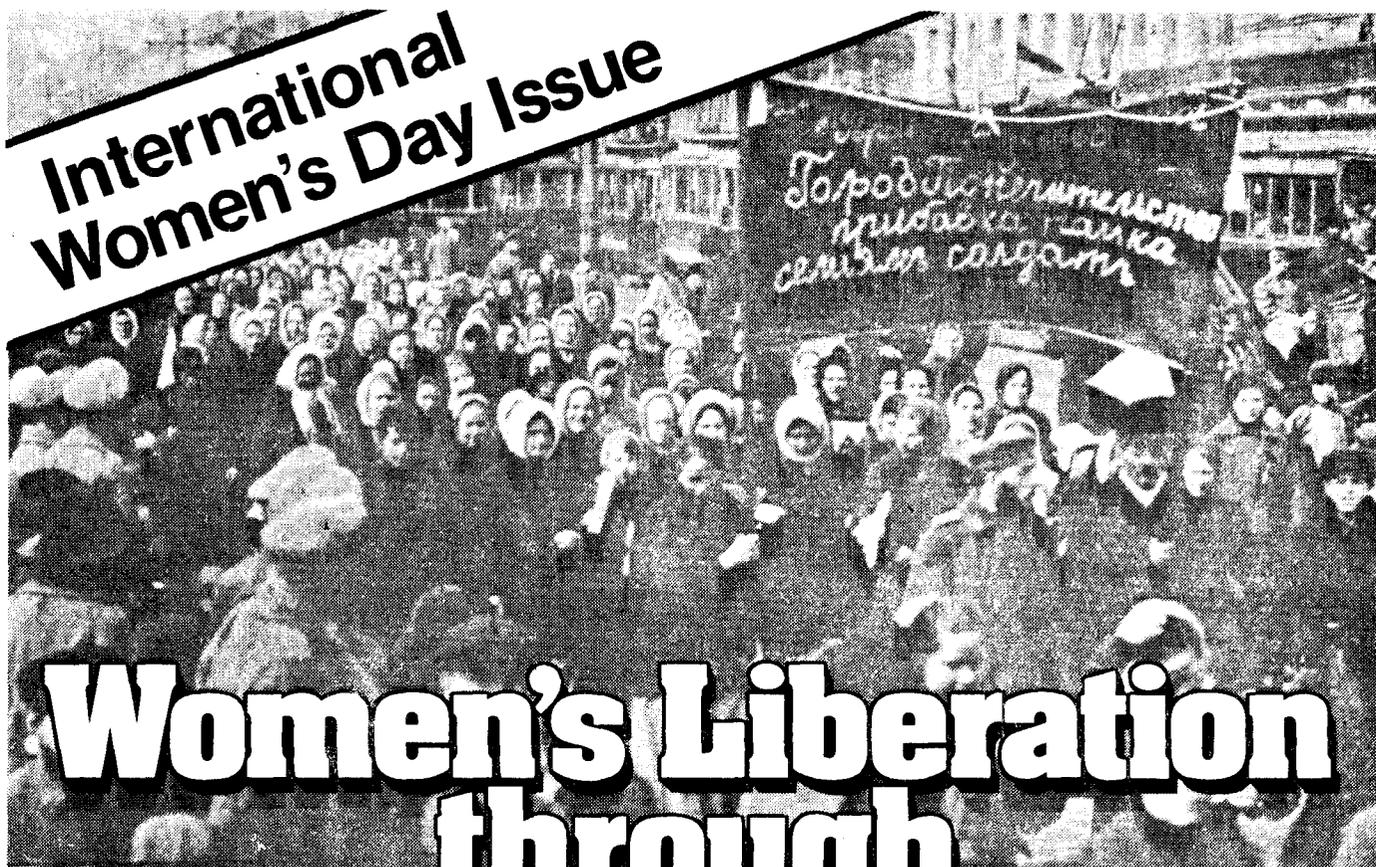


# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

50¢



**International Women's Day Issue**

# Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution!

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# From Weimar to Hitler: Feminism and Fascism

Among the proliferation of tracts excoriating the evils of pornography which have dominated feminist writing recently, another theme has made a modest splash. An *off our backs* (December 1980) article by Carol Anne Douglas, titled "German feminists and the right: can it happen here?," worried:

"With recession, inflation and unemployment growing and Ronald Reagan running for president (of course, he couldn't win), the Moral Majority bellowing in the land and the ERA dying a lingering death, it seemed like a good time to read about German history.... What signs were there of impending fascism? Did feminists see the signs? How did they act as fascism drew near? Why did some women become Nazis?"

Douglas' article reviewed four recent books on German feminism and fascism. *Ms.* magazine has also published a two-part series by Gloria Steinem on the same theme, "The Nazi Connection," which however does not mention a single feminist organization or individual by name.

## Weimar Germany—A "Fortress of Feminism"

For feminists the struggle against patriarchy is theoretically the highest imperative; and Nazi Germany was, in the words of feminist Adrienne Rich, "patriarchy in its purest, most elemental form." There is undoubtedly an inherent contradiction between feminism as a variant of bourgeois liberalism, committed to the quest for more individual liberties for women within the confines of capitalist society, and fascism; but at certain conjunctures it has been subordinated. It is beyond doubt, for example, that the Third Reich enjoyed broad support among German feminists.

Why? Certainly no one can argue that they were duped. Hitler was even more forthright about his program for women than Mussolini had been. Whereas

Mussolini had conciliated feminists in 1923 by granting the vote to women in local elections, the original Nazi program called for the abolition of women's suffrage, and Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf*: "The message of women's emancipation is a message discovered solely by the Jewish intellect and its content is stamped by the same spirit." Equal rights for women, said Hitler, actually meant a deprivation of rights, since it involved women in areas where they would necessarily be inferior, i.e., public life. Gottfried Feder, one of the Nazi Party's founding "theoreticians," wrote:

"The Jew has stolen woman from us through the forms of sex democracy. We, the youth, must march out to kill the dragon so that we may again attain the most holy thing in the world, the woman as maid and servant."

—quoted in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*

Nor can it be argued that Hitler triumphed because the organized feminist movement was weak. In the words of Kate Millett, by 1925 in Germany "feminism was in fact a fortress." She points out that in that year Gertrud Bäumer, the most authoritative spokesman of middle-class German feminism, was a member of the Reichstag and a high official in the Ministry of the Interior.

Millett's explanation of feminist support to Hitler is that between 1925 and 1933, when Hitler came to power, the feminist movement was gutted and perverted by Nazi infiltration. In fact, though, the German feminism of 1933 evolved inevitably and organically from what it had been even prior to World War I.

The overwhelmingly predominant German feminist coalition, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF—Federation of German Women's Associations), which had almost a million members in 1925, had grown increasingly conservative since 1908. Faced with the possibility that its membership would endorse the legalization of abortion, the right wing of the BDF persuaded the large and extremely reactionary German-Evangelical Women's League (Deutsch-evangelischer Frauenbund) to join and use its voting power to defeat the proposal. This maneuver was followed by the ousting of president Marie Stritt in 1910 and her replacement by the far more conservative Bäumer and the expulsion of two "left-wing" tendencies, the Bund für Mutterschutz (League for the Protection of Motherhood) in 1910 and a small pacifist faction in 1915 (which went on to help found the liberal pacifist Women's International League for Peace and Freedom).

Lest feminists be tempted to overstate the importance of the loss of these "radicals," it should be noted that the Bund für Mutterschutz, which was strongly influenced by sexual libertarian Helene Stocker and



On the  
Cover:  
Revolutionary  
Russia, 1917:  
Women  
demonstrate  
for pay

increases to soldiers' families. Striking women textile workers sparked the February insurrection, culminating in overthrow of centuries-old tsarist dynasty.



**“Women, this is your fate in the ‘Third Reich’! Your answer: Fight the Nazis—for the Social Democracy!”** Despite such appeals, neither the SPD nor the KPD mobilized their ranks to smash fascism, thus leading to the crushing of the workers movement and the triumph of Hitler.

whose manifesto advocated an end to “the capitalist rule of man” and the establishment of a matriarchy, sought to create colonies in the countryside for unmarried mothers and their children as a way of promoting “German racial health.” Racially “unhealthy” mothers were not admitted. “It is indeed disturbing,” complains Carol Anne Douglas, “that the first women to endorse sexual freedom were racists.”

The explanation for the BDF’s early conservatism lies not in the departure of these small dissident elements but in the fact that it existed from its inception in a highly politically class-differentiated society with a mass working-class party—the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which had, moreover, developed a strong socialist women’s movement. Left-leaning and working-class women who wanted to fight their oppression joined the SPD, not the BDF.

