

Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League X-523

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On Black Women in South Africa



**Smash Apartheid!
For Workers Revolution!**

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Photo: William Campbell

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Letters

“Even the most beautiful girl in France...”

London, England
12th August, 1985

Dear Editors,

I am aware that my comments on your editorial note “A Social and Anthropological Journal” in the issue no. 28 are late. My excuse is that I did not get the journal until last week when I attended a Spartacist League meeting for the first time.

I would like to point out something in that note which should be eliminated as something totally opposed to the principles of truly free and classless society, namely the use of stereotypes. The capitalist class system upholds and encourages their use in order to enforce that system. Women especially suffer from that; their looks or their housewifely attributes are emphasized thus ensuring the continuity of the slavery of women.

The stereotype used in the note is that of a woman as a beautiful object, her setting in France giving the picture sexual overtones. The mention of “the intellectual limitations” in the next sentence indirectly enforces the idea of intellect being outside the limits for women. The words about “the most beautiful girl” being put in the mouth of “every feminist in the room” puzzles me: I cannot imagine (my lack of imagination?) any feminist saying that. Furthermore, the feminist trying “to shoot” the speaker down with those words and in spite of this shooting him saying the same thing “every national conference” suggests the ineffectuality of all this shooting, the ineffectuality of the feminists, of the women.

The longer the use of stereotypes is prolonged the longer the negative attitudes persist in the society. Surely it is time to revolutionize our attitudes and our language and not go along with the capitalist conventions any longer. I am aware of all the difficulties for us in shaking off the wrong attitudes and the wrong use of language as we (at least I was) were brought up within

these conventions. They are ingrained in us and consequently we do not always realize we are using them. All the more reason for us to be watchful.

I look forward to receiving future issues of *Women and Revolution*.

With best wishes,
Irene Sointu

W&R replies: Admittedly some jokes don't travel well (as somebody commented, Americans and English are one people separated by a common language). But it appears that our reader's feminist preconceptions enabled her to simply miss the point.

The letter takes exception to this remark made by *W&R* Editorial Board member Jim Robertson about our paper in August 1983 (his full remarks were published in *W&R* No. 28, Spring 1984):

“Every national conference I say this, and I always get in trouble, because every feminist in the room always tries to shoot me down: ‘Even the most beautiful girl in France can give no more than she's got.’ So I think we have relatively failed to exploit *Women and Revolution*, but it's because of the intellectual limitations of our organization.”

W&R, he said, ought to be the social and anthropological journal of our party, “the open journal for every question of human experience, because when you touch the woman question, you touch the being of us all.” But our small party doesn't have the scientific and intellectual resources to fully use this journal. Robertson recalled an earlier period when young Trotskyists had complained to *International Socialist Review* editor Murry Weiss that the old journals read better than *ISR*; those old papers had Leon Trotsky and others writing for them, Weiss replied, “now all you got is me—I'm sorry!”

Our reader doubtless assumes that *W&R* is a project “for women only” and therefore the responsibility of the women comrades. We are Marxists, not New Left sectoralists; *W&R* is produced under the direction of the SL Central Committee and senior comrades of both sexes are heavily involved. The objective limitations that were noted are those of the international communist movement of today, not as the letter assumes those of “the women.”

On “language,” indeed we will not tolerate the obscene, racist, degrading epithets used to insult and humiliate women, blacks and others. We don't think the joke is degrading to women. The questions of style raised by the letter are, however, not that simple. Feminists, along with others, tend to believe that an alteration of “language” and “stereotypes” can have more than a tangential effect on soul-destroying oppression in the real, material, social world. Where this is not just empty liberal hypocrisy, it suggests a utopian belief that a non-oppressing culture can somehow be created within this society as it exists—e.g., the old idea of “proletarian culture,” the feminist notion of a “women's culture.” As Marxists, we

Women and Revolution

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Commission for Work Among Women

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understand that reactionary aspects of the cultural superstructure can only be attacked at the root, through smashing the capitalist class system to which oppression and degradation are fundamental.

Toward that end, we are building a party. Our press aims to reach potential supporters of that party through communicating our ideas as vividly as we can, using the culture that exists, which is indeed bourgeois culture. Jokes are particularly a rich source of material for Marxists, because humor derives from exposure of social contradiction. Our aim is not to create an artificial, hence antiseptic, "liberated" zone in the columns of our paper, but to forge a party of women and men to smash the capitalist system and thereby open the road to human freedom.

Hail Red Army In Afghanistan!

July 1985

To the Editors:

Women and Revolution has stood proudly on the side of Soviet-backed Afghanistan against Washington's anti-Communist and anti-democratic alliance of feudal tribal chiefs. While most of the left gave open or backhanded support to Reagan's "freedom fighters" by calling for a withdrawal of Soviet troops, *Women and Revolution* and the Spartacist League raised the slogan: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!"

A vivid illustration of the horrifying daily life the wives of those "freedom fighters" experience was



Planeta Publishers

**Afghan women
learn to read
under protection
of Soviet Army.**

given in an interview with Mandana Kerschbaumer of *Amnesty for Women*, which appeared in the West German leftist newspaper *taz* (28 January 1985). *Amnesty for Women* had begun an aid program for Afghan women in Pakistan refugee camps. Look what happened. Intense hostility from the Afghan mullahs stopped even this bourgeois organization from continuing its project and taught those directly involved what "upholding the freedom of poor little Afghanistan" means. Here are some excerpts translated from

the article:

taz: Why did you choose Pakistan in particular for your first *Amnesty for Women* project?

Kerschbaumer: Cheryl Benard and Edit Schläffer were in Pakistan in early 1982. When they came back, they gave an extensive report on the grim conditions under which women in the Afghan refugee camps live: locked up in a few square meters of room and fed only with the worst food, ostensibly because the donations and assistance intended for them are much too good for women. Finally, the Americans sent Australian protein biscuits, because the Afghans thought they were just stale bread—so they gave them to the women. European women's groups donated money intended to establish women's centers and women's clinics but the money sent was spent instead on male projects, for example a car repair station....

taz: What was the general state of health of the women and children in the camps?

Kerschbaumer: A high percentage of the women suffered from anemia, TB and gynecological diseases. These problems certainly originated from malnourishment, bad hygienic conditions and from the fact that even pregnant women have to fulfill their daily workload....

taz: In addition to your health program, did you consider starting an educational program, such as a literacy program, for example?

Kerschbaumer: For heavens sake! That would have cost our lives! We certainly didn't even ever explicitly talk about a women's program. The men and the mullahs would never have tolerated it! We had to approach the women very carefully, talking about care for babies, nurseries and so on. To teach women how to read or write would have been much too dangerous. By the end of the program some people thought I was a communist infiltrator in any event. Some Communist teachers had already been shot—not least because following the Soviet occupation there had been campaigns to educate girls."

And here's another report of interest to your readers: the *New York Times* of 8 July 1985 reports on the Soviet Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan: "Of all the many parts of the Soviet empire, it may well be Central Asia that has made the longest social and economic leaps under Russian and Communist rule.... Education, medicine and transportation have spread to the smallest villages. Tashkent, the biggest city of the region and the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan, has grown into a modern city with a sumptuous subway and impressive contemporary architecture."

While in Afghanistan over 90 percent of the people are illiterate, in neighboring Soviet Uzbekistan the rate of literacy is probably higher than in the U.S. There is one doctor for every 380 people in Uzbekistan, while in Afghanistan the rate is one for every 20,000!

Marxists hold that the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of the general emancipation of society. The experience of the volunteers of *Amnesty for Women* confirms the correctness of *Women and Revolution's* position: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!"

Comradely,
Silvia Lenz

Kim Kilmer



17 June 1953—24 January 1986



Workers Vanguard

Our comrade Kimberly Sue Kilmer died tragically on 24 January 1986. She was only 32, but had been a member of our movement for almost eleven years. She died of carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty gas oven in her San Francisco home—it was “landlord murder.” Spartacist comrades, concerned when Kim’s companion

Paul Costan missed an appointment, went to the couple’s house in time to get Paul to the hospital; he has now substantially recovered. Kim, a small slender woman, was already dead.

