period of reaction, it is not enough to continue propagandistic activities in the hope that by an automatic process workers will flock

to the banner of the party. It is necessary, on the contrary, to make a concerted, determined and systematic effort, consciously directed by the leading committees of the party, to penetrate the workers' movement, establish roots of the party in the trade unions, the mass labor organizations and in the workers' neighborhoods and recruit worker militants into the ranks of the party. (Struggle For A Proletarian Party, p. 256)

SOME UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

That the party leadership is changing the tenets of our movement should be self-evident to all comrades by this time. It must be made clear that this is not, in and of itself, wrong. If the leadership feels, as they apparently do, that the uniqueness of the current radicalization makes the lessons of the past inapplicable they are duty bound to try to turn the party on the right road to revolution.

However, many questions must be answered before and not after they carry out this change. The leadership also has the duty to explain to the ranks clearly why these changes are necessary and what alternate road they propose. Theoretical clarity is a must. The history of the Marxist movement is strewn with the wreckage of many who claimed "new" conditions made revisions in traditional approaches necessary, who found exceptions to our general understanding of history and to the lessons we have learned on how to build the Leninist party.

At the least, the leadership must explain why the character of the current radicalization necessitates turning away from our traditions. They must explain where they stand on Trotsky's admonition that "a party which doesn't participate in the real trade unions is not a revolutionary party" (Trotsky On Trade Unions, p. 58). They must explain, if class composition is no longer a central concern, where they stand on the section of the Transitional Program which states:

...against a possible influx into our party of petty-bourgeois elements, now reigning in the apparatus of the old organizations, strict preventive measures are necessary.... The revolutionary workers should feel themselves to be the masters. The doors of our organization are wide open to them.

They must explain how the decisive mass

of workers entering into struggle will relate to the party if we stay removed from the working class.

The party members who today call for a proletarian orientation do not think these clear lessons of the past should go unheeded, nor do they think

them inapplicable to the "new radicalization." We believe the party has strayed too long from the proletarian road and is in danger of finding a permanent home within the petty-bourgeoisie. We do not believe the party can be changed or overnight, but only over time through persistent and diligent efforts to change its direction. These efforts must start now, they can no longer be put off.

June 2, 1971

FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORD AND DEED

by Hedda Garza, Lower Manhattan Branch, New York Local

In our party, merely having a written line -- a resolution approved by the majority of the delegates at a National Convention -- is insufficient. Comrades must thoroughly understand that line, get help in formulating the best possible ways to bring it into the movements where their work is carried out. When comrades are assigned to speak for our party, or take the floor at public meetings, they must be criticized if they change and distort the line of the party -- either through misunderstanding it or through preference for their own favorite interpretations. If they continue to put forth their ideas in a manner that ceases to resemble the party position, then they should not speak for the party until they can learn its line. If it becomes clear to the party leadership that there is a generalized misinterpretation of party positions, then the political resolutions should clearly correct those errors, stating the correct position in an understandable and firm fashion.

In some areas of our work, unfortunately, this has not been the case. Public speakers for the party have changed and distorted our program until it is scarcely recognizable. Comrades who have criticized this behavior have been treated as though they are backward and unreasonable and subjected to insults and corridor insinuations that they are "disloyal," or "against women's liberation," or "prejudiced against homosexuals." It is becoming increasingly difficult for comrades to figure out whether they should do what the documents say or do what many comrades are doing.

Women's Liberation

For a long time in our party, there was very little discussion of women's problems in our society. There was no emerging movement, and "women's work" was pretty much confined to an infrequent educational talk or pamphlet. Women comrades who spoke out against male chauvinism or decried the second-class citizenship status of women in the party were either told they were "off the wall" or that this was "part of our capitalist system and could not be avoided." The emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement brought about a swift and happy change in this state of affairs. Women comrades were given far more equal status as leaders of our movement, and were able to launch an open struggle against male supremacist attitudes without being subjected to embarrassment and humiliation.

Those of us who were in the party before the Women's Liberation Movement emerged did not have such an easy time.