**The Socialist Women’s Movement versus the BDF**

The SPD’s women’s movement was founded in the 1890s by Clara Zetkin, and was based on the Marxist understanding that women must be organized as part of the revolutionary proletarian movement, given the indissoluble connection between women’s oppres-

sion, the family and the private ownership of property. It was from the beginning counterposed to bourgeois feminism. By 1914 the SPD women’s organizations had a membership of 175,000, while Zetkin’s journal *Die Gleichheit* (Equality) had a circulation of 124,000.

It was Zetkin who addressed the Third World Congress of the Communist International with the powerful statement:

“There is only one movement; there is only one organization of women communists within the Communist Party, together with male communists. The tasks and goals of the communists are our tasks, our goals. No autonomous organization, no doing your own thing which in any way lends itself to splitting the revolutionary forces and diverting them from their great goals of the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the construction of communist society.”

—*Protokolle des IV. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, p. 725

While the SPD’s record on women’s rights was far from spotless (it sometimes dropped the demand for female suffrage in local elections, and in the name of “modesty” discouraged the open discussion of abortion and contraception), it was the staunchest fighter for the advancement of German women in the early 20th century. In 1895 the party introduced a female suffrage motion into the Reichstag and in 1896 stood almost alone in opposing the male supremacist Civil Code. The SPD campaigned for the protection of working women and for equality of women in education and jobs. It supported equal pay for equal work and daycare centers for working mothers. The SPD also criticized Germany’s abortion laws, favored the availability of contraceptives and ran educational courses to train and promote women as leaders of the proletarian movement.

In contrast, during the same period, the middle-class feminist BDF held the position that only a minority of women had either the ability or the need to enter politics or pursue a career, and it was taken for granted that those who did so would remain unmarried. Thus the BDF supported the law requiring women schoolteachers to resign if they married (just as later in 1930 it did not oppose the measure introduced into the Reichstag—supported by *all* major political parties

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# Women and Revolution

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

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except the German Communist Party [KPD]—providing for the dismissal of married women from public service).

World War I exposed the internal rottenness of the SPD, which supported the imperialist German war effort (as of course the BDF did). Many left-wing cadres of the SPD's women's work left with the anti-war minority, some joining the large Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), others the much smaller group of revolutionary socialists who formed the Spartakusbund in 1916 and later the KPD. Despite heroic efforts and personal courage, these socialists were unable to properly take advantage of the revolutionary crises sweeping Germany after the war. The Weimar Republic was consolidated with the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and the bloody defeat of the Spartacists.

Puffed up with self-importance, the petty-bourgeois and reformist caretakers of the Kaiser's shattered state indulged in grandiose illusions in their historic role. In 1919 the program of the BDF proclaimed its aim to "unite German women of every party and world-view, in order to express their national solidarity and to effect the common idea of the cultural mission of women." This program declared housekeeping and childbearing women's proper destiny, rejecting the idea that men and women were equal. It advocated "eugenic" policies and the sterilization of "anti-social" elements and actively campaigned for higher birth rates. BDF member Adele Schreiber advocated the sterilization of "drinkers"; Elsie Luders fought for the elimination of interracial marriages; and the German Colonial Women's League, whose sole reason for existence was to oppose the marriage of German men living in the

colonies to non-Caucasian native women, joined the BDF.

The BDF vehemently supported the reconquest of territory lost by Germany in the war. While claiming all political parties were divisive and supporting the ideal of an organic national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), it was in reality anti-communist, and largely associated with small bourgeois parties such as the Deutsche Demokratische Partei. Throughout the Weimar years it expended most of its energy in the same endeavor that consumes contemporary middle-class feminists like Susan Brownmiller and Robin Morgan—campaigning against pornography. The BDF also worked for stricter censorship of films, books and plays and against contraception and "licentiousness."

### Fascism: Capitalism Takes a Different Form

The post-war chaos in Weimar Germany and the world depression of 1929, and above all the perceived inability of the workers' movement to break through the impasse, threw masses of frustrated and impoverished petty bourgeois into the arms of the Nazis. Yet Hitler and his radical-lumpen street gangs would never have attained state power had not the bourgeoisie thrown its support to him, seeing in the Nazi movement a tool to crush once and for all the workers' movement and open the road again for unimpeded German imperialism. As Trotsky explained in his brilliant analysis of fascism, fascism is the *continuation* of capitalism in another form. Understanding this helps explain why masses of German bourgeois feminists who had loyally supported the Kaiser and/or the

The SPD women's organizations in the early 20th century fought for the interests of working women, such as these participants in the Crimmitschauer textile strike, 18 January 1904. The banner reads: "22 Weeks: Fight for the Ten-hour Day. Solidarity!"



Weimar Republic did not find it so difficult to accept the Third Reich as well.

In his 1932 article, "What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat," Trotsky pointed out the essence of fascism:

"At the moment that the 'normal' police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium—the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpen-proletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy.... When a state turns fascist... it means, primarily and above all, that the workers' organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism."

In Germany, the bourgeoisie had the opportunity to resort to this system only because the proletariat, paralyzed by the treachery of its political leadership—the reformist SPD and the Stalinized KPD—did not accomplish the socialist revolution instead.

### Feminists Go With Hitler

By 1930 the BDF—that "fortress" of feminism—opposed contraception, sexual libertarianism and abortion on demand, defended the family and reaffirmed that woman's proper destiny lay in marriage and motherhood. By 1932 the feminists joined in the general attack then being made on the parliamentary system and urged the establishment of a corporate state on the Italian model but with the exception that one of the "corporations" would consist of women.

The feminists of the BDF, like their husbands and brothers hit by the chaos and depression, were disillusioned with impotent Weimar parliamentarianism, and thus welcomed the "national revolution" promised by Hitler, seeking promise even in his statement that "equal rights for women means that they experience the esteem that they deserve in the areas for which nature has intended them." BDF president Agnes von Zahn-Harnack proclaimed that feminists could "do nothing but approve a nationalist government and stand by it" and that the BDF would "do all it can to help us work together, and will certainly take up personal contacts with the best women in National Socialism."

In the last elections of the thirties in which Germans exercised any freedom of choice—those of March 1933—the BDF gave considerable support to the Nazis and expressed the hope that Hitler would soon introduce a "biological policy" to preserve the German family and a "Law of Preservation" to protect it from "asocial persons." (Bourgeois feminists in other advanced capitalist countries would not have found BDF racism so shocking; conventional bourgeois sociology at the time took for granted that "asocial" types and "lesser races" were genetically inferior.)

The key point about the BDF's accommodation to Hitler is that it followed at every crucial point the class interests of the bourgeoisie, of its husbands and



Novosti Press Agency

**Inmates of the Auschwitz death camp, before being freed by the Red Army.**

brothers—and was willing to subordinate to that end even its very conservative, upper-class goals of giving bourgeois women more access to the privileges of upper-class men. Accepting the bourgeois mystique of the sacred nuclear family, and imbued with the nationalist aspirations of its class, the BDF was unable to argue against Hitler's mystical, racist, zoological view of human society.

Hitler came to power, and proceeded to ruthlessly crush the workers' movement. The most powerful proletariat in Western Europe was smashed, its organizations ripped apart, its spirit broken for a generation, all without striking a blow in its own defense. And in this triumphant wave of reactionary terror the bourgeois feminist BDF too was simply swept aside.

In April the Nazi government ordered the BDF to expel its Jewish affiliate, the Jüdischer Frauenbund (JFB—League of Jewish Women), its largest single organizational member, and join the Nazi mass women's organizations being formed. BDF leader Gertrud Bäumer publicly supported this move, stating that she believed the Nazi women's organizations were merely larger versions of the BDF—"a new, spiritually different phase of the women's movement"—and advised her followers to accommodate themselves to the new order. In June 1933 the BDF was formally dissolved by its membership.

Contemporary feminists are outraged by this forced  
*continued on next page*



Workers Vanguard

### SL-initiated demonstration, Detroit 1979: "The Klan Won't Ride in the Motor City!"

dissolution of the BDF, characterizing it as a manifestation of naked fascist tyranny. But if there was a voice raised against it at the time, it was the voice of president von Zahn-Harnack, who argued that the BDF should not be dissolved—because its aims were thoroughly compatible with those of National Socialism! She cited the organization's support for "eugenic" policies and the sterilization of "anti-social elements," its condemnation of the Revolution of 1918 and the Versailles Treaty and its recognition of men's and women's "different spheres." To no avail—the vote for dissolution carried and this was the end of the "fortress of feminism."

