

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

25¢

## *Toward a Communist Women's Movement!... 2*

**How the Bolsheviks  
Organized Working Women:  
History of the Journal Rabotnitsa... 4**

**The Woman Question  
and the Split in the  
International Socialists... 6**



**On the Comintern Theses  
on Work Among Women—  
I.S. Slander Refuted... 8**

**Our Program... 23**

**Why We Support  
the ERA... 24**

# Toward a Communist Women's Movement!

It has been more than a year since the last issue of *Women and Revolution* was published. Beginning with this present issue, *W&R* resumes publication, at a projected initial frequency of three issues a year, under the direction of the Commission for Work Among Women of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League. This transformation of *W&R* into an organ of the Spartacist League is the product of several factors: the consolidation of *W&R* supporters around the Trotskyist program of the SL, the stagnation of the feminist-dominated petty-bourgeois women's liberation milieu and the continuing transformation of the SL itself into the nucleus of the vanguard party.

Over the course of the past few years, the Spartacist League has been engaged in an internal discussion over the perspectives and scope of our intervention around the woman question, a discussion which culminated in the adoption of several documents at our Third National Conference held in November 1972. This discussion focussed on a reassessment of the mechanisms for continued SL action on this question in the light of a critical review of the origins and evolution of our work.

## The Fight Against Feminism

The radical women's movement—as distinct from purely liberal, petty-bourgeois feminist organizations, such as the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.)—emerged as an outgrowth of 1960's New Leftism. The reality of women's oppression under capitalism predictably produced an elemental resentment and sporadic outbursts of resistance, but in the absence of a strong, proletarian pole of attraction and a principled revolutionary leadership, this partial consciousness could not generate a revolutionary program for women's emancipation. Inevitably it was channelled by bourgeois ideology into utopian and reformist dead ends and made prey to isolation and demoralization.

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

The SL's earliest systematic involvement in this arena took place in the San Francisco Bay Area, where SL supporters along with others initiated the formation of the Socialist Workshop, a socialist women's liberation group which intervened in the

amorphous women's movement to struggle for an explicitly political, anti-personalist perspective based on the recognition of the working class as the central force for socialist revolution. On the basis of this involvement, as well as other more fragmentary work taking place on the initiative of other SL branches, the 1969 Central Committee Plenum established work around the woman question as a real although subordinate priority for the organization as a whole.



Boston W&R group in 1972 demonstration.

W&R PHOTO

Spartacist members and others drawn around the SL program initiated local groups in several cities, and the first issue of the national newspaper *Women and Revolution* appeared in early 1971. Its "Manifesto" stated: "Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it." W&R activists intervened to fight for the transitional program in such organizations as Bread and Roses and Oakland Women's Liberation. In New York, W&R participation in the "Working Women's Organizing Committee" (initiated by the International Socialists) was discontinued after the WWOC (which in its patronizing desire to avoid "alienating" anyone consistently shirked any discussion of program) codified its irrelevance to the struggles of working women by refusing to take any position on the union organizing drive taking place in the WWOC's chosen target of activity,

the telephone company.

W&R supporters also intervened in conferences and demonstrations of the SWP-initiated movement to legalize abortion; W&R demanded "Free Abortion on Demand," an end to support for capitalist politicians like Chisholm and Abzug, a break from "single-issue" campaigns and the adoption of a full working-class program and an end to the exclusion of men from the movement.

W&R fully expected an "unsisterly" response to its explicit anti-feminism from the bulk of the petty-bourgeois women's movement. Yet at the same time we found that many of the more serious women's liberation activists were drawn toward W&R on the basis of its uncompromising programmatic perspective. From out of the amorphous women's movement came individual recruits and, in addition, W&R intersected several local study groups and feminist collectives which polarized and split along the lines of the fundamental political alternatives posed by W&R supporters. Through their study of the woman question, and often through reassessing their own earlier experiences in attempting to organize working-class women, these groupings began to take sides on basic questions: feminism vs. Marxism, Maoism vs. Trotskyism, "serve-the-people" spontaneity vs. the vanguard party.

### Comintern Positions Rediscovered

It was at this point that the Spartacist League found itself compelled to rediscover concretely the work of the Leninist Communist International on the woman question, which centered on the building of transitional organizations—women's sections affiliated with the revolutionary proletarian parties.

The question of special communist work among

# Women and Revolution

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women had been a controversial one in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as early as 1896. Klara Zetkin's position in favor of such work was adopted by the party, and a party section for work among women was established to direct it. Within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) there was, beginning around 1905, a similar debate, in which Alexandra Kollontai was one of the leading proponents of special work among women on the German model. Special work among women was carried out by the Bolshevik party which published the journal *Rabotnitsa* (*The Working Woman*) under the direction of its Central Committee and which established *Genotdel* (The Department for Work Among Women) after the seizure of state power in 1917.

Within the Second International no special section responsible for directing work among women had ever been established. Lenin found the lack of such an international body intolerable:

"The first proletarian dictatorship is truly paving the way for the complete social equality of women. It eradicates more prejudice than volumes of feminist literature. However, in spite of all this, we do not yet have an international Communist women's movement and we must have one without fail. We must immediately set about starting it. Without such a movement, the work of our International and of its parties is incomplete and never will be complete. . . ."

—Klara Zetkin, *Recollections of Lenin*, 1920

The Third International set itself the task of extending internationally and codifying the work begun by the German and Russian parties. On its initiative, the First Conference of Communist Women was held in 1920. This conference established an International Secretariat for Work Among Women with permanent representation on the Executive Committee of the International. The Comintern also made mandatory the establishment of special administrative and organizational bodies for work among women within all party committees. Thus, while decisively rejecting the notion of an autonomous women's movement, the Comintern in its first four congresses specifically demanded a special division of labor within the communist parties for the direction of work among women.

Comintern work among women degenerated qualitatively as part of the general process of Stalinization, and the positions on the woman question which the first four congresses had clarified were virtually forgotten. Thus these crucial struggles became inaccessible to the working class for decades. It was only in the course of the SL's extended internal discussion on work among women that we were compelled to rediscover many of these positions.

### Women and Revolution Affiliates With the SL

While the first W&R groups which the Spartacist League initiated were based on the SL's program for women's emancipation as an integral part of the struggle of the working class for socialist revolution and were linked to the SL through their most conscious cadre, they were not yet functioning as a disciplined part of the common Spartacist tendency. Predictably, many of the militants they recruited

*continued on page 17*

# How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women

## History of the Journal Rabotnitsa

Along with topical articles and reviews of particular importance to the struggle for women's emancipation and ruthless criticism of the programs and practice of the various ostensibly revolutionary organizations in relation to that struggle, *Women and Revolution* will also bring to light material—much of it either new to American readers or long-neglected—from the history of communist work among women. In this, the first issue of *Women and Revolution* to be published under the direction of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League—the nucleus of the revolutionary vanguard party in the United States today—we feel it is most appropriate to discuss an earlier journal which addressed itself to the attainment of women's liberation through international proletarian revolution. It was called *Rabotnitsa* (The Working Woman) and it was published in St. Petersburg (later called Petrograd, then Leningrad) under the direction of the Central Committee of the vanguard party of that time and place—the Bolshevik party.

Lenin always maintained that a vital precondition for the success of the Russian Revolution would be the support and active participation of masses of working women and peasant women. In its dual capacity as propaganda weapon and collective organizer for the Bolshevik party, *Rabotnitsa* played a crucial role in rallying masses of women around the party's revolutionary program and practice. *Rabotnitsa* was an important weapon in the Bolshevik party's struggle for hegemony among the working masses. The fact that the majority of proletarian women stood with the Bolsheviks, rather than the Mensheviks, at the time of the October Revolution was in part a result of the widespread influence of *Rabotnitsa*. (The Mensheviks attempted to counter this influence with a women's journal of their own entitled *Golos Rabotnitsy* or Voice of the Working Woman, but it appeared only twice and seems to have had little impact.)

To be sure, unlike the period in which *Rabotnitsa* appeared (1914-18), the task facing the revolutionary vanguard is not yet one of mass agitation, but rather of the dissemination of revolutionary propaganda and the carrying out of exemplary mass work preparatory to the building of a mass proletarian party, section of a reborn Fourth International. But while our tactics in this period are necessarily different from those of *Rabotnitsa*, our principles and program are essentially the same—i.e., Bolshevik—and thus our study of *Rabotnitsa* illuminates our intentions and our strategic goals in building a mass communist women's movement.

Prior to 1914, the Bolshevik Party carried on much of its propagandistic work among women in the pages of *Pravda*. It was *Pravda* which publicized the first celebration of International Women's Day in Russia on 23 February/8 March 1913 (dates are given in both the Old and New Styles) and which published a special Women's Day edition in which it greeted the women workers and congratulated them upon entering the ranks of the fighting proletariat, declaring, in opposition to the Mensheviks (who took a male exclusionist position in the women's movement) that the day signalled the evolution of the working women's movement to a movement which embraced the entire working class.

Working women responded enthusiastically to *Pravda*. In fact, by the winter of 1913, the editorial board was receiving much more mail from working women than it could handle. The solution proposed by Lenin was the creation of a new journal aimed specifically at proletarian women. Acting on his proposal, the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party authorized the publication of *Rabotnitsa*.

Writing from his residence in exile abroad, Lenin suggested that his comrade and sister, Anna Elizarova, organize the publication of the journal and select the editorial board. Her selections, later confirmed by the Central Committee of the Party, comprised two groups—one in exile and one in Russia. The resident editors were Elizarova, Samoiloova, Kudelli and Menzhinskaia. They were responsible for the publication of the journal and for any organizational work connected with it, while the editors in exile, Krupskaja, Armand, Lilina and 'Stal', were responsible for conducting work among proletarian women in the countries in which they were residing and for linking the journal with the international proletarian women's movement.

### International Women's Day—1914

To the amazement of the party, the Tsarist government gave its permission for the publication of

*continued on page 14*

## forum

### "Women and the Bolshevik Revolution"

Speaker:

D.L. REISSNER

Editor, Women and Revolution

Saturday

October 20

7:30 p.m.

**NEW YORK**

Place to be announced

For information call: (212) 925-5665

# Excerpts from Rabotnitsa

In recent times here in Russia, the question of the organization of working women has become one of the most burning and vital questions. All over Russia the insurance campaign has been unfolding, stirring the most backward strata of workers. The insurance law at the authorized elections does not make a distinction between men and women, granting them equal rights. Thanks to this, the working woman has become an immediate participant in the insurance campaign and has been involved, often against her will, in the struggle which the working class is waging for its rights.

Life has placed Russian working men and women face to face with the so-called "woman" question.

Only the "woman" question in the workers' milieu develops in a completely different soil and bears quite a different character than it does among the bourgeoisie.

Bourgeois women advocate their special "women's" rights, they always oppose themselves to men and demand their rights from men. For them, contemporary society is divided into two main categories: men and women. Men possess everything, hold all the rights. The question is one of achieving equal rights.