Kim was a socialist all her adult life. “The oppression of blacks in Detroit, where Kim grew up, was a formative factor in her

worldview,” a long-time friend recalled. Kim joined the Spartacus Youth League in April 1975 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and first joined the SL two years later in Boston, where she was youth organizer. Kim worked in the Detroit and Los Angeles branches and in New York as part of the *Young Spartacus* comp crew. In a brief period of demoralization in 1979 she resigned, but soon came back hard, actively selling the paper in Los Angeles, where she rejoined in 1981. In L.A. and then in S.F. she was a tenacious, driving comrade and took active responsibility in pushing forward our press and our involvement in militant labor-black protest against cop and racist terror.

In the summer of 1985 Kim and Paul, an active trade unionist, visited Nicaragua to show solidarity with and learn from the struggles of the working people of that embattled country targeted by U.S. imperialism. On her return Kim presented a perceptive report to the Bay Area district committee (see *Workers Vanguard* No. 396, 31 January). Kim’s remarks paid special attention to the condition of women and to how the U.S. war drive has led to the impoverishment of the population, illuminating the necessity for thoroughgoing social revolution.

It’s not easy to be a communist in America, and the bitter tragedy of Kim’s death is that she had put in that hard decade of work it takes to make a seasoned communist cadre, and was visibly growing and maturing politically. Her death is a widely and bitterly felt loss in our party. Comrades came from New York, Cleveland, Chicago, Atlanta and the West Coast to attend her funeral held in Farmington Hills, Michigan. *Women and Revolution* joins the Political Bureau of the Spartacist League in extending heartfelt condolences to her family and her companion.

Comintern Journal, 1921-1925: Communist International's Work Among Women

Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale, 1921-25
Edited by Klaus Aresti, Published by VTK Publishers
Frankfurt, West Germany, 1983

Women and Revolution welcomes the publication of four volumes containing the complete reprints of the journal of the Women's Secretariat of the Communist International, *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (*Communist Women's International*) in the original German. Published monthly from 1921 to 1925, the journal sought to provide revolutionary leadership to communist women cadres internationally. For several years, it was a high-grade propaganda organ, an organizing tool in the internationalist tradition of Lenin and Trotsky's Third International.

Articles appeared about a range of proletarian struggles—from the great British miners strike of 1921 to "The Harsh Life of Women Farmers in Nebraska and Wyoming and Their Demands." The journal dealt with a spectrum of social questions such as "Child Suicide: A Devastating Accusation Against the Bourgeois Order" and "Prostitution in Vienna," articles on infant mortality and women in politics. Systematic reports were made of events in the international communist movement, with detailed reports on conferences of

international women's organizations and various bodies of the Third International. Historical articles, such as the intriguing "Women as the Vanguard of the Great Rice Insurrection in Japan in 1918" by communist leader Sen Katayama, and literary articles appeared in just about every issue. Pieces such as "The Fascist Women's Movement in Italy" and "French Imperialism's Rapacious Attack on the Ruhr and the Danger of a New War" oriented the communist militants in a class-struggle approach to current urgent questions. There are many articles on the working women's struggles for unionization and equality.

Development of the Communist Women's Journal

The editor of the journal *Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (KF) was German communist Clara Zetkin. As a leader of the German Social Democratic Party, Zetkin had played a vital role in the development of a revolutionary Marxist position on the woman question which later became a model for the Communist International. In 1891 she helped to found *Die Gleichheit* (*Equality*), the newspaper of the SPD devoted particularly to the question of women's emancipation. In the years before the outbreak of World War I, SPD left-wingers like Zetkin had fought persistently for special work among women on a high propagandistic level. They were also among those who defended their revolutionary proletarian outlook against all forms of narrowness and chauvinism, from trade unionism, parliamentarism and nationalism to male chauvinism and feminism. After the historic betrayal of the SPD, voting for war credits in the imperialist war, *Die Gleichheit* became known as a voice for internationalism, opposing the imperialist war in defiance of the SPD leadership. Many of the left wing joined Rosa Luxemburg in forming the Spartacist group in 1916, precursor of the German Communist Party formed in 1919 which affiliated with the Third International. Clara Zetkin was fired as editor of *Die Gleichheit* by the SPD leadership, which published it for a short time as a depoliticized and chauvinist magazine.

The founding of the journal KF continued the work of *Die Gleichheit*, broadening it and thus realizing one of the tasks set forth in the "Resolution on Work Among Women" adopted at the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921. This congress took place three years after the conclusion of the devastating First World War and four years after the successful



SPD women's journal *Die Gleichheit* became forum for internationalist, anti-war left wing. Comintern journal *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* extended special work among women internationally.

G.P. Putnam's Sons



**Moscow 1921:
Clara Zetkin and
Alexandra Kollontai
(seated left of center)
preside over Congress
of Communist Women;
Third Congress
of Communist
International,
convened next day,
adopted resolutions
on work among women.**

proletarian revolution in Russia which created the first workers state, the Soviet Union. The year 1921 marked the end of the four-year Civil War when the internal counterrevolution, in league with 14 capitalist armies, was defeated by the Soviet Red Army. But internationally, the working class had suffered important defeats in Italy and Germany. It was a time of retrenchment, a time of defensive struggle. In the words of the Theses adopted at the Congress, "On the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern":

"It is absolutely incontestable that on a world scale the open revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for power is at present passing through a stoppage, a slowing down in tempo. But in the very nature of things, it was impossible to expect that the revolutionary offensive after the war, insofar as it failed to result in an immediate victory, should go on developing uninterrupted along an upward curve."

In this period of retrenchment, the International determined that it was imperative to draw into the Communist parties layers of the oppressed which had hitherto been outside of organized politics or part of the mass reformist parties. The Third Congress had adopted the "Theses on Tactics," a manual for splitting the centrist and reformist mass parties and winning over their proletarian base. Central to this task was winning the Communist parties of the world to the importance of mobilizing and organizing proletarian women and youth into the revolutionary struggle. Trotsky motivated this task in his presentation to the Third Congress:

"Millions of new workers, particularly women workers, drawn into industry during the war, have brought with them into the proletariat not only their petty-bourgeois prejudices but also their impatient aspirations for better conditions of life....

"All these layers of the proletariat, so diverse in origin and character, have been and are being drawn into the postwar movement neither simultaneously nor homogeneously. Hence the fluctuations, the flows and ebbs, the offensives and retreats in the revolutionary struggle.

But the overwhelming majority of the proletarian masses is being rapidly welded together by the shattering of old illusions, by the terrible uncertainty of existence, by the autocratic domination of the trusts, by the bandit methods of the militarized state. This multimillion-headed mass is seeking a firm and lucid leadership, a clear-cut program of action and thus creates the premises for the decisive role which the closely welded and centralized Communist Party is destined to play."

Special Work Among Women

The communists understood that winning working women to communism would require special tools. Clara Zetkin motivated the resolution which ordered all sections to establish women's commissions to undertake special work among women:

"We see clearly the residue of thousands of years of subjugation on the souls and psyches of women. This is why, despite the common organization, special organs and measures are necessary to reach the masses of women and to organize and educate them as communists.

"For such organs we propose to establish women's agitational committees or commissions—whatever the parties wish to call them—on the leadership and administrative party levels. And these commissions should exist from the leading bodies of the local groups up to the highest central leadership. We call these organs women's commissions because their task is to undertake work among women but not because we wish to stress that they consist only of women. Quite the contrary. We welcome the participation of men in the women's commissions, with their greater political experience and skill. To us, the crucial thing is that these commissions work among the masses of women in a planned and permanent way; that they take a stand against all the misery, and on all subjects of interest to the lives of women; that they intervene in all spheres of social life for the welfare of the millions and millions of proletarian and semi-proletarian women with knowledge and energy."

It was to the task of guiding and strengthening these party bodies that the International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International devoted their journal

Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale. The journal reflected the living struggle of the international communist movement, deriving its existence from the contributions of correspondents elected by the Communist party in each country. Through these contributions, the pages of *KF* became a treasure trove of direct political experience, recording the struggle of the Communist parties of the world on questions of particular interest to women. The richness of the political debates of the Third International reflected through the struggles in various countries make fascinating reading. Particular attention was devoted to polemics against the Social Democratic false leaders of the working class and the bourgeois feminist movement.

By publishing the actual decrees of the new Soviet state on the protection of mother and child, abortion, education and a myriad of other social questions, the journal showed concretely how the basis for the emancipation of women was being laid in the Soviet Union through the replacement of social responsibili-

ties of the nuclear family. This was the future toward which the Communist International was looking. Throughout these volumes the urgent need for defense of the Soviet Union in light of these enormous social accomplishments is highlighted.

