

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

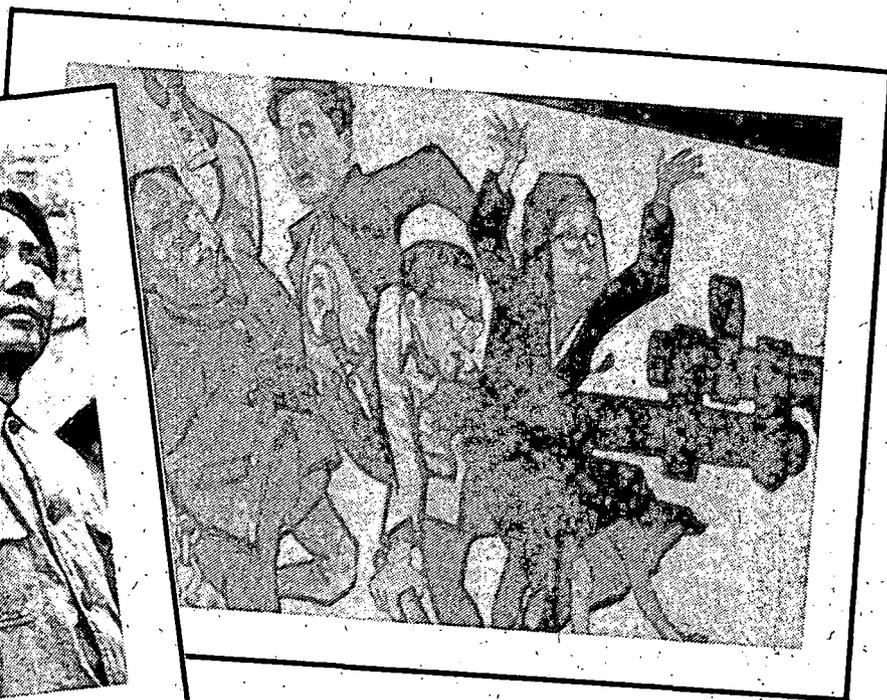
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## The Rise and Fall of Chiang Ching



Time-Life. Time. UPI (l. to r.)



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# The Rise and Fall of Chiang Ching

by Joseph Seymour

Few recent books are at once so objectively significant and so utterly intrinsically trivial as *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*. In the summer of 1972, American feminist academic Roxane Witke was given 60 hours of exclusive interviews with Chiang Ching; this was by far the longest that any leading Chinese Communist had spoken to a Western writer since the 1930's. This in itself

Witke, Roxane.

*Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*.

Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977.

should have made *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* a historically important document.

Almost immediately after the interviews were given, they became a major focus of Peking's venomous cliquism. It was widely reported that Mao was furious at his wife for revealing closely guarded party and state secrets to an outsider. Witke partially corroborates these reports. She recounts that the Chinese government, through its UN mission, pressured her to abandon her projected biography of Chiang Ching, even offering her money not to publish it!

*Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, published just after the purge of the "gang of four," now takes on even more political significance. This book is Chiang's last chance to defend her political honor before those foreign radicals who may be sympathetic to her cause.

What a prosecutor wouldn't give for such a defense brief as this! In one sense, the new Hua Kuo-feng regime should be grateful that Witke carried through her project, because Witke, despite her sympathy toward her subject, reveals Chiang Ching as a politically shallow, grossly self-indulgent, paranoid and vindictive woman. In another sense, however, there is good reason why the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy wanted this book suppressed: It unwittingly shows the hypocrisy, luxury-loving and viciously clique-ridden nature of Mao's court.

Many foreign radicals were taken in by the Mao/Chiang claim that the so-called Cultural Revolution was an attack on bureaucratic corruption and privilege. At the time, the Spartacist tendency asserted that the events in China represented an intra-bureaucratic fight, with a large cliquist dimension. *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* reveals the petty, sordid, backstabbing motives of the main inspirers of the Cultural Revolution to a far greater degree than we had envisioned. Key to Chiang's activities during the Cultural Revolution was settling decades-old personal scores. Anyone who, after reading *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, still believes that communist morality and rectitude were on the side of the Mao group is hopelessly politically naive, or worse.

When Chiang was purged, the Hua regime claimed she had been leading a double life, preaching revolutionary austerity and puritanism to the masses, while living like a decadent empress-dowager. At first, one was inclined to dismiss these accusations as typical Stalinist slanders and character assassination. However, after reading Witke's book, it is clear that Hua's charges are not slanders; at most they are exaggerations.

To entertain Witke, Chiang screened her private collection of Greta Garbo films! When Witke asked her why Garbo films were banned as "bourgeois decadence":

"Those bourgeois democratic films are to be reserved for private showing," she flatly declared. "If the people could view them they would criticize them bitterly on political grounds. Such public exposure and attack would be most unfair to Garbo because she is not Chinese."

Chiang Ching was hardly the only one in Mao's court to indulge in cultural activities forbidden to the people. The "Great Helmsman," himself, and also his old comrade-in-arms Chu Teh wrote poetry in the classical style, which is barred to lesser mortals as a "decadent" art form.

Hua and Teng are no better from the standpoint of communist morality than the "gang of four," but Chiang Ching's crimes are not limited to hypocrisy and self-indulgence. During the Cultural Revolution she and her clique committed unforgivable atrocities, such as starving to death the old guerrilla chief Ho Lung. We no more defend Chiang Ching against Hua than we would defend Beria against Molotov or Molotov against Khrushchev.

## From Shanghai With Venom

Before the Cultural Revolution catapulted her to prominence, Mao's wife was virtually unknown; far less a political personage than the wives of other Chinese Communist leaders. Therefore, Chiang Ching is understandably preoccupied with establishing her independent revolutionary credentials and dispelling her image as a beautiful concubine-turned-empress-

## Women and Revolution

Journal of the Spartacist League Central  
Committee Commission for Work Among Women

EDITORIAL BOARD: D.L. Reissner (editor), Karen Allen, Kay Blanchard, Helene Brosius, Helen Cantor, Liz Gordon

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Louise Bolton

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Anné Kelley

Published by the Spartacist Publishing Company, Box 1377, G.P.O., New York, New York 10001. Telephone: 925-2428.

Opinions expressed in signed articles or letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.

dowager, who exploited an old man's weakness in order to gain power.

Much of the new material she provides for Witke is an attempt to establish her credentials as a Communist militant years before she went to Yenán and met Mao. She claims to have joined the Communist Party (CP) in early 1933 at age 18 in Tsingtao in her native province of Shantung. Almost immediately thereafter she moved to Shanghai and joined the League of Left-Wing Dramatists, a CP front group.

By her own account, she was a marginal member of the CP in Shanghai. In fact, much of her political effort was directed toward locating the party's underground network, although this fact does not necessarily reflect badly on her subjective revolutionary commitment. The CP was severely repressed by the Kuomintang, and its underground apparatus may well have been as anarchic and inefficient as Chiang Ching makes out. None the less, the fact remains that Chiang Ching was politically insignificant until she moved in with Mao.

Chiang does not attribute her political marginality to objective circumstances, including her own juniority. In truly paranoid fashion she blames the ill-will of the Shanghai leadership. Virtually every male CP cadre she deals with is presented as a male chauvinist pig who tried (unsuccessfully) to seduce her. This section of the book does not read like the biography of a political activist but rather like one of Freud's case studies in paranoia.

Needless to say, the surviving CP cadres who knew Chiang Ching in the early days were almost all victims in the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards persecuted Li Ta-chang, who was head of the Tsingtao party at the time that Chiang Ching joined, and Tien Han, who was head of the League of Left-Wing Dramatists when she was a member.

Chiang's career as a film actress in her Shanghai days is an acute political embarrassment to her. She finds it difficult to square that career with her claim to have been a revolutionary militant. So she asserts that the CP leadership, in cahoots with the Kuomintang (KMT) forced her to act in films against her will:

"She did not seek fame in films.... But after she established a reputation as an actress [on stage], several film companies sought her out and tried to force her to sign contracts. Lu Hsun [famous left-wing writer] came to her defense.... The great film impresarios (who served the KMT directly or indirectly, e.g., through Chou Yang and his [Communist] Party associates in cultural operations) counterattacked by vilifying him and threatening to kill her" [emphasis in original].

Who could possibly believe this? Who is gullible enough to believe that Chinese film moguls, the underground CP and ruling Kuomintang would conspire to force a young actress to enter films against her will?

As a contribution to the history of the Chinese revolution, Chiang's account of the left in Shanghai in the 1930's is worthless. We learn nothing about the



UPI

Nixon and Chiang Ching at the ballet, 27 February 1972.

overall goals and activities of the underground CP. We learn little of the major factional struggle between Wang Ming's urban-centered adventurism and Mao's cautious rural-guerrillaist strategy, or of the transition from Third Period adventurism to the Popular Frontist collaboration with the Kuomintang. All we really learn is why Chiang Ching hated almost every CP cadre she encountered.

### Mao/Lan Ping Scandalize Yenán

It was quite a bedroom scandal when in 1938 Mao divorced his wife to marry the beautiful, young film actress then called Lan Ping. In a way, Chiang Ching has never lived down the obloquy of that event. To Witke, she was defensive and self-justifying about the beginnings of her relationship with Mao.

Mao's first wife, a Communist militant, was captured by the Kuomintang in 1930 and beheaded in revenge for her husband's activities. Shortly thereafter, Mao married another Communist cadre, Ho Tzu-chen, who bore five children by him. She was one of the few women to undertake the Long March in 1935, during which she was wounded.

Although accounts differ, it appears that Mao and Ho had separated, though not yet definitively, when Lan Ping (soon to be Chiang Ching) arrived at Yenán in the summer of 1937. Ho had suffered a psychological breakdown. It was also rumored that Mao's philandering was a cause of the marital break-up. Predictably Chiang Ching describes Ho Tzu-chen as a shrewish wife, who, driven insane by the horrors of the Long March, beat her (and Mao's) children.

When Chiang moved in with Mao, Ho was in a sanitarium in Moscow. The Red Army's "old guard" accepted Mao's love life without much tongue-wagging moralism. But the idealistic youth, who poured into Yenán in this period, were shocked that

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## Chiang Ching...

the great Communist leader would abandon his faithful companion and comrade-in-arms for a Shanghai glamor girl.

### Cultural Nihilism and Stalinist Bureaucracy

*Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* tells us little about the Cultural Revolution and fall of Lin Piao that cannot be found elsewhere in far more intelligible form. Oh yes, we are informed that Lin Piao tried to poison Mao and Chiang gradually; he obviously failed, though she suffered an illness which took her out of action for most of 1969.

For those who still harbor illusions about Chiang Ching as the radical protector of the Red Guards, this book confirms her active role in suppressing the "revolutionary rebels." A turning point in the Cultural Revolution came in September 1967 when under the guise of combatting "ultra-leftism" the Red Guards were disarmed. At the same time, the slogan, "seize a small handful in the army," was withdrawn, and the PLA officer corps—the heart of the Maoist bureaucracy—was declared off-limits for the Cultural Revolution.

In an important speech on 5 September 1967, Chiang Ching attacked the so-called "May 16th" group for criticizing Mao's regime from the "left":

"The 'May 16' is a very typical counter-revolutionary organization, and we must raise our vigilance against it. . . . This is to say that we oppose people who oppose the leadership group of the Party Central Committee headed by Chairman Mao either from the Left, the extreme Left or from the right side."