For the working woman, the woman question becomes quite different. The conscious working woman sees that contemporary society is divided into classes. Each class has its special interests. The bourgeoisie one, the working class another. Their interests are opposed. The division between men and women does not have great importance in the eyes of the working woman. That which unites the working woman with the working man is much stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common need, their common conditions, which are the exploitation of their labor, their common struggle and their common goals. "All for one, one for all!" This "all" means the members of the working class—men and women alike. The "woman" question for working men and working women is a question of how to organize the backward masses of working women, how best to explain to them their interests, how to make them comrades sooner in the common struggle. Solidarity between working men and working women, common activity, common goals, a common path to these goals—such is the solution of the "woman" question among workers. The struggle for women's rights against those antagonistic to women's rights—men—is the solution to the "woman" question among the bourgeoisie. The journal *Rabotnitsa* will seek to explain to the insufficiently conscious working women what their interests are, to indicate the communality of their interests with the interests of the entire working class. For this every incident in the life of working women will be used to make a close connection with the general conditions of capitalist production, with the

general conditions of the entire country. *Rabotnitsa* will elucidate everything occurring in the country from the point of view of the interests of the working class. It will awaken in working women the consciousness of the great liberating task of the workers movement and will call for a struggle for these great goals. *Rabotnitsa* will tirelessly reiterate the necessity for organization, will call upon working women to join workers' organizations and will make them active members.

Our journal strives to help working women to become more conscious and to organize themselves. The journal does not have any means of subsistence. Our work began with 100 rubles made up of donations from workers' publishing houses.

Our cherished desire is that *Rabotnitsa* become the organ of organized working women.

We call upon all conscious working women to join in work on the journal. This is your duty.

Share your experiences with less conscious working women, tell them of your first steps along the path of struggle, of your failures and victories, of your activity in workers' organizations.

Write notes and letters to the journal about whatever interests you, about what interests other working women; tell us what themes you want so there will be articles. Indicate the shortcomings of the journal. In the beginning there will be no small amount of them but through our common efforts we shall improve.

—Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Rabotnitsa*,  
23 February/8 March 1914.

Hunger, the high cost of living, the attack of the enemy army—all these disasters have been hanging over our heads like a leaden cloud. Every hour of such a state of things only intensifies our suffering. The mother's heart bleeds at seeing the deprivations which proletarian children suffer today. Wives sob over the participation of their husband-sailors in the fighting on the cold ocean waves....

There is one salvation—in place of that government which by its criminal policies has led the capital of revolutionary Russia into jeopardy, it is necessary to establish the power of those who have an interest in the quickest end to the war, who need land, who demand control over production; in other words, the working men, peasant men, working women and peasant women must themselves stand in defense of their rights, must become the masters of republican Russia.

Not the Kadet or Defensist-Socialist ministers should govern and play the masters in Russia, but the workers, peasants and sailors themselves with the help of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies...."

—"What Road to Take?", *Rabotnitsa*,  
18 October/1 November 1917.

# The Woman Question and the Split in the International Socialists

By Judith Shapiro, former member of the Leninist Tendency of the International Socialists

Debate over sharply counterposed approaches to women's liberation played an important role in the recent split in the International Socialists. Approximately one third of the IS' membership formally broke away on July 7 in an ill-defined leftist direction and is now organized as the "Revolutionary Socialist League" (RSL). The small "Leninist Tendency," which had struggled for Marxist clarity throughout the faction fight preceding the split, resigned from the IS at the plenum which expelled the RSL comrades. (For a full account of the issues behind the bitter fight which ripped the IS apart, see *Workers Vanguard* No. 26.)

While the woman question did not take center stage in the final convulsion, a careful look at the record of the battle reveals that this subject played an important role in the polarization process. While the leftward bulge was groping toward the rudiments of a Leninist approach, the present IS majority was busy codifying further adaptations to feminism. Given the counterposed directions of motion, great tension was bound to develop.

The RSL has done nothing more than restate basic revolutionary Marxist principles on the woman question, with some flaws and ambiguities. RSL writers have discussed the economic roots of women's oppression, noted the importance of revolutionary leadership and rejected the view that feminism in any form is a revolutionary companion to Marxism. This restatement of the Bolshevik theory and practice consistently upheld by the Spartacist League provoked a great storm in the allegedly Leninist IS. To understand this IS allergy to elementary Marxism it is necessary to examine the background of the IS position.

## The Tradition of Shachtmanism

The IS majority, commenting briefly in *Workers' Power* No. 80 on the massive IS split, claimed that the RSL, in taking up its new found near-Leninist position on women, was abandoning the traditions of revolutionary democratic socialism from below, thereby rejecting the method of Shachtmanism, of which the IS is the historical continuator.

The essential element in the IS position on the woman question is an insistence that male-exclusionist organizational forms are the appropriate vehicles for struggles for women's rights. But if one examines the history of Shachtmanism from the 1940 split in the Socialist Workers Party (where it began) until the emergence of the radical middle-class women's movement in the latter part of the sixties, one will nowhere find any mention of the importance of the IS-touted

"self-organization of women," nor, in fact, much mention of the woman question at all. Why then does the IS believe its championing of such methods of organization—which the IS insists are necessary if women are to be liberated, even given a triumphant proletarian revolution—is a basic Shachtmanite principle?

It is not just the IS' Stalinophobia and spontaneism—with the consequent distrust of Lenin's concept of the vanguard party—which leads it to this view. At the root is the IS principle of quite consciously tailing after any and all existing struggles. The "revolutionary feminism" which is being retrospectively attributed to old-line Shachtmanism is a crude theoretical expression of the application of this tailist strategy to the women's movement. Nowadays the IS majority has wholeheartedly endorsed workerism, but it still retains its fondness for the movements of the radical middle classes. After all, it was capitulationist deep immersion in these movements which built the IS into the organization it is today.

The IS has carefully worked out its approach to

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organizations such as those of the women's liberation movement. One enters an organization on its own terms, seeking to move it "a step at a time" to the left. The IS urges such movements to go to the working class with their defective and anti-Marxist programs and consistently fights *against* a socialist, i.e., working-class program in the organizations it tries to build, since a program of transitional demands would "alienate people" if put forward "prematurely" — that is, at any time in the foreseeable future.

The IS has carefully positioned itself a step to the left of the SWP. But this supposed golden mean, between the outrageous opportunists on the one hand and the principled communist politics of the Spartacist League on the other, has proven to be a hollow center. While the SWP's outspoken reformism has successfully appealed to outspoken reformists, the Spartacist League has attracted not just revolutionary individuals within the women's movement, but whole groupings (such as a collective in East Oakland which the IS tried very hard to recruit, but which was won in its entirety to the SL). The poor IS, squeezed from both sides, has been left with crumbs.

But the IS' entire method would be threatened if it abandoned this untenable middle ground for a revolutionary proletarian position, even on one question. Demonstrating once again that the IS' opportunism, anti-vanguardism and "third camp" (that is, anti-communist) world view lead it to reject not just Trotsky and Lenin but also Marx, the IS has moved to abandon any pretense to Marxism.

All this retreating is done, of course, in the names of Lenin, Trotsky and Marx, but it adds to its arsenal of interesting anti-Marxist concepts the notion of "revolutionary feminism," which it considers an historical sister to Marxism; not part of socialism, but not exactly a competitor either. The IS tendency has historically been no theoretical slouch when opportunist necessity demanded anti-Marxist "creativity."

Of course, the IS is really just sidling up to the SWP's viewpoint, in which "consistent feminists" somehow become Marxian socialists by trying hard enough to be feminists. What the IS cannot understand is that Marxists are not pontificating abstractly when they insist that class divisions are primary, that there are no "classless" movements in class society. Marxists *oppose* feminism, which is not just a desire for women's liberation, but an ideology which sees the oppression of women by men, rather than the exploitation of the proletariat by capital, as the essential axis upon which the existing society turns.

The assertion that the class division is primary reflects the obvious truth that all other forms of oppression are felt differently by different classes. A working-class woman experiences her oppression as a woman in trivial, monotonous, enervating and time-consuming housework; unrewarding, low-paid jobs; gross, sometimes even physical, male chauvinism. For a bourgeois woman, her oppression as a woman means primarily her inability to enjoy fully the privileges of her class. For women of the petty bourgeoisie it means something in between.

The IS' anti-Marxism is only just now flowering on this question; it will soon publish a pamphlet by Celia Emerson, IS right-wing theoretical hack, which fully develops this position of "revolutionary femi-

nism." Those who have read previous SWP accounts in this vein, such as Debby Woodrooffe's *Sisters In Struggle* (Pathfinder Press, August 1971), will learn little new about the battle of the "gallant heroines." But for the IS the Emerson viewpoint marks the spot where the IS moved to the right. Its middle position untenable, leftward motion undesirable, this direction was predictable.

### "Sisterhood or Class Struggle"

The change in IS policy will be particularly noticeable because the line of the previous year allowed considerable room for left-wing views. The reason for this was simple: the usual IS practice of papering over differences in the organization by adopting as the official position a document vague enough to allow more than one grouping to read its views into it. The document which served this purpose in this case was Ilene Winkler's, passed by the National Committee at Thanksgiving. Despite pages of fudge, and obvious feminist impulses, it had several parts which permitted a class-struggle interpretation.

But there was a frenzy of deep concern and opposition throughout the IS nationally when some branches of the IS took the document seriously and intervened with such an orientation. This threat from the left aroused even the somnolent Berkeley branch, which devoted its little-used energies to protesting against these embarrassing "sectarians."

A particular focus of the right wing was a brief position paper which the San Francisco IS distributed to a women's conference in late January. This leaflet was drafted, at the urging of the branch, by a member of the Leninist Tendency; it was approved by the branch executive committee. While the leaflet was carefully tailored to avoid overstepping the outer limits of the IS line, its clear Marxist approach was strikingly different from the usual IS writing. Its very title "Sisterhood or Class Struggle" sent shock waves through the right-wing sections of the organization. Worse yet, the leaflet was favorably received by women from the KPFA (Pacifica Radio Station) Women's Collective who attended the conference, and they quoted from it on the air!

Protests were heard from Seattle to New York at this unbridled display of Marxism in public. The Berkeley branch initially suggested that a joint Bay Area "women's caucus" be convened to discuss the politics of the leaflet. When the San Francisco women suggested that this was a subject for the whole organization, it probably added insult to injury. Eventually the Berkeley branch took the stencils, which had been left in its office for storage, and sent them off to the National Office with a demand that they be published in the internal bulletin.

The leaflet had, in fact, already been sent for comment to the National Action Committee (the IS' leading body) by the San Francisco branch, which was sure it had been within the limits of the new IS position. By the time the first reply was received, however, six weeks later, the drumbeat of the coming faction fight could be heard clearly in the distance. The NAC had referred a detailed discussion of the San Francisco leaflet to the newly formed Women's

*continued on page 18*

# I.S. SLANDER REFUTED

July 2, 1973

Barbara Zelleck  
International Socialists

Dear Cde. Zelleck:

Several of my comrades who attended an International Socialist forum a few weeks ago dealing with the work of the British I.S. in the woman arena reported that you made a statement to the effect that the Spartacist League had incorrectly represented a Comintern document dealing with communist work among women.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would substantiate this public statement by writing me at your earliest convenience and letting me know exactly where you think the error(s) has (have) been made. If through a faulty translation we have indeed misquoted the document, we wish to make the appropriate correction. If not, we want to put a stop to these allegations of the I.S.

Sincerely,  
D.L. Reissner  
for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League

July 25, 1973

D.L. Reissner  
The Woman Commission of the Central  
Committee of the Spartacist League  
Box 1377 G.P.O.  
New York, N.Y. 10001

Dear Comrade Reissner,

I have just returned from a visit to the British I.S. and found your communication.