The fate of the Jüdischer Frauenbund, which had shared all the illusions of the BDF in an educational, respectable, middle-class orientation and loyalty to German society, was perhaps the most tragic. Retreating into the Jewish community, where it had always carried on social work (like teaching young women to become maids and servants), the JFB urged its members to "lie low," not to act loud or ostentatious and to be "good Germans." After Crystal Night, November 10, 1938, when the Nazis burned their orphanages and dissolved the organization, Jewish feminists ended up at railroad stations, making up food packets for Jews being deported to concentration camps. At the bitter end in 1942 there were only eight women carrying on at the Berlin train station, until they too were shipped away to die.

As for Gertrud Bäumer, she continued to publish the BDF's *Die Frau* throughout the Nazi regime, later claiming that its Christian mystical emphasis was a form of resistance to Nazism. But as *off our backs* noted, "Considering that they allowed her to continue undisturbed, they weren't too threatened."

### And Mussolini, Too

The German feminist movement was of course stamped with the particular experience of German bourgeois society, but it should not be thought that the BDF's response to fascism represented a particular,

German idiosyncrasy. In Italy, too, every major feminist organization voluntarily supported fascism during the early years of Mussolini's premiership on the basis that it was stamping out socialism, which was seen as the greatest danger.

After Mussolini's march on Rome both the Consiglio nazionale delle Donne italiane (CNDI—National Council of Italian Women) and the *Giornale della donna* (Journal of Woman) openly offered their help in the work of "national reconstruction." And they did help. Feminists played an important role in several major fascist propaganda campaigns, including those for a ruralization policy, an increased birth rate and against strikes. The task of organizing urban women to resist strikes was carried out largely by the journals *Voce Nuova* (New Voice) and *Giornale della donna*, while in the countryside *La donna nei campi* (The Woman in the Fields) urged women to refuse to participate in strikes and persuade their men to do the same.

Nonetheless, by the late '20s the contradictions inherent in a "feminist-fascist" ideology became pronounced. The Genoese feminist newspaper, *La Chiosa* (The Comment), for example, ran an editorial in 1927 which complained:

"...we wish to ask our good Fascist camerati what you have done recently for women's rights, to educate and elevate women? In Fascism there seems to be a spirit of inexplicable, yet ferocious, anti-feminism."

—quoted in Alexander De Grand, "Women Under Italian Fascism," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 1976

Too late. After supporting Mussolini, even capitulating to the fascists' insistence on the primacy of the patriarchal family, such feminists' uncomprehending complaints met their inevitable response. The government simply transformed *La Chiosa* into a fashion and movie magazine.

### What Does "Consistent Feminism" Lead To?

We have expressed contempt over the years for the reformist Socialist Workers Party's idiotic slogan

## Protest Gay Bust in Toronto!

TORONTO—More than one hundred Toronto cops launched a Gestapo-style raid on four gay bathhouses here February 5. Swinging crowbars and sledgehammers, the terrorists in blue smashed down doors and rounded up patrons. "It's too bad the showers weren't hooked up for gas instead of water" snarled one cop marauder (*Toronto Star*, 7 February)! Over 250 people were arrested. Twenty charged with keeping a "bawdy house" have been ordered to take a VD test or face seven days in prison. Ironically, among the more than 230 others, charged as "found-ins," was a volunteer giving free VD tests.

This terror raid takes place in the context of an increasingly hysterical offensive against homosexuals. In last year's municipal elections, anti-homosexual furor was directed against gay candidate for alderman George Hislop. As the enforcers of "morality" in puritanical Ontario (where you can hardly find a drink on Sunday and films like the internationally acclaimed *Tin Drum* are banned as some kind of "kiddie porn" by the censor board) the cops raided the bathhouses in the name of routing

out "prostitution and indecent acts."

The raid was met with a cry of outrage from Toronto's sizable gay community. The next night 3,000 demonstrators marched through downtown Toronto chanting "Stop the cops! Stop the cops!" and "Liars, bigots, Nazis: Toronto cops!" On February 10 more than 1,500 people jammed a Toronto high school auditorium to protest the raid. The Trotskyist League of Canada joined the protest, arguing that a successful mobilization against this police terror required mobilizing the labor movement—the only force with the social power to defend the interests of all the oppressed.

If a gay bar or bath can be wantonly smashed and its "found-ins" rounded up and arrested, left-wing offices and union halls could soon be on the cops' agenda. Democratic rights are indivisible! We demand that all charges be dropped! Send contributions to the defense of those arrested to: Ross Irwin in Trust for the Right to Privacy Committee, Symes and Irwin, 31 Prince Arthur Avenue, Toronto M5R1B2, Ontario, Canada.

"consistent feminism leads to socialism." While mass movements of oppressed women have been a motor force of revolution in the backward societies of the "countries of the East," bourgeois feminism in the advanced countries has led to many things—the doctrine of war between the sexes, reformist schemes like "affirmative action," recently to a moralistic campaign against pornography—but never to socialism. Indeed, if the experience of the BDF and Italian feminism proves anything, it is that there is in fact no such thing as "consistent feminism." The specific program and character of various feminist groups in various historical periods, while all in some sense a response to the special oppression of women, is determined essentially by class considerations. The accommodation of the BDF to fascism reflected the broader failure of bourgeois liberalism in a period of intense capitalist crisis, as well as the fundamental hostility of the bourgeois class to proletarian revolution, the only way out for the exploited and oppressed.

For today's petty-bourgeois feminists, mired in the myth of the "sisterhood" of all women, the accommodation of their "fortress of feminism" to Hitler must remain forever a source of confusion and mystery. But for us revolutionary Marxists, it is only one more striking confirmation of our position that women's liberation is above all a question of class struggle.

Much of the current rad-lib worry about "Nazism now?" in the face of the Reagan years in fact reflects only liberal illusions that the ousted Democrats were somehow qualitatively better, even though both capitalist parties are equally war-mongering enforcers of austerity on the working class. Reagan's no fascist, but he is certainly the most right-wing politician to run the American state in the last 50 years and is riding a backlash of conservatism at all levels of society. In this

atmosphere of reaction, of course Nazi and fascist terror groups feel emboldened. Fascists run openly for election on both Democratic and Republican tickets; communists, labor organizers, blacks and women are slaughtered and their KKK/Nazi killers get off scot free in Greensboro, North Carolina, while Klan crosses flare in victory across the nation. Where has been the feminist response to this immediate upsurge of tiny race-hate, terror groups?

It has been the "consistent socialists" of the Spartacist League who have called for the mobilization of labor to smash this Nazi terror in the egg. Feminist Kate Millett, who has agonized at some length in print about the vicissitudes of being a woman in Nazi Germany, refused to endorse a demonstration to stop the fascist scum from "celebrating" Hitler's birthday in downtown San Francisco last April 19. Like the Socialist Workers Party, which actually champions "free speech" for fascists, Ms. Millett was more concerned about the safety of these thugs than about those whom they would murder. The rally, which was supported and heavily built by the Spartacist League, turned out 1,200 people to let the Nazis know San Francisco is a labor town, not a Nazi town—and they didn't dare show their faces. No thanks to Millett, or those bourgeois feminists who tell women to pin their hopes on the capitalist system of "law and order."

The experience of German feminism only confirms the fact that no matter how large or powerful a feminist movement is created, the fate of women is the fate of the working class. The fight to smash fascism today—like the fight to stop Hitler in Germany—is above all the fight to forge a revolutionary proletarian party which can, as the "tribune of the people," lead the working class and all the oppressed to victory over capitalism, and end forever its inevitable, periodic crises and poisonous ideologies. ■

# The Comintern Theses on Work Among Women

The Third Congress of the Communist International, meeting in Moscow from 22 June to 12 July 1921, adopted the following theses on the woman question. The Second International Congress of Communist Women, including delegates from as far away as Mexico and India, had met just prior to the Congress and also adopted this document. We are reprinting the Comintern - approved English-language edition, published by the Contemporary Publishing Association, New York City, 1921. (For a discussion of certain flaws in this translation, see "On the Comintern Theses on Work Among Women—I.S. Slander Refuted," W&R No. 4, Fall 1973). For space reasons, we are printing excerpts. The "Propaganda and Agitation Methods" section, which deals with tactical implementation, and the one-sentence conclusion, "Work on an International Basis," which directs the Women's Secretariat of the Comintern to oversee the work, have been dropped entirely.

The Theses set forth the Communists' determination to find effective means of propaganda and agitation among women to win them to the cause of proletarian socialism. To the feminist notion of an "autonomous" women's movement, the Theses forthrightly counterpose the need for class-conscious women's organizations led by the Communist vanguard in a united struggle against capitalism.