She goes on to declare that the Cultural Revolution must not touch the army, i.e., the repressive apparatus upon which the bureaucratic regime rests:

"Now we come to the second question—the army. Sometime earlier, there was a wrong slogan: Seize a small handful in the army. As a result, a small handful in the army was seized everywhere and even the weapons of our regular troops were seized.

"Comrades, come to think of it: Without the People's Liberation Army, is it possible for us to sit in the People's Great Hall holding a conference? If our field army were thrown into confusion and if trouble occurred, could we tolerate such a situation? Let us not fall into the trap. The slogan is wrong. Because the Party, the government and the army are all under the leadership of the Party."

—reproduced in Chung Hua-min and Arthur C. Miller, *Madame Mao: A Profile of Chiang Ch'ing*

Chiang Ching's main impact upon the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution concerned culture. And the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution bore the same relation to culture as it did to the proletariat—a hostile one. Under Chiang's direction all Western, Soviet and traditional Chinese art was banned; so was most art produced in the People's Republic before 1966. In 1967 all films were withdrawn from public circulation; few have been reintroduced to date. When Witke asked Chiang if foreign dramas would be reintroduced in China, she replied, "There seemed to be no point in it." She went on, "Original pieces of literature and music should be altered and transformed to revolutionary theater only under the authorization of the leaders, and then with utmost care."

Chiang's activities as cultural tsar were governed by a petty, vindictive subjectivity. She first came to prominence through her "socialist realist" reform of traditional opera in 1964. She recounts that the salty-tongued Peng Chen referred to her operas as "still at the stage of wearing trousers with a slit at the seat and sucking the fingers." No doubt this insulting remark was at least as much a factor in Peng Chen's downfall during the Cultural Revolution as any matter of great political import.

Not only in Maoist China but in all Stalinist-ruled societies, art is an important locus of political conflict. There is good reason for this. With open political controversy suppressed, art necessarily becomes a cover and vehicle for polemics. Dramas and operas in Mao's China are replete with obvious historical allegories and symbols related to current political controversy. Wu Han's play, *Hai Jui Dismissed from Office*, was the main public attack on Mao's sponsorship of the economically disastrous Great Leap Forward of 1958-61. Therefore the Mao group had to make the play a major focus of political attack. The Stalinist suppression of workers democracy necessarily leads to the totalitarian control of art.

There is another important aspect of art under Stalinism which is more central to Chiang's concerns. Her operas are typical examples of "socialist realism," the falsification of reality so as to make China conform to Stalinist ideals. In Stalinist countries, "socialist realism" is not an arbitrary and dispensable esthetic doctrine but is closely bound up with the false consciousness of the bureaucracies in the degenerated/deformed workers states. The formal ideological expression of this false consciousness is the doctrine of "socialism in one [backward] country." Poverty, ignorance, greed, careerism, male chauvinism and bureaucratic coercion expose the hollowness of China's "socialist" claims. Like the Christian heaven, Maoist "socialism" can exist only in the imagination—in art.

Stalinist ideology maintains that popular consciousness expresses socialist values and attitudes. Thus, if Chinese workers and peasants appreciate Western bourgeois or traditional art more than local Maoist creations, this gives the lie to the cultural pretensions of "socialism in one country." The Stalinist bureaucrats must consider art produced in contemporary bourgeois societies not only inferior to their own creations and subversive, but irrelevant. What's the point of reintroducing foreign dramas into China, asks Chiang Ching.

Chiang's attitude toward culture was summarized in a 1966 speech:

"Imperialism is moribund capitalism, parasitic and rotten. Modern revisionism is a product of imperialist policies and a variety of capitalism. They cannot produce any works that are good. Capitalism has a history of several centuries; nevertheless, it has only a pitiful number of 'classics'. They have created some works modelled after the 'classics,' but these are stereotyped and no longer appeal to the people, and are therefore completely on the decline. On the other hand, there are some things that really flood the market, such as rock-and-roll, jazz, strip tease, impressionism, symbolism, abstractionism, fauvism, modernism... all of which are



Hsinhua Weekly



Renmin Hua Bao

**Maoist leaders come and go: Top picture published in *Hsinhua Weekly* (20 September 1976) and in *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*, shows Chiang on horseback behind Mao in 1947. After her removal from office she was removed from the picture, which was reprinted in *Renmin Hua Bao* (November 1976).**

intended to poison and paralyse the minds of the people. In a word, there is decadence and obscenity to poison and paralyse the minds of the people."

—Chung Hua-min and Arthur C. Miller, *op. cit.*

This kind of cultural nihilism is profoundly anti-Marxist. The Marxist attitude toward culture in a workers state was well expressed by Lenin in his famous attack on the Proletkult school, a forerunner of "socialist realism," in 1920:

"Marxism has won its historic significance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat because, far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois epoch, it has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two

thousand years of the development of human thought and culture. Only further work on this basis and in this direction, inspired by the practical experience of the proletarian dictatorship as the final stage in the struggle against every form of exploitation, can be recognised as the development of a genuine proletarian culture."

—V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.

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A socialist culture can arise only when the cultural heritage of mankind is accessible to *all members of society*. This requires that all members of society possess the available time and resources now enjoyed only by a thin stratum of intellectuals. Such a condition obviously entails a far higher material level than that of the most advanced capitalist society, not to mention the Chinese deformed workers state. The cultural creations of today's advanced bourgeois societies are comparatively richer than those of Maoist China (or Brezhnev's Russia) because they arise from a material base which provides at least some of its members with a greater degree of literacy, of education and of access to culture. It will require several generations for global socialist society to develop a new culture so rich and comprehensive that the art of the past class societies will seem impoverished and antique by comparison.

Official Stalinist art is so boring and sterile that it fails to satisfy the intellectual appetites of the bureaucrats themselves—whence Mao's recourse to classic-style poetry and Chiang Ching's infatuation with Greta Garbo films. But the Maoist bureaucracy insists that for the masses only art produced in China since 1949 is permitted, as expressing the veritable nature of reality.

Chiang Ching's vicious, paranoid subjectivity, hypocritical self-indulgence and utter philistinism reflect, in the last analysis, her role as representative of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. But this social role does not negate the impact of personality in political life. Che Guevara also was a leading figure in a bureaucratically governed workers state—Cuba. However, his moral and intellectual integrity,

however wrong and misguided his program, enabled him to partially transcend bureaucratic careerism, privilege and hypocrisy. Che Guevara was an admirable figure and his death a defeat for the communist cause.

We adamantly oppose the universal Stalinist practice of murdering political opponents, even when they, like Chiang Ching, have themselves committed heinous crimes (no more so, however, than her potential executioners). As for the purge of Chiang Ching: in the name of communist morality, in the name of intelligence and culture—good riddance! ■



The Sunday Press [Dublin]

Reading of the Peace Declaration of the Northern Ireland Women's Peace Movement in Dublin, August, 1976.

## "Peace Women" in Bloody Ulster

In the near-decade since the renewed upsurge of violence in Northern Ireland, several pacifist movements have emerged. The latest of these, calling itself the "Peace People," received the enthusiastic backing of Queen Elizabeth II, the bulk of the British bourgeois press and the British Communist Party, although recently its popularity has declined somewhat. This decline is undoubtedly due in part to the transparent disingenuousness of a call for "peace" within a nation in the throes of unremitting bloodshed. Even the conservative bourgeois *Economist* felt obliged to explain to the Peace People that peace and politics are "inextricably intertwined" and that "in Northern Ireland, peace means different things to different people." Indeed it does! In the context of communalist hatreds, "peace" awaits the victory of one side over the other!

Since October of last year, the Peace People have made crystal clear what was always implicit in their politics: their program is not a simple pacifist response to all violence perpetrated in the endless rounds of sectarian terror. Rather, they uphold the right of one particular form of violence—that perpetrated by the state. Peace People spokesmen and founders, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, stated at an October 14 press conference: "We fully support the rule of law and order in Northern Ireland... the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the other security forces are the

only legitimate upholders of law and order." This explicit support for the hated RUC, the Protestant police force and the British Army presence in Ulster increased their growing unpopularity.

A London rally on 27 November 1976 provided the most blatant expression of the movement's politics. The 10,000-15,000 marchers (the sponsors had predicted 30,000-40,000), including folk singer Joan Baez, the two "peace women," Williams and Corrigan, and a host of reactionaries, crowded into Trafalgar Square, which was opened to them despite the fact that for several years it has been closed to demonstrations on Northern Ireland. The respectable crowd watched approvingly as counter-demonstrators (organized by the Peace Through Freedom Committee and carrying signs saying "Peace with Justice," "Ireland Unfree will never be at Peace" and "Troops Out Now") were dragged off by police for threatening the "rule of law." The bourgeois *Irish Times* of Dublin described a typical incident:

"A lone demonstrator who waved a small tri-colour [the Irish flag] and shouted 'troops out' was asked by a policeman to move away. As he did so, a second policeman ran at him and knocked him down. Four policemen then carried him away struggling to shouts of 'scum' and 'give it to him' from people standing nearby."

### Origins of the Peace Movement

Without doing violent injustice to reality, it is possible to dismiss the notoriety of the Irish peace

movement as pre-eminently media inspired. But investigating the reasons for its appeal does help in pointing the way forward for the working class of Northern Ireland. It also demonstrates once more the irrelevance of feminist moralism in the face of real social antagonisms.

The present "peace movement" came together over an all-too-common event in Belfast, one in which four people were killed as a result of British Army action. Some British soldiers in the Catholic district of Andersonstown spotted a "wanted man," (Provisional) IRA member Danny Lennon. Lennon attempted to escape, and 50 shots were pumped into the car he was driving. As he slumped dead at the wheel, the car swerved out of control, killing three children of the Maguire family.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, Betty Williams, who lives on the outskirts of Andersonstown and is a member of the bourgeois Alliance Party, which unites both Catholic and Protestant middle-class voters in a pro-British organization similar to the British Liberal Party, went door to door with a "peace" petition. At the funeral of the Maguire children Williams met Mairead Corrigan, 32-year-old aunt of the slain children and an activist in the clerical-reactionary, anti-abortion Legion of Mary. The politics of Corrigan and Williams suggest the political direction of the organization they founded. As the liberal bourgeois *Guardian* of Britain put it (12 October 1976): "They are tough, shrewd, and not nearly as nice and ordinary as they claim."

From the beginning, the press deliberately overestimated the numbers involved in Williams' and Corrigan's peace marches, while giving scant coverage to quite large demonstrations of women in the Relatives Action Committee who were protesting the treatment of prisoners in the notorious Long Kesh internment camp. The "peace women," as they became known, were later joined by a young man, Ciaran McKeown, who serves as public relations director, and who has had quite a checkered career, including involvement in student politics and on the fringes of sundry political groups, as well as a stint as a bourgeois journalist. Thus, the movement was launched, tapping war weariness, conservative impulses and the interests of the British authorities.

### **Pacifism and the Oppression of Women**

Why did this movement, like the two which preceded it in 1971 and 1972, appeal primarily to women? Clearly because of its conscious appeal to pacifist, conservative sentiments—sentiments encouraged in women by bourgeois ideology. Betty Williams says often (as in the December issue of *Cosmopolitan's* British edition) that she wants peace so that she can get back to her kitchen. The first issue of the Peace People paper, *Peace by Peace*, included an article citing Mahatma Gandhi's praise of the "natural" qualities of women, such as chastity, sacrifice, humility and silent suffering. These are the qualities which the Peace People support, as well.