Members of the International Socialists do not make public charges, either written or spoken, against members of other revolutionary organizations without first having checked their facts. Nor do we publish such important documents as those of the Communist International without checking their accuracy.

The primary language in which proceedings of the Communist International were carried on was German. *Thesen und Resolutionen Des III. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale (Moskau, 22, Juni bis 12, Juli 1921)* are to be found at the 42nd Street New York Public Library, on film, listed as \*ZAN-18, Communist International, Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale, Nr. 20, Moscow, 1921.

My primary source (since I do not read German) was the *Manifestes, Thèses et Résolutions des Quatre Premiers Congrès Mondiaux de l'International Communiste 1919-1923, Textes Complets*, Bibliothèque Communiste, Librairie du Travail, Juin 1934, Réimpression en fac-similé, François Maspero, 1972. The discrepancies between the French and *Women and Revolution* texts I then checked (through an intermediary translator) with the German.

Let me cite you but four discrepancies:.... [The "four discrepancies" are quoted in entirety below in the context of our reply.]

It is strange that all your errors seem to be of one piece. That is they run counter to the Marxist conception of self-organization and self-emancipation of the working class, i.e. of working men *and* working women organized as an independent class conscious force.

Sincerely,  
Barbara Zeluck  
New York I.S.

August 8, 1973

Barbara Zeluck  
International Socialists  
17 East 17th Street  
New York, New York 10003

Dear Comrade Zeluck:

We have received your letter of July 25 in which you persist in your allegation that the Spartacist League/*Women and Revolution* "deliberately distorted" a document of the Communist International which we reprinted in previous issues of *W&R*. This outrageous lie—which also appeared in your article "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organizations" and which you publicly repeated at a forum which several members of the Spartacist League attended—will not be allowed to stand.

Since you proudly assert in your letter that "members of the International Socialists do not make public charges, either written or spoken, against members of other revolutionary organizations without first having checked their facts" we have no choice but to assume that your action in making and repeating this baseless lie was deliberate and not merely the result of sloppy research, and that you intend to stand by this accusation.

The text of the Comintern document which we reprinted was taken *word for word* from the English translation of this document made in 1921 (a Xerox copy will be provided upon request). Therefore your accusation of "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions" is a fraud on the face of it. You may be assured that we have no intention of letting this matter rest but will use your clumsy slander to expose you.

In a future issue of *W&R* we intend to deal with the substantive question of the notoriously flawed French version of the document which you used, as well as with your own further mistranslations in the service of the IS's point of view. However, this is beside the point as far as you are concerned. Whatever the merits of the various versions, our republication of the 1921 English translation was letter-perfect. Even if it could be shown that your interpretation of the French version were the correct one, your repeated accusations of deliberate falsification on our part is a disgusting slander for which we demand

an immediate apology.

The record of the Spartacist League for absolute honesty is spotless (thus when we do make and discover errors we are careful to publish corrections and retractions). By your attempt to impugn our integrity you have succeeded only in again exposing your organization, and yourself personally, as unworthy of consideration by serious revolutionists.

D.L. Reissner

for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League

August 14, 1973

D.L. Reissner

for the Woman Commission of the  
Central Committee of the Spartacist League  
Box 1377 G.P.O.  
New York, N.Y. 10001

Dear Comrade Reissner,

Despite the uncomradely tone of your first letter, I proceeded on the assumption that you were seeking clarification and took the trouble, not to "allege", but to cite some of the errors in the *Women & Revolution* text of the Communist International's Third Congress resolution "Theses for Propaganda Among Women". The errors cited were based on comparison with the *original German text*.

Neither in my letter nor during the discussion period at our forum on the British Women's Liberation Movement, attended by some members of the Spartacist League, did I use the term "deliberately distorted". I never made such a public charge. You have personally thus just shot down the "spotless" record of the Spartacist League for "absolute honesty".

Because the French text of the Comintern resolution is known to be unreliable, I checked it with the original and reliable German text. On being informed in a fraternal manner that the early English text is known to be at least equally unreliable, without even checking the errors cited, you persist in defending the propriety not only of re-publishing the 1921 English version, but of relying on it in public debate.

Since your purpose is clearly to "expose" rather than to clarify the points at issue, I will not take the trouble to cite examples of the disparities that exist between the *Women & Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street, catalogued as "8 SFN, Communist International, Third Congress, Moscow, 1921, *Theses and Resolutions Adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, June 22-July 12, 1921*, published by The Contemporary Publishing Association, New York City, 1921."

"Expose" away, "Comrade". We are sure that the struggles of the working class—for power or for improved working conditions—will be little effected by your propensity for intersectorian debate of a non-political character (not to mention your repeated and deliberate public slanders of the I.S.). I must confess to finding your left gossip sheet, *Workers Vanguard*, highly amusing, but I realize that my personal tastes are not widely shared.

While you are "exposing", we are sure that you will not omit to include the fact that my *internal Discussion Article*, in which I did use the term "deliberately distorted" (a judgment which your letter of August 8, 1973 tends to support) appeared in an *internal I.S. Bulletin*, and that you secured a copy of that Bulletin through either (1) outright thievery, or (2) planting an agent of the Spartacist League within the I.S. Such are "Their Morals"; not Ours.  
Barbara Zeluck  
New York I.S.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have reprinted above an exchange of correspondence between Barbara Zeluck of the International Socialists and D.L. Reissner of the Spartacist League. This exchange was triggered by an article by Zeluck, "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization," which appeared in *IS Internal Bulletin* of 1 May 1973. We are publishing below an article by Comrade V.Z. of the SL discussing in detail the specific allegations made by Zeluck against the SL. Before proceeding to that discussion, however, the Editors of *W&R* consider it important to set this dispute in its political context.

As our editorial statement in this issue, "Toward a Communist Women's Movement," makes clear, the Spartacist League seeks to stand upon the basic principles of revolutionary organization which guided the communist movement of Lenin and Trotsky, in particular the position worked out most fully by the Communist International in its revolutionary period. Central to the Comintern's orientation was the understanding of the need for special organizations for work among women, indissolubly linked to the proletarian vanguard party itself. It was in order to emphasize this concept of communist organizations for work among women ("transitional organizations") that we reprinted, in issues No. 2 and No. 3 of *W&R*, a document on work among women adopted by the Comintern in 1921.

So far so good. The International Socialists, meanwhile, were busy putting forward their usual Menshevik politics, which over the woman question consisted largely of insisting on the need for the inviolable "self-organization" of the different strata of the oppressed (for elaboration of this view, see the analysis of the IS position on the woman question in the article in this issue by Judith Shapiro). The IS insistence on "self-organization" was of course part of its pervasive opportunist adaptation to the multi-vanguardist mood of the petty-bourgeois New Left, which viewed the proletariat as at best on a par with other oppressed sectors of society, and the proletarian vanguard as an elitist device for the continued subjugation of blacks, women, national minorities, youth, etc. The New Left, the black nationalists, the feminists, the youth vanguardists, shrilly insisted on the revolutionary thrust of each oppressed grouping organizing itself in exclusionary "movements," and the IS tailed along prating about "self-organization." But like all revisionists, rather than explicitly repudiating Marxism, the IS sought to find justifications for its positions in the Marxist tradition itself.

continued on next page

## I.S. Slander Refuted

Enter Barbara Zeluck, eager volunteer for the thankless job of finding a "Marxist" historical cover for the politics of the IS. In some cases, the historical cover was explicitly Menshevik. For example, unlike the SL understanding of bodies such as a women's commission within the party as mechanisms to achieve a division of labor in the implementation of a political line determined by the party as a whole, Zeluck puts forward the IS view of an internal *political* grouping whose purpose is apparently to whip the *male* ISers into line:

"In 1907, when she was a member of the Menshevik organization, [Alexandra] Kollantai also postulated the formation of women's collectives *within* the party in order to impress on the men comrades the need *for the party as a whole to fight for women's rights, for the party to assume responsibility for the work among working women* (i.e. to perform the functions to be served by the projected IS Women's Commission, which we all support)." [original emphasis]

—Barbara Zeluck, "Women and the Revolutionary Organization"

If only these latter-day Mensheviks would simply content themselves with fighting for Menshevism! But alas, while the actual views and methods of the Mensheviks may be quite popular among the petty bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks themselves are discredited (to say the least), as reformists and centrists of all stripes rush to associate themselves with the names (though not the views) of Marx, Lenin and sometimes even Trotsky. So Zeluck, appropriately, resorts to the device of quoting Lenin and the Comintern and hoping that nobody will notice how the IS line takes off at right angles from its views. Thus Zeluck includes even the following quote from Lenin which flatly contradicts the Menshevik view:

"We want no separate organizations of communist women! She who is a Communist belongs as a member of the Party, just as he who is a Communist. They have the same rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score."

"However, we must not shut our eyes to the facts. The Party must have organs... with the specific purpose of rousing *the broad masses of women*, bringing them into contact with the Party, and keeping them under its influence. This naturally requires that we carry on systematic work among the women. We must teach the awakened women, win them over for the proletarian class struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party, and *equip them for it*." [elision and emphasis by Zeluck]

—"Women and the Revolutionary Organization"

In the course of her article, Zeluck also presented extracts from the Comintern's 1921 document on women.

After all, Lenin isn't around to defend himself against Zeluck's "interpretations" of the Comintern's views. But the Spartacist League is. And Spartacist League supporters had recently republished the 1921 Comintern document in *W&R*. And the Spartacist League was busily propagandizing the views of the Comintern document, exposing the revisionists by drawing attention to the gross departures of groups like the IS from the authentic traditions of Marxism. What was Zeluck to do? Simple enough—just announce

that the text printed in *W&R* was a forgery, thereby in one fell swoop eliminating both the text and the Spartacist League from consideration by those who might not be looking too closely at the IS' pretensions to be following in the footsteps of the Comintern.

The particular device Zeluck employed was six interlocked and extended "footnotes" to her article ("Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization" in an IS internal bulletin) whose import is that the Comintern didn't mean what it unambiguously and repeatedly said, but rather what the Menshevik Zeluck said it said, and that the *W&R* text of what the Comintern said is a forgery. What is behind all of the factual and textual argument is the IS' denial of the Comintern's central thrust: that the conscious class struggle for communism transcends and absorbs the struggle against the oppression of women, resolving the latter into irreconcilably counterposed individualistic bourgeois feminism on the one side, and the struggle for the communist emancipation of the whole of humanity on the other.

Zeluck made her hair-raising proclamation of *W&R*'s "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions" very privately, in an internal IS bulletin. No doubt she assumed that the SL had no access to this bulletin; hence her protestations of indignation in her second letter at our daring to know or take note of her document. (Trotsky once noted that when petty-bourgeois elements start speaking of morality, you had better put your hand over your wallet. Stripped of its hysterical references to theft or planting agents, the Zeluck position amounts to the view that it's all right to lie so long as it's only to your own comrades!) A little later, she repeated orally in a public forum a sanitized and minimized version of her accusations, hoping to discredit the SL without saying anything specific on which she could be nailed. Following the inquiry by Reissner on the part of the SL, Zeluck's first letter charged: "It is strange that all your errors seem to be of one piece," but her second letter in effect denied that she had ever charged us with "deliberate distortion" (except, of course, in the sacrosanct internal bulletin).