\* \* \* \* \*

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



Alexandra Kollontai (far right) next to Clara Zetkin at the presidium of the Second International Conference of Communist Women, Moscow, 1921.

women workers, are faced with the problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The capitalist economic system has got into a blind alley, for there is no room for the further development of industrial forces within that system. The general impoverishment of the workers, the impotence of the bourgeoisie to revive production, the development of speculative enterprises, the decay in the production system, unemployment, the fluctuation of prices out of keeping with wages,—all this leads inevitably to the deepening of the class struggle in all countries. This struggle is to decide who shall conduct, administer, and organize production, and upon what system that should be done,—whether it should be in the hands of a clique of bourgeois exploiters, and be carried on upon the principles of capitalism and private property, or in the hands of the producing class and carried on upon a Communist basis.

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

So long as the power of government is in the hands of

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

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

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

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

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

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



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**International Women's Day, 1917: Strike sparks February Revolution.**

active and the more conscious and willing the participation of the women.

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

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

Hence, the direct task of the Communist Parties: to spread the influence of the Communist Party to the  
*continued on page 17*

## 10 Years of Spartacist Women's Journal: Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

International Women's Day 1981 finds *Women and Revolution* celebrating our tenth anniversary. This holiday, historically a symbol of proletarian commitment to women's equality, seems an appropriate time to review our first decade of work around the woman question. W&R expresses the commitment of the Spartacist League and international Spartacist tendency to the fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution. Over the past decade our Marxist program and practice have uniquely stood the test of events. The brief explosion of New Left women's liberation activism of the early 1970s has long since dissipated into personalist, passive, essentially literary exercises, while most of the ostensible left has veered wildly from tailing lifestyle radicalism, and chasing liberal illusions that this or that legal reform will liberate women, to actually supporting regimes (like Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism) which practice the most barbaric oppression of women.

Today an atmosphere of foreboding facing the Reagan years is pervasive. Utopian and reformist schemes for women's liberation have come to nothing; minimal legal gains of the oppressed, from busing to abortion, are on the chopping block. It will not be an easy period to be a communist in America. Yet it is more than ever necessary to fight against this reactionary onslaught on all levels of society. Our tendency's history of living struggle around the woman question points the way forward today, as we continue our battle to become the party of the working class, to reach out to the oppressed—women, minorities, other specially oppressed sectors—and link their struggles to the driving force of proletarian socialism.

### The SL and the New Left Women's Movement

The Spartacist League in the late 1960s was a very small propaganda group fighting to re-establish the revolutionary traditions of Trotskyism against far larger centrist and reformist currents. The Vietnam War and the mass, reformist-led struggle for black rights generated a wave of student-based radical activism which we worked to intersect with our program. While the reformists (Communist Party, Socialist Workers Party) and centrists tailed the "progressive bourgeois-



Women and Revolution

**Spartacist League of Australia/New Zealand contingent in International Women's Day demonstration, March 1977, Sydney.**

sie," the SL fought to break the youthful antiwar and black activists from class-collaborationist (social-patriotic and pro-Democratic Party) politics.

A main more-or-less organized repository of subjective anti-imperialism and petty-bourgeois radicalism was Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Comrades of the SL joined SDS seeking to win the best of these militants to Marxism through posing a class-struggle pole. We fought for the perspective of labor action against the war and in the struggle for black freedom and women's liberation; for class solidarity with the Vietnamese Revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracies, saboteurs of international revolutionary struggles; against polyvanguardist/spontaneist illusions—for a Leninist vanguard party. One of our first position papers in SDS was on the woman question, directed against the Progressive Labor Party's Stalinist line that "the family is a fighting unit for socialism." Against their primitive workerist notions, we upheld the Marxist position that the family is the main social institution oppressing women, indissolubly linked to the institution of private property, and we raised demands geared to freeing women from its restrictions.

The women's liberation movement was also coalescing, based on women activists repelled by New Left male chauvinism. The women's movement was if anything less organized, more anti-communist, narrower and more anti-"elitist" (anti-party) than SDS. Yet there too were individuals and groupings looking for a

way to fight capitalist oppression. Some of them were the same people: female New Leftists, most typically members of soft-Maoist local collectives, who carried out the logic of New Left "serve the people" sectoralism to become women's liberation activists. And there too the SL intervened. From SDS, from the women's movement, from other "arenas" the SL recruited serious people capable of generalizing their leftist activism into a Marxist critique of capitalist society and drawing Leninist conclusions.

W&R itself was founded by an interpenetrated Spartacist League/left-feminist milieu of Bay Area women. Its first issue, dated May-June 1971, stated:

"Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it."

W&R's cadres, organized as Revolutionary Women of the Bay Area, fought through the question of feminism vs. communism. The winning of these comrades to the understanding that the emancipation of women requires proletarian revolution to liberate society from class and extra-class oppression was symbolized by the publication in issues No. 2 and 3 of the Communist International's 1921 Theses on work among women (see excerpts reprinted in the present issue), which set forth the need for special methods of communist work among women while opposing the separate organization of women counterposed to the proletarian vanguard. W&R's program linked demands to combat the oppression of women in the family, on the job and in society (including demands for what later came to be called gay rights) to all the key issues facing the working class: e.g., the imperialist war, the black struggle, the need for a workers party and a workers government.

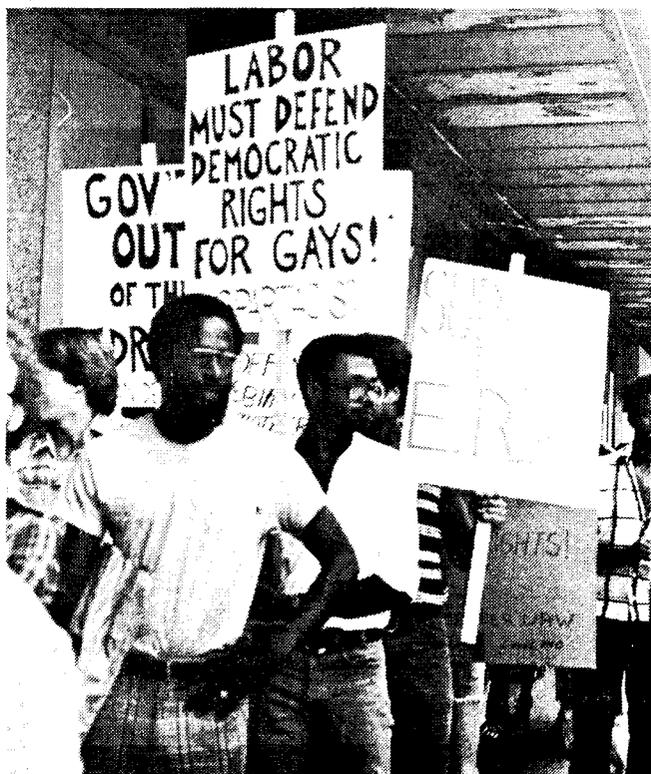
Predictably, W&R's fight against personalism and male exclusionism (an early article was titled "It Ain't He, Babe") generated an "unsisterly" response from the bulk of the milieu. But our insistence that the capitalist class, not men, was the enemy won us supporters and was an important factor in the fusion of the Buffalo Marxist Caucus with the SL's youth group. The "East Oakland Women," too—a group of Maoist/workerist feminists whose efforts to organize working-class women led them to confront this question—were won to the Trotskyist transitional program and the Spartacist League.

By 1973 we had coalesced circles of women around our program in the Bay Area, New York, Boston. But the amorphous radical women's movement was already splintering and shrinking. W&R, founded as an organ of polemical intervention into a living radical milieu, was losing a semi-organized audience among active women's liberation militants. The future of the paper was hotly debated in the local W&R circles and throughout the SL. After a rich internal discussion including written documents (nine contributions were published in the SL internal bulletins) and debates, the Third National Conference of the SL in 1973 passed a resolution solidarizing with the strategy outlined by the Communist International in its revolutionary period:

"The organizational experience of the SL in this work has tended strongly toward the conclusion that the women's circles must be brought under the discipline of the party so that non-SL comrades involved can participate fully in

the debates and decisions of the movement and be represented on its leading bodies. In our experience in the women's arena we were forced pragmatically to rediscover the position of the Communist International, which strongly opposed the initiation of women's organizations not organizationally linked to the proletarian vanguard, not only when the revolutionary organization is a mass party—in which case 'independence' would in fact constitute counterposition to the revolutionary party—but also when the vanguard is weak and struggling to increase its contact with and influence among the masses. Our strategic perspective should be the development of a women's section of the SL...."