For a time, war weariness and the rapidly deteriorating economic conditions in Northern Ireland lent the Peace People a certain appeal, but this appeal

was short-lived. It was in Turf Lodge—an overwhelmingly Catholic section of Belfast, where local women have played a strong role in recent months in opposing the presence of British troops—that the Peace People met their decisive downfall as a popular force. In October, they were attacked by an angry group of Turf Lodge protesters, aroused by the British Army killing of a young local boy, Brian Stewart. Under pressure, Williams and Corrigan initially caved in and denounced the army presence, but they later repudiated this denunciation and put out their press release supporting the "rule of law." While they might continue to be feted abroad, the "honeymoon was over" (as the bourgeois media said) in Belfast.

Thus, despite its attempts to appeal to the most backward aspects of bourgeois-inspired "women's" consciousness, the peace movement has not recruited a mass following of women in Northern Ireland. This should not be surprising. Northern Ireland hardly provides the basis for enthusiastic support for the status quo (i.e., "peace"). The country is economically drained to the point of utter destitution. Housing, unemployment, wages and schools are among the worst in Europe for all workers, Catholic and Protestant alike. Women, of course, receive the lowest wages and suffer the highest unemployment. Not even tokenism has been achieved here: the British Sex Discrimination Act does not apply here, and the Equal Pay Act is so restricted as to be even more useless than it is in England. Westminster has not seen fit to extend either the "liberal" 1967 Abortion Act or the divorce reforms to Northern Ireland.

Though somewhat less hard-hit economically, the southern Republic of Ireland presents an equally depressing picture of social reaction based especially on its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church. A wide range of literature (including James Joyce) is banned. Divorce is disallowed in the constitution and a recent "reform" provides only for giving away—but not selling—contraceptives. Abortion is absolutely illegal. Religious bigotry is extreme.

While there are no magic solutions to the oppression of women in Ireland, it is only the class-struggle perspective which opens the possibility of women's liberation in both north and south, through destroying the power of the same reactionary agents of the bourgeoisie who have kept the working class and oppressed divided.

Only a genuinely revolutionary party could cut through the pervasive and poisonous sectarian terror, nationalist backwardness and fear. This will not be an easy or a linear task. It requires an organization which will win authority within the working class over time, demonstrating its commitment to opposing oppression and seizing every precious opportunity for non-sectarian class-wide struggle.

### **Irish Heritage of Catholic-Protestant Joint Struggle**

The last great united struggle of the Belfast working class occurred in 1932 and is an important episode for revolutionaries to study. Those who, in totally un-Marxist fashion, write off the potential of the Protestant

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## Bloody Ulster...

section of the working class, dismiss this as "only one incident." But it was, in fact, a great upheaval, precisely the sort of opportunity in which the intervention of a revolutionary leadership could make a critical difference.

Contrary to popular belief, also, the 1932 events were not simply spontaneous but were prepared carefully by the Revolutionary Workers Groups (RWG), forerunner of the Communist Party of Ireland. The focus of the struggle was the "outdoor relief"—the public works project available only to married men. The men received truly wretched wages, and the RWG called a strike for an approximate doubling of pay, for the extension of outdoor relief to single women and men and for trade-union rates for street improvement work.

A great deal of agitation was done in preparation for the strike, including, importantly, a special meeting for wives of the strikers at St. Mary's Hall, as well as for women from the textile mills. This certainly had its impact, as the *News Chronicle* recorded (in horror) that women fought alongside the men when it came to the barricades. This special effort to reach women who might otherwise be a brake on militant activity which threatened the breadbasket in an already economically strained period is particularly outstanding. As the Belfast events showed, once this militancy is tapped, a potential brake can turn into a terrific boost. But there is need for special effort in order to achieve this. While certainly the Stalinist RWG had much wrong with its program, its efforts on this score are nevertheless notable.

The well chronicled highlight of the 1932 events was the uprising of October 11. Strikers from both Catholic and Protestant areas were to march to a common rallying point. The government banned the marches and attacked the Falls Road contingent (Catholic), which defied the ban. A journalist who saw the events on the Protestant Shankill Road recorded them vividly:

"On the Shankill Road crowds of growling men lounged about waiting. Suddenly a big red-faced woman with a black shawl thrown over her shoulders, wisps of hair hanging over her eyes, appeared almost from nowhere... she ran to the crowds of men and in quick tense language told them that the unemployed and the police were in conflict. In the Falls Road—one man was killed and others were wounded—and the fighting was still going on. Are you're going to let them down, she almost shrieked... A cheer went up. 'No,' by heavens, we are not,' they roared back and in a twinkling a veritable orgy of destruction had begun."

—Kelly, *Capuchin Annual*

Nor were these victorious upheavals the last of united struggle. It took several years for the fierce agitation of the frightened ruling class to win out and recreate the sectarian divisions. In the following year, Protestant workers accepted help from the IRA in their railway strike. And in 1934, it is reported, a delegation from the Shankill made its way to the annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration March in Bodenstown, bearing signs saying "Break All Links With Capitalism." The IRA ordered them off the line with their signs, and the successor group to the Stalinist RWG stood by as they were excluded. The following year bitter sectarian fighting broke out again. Nine people were killed and hundreds of Catholic families were burned out.

### A Program for Ireland

How is a revolutionary program to be developed for Ireland after centuries of brutal domination by British imperialism? The demand for British troops out of Ulster must be a starting point for any serious attempt to programmatically address the Irish question, for the army has been the British rope around the necks of the Catholic minority. But this demand has been explicitly opposed by the peace movement. Withdrawal of the army will not bring immediate peace. Far from it. But revolutionists must demand the army's immediate, unconditional withdrawal in order to set the stage for a resolution of the sectarian conflict. The British imperialist presence is inherently oppressive of the Catholics, perpetuating the inequality which must be opposed if there is to be any real unity among the working people.

Revolutionists oppose mass-directed terror, such as pub bombings, carried out by either side. But the working-class answer to such indiscriminate terror is not empty pacifist moralizing but disciplined, anti-sectarian workers militias prepared for self-defense and united in action by a class-struggle program. Terror directed against agents of the British ruling class in Ireland, such as the assassination of Ambassador Biggs, is merely counterproductive outside a situation of full-scale civil war.

Certainly a British withdrawal would set off a new round of communal violence. In the framework of

### Stop the Persecution of Homosexuals!

JUNE 9—As we go to press, thousands of demonstrators around the country have taken to the streets to protest the disgusting and reactionary repeal on June 7 of a Dade County, Florida law which had made it illegal to discriminate against homosexuals in employment, housing and public accommodation. In New York City, several thousand demonstrators gathered in Greenwich Village on June 8 and marched through midtown Manhattan, proclaiming the need for a new campaign to end discrimination against homosexuals.

The outrageous repeal, initiated by right-wing bigots under the leadership of Bible-thumping singer and orange juice pitchman Anita Bryant, of an ordinance professing elementary democratic rights is likely to be only the first in a series of such struggles around the country. It represents a defeat not only for homosexuals but for everyone concerned with democratic rights and human dignity.

The Spartacist League, in the tradition of Leninism (and in opposition to the Stalinist regimes in the USSR, China and Cuba, which glorify the family and persecute homosexuals, perceived as a threat to the family), is irreconcilably opposed to every manifestation of racial or sexual discrimination. We stand for the absolute non-interference of the state into private sexual relations between consenting adults, and we demand the immediate abolition of all legislation which discriminates against homosexuals!



Gerard Harlay

### Northern Ireland: The fighting penetrates every aspect of daily life.

capitalism and the interpenetration of Protestants and Catholics, wholesale bloodletting in Ireland is virtually inevitable. In fact, a bourgeois unification of Ireland may very well simply reverse the terms of oppression, transforming the Protestants into the oppressed minority. Only in the context of a proletarian upsurge led by a revolutionary party could there be a resolution of the conflict through an Irish workers republic within a socialist federation of the British Isles. This leaves open the question, which cannot be determined in advance, of where the Protestants would fall in such a federation.

A revolutionary party in Ireland must speak to the pervasive economic exploitation, unemployment and unspeakable living conditions through a system of transitional demands including free health care for all, access to education with stipend, sliding scale of hours and wages for full employment and so on. Further, the democratic rights of the Catholic minority must be enforced and discrimination in housing and unemployment opposed. And the special oppression of women, so intense in all of Ireland, must be addressed.

### IRA on the Woman Question

Both the Provisional and the Official IRA—bourgeois-nationalist political agents of the regime in power in the south—are grossly capitulatory to the Catholic hierarchy and backward consciousness on the question of abortion, divorce and the woman question in general. But there is a distinct difference between them. The Officials are garden variety, cowardly opportunists, while the Provisionals take positions which can frankly be characterized as reactionary. "In fact," says Rona Fields in *A Society on the Run*, "the quickest way to spot the difference between an Official and Provisional funeral is to check the position of women in the procession. In the former, they are

interspersed, although the wreath-carrying is still allocated to the women."

The Provisionals' program—Eire Nua (New Ireland)—carefully limits its demands for women to equal pay for equal work and declares that "men and women have the equal right to marry and found a family" in the New Ireland. Of divorce, contraception and abortion there is not a word. The Provisional group in the Clonard area of Belfast issued a leaflet to the peace movement at a rally which cited as an example of "Brit oppression" the 70,000 "babies killed" in Britain as a result of the 1967 Abortion Act.

The Provisionals' *An Pho-blacht* also makes the point that men and women are "not

equal in all things.... In some spheres, women are superior just as, in others, men; generally speaking men and women are complementary to each other and success in the class war demands that they work together for the freedom of all." Like the "separate but equal" rhetoric of American segregationists, this rhetoric means the continued second-class status of women.

The Officials are a bit better and quite a bit more subtle. In contrast to Eire Nua, the Officials' program from 1972 on has contained a number of reformist demands for women, including "free family planning and advice for all women." No mention, however, of divorce or abortion—only that "a mother without the financial and emotional support of a husband be granted a living wage." Most Officials' demands, like those of the Provisionals, center on equal pay and equality before the law, although more sensitive language is used about the oppression of women in all spheres. In the first issue of *Teoric*, the theoretical journal begun in 1975, there is a discussion article by leading Official Mairin de Burca which is confused, reformist and qualitatively inadequate but goes slightly further than the official view: "Women must have control over their own bodies' has become slightly tarnished by association with extreme elements in the women's movement. That should not, however, blind us to its essential validity. No woman should be forced to bear a child when she doesn't want one."

This broadmindedness did not, however, extend to permitting a speaker on women's rights at the 1975 May Day rally in Dublin. A woman was hospitalized as a result of the melee which occurred when a group of women tried to obtain a single speaker.

### Enter the "Marxists"

The Movement for a Socialist Republic (MSR), Irish section of the United Secretariat (aligned with the

*continued on page 21*

# Crisis in the Australian Women's Movement



Australasian Spartacist

Special meeting of Sydney Women's Liberation Movement, May 1977. Motion to exclude SL lost: 100 to 88.