Despite Zeluck's later pseudo-scholarly obfuscations, the factual core of the dispute is her charge that the SL publication of the Comintern document contained "omissions, distortions and absolute inventions." She begins by seeking to "prove" this by counterposing to our published text her translations of the French text. It is of course true that a dispute over the correct translation of a document can only be cleared up by recourse to authentic originals in the hands of competent multilingual researchers. It is nice that Zeluck knows some French, but her counterposing the *equally derivative* French text to our use of the Comintern's own English translation is but an exercise in empty, petty-bourgeois academic pretentiousness. Upon finding out that her attempt to elevate the French version to the status of an "original" would not hold up, she tried the German.

Stripped of the interesting but peripheral textual arguments, the dispute comes down to the question of the SL's integrity in publishing the Comintern document as authentic. Whatever the merits or deficiencies of the English version that *W&R* printed,

they are beside the point since the putative "errors" are not *our* "errors" but those of *Comintern* commissions and/or translators of 42 years ago. Forced to confront this, Zeluck tries one last brazen evasion; she asserts that she "will not take the trouble to cite examples of the disparities that exist between the *Women and Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library...." Since all parties in the dispute have already gone to a great deal of "trouble" over this affair, why this sudden reticence? It is simple; there are no "disparities" whatsoever!

Zeluck's account of where the "real" document is to be found is of no help to us; we took our text directly from that document and have carefully checked it against the self-same volume in the New York Public Library to which Zeluck refers us. But since Zeluck has thoughtfully provided the reference, we urge interested readers to write us for copies of No. 2 and No. 3 of *W&R* and check it against the original 1921 *Comintern* English-language version. Short of claiming that the SL has secretly altered all publicly available 1921 copies to correspond with our "distortions," Zeluck has no defense left. Her case has been laughed out of court.

Finally, let us lay to rest once and for all Zeluck's final, desperate allegation that our exposure of her lie—her attempt to disown the *Comintern's* own English-language translation as the SL's "distortion"—was illegitimate because we could only have obtained knowledge of it through planting agents or outright thievery. Well, Comrade Zeluck, at least at the time you wrote your document, if not now, there were in the IS a number of comrades who thought sufficiently well of the SL, whatever their disagreements with our politics, to make immediate and forceful inquiries as to the correctness of the *Comintern* material published in *W&R*. Our source was not your paranoid Watergate world of planted double agents and burglars, but some of your own comrades with sufficient socialist integrity to know that there is a fundamental relationship between Marxist class consciousness and truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The recent exchange of correspondence between Barbara Zeluck of the International Socialists and D.L. Reissner of the Spartacist League Commission for Work Among Women presents us with a welcome opportunity to correct various errors in the translation of the *Comintern* documents published in *Women and Revolution*, Nos. 2 and 3, while also exposing the fraudulent and cynical methods of the IS. First, let it be said, the self-righteous sectarian relish of Comrade Zeluck notwithstanding, that the errors to which she points in this translation stem not from the Spartacist League but from the official English translation which we in good faith reprinted, *Theses and Resolutions adopted at the Third World Congress of the Communist International (June 22nd-July 12th, 1921)* (New York: The Contemporary Publishing Association, 1921), admittedly without checking this against the German original. Zeluck's charge of deliberate distortion thus stands revealed as utterly baseless. In a series of footnotes to her article,

"Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organization" in an IS internal bulletin of 1 May 1973, on our supposedly intentional alterations of basic *Comintern* statements Zeluck had written:

"This is not to say that the Theses of the 3rd Congress of the C.I. opposed the separate organization of women outside the party. Quite the contrary. In this connection, it is to be noted here that the position of the C.I. is not to be confused with that of the Spartacist League. The latter, in its publication of the C.I. Theses in its *Women and Revolution* No. 2 and No. 3, has deliberately distorted said Theses.

"In checking the *Women and Revolution* texts against the *French originals* (as republished in facsimile in 1972 by Francois Maspero), I discovered omissions, distortions, and absolute inventions." [our emphasis]

This is a far cry from the pretensions to scholarly objectivity of her two letters to D.L. Reissner, which, n.b., demonstrate Zeluck's cognizance of the fact that there exists no such thing as a "French original," that in fact this French text is, as Zeluck writes, "known to be unreliable," is, to put it bluntly, notorious for its inexactness as well as its incompleteness.

This "scholarly" flexibility then serves a very definite political purpose, the "unmasking" of the supposedly bureaucratically deformed Spartacist League. Zeluck concludes her listing of supposedly purposive SL mistranslations with the words:

"The overall import of the Sparts' distortions is the intention of their leadership to force working women and women comrades, as well as working men and men comrades, to submit to bureaucratic control. The net result, were they to be successful in their intention, would of course be the impossibility of 'creative activity and initiative' on the part of women, and, as a necessary consequence, the impossibility of a victorious proletarian revolution."

While Zeluck publicly charged the SL with deliberate distortion of *Comintern* documents at an IS forum held in New York in June (Sy Landy, then of the IS, insinuated the same at an IS forum in the Bay Area held over Memorial Day weekend), the fact that she has not attempted to substantiate her charges in pub-

*continued on next page*

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## I.S. Slander Refuted

lic—charges which, if sustained, would go far toward discrediting the SL—is a reflection of the simple fact that these charges will not in fact stand up to even casual scrutiny. Instead, she has been caught out in lying to members of her *own* organization ("French originals") in an attempt to harden them up against the revolutionary politics of the SL in the process of internal differentiation then taking place in the IS.

Since the purported "errors" in the *W&R* Comintern texts stem not from us but from the *official* English translation, it might seem superfluous to examine these in detail, blessed as we are with Comrade Zeluck's corrections. But alas, despite her monumental self-assurance, Zeluck's scholarship leaves much to be desired. Let us then deal with these supposed corrections in order.

"GENERAL PRINCIPLES, IV, paragraph 4:

French text, page 144: 'Mais le communisme est en même temps le but final de tout le prolétariat. Par conséquent la lutte de l'ouvrière et de l'ouvrier pour ce but commun doit, dans l'intérêt de tous les deux, être menée en commun et inséparablement.'

My translation: '...But Communism is at the same time the final aim of the whole proletariat. Consequently, the struggle of working women and working men for this common aim must, in the interests of both, be organized in common and inseparably.'

Your translation, on the other hand, ends: 'under a united leadership and control.'

The German reads (page 151): 'Der Kommunismus ist aber gleichzeitig das Ziel des gesamten Proletariats; folglich muss der Kampf der Arbeiterinnen und Arbeiter im Interesse beider Seiten *gemeinsam und geschlossen* geführt werden.'

—Excerpt from letter of B. Zeluck to D.L. Reissner, 25 July 1973

1: In her letter Zeluck claims to have had recourse to an "intermediary translator" for the German (which she does not know) and states that this translator verified the correctness of her translation from the French. Nonetheless the German original repeatedly stands in contradiction to her version. Thus an exact translation of the German would be "... But Communism is at one and the same time the goal of the proletariat as a whole, wherefore the struggle of working women and working men must, in the interest of both, be conducted *in common and unifiedly*." The question here is the meaning of "geschlossen," literally "in closed fashion," en bloc, unitedly, unifiedly. The English translator of 1921 clearly thought that the revolutionary solidity ("geschlossen") was to be provided by party leadership, and the text, indeed the whole frame of reference, of the "Thésés" as a whole, as well as Zetkin's and Kollontai's supporting speeches, confirm this. The French text is incorrect here: "en commun et inséparablement" clearly trivializes the content into male-female unity, i.e., offers two paraphrases of the German "gemeinsam," while overlooking "geschlossen."

"2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES, V, paragraph 1:

French text, page 144: 'Le 3<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l'Internationale Communiste confirme les principes fondamentaux du marxisme révolutionnaire suivant lesquels il n'y a point de questions 'spécialement féminines'; tout rapport de l'ouvrière avec le féminisme

bourgeois...'

My translation: 'The 3rd Congress of the Communist International confirms the fundamental principles of revolutionary Marxism, according to which there is no 'special woman question'; every relationship of working women with bourgeois feminism...'

Your inclusion of 'no specific woman's movement' in that first sentence does not appear in the original.

The German reads (pp. 151-152): 'Der III. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale betont den grundlegenden Satz des revolutionären Marxismus, dass es keine 'besondere Frauenfrage' gibt und dass jegliches Zusammengehen der Arbeiterinnen mit dem kapitalistischen Feminismus...'

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

2: The sense of the German is: "The 3rd Congress of the Communist International emphasizes the basic principle of revolutionary Marxism that there exists no 'special women's question' and that every act of cooperation of working women with capitalist feminism leads to a weakening of the forces of the proletariat..." The Comintern's English translation utilized in *W&R* took the liberty of adding "no specific women's movement," as Zeluck notes.

"3. METHODS OF ACTION AMONG WOMEN, 3.c. (5), paragraph 2:

French text, page 145: 'Tout le travail des sections féminines devra être fait sous la direction immédiate et sous la responsabilité des comités du Parti.'

My translation: 'The entire work of the women's Sections should be carried on under the immediate leadership and responsibility of the Party Committees.'

*Women and Revolution*: 'The entire work of the Sections or Committees should be carried on under the direct control and responsibility of the Party Committees.'

The German (page 155) reads: 'Die Parteikomitees haben die genaue Arbeit der Kommissionen unmittelbar zu leiten und sind für sie verantwortlich.'

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

3: A word-for-word rendering of the German would be, "The party committees are to immediately direct the detailed [or: exact] work of the commissions and are responsible for them [or: for this (meaning work)]"; a more literate rendering would be, "It is the task of the party committees to provide immediate direction" etc. Zeluck was either unaware of the two meanings of "direction" in French ("leadership" vs. "direction," in the sense of directing or controlling a thing) or was prevented by her IS blinders from even a side glance at the second. Here the latter is clearly meant, since the German text employs the verb "leiten" (meaning to direct) rather than the noun "Leitung" (meaning "leadership"). (The German for Zeluck's version would be "under der unmittelbaren Leitung der Parteikomitees," but this would entail a restructuring of the entire sentence.

"4. METHODS OF ACTION AMONG WOMEN, 3.c. (5), paragraph 4:

French text, page 145: 'Toutes les mesures et toutes les tâches qui s'imposent aux commissions et aux sections des ouvrières devront être réalisées par elles, d'une manière indépendante...'

My translation: 'All the measures and all the tasks imposed on the Commissions and on the Sections of working women should be handled by the women, in an independent fashion...'

You reversed the meaning of this statement by incorporating the word 'not', thus: 'All measures and problems of the Sections... must not be handled by

them independently..."

The German (page 156): 'Die Kommissionen sollen selbständig alle Massregeln durchführen, die sich vor ihnen erheben...'

—B. Zeluck, *Ibid.*

4: Here the German text suffers from telescoping two successive actions into one. A literal translation would be, "The commissions are to independently carry out all measures which are raised before them [or: which are brought to their attention]...." Zeluck rightly objects to the "not" unwarrantedly present in the official English translation, but her own version of this passage is equally faulty. In her "French original" "réalisées par elles" cannot grammatically refer to "women" but only to "commissions and sections," both of which are feminine in French. Less significant is her misrendering of "s'imposent" as "imposed on": in the sense "thrust oneself upon" the French verb constitutes an exact equivalent of the German (as translated above).

Now in her first letter to Reissner Zeluck had (wisely!) refrained from bringing up two further charges of intentional distortion included in her internal document. (At this point she was presumably unaware that a copy of this document was in our possession.) We cite her footnotes 4 and 5:

"4. 'A member of the local party committee should be at the head of such section or committee.' (A complete invention)).