The context for the discussion was the "transformation of the Spartacist League" from an "unstable sub-propaganda group" to a "vanguard nucleus" capable of addressing the many-sided work—from systematic industrial implantation to international expansion—made possible by the SL's rapid recruitment from the antiwar, black and women's milieus and from our ostensibly Marxist competitors. The central, unifying task posed was the leap from a monthly to a bi-weekly *Workers Vanguard*. A main operative question was thus whether W&R could maintain a focus and readership given the decline of organized women's liberation



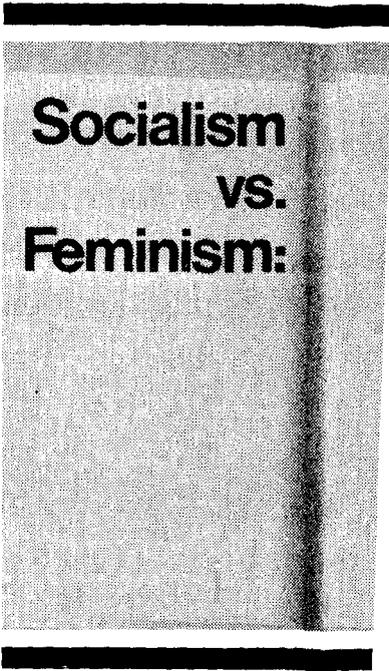
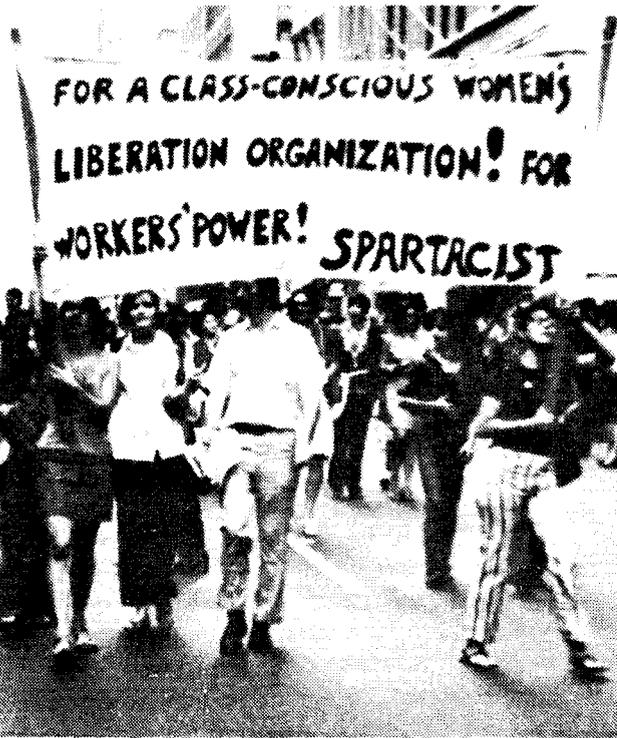
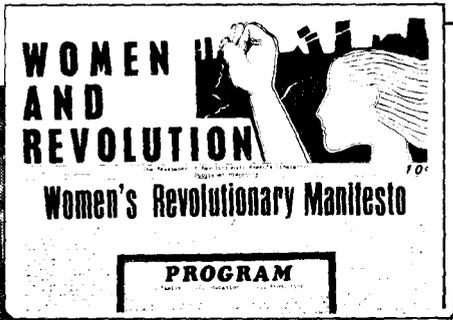
Women and Revolution

**Detroit, 1978: Spartacist contingent at gay rights demonstration.**

activism, without undercutting the party's ability to take its main paper to bi-weekly frequency.

The Third National Conference united around the continuing publication of W&R as a journal of the SL under the supervision of the Commission for Work Among Women, responsible to the Central Committee. The fight against women's oppression is the responsibility of the whole party, male and female

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Women and Revolution

# 1970

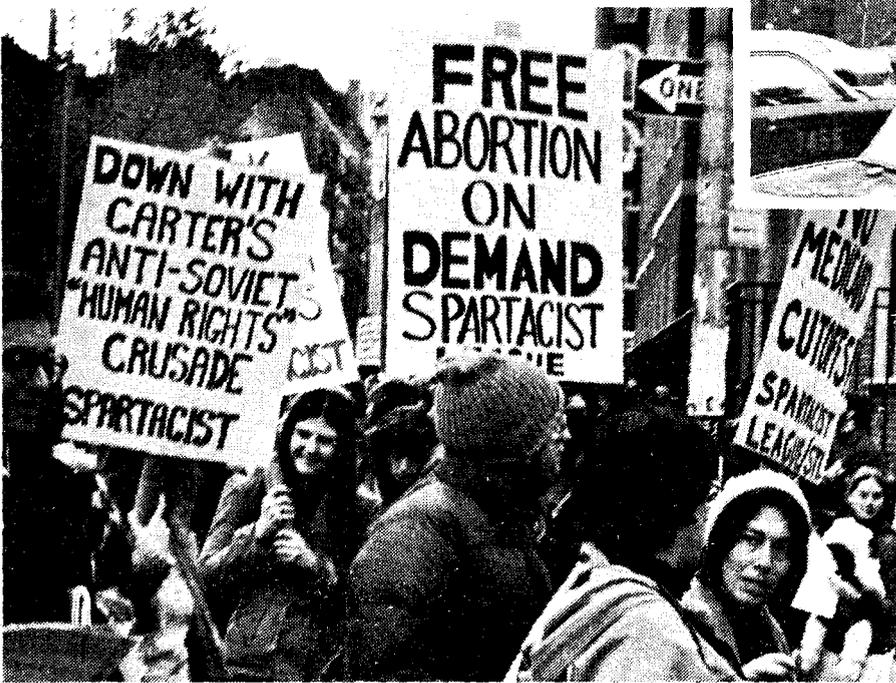
Above: Spartacist contingent at first major "women's liberation movement" march, 27 August, New York City.

# 1973

Right: Toronto march to defend Dr. Henry Morgenthauer, charged with performing illegal abortions.



Workers Vanguard



Women and Revolution

# 1977

Left: Protest against the Hyde Amendment, which cut off Medicaid funding for abortions, New York City. Jimmy Carter told poor women, "life is not fair."





E.P. Dutton

Tadzhik mountain women learning to read at early Soviet school.

## Women's Liberation...

(continued from page 11)

comrades alike—our insistence on this point stood in sharp contrast to our opponents, whose cheering of women's "autonomy" boiled down in cynical practice to "let the women do it."

An important contribution of *W&R* to the communist movement was the rediscovery of the rich history of socialist work among women, largely lost as a living experience due to the hideous degeneration of the Communist International under Stalinism. Carrying forward the rediscovery of our history begun by the republication of the Comintern Theses of 1921, *W&R* undertook a critical review of the work among women of the German social democracy (*W&R* Nos. 8 and 9, 1975) and of the Russian Bolsheviks (*W&R* Nos. 10 and 11, 1976). Our struggle for the re-establishment of the authentic communist tradition of work among women is a key component of our struggle against Stalinism, the "great organizer of defeats" which demoralizes the working class and through its bureaucratic privileges, political and cultural repression and fostering of poisonous ideologies (national chauvinism, glorification of the nuclear family, persecution of homosexuals, etc.) alienates the workers and oppressed from the great liberating goals of authentic Leninism.

### Women's Liberation vs. Bourgeois Reformism

During the early 1970s the bourgeois National Organization for Women (NOW), linked to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, grew rapidly. The Equal Rights Amendment and the fight for the right to abortion became major issues. Unlike the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which plunged into such bourgeois formations and hailed these parliamentary

campaigns as the road forward for women, we attacked illusions that capitalist society could establish women's equality by legislation.

Nonetheless, we of course supported the ERA as a simple statement of women's legal equality—and at a time when some ostensibly socialist groups like the Communist Party, the International Socialists and the Maoist Revolutionary Union initially opposed it, fearing losses in protective legislation for women workers. Opposing this legalistic timidity, we demanded the extension of protective legislation to men:

"The Spartacist League supports the Equal Rights Amendment because we are in favor of equality between the sexes but at the level attained through the struggles of the most advanced sections of the working class. Partial gains must be extended, thereby aiding in the unification of the class...."

—"Why We Support the ERA," *W&R* No. 4, Fall 1973

On the question of abortion rights too, the SWP promoted the most reformist illusions, in its single-issue women's group WONAAC (Women's National Abortion Action Coalition) limiting the fight to simply legalization in order to attract liberal Democrats. In contrast, we fought for "Free Abortion on Demand," pointing out abortion's high price still left poor women defenseless. The bitter truth of our warning is clear enough today, with Medicaid cut off and the quite likely possibility that under Reagan abortion may again be entirely abolished. What we said back in 1973 is more than ever vital: reliance on the capitalist courts to liberate women is a deadly illusion—reforms can be granted or taken away at the bourgeoisie's whim, depending on which way the political winds are blowing. Abortion reform itself, as an isolated issue, does not threaten the institution of the nuclear family, which remains the main source of women's oppression; thus we have always linked our fight for abortion and contraception rights for all, without cost, to the fight for a socialist, working-class program for women's liberation.