In 1925, the character of the journal changed radically. In the handful of issues published that year, the revolutionary edge was blunted and the pages were filled with empty tributes to Lenin, nationalistic declarations of allegiance to the Soviet Union and dull statistical tracts. Stalinism had destroyed the Communist International as a revolutionary force, substituting the false doctrine of "socialism in one country." *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* was discontinued in 1925, one of the victims of Stalinism.

Women and Revolution is proud to introduce these important volumes to our readers. From time to time we hope to publish translations of selected pieces. In this issue, we publish excerpts from Clara Zetkin's *Preface*, printed in the first number of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, April 1921.

Clara Zetkin's Introduction to the Communist Women's International

This is not the journal of a communist women's movement of a single country; it is the common international organ of the communist women's movement of all countries. And this imparts special significance to *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*: presently it is the only international women's journal not to regard the problems of the so-called woman question from the shaky ground of the bourgeois view of society and from the perspective of the women's righters, but to base its viewpoint on the weather-hardened granite of the socialist, communist worldview, oriented unswervingly toward the liberation of humanity through communism. Thus it is a creation of the revolutionary workers movement itself, its most advanced, perceptive, confident and energetic component: the Communist International.

Certainly, the internationally oriented and distributed *Die Gleichheit*, the women's journal of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, sought to join the proletarian women's movement of the various countries on a common basis and to combine forces to achieve a common goal. But after all, for the most part the journal necessarily remained the paper of the German Social Democracy and could be an international publication only in its "secondary function," an "ersatz publication."

No thought was more remote from the Second International than establishing an international women's publication, even on the most modest level. Despite its fundamental commitment to equal rights for the sexes it tolerated the proletarian women's movement more as unavoidable and secondary, if not as a necessary evil, rather than evaluating it according to its historical worth. Representatives of the Women's



Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus, DDR

Revolutionary communist Clara Zetkin fought in SPD for propaganda and agitation among women, continuing this work with Comintern women's journal.

International were admitted to its conferences more or less sympathetically, but they had no statutory right to participate. The Women's International had no representation on the Secretariat of the Second International. It required world war, the destruction and shattering of the capitalist economy and bourgeois society to its very depths; it required world revolution beginning its mighty march of victory across the entire earth, crushing everything old and rotten under its iron heel and creating with bountiful hands new things demanding life; it required the power of Soviet Russia, the first state built by free and creative labor; it required a break from the chaos of betrayed principles and the new perception of the Communist International amidst

these historic events, in fierce combat against its bourgeois mortal enemies and in passionate, painful struggles with those proletarians lacking insight, weak in perception and misled—all this was required for this revolutionary vanguard, nucleus of the working class, to fully value the proletarian women's movement.

As an organization of action the Communist International necessarily came to an enhanced appreciation of the participation of the masses of women in the revolutionary struggle, in revolutionary construction. As an organization of action it gleaned its insight and strength from the lessons of the past as well as from present experience, in particular in Soviet Russia where the revolution, embodied in flesh and blood, has set about overturning society. There the truth of the fact—to which Socialists of all countries and tendencies give mere lip service—was proven and continues to be completely proven in practice: without the informed, spirited and self-sacrificing participation of broad masses of women, capitalism cannot be conquered and eradicated, nor can communism be realized. Soviet Russia's rule by sword and soup ladle could reach an unprecedented level of sacrifice and heroism and thus its victorious affirmation only through the full participation of masses of women. Dire necessity called the Russian women to every battle station, into every field of economic and cultural activity. If they served the revolution in greater numbers and with more dedication, this was because they met much less prejudice than women of any other country. In Russia, the struggle for the full equality of women, as the revolution itself, has always been the great cause of men and women in common.

Under the historic leadership of the Communist Party of Soviet Russia, and with its great example, the Third International was bound to undertake that which the Second International had failed to do. On the basis of a unified and consistently executed plan the communist women were integrated into the Communist parties nationally and internationally into the world

proletariat's great revolutionary fighting instrument.

Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale must fulfill another important task. It is the publication for researching, exploring and clarifying the various questions and phenomena which particularly touch women's lives. This transitional period, in which an old, decaying society is wrestling with a new, emerging one, poses those questions and phenomena daily. Facts and perceptions storm by us. Social conditions which only yesterday still seemed to fetter the emergence of women are scattered today like dry tinder. In the masses of women, desires, wishes, will, needs arise great, naked and commanding, which were in the past small, timid, hidden, hardly breathing, subconscious. The revolutionary social situation is revolutionizing the psyche of women, and this demands social conditions which will provide them fertile soil, fresh air and warm sunshine to grow, to exist and to act according to their own capacity. In all fields women are beginning to pose their right to exist against the anachronistic, dead or dying social forms and conditions. *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* must pursue and answer from the stable standpoint of historical materialism the questions which thus arise. It is the duty of the women comrades of all countries with clear perception and firm will to channel the small, weak springs of women's new, revolutionary will to life into the powerful stream of the proletarian world revolution. ■

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Anti-Porn Censors, Abortion Clinic Bombers: Reagan's Sex Witchhunt

With *Deep Throat* star Linda Lovelace (aka Marchiano) standing in for Whittaker Chambers, and the genuinely obscene feminist anti-porn crusader Andrea Dworkin billed as a "civil rights advocate," the nation's top cop Edwin Meese wanted to stage the 1950s HUAC traveling road show all over again. Only this time the object of the witchhunt wasn't reds—not so abundant in Reagan's America—but sex, which apparently still lingers on despite the best efforts of the administration. In the spirit of Jesse Helms's recent declaration that there shall be no more tax exemptions for organized witches and agents of the devil, the attorney general's Commission on Pornography has been holding hearings in Washington, D.C., Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago and New York City. Their aim: to establish that pornography causes marital infidelity, divorce, child molesting, rape, incest, serial murders, hairy palms and zits.

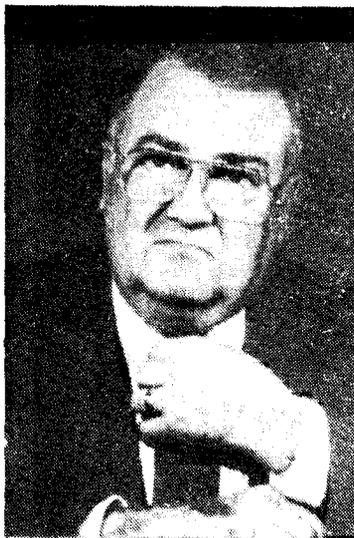
A housewife in Houston wailed about her husband, "He had more sex with pictures in magazines than he did with me." And when they brought the hearings to "sin city" January 21-22, a clergyman in New York recounted the testimony of a convicted rapist: "I've got to stay away from those dirty magazines. They are what gets me started." A churchgoing Christian accidentally got a peek at *Playboy* and before you know it he was mailing pictures of sex acts committed with his own children all around the country. It seems we're headed for a new version of the Dan White "Twinkies defense" (for murdering San Francisco mayor George Moscone and supervisor Harvey Milk): *Playboy* made me do it.

It all sounded like another remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and anthropologist Carole Vance correctly identified it as a "sex panic." The hysterical atmosphere at the hearings was exemplified by one

Mormon woman's testimony that pornography was a greater threat to America than Pearl Harbor or nuclear war since, once viewed, it "will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life." Pointing the finger even more ludicrously, a fundamentalist missionary testified, "The witchcrafts of Hollywood have seduced America since the 20's," and named Bob Hope and John Wayne as directly responsible for today's social ills!

With a commission of witchhunters hand-picked by Meese and chaired by the notorious Henry Hudson, who as a Virginia vice prosecutor closed down every adult bookstore in his jurisdiction, not many supporters of the First Amendment or even sanity made it onto the witness stand. The first day of the New York hearings was composed almost entirely of cops and FBI agents. But it didn't go entirely to the liking of the commissioners. Former *Penthouse* pet Dominique Maure, a stunning example of American womanhood, stated: "I'm testifying because I'm not a victim of what's called pornography. It's been a great benefit, and it hasn't destroyed my marriage to a Long Island policeman." Well-known Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz attacked the Commission's definition of pornography, declaring that being sexually aroused "is as American as apple pie."