"5. 'Communists should be members of these committees or collegiums wherever it is possible.' ((The French text reads 'camarades communistes hommes'; the only possible translation for 'hommes' is 'men'. If the Sparts mean the same thing, they appear to be saying that women cannot be real 'communist comrades!'))"

—B. Zeluck, "Some Comments on Women and the Revolutionary Organizations," 1 May 1973

At this point it has become necessary to cite the whole of the second paragraph under Arabic 5 of the "Theses" in a translation from the German original:

"It is the duty of the party committees to provide immediate direction for the exact work of the commissions, for which they are responsible. At the head of every commission should stand a member of the committee. Insofar as possible several communists should be members of these commissions."

So much for *our* "complete invention." But what of Zeluck's vaunted French text, with its incredibly rudimentary translation error (mistaking German "mehrere," "several," for "männliche," "male")? Moreover, once one regards this paragraph as a whole, as opposed to the bits and snippets approach preferred (for good reason!) by Zeluck, her threadbare justification (in footnote 3 of her article) for preferring the vague "leadership" to the unambiguous party "control" as translation for French "direction" ("While 'control' is a possible translation of the French word 'direction,' the latter is almost invariably translated as 'leadership'.") stands revealed as the emasculation of Leninist organizational principles that it is.

We do not make this charge lightly. The whole thrust of the "Theses" goes against this IS downplaying of the role of the party. Thus this paragraph 5 is preceded (on the very same page!) by a passage which, recognizing the effects upon women of millenia of op-

pression, therefore calls for:

"...the creation of special organs for carrying out [communist] work among women. Such organs are sections and commissions, which must be organized for all Party Committees from the C.C. of the Party down to the city-level or county-party committee. This decision is binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International."

This unambiguous assertion of the *party-character* of the women's commissions Zeluck accordingly has in her article to water down into "Sections or Commissions, functioning in close association with all party committees...."

We would suggest, then, that the shift in tone from the scholarly detachment (fraudulent) of Zeluck's first letter to the sectarian virulence (genuine) of her second is capable of a perfectly straightforward explanation, her learning from Reissner's second letter that we had a copy of this internal discussion article. Realizing that we had the goods on her—in the matter of the "French originals" and that document's charges 4 and 5; judiciously omitted in her first letter—her sole recourse, was to attempt to shift the grounds of discussion by inveighing against *Workers Vanguard* as a "left gossip sheet."

In fact Zeluck's second letter is devoid of substance, that is if one excepts her charge of "the disparities that exist between the *Women and Revolution* version of the 1921 English translation and the 1921 English version in the collection of the New York Public Library at 42nd Street," which Zeluck could "not take the trouble to cite"—a wise action on her part, since it was this translation which we reprinted *verbatim* in *W&R*!

One final comment on Zeluck's systematic downplaying of the role of the party. The "Resolution on Forms and Methods of Communist Work Among Women" passed by the Second International Women's Conference in Moscow and adopted at the Third Congress of the Comintern concurrently with the "Theses" presents in particularly concise form just those principles adhered to by the Spartacist League but which an IS-mentality automatically rejects:

"...it is the duty of all parties affiliated to the 3rd International, for all their organs and institutions—from the lowest to the highest—to erect women's committees headed by a member of the party leadership. ... These women's committees... are, in all areas and at all times, to operate under Party direction while nonetheless possessing the necessary freedom of action to apply such methods and forms of work and to create such devices as seem indicated, with a view to the success of their work, by the special character of women and their, so far not yet overcome, special position in society and in the family."

—*Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale* (Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921), Bibliothek der Kommunistischen Internationale XXIII (Hamburg: Verlag der Kommunistischen Internationale, 1921), pp. 932-33

It is this interpenetration of creative initiative and party direction which will remain forever incomprehensible to the ill-assorted denizens of the IS swamp. ■

—V. Z.

(Continued from page 4)

## History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*

*Rabotnitsa* and it was decided that the journal would make its first appearance on 23 February/8 March—International Women's Day—1914. Subscriptions were advertised in *Prauda* and advance sales were quite successful.

Since the editorial board had no office, its first meeting on 6/19 February 1914 took place in Samollova's apartment, where, in addition to the editors, eight women factory representatives were also present.

The second editorial board meeting was scheduled for 18 February/3 March 1914 in Kudelli's apartment, but Elizarova arrived late at that meeting to find only an empty apartment. The police had gotten there earlier and arrested the entire editorial board. The governor's written permission for the publication of *Rabotnitsa* which the women produced was of no avail. Following detention in St. Petersburg's Viborg Prison for several weeks, they were exiled from the region and placed under police surveillance for three years.

Due to her tardiness, Elizarova had escaped arrest. Now only she was left to complete the task of publishing *Rabotnitsa* in time for International Women's Day. Working with incredible energy and determination, she succeeded in meeting the deadline, and 12,000 copies of the first issue did appear, as planned, on the proletarian holiday.

Feminist organizations had been founded in Russia as early as 1905. Like feminist organizations today, they believed that the fundamental social distinction was one of sex, rather than class—that men are the enemy. They were also similar to such familiar feminist organizations as the National Organization of Women in that they were, by and large, organized by, composed of and operated in the interests of bourgeois women; they had very little impact on working women.

Krupskaya, who wrote the lead article in the first issue of *Rabotnitsa*, took the opportunity to draw a sharp distinction between Bolshevik and feminist methods of work among women. Feminist ideology, which survives to this day, continues to mislead women and to prolong their oppression under capitalism, and we are still forced to struggle against it and to delineate its differences from Marxism.

### Rabotnitsa Struggles to Survive

The first issue was a success, but a new wave of arrests among the most militant working women and the difficulty of finding a printer called the continued existence of the journal into question. Within the Party, too, some comrades discouraged the publication of a separate women's journal on the grounds that it would be a financial drain on the Party.

Working women, however, demanded its continuation. The new editorial office on Yamskaya Street was deluged with subscriptions and correspondence. This popular support reinforced Elizarova's determination to continue publishing *Rabotnitsa* despite all difficulties, and after a great deal of effort she finally managed to find a printer who consented to work on the journal. The editorial staff did sewing to pay for



Editorial board of *Rabotnitsa* in 1917. Top row, from left: Nikolaeva, Kudelli, Samollova. Bottom row, from left: Elizarova, Kollontai, Stal', Bonch-Bruevich.

paper and printing costs and to cover losses. The second issue appeared in March, the third and fourth issues appeared in April and the fifth appeared at the beginning of May. Every issue, costing four kopeks a copy, was quickly sold out, chiefly to factory workers.

One issue was confiscated by the police because of two articles entitled "Wave of Disease Among Workers" and "They Became Angry" and a poem called "Working Woman." "Wave of Disease Among Workers" dealt with the mass poisonings of working women at the Treugol'nik Rubber Factory in St. Petersburg and other rubber factories in Russia in March, 1914. These incidents aroused the indignation of workers throughout the country and overcame the initial reluctance of the relatively well-paid working women in the rubber industry to participate in working-class struggle. Then, as now, capitalist enterprise operated to produce profits for the bourgeoisie and with little regard for the welfare of the workers. At this time, rubber manufacturers were cutting costs by using a low quality benzine with toxic properties which induced dizziness in the workers and sometimes caused blindness.

The publication of *Rabotnitsa* was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I in July 1914, when many workers' newspapers were suppressed in Russia and hundreds of radicals were imprisoned or exiled to Siberia. The great popularity which the journal enjoyed in 1914 had been created by only seven issues (two of which had been confiscated) over a period of five months. In this short time, *Rabotnitsa* had become an authentic organ of working women, in which they dis-



Front page of the first issue of *Rabotnitsa* dated 23 February [International Women's Day] 1914.

cussed their needs and their struggles and around which they united and organized. Now it was silenced by the autocracy and would not reappear until that autocracy had been overthrown. The discontinuation of *Rabotnitsa* in Russia did not, of course, affect the existence of its editorial board in exile, which continued to intervene in the international working women's movement.

**Organizing for October**

Publication of *Rabotnitsa* resumed in May 1917, under the editorship of Krupskaya, Elizarova, Kollontai, Samoilova, Kudelli and Velichkina. The first issue carried a series of resolutions which had been passed in several plants and factories, notes on the women's movement in Russia and abroad, greetings to Russian working women from the Swedish and Finnish Social Democratic Parties and greetings from the editors of *Pravda*, who expressed their confidence that the renewed journal would successfully rally broad strata of proletarian women so that "on the ruins of tsarism, they would build the temple of socialism" hand in hand with proletarian men.

Subsequent issues dealt with such contemporary questions as the war, the eight-hour working day, the elections to district dumas and child labor. As an organ of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, *Rabotnitsa* sought to advance Bolshevik politics and to argue for Bolshevik positions on all of these questions. But it functioned not only as a literary vehicle for the dissemination of Bolshevik propaganda and agitation, but also as a collective organizer. The first meetings of Petrograd working women were organized by *Rabotnitsa*, as were several protests and demonstrations. Forums bore such titles as: "Who Needs the War?" "The Working Woman and the High-

Cost of Living," "Women's Labor," and "The Protection of Motherhood." In June 1917, the editors organized an international antiwar protest in Petrograd. This was the first public international meeting ever to be held in Russia and it drew over 10,000 people. The following month *Rabotnitsa* organized a demonstration to protest the high cost of living, which also attracted thousands of working people.

During the "July Days," when the Bolshevik Party was persecuted by the Provisional Government and its presses were closed down, *Rabotnitsa* remained the only functioning Bolshevik publication. In it, Lenin sought to publish his article, "Three Crises." When troops arrived at the printers to confiscate the issue, working women risked imprisonment to rescue it. At the very moment the search was being carried out, the women managed to sneak stacks of the journal past the soldiers and hide them. Later, they distributed them in the factories.

A great deal of agitation was carried out in the pages of *Rabotnitsa* during the days immediately preceding the October Revolution. A typical agitational article was "What Road to Take?", which appeared on the front page of the 18 October/1 November 1917 issue.

Just prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917, *Rabotnitsa* organized the First All-City Conference of Petrograd Working Women, which was attended by 500 delegates representing 80,000 working women. This conference passed a resolution which, among other things, standardized the work day at eight hours and banned labor for children under the age of 16. One of the aims of the conference was to prepare non-Party working women for the coming uprising and to acquaint them with the goals that the Soviet government planned to pursue after the establishment of

*continued on next page*

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## History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*

the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Conference discussions were interrupted by the actual outbreak of armed struggle. The delegates thereupon adjourned temporarily and participated in the Revolution. The conference was resumed immediately after the Bolshevik victory.

### Under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

In November 1918, *Rabotnitsa* convened the First All-Russian Conference of Working Women and Peasant Women which met in Moscow. Prior to this conference, a bureau of convocation dispatched agitators throughout Russia—even to the front-line regions—to inform women about the conference and to facilitate the election of delegates. In the difficult conditions created by the Civil War, it was expected that approximately 300 delegates would be elected, but the response of the women was overwhelming and the actual number was 1,147.

The conference, which convened on 16 November 1918, was presided over by K. I. Nikolaeva and was addressed by Sverdlov and Lenin. It took up such questions as: the problems of working women in Soviet Russia, the family and communist government, problems of social welfare, the international revolution and working women, organizational problems, the struggle against prostitution in Soviet Russia, the struggle against child labor and the housing problem.