### Women and the Working Class

One of the key conditions for the liberation of women is their ability to take part in social labor, to break out of the stifling confines of the household. During the 1970s the Spartacist League began to develop some modest but real influence among the unionized working class. Recognizing that the union movement had to take up the fight for women's jobs and equality, Spartacist supporters in the trade unions fought against the conservative union bureaucracy on the basis of the transitional program, calling for "Jobs for All," with the transitional slogan of "30 hours work for 40 hours pay" to provide full employment. In contrast, feminists, reformists like the SWP and the capitalist state united behind "Affirmative Action" schemes to introduce a few token blacks and women into the workforce at the expense of hard-won union gains like seniority and the union hiring hall. *Women and Revolution* supported and brought to the attention of its readers the work of groups like the Militant Action Caucus (MAC) of the Communications Workers of America (CWA), in an industry which heavily employs

women in the most repressive conditions, as a model of this fight:

"The MAC contends that the bourgeoisie's manipulation of ethnic and sexual antagonisms—to which the conservative union leadership is a too-willing accomplice—is central in maintaining political backwardness in the American working class. To defeat these antagonisms it is crucial to demonstrate that the gains of oppressed racial groups and women will take place not at the expense of other workers, but at the capitalists' expense. Categorically opposing government interference in unions and preferential hiring schemes as a pretext for union-busting, the MAC demands replacement of job trusting and discriminatory seniority systems by plant-wide seniority, equal access for all workers to job training and apprenticeship programs, a fight for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay and union-controlled hiring on a first come first served basis."

—"Class Struggle in the Phone Company," W&R No. 5, Spring 1974

Women, largely concentrated in the worst-paying, non-unionized industries, must be brought into the union movement. This is a vital need for the entire workers movement as well, as otherwise the tendency for unorganized women to be used as scab labor to break strikes will continue to have deeply demoralizing and splintering consequences.

### The Gay Liberation Movement and Lifestylism

As communists, we understand the strategic role of the industrial proletariat as the force which has the social power to smash capitalism. But we do not take the working class as it is, adapting to its present level of consciousness, but fight to change it. The task of a vanguard party is not simply to lead the working class in struggle, but to unite with it all sections of the oppressed; to act, as Lenin said, as a "tribune of the people." Thus we fight against all aspects of social oppression, whether stemming from race and national hatred or the repressive sexual morality enforced by the bourgeois family. Unlike Maoists who adapt to the most backward, hateful prejudices and condemn homosexuals as "sick deviants," or the SWP, which went from championing "gay liberation now" to abruptly dumping the movement in its "turn" to the working class (in reality to the union bureaucracy), we have fought consistently against all legal restrictions on homosexuals, and for their right (and the right of everyone) to their private sexual life, to hold a job, to live where they choose.

But unlike the lifestyle radicals of the "gay is good" movement, who proclaimed that "coming out" and gay ghettos would provide "liberation now," we warned that a few middle-class enclaves were no protection against the sick morality of bourgeois society. Today, with the "Moral Majority" riding high, even some gay activists are worrying, "Will we have to go back in the closets?" It is ironic that we revolutionary Marxists, bitterly attacked by small radical fringe groups for our so-called "closet rule," a simple statement that our members seek to be known first and foremost for their politics, not their personal sexual lives, end up standing out most clearly in this period as the most consistent defenders of homosexuals and other sexual "deviants" against this reactionary onslaught.

Our hard fight against lifestylism won us a majority of the Red Flag Union, which originated as a Los Angeles-based "Gay liberation-Communist organization" called the Lavender and Red Union in 1974. In 1977 the Red Flag Union and Spartacist League merged our organizations, the culmination of a lengthy political discussion not only on the fight for Trotskyism and our analysis of the Soviet Union, but the need to break from sectoralism. As the Red Flag Union said in its final article announcing the fusion:

"There is no special revolutionary program for homosexuals. The communist program includes demands which address the special oppression of homosexuals. But unlike sectoralists, revolutionaries understand that the fate of homosexuals—like that of any other oppressed group—is determined by the course of the class struggle."

### "Hunger, Sex and Death"

Our consistent refusal to set our "seal of approval" on any particular lifestyle, or to hail as "inherently revolutionary" particular expressions of sexuality, has often been used against us as proof that Marxism is inherently rigid, envisions a straitjacket society of gray sexless little automatons. On the contrary: the Marxian vision of socialist society is one in which infinitely more diverse, rich developments of the human personality will unfold. But under capitalism, utopian experiments with "alternative lifestyles," while they may create the illusion of liberation for the privileged few with the leisure and economic security to try it, pose no challenge to the bourgeois order which hinders and deforms individual human development for the vast mass of humanity in the most elementary ways: the oppression of man by nature and of man by man.

*Women and Revolution* has discussed broad questions of human culture, sexuality and our vision of what a socialist future may look like, because the "woman question" touches on the most intimate aspects of life, affecting the most basic organization of human society. In articles such as "Women, Culture and Class Society," we argued that the deforming effects of racist, sexually oppressive, class-divided capitalist society must inevitably have their reflections even within such idealistic

*continued on next page*



projects as "women's art." At the same time, we fought against the stultifying, false view of "socialism" Stalinists and Maoists have enforced in the deformed and degenerated workers states, which has done much to demoralize and confuse those looking for an alternative to capitalist society.

In arguing such questions with impatient and utopian New Leftists, *Women and Revolution* has often recalled the powerful words of Isaac Deutscher:

"We do not maintain that socialism is going to solve all predicaments of the human race. We are struggling in the first instance with the predicaments that are of man's making and that man can resolve.

"May I remind you that Trotsky, for instance, speaks of three basic tragedies—hunger, sex, and death—besetting man. Hunger is the enemy that Marxism and the modern labor movement have taken on.

"Yes, socialist man will still be pursued by sex and death; but we are convinced that he will be better equipped than we are to cope even with these.... We do not see in socialist man evolution's last and perfect product, or the end of history, but in a sense only the beginning of history."

### Iran: No to the Veil!

Today in much of the world women still face the most barbaric, feudal oppression. Nowhere was the question of women's liberation more starkly posed as literally a choice between barbarism and socialism than in Iran. Uniquely it has been the international Spartacist tendency which has recognized the strategic importance of this question. Criminally, most of the left actually hailed Khomeini's Islamic militants, who keep women in veils, who stone, whip and kill adulterers, homosexuals, all sexual "deviants." Even before Khomeini's victory we called for "Down with the shah! Down with the mullahs!" and for workers revolution. Comrade Fatima Khalil, a communist of Muslim origin, made a tour of the United States sponsored by the Spartacist League, speaking on the brutality of women's oppression under the veil, and the need for socialist

revolution in Iran. In a special issue of *Women and Revolution* (Fall 1979), highlighting Khalil's tour, we pointed out:

"The fight for women's emancipation is a motor force for revolution in Iran. [Khalil] quoted Trotsky on the Eastern woman, the 'slave of slaves': 'There will be no better fighter for the ideas of the Revolution and for the ideas of Communism than the awakened woman worker.' It is in the so-called 'third world' that feminism's penny-ante personalist notion of women's liberation is most patently absurd."

As an SL spokesman said at one of the Fatima Khalil forums:

"It's an oversimplification, but in the Muslim world women's liberation is not a question of who does the dishes; it's a question of life and death for women, of whether you should live in slavery. This struggle is a great motor force which must be centered on the proletariat. Only the proletariat can transcend and at the same time incorporate the appetites for social and national liberation."

Iran demonstrated in the clearest possible form the inability of the weak national bourgeoisie to make even the most minimal modernizations and social reforms without alienating the deeply reactionary forces, which rose up in defense of medieval, savage reaction. Imperialism supports and props up such regimes throughout the "third world"—from Saudi Arabia to El Salvador. The international Spartacist tendency's defense of Iranian women, our fight against Khomeini and his anti-woman, anti-national minority, anti-working-class "Islamic Revolution" is key to crystallizing a revolutionary workers party in Iran.

### Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!