Under pressure from Reagan reaction, a split seems to have occurred among feminists. While groups like WAP (Women Against Pornography) have been competing with far right yahoos in the "war against porn," even staging an obviously prearranged takeover of the mikes for a half-time show during one of the New York hearing breaks, the liberal Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (F.A.C.T.) picketed outside with



Downing/Newsweek

U.S. top cop Meese (left) wants to criminalize sex. Anti-censorship feminists' guerrilla theatre ridicules Meese porn hearings in New York, January 21.



Workers Vanguard

chants of "Stop Sexism, Not Sex!" Inside F.A.C.T. sat through hours of hearings with large yellow and black cardboard signs reading "CENSORED" across their chests...until the Commission indeed censored the signs on the grounds that they might be intimidating to witnesses.

This ludicrous (and expensive) circus is designed to overturn the results of the 1970 President's Commission Report on Obscenity, which found no connection between pornography and violent or "anti-social" behavior. Reagan's declared "war" on organized crime has singled out pornography, prostitution, gambling and drug use as Mob activities to be stamped out. But, in fact, these are "crimes without victims"—like "sodomy," "fornication" and "adultery"—punished by the capitalist state in order to ensure social conformity and persecute deviants. At the New York hearings, FBI agents complained about the lack of tough porn laws and difficulty in convicting; one said the RICO laws should be used more, noting you can almost always get a conviction under the "conspiracy" dragnet. RICO, Reagan/Meese's favorite all-purpose frame-up law, is increasingly being used to go after anyone on the government's shit list; trade unions, leftist organizations, even, occasionally, white-collar businesses, are all equated in the Justice Department as rackets controlled by gangsters. Among other draconian provisions, RICO allows the government to seize its victims' property, as "proceeds of crime," before a trial has even taken place.

The Commission's report is to be issued in June 1986, in time to whip up public hysteria for the fall election

campaigns. Congressmen are to be intimidated by fear of being labeled "soft on smut" into passing even more reactionary laws controlling private life and the media. Proposed legislation under consideration by the Commission includes strengthening the 1984 Crime Control Act to allow for enormous fines against "pornographers" trafficking across state lines, to put them out of business; a national data bank of "sex offenders"; and a law against sexually stimulating "rubber goods"—including vibrators, which commissioners claim electrocute people!

The feds have already targeted "X-rated" videocassettes: FBI agents have raided "mom and pop" video stores across the country, handcuffing the proprietors and seizing customer lists. According to *Video* magazine (January 1986), the only conviction so far from all these busts was a poor clerk at the World News Stand in Abilene, Texas, given a 30-day suspended sentence for renting an X-rated tape. To the New Right Mrs. Grundys (Mrs. Grundy was an intolerant prude in an 18th century English play), VCRs and cable TV, which bring "smut" right into the living room, are the new Sodom and Gomorrah. Groups like Morality in Media want to ban *all* nudity from cable TV, including standard Hollywood films with nude scenes. They can't stand the fact that now people don't have to go to some seedy red-light district to enjoy pornography; women, many of whom would hesitate to go into an X-rated theater, now make up a large proportion of the X-rated cassette market. So the feds may find they've got no mandate for this one: as *Video* noted, in 1984 an estimated 55 million "adult" videotape transactions took place—3 million more than the number of votes that re-elected Reagan.

But the fact that "pornography" is now an \$8 billion a year business—i.e., people *like* it—just seems to add fury to the determination of the petty ayatollahs in their campaign to stamp out sex. Meese has granted \$734,000 to one Dr. Judith A. Reisman to conduct an official Justice Department "content analysis" of *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Hustler*. This mad doctor, a former songwriter for *Captain Kangaroo*, has declared that Hugh M. Hefner is "every bit as dangerous as Hitler" (*Film Comment*, October 1985).

And last July the House of Representatives passed an amendment intended to halt the publication of a Braille edition of *Playboy* by the Library of Congress. The sponsor of this incredible measure ranted on the floor of Congress against *Playboy's* purported "talk about wanton idleness, of wanton and illicit sex" (*New York Times*, 5 December 1985). Can this be for real? As TV satirist Mark Russell commented, "They actually want to take away *Playboy* from the only people who read the articles."

As anyone knows whose mind has not been hopelessly deranged by fundamentalist rubbish, as "pornography" goes, *Playboy* is pretty tame stuff. The magazine has nonetheless become a special target of the New Right, who seem to view it as the granddaddy of them all. Undoubtedly the contents of the magazine, which champion First Amendment rights and the right to privacy in one's sex life, please them no more than do the erotic photographs and dirty jokes.

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Chenet/Newsweek

Leave our VCRs alone! Now men and women can enjoy pornography in the safety and comfort of their homes.

Blind people evidently do not appreciate these guardians of their morality. Complaining of "blatant, paternalistic censorship" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 December 1985), several organizations of the blind joined with the American Library Association and Playboy Enterprises, Inc. in a lawsuit seeking to overturn the Congressional ban.

Anti-Sex Crusade Targets Everybody

The government's aim in its war on sex isn't just to keep people from having a good time. In periods of rampant reaction, the manipulation of sexual anxieties by the state has been a favorite tactic to regiment the population through guilt and paranoia. Under 1950s McCarthyism the witchhunting of gays employed by the government paralleled the purge of alleged "reds" in the State Department. Thousands lost their jobs. At the University of Michigan, for example, the number of faculty fired for alleged homosexuality appears to rival the number fired as communists. The lie that homosexuals are child molesters was deliberately exploited to whip up public hysteria against gays.

Today similar manipulation of fears over "child sexual abuse" acts to make childcare appear as a sinister plot by pornographers. The consequent drop in childcare programs is exactly what Reagan wants: he thinks a woman belongs at home with the kids, anyway—never mind that no one can live on one salary anymore, or that many women are raising children on their own.

Hysteria over the terrible disease AIDS is being deliberately manipulated by the anti-sex bigots to impose their views of "one man on one woman for life" on everyone. Incidents of "gay-bashing" are on the rise, while laws forbidding gay sex are reconfirmed. A federal appeals court recently reinstated a Texas sodomy law "in view of the strong objections to

homosexual conduct, which has prevailed in Western culture for the last seven centuries" (*San Francisco Examiner*, 27 August 1985). Catholic archbishop John J. O'Connor and myriad fundamentalist preachers back up their brothers on the bench by condemning homosexuality as "sin." Recently the U.S. declared that any non-citizen wishing to enter the United States would have to pass the AIDS antibody test with no sign of infection—this from the main exporter of the AIDS virus in the world!

The very day that the Meese Commission was conducting its absurd spectacle in New York City, Reagan was cheering a 36,000-strong demonstration of anti-abortion bigots in Washington. These anti-woman fanatics are so emboldened by the applause they've gotten from the White House that in a private meeting Paul Brown of the misnamed American Life League asked Reagan to pardon convicted abortion clinic bombers as "unjustly incarcerated" (*Newsday*, 23 January)! He was thrilled by Reagan's answer that he "might get a review" of one case, where the "Army of God" nuts kidnapped an Illinois doctor. This unspeakably outrageous insinuation of pardon comes at a time when terror against abortion clinics is on the rise and some anti-abortion crazies have also turned to sending bombs through the mail, as happened in Oregon.

So while the Meese Commission "investigates" dirty pictures as the "cause" of violence against women, no woman can go to a clinic to have a safe abortion without fear for her life. Witchhunts against sexuality and attacks on women's basic human rights, indeed, have long gone together. The notorious 1873 Comstock Law, which (among other things) banned use of the U.S. mails for "obscene" materials, was widely used to stop dissemination of birth control information. Today, the moralistic mullahs are trying to end sex education in the schools, while teenage pregnancy is soaring at rates double and triple that in other advanced industrialized countries, where birth control information is easily available to young women.

This social/sexual counterrevolution is aiming to go pretty deep. The persecution of gays and any others who do not fit Reagan's Norman Rockwell view of human sexuality is merely the starting point. The anti-sex crusade is part of Reagan's push to regiment American society into ideological conformity behind imperialism's anti-Soviet war drive. Faced with a population which still hasn't swallowed the New Right agenda, Reagan's response is to call out the cops—in this case, the vice squad. Especially dangerous is the threatened media censorship, which would provide the state with a powerful tool for clamping down on free speech. While anti-abortion terrorists are encouraged in their murderous work, "pornographers" are arrested. Stop the terrorist attacks on abortion clinics! No to censorship laws! Government, get your snoops out of the bedroom! ■

—Adapted and expanded from "Meese's Porno Witchhunt" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 396, 31 January 1986) and "Reaganite Bigots vs. the Blind" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 395, 17 January 1986)

On Black Women in South Africa: Smash Apartheid! For Workers Revolution!