SYDNEY, MAY 19—"Women: back to the barricades!" blared the front-page headline of an article on the Australian women's movement by feminist author and journalist Anne Summers in the *National Times*, a major liberal weekly, earlier this year. The article focused on the increasingly desperate search for direction in the Australian women's movement. Plagued with a deep-going malaise and the inability to resolve its internal contradictions, the feminist-dominated radical women's movement here faces a prospect of disintegration similar to that which occurred in the U.S.

The Australian women's movement has remained active and intact longer than its American counterpart—despite similar origins in the New Leftism of the late 1960's—largely because of the optimism generated by gains which have (predictably) turned out to be more apparent than real. For three years, the Whitlam Labor Party (ALP) government fostered illusions in reformism by doling out sometimes substantial funding to women's refuges, health centers and commissions. This was accompanied by some legal tinkering and a great deal of phony rhetoric. Radical women staffed the centers and devoted much energy to servicing a few immediate needs of a small number of women without laying the basis for fundamental changes in the specially-oppressed status of women under capitalism.

The women came together through the general meetings of Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), an umbrella organization in which vague feminist notions of "sisterhood" and a membership open to all women (but no men) wishing to fight women's oppression substituted for a program. Along with feminist ideas went a New-Leftist conception of "autonomy," which was, to a certain extent, a reaction against the Stalinism (and male chauvinism) of the Communist Party of

Australia (CPA), a reformist organization which split from its pro-Moscow minority (now organized as the Socialist Party) over the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Despite the restrictions of male exclusion and the dominance of feminist ideas, the WLM provided an important forum for the discussion of radical ideas and programs for the liberation of women. The radicals of WLM also demonstrated a healthy disgust for the bourgeois-liberal women who formed Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), an organization similar to NOW which, as the name implies, was designed as a direct pressure group on parliament.

Gradual funding cutbacks initiated under Whitlam and increased by the Liberal-National Country Party coalition regime of the present prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, touched off the present malaise. With the money for the centers gone, the activists were left isolated and impotent. In Melbourne last July, they reached the point of voting to dissolve WLM entirely, although the vote was later reversed.

The current questioning of the most basic principles and direction of the movement is reflected in a brochure for an upcoming national "Marxist-Feminist Conference," which is centered on 71 questions—all unanswered—including: "What is the relation between the state and patriarchy?" "Should the WLM work for 'revolution'?" "What attitude should the WLM have to reforming governments?" "What is the autonomous women's movement? Autonomous from what?" "How do class differences between women affect our organization?" and "What is our ideology?"

The present crisis stems also from the failure of the "autonomous" women's movement to pose an independent perspective in the November 1975 political crisis, in which the reactionary governor-general, Sir John Kerr, combined with Fraser's coalition of

bourgeois parties to topple the Whitlam government. While most radical women correctly sided with the Labor Party against this anti-working-class assault, most did so on the basis of mourning bourgeois democracy and tailing the social-democratic Whitlam regime. WLM found its forces falling in behind one of the chief props of the supposed "male power structure" and was incapable of raising an independent, revolutionary program. As the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand (SLANZ) pointed out at the time, this was the reflection of the non-proletarian perspective of feminism and of a program which was necessarily "limited to reforms" (*Australasian Spartacist*, 20 December 1975).

The crisis was deepened still further by the failure of the much-vaunted "autonomous" movement to mobilize women in opposition to the funding cutbacks. "Sisterhood" was demonstrably not very powerful, and a process of political polarization began to be manifested. Feminists like Summers and long-time CPA-sympathiser Kathie Gleeson in Melbourne pushed for greater acceptance of reformist class collaborationism similar to WEL's brand of parliamentary lobbying; but such rightism was not immediately taken up by the mostly disillusioned radicals.

### Anti-Communist Purge Attempt

The polarization became more explicit when the Spartacist League proposed a clearly non-feminist, class-struggle, united-front basis for this year's International Women's Day (IWD) march in Sydney at an early planning meeting. The proposal—centered on such demands as "Jobs for all through shortening the workweek at no loss in pay"; "Free abortion on demand"; "Free 24-hour childcare"; "Free quality health care for all"; "Reverse the cutbacks"—was adopted overwhelmingly. It was then reversed at a subsequent meeting which was heavily packed for the purpose of restoring hackneyed "sisters unite" rhetoric. Leading the pack, despite their professed (but hard to find) differences with each other, were women from the CPA and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the latter an ally of the reformist, ex-Trotskyist SWP of the U.S.

Within weeks of the near-victory for a class-struggle IWD, a move was initiated in Sydney WLM to purge the Spartacist League. The motion came from one Margo Moore, a member of the collective around the journal *Scarlet Woman*, which considers itself "socialist-feminist" and is a by-product of the October 1975 "socialist-feminist" conference reported in *Women and Revolution*, Spring 1975. Not surprisingly, the exclusion move was strongly supported from the beginning by women of the CPA—a number of whom are also in the *Scarlet Woman* collective. Moore cited the IWD "coup" and other imagined incidents of "disruption" by the SL as support for her essentially bureaucratic, anti-communist argument. SL women "receive directives" from "their party organization," raged Moore.

The exclusion motion prompted one of the most intensive political discussions in the history of the radical women's movement. It ran for nearly two months in the

pages of the Sydney WLM Newsletter and in other left and feminist publications, was discussed in numerous meetings of groups and collectives and was the topic of a special debate on the nature of autonomy organized by the women's collective of the General Philosophy Department of Sydney University. It spread to Melbourne, as well, where many of the arguments were repeated in an effort to readmit the SL to the WLM there, after three years' exclusion.

Though excluded in Melbourne, the SLANZ has been active for years in the much larger Sydney WLM without ever facing a serious threat of exclusion. Throughout its history in the radical women's movement of Australia, the SL has struggled consistently for a revolutionary, working-class perspective to combat women's oppression, constantly putting forward the Leninist answers to the questions and contradictions plaguing the movement. Warning against the separate organization of women, which would cut women off from the social power of a united proletariat, the SL opposed male exclusionism and insisted that no movement could remain "autonomous" or "independent" from the two basic classes in society. Opposing feminism, which sees the sex division instead of the class division as fundamental, the SL argued against any attempt to "integrate" Marxism and feminism, denouncing this as providing a left cover for reformism and class collaboration.

### "Marxist" Feminists Show Their Colors

It took the present crisis of confidence in WLM to impel "Marxist" feminists such as Mooré, *Scarlet Woman* and the CPA to throw out Sydney WLM's policy of admitting women of all political tendencies in order to "get" the SL. Faced with the divergence in practice between feminists' assumptions such as "autonomy" and the realities of the class struggle as demonstrated in the political crisis, it was "Marxist" feminists who were most threatened by the SL's revolutionary critique and Leninist program for a communist women's movement linked to a revolutionary vanguard party.

The pernicious purpose of "Marxist" feminism is to mask the fundamental reformism of feminism in a barrage of class-analysis rhetoric, thereby keeping radical women tied to a movement which is potentially just as class collaborationist as the social-democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies against which many of them initially rebelled. An article by Margo Moore in *Scarlet Woman* of March of this year developed an argument to justify feminist class collaboration:

"...although the forms of women's oppression differ according to class...both forms ultimately stem from and service the needs of capital. This recognition forms the material basis for the unity of women and for alliances of women from different classes in a revolutionary struggle" [emphasis in original].

In the article, Moore expressed an explicitly sympathetic attitude to housewives who break their husbands' strikes. But Marxism leads to an exactly opposite conclusion. While all women in capitalist society are the victims of a special oppression, the real material gulf separating the working class from the

continued on next page

## Australian Women's Movement...

bourgeoisie determines that working-class women have much more in common with their husbands than with the privileged wives of the bosses. And it is only the working class, with its power to overthrow the bourgeoisie and ability to reorganize society on a new, socialist basis, which can lead a genuinely revolutionary struggle uniting all the oppressed. One of the purposes of a communist women's movement is to aid the victory of working-class struggles by mobilizing women and combatting the backwardness which often feeds into employer counter-mobilizations.

"Marxism-feminism" does not, as it claims to, reconcile the two counterposed ideologies. While dressing feminism up in "class" rhetoric, "Marxist"-feminists nevertheless resort to one or another variant of the New Left's "coalition of the oppressed" conception. Each sector of the oppressed, fighting its own specific oppression, is supposed to coalesce at some future time in an alliance to overturn capitalism. Behind this conception is a profound pessimism characteristic of revisionists of CPA and SWP ilk, anarchists and feminists alike, that the proletariat cannot be won to revolutionary consciousness—to a struggle in the interests of all the oppressed. Far from laying the basis for any future unity, this poly-vanguardist notion pits one section of the oppressed against another in reformist bickering over the limited and shrinking pool of concessions which the ruling

class is willing or able to grant under decaying capitalism.

The discussion around the proposed exclusion of the SL forced all tendencies in the women's movement to come forward with their political views, thereby laying the basis for the political clarity on the crisis in the women's movement which Moore & Co. said could only be achieved after the SL were gotten rid of. For its part, the *Scarlet Woman* collective realized that Moore's crude and false charges of "disruption" would not be enough to overcome Sydney WLM's traditions. The collective wrote a rationale for the exclusion which, dropping the "disruption" clap-trap altogether, argued that WLM was a "sufficiently defined political force" to exclude the SL. Although based on a systematic falsification of the SL's Leninism, equating opposition to feminism with opposition to the recognition that women suffer a special oppression, the *Scarlet Woman* collective's basic argument was that women's liberation necessarily means "autonomy" and the separate organization of women: "Often the needs of working women are separate and in conflict with those of men," argued *Scarlet Woman* in support of the separate organization of women on the shop floor.

While the CPA itself maintained a hypocritical official silence on the subject, most CPA women supported the exclusion, though preferring to stay in the background as much as possible. The SWP, however, jumped to the other side of the fence and opposed the exclusion. Afraid that it might be the next target of rampaging bureaucratism by feminists and the CPA, the SWP sagely advised that there were more "democratic" ways to "put an end to SL domination" of proceedings in WLM. The SWP's biggest concern was that the discussion on Moore's motion was diverting too much attention to the Spartacist League when WLM should instead be submerging itself in "broad," legalistic, reformist campaigns, such as pressuring the ALP government of New South Wales to abolish abortion laws.

The Communist League (CL), whose mentor is Ernest Mandel, although it blocked with the SL against the exclusion and for the need for political debate on key issues facing the women's movement, demonstrated the political unclarity which allows it to cohabit with the SWP in the "United" Secretariat. These centrists claimed that like the SL, they did not "call themselves feminists." But the CL's adaptation to feminism is manifestly sufficient to have prevented its being the first target of exclusionism (although it easily can be thrown out in a general bureaucratic sweep). It was these "non-feminists" who initiated the Australian version of the Working Women's Charter campaign, a reformist gimmick borrowed from their British co-thinkers in the International Marxist Group (IMG). (The campaign has since been taken over entirely by the CPA).

The CL justifies this organizing of working women apart from their class brothers with the argument that, "only the organization of women among themselves at all levels can challenge the sexism of the workers' movement." The CPA and *Scarlet Woman* justify their conclusions with the argument that the "class struggle"

*Revolutionary Communist Bulletin*

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Spartacist contingent in International Women's Day march in Sydney, March 1977.

is limited to economic demands (i.e., it is the struggle of the reformist trade-union bureaucracy—a bureaucracy which in fact includes many CPA members). In this view, an “autonomous” women's movement can only be intended to pressure this bureaucracy within a reformist framework. Though attempting to straddle the fence separating feminism from Marxism, the centrist CL is nevertheless forced to arrive at largely the same feminist conclusions.