We had to fight very hard for assignments other than office work or supporting a male comrade so that he could be a "leader." If we could speak, write, or organize, we had to doubly prove our abilities in order to be given an assignment in any of those fields. It is not too difficult to see why many women were very excited by the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement and why so many have been bending toward the line of the movement as a whole instead of putting forth our own line, as we did, say in the antiwar movement. For a period it is not impossible to sit back and say: "In a short while this will correct itself -- it is only anger and overenthusiasm at work; soon things will simmer down and there will be a clearer perspective." Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

The Political Committee resolution on women's liberation states straightforwardly -- as do the articles by Evelyn Reed -- that our line is a class line -- not a man-hating line -- not a line that divides society along sex lines. It defines the real nature of women's oppression -- the class nature -- the way it is all linked to the war in Vietnam, imperialism in general, racism, and all of the other diseases of a sick capitalist society.

At a recent educational conference at Madison, Wisconsin, organized by the YSA, the Wohlforthites accused the YSA-SWP of intervening in a movement that was "in danger of dividing society along sex lines rather than class lines." We dispensed with the Woollys with great ease, simply telling them that that danger certainly does exist in a movement such as the Women's Liberation Movement, but that it is the job of a revolutionary to go into these movements, help to build them, and raise the truth about this society at every opportunity. For example, we said, if women get up and say that men should be dumped out of elected office and only women candidates elected in their stead, we must answer that Lady Bird and Lyndon represented the same interests, as do Jackie and John F., Rocky and Happy, etc., etc. We must explain the class control of the U.S. government, making it clear that we don't think ruling class women will care very much about their sex identity when the means of production is up for grabs. The Political Committee document says this; but many comrades have gone along instead with a distortion of the theme of Sisterhood -- the thesis that all women are in the same awful predicament together -- all women are collectively better than all men.

This has led, of course, to the

current rage for man hatred -- which is not discussed in the Political Committee resolution although it is common knowledge that, at least in New York, a great many comrades publicly and privately push the man-hatred line. At a recent educational panel, for example, Ruth Ann Miller, representing the SWP, said, "I hate men, and man hatred is the best motivating force in the Women's Liberation Movement." The best formulation on man hatred would be something along these lines: "Yes, many young women come to the movement on the basis of man hatred. They become aware of their oppression through many events, not the least of which is the visibility of the movement itself. They begin to understand that many of the things about themselves that they don't like have been caused by the distorted sex roles of our society. They get all het up with man hatred and join the movement."

"At first this can be a healthy force that propels them into action and gives them a new attitude toward themselves, but if it stays at that purely emotional level, if the emotions don't weld with political thought, and if they tend toward the ultraleft side, the logic is for them to devote their lives to 'ripping off men' -- mentally or physically. If they become political, however, they will understand that men are also victimized in this society; they will understand the nature of their extra-oppressed condition; they will begin to examine our society and see that class society is the enemy, the thing to hate and abolish. Their initial hatred against men will simmer down. They will no more hate men than they will hate the women who become warped 'cutie-pies' because of this society. They will be moving on toward the stage where they can become revolutionary socialists."

Although man-hatred may please so-called "radical feminists," many young women are severely turned off by that side of the movement. Among a large section of youth today, in particular high school youth, relationships between the sexes have become relationships of friends and equals. We see this in youth groups where couples are not necessarily "coupling," where there are large groups of friends, regardless of sex, no longer caught in the bind of such mores as "there is no such thing as platonic relationships between men and women." Platonic relationships abound when sexual relationships are freer. Many young women are losing interest in the Women's Liberation Movement (although not in the liberation of women) because of this extremism that many YSA and party comrades endorse and publicly embrace.

The most ardent form of this man hatred, of course, is an overglorification of lesbianism, way beyond a question

of personal sexual choice, elevating it to a status of superiority over heterosexuality. Several leading women in our party have publicly said that it is difficult to stay with a man once you become involved in women's liberation work or have equated lesbianism with sisterhood. More about homosexuality later.