In the living hell that is South African apartheid, the oppression of women reflects the most intense contradictions of that tortured society. Apartheid is not simply a particularly vicious form of racism whose excesses might be purged while leaving the capitalist structure of the society intact. South African capitalism is fundamentally based on the structures of apartheid: the migrant labor system, centrally in the mines, and the so-called "homeland" system for blacks—the barren wasteland bantustans where the black women of South Africa live and die, forcibly separated from their working men, left to tend the young, the aged and the dying in starvation conditions. These "homeland" bantustans are a filthy lie from start to finish—the "homeland" of the white minority comprises 87 percent of South Africa, including all the mines, industries, ports, the rail system, the good land, in short *all* the wealth and development accumulated through the sweat of superexploited black labor.

In no other country in the world is the entire majority population denied their very birthright, their right to be at home in their own country. Winnie Mandela, called by many blacks "the mother of her country," the



Tannenbaum/Sygma

Winnie Mandela:
"I am charged with a crime that does not exist in most of the democratic, civilized world—being at home."

heroic wife of imprisoned African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela, expressed that bitter truth for all black South Africans. After her arrests last December by the white police state as she tried to return to her home in Soweto after her banning restrictions were loosened, she stated: "I am charged with a crime that does not exist in most of the democratic, civilized world—being at home" (*New York Times*, 26 December 1985).

The vicious apartheid system, centrally the ban-

tustans, exacerbates all the oppression black women face, not only as blacks, but also as women. Accompanying the virtual enslavement of the black majority is the systemic government repression in all spheres of life, not least in the realm of sexual relations. Indeed, apartheid South Africa magnifies and institutionalizes all that is backward, brutal and sick in capitalist society. Given its dependence on the migratory labor force and the bantustans from which that labor is drawn, apartheid capitalism also finds it useful to deliberately maintain and foster tribalism.

On the bantustans, white judges—the so-called white witch doctors—"interpret" tribal laws, including enforcing a bride price for women, known as *lobolo*, a transfer of cattle or cash from the husband to the wife's father, which gives the husband the right to repudiate the marriage at any time simply by forfeiting his *lobolo* payment. An African woman married by such "customary union" in the bantustan is considered a perpetual minor under her husband's control and is unable to own property in her own right.

In fact, such "interpretations" by the white ruling class are even a deformation of tribal society, as Hilda Bernstein has pointed out in "For their triumphs and for their tears: women in apartheid South Africa" (1975). She notes that while "the concept of the independent woman cannot take shape" in tribal society, being based on kinship groups rather than any conception of individual rights, nonetheless women had some protections within that kinship structure. But in South Africa today the "tribal chiefs," for example, are not heads of tribes but simply appointed civil servants. The retribalization enforced by the white capitalist rulers has superimposed the worst aspects of capitalism on the intense backwardness of tribalism. Such attempts to run the reel of history in reverse have met sharp opposition from the black population: the 1976 Soweto uprisings were in part revolts against the teaching of Afrikaans and tribal languages rather than English in the schools.

South Africa, like tsarist Russia, represents an extreme case of uneven and combined capitalist development. South Africa's advanced industrial infrastructure is entirely dependent on a rigidly totalitarian, colonial subjugation of the black, Asian and coloured (mixed-race) toiling masses. Inside Soweto, the two-million-strong black city outside Johannesburg, the largest structure is a huge electrical power station: but that power lights up white Johannesburg, not Soweto, where only 20 percent have electricity; for the rest it is darkness at night or at best candlelight or kerosene lamps. Yet blacks who live there consider



Tony McGrath

Transkel bantustan: Capitalist apartheid migratory labor system separates women from their men, condemning them to tend young and elderly in barren, starving wastelands.

themselves lucky, for wives and children are allowed, unlike in labor camps where such "superfluous appendages" are literally thrown away back onto the bantustans.

Not far from the modern auto plants of Port Elizabeth, Xhosa youth are initiated into tribal secret rites leading to circumcision and manhood. "There are minor differences between Pedes and Zulus. But they are not differences we can classify as relevant. The Pedes circumcise their women and the Xhosas do not," a former "Black Consciousness" woman leader and disciple of Steve Biko, Thenjiwe Mtintso, told American reporter June Goodwin (*Cry Amandla!*, 1984). Sexual mutilation is *not* irrelevant! This shocking statement in itself reveals the wracking contradictions of South African society, as well as the inability of any form of nationalism to even approach the question of the liberation of women from such horrifying backwardness. Indeed, in those African countries formally independent of colonialism, like Zimbabwe or Angola, the masses of blacks and especially women still suffer under the most intense poverty and backwardness.

The Bantustans: Industrial Reserves of the Unemployed

Four million African women are relegated to the bantustans where, on an inadequate plot of impoverished land, they are supposed to scratch out of the brush and rock the subsistence to nourish and raise a family, care for the sick, the aged and the unemployed. These inhuman conditions lead inevitably to disease and early death. The South African government keeps no mortality statistics for blacks, but it is estimated that in some rural areas infant mortality is over 25 percent. Many black women in South Africa do work—some

as agricultural workers, some in textile industries and many of these have participated in union organizing struggles—but always, always under the hideous deformations of apartheid. In Soweto some black women work as nurses at the huge Baragwanath Hospital, largest in the Southern hemisphere. A bitter strike by black nurses and auxiliary workers last fall exposed the starvation wage conditions in this medical outpost of the forced labor camp that is South African apartheid. Yet such jobs are considered among the "best" black women can find.

Most black women who work in the cities are domestic servants, paid hardly anything at all because they have the "privilege" of living in the house of the white *baas* (boss): that is, forcibly separated from their husbands or their children, who grow up on the bantustans cared for by female relatives. "You go to the butcher and get their meat and servants' meat. They call it servants' meat. They write 'servants' on the label. You don't know whether you eat good meat or old or bad," said one black woman (*Cry Amandla!*, 1984).

The heart of apartheid is the migratory labor system, the reduction of South African blacks to dispossessed foreigners within their own country and the reduction of the surrounding black states to labor colonies for South Africa's mines, factories and farms. The bantustans with their forced evictions and tribalization, the contract labor system, the onerous pass laws, all exist to turn southern Africa into a vast reservoir of superexploited black labor. It is on the bantustans that the next generation of wage slaves is raised. It is to the bantustans that black workers must return when they are unemployed or injured, or to be buried by their widows. (As late as 1981, in one year over 600 workers were killed in the gold mines alone, another 119 in the coal mines.) Thousands of workers, maimed for life while toiling for the white ruling class, are dumped back on the bantustans. The full brunt of "social insurance" for South Africa's black proletariat is borne by the women relegated to these unspeakably destitute "homelands."

This system was developed under the auspices of British imperialism in the pre-World War I period: apartheid was created in the struggle to extract the



Peter Magubane

Nurses at Soweto's Baragwanath Hospital work in shadow of white supremacist war machine.

tremendous gold reserves and diamonds of the South African mines. As H.J. and R.E. Simons point out in their book *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*:

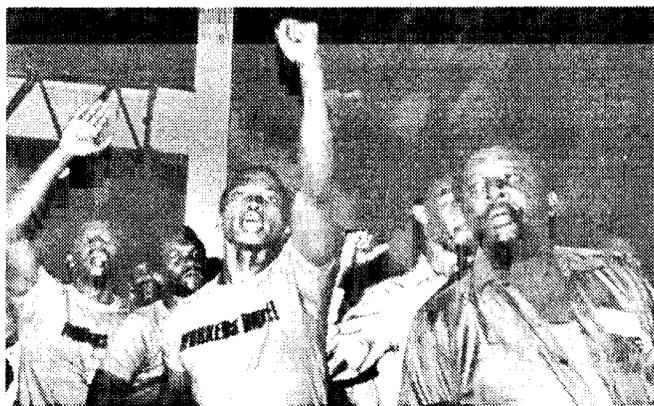
"The high turnover of migrants exposed great numbers of men to the unfavourable conditions, spread the risk of pneumoconiosis and venereal diseases over a wide area, and delayed the peasant worker's adjustment to an industrialized environment.... A certain way to reduce the high death rate... was to settle the miners with their families in villages along the Reef.... The owners preferred to offset the cost of wasted lives and skills with savings on housing, food and wages. Africans received less than a living wage, while their families kept themselves on the land. The owners contended that the migratory system was 'a fundamental factor' in the mining economy and essential to their prosperity. If the African 'has not got the reserve subsistence to go back to,' said Gemmill, the secretary of the Chamber, 'we cannot afford a wage to make it possible for him to live in an urban area.'"