### Purge Attempt Defeated

The discussion of the proposed exclusion of the SL culminated in a specially-called general meeting of Sydney WLM held on 17 April. Attended by 220 women, it was probably the largest—and certainly the most significant—meeting of Sydney WLM ever held. “I don't think we've had a meeting with such energy of discussion and thought put into it since November 1975,” said one anarcho-feminist noted for her anti-Spartacism.

The outcome was a defeat for *Scarlet Woman* and the CPA, as Moore's motion was voted down by a vote of 100 against 88. Supporters of the SL, CL, SWP, International Socialists (I.S.), and numerous independents combined in the voting to stop the exclusion. Even some of the more leftist CPA women voted against it.

One of the high points of the meeting came when a Spartacist speaker responded to feminist apologetics for strikebreaking:

“We have an answer to that question. We're revolutionaries. We're for the unity of the class around victory. We are for unity to organize women in support of the strike. . . . If that strike is broken, not only the men will lose their jobs but the women and children will starve. *Men and women workers do have common interests!*”

If any further proof of the rabidly bureaucratic and anti-communist nature of the purge attempt were

needed, it came a week later when a small clique of embittered losers, centered on the house collective of Sydney WLM's Women's House, attempted to bar the SL from the regular general meeting and then held their own “autonomous” meeting to rave against Spartacist and denigrate the 17 April outcome. After six weeks of one of the most intensive and broad-ranging discussions in the history of the women's movement, these women insisted the SL had only won the vote because it stacked the meeting!

In the smaller Melbourne WLM, feminists won the vote to keep the SL out by 37 to 19 at a meeting on 7 May. Despite diligent efforts by the victors to point out that only the handful of SL members present actually

had to leave, nearly twenty women walked out of the meeting. Some of these thought an “autonomous” movement was impossible, and others were simply protesting the extremely bureaucratic, cliquist domination of Melbourne WLM. But the vote against SLANZ' exclusion in Sydney, while a setback for anti-communist feminists, was in no way the vitally-needed repudiation of class collaborationism as the road to women's liberation.

In fact, the bureaucratic purge drive against the SLANZ in the Australian women's movement is symptomatic of the conservative period through which the movement is passing, and presages a clearly class-collaborationist, anti-class-struggle, anti-communist direction. But widespread questioning of the viability of “autonomy” gave the lie to *Scarlet Woman's* assertion that the WLM had a “sufficiently defined” political nature to warrant the exclusion.

The “movement” has never been a politically defined organization. In its umbrella role as a center for discussion and debate, however, it has served as an important open forum. To destroy that forum now, when the debate over the way forward for those fighting for women's liberation is the most pressing need facing movement activists, would severely hinder the struggle for political clarity and direction.

The current women's liberation movement must allow the debate over program and perspectives to continue. But it cannot be transformed organizationally into a force fighting successfully against women's oppression. Because of its programmatic heterogeneity and class composition it must inevitably polarize along class lines, i.e., counterposed class programs. Autonomy from the *proletarian* class struggle can only lead to increasing subordination to the bourgeoisie. The only movement for women's liberation which can succeed is one which is an integral part of the movement for the proletarian dictatorship. ■

## Alone of All Her Sex: A Review

# The Cult of the Virgin Mary

Warner, Marina.

*Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Marxists find contemporary religion—in which fear and degradation comprise the liturgy through which the believers are rendered stupid and impotent before the divinity of their oppressors—an odious thing. We understand, however, that what sustains religious affiliation in the scientific age is not so much intellectual conviction as social oppression. Thus, while the anti-clerical spirit which animates Voltaire's earnest

wish that "the last king... be strangled with the entrails of the last priest" may be sincere and even justified, such a "war against god" does not transcend petty-bourgeois idealism. Religion will disappear only when the society which creates the need for it is destroyed.

The bourgeois revolutions established the principle of separation of church and state, but, as Marx pointed out, this did not result in freedom from religion. Nor has the decline in the vitality of organized religion eliminated religious sentiment.

While there has never been a state religion in the United States, the coupling of religious bigotry with nativist right-wing movements is well known, and patriotism, piety and prosperity have been the time-tested trinity of American imperial politics. Thirty to forty million Americans currently consider themselves "born-again" Christians, not to mention the more traditional sects, much less the wretched mysticism which serves as a junkyard for New Left derelicts still searching for personal liberation on the cheap.

The sanctimonious tone of the last presidential campaign and the fact that victory went to holier-than-anybody Jimmy Carter, who claims to consult his "faith-healing" sister in important decisions, suggest not so much a serious religious revival as a despairing passivity which hangs over the American working class. An indication of the relationship between political defeat and religious conversion is the growth of the Black Muslim sect, which gained from the despair and cynicism among black people following the political failures and physical destruction of the black movement in the sixties.

Not surprisingly it is women who are often the most fervent devotees of religion. Isolated from social production and social struggle within the suffocating confines of the family, women have generally been the

most susceptible to and the most reliable instruments of the "gendarmes in cassocks."

### Myth of the Virgin Mother of God

Marina Warner's book, *Alone of All Her Sex*, attempts to explore the religious myth which has been most explicitly directed toward molding and deforming women's consciousness—the myth of the virgin mother of god. The rituals and intricacies of Catholic theology are more prevalent and familiar in Europe and Latin countries than in the U.S., but this particular image is not at all unrelated to more general stereotypes or models of the "ideal woman."

And what a powerful myth it has been! Dante and Botticelli were inspired by it; the spires and towers of Notre Dame and Chartres were ostensibly raised to celebrate it; even Elizabeth I—never one to let religious scruples interfere with the affairs of state—allowed herself to be draped in the imagery of the "Virgin Queen."

The myth of the virgin birth of the god/redeemer is, of course, not unique to Christianity, but has its roots in ancient lore. William Butler Yeats's poem, "Leda and the Swan" (1923), revives the mythical encounter between the god Zeus and the mortal Leda:

"A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.  
How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?"

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead.  
Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?"

In describing the growth of the cult of the virgin mother in Western Europe, Warner attempts to explore what she poses as a paradox: "that in the very celebration of the perfect human woman, both humanity and women were subtly denigrated." Some 300 pages later she asserts her concluding hypothesis:

"The Virgin Mary is not the innate archetype of female nature, the dream incarnate; she is the instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic Church about the structure of society, presented as a God-given code. The argument changes, according to contingencies....

"The Catholic Church might succeed, with its natural resilience and craft, in accommodating her to the new circumstances of sexual equality, but it is more likely that the Virgin will recede into legend... the Virgin's legend will endure in its splendour and lyricism, but it will be

emptied of moral significance, and thus lose its present real powers to heal and to harm."

However, it is not the myth which harms but the reality that it mystifies, and it is not the refurbishing of the myth which will "heal" women's oppression. Marx and Engels quoted approvingly the motto on the journal of the French republican Loustalot:

"The great appear great in our eyes  
Only because we are kneeling.  
Let us rise!"

However, they added: "But to rise it is not enough to do so in *thought* and to leave hanging over one's *real sensuously perceptible* head the *real sensuously perceptible* yoke that cannot be subtilised away with ideas."

### Foundations of Christianity

Christianity began as the ideology of the poor Jewish masses under the Roman Empire. As economic relations did not provide opportunities for the multiplication of wealth through the development of the productive forces, the possessing classes of Rome could sustain their wealth only by the continual and ever-expanding plundering of conquered areas. The extreme cheapness of slave labor procured in such a fashion was the only thing that made large-scale enterprises (mainly agriculture and some mining) reasonably profitable relative to those of the small peasants. The wealth accumulated through plunder was devoted almost exclusively to consumption, to the pursuit of enjoyment.

The fundamental cause for the decline of the Roman Empire was the contradiction inherent in the growing luxuriousness of the possessing classes, the incessant growth of surplus value on the one hand and the static character of the mode of production on the other; and it is in this contradiction that one must also seek the roots of primitive Christianity. Abram Leon writes:

"... while it is obvious that the majority of Jews played a commercial role in the Roman Empire, we must not think that all the Jews were rich traders or entrepreneurs. On the contrary, the majority was certainly made up of small people, some of them making their living directly or indirectly from trade: peddlers, stevedores, petty artisans, etc. It is this mass of small people which was first hit by the decline of the Roman Empire and suffered most from Roman extortion. Concentrated in great masses in the cities, they were capable of greater resistance than peasant people dispersed in the country. They were also more conscious of their interests.... It was among the poor layers of the great cities of the Diaspora that Christianity spread.... Just as the Jewish insurrections were followed by insurrections of the non-Jewish popular masses, so did the Jewish communist religion rapidly find its extension among these pagan masses."

—A. Leon, *The Jewish Question*

As an ideology of protest on the part of the dispossessed and powerless, Christianity embodied a trenchant anti-plutocratic spirit. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, one finds:

"Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled.... But woe unto you that are rich! Woe unto you, ye that are full now! for ye shall hunger."



Alfred A. Knopf

**The barefoot "Madonna of Humility" (c. 1425) epitomizes the Christian view of woman's role.**

The Epistle of James is similarly explicit:

"Come now, ye rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.... Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire...."

The "communism" of primitive Christianity was not based—could not have been based—on communalizing the productive capacities of society but on communalizing consumption; "communism by plundering the rich," in the words of Karl Kautsky. But as Christianity spread, its leaders took pains to blunt its anti-plutocratic thrust.

The process which the church was undergoing was not primarily one resulting from the greed and individual ambition of its officials; it was not simply a tool for deceiving and fleecing the masses. Christianity

*continued on next page*

## Virgin Mary...

became the state religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine at the same time that the empire's decadence, based on parasitism and brigandage, led to reforms by Diocletian and Constantine which attempted to set it on the foundations of a natural economy. As the religion of the class of great landed proprietors at the inception of feudal economy in



Alfred A. Knopf.

"St. Theresa in Ecstasy" by Bernini exemplifies the "sublimation" of female sensuality encouraged by the church.

Europe, Christianity's original anti-plutocratic fire was now reserved for merchants and usurers.

### Secularization and Celibacy

Warner cites an interesting link between the growing wealth of the Church and its sanctification of celibacy. (The scriptures themselves fail to even mention the "immaculate conception" and raise a number of doubts concerning Mary's virginity.) Under Roman law a woman was allowed to inherit and dispose of her own wealth independently after a certain age. It was common among Roman families to raise the sons in the old religion and the daughters in the new; moreover, it often happened in the period of Roman decadence that families had died out in the male line. Thus, a vocation of celibacy (i.e., no heirs) for Christian virgins and childless widows was remarkably profitable for the church. It was thus as a part of the growing secular power

of the church, according to Warner, that the cult of the virgin first achieved prominence.

Augustine, who lived in the 5th century, drew an explicit and literal connection between sexual intercourse and original sin, Christ was born of a virgin because that was the *only* way he could avoid the contamination of original sin. The perception of virginity as an inherently holy state and the identification of spiritual purity with sexual abstinence continue to dominate church doctrine to this day.