During the discussion of organizational problems, the question of separate and autonomous women's organizations to deal with women's needs was raised. This position, which remains a cornerstone of feminism, was resolutely opposed by the delegates on the grounds that working women, although oppressed both as workers and as women, could be liberated only through the liberation of the entire working class, i.e., through communism. This decision was confirmed by later congresses, including the Third Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July 1921, which published a resolution stating the basic Marxist proposition that there is no separate woman question and that class collaboration between working women and bourgeois feminism leads to the undermining of the proletarian struggle, thereby delaying the triumph of the socialist revolution and the advent of communism, which alone can insure women's ultimate liberation. (See *Women and Revolution* No. 2, September-October 1971.)

In view of the fact, however, that working women were the newest and, in many ways, the least-conscious section of the working class, it was proposed by Armand and Samoilova and resolved by the delegates that the conference appeal to the Bolshevik Party "to organize from among the most active working women of the Party special groups for propaganda and agitation among women in order to put the idea of communism into practice."

The Party responded to this appeal with the creation of a commission of the Central Committee for work among women under the presidency of Inessa Armand. In 1919, this commission was replaced by the governmental Department of Working Women and Peasant Women or *Zhenotdel*.

As a result of the transfer of the Soviet capital from Petrograd to Moscow in 1918, the closing of many mills and factories in the city and the subsequent dispersion of a section of the Petrograd proletariat, the publication of *Rabotnitsa* came to an end. Even after its official closing, however, those members of the staff who remained in the vicinity repeatedly called meetings of working women in the editorial offices to discuss important political questions.

At the beginning of 1919, at the suggestion of Samoilova, other organs of the Party press, including *Pravda* and *Krasnaia Gazeta*, began to include working women's pages and later peasant women's pages in their issues, and in the summer of 1920, a journal dealing especially with women again appeared. It was called *Kommunistka—The Communist Woman*—and it was edited by a group of prominent male and female revolutionists, including Bukharin, Kollontai and Armand.

While some people, and even some Party members, still failed to understand the function of a communist women's journal and were inclined to regard it as a "ladies' pastime," others, and especially Lenin, waged an arduous struggle for its continuation. As Lenin had argued for the publication of *Rabotnitsa* in 1914, he now argued for the publication of *Kommunistka* and in its third issue he carried his arguments outside the Party by publishing an article in which he clarified the enormous importance of the journal in winning the loyalty of working women around the world to communist politics.

This goal was never achieved. The Soviet State has long since degenerated—and as a part of and reflection of its degeneration, many of the decisive gains in the position of women in Soviet society accomplished by the October Revolution were reversed by the Stalinist Thermidor. The masses of working women of the world have yet to be won to communist politics. Solidly based on the Bolshevik principles and program of our predecessor, *Rabotnitsa, Women and Revolution* sets for itself the completion of this task. We are determined to advance the working-class struggle through revolutionary propaganda and the organization of working women around the proletarian vanguard of which we are an integral part. We look forward, therefore, to the creation of a Spartacist League section for work among women and a women's section of the reborn Fourth International. ■

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(Continued from page 3)

## Toward a Communist Women's Movement

recognized the need to become full communists and to become involved in the work of the Spartacist League as disciplined supporters. In the course of this common work, the SL realized the need to make the W&R groups a part of the common Spartacist tendency and enable disciplined W&R supporters to participate in the work and internal life of the SL. It was proposed therefore that local W&R groups organizationally affiliate with the SL. The impetus for this step came from the SL, but mainly as the formalization of an accomplished fact.

By the time of the opening of the SL's pre-conference discussion period in preparation for the Third National Conference, the New York and Boston W&R groups had voted to become supporters of the SL on the local level and were participating in the discussion process. Elements from the Oakland and New Orleans women's groups had already joined the SL or its youth group, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), and many had been implanted in industrial work, under the direction of the SL Trade Union Commission. The work around W&R, demonstrating the SL's principled approach on the woman question, had been instrumental in the fusion between the RCY and the Buffalo Marxist Caucus, a component of which had been heavily involved in the women's movement. Earlier, the woman question had been one of the focal points of the SL's oppositional intervention into Progressive Labor-dominated SDS, which had won to the SL dozens of ex-New Lefters and individuals from PL's periphery and had laid the basis for the formation of the RCY.

The virtual disintegration of the petty-bourgeois women's movement in the early 1970's played a crucial role in convincing serious militant women that Trotskyism was the only way forward. It also precipitated a reassessment of perspectives for W&R. The women's movement was virtually ceasing to exist as an arena for intervention, but a diffuse consciousness of the reality of female oppression had trickled down to broad social layers, and its effects were becoming more apparent, especially within the labor movement itself.

In a document drafted for the SL Political Bureau

and adopted by the Third National Conference, tactical guidelines for our work among women were set forth. While keeping in mind the current priorities and resources of the SL, we adopted as our goal a general strategy based on that of the Communist International in its revolutionary period, the creation of a transitional women's organization affiliated with the proletarian vanguard party:

"The organizational experience of the SL in this work has tended strongly toward the conclusion that the women's circles must be brought under the discipline of the party so that the non-SL comrades involved can participate fully in the debates and decisions of the movement and be represented on its leading bodies. In our experience in the women's arena we were forced pragmatically to rediscover the position of the Communist International, which strongly opposed the initiation of women's organizations not organizationally linked to the proletarian vanguard, not only when the revolutionary organization is a mass party—in which case 'independence' would in fact constitute counterposition to the revolutionary party—but also when the vanguard is weak and struggling to increase its contact with and influence among the masses. Our strategic perspective should be the development of a women's section of the SL...."

The National Conference decided to establish a Commission for Work Among Women responsible to the SL Central Committee. This commission will oversee SL work among women, centering on the regular publication of W&R. It will also work in close coordination with the other leading bodies of the SL, especially with the Trade Union Commission, since the struggle for the fullest possible integration of women into the organized labor force and against the divisive effects of male chauvinism in the working class occupies a central place in the work of both bodies.

W&R will feature articles on the women's movement in the U.S. and abroad, the history of the communist women's movement, the role of the family and women in the work force, as well as articles on topical issues and book reviews. The aim of the journal is the crystallization of a readership committed to the establishment of a communist women's movement, looking toward the creation of a Spartacist League section for work among women dedicated to the struggle for the emancipation of women through international proletarian revolution. ■

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(Continued from page 7)

## The Woman Question and the Split in the International Socialists

Commission. While this Women's Commission was headed by Shelley Landau, a secondary leader of the forming left wing, two of its three members were eventually to go with the majority.

And in its very first (nearly its only) action, the consideration of the San Francisco leaflet, the prefactional divisions on the Women's Commission showed up quite clearly. The two majorityites voiced their distress and antipathy, while Landau tentatively defended it, though with disagreements. Controversy over the leaflet continued nationally until the tide of the onrushing factional struggle washed over it.

The leaflet had not yet been published in the IS bulletin. Now that the left-wing menace has been laid to rest, it may be deemed unnecessary by the fearful feminists of Seattle and Berkeley. No such small IS intervention has ever been given such attention nationally by the organization.

### The Woman Question and the Russian Question

The IS' view on women's liberation has always been flawed by its Stalinophobia. Its incorrect analysis of Russia, which it sees as a "new class" society and its inability to understand the basic dynamics of a socialist revolution, lead it to search for "guarantees" that a new Stalinist society will not be the inevitable outcome of any successful proletarian revolution. The IS' "guarantees" are found in a new sort of pluralism: a host of interest groups bringing pressure on the soviets will fight degeneration in the future workers state. Such "guarantees" are inevitably specious

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# Women and Revolution

and are barriers to the only possible guarantee against Stalinist degeneration—world-wide proletarian revolution.

Because of the theoretical distortions inherent in Shachtman's abandonment of the Trotskyist position on the deformed workers states, ISers could not even comprehend the statement of the Spartacist League (*Spartacist* No. 17-18) that IS propaganda on women's liberation "is flawed by their premise that a socialist revolution is not sufficient for women's liberation, as if imagining that this country's proletarian revolution will take a Stalinist form, and will somehow manage to defeat capitalism without any increase in social consciousness in the masses."

The IS' Stalinophobia is quite obvious when it tries its hand at analyzing the position of women in Stalinist-ruled countries. The IS feeds into the anti-communism of the petty-bourgeois women's movement by exaggerating and playing up the failure of these states to fully emancipate women, while trying to downplay the admitted gains. But when done accurately, this method backfires. Articles in *Workers' Power* (the IS press) on women in the Stalinist countries usually open by explaining that they will demonstrate once again that these states have "nothing in common with socialism." The articles then go on to show that because of the needs of the bureaucratically planned economy, women find themselves in a significantly better situation than before, but that they are not decisively emancipated; inequality and family oppression remain, and the vagaries of the bureaucracy lead to periodic shifts in policy on women. Such an analysis can be found in the widely circulated IS pamphlet by Laurie Landy, "Women in the Chinese Revolution."

A serious examination of this type of argument must eventually lead to the conclusion that the evidence is in fact ammunition for the Trotskyist view that these countries are deformed workers states, whose economies represent a distinctly higher form of rationality than capitalism, despite the burden placed on them by the Stalinist bureaucracies. Thus, revolutionaries must defend these states against capitalist attack, while working to overthrow the bureaucratic parasites who threaten the gains made. The IS conclusion is quite different, of course, but it is not justified by any honest telling of "the facts."

### RSL Refuses to Break from Shachtmanism

As the IS sought a way out of its troubles by chasing the dwindling women's movement to the right, the grouping which was to become the RSL edged leftward. And it has taken up a position which, like its other stances, reflects both its inconsistent leftward impulse and its deformations of Leninism due to the incompleteness of its attempted break from the Shachtmanite heritage.

The key RSL documents on the woman question, like other RSL documents, are often excellent in the abstract. Margaret Brecht wrote about the fight for women's liberation after the successful revolution:

"If this is not expressed in the consciousness, program, and organization of the vanguard then this must

be corrected. But this must come from inside the vanguard; not from the pressure of women organized independently outside of it to supposedly 'keep it on its toes.' Any other approach is to call on the more backward to lead."

—Amendment to Women's Liberation Perspectives, undated.

This amendment caused an upheaval at the National Committee meeting. Brecht charged that "the organization has reaffirmed the independent organization of women," and insisted:

"We will not win [the most politically advanced women leaders] to us by abstract rhetorical flourishes like the independent organization of women, but by concrete analysis, program, and strategy. It is the latter that they will seek, for it [is] only these that enable one to lead."

For the IS, this was tantamount to heresy, and some of the appalled majorityites suggested that these views constituted incipient Stalinism.

But the Brecht document suffers from weaknesses which are attributable to the RSL's refusal to break with the "third camp" view of the deformed workers states. Since it is dangerous to stress the economic base if one holds to "third camp" analysis (at all costs a "third camper" must ignore the fundamental Marxist insight that the relationship between people expressed at the point of production is the essential determinant of class) one must dwell on the important but secondary superstructural aspects like the state. This is the IS method, where we are told that "socialism is, above all, democracy," and this view is apparent in the Brecht document.

The analysis suggested in the "heretical" passages we have quoted from the Brecht document was amplified in the Leninist Tendency's Draft Program of 25 March 1973 (IS Bulletin No. 39, page 6):

"A central part of our conceptions on the liberation of women is the idea that the workers' power will have no material interest in the exploitation of women, and will necessarily be hostile to their oppression. Thus the victorious revolution will immediately begin to undercut that oppression and begin at once to provide the material basis for the replacement of the necessity of the family. Although male chauvinism will not disappear 'automatically'—what does?—we counterpose this view to the vision of a protracted and bitter struggle, with victory an open question, by 'independent' women's organizations after a triumphant revolution."