This system is in essence unchanged to this day.

For Permanent Revolution in South Africa!

The Achilles' heel of apartheid is its absolute dependence on the labor of the six-million-strong black proletariat. Hundreds of thousands of these black workers are coming together with the coloured proletariat, Indians and even some courageous whites, like martyred union organizer Neil Aggett, in a burgeoning union movement. For Marxists, the principle that those who labor must rule is fundamental. The trade-union movement provides an extremely important form of mass organization for the black workers. But the black proletariat is still being used as cattle to haul the ideological cart of nationalism. A Bolshevik party must be built to lead a victorious struggle for "amandla," power, for all the oppressed, through workers revolution.

South Africa is the one place in sub-Saharan Africa where there is the possibility for a workers state, because here the black population has been partially absorbed, at the bottom, into a modern industrialized society which can, based on the revolutionary reorganization of society, provide a decent life for its citizens. The black working class must pose itself as the vanguard of workers revolution, not only within South Africa, but



Mendel/AFP

Formation of Congress of South African Trade Unions, December 1985, created strongest organization of black proletariat in South Africa's history. But petty-bourgeois nationalist ideology blocks revolutionary fight for workers' rule.

also as the motor force for the socialist reconstruction of all southern Africa.

In this regard the black miners of South Africa resemble the oil workers of Baku in tsarist Russia. Recruited from the many peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, they were not only the vanguard of the Bolshevik Revolution in the region but became a transmission belt for communism to the toiling masses and oppressed peoples of Turkey and Persia. Contrast the mass misery of neocolonial black Africa with Soviet Central Asia today. At the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution that region was largely inhabited by illiterate, mullah-ridden nomads. Today, their social progress is measurable in centuries and in some respects (i.e., literacy) compares favorably to the United States. Most striking is the change in the status of women in these societies, freed from their utter subjugation to tribal elders and barbaric slavery.

Because South Africa, like tsarist Russia, is such an extreme case of combined and uneven capitalist development, it also represents an extreme application of Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution summarizing the experience of the Russian Revolution. This holds that in countries whose bourgeois development has been belated, especially colonial and semi-colonial countries, genuine democracy and national emancipation can be achieved only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. A workers revolution in South Africa will be the spark for the liberation of the desperately impoverished black masses throughout the continent. More broadly, socialist revolution must conquer *internationally*—only the worldwide expropriation of imperialism will lay the basis for the international division of labor upon which a communist society must be based.

Writing of tsarist Russia, Trotsky described the permanent revolution as:

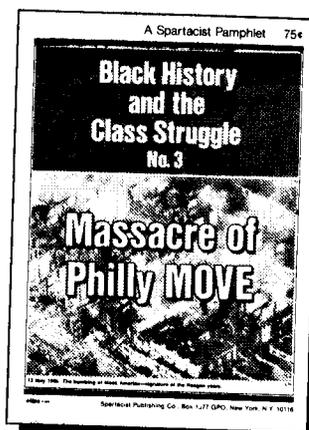
"...a revolution which welds together the oppressed masses of town and country around the proletariat organised in soviets; as a national revolution that raises the proletariat to power and thereby opens up the possibility of a democratic revolution growing over into the socialist revolution.

"The permanent revolution is no isolated leap of the

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proletariat; rather it is the rebuilding of the whole nation under the leadership of the proletariat."

—*The Permanent Revolution* (1930)

The lessons of October—the victorious Russian workers revolution of 1917—are key for the liberation of South Africa's exploited and oppressed: the women, the youth, the entire disenfranchised black population, the Indian and coloured peoples, the urban and rural workers. Precisely because apartheid and all its institutions are necessary appendages to capitalist rule itself in South Africa, the only solution is workers revolution. The African National Congress' call for a "non-racial, democratic" capitalism is a utopian scheme for reform which must founder on the rocks of brutal competition for scarce economic resources under current conditions. To accomplish the rudiments of women's liberation in South Africa requires a program to provide those millions trapped on the bantustans with productive work, which means smashing the profit system and rebuilding the society on a different class basis.

**The Color Bar:
Breaking Down Residential Segregation**

In South Africa, as nowhere else, the struggle for the most elementary rights of women, and democratic rights in general, is inextricably bound up with the struggle for socialist revolution. "One man, one vote." In South Africa this would mean the end of the power of the white ruling class. "Land to the tiller!" In South Africa this demand is explosive. The demand that blacks regain their birthright, the right to live and travel where they want to in their own country is necessarily revolutionary in South Africa, as it cuts across the entire apartheid structure of capitalism.

The enforced ghettoization of the black majority must be fought as an important part of the struggle for workers power. Thus, repealing laws against interracial sex and marriage is not for revolutionaries a trivial matter, particularly since this reform undercuts the strict residential segregation. Of course the repeal of the racist "Immorality and Mixed Marriages Acts" last April 15 by President P.W. Botha's Pretoria regime was a calculated political act designed to make cosmetic reforms while leaving intact the white supremacist power structure. It was a sop to Reagan's "constructive engagement" policy, just as Botha's recent statements about revamping the hated Pass Laws are designed to get Western banks to renew their loans. But while not changing the basic facts of white domination and black enslavement, the repeal of such laws challenges its very rationale. Certainly the repeal of the racial sex bar poses some awkward anomalies for apartheid: In a society where residential areas are segregated by law, where will the legalized mixed couples live? How will children be educated? If people of different races can sleep together and have children, if more public facilities are integrated, it will not deflect but will fuel the demand for equal political rights for all in a non-racial South Africa.

Antagonism to interracial marriages among blacks is in part an expression of understandable bitterness of blacks toward the one-way prerogatives of the white male. Certainly much "interracial sex" there is exacted

by the white baas from his black female servants, or takes place between white men and black women in warehouses on the edge of the bantustans and neighboring black statelets. Many black nationalists have simply dismissed the repeal of the ban as irrelevant: "I'm not interested in going to swimming pools with blondes in bikinis," expresses the attitude of many a black activist. But that is not the only question. The breakdown of residential segregation implied in the repeal of the racist marriage laws facilitates the struggle for a black-centered workers government. It's very important for the revolution that the white supremacist rulers not be able to unleash their bombs and cordon off areas without affecting any whites. Further, organizers of a racially integrated communist party, blacks and whites, men and women, will find it easier to meet or travel together.

South Africa on the Razor's Edge

Defiant black South Africans have made it clear they refuse to take the degradation and humiliation of apartheid any longer. At the same time, the white



Workers Vanguard

Spartacists say workers revolution must avenge black martyrs murdered by apartheid butchers.

supremacist police state, armed to the teeth, confronts an inchoate outrage which is disarmed both politically and militarily. So far, the South African security forces have been battling unarmed schoolchildren—not a Bolshevik-led workers revolution. As a banned issue of *Newsweek* put it last fall, the anti-apartheid revolt "awaits its Lenin."

In the absence of such a revolutionary proletarian pole, there is the potential for an all-sided bloodbath and/or monstrous repression by the apartheid butchers. Sheena Duncan, a leader of the middle-class, white women's anti-apartheid organization Black Sash, exclaimed that the country was heading into "an endless destructive hopelessness in a Beirut-type conflict in which there is no justice, no truth, no peace and no freedom from fear" (*Washington Post*, 24 December 1985). The urgent task of revolutionists today is to construct the necessary communist vanguard to lead the struggle against apartheid along class, not national, lines. Therein lies the key to victory.