The image of the mother of god—all but ignored for the first four centuries of Christianity—was not the humble, submissive girl of the annunciation but the triumphant queen of heaven, an image which also served to symbolize the church's competitive edge over other temporal rulers throughout Europe and the Byzantine Empire. This image of Mary as the queen of heaven remained essentially unaltered, except perhaps for the increasing opulence of her raiment, for many centuries, lending the authority of divine sanction to the concept of monarchy.

Some of the economic tribute deemed fitting for a queen—and the separation between the temporal and the divine was conveniently blurred—can be seen in the extraordinary wave of adulation which was the ostensible motivation for the raising of 80 cathedrals in France within one century alone.

French feudal law in the 12th and 13th centuries permitted a woman to hold rank and property in her

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own right; and in a society where acquisition of land was a constant and pressing necessity, heiresses sometimes wielded enormous power—Eleanor of Aquitaine (c. 1122-1204) is the most celebrated. But the consolidation of France and other territories as nation-states conflicted with the centrifugal tendencies of feudal inheritance patterns. Eventually women lost many of their former economic rights.

Part of the battle for the national consolidation of France was fought as a holy war by the Pope and the northern French lords to subjugate southern France, the breeding ground of the popular Cathar heresy. This heresy, an ascetic form of Manichaeism, allowed women to enter the clergy and held that casual sex and sodomy were less reprehensible than marriage, which populated the foul universe. Southern France was also the terrain of the Provençal poetry of the troubadours, which exalted adulterous love. From different vantage points, therefore, both heretics and troubadours were anathema to the church and the northern Capetian dynasty. The battles waged against the south at the beginning of the 13th century destroyed half a million people.

It was the generation of Eleanor of Aquitaine's granddaughter Blanche of Castille, which, encouraged by both church and state, began to focus its ardor on Mary as virgin. This "new" Mary assumed much of the character and function of the original figure in Provençal poetry but without celebrating hedonism and permissiveness. She was still acknowledged a powerful queen but only, it was emphasized, by grace of her son, not in her own right. She was portrayed as the incarnation of loveliness and divine ardor, but above all as the incarnation of chastity.

As Warner points out, the special status accorded the virgin mother of god has as its reverse side an equally special loathing for ordinary, non-virginal women, who are viewed, like Eve, as "occasions of sin," temptresses who distract men from god and lead them into everlasting perdition.

**To Pluck the Living Flower**

Warner's book is an often unfocused welter of historical and sociological research, nostalgia and self-analysis. She is frank in her ambivalence:

"I could not enter a church without pain at all the safety and beauty of the salvation I had forsaken. I remember visiting Notre Dame in Paris and standing in the nave, tears starting in my eyes, furious at that old love's enduring power to move me."

Not having satisfactorily settled even her own personal accounts with religious obscurantism, Warner explains the church's hold over believers entirely in psychological/ideological terms.

One must indeed acknowledge the church's "genius... for getting a grip on its followers' psyches," in the words of a *Village Voice* review. In fact, in countries where the Catholic Church has been a dominant cultural and political influence, it has so maimed and distorted the psyches of masses of people that even politically motivated demonstrators have been driven to orgies of twisted anti-clericalism. For instance, when in

1909, the Spanish government attempted to call up military reservists for defense of its Moroccan colonies, the population responded with a general strike and a five-day frenzied protest which included dancing in the streets with the corpses of nuns dug up from their graves.

At the same time, the church has historically enforced psychological manipulation with highly effective coercion—physical and social. When Spanish workers and peasants in the first six months of the Spanish Civil War burned 160 churches to the ground, they were not rebelling merely against psychological oppression but against a powerful state institution, fanatically devoted to the preservation of the monarchy and to reaction.

In the end, Warner rejects the female eunuch of the Catholic Church, albeit with a bizarre, feminist ambivalence:

"Although Mary cannot be a model for the New Woman, a goddess is better than no goddess at all, for the sombre-suited masculine world of the Protestant religion is altogether much like a gentlemen's club to which the ladies are only admitted on special days."

And so the question of religious mythology remains in the end a dismal choice between pernicious fantasy and a bleak and sterile reality.

Marxists insist that these are not the only alternatives. Marxist criticism of religion demystifies religious fantasy and demonstrates that man has created his gods and goddesses and not the other way around—not in order that the toiling masses be deprived of whatever small comfort these fantasies may provide in a harsh world but in order that these poor illusions may be replaced by a far richer and more rewarding reality. Marx put it most eloquently:

"Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.... The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore, in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears.

"Criticism has torn up the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man shall wear the unadorned, bleak chain but so that he will shake off the chain and pluck the living flower."

—K. Marx, *Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* ■

**Women and Revolution**

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# Seattle Radical Women Fronts for Cops

Radical Women, a small, Seattle-based organization of "socialist-feminists" which claims to be building a Trotskyist vanguard party (see "Seattle Radical Women: 'Socialist-Feminism' Equals Reformism," W&R No. 13, Winter 1976-77) recently reconfirmed the bankruptcy of its politics by voting to exclude Spartacist League supporters and a militant phone worker from a study group it had organized in San Francisco. Furthermore, in opposition to the most elementary tenets of class-struggle politics, the study group agreed that a female security guard was more welcome in the group than the so-called "elite" phone worker. The SL denounces this violation of workers democracy, which is a measure of these reformists' inability to withstand Marxist criticism.

Radical Women has consistently suffered from a grossly legalistic, sub-reformist political program. Consciously rejecting the Marxist insistence on the need for a united, class-conscious proletariat, Radical Women has substituted the polyvanguardist conception that the most oppressed are necessarily the most revolutionary and has embraced women as capitalism's "most oppressed group of human beings" ("Radical Women Manifesto"). Far from offering a strategy of revolutionary struggle, Radical Women's political program is one of shameless reliance on the capitalist state, e.g., calling on female bourgeois politicians to "act responsibly" and on the bourgeois police to "protect" prostitutes. In fact, its maximal programmatic demand for ending women's oppression is "affirmative action" programs.

Radical Women's impotent politics were clearly reflected in the San Francisco study group organized by Radical Women supporter Suki Durham. The group was so politically diverse that it could not even agree on why Spartacist League supporters should be excluded, although all of the reasons given betrayed anti-communist sentiments. In fact, the attacks on the SL were so unscrupulous that even "socialist-feminist" Durham was obviously ill at ease. Pointing out that exclusion on grounds such as "dogmatism" was extremely shaky, she expressed concern that such a charge could become a precedent for the exclusion of anyone with a political viewpoint (i.e., herself), and at least one-feminist agreed that Radical Women supporters could indeed be excluded for the same reason at the next meeting. Nevertheless, Durham did not even denounce the group's anti-communism, but in classic opportunist fashion simply tried to persuade it to define itself as feminist so that it could then exclude the SL supporters on the "justifiable" grounds of anti-feminism.

The most appalling incident in the meeting took place when a militant phone worker mentioned that it had recently come to her attention that one of the

women in the group was a security guard, i.e., an armed agent of the bourgeoisie. At this, the entire group, with Durham in the lead, jumped to the cop's defense, protesting that this enemy of the working class was simply a poor, oppressed Chicana. In fact, Durham insisted that cops are workers; that she supported the "progressive" 1975 San Francisco police strike and that she advocates unionization of Attica prison guards. Some of the other women asserted that phone workers were no different from cops, since both work for the capitalist system. Durham agreed.

The excluded phone worker is a supporter of the Militant Action Caucus (MAC), a class-struggle caucus in the Communication Workers of America. MAC has a long-standing policy of insisting that security guards do not belong in the union and in 1975 fought the downgrading of installers who were offered jobs as security guards, calling on these workers to refuse the jobs and insisting that those who accepted such jobs did not belong in the union.

Although the class betrayal and bureaucratic anti-communist exclusion perpetrated by the tiny Radical Women-supported study group are of small practical significance in themselves, they serve to strip away volumes of "socialist-feminist" rhetoric and reveal in crystalline clarity how the wretched politics of Radical Women intersect the logic of feminism to form an alliance with female cops against working-class militants. ■



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# Letter --- On Proletarian Culture

To the editor:

The Marxist camp has been historically divided into two camps on the question of proletarian art. The Stalinists, their fellow-travelers and camp followers have reverently and mechanically defended proletarian art and equated it with the "socialist realism" of the Soviet Union (and the other workers states). The majority of the old Bolsheviks, and later the Trotskyists, attacked the theoretical possibility of proletarian art.

I believe that both sides are demonstrably wrong on this question, and that proletarian art is not only possible from a theoretical viewpoint but quite likely.

Trotsky was perhaps the most vehement and most talented opponent of the concept of proletarian art, although he and the Bolshevik Party did not repress it, penalize its supporters or discriminate against them in any way.

Trotsky's arguments against proletarian art were basically:

1. that in the process of the creation of the working class there will not be enough time for it to develop an art of its own, unlike the bourgeoisie, which had centuries to do this even before it conquered state power;

2. since the working class is by historical definition property-less, it does not have the material resources needed for establishing its own art; and

3. that when the working class finally does take power in the advanced capitalist countries, the character of the resulting dictatorships of the proletariat will be so transitory and temporary before the withering away of the state and consequently of all classes, that there will not be enough time or stability to establish a uniquely proletarian art.

This argument is overly optimistic in that it is predicated on the proletariat holding power for merely decades before the state withers away. Here is what Trotsky wrote:

"Will the proletariat have enough time to create a 'proletarian' culture? In contrast to the regime of the slave owners and of the feudal lords and of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat regards its dictatorship as a brief period of transition. When we wish to denounce the all-too-optimistic views about the transition to socialism, we point out that the period of the social revolution, on a world scale, will last not months and not years, but decades—decades, but not centuries and certainly not thousands of years. Can the proletariat in this time create a new culture? It is legitimate to doubt this, because the years of social revolution will be years of fierce class struggles in which destruction will occupy more room than new construction...."

—L. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*

As to how long the proletariat will hold power before disappearing as a class, we have neither knowledge nor timetable. If we assume the most favorable hypothesis for our prognostication, i.e., a relatively short and undestructive civil war in the advanced capitalist countries, that would still not preclude the development of proletarian art.

We can lay it down as a tenet of Marxism that the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries will not disappear, and with it its state, as long as the "Third World" remains underdeveloped and backward. The first duty of a successful revolution in the advanced capitalist world will be to pull the more backward sections into the age of technology. This process, which will begin with the shipment of machines and experts to the backward countries, will take a very long time. Even assuming the best, it might take a century or more. During this period, there will be more than enough time to develop a new proletarian art.

Furthermore, just as we will accomplish in, say, Afghanistan in decades what it took centuries to accomplish in Britain, so, too, will the process of cultural development occur at a dizzying speed. What it had previously taken artists centuries to accomplish and develop will not take decades, perhaps years. Art will stride forward in seven-league boots. This process will be greatly facilitated by the revolution in communications. No longer will it take competing artists and their various schools years and years to influence each other, but rather a much shorter span of time.

All of this is predicated on the assumption that the capitalist class will not wage a global war and destroy in hours the accomplishments of the millennia. Should that be the case, then the transition to socialism will take that much longer.

But while Trotsky was overly optimistic about how little time the transition to a stateless, classless society would require, he was overly pessimistic on just how much art could accomplish in this "short" period of time.