For a long period, too, our public posture was to call for "abolition of the nuclear family," using the phrase as a transitional slogan. It went over like an ultraleft bomb. To the women uninitiated in the language of the movement, it sounded as though we were calling for the eradication of families who had suffered radiation disease in an atomic holocaust. Its affect was not too far removed from the effect of Workers Leaguers calling out "Labor Party Now" to a group of high school antiwar demonstrators. Perhaps this happened because it was difficult for comrades to differentiate themselves from the Communist Party line on the family -- the sentimental, peaceful coexistence position in keeping with the Soviet Union's maintenance of the old forms. When YSA comrades attempted to straighten out the formulation at the YSA convention, they were loudly chastized from the floor by party-member YSA leaders.

At a women's conference at Adelphi University, several young women raised the question of the SWP position on the family. We commented that the Communist Party was indeed right on one score -- working class women are terrified by the "abolish" slogan. It makes them feel that despite the hell they live in, they will be thrown out from the one miserable refuge they have into the streets and on to a totally forsaken, worse hell. They don't feel this way because the family is a lovely and progressive haven -- a la the CP -- but because they have nothing else; and when you're unarmed and naked, a cell is better than the lonely jungle. We then went on to explain the enormous changes that things like 24-hour day care centers, free abortions on demand, community cleaning facilities and restaurants could bring; how after a period of time the terrible dependency on the family structure would disappear and new social forms would emerge, bearing little resemblance to the family as we know it. Something would develop in human relationships that would bring people real security, real warmth. We had no problem with that audience when we concluded with: "And then you would have the abolition of the nuclear family. That's what it's all about."

The PC resolution makes it clear that calling outright for abolition of the family is ultraleft, and the document then proceeds to outline the demand in a very similar way to the above. Good! But unfortunately comrades were called

everything from Stalinists to Wohlforthites for saying exactly the same thing a few short months ago.

Another danger that subjective enthusiasm and loyalty to one particular mass movement brings is the danger of "kiting," exaggerating events in order to make movements appear bigger and better and therefore more important than other movements. A demoralized demonstration of two or three hundred is reported as a spirited demonstration of a thousand, as in the case of the recent Albany abortion demonstration. There is a fear of evaluating the real situation and planning tactics accordingly. The size of one demonstration does not toll a death bell for the Women's Liberation Movement. What it should have told us is that at that particular time women were still celebrating the extraordinary change on the abortion question from last year to this year. Last May abortions in New York were illegal. Women were still desperately running around getting butchered or having unwanted children. A month later, it was not a free-abortion heaven in New York, but for the first time a woman could check into a city or state hospital and get a free, or almost free safe abortion. Women were apathetic about the possibilities that this victory might be taken away when the situation seemed so remarkably improved. Therefore it was poor timing to rally a really large and successful demonstration at that point. Kiting makes it almost impossible to formulate decisions based on reality. It increases the danger of attempting to substitute ourselves for the masses out of impatience with their slowness.

Gay Liberation Probe

The party has called for a probe into the Gay Liberation Movement and has made it clear that homosexuals are not excluded from the SWP. The YSA lifted its formal ban against homosexuals joining. That was it. That was the extent of it. But many things have happened in real life that have no basis in this line, and the leadership, certainly not blind to the real events, has not spoken out on this subject in their resolutions.

Comrades have publicly stated that homosexuality is "transitional." Transitional to what? Why, to abolition of the family, of course! There's only one problem. If Gay people are better people and it is more revolutionary to be Gay, then not only the nuclear family is threatened but indeed the existence of all of humanity -- in which case, why bother about making a socialist revolution!

Woman comrades attending all-woman parties are sharply chastized if they don't care to dance with other women, and are definitely made to feel that they

are backward if they, too, as so many others have done, don't declare themselves man-haters and lesbians. Confessions of newly acquired homosexuality have become a regular event, as though it were a fine model, a badge of honor, and worse yet, as though comrades who would rather "fight than switch" are somehow not true-blue Bolsheviks. All of this hasn't the faintest resemblance to a "probe" into Gay Liberation.

When leading comrades are approached for help in Vietnam veterans work or welfare rights work or GI work or high school work, they are told that the forces aren't available for Militant coverage or anything else. If questioned about the large amount of forces and time being put into Gay Liberation, they have been bluntly told that Gay is more important "because we can recruit them faster."