The IS right wing was able to seize on weaknesses in the Brecht document precisely because it ignores the point that the LT makes—that the workers state will have *no material interest* in the oppression of women, but rather an interest in the full development of all. Shying away from the materialist analysis of the ET, Brecht instead makes the unconvincing argument that:

"It is in the self-interest of the workers' state to liberate women, because the state is the class, and women are 50% of the class. Every cook must govern. Lenin points this out in *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* If the workers' state excludes 50% of itself it won't be able to govern."

Thus an important argument is weakened by the RSL's lingering Shachtmanism. Like the IS, the RSL finds consistent, authentic Marxism dangerous and

shies away. The difference is that the RSL, in straying further to the left, develops an inconsistency, whereas the IS is more wrong and more consistent.

The vacillation of the RSL is shown in other formulations in this otherwise excellent document. Brecht is vague about what program to call for when building organizations of women. She talks about their being organized "under the banner of the class." A better formulation is to be found in Shelley Landau's polemic of the same vintage. Landau, another RSL leader, writes:

"We call for and support independent organizations of the oppressed so that the oppressed can wage a struggle for their liberation in the course of which we can win them to a socialist program and leadership. To use an analogy, Trotsky described what he meant by 'independence' of the working class:

"Independence from the influence of the bourgeoisie cannot be a passive state. It can express itself only by political acts, that is, by struggle against the bourgeoisie. This struggle must be inspired by a distinct program which requires organization and tactics for its application. It is the union of program, organization and tactics that constitutes the party. In this way the real independence of the proletariat from the bourgeois government cannot be realized unless the proletariat conducts its struggle under the leadership of a revolutionary and not an opportunist party' (*Trotsky on the Trade Unions*).

"The same is true for organizations of the oppressed. Real political independence is only possible under revolutionary leadership. This is why we must win the most advanced women to the revolutionary party and we must build a working-class women's movement on a socialist basis...."

—"Critical Comments on Emerson's Women's Liberation Document," page 8.

But Landau's writing also reveals the same flaw as Brecht's—we form organizations *first* (mislabeling them united fronts) and *later* we fight for our program. The major difference with the IS majority is that the RSL vigorously issues promissory notes that it will *really* fight for a socialist program later. But at bottom the RSL has not broken from the strategy of building organizations on a reformist basis first, hoping they will "grow over" into revolutionary ones in the future.

In sum, we can see that the RSL falters at crucial points, allowing its Shachtmanite residue to blunt even its correct positions. This did not, of course, lessen the force of the rupture with the IS right wing. The original leftward impulse of those who became the RSL is in conflict with its "third camp" view on the deformed workers states, which inevitably blights RSL's analysis. Despite occasionally fine polemics and persuasive argumentation, the RSL is caught between conflicting impulses. It cannot advance without abandoning its pervasive Shachtmanism and the resulting inability to break fundamentally from many of the IS' flagrantly anti-Trotskyist positions. Its vacillations on questions of program are an indication of this unresolved contradiction, which must be decisively shattered if the RSL is not simply to recapitulate the wretched history of the IS with a more "leftist" cover. ■

(Continued from page 24)

## Why We Support the ERA

effect of the ERA on working women will ultimately be the outcome not of "congressional intent" or "judicial interpretation" but of the class struggle itself. Legalistic and tokenistic affirmations of equality must be transcended in this struggle, not opposed.

### The Meaning of the Equal Rights Amendment

Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment would overturn hundreds of state laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. These include:

- laws excluding women from certain occupations;
- laws that discriminate in hiring for state and local government positions;
- laws that permit state colleges to set higher admission standards for women;
- laws restricting the rights of married women to own property or engage in business independent of their husbands;
- laws that bias jury selection against women;
- laws establishing dual pay schedules.

The ERA would also make the payment of alimony less arbitrary and discriminatory by providing that it be awarded to either partner or dispensed with according to the partners' relative incomes and ability to support themselves. (The Spartacist League opposes the very concept of alimony, which is a substitute for providing women access to jobs and training in marketable skills, instead limiting their domain to home and children.)

This list, by no means exhaustive, indicates that the Equal Rights Amendment would mean some real, if limited, advances in the areas of women's civil and economic rights and, particularly, employment opportunities for professional women and women in public schools and state institutions of higher education. Unlike ultra-leftists who proclaim that they have no interest in legalistic reforms like the ERA, Marxists recognize that such struggles for bourgeois-democratic rights are of profound importance to the proletariat. By fighting the special oppression of women, Marxists attempt to unify the working class on a correct basis and to demonstrate in struggle that sexual equality can be achieved only through socialist revolution.

### The Equal Rights Amendment and the Civil Rights Act

The laws ostensibly granting equal opportunity to women, including the ERA, are of the same basic character as the 1964 Civil Rights Act (CRA) and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In both cases, the capitalist state felt compelled to grant formal concessions of democratic rights in order to give the sellout "leaders" of the black and women's movements a few crumbs to distribute to their restive followers. The civil rights movement, like the liberal women's movement typified by N.O.W., was unashamedly reformist and operated in the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie, which recognized that legal discrimina-

tion was the main obstacle to educational and professional opportunities, turning its back on the black masses for whom "upward mobility" under capitalism is a cynical fiction.

Both movements contained the same inherent contradiction between the partial but legitimate aspirations of a specially oppressed group and the impossibility of achieving full equality under capitalism except for a class-privileged few. Women, blacks and Latins are the main source for the pool of surplus labor vitally needed by the capitalists to expand the work force in boom periods and to depress all workers' wages in bust periods. The poisonous ideologies of racism and male chauvinism keep the workers at each others' throats rather than uniting to smash the bosses. By denying cultural advantages and technical training to blacks, Latins and women, the bourgeoisie is able to recruit workers at starvation wages for the thousands of obsolescent sweatshops that could not operate otherwise. While blacks and Latins are concentrated overwhelmingly in the lowest social strata, however, women are distributed throughout all social classes. Their oppression has its special locus in the family which serves capitalism not only as a conservatizing social institution but also as the source of billions of dollars in unpaid labor necessary to reproduce the work force.

But even though full sexual and racial equality cannot be achieved under capitalism, the ruling class under pressure may grant token reforms rather than install outright barbarism. The ERA, like the Civil Rights Act, is an attempt to obscure the most blatant manifestations of sexual and racial discrimination while avoiding action necessary to eliminate the real substance of the oppression of minorities and women. The bourgeoisie can sustain a few adverse judgments by government anti-discrimination agencies but could not survive the loss of the billions in extra profits derived from the super-exploitation of women and minority workers.

To cover their opportunist policy of supporting the 1964 Civil Rights Act while opposing the Equal Rights Amendment, a number of left tendencies have invented a qualitative difference between them. To the Revolutionary Union the ERA "will bring nothing but sham equality and more real oppression for the vast majority of women in this country. It is part of the overall attack on the people's living standards launched by the U.S. ruling class" (*Revolution*, February 1973). To the RU the amendment is nothing but a cloak for the abolition of state protective laws: "The ERA neither comes from mass struggle nor does it benefit the masses" (*Revolution*, March 1973).

Further, the April issue of *Revolution* treats us to a particularly juicy attempt to tailor history to the RU's political needs:

"The ruling class only makes concessions in the face of mass struggle. While there has been some struggle around specific issues of women's oppression, there has not been any real mass movement around the general question of 'equal rights for women' or the ERA. "The Civil Rights Movement was able to wring real concessions from the ruling class because it involved millions of people, including many working men and women, in militant, determined struggle" [emphasis in original].

The key word in these paragraphs is "real." The Civil Rights Movement was a "real mass movement"; the women's movement is not. The CRA contained "real concessions"; the ERA does not. What, comrades of the Revolutionary Union, distinguishes a supportable movement? Politics? Social composition? Both the civil rights and women's movements are multi-class, reformist movements under bourgeois leadership. Obviously the answer is numbers; the bigger it is, the more "real" (i.e., supportable) it is. We might suggest another such "real mass movement" to the RU, one to which their opportunist appetites inevitably lead, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

Those who remember the mass civil rights marches of the early sixties, led by pacifist ministers, sellout labor "leaders" and liberal politicians into the waiting arms of JFK and LBJ, may have difficulty reconciling that political reality with the RU's image of a revolutionary black liberation movement wringing "real" concessions from a cringing bourgeoisie. The struggle for racial equality did indeed produce stirrings of unrest (which generally developed in a black nationalist rather than a revolutionary direction) among the black masses (ghetto rebellions, independent political experiments like Detroit's Freedom Now Party, the development in SNCC and CORE of subjectively anti-imperialist politics, the emergence of the Black Panthers and the idea of armed self-defense, etc.). These, however, were not the cause of the various civil rights acts but were rather the result of widespread frustration over the ineffective tokenism and superficial nature of these laws. The CRA was nevertheless an advance in that it represented some genuine, although extremely limited, concessions to racial minorities and improved the conditions of struggle. The ERA, if passed, would provide similar concessions to women.

### Bourgeois Legalism and Labor Reformism

The Communist Party and the International Socialists, like the RU, justify their opposition to ERA primarily by claiming that the amendment would lead to the abolition of state protective laws. The crucial question of protective laws is examined below, but several preliminary points are important to make.

First, many state protective laws have already been voided on the basis of the Civil Rights Act. In 1963 40 states had maximum hours laws for women in one or more occupations or industries. State courts and attorneys general have since ruled these laws discriminatory under Title VII of the CRA, and 32 of the 40 states have eliminated them. Courts in California and Oregon have also used Title VII to overturn those states' laws establishing weightlifting limits for women. Do the RU, IS and CP propose to repeal the Civil Rights Act because it has been used to strike down protective laws? Perhaps the RU can invent some new history to demonstrate how the "sham equality" of the ERA differs from the "real concessions" of the CRA.

Secondly, the amendment itself says nothing one way or the other about protective laws; they could either be abolished or extended to cover men and still be consistent with ERA. Of course the bourgeois-

ie will seek to establish the former interpretation; it is the responsibility of self-styled revolutionists (as distinguished from liberals) to seek to develop mass struggles to establish the latter. Precisely because it is such a simple and unequivocal statement of legal equality, the ERA is supportable and must become a basis for further agitation to defend and extend protective legislation.

The pattern established by court decisions and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines indicates that they will interpret the amendment to extend minimum wage laws, rest and lunch period laws to cover men, while invalidating laws limiting hours and weightlifting. The workers movement should, by no means, accept these interpretations as final. Whereas the RU, CP and IS position leads to the conclusion that it is preferable for women to be excluded from high paying jobs in major industries like auto, which require many hours of compulsory overtime, rather than face the loss of state maximum hours laws, we believe that all barriers to women's full integration into the work force should be removed while workers in auto and other industries should fight to extend the protection of maximum hours laws to men, to eliminate compulsory overtime and to institute a 30-hour week at 40 hours' pay in their national contracts.

The key to a correct evaluation of any extension of democratic rights like ERA or CRA is to understand that these laws necessarily have a contradictory aspect when implemented under a social system in which sexual and racial discrimination are inherent. As long as the bourgeoisie holds power, any democratic reform, any partial gain of the working class, can be perverted into a covert attack on all or part of the class (e.g., wage gains are used to justify wage controls). This is precisely the opportunity for socialist propaganda to expose the hypocrisy and the reactionary character of the bourgeoisie and to pose the class struggle as the road to equality.