As for his *obiter dicta* about the proletariat being engaged more in destruction than construction, we can merely look at the early development of proletarian art or proto-proletarian art in the Soviet Union. When did it begin and flourish? During the Civil War! If proletarian art could flourish in backward, semi-feudal Russia during a four-year civil war coming on the heels of four years of imperialist war, must we worry that in the advanced capitalist countries after the seizure of power that proletarian art will be unable to flourish? Nor is the fact that art in the Soviet Union degenerated into "socialist realism" an argument against the emergence of proletarian art. Arguing against the possibility of proletarian art on this basis would be tantamount to arguing against the possibility of a healthy workers state simply on the basis of the degeneration of the Soviet state.

Trotsky's second argument, perhaps, is the strongest. How, one may ask, can a class with no property produce an art? If we did not believe that the international working class will take state power, proletarian art would be just a dream. The whole premise of proletarian art is based on the existence of a healthy workers state in the advanced countries.

Proletarian art will begin before workers take state  
*continued on next page*

## Letter...

power, much in the same way that working class politics begin before the taking of state power. And proletarian art, like working-class politics, will only come to fruition after the seizure of power.

The rise of a mass militant working-class movement in one or more of the advanced capitalist countries will pull in its wake scores of artists (as well as other sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie) who will be inspired politically as well as artistically by this phenomenon and who will actively and energetically seek to express their loyalty and enthusiasm toward revolutionary politics through the medium of art. The revolutionary movement should make every attempt to encourage this without favoring any particular artist or school.

Trotsky viewed proletarian art with suspicion for some very good reasons. He saw it as the glorification of backward Russia's "uniqueness" dressed in "socialist" garb. And indeed that and much worse is what it became under Stalin. Socialist art was debased and caricatured. It attempted to hide the nauseating realities of Stalin's Russia and pretend that Stalinism was the best of all possible worlds.

Trotsky, like the vast majority of Russian Marxists, was a Europophile (a "rootless cosmopolitan" in Stalin's anti-Semitic view), and his suspicions of a proletarian art based on the poverty of Russia were justified to an extent, but to generalize that suspicion into a categorical rejection of proletarian art is unwarranted.

In conclusion, there is every chance that a mass working-class upsurge in the West will attract to itself artistic support which will be the basis of proletarian art. Should this upsurge be prolonged and successful, then the advanced socialist societies will see a blossoming of proletarian art which will spread to the more backward workers states. Should socialism fail or degenerate, then, too, will proletarian art degenerate and abort. The time elapsing between the taking of power in the West and the global transformation to a classless society will give ample time for the establishment of proletarian art. What will further facilitate this process will be the super-accelerated speed of historical and, concomitantly, artistic development. This is not a development to be feared or repulsed, but one to be welcomed.

A. Greengold

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*W & R replies:* *Women and Revolution* has published several articles dealing with the arts, partly in order to refute both the vulgar Stalinist idealization of "socialist realism" and the vulgar feminist idealization of "women's culture." At the same time, we have sought to raise some of the implications of proletarian revolution for all aspects of human culture.

Cde. Greengold's letter is a response to "Art and Revolution: Before 'Socialist Realism' in the Soviet Union" (*W & R* No. 13, Winter 1976-77), an examination of artistic innovation in the young Soviet Republic, which included a polemic against the theory of "proletarian culture" developed by Aleksandr Malinovsky, better known as Bogdanov.

Bogdanov's theory, which found expression in the organization "Proletkult" during its brief existence during the early years of Soviet rule, was that all culture of the past was bourgeois and that, except perhaps for technology and natural science, it contained "nothing worthy of life." The proletarian artists of the new state were to destroy the old culture entirely and build a new one on the foundations of materialism, atheism, internationalism and Marxism.

Certainly there was a great deal of ferment among artists in the revolutionary period. Debate raged among the various artistic tendencies (Cosmists, Futurists, the "Left Front to Art" group, the "October" group, etc.) over whether the class origins of the artist were decisive in the creation of proletarian art, over which artistic school best reflected the proletariat and over whether artists ought to be organized along "proletarian" (i.e., factory) lines. In the main, this ferment represented the surfacing of a host of petty-bourgeois tendencies liberated by the Revolution from the restrictions of Tsarist censorship. But to posit, as Cde. Greengold does, that all Soviet art was "proletarian art" because it followed a proletarian revolution is to reduce reality to a meaningless tautology:

1. There was a proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union.
2. There was an artistic upsurge in the Soviet Union.
3. Therefore, there was proletarian art in the Soviet Union.

Presumably, there were also "proletarian science," "proletarian sports" and "proletarian borsch"!

And this is not all. According to Greengold, every petty-bourgeois intellectual won to a class-struggle political program is automatically transformed into a "proletarian artist" even before a proletarian revolution!

Trotsky's refutation of Bogdanov, which was cited in our article and with which we solidarize, is summarized in the following passage from the preface to *Literature and Revolution*:

"It is fundamentally wrong to oppose proletarian to bourgeois culture and art. Proletarian culture and art will never exist. The proletarian regime is temporary and transitory. Our revolution derives its historic significance and moral greatness from the fact that it lays the foundations for a classless society and for the first truly universal culture."

Greengold's difference with Trotsky seems to derive from pessimism about the possibilities of international proletarian revolution in the foreseeable future. This leads him to the conviction that there must be centuries of proletarian dictatorship before the advent of socialism—by no means an innovative argument. This is, in fact, the argument of Nikolai Bukharin during the period of his shift to the right, reflecting a demoralized, impressionistic and capitulatory response to the isolation of the Soviet state after the failure of the working-class movement to extend the revolution internationally.

It was Bukharin who argued that proletarian culture could be created within the Soviet Union prior to the victory of the international proletarian revolution—a victory which he viewed as increasingly distant. Bukharin argued, too, that the uneven economic

development of nations as a result of imperialism necessitated a prolonged period of proletarian dictatorship before the bourgeoisie could be defeated internationally. During this period, he said, the proletariat would develop its own culture to counter the "infection" of bourgeois culture.

Bukharin's (and Greengold's) difference with Trotsky is not essentially an argument over the amount of time required by the proletarian dictatorship to accomplish its tasks but over the nature of the tasks themselves. Trotsky argued that the theory of proletarian culture implied a repudiation of the Marxist view of the state and the tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat institutes its dictatorship not to entrench its class rule but to eliminate classes. This dictatorship is the last vestige of past oppression and not a model for the future culture. Any prolongation of the proletarian dictatorship represents a defeat for the working class. Isaac Deutscher points out:

"Trotsky's mistake, Bukharin maintained, was that he imagined that the proletarian dictatorship and the transition to socialism would be of so short a duration as not to allow any distinctive proletarian class-culture to arise....

"There was some truth in Bukharin's argument (which formed part of his and Stalin's case for socialism in a single country).... Trotsky undoubtedly underrated the duration of the proletarian dictatorship and, what goes with it, the extent to which that dictatorship was to acquire a bureaucratic character....

"However, his all too evident mistake about this does not

invalidate his argument against 'proletarian culture.' On the contrary, it gives to it even greater strength. The fact that the dictatorship and the transition to socialism was to last far longer than he anticipated did not make the era of transition more fruitful culturally and more creative. It made it less so. Stalinism did not beget any proletarian culture. It was instead engaged in 'primitive cultural accumulation'...."

—I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*

Greengold resigns himself to such a defeat and welcomes it as an opportunity for cultural development. His incredible statement that should the bourgeoisie initiate a global class war, then "the transition to socialism will take that much longer," reveals an inability to understand what such a defeat would mean—to grasp the idea that global class war would destroy human culture entirely for the foreseeable future.

Only socialist culture—that is, human culture, the culture of non-alienated mankind—will replace bourgeois culture. To the extent that it is victorious, the proletariat begins to lay the groundwork not for its greater development but for its disappearance as a class, along with the bourgeoisie which it has defeated. As for Greengold's assertion that proletarian art flourished "in backward, semi-feudal Russia during a four-year civil war coming on the heels of four years of imperialist war," Lenin had this to say:

"To the extent that it is proletarian it is not yet a culture; to the extent that it is a culture it is not proletarian."

## Bloody Ulster...

(continued from page 9)

majority faction led by Ernest Mandel) is quite active on the woman question. Its approach, however, is typically opportunist. It puts forward the Southern group, Irishwomen United, with its tedious and unpolitical paper, *Banshee*, and its gimmicky campaigns against the exclusion of women from pubs as "an excellent example of what a section of the political vanguard can do if it is organized properly around the correct demands." The "correct demands" are, as it turns out, entirely democratic, generally supportable and thoroughly reformist. It can confidently be predicted that Irishwomen United will flounder, despite the obvious impetus that the sharp oppression of women in Ireland provides. This is just one more rather typical example of the United Secretariat's search for the "broad vanguard" in lieu of providing political leadership. The MSR went so far as to criticize the Socialist Women's Group (SWG) of Belfast for using the term "socialist" in defining itself.

The SWG of Belfast, although limited both by "socialist feminism" and nationalism, would seem to stand somewhat to the left of the MSR "Trotskyists," and recognizes that "Marxism...has provided the method whereby revolutionaries may consciously undertake the overthrow of the class system upon

which sexual antagonism is based." But the SWG simply has no program to deal with the divisions in the Belfast working class and therefore has a difficult time seeing beyond the call for the British troops to get out. This can all too easily lead to the perspective that the immediate goal is the unification of Ireland—*bourgeois or not*.

"Peace," feminism and nationalism have proved to be dead ends and cover-ups for reactionary policies in Ireland, as elsewhere. Workers continue to be exploited, women continue to be oppressed and superexploited, and the sectarian bloodshed goes on. Liberty, social justice and an end to violence will never be gained by petitioning the authorities and smugly calling for "peace" while approving the imperialist occupation which guarantees the continued oppression of the Catholics, but only by struggle against the source of oppression and violence—class society itself. Not women against men, not Catholic against Protestant, not Orange against Green—but *class against class!*

An Irish Trotskyist vanguard party, section of a reborn Fourth International, must be built which can seize the opportunity to turn the cycle of unending sectarian war into class war again. October 1932 in Belfast was an example of the episodic moments when united class struggle becomes possible and its necessity palpable. When such moments intersect a principled proletarian leadership capable of posing social revolution as the alternative to the genocidal nationalist deadlock of interpenetrated peoples, Belfast will have a second October, and this time we will win. ■

## SWP at NOW Conference...

(continued from page 24)

its focus on reforming the bourgeois state has never wavered.

The Detroit convention, entitled "On to the Second Decade," was tightly controlled. The last point on the agenda—voting on resolutions—was stampeded through with no discussion, while many resolutions were simply dropped for "lack of time," including the SWP's main resolution, "Defending Women's Rights in the Second Decade."

Adapting to the increasingly conservative political climate in the U.S., the convention emphasized the "homemaker," which is new President Ellie Smeal's proud self-description. A resolution on "displaced homemakers," calling for state aid, legislation and jobs to ameliorate the plight of housewives without husbands, was vaulted to first place in the list of resolutions to be voted. "NOW is not committed to the destruction of the family," but to making "alterations" in it; a *NOW Times* article asserted.

Also passed, although with a small majority, was a formal statement of what has always been NOW's real strategy—orientation toward support of bourgeois politicians, through the establishment of a Political Action Committee to raise money for electoral campaigns.