In December 1979, the Soviet Army's invasion of Afghanistan again posed a key test for socialists and those who claim to speak for women's liberation. And again our tendency was virtually unique on the left in recognizing that the question of women's oppression

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

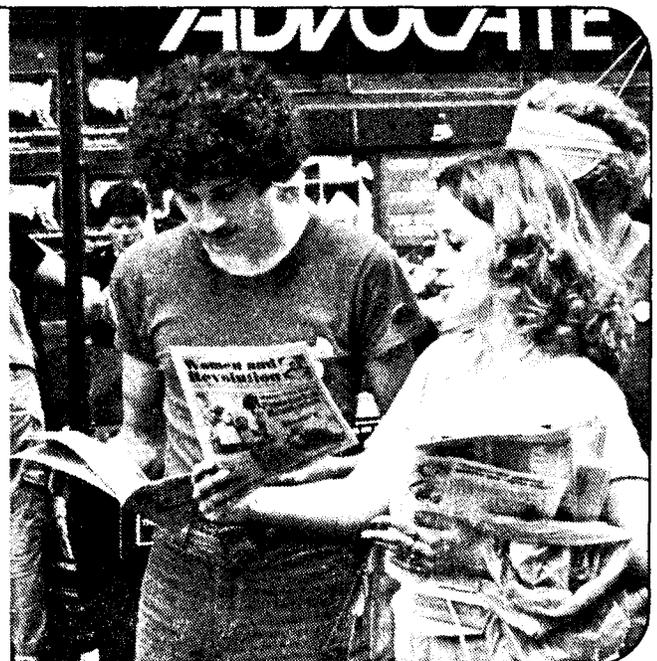
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was a key criterion. As former *W&R* editor D.L. Reissner said last year in our International Women's Day 1980 forums on Afghanistan:

"The question of women's liberation in countries like Iran and Afghanistan engages prejudices and fears so deep that even the mildest cosmetic reforms can evoke a murderous backlash.... [Afghanistan] was probably the first instance of a shooting war in modern history which was ignited specifically by the question of women's liberation.... The fight for the most basic needs of Eastern women—and I mean literacy, education, contraception, an end to forced marriage, freedom from grinding poverty, from legal subjugation and the veil—the fight for the most basic needs of these women is an attack on the very foundations of capitalist society in these regions and poses nothing less than socialist revolution."

Afghanistan posed point blank the question of the Russian Revolution, the nature of the Soviet state today. The defense of the USSR against imperialism, the defense of Afghan women against murderous counter-revolution (whose rallying cry is opposition to female literacy), the historically progressive possibility that backward Afghanistan could be absorbed into the social system of the USSR as a deformed workers state based on collectivized property forms, come together in our slogan, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend Social Gains of October to Afghan Peoples!" As Reissner said in her forums, "the Red Army alone stands between women and the perpetuation of feudal and pre-feudal enslavement."

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 opened up the most liberating potential in human history, promising women freedom at last from subjugation to the family hearth and opening up to them all of social life. Yet the decimation of the proletariat in the cruel civil war and the failure to extend the revolution internationally permitted Stalin's political counterrevolution in the isolated proletarian state. The condition of women is a litmus test of Soviet society (as of every society); the Stalinists' reversal of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary policies toward the abolition of the family is itself a telling argument for workers political revolution to restore workers democracy, open the road to socialist development and place these states at the service of the international class struggle. A key programmatic component of the struggle for political revolution is the defense against imperialism and capitalist restoration of the gains of the Soviet working class in abolishing capitalist exploitation in the USSR (and by extension in the other deformed workers states—Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc.). And this is no academic question. If Reagan/Haig do unleash nuclear holocaust on the world, it will be because of imperialism's unrelenting hostility to the gains of October.

For us as communists, the struggle for women's emancipation is inseparable from the struggle for the emancipation of the working class from capitalist exploitation and oppression. The struggle to break the working class from the social backwardness enforced by its pro-capitalist "leaders," to forge a revolutionary leadership of a conscious working class to fight for state power on behalf of all the oppressed—this is our struggle. The first ten years of *W&R* have helped forge

our tendency as an instrument of that struggle. We look forward to its next decade. Toward Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution! ■

## Comintern Theses...

*(continued from page 9)*

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

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

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

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

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

In other words, only by overthrowing the system of exploitation of man by man, and by supplanting the capitalist mode of production by the Communist organization of industry will the full emancipation of

*continued on next page*

Communist Women's Journals

Center: *Rabotnitsa* (The Working Woman) editorial board in 1917.

Right: *Kommunistka*, Soviet women's journal (No. 7, 1923). Retrospective article shows 1920 editorial board.



Left: *Die Kommunistin* (September 1923), German KPD women's journal edited by Clara Zetkin. Picture shows overthrow of "the rule of usury" by the proletariat.

woman be achieved. Only Communism affords the conditions which are necessary in order that the natural functions of woman—motherhood—should not come into conflict with her social obligations and hinder her creative work for the benefit of society. On the contrary, Communism will facilitate the most harmonious and diversified development of a healthy and beautiful personality that is indissolubly bound together with the whole life and activities of entire society. Communism should be the aim of all women who are fighting for complete emancipation and real freedom.

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

5. The Third Congress of the Comintern confirms the basic proposition of revolutionary Marxism, i.e., that there is no "specific woman question" and no "specific women's movement," and, that every sort of alliance of working women with bourgeois feminism, as well as any support by the women workers of the treacherous tactics of the social-compromisers and opportunists leads to the undermining of the forces of the proletariat, delaying thereby the triumph of the social revolution and the advent of Communism, and thus also postponing the great hour of women's ultimate liberation.

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

In their own interests the masses of proletarian women should support the revolutionary tactics of the

Communist Party and take a most active and direct part in all mass-actions and all forms of civil war on a national and international scope.

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

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

Any support rendered to the Second and Second-and-a-half Internationals hampers the social revolution, delaying the advent of the new order. The more resolutely and uncompromisingly the women masses will turn away from the Second and the Second-and-a-half Internationals, the more certain will be the triumph of the Social Revolution. It is the sacred duty of all women Communists to condemn those who flinch from the revolutionary tactics of the Comintern and to

demand their expulsion from the ranks of the Comintern. The women ought to remember that the Second International never created and never attempted to create any organ, whose task would be to carry on an active struggle for the complete emancipation of woman. The organization of an International alliance of women socialists was started outside the Second International by the initiative of the men workers themselves. The women Socialists who devoted themselves to work among women had neither representation nor a decisive vote in the Second International.

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

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

The place of conscious working women in Eastern and Western countries is under the flag of the Communist International and in the ranks of the Communist Parties of their own countries. All wavering on the part of the working women and the fear to sever connection with the parties of compromise, and the hitherto acknowledged authorities have a pernicious influence on the satisfactory progress of the great proletarian struggle which is assuming the nature of an open and relentless civil war on a World scale.

### Methods and Form of Work Among Women

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

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

2. To recognize the importance of recruiting women into all branches of the active struggle of the proletariat

(including military service for the defence of the proletariat) and into the construction of new forms of society and the organization of industry and life on a communist basis.

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

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

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party committees. This decision is obligatory for all parties attached to the Comintern....

### Work of the Party Amongst Women in Soviet Countries

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

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

In the Soviet Republics the Sections should see that all the regulations of the 8th Congress of Soviets regarding the attraction of working and peasant women to the work of building up and organizing public production, as well as their participation in the work of all those organs which direct, manage, control and organize production should be carried out. The Sections should participate through their representatives and through the Party organs in the elaboration of new laws and exercise an influence on the alteration of such as require much alteration in the interest of the enfranchisement of women. The Sections should take

the greatest interest and show most initiative in the development of those laws which deal with the protection of the labor of women and children.

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

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

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

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

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

Through the organizers working among women elected by the Communist fraction of trade unions, the Sections should assist in the education of the women workers, members of the trade unions, in the spirit of Communism.

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

The Sections should carry out a systematic distribution of auxiliary workers, for all the Soviet, economic and trade union work.

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

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

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

These delegates meetings are formed from factory and shop representatives of a certain region, city or volost. In Soviet Russia, the women delegates are drawn into all kinds of political and economic campaigns. They are sent into different committees in industry, are invited to control Soviet institutions, and used for

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regular work in the Soviet Departments, in the capacity of clerks, for two months (Law of 1921).

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

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

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

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

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

### In Capitalist Countries

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

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

The Committees or Sections must facilitate the work of the wide masses of the women proletarians and



Photo-History Magazine

### Great Flint strike, Detroit, 1936-37, forced GM to recognize UAW: the Women's Emergency Brigade.

peasant women in utilizing their franchise in the interests of the Communist Parties during election to the parliament and to all the public institutions, explaining at the same time the limitations of those rights, in the sense of weakening the capitalist exploitation, promoting enfranchisement of women, and replacing parliamentarism by the Soviet system.

The Committees must also aid the women workers, employees and peasant women to take a most active part in the elections of revolutionary, economic and political soviets of workers deputies, obtaining representation in them; awakening the political activity of the housewives, and carrying on a propaganda of the Soviet idea among the peasant women. The special concern of the Committees must be the realization of the principle of equal pay for equal work. It is the task of the Committee to start a campaign, drawing men and women workers into it, for free, universal education, aiding the women to become highly qualified in their work.

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

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

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

*continued on next page*

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

### In Economically Backward Countries (the East)

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

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

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

The Sections should look for support in their work, first of all, among the large classes of women who are exploited by capitalism in the capacity of workers in home industries (Koustar), as laborers on rice, cotton and other plantations, and assist in the general establishment of communal workshops and home (Koustar) co-operatives; this applies especially to all Eastern peoples living within the borders of Soviet Russia; the Sections should also assist in the general organization of all women engaged in plantation work with the working men united in trade unions.