The positions of the IS, CP and RU display a thinly veiled form of legalism and reformism. In the 15 March issue of *Workers' Power*, the IS states its case:

"We oppose the ERA simply because the elimination of protective legislation will severely weaken the position of working women. We would, however, support a legislative measure that would both guarantee the legal equality of women and protect the rights of working women."

What underlies this position are two assumptions: 1) that the interests of the proletariat can be protected by a perfectly worded law and 2) that the proletariat is a passive object that cannot defend itself against capitalist attacks. To the first point we answer that no "legislative measure" will ever "guarantee the legal equality of women and protect the rights of working women" because the bourgeoisie, despite democratic pretensions, cannot provide such a guarantee, which is inimical to its class interests. Only a workers' state can guarantee real social equality and steady improvements in the proletariat's living and working conditions.

The CP, IS and RU reveal a deep-rooted reformist outlook when they accept the bosses' proposition that

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## Why We Support the ERA

any further extension of democratic rights for women must be paid for by the loss of protective legislation. This is the cowardly and opportunist approach of the labor bureaucrats who tell the workers that they must pay for everything they get by trading off losses against gains, by accepting speed-up as the price for wage increases or by accepting compulsory overtime as the price for pension improvements. It is the same divisive outlook the bosses seek to engender when they insist that a gain for some workers is a loss for others and thus whites must oppose the demands of black workers. By painting a picture of the working class as passive and defenseless, these so-called revolutionaries are only mirroring the cringing servility of labor's misleaders who betray and manipulate the workers' fighting instincts into the narrow and self-defeating tactics of business unionism. This is especially evident in the fawning admiration the CP shows toward various AFL-CIO bureaucrats (like Myra Wolfgang of the Hotel, Bar and Restaurant Workers Union) when they publicly oppose the ERA. In their quest "to be at one" with the workers—all the workers—these opportunists find themselves tailing the class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy. But despite their misleadership, American workers have not suffered a decisive defeat which would permit the capitalists to ride roughshod over them. It is hardly preordained that passage of the ERA would mean the loss of gains embodied in protective laws.

### The Reality of Protective Legislation

Protective laws are hardly unalloyed gold for women workers. A major problem in characterizing them is that from state to state the laws differ greatly in the specific restrictions on the employment of women, the number of women covered, legal penalties and enforcement procedures. This is due largely to the varied origins and intentions of the laws. Women's labor unions, bourgeois philanthropic organizations, job-trusting craft unions, factory inspectors and aspiring reform politicians all played a role in shaping these laws, often with very different ends in mind. Many of the laws have been invalidated under Title VII. Others are rarely enforced and are of little use to those women in small sweatshops, which the labor-fakers consistently refuse to organize.

Some of the protective laws were class victories won by militant strike action and with the gains soon extended to men. Massachusetts' 60-hour law of 1874 was the first enforceable maximum hours law, and within a decade most of New England textile workers were covered by similar laws. Although through a legislative compromise the law applied only to women, the textile companies soon found it impossible to maintain different schedules for the minority of men in the industry, a general phenomenon noted by Marx in his study of the effects of England's factory laws.

These maximum hours laws were progressive insofar as they shortened the workweek, but they have also been used widely to exclude women from indus-

tries like auto that thrive on long hours of compulsory overtime. Passage of the ERA would put an end to the utilization of maximum hours laws as an excuse to exclude women from industry and sharpen the counterposition of the proletarian policy of a shorter workweek for all at no loss in pay to the bourgeoisie's policy of a longer workweek for some and unemployment for others.

Eighteen states have enacted laws either prohibiting or strictly regulating the conditions of night work for women. Night-work prohibitions have been defended as a measure for the maintenance of women's position in the home.

Although certain amenities like taxi fare for female night-shift workers could usefully be extended to men, in general, night-work laws are reactionary restrictions on women's rights and should be opposed by the labor movement.

Likewise the many state laws which prohibit women from working in certain occupations like mining, bartending, foundry work, meter reading, brass polishing, etc., only reinforce the image of women as docile, helpless creatures to be protected from "immoral" and "hazardous" occupations by a benevolent ruling class. Such laws were often the result of pressure by job-trusting craft unions that preferred to exclude women rather than organize them and fight for equal pay.

Bourgeois philanthropists, concerned that the pauperization of women workers was driving thousands into prostitution and onto public charity, were the main force behind most of the state minimum wage laws for women. Thirty-six states have these laws, and the vast majority has already extended coverage to men. Since they maintain wage levels in local businesses not covered by the federal minimum wage, these laws must be retained, extended to men in all states and increased from the present absurdly low minimum levels.

Although the weightlifting laws have frequently been used arbitrarily in job classifications to exclude women from better paying jobs, we favor both their retention and their extension to men to provide protection for all workers against the capitalists' disregard for their health and safety.

Women textile workers took the lead in fighting for maximum hours laws, the first protective laws, because the men in other industries like the building trades were better organized and had already secured shorter hours through trade-union struggles. The craft-union bureaucrats' policy of deliberate neglect of the more oppressed women workers was the root cause that drove the women to rely increasingly on bourgeois philanthropists like the Consumers' League and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, rather than on their own strength as part of the proletariat. The total inadequacy of protective legislation and the long-standing pattern of sexual discrimination in industry are an indictment of the labor bureaucracy's self-serving refusal to mobilize the workers to struggle collectively to overcome inequality and achieve class solidarity as well as to organize the unorganized and to advance the interests of all workers. ■

# OUR PROGRAM

1. Free quality health care for all, including free abortion and birth control on demand. Free prenatal and postnatal maternity care. No forced sterilization.
2. Socialize household duties by making available, at the workplace and residential areas, dining rooms and laundry services paid for by the state.
3. Free quality 24-hour child-care facilities available to all, controlled by parents and staff, paid for by the state or by the employer.
4. Free, immediate divorce on request of either partner. No alimony, with child support borne by the state.
5. No discrimination by employers or the state based on marital status. Equal legal rights for all—married or single. Abolish the legal classification of illegitimacy.
6. No laws or discrimination against homosexuals. No sex codes or discrimination against relations based on consent of those involved.
7. End the legal persecution of prostitutes.
8. For a state stipend available to all young people, enabling economic independence from the family. Lower the legal age of adulthood to sixteen.
9. Free and equal education—open admissions—with a state stipend. Worker-student-teacher control of schools.
10. End the falsification of history. Teach the history of the international class struggle, including the struggles of women and minorities.
11. End tracking in schools by class, race or sex. (Equal access to all types of academic and vocational training.)
12. Equal rights and benefits for part-time and temporary workers. Full pay, rights and benefits during training. Maternity and paternity leaves with full pay and no loss in job security.
13. Extend protective legislation to cover all workers.
14. Equal pay for equal work. Equal access to all job categories.
15. No job discrimination based on race, sex or age.
16. End unemployment at the capitalists' expense. For a shorter workweek with no loss in pay. (30 hours' work for 40 hours' pay—sliding scale of hours and wages.)
17. For unlimited cost-of-living escalator clauses in all union contracts.
18. Organize the unorganized. Union organization of the unemployed.
19. For union hiring halls. No racial or sexual discrimination in the unions.
20. For rank-and-file control of the unions. Oust the labor bureaucrats by building militant caucuses based on a class-struggle political program that includes a fight for the needs of the specially oppressed. No exclusionism in the caucuses by race or sex.
21. No anti-labor laws. Government out of union affairs.
22. For the right of armed self-defense of the working class.
23. No confidence in capitalist politicians—male or female. Build a labor party based on the trade unions.
24. For labor political strikes against the wage freeze and the Indochinese war.
25. For the expropriation of industry without compensation, under workers control.
26. For a workers' government.

# WHY WE SUPPORT THE E.R.A.

The Equal Rights Amendment is a simple statement of women's legal equality. It reads: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." In this or similar form, the ERA has been introduced (and defeated) in Congress every year since 1923.

After half a century, during which it rarely received a serious hearing, the ERA was passed by Congress in 1972. To become a constitutional amendment, it must be ratified within seven years by at least 38 states. To date, it has been approved by 28 state legislatures and rejected by ten and is the subject of extremely sharp controversy.

This controversy has produced the most incongruous political lineup of recent history. Opponents of the amendment include not only reactionary standardbearers of white male supremacist ideology, like the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society or pawns of medieval obscurantism like the National Council of Catholic Women but even major currents within the workers movement—the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the reformist Communist Party (CP), the left social democrats of the International Socialists (IS) and the Maoist Revolutionary Union (RU). Among ERA supporters we find the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Maoist October League (OL), the National Organization of Women (NOW) along with a myriad of petty-bourgeois feminist organizations, the United Auto Workers' and Communications Workers' bureaucracies, the Democratic Party and such "champions of sexual equality" as George Wallace, Richard Nixon and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM).

The bourgeoisie generally favors the amendment as a token gesture that will cost it little while shoring up the illusions of American democracy which have been severely shaken by the racial violence of the sixties, the Vietnam war and the general decline of the domestic economy. Nixon's veto of the childcare bill and the extreme backwardness of state and federal laws governing maternity leave and pay indicate the real extent of the ruling class's hypocritical concern for women's rights. In addition, elements like the NAM hope to use the amendment to secure the abolition of state laws regulating women's minimum wages, maximum hours and weight-lifting restrictions, as well as rest periods and other provisions of "protective legislation."

For their part, the more openly reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done their best to turn the ERA into a contemporary parallel of the Dreyfus case in nineteenth century France, where the denial of democratic rights to a Jewish army officer was the occasion for a mobilization of reactionaries and anti-Semites which conditioned the entire climate of opinion and affected every layer of society. Many of the forces that led the anti-abortion campaign have coalesced around "Stop ERA," a group headed by Phyllis Schlafly, well known right-wing writer and Goldwater supporter in 1964. Schlafly claims that the ERA would be a step down for women



Women do "men's" jobs during war. Railroads employed 100,000 women in 1944.

who "already have the status of special privilege." John Schmitz of the American Independent Party bemoans the fact that "Women already have too much freedom."

While this debate exposes both the seamy underside of bourgeois reaction and the transparent hypocrisy of liberal representatives of the ruling class and their lackeys in the labor bureaucracy, it is more important as an acid test which reveals the utter disorientation of many ostensibly revolutionary organizations faced with the struggle for legal equality and bourgeois-democratic rights in an epoch when the bourgeoisie has long since outlived any progressive thrust; in the imperialist era, only the proletariat retains a real stake in the issues of democracy.

The Spartacist League supports the Equal Rights Amendment because we are in favor of equality between the sexes but at the level attained through the struggles of the most advanced sections of the working class. Partial gains must be extended, thereby aiding in the unification of the class. The ERA makes no provision for extending protective legislation. In this situation we must give support to the Amendment while continuing the struggle to protect and extend the gains already won. We support the ERA from the standpoint of the proletariat and with not the slightest illusion of confidence in the bourgeoisie which "always takes away with the right hand twice what it grants with the left." But to oppose the ERA on the grounds that it will allow the capitalists to destroy (in the name of equality) the partial gains of women workers embodied in state protective laws would be to reject the struggle for democracy and to deny that the principle of equality is important. The proletariat has its own weapons for protecting and extending its social gains and the

*continued on page 20*