Apartheid's "divide and conquer" policies of

fomenting tribalist/communist bloodletting cannot be combatted by either the reformist policies of the ANC or the more militant-sounding black separatists. The social reality of South Africa is much more complex, vicious and irreformable, short of a thoroughgoing social revolution, than either of these nationalist formations would lead their constituencies to believe. There are two distinct white populations—the Boers who have lived there as a “white tribe of Africa” for hundreds of years and successive waves of English-speaking settlers (as well as, lately, some Portuguese and others). South Africa has an Indian/Asian population of nearly a million people; a coloured population of nearly two and a half million; the black population is itself divided, with the Xhosa-speaking people a majority, the Zulus the next largest group, and a myriad of other tribal/linguistic groupings. Unless all those oppressed by apartheid unite in class struggle against the ruling class, the seething discontent can be turned toward many-sided genocide.

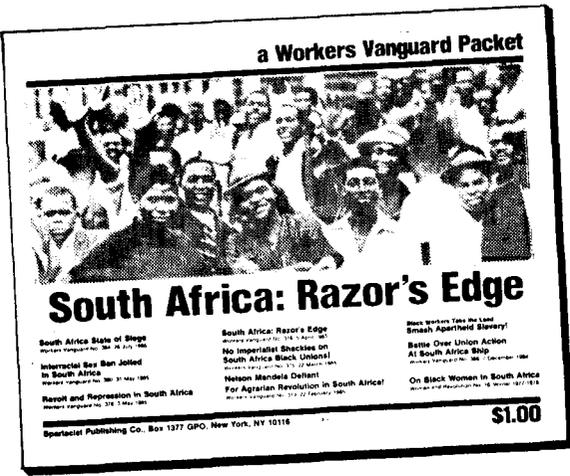
However, in the face of Pretoria's sweeping repression, there have been examples of interracial solidarity which could be utilized by a Bolshevik party to wage class war against the white rulers. For instance on January 2 some 20,000 blacks flooded into the white areas of Port Elizabeth to attend the funeral of Molly Blackburn—a leader of Black Sash—who was killed in an automobile accident (or so the “official” story goes). Black militants formed a military guard of honor outside her funeral, and six black youth sat in front of her coffin, their fists raised throughout the service. “Molly Blackburn proved conclusively that being white does not in itself make one an enemy of the people,” said a black preacher at the memorial. There has also been opposition from some white youth to being conscripted as occupying forces in the black townships.

A genuine revolutionary leadership must unite all the

oppressed and neutralize a section of the white population (i.e., convince some whites *not* to fight for apartheid). Certainly a black-centered workers government would struggle to place in its service the technical, scientific and administrative skills which the white population to a large extent monopolizes. Meanwhile, the existence of groups such as Black Sash and the “anti-conscription” campaign reflect weak links in the attempt to impose a *laager* mentality upon all South African whites. In the brutal, nasty, patriarchal South African police state, in which the Dutch Reformed Church imposes its own form of Christian fundamentalism, it's no accident that among the white opponents of apartheid, many are women.

The women of South Africa are destined to play a crucial role in the South African workers' revolution, as the women of Russia were key to the October Revolution. During the 1950s, when the Pass Laws were extended to women, there was a massive mobilization of black, Indian, coloured and white women from all over South Africa—very often walking for hundreds of miles in a massive pilgrimage. They gathered 20,000-strong in Johannesburg and sang the freedom song whose lyrics must resound soon: “Now you have touched the woman, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed.” To crush the white supremacist regime once and for all, to smash apartheid slavery, the black working class of South Africa must be organized to lead a fight for proletarian revolution. The popular chant at union meetings: “Amandla! (Power!) Awetu! (It is ours!)” will be realized only through the building of a Leninist/Trotskyist party to lead that revolution. Under the red banner of authentic communism, the liberation of black South African women will be won when power is seized once and for all from the white racist rulers. Smash apartheid! For workers revolution! ■

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Nicaragua...

(continued from page 24)

August 1978 storming of the National Palace in Managua. Mónica Baltodano was in charge of the internal front, coordinating the insurrection in the capital of Managua, which held out for weeks against National Guard bombs and tanks, then executed the grueling strategic retreat to Masaya. Leticia Herrera, the third woman *comandante de la revolución*, was part of the commando which took over the house of a buddy of Somoza during a Christmas party in 1974. And there are many more, notably Nora Astorga, recently named Nicaragua's ambassador to the United Nations, who earned Washington's ire for her role in the execution of General Pérez Vega, "The Dog," a CIA agent and one of the worst torturers in Somoza's National Guard. This act of revolutionary justice was carried out on 8 March 1978, a fitting celebration of International Women's Day.

In February 1978, the market women of the Indian barrio (neighborhood) of Monimbó in the town of Masaya led the first of several local insurrections against the dictatorship. Against incredibly ferocious repression by the National Guard (boys carrying the Sandinista flag had their hands chopped off, children who shouted "*¡Viva el Frente Sandinista!*" had their tongues cut out), the Monimbó women were central at every level of the armed struggle, building barricades, making contact bombs, in this largely spontaneous outburst of mass outrage (*La insurrección popular sandinista en Masaya* [1982]). It took two weeks to put down the Monimbó uprising, which paved the way for the general insurrectionary offensive that swept the country some months later.

One of the main factors helping to mobilize women against Somoza was the FSLN's initiation in 1977 of a mass women's organization AMPRONAC (Association of Women Concerned with National Problems). The initial participation of prominent petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois women gave AMPRONAC a certain protection against repression. They carried out protests outside the jails, demanding the release of imprisoned Sandinistas (often their own sons and daughters). In February 1978, AMPRONAC led a sit-in of 600 mainly working-class and poor women at the Managua offices of the UN, demanding, "Where Are Our Peasant Brothers and Sisters? Let the Assassins Respond!" They gained world attention when the women fought off a brutal National Guard attack. But after the group joined with peasants in a hunger march, the bourgeois women began to question the leftist evolution. AMPRONAC founder Lea Guido noted:

"There were two very different political trends developing and we would have to choose between them. One was a kind of Somozaism without Somoza which in the end would result in 'modernizing' the dictatorship. The other option was the Nicaraguan people overthrowing the dictatorship."

—Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* (1981)

A meeting representing AMPRONAC's 3,000 members finally voted to join the United People's Movement, which included the FSLN.



Workers Vanguard

Reagan aims to starve Nicaragua into submission. U.S. war blockade exacerbates privations of the poor, especially women and children.

One of the most dramatic examples of the radicalization brought about by the struggle against Somoza came in León. After the women guerrilla commanders Tellez and Herrera, leading hundreds of their *compañeros*, drove the Guard out of the fort by a frontal assault, for several weeks an egalitarian commune was erected—factories were kept running, medical care was organized, a radio station set up, money abolished and food rationed by a "people's power" administration—until the Sandinista/bourgeois junta established itself in Managua. But while the victorious Sandinistas were met with chants of "workers to power" and farm laborers invaded haciendas in nearby Chinandega, the FSLN tops ordered the land returned and put an end to "communist León"—in order to preserve their alliance with the "patriotic bourgeoisie," who soon went over to the *contras*.

Perhaps the single most eloquent testimony to the combative role of women in the struggle against the Somoza tyranny is the fact that by the final 1979 insurrection, *fully 30 percent of the 15,000 armed combatants were women*. And this does not even count the many thousands of housewives and mothers who were mobilized in the dangerous tasks of providing food, medical attention, safe houses and communication during the fighting. The masses of women are in normal conditions isolated in their homes burdened by domestic and maternal responsibilities, the last line of defense of traditional social relations. When they move into action en masse it is a sure sign of profound social crisis—and then their passion, heroism and devotion to the revolutionary cause cannot be surpassed.

Social Reform and Mass Participation

In its 1969 "Historic Program," the FSLN declared its intention to "abolish the odious discrimination women have suffered" and to "establish economic, political

and cultural equality between women and men." Once in power, while insisting that "defending the revolution" took priority over "special" women's demands, many of the FSLN's general social reforms particularly benefited women. Thus of the 592,000 Nicaraguans who learned to read and write during the 1979-80 Literacy Crusade (out of a total population of under 3 million), 375,000 were women. (Under Somoza, more than half the population was illiterate, and among the women of some rural villages, this figure reached 100 percent.) Moreover, a majority of the *brigadistas* who took part in the Crusade were women, mostly young students, many of whom got their first experience with Nicaraguan social realities living in the homes of dirt-poor farm workers. One of the literacy lessons began, "Nicaraguan women have traditionally been exploited. The Revolution now makes their liberation possible."