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

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

Special clubs should be organized for nomadic peoples.

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

practically propagated, in a manner to convince the working women that the former home-life and home-production oppressed and exploited them, while communal labor will emancipate them.

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

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

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

*Notice:* The work among the Eastern women being of great importance, and at the same time representing a new problem for the Communist Parties, the Conference deems it necessary to add to those theses special instructions on the methods of communist propaganda among the women of the Eastern countries, appropriate to their local habits and conditions. ■

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## Italy...

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destine ones. While this referendum leaves untouched the "conscientious objector" clause, it is supportable as an improvement over the existing law.

The result of either of the two right-wing referendums would be a return to dangerous back-alley abortionists and an accompanying increase in the death-rate of women. The "maximal" referendum proposes the total abolition of abortion except in the case of grave physical danger to the woman's life and only within the first 90 days of pregnancy. The second, "minimal" referendum (a clear expression of a defeatist mood among rightists) calls for the illegalization of abortion except in the case of possible death or physical danger, with the right of "conscientious objection" even in life-threatening cases. At the same time it proposes the abolition of information on birth control.

In the face of this reactionary attack against the democratic rights of women, the fake left, led by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and tailed by the feminists; has capitulated to the moralism of the church. The old feminists have grown up, making their peace with society. Earlier slogans such as "Abortion does you good" and "Choose abortion to avoid poisoning your body with contraception" have been replaced with "Women, children and gardens" and "Defend the law in order to defeat abortion"! After the approval of the current law—itsself a maneuver by the DC and PCI to head off a pro-abortion drive by the Radicals, feminists and "far left"—the feminist movement essentially dissolved into squabbling circles and self-help groups, with some organized activity around fighting for new clinics and against sexual violence.

Now these women have come out against all three referendums. The feminist journal *Effe* claims that the existing law guarantees the "self-determination" of women, while the Coordination for the Self-Determination of Women in Milan has announced that the Radicals' proposal to eliminate the 90-day clause would subject women to social pressure to continue the pregnancy! These arguments make no sense, and one can only assume that the feminists are afraid of losing the existing law when the "confused masses" go to vote and are confronted by three different, awkwardly worded proposals. Thus in opportunist fear the feminists end up to the right of the bourgeois Radicals on a question of women's rights.

In September, women from the PCI, together with those from the Socialist Party, the Liberals, Republicans and bourgeois social democrats, formed the National Committee for the Defense of Law No. 194 (CDL). This popular-frontist formation immediately issued a communique stating, "The painful reality of abortion cannot be overcome by destroying this law" (*Dossier Donne* No. 3). The communique then goes on to urge Catholic women, in particular, to support the existing law because it tends to prevent abortions!

Of course for the women of the bourgeoisie, safe abortions from competent physicians have always been available. The majority of those who continue to have back-street abortions (estimated at 800,000 per year by *Corriere Della Sera* [19 January 1981]) have done so due

to the requirement of parental consent for minors, the complete abuse of the "conscientious objector" clause and the one-week think-it-over moral pressure.

Wobbling between pressure from its bourgeois bloc partners on the one hand and the church's crusade against "murderers" on the other, the PCI has gone so far as to claim "We are against abortion and we want to make a contribution toward changing a society burdened by so many death-causing aspects" and "We have not put and are not now putting into discussion the right of the Church and of the Pope to reaffirm and defend the religious and moral principle of Catholicism" (*Com Nuovi Tempi*, 10 May 1980). The PCI fears a political confrontation with the bourgeoisie similar to the one provoked by the referendum on divorce in 1974 (see *Workers Vanguard* No. 45, 24 May 1974). Referring to the Radicals' referendum as "injustifiable rashness and a grave error" that could become "an obstacle to legislative reform and provoke electoral competition with the risk of a political and ideological collision" (*Dossier Donne* No. 3), the PCI shows its desire to maintain bourgeois stability.

The Lega Comunista Rivoluzionaria (LCR), Italian section of the Pabloite United Secretariat, has found itself caught by its opportunism between the Stalinists and the feminists. It has called for a no vote on all three referendums without mentioning why. And its only criticism of the popular-frontist CDL is that "some elements" have only an "abstract interest" in abortion and have never really participated in the women's movement!

### For Free Abortion on Demand!

Alone among the left, the Lega Trotskista d'Italia (LTI), sympathizing section of the iSt, has called for a break from the CDL. Coalitions between the left and sections of the ruling class can occur only at the expense of revolutionary program and ensure that the struggle will stay securely within reformist bounds.

We call for a yes vote to the Radicals' referendum while criticizing its limitations. As communists, we continue to agitate for free abortion on demand by competent medical personnel, for the unlimited dispensation of contraceptive information (including in public schools) and for free, safe and effective contraception. At the same time we insist upon the need for extensive maternity benefits, paid maternity leave before and after childbirth, free quality health care for all and free 24-hour childcare at the workplace so that working women can have children without losing their jobs.

Recognizing that the current attack on abortion rights is part of a broader reactionary campaign on the part of the Catholic hierarchy, we highlight our call for separation of church and state. In particular, we demand the end of the Lateran Treaty, a deal enacted during the fascist Mussolini regime, recognizing the Vatican as an independent sovereign state.

As the latest rightist campaign against abortion makes clear, reforms are always reversible under capitalism. The oppression of women will only be ended under socialism when the family as an institution is replaced and the economy run for the benefit of society as a whole. ■

Report from Italy:

# Fight Pope's Anti-Abortion Campaign!

Fall 1980 Italian pro-abortion rally. Woman's sign attacks pope: "Wojtyla—In Poland there has been an abortion law for 15 years; why don't you 'interfere' in your own country?"



Mordenti/AGF

The following article is a contribution to Women and Revolution from the Lega Trotskista d'Italia, sympathizing section of the international Spartacist tendency.

\* \* \* \* \*

MILAN—When 50,000 demonstrators filled the streets of Rome on 10 January to protest recent attacks on abortion rights in Italy, everyone asked the same question: Is this the rebirth of the women's movement? But long gone are the provocative slogans of the feminists, and a more sober atmosphere reigns.

The current resurgence of activity is the result of a massive reactionary campaign against abortion spearheaded by the pope and the Right to Life Movement, with the political support of the Christian Democrats (DC). The right wing claims their offensive was forced on them by the bourgeois Radical Party's referendum, which seeks liberalization of the existing abortion law. By August the Right to Life Movement had collected 100,000 signatures for two referendums of its own, both with the aim of destroying the gains made in limited legalization of abortion.

In this homeland of papal reaction, there are 60,000 priests, 15,000 nuns and one million members of various religious organizations. And the aggressively anti-communist pope Wojtyla is mobilizing his resources in the service of the anti-abortion forces. His inflammatory speeches have raised the number of signatures on the two referendums to 400,000. Priests visit nursing homes to urge old women to "sign against the law that kills babies," while private television stations directly linked to the church disseminate misinformation.

As its authority erodes in an increasingly secularized world, the church directs its appeal more and more to the most backward sections of society. The south of Italy, burdened by economic misery, has been the stronghold of the DC and Catholic reaction. Official statistics for physicians who refuse to perform abortions under the present law's "conscientious objector"

clause are double that of the north. In all of Sicily there exists only one abortion clinic.

With the decay of capitalism and the breakdown of bourgeois morality, the Catholic hierarchy's proscriptions on sexual activity have become ever more frenzied. The church's ultimate solution was made clear by the pope in a particularly hysterical and disgusting speech in October: "Do not commit adultery. But I tell you: whoever looks at a woman desirously has already committed adultery in his heart. Whoever looks at his wife with lust commits adultery in his heart." The church dictates sex for procreation only, and intends to enforce procreation on unwilling women by law. Underlying this campaign, like those against birth control and divorce, is the defense and maintenance of the family, an institution which provides capitalism with a means of social control of the working masses.

## Vote Yes on the Radicals' Referendum!

Enacted in May of 1978, Italy's present abortion law permits free, state-subsidized abortions for women over 18 during the first 90 days of pregnancy for "economic, social, family or psychological" reasons. While this law is one of the most liberal in Western Europe, its effectiveness has been greatly curtailed by the church, which has threatened physicians with excommunication for performing abortions and instructed them to utilize the "conscientious objector" clause.

The Radical Party's current referendum calls for free abortion within 90 days without limitation as to age or reason, without intervention by doctors or husbands, as well as legally extending the 90-day period. It proposes to drop all reference to state jurisdiction of "responsible maternity" and insists that abortion is not a method of contraception. Its stated aim is to increase the number of legal abortions, thereby decreasing clan-

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