The SWP makes much of the fact that NOW is the largest feminist organization in the country, but the SWP's criminal blindness in claiming that NOW's growth is an expression of radicalization indicates a tenuous hold on reality. In fact, NOW's current size and influence are a direct result of the *failure* of the women's movement of the late 1960's to develop a revolutionary strategy to overcome the oppression of women. As disillusioned feminists abandoned politics for various escapist life styles, fantasies of creating a self-contained "women's culture" and historical research into "forgotten women," they left a vacuum which was filled by the bourgeois feminist NOW, an organization which has become even *more* conservative over the past several years, as attacks on women's rights have increased.

### SWP Pledges Allegiance

The two major resolutions supported by the SWP (which even the *NOW Times* anti-SWP polemic conceded were "ostensibly harmless"), were essentially calls to bring women "into the streets" in "mass actions" around the ERA and other democratic demands and to bring more minority and working-class women into NOW. The SWP wants to build a better, more visible and more "activist" reformist organization. This is, indeed, a harmless approach, in no way threatening the liberal, Democratic Party political basis of NOW. The witchhunt is an attempt to dissociate NOW officially from an ostensibly communist organization. But the actual political program which the SWP puts forward within NOW is well within the framework of NOW's bourgeois reformism. It is only the SWP's communist past, its name and the writings by Trotsky that are still for sale on SWP literature tables which pose a problem.

The SWP's response to the redbaiting was revealing. Mary-Alice Waters was incredulous. It is not, she said, "as if we had ideas that were in contradiction to NOW." She couldn't understand why party affiliation should be an issue; she didn't care if a woman was a member of the Democratic Party. "It is irrelevant," she said. "What counts is what her ideas are and if they can move the struggle forward."

Cindy Jacquith agreed. NOW and the SWP have the same program for women's liberation, she said. Both are for the Equal Rights Amendment and legal abortion. Willie Mae Reid was "outraged that we were used to destroy one of the best conferences NOW has ever had."

Contrary to NOW's slanderous accusations that the SWP was seeking to disrupt the conference, the SWP's protestations of loyalty to this bourgeois, class-collaborationist and anti-communist organization, while opportunist, are quite sincere. The SWP's internal documents express genuine loyalty to NOW. A "Women's Liberation Report" by Cindy Jacquith (*SWP Internal Information Bulletin*, February 1977) states:

"We are not interested in organizing a power caucus to capture the leadership of NOW....

"We're not talking about a socialist-feminist caucus, either. A significant number of women in NOW who are not socialists—they may be Democrats, Republicans, or independents—agree with us about the problems NOW faces.... We will urge them to join in helping win NOW as a whole to this perspective."

What is hypocritical is the SWP's pious defense of democracy and free discussion and debate in the women's movement. Willie Mae Reid says: "Socialists believe all women in the movement have the *right* to express their opinions, explain their ideas and distribute their literature. We are the most consistent fighters for democracy in the women's movement." But, in fact, the SWP is more used to dishing out the bureaucratic treatment it got at the NOW conference than to being on the receiving end. Its "consistent democracy" included engineering the expulsion of Spartacist League supporters at the Boston 1971 conference of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC, an SWP front group) for protesting the presence of Democratic Party politician Bella Abzug's aide-de-camp; and the SWP has always upheld male exclusion as a valid tactic, repeatedly expelling socialist men from its conferences, while admitting female Republican or Democratic Party representatives.

The SWP's shameless chasing after NOW is so grotesque that it is an embarrassment even to its cynical, centrist bloc partners in the rotten amalgam known as the "United" Secretariat (USec). No doubt the SWP's attempt to polemicize against the Spartacist League's article in *Workers Vanguard*, "Consistent Feminists Redbait SWP" (WV No. 156, 6 May 1977), appeared in *Intercontinental Press (ICP)* rather than the *Militant* precisely in order to undercut its bloc partners' criticisms. The *ICP* article, "The Debate at NOW's National Conference," which insisted that the conference was "an important victory," commented acidly:

"...the Spartacist League was 'not surprised' at the redbaiting, of course, since they 'know full well' that feminism is a bourgeois ideology, necessarily hostile to communism....

"The Spartacist League does not explain why the gains won by 'bourgeois' supporters of feminism have become a focal point of the capitalist class's assault on the American masses. Nor does it explain the apparent contradiction between the polls that show a majority of the population favoring the Equal Rights Amendment and their contention that the fight around such issues is a 'bourgeois' concern.

"In their sectarian purity, they ignore the difference between the racist, reformist leadership of NOW and the thousands of radicalizing women that have joined the organization in the hope that it will provide orientation for their struggle. These women will not follow the Spartacist League's cry that they wait for the proletarian revolution to bring them their liberation."

—ICP No. 19, 23 May 1977

The phrase "racist, reformist leadership of NOW" is what catches the eye. Such strong language is obviously meant for international consumption, since it never appears in the *Militant*—and certainly never in the SWP's interventions into NOW!

### For a Women's Section of the Vanguard Party

The SWP's tailing after NOW is rationalized by its position that "there is no objective basis for a separate [from bourgeois feminism] revolutionary Marxist women's organization" and that "the struggle for socialism requires both a mass feminist movement and a mass revolutionary Marxist party." To NOW's discomfiture, the SWP touts NOW as the mass feminist requirement for socialism. This political orientation demonstrates the SWP's total abandonment of the historical communist struggle to build precisely a "revolutionary Marxist women's organization" linked to the vanguard party through its most conscious cadres; i.e., a women's section of the party. It is interesting that in none of its discussions of the woman question or its polemics against the Spartacist League does the SWP mention this struggle—because it is not some "sectarian" invention of the Spartacist League but was the strategic orientation of the international communist movement both in the pre-World War I German Social Democracy and in Lenin's Bolshevik party and Communist International.

But this Leninist tactic for women's liberation has been cited—and repudiated—recently by the SWP's comrades in the International Majority Tendency (IMT) of the USec. In "The Women's Movement and the Class Struggle" (*Inprecor* No. 7, 26 May 1977), Jacqueline Heinen states that the Communist International's denunciation of "non-mixed" (USec euphemism for "male-exclusionist") organizations and its insistence that the emancipation of women could be achieved only through international proletarian revolution were short-sighted and incorrect:

"...the Communist parties of the International as a whole believed that the struggle for women's emancipation could occur only through the struggle of the workers movement for the overthrow of the bourgeois state. This is true but insufficient. Their energetic rejection of any separate organization of women in the trade unions or in any other workers organization, like their assertion that 'there are no specially feminine questions,' clearly shows that revolutionaries in the 1920s totally underestimated the importance and duration of the struggle on the subjective level, in the ranks of the workers movement,

against dominant ideas and against the automatic acceptance of the inferiority of women."

Unlike the benighted Bolsheviks, the USec, argues Heinen, "recognizes the importance of non-mixed groups and of an independent women's movement," not only now but under the dictatorship of the proletariat. This New Left polyvanguardist revision of Leninism, shared by both the majority and minority tendencies of the USec, constitutes an open attack on the leading role of the vanguard party in class struggle.

The long history of the Marxist struggle with feminism was codified in the "Theses and Resolutions on Work Among Women" approved by the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921. This document pointed out that feminism, which is class-collaborationist in principle, can only obstruct and delay the emancipation of women. It charged all Communist parties to:

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

At its Third National Conference in 1972, the Spartacist League, which represents the continuity of Bolshevism in this period, adopted as its goal a general strategy for women's liberation based on that of the Communist International in its revolutionary period. At that time we affirmed:

"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 SL's long and serious work among women, including since 1971 the publication of *Women and Revolution*, easily refutes the SWP's absurd charge that we tell women to wait passively for the socialist revolution to liberate women. On the contrary, we fight now to win women to the perspective of class struggle—the only road to liberation. We support all genuine reforms which will alleviate the special oppression of women under capitalism, in the course of these struggles putting forward the transitional program which extends and generalizes their demands to the struggle for socialist revolution. With Lenin, we assert that women must be an integral part of the revolutionary struggle, for without their participation it will not succeed. But women organized separately from the working class and its vanguard cannot prevail.

Therefore, unlike the SWP, which seeks to recruit more working women to NOW (and, by extension, to bourgeois politics), the Spartacist League is committed to convincing militant working women to break with feminism and take their places in leading the struggle for international proletarian revolution. ■

## A Falling Out Among "Sisters"

# SWP Redbaited at NOW Conference

For the last four years the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has focused its work among women on the bourgeois liberal National Organization for Women (NOW). But like so many of the SWP's opportunist and class-collaborationist maneuvers, this attempt to ingratiate itself as NOW's loyal "best builders" has proven to be not only unprincipled but unrewarding even in terms of short-term popularity.

At the Tenth National Convention of NOW, held in Detroit on April 22-24, many SWPers were visibly shaken, and some were reduced to tears as a crescendo of redbaiting ended with a despicable, anti-communist motion, passed amid the cheers of their "sisters," condemning the SWP. The motion stated:

"...that this conference protests attempts by the SWP to use NOW as a vehicle to place before the public the agenda of their organization and to exploit the feminist movement. We bitterly resent and will not tolerate any group's attempt to deflect us from the pursuit of our feminist goals."

A conference supplement to *NOW Times* had published a special article entitled "SWP: A Study in Political Parasitism," which accused the SWP of being a vanguard party dominated by white males, asserted that many feminist groups had been disrupted and destroyed by the SWP and even compared the latter's activities in NOW to FBI and CIA infiltration of the SWP! (In fact, NOW's redbaiting slanders of the SWP were reminiscent of those circulated within the women's movement in the early 1970's by the FBI/CIA.) An intensive whispering campaign against the SWP, including the slander that the SWP was planning to disrupt the conference, was carried on throughout the gathering. In the final minutes of the conference, when SWP supporters were out of the main room, attending a Minority Women workshop, the full-scale attack was launched.

A black NOW member announced to the delegates: "I heard that an organization has called a meeting of the Minority Women's Caucus to declare that NOW is a racist organization. That group doesn't speak for me as a minority woman." She left the microphone to thunderous applause, only to return moments later to announce dramatically: "I have been asked to name the organization. That organization is the Socialist Workers Party." SWPers attempting to respond had their microphones cut off, and an outburst of chanting "NOW lives! NOW lives!" (which SWPers, including Willie Mae Reid, briefly joined while attempting to speak) drowned them out. In this witchhunting atmosphere, the anti-communist motion was passed, and the conference formally concluded.

The Spartacist League vigorously condemns this



W & R Photo

SWP spokesman Willie Mae Reid at Tenth National Convention of NOW, 22 April 1977.

disgusting redbaiting. But we do not share the SWP's bewilderment at this turn of events. The SWP has worked hard to build this feminist organization—i.e., an organization which insists that the question of sex, not class, is primary. The logical extension of such an ideology must be anti-communism. Furthermore, NOW has recently moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C., where it can better function as a respectable lobby within the bourgeois state. Naturally, it is interested in expunging the "taint" of "communist" influence.

### Nothing New Now

From its founding in 1966 under the leadership of Betty Friedan, NOW has always represented a liberal, bourgeois current within the amorphous and organizationally disparate women's "movement," unlike the more radical current which originated out of the petty-bourgeois New Left in the late 1960's. NOW's social base was from the start middle-class, educated women, seeking access to the power and privileges which capitalist society has traditionally withheld from women, but not challenging the basic structure of that society. While during its first decade NOW occasionally adopted some of the rhetoric of more radical feminists,

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