Black comrades are told to recruit Gay people in Harlem, which outrages them because in the Black ghettos, the attitude toward Gay people takes on almost a defensive aura. Many Black people believe that Black youth become Gay because of too many years spent in reform schools and prisons, deprived of social contact with the opposite sex. They see homosexuality as just another horror perpetrated on Black people by an oppressive society.

On April 24th, the Gay Contingent, or at least a large section of it, went up on a hill facing the crowd, over to one side of the speakers' platform, about a city block away. They proceeded to put on what can only be described as a sex circus for the benefit of the masses of people facing the speakers' microphones. They cavorted and carried on, making sexual gestures and freely fondling each other in a most intimate style. I will not go into a graphic description of the proceedings, but suffice it to say that if two hundred or so heterosexual comrades lined up facing the public and carried on in that fashion, they would be expelled from the party.

Now I realize that our Gay comrades cannot be responsible for the actions of an entire contingent, any more than the SWP can be responsible for flag-burners in the antiwar movement; but we do expect our Gay comrades to have the correct attitude within the movement they are "probing." It was within that thought in mind that I asked the comrade giving the April 24th report to the New York Branch what our attitude was toward this "action." Let me make it clear that I in no way meant that Gay people should not walk together, "neck" in public, if that's their desire, hold hands, etc. But they were coming as Gay people to an antiwar demonstration, and should have behaved in their own natural fashion, as did the

heterosexual couples, not deliberately put on an en-masse off-Broadway show for the local gentry.

In his summary, the reporter attempted to distort my remarks by commenting that I must have been referring to Gay couples strolling around holding hands, etc., which, of course, they had a perfect right to do, pretending in other words that the whole thing had never happened and that he was dealing with a severe case of prudery. The many comrades who had seen the exhibit, of course, knew the reporter was ducking the question.

After the meeting, however, a leading Gay comrade told me that yes, it had happened, that there was nothing wrong with it and that our Gay comrades would never speak out against anything of the sort.

When we confront our opponents, it is becoming more and more difficult to defend our deeds. Often we find ourselves speaking for the party line while knowing full well that the opponent's charges about our actual words and deeds are quite accurate. Many comrades HAVE publicly acted on the basis of man hatred, a sex-divided society, and have defended Gay liberation as of equal importance with the antiwar movement, the working class as a whole, etc.

We are entering a period now when the radicalization process can expand in unexpected and sudden ways. The high schools are filled with youth who are questioning every aspect of our society; some will be drafted; others will go on to college; still others to a wide variety of jobs. The antiwar movement is beginning to reach into important layers of our society. Vietnam veterans are beginning to speak up and organize and it is our job to keep as many of them as possible from the jaws of the Democratic Party and reformism. An influx of young workers, influenced by the growing radicalization, are capable of changing the face of the

trade union movement; the Black struggle has been relatively quiescent, but at any moment it could flare up. The same holds true for the other oppressed minority groups in this country.

All of these movements are discussed in the party resolutions; verbally, anyway, we are to take note of the important changes and possibilities on the horizon. But a document or two are not enough to turn back a growing tendency in our ranks to jump barefoot and fully into one or two movements, ignoring all else and worse yet, adapting alien lines to suit the particular milieu.

We cannot allow important areas of work to go by the boards because some comrades, for emotional reasons, prefer this or that movement. It may be true that there are many Gay workers, but we will not win workers in general to the revolutionary movement by exaggerating the revolutionary significance of Gay Liberation. There are many young women who could be attracted to the Women's Liberation Movement and could help to build it into a healthy and viable mass movement that could appeal to hundreds of thousands of working class women; but if we are to make sure that they enter the movement, then we must not turn them away by caving in to extremist pressures and allowing the movement to become a dumping ground for grievances against men and a conversion school for lesbians. Mostly, we must keep a sense of proportion in utilizing our still-slim cadres in the best possible fashion without playing a numbers game. We cannot go into an all-out effort to recruit Gay people and man-haters to a new-found haven or hospital at the expense of recruiting workers, veterans, and student youth.

In order to take advantage of the opportunities waiting for us in the next period, we must do what has been said by the Political Committee -- not continue on the present course.

June 6, 1971