Similarly, free health care has been established throughout Nicaragua. This led to the reduction of malaria by 50 percent, virtual elimination of polio through mass immunization campaigns, and a drop of infant mortality from 121 per 1,000 live births to 94 per 1,000. However, this indicates the long road yet to go: Cuba, which abolished capitalism a quarter century ago, has reduced infant mortality to 16 per 1,000, better than most American cities. The reason for the continuing high mortality in Nicaragua is simple: pervasive poverty and limited resources. Thus, while 244,000 mothers received prenatal examinations in 1982, only one-quarter of these gave birth in hospitals. The simple fact of rationing of basic food items has eliminated starvation, greatly aiding poor families, most often those headed by a single woman. But under the impact of imperialist economic sanctions and the black market, subsidies of these items have been drastically curtailed.

There has been a dramatic increase in women's political participation since the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship. Women constitute well over half the membership of the neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), and a high percentage of the militia members. AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan Women's Association (named after Luisa Amanda Espinoza, the first woman combatant of the FSLN to fall in combat) set up after the revolutionary victory in 1979, now reports a membership of 85,000. And while they are only 22 percent of the membership of the Sandinista Front, 37 percent of upper-level cadres of the FSLN are women. Nevertheless, compared to the total number of women, only a tiny minority are politically active.

And this is not simply the result of the weight of social backwardness on women's consciousness. There has been resistance to attempts to integrate women in social and political activity. Individually, there are numerous stories of husbands resisting participation by their wives. *Barricada Internacional* (April 1984) quoted one: "Look, I've been married for 26 years and at first, it was a tremendous struggle. I had to go to meetings on the sly; if my husband came home early, they let me know quickly and I came in by the back door." After one of her children died as a soldier defending the revolution, she reported, her husband became more

understanding. But in addition to widespread popular attitudes that "woman's place is in the home," there has also been resistance from the government to women's participation in one crucial area: the army.

Defending the Revolution

Almost immediately after the triumph, as the FSLN set about organizing the Sandinista People's Army (EPS), women were disarmed along with all non-Sandinista militias, and many of them demobilized. The change was dramatic: one month you would see military parades in the capital featuring armed detachments of women, the next month the women were marching in uniform but *without guns*. Sandinista supporter George Black reports in his book, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua* (1981):

"But the most visible change in Nicaragua in the Revolution's first year is a conscious demilitarisation of women, the result of a military regulation minimising the exposure of women to potential combat situations. The hundreds of armed female combatants on the streets of Managua are a thing of the past, and the move to reassign women to secretarial, guard and political education duties was resented by many women who had given proof of their equal military ability on the battlefields. Many women have left the EPS. When the first officer ranks were created in February 1980, the lists contained only fifteen women out of a total of 230."

Black "explains" this as partly because women cadres "are better placed than men to fill positions as intermediate and leadership cadres in the government and the mass organizations."

There is an element of truth in this subterfuge. An unusual number of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois women did join the Sandinistas through AMPRONAC, and when the FSLN found itself running a government their skills were in demand. But particularly in this bonapartist regime, who has the guns is the bottom line. The nine-man FSLN directorate essentially saw women in the army as "trouble," trouble with husbands, trouble with men soldiers, trouble with their bourgeois allies. Doris Tijerino, one of the Sandinista "Old Guard" (she joined in the 1960s) rationalized pulling women out of combat positions by alleging that the danger of pregnancy would make the army "less effective." This is hypocritical nonsense: no one seemed to notice the "unreliability" of women during the intense armed struggle against Somoza!

Even AMNLAE, normally a compliant Sandinista mass organization, gagged on this. When an EPS unit in the Estelí area requested that the women's association send a dozen members as cooks, not troops, they got a blistering reply from the local AMNLAE secretary noting that 60 percent of the militia were women:

"Sandino's country is being threatened. We women cannot restrict our participation in its defense to duties that will place us again in a secondary role. If we did, we would be leaving empty the space left to us by those women who died for the country."

—AMNLAE, *Mujer y Revolución*, July 1982

A women's battalion of the army reserves, No. 50-10, was subsequently formed in the traditionally militant León area. And when a debate arose in 1983 over the

FSLN law establishing the draft (Patriotic Military Service) while exempting women, AMNLAE protested and won a partial success: service in the army is now open to women on a volunteer basis.

Today, with the imperialists threatening invasion, women are being reintegrated into the fighting ranks of the army. And between the EPS, militias and CDS, *thousands* of women are participating in military duty defending the revolution. The attempt to exclude women from the military or limit their participation is a *blow against the revolution*. A Trotskyist party in Nicaragua must fight for the full integration of women in the defense against imperialist-aided counterrevolution.

For Free Abortion on Demand!

The question of women's right to abortion—to be able to choose when and if they wish to have children—is fundamentally tied to the question of women's oppression within the nuclear family and to the reactionary influence of the Catholic church. This key area of the struggle for women's rights in Nicaragua has until recently been taboo. Sandinista apologists, even feminists, have deliberately covered up the fact that any form of birth control is hard to get in Nicaragua, and that the old Somozaist law making abortion illegal is still in effect. Thus an article on "Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution" in *Nicaraguan Perspectives* (Winter 1985-86), the official publication of the Nicaraguan Network, is mum on the issue. And the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which sees itself as a public relations agency for the FSLN, has written more than a dozen articles on women in Nicaragua since 1979 but *not once* until 1986 did they mention the issue of abortion. They have done so now only because the FSLN newspaper *Barricada* decided to open a discussion on the issue in the face of demands for legalization coming mainly from health care workers. To this date AMNLAE has not taken a position on abortion.

Despite this scandalous silence by the Sandinistas and their political supporters, *illegal* abortions are flourishing in Nicaragua, and *hundreds* of women are dying every year at the hands of back-alley butchers. *Barricada* reported last November that from March 1983 to June 1985, some 8,752 women suffering complications from illegal abortions were admitted to the Bertha Calderón Women's Hospital in Managua. This is ten patients a day, almost half of all admissions to the hospital. In a sample study, 10 percent of these women died as a result of the botched abortions and more than a quarter required hysterectomies (*Militant*, 10 January). The hospital team that carried out the study recommended that birth control devices be made readily available—it is currently illegal to advertise them or to sell them over the counter—and advised revising the abortion law.

There are several important reasons why contraception and abortion have been taboo in Sandinista Nicaragua. A book by several British feminists (*Sweet Ramparts: Women in Revolutionary Nicaragua* [1983]) notes:

"First, there is the church's opposition to birth control and abortion. Most women believe that having children

is reflecting God's will. Secondly, the war itself strengthened the general commitment to family life. After years of bloodshed, splitting up of families and deaths of relatives, people want to create new life, and to reestablish the security and the bonds of the family."

In addition, "The FSLN argues that the country is underpopulated, a fact exacerbated by war casualties," and that previously birth control was an imperialist plot: "Like many other Latin American countries, Nicaragua under Somoza was the victim of birth control programmes aimed not at respecting women's needs but at controlling the poor. As President Johnson remarked, it is easier to kill guerrillas before they are born."

So in rejecting the Yankees' neo-Malthusian "preventive counterinsurgency," the Sandinistas have denied women the basic right not to be burdened with unwanted children! Teenage girls who have not yet gotten a decent education, which could prepare them for a productive life, must be bound to "hearth and home"; poorly paid women factory workers in their early 20s who have already had several children are condemned to have more, as a "sacrifice for the revolution"! (Naturally the women of the bourgeoisie and well-off middle class will not be so hard-hit, for



Barricada

Mothers with photos of their sons killed by U.S.-supported "contras" confront the pope in Managua, 1983: when Wojtyla rejected their pleas women defiantly chanted "People's Power!"

they can afford abortions by their private doctors, not murderous coathanger jobs.) In total contrast to this nationalist program, the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky gave to every woman the right to abortion, as one of her most important civil, political and cultural rights.

Central to the Sandinistas' refusal to touch this vital issue is their fear of a showdown with the forces of counterrevolution: "They'll call us communists" if abortion is legalized, said a woman doctor who formerly headed the Health Ministry's mother-infant program. And, of course, that's exactly what the Catholic church is saying. After the discussion on abortion opened, the Managua archdiocese published a statement in *La Prensa*, the U.S.-funded newspaper of the bourgeois opposition, entitled "Thou shalt not kill" and vowing to fight "the abortion plague" to the end

(*Intercontinental Press*, 10 February). Behind all the justifications is a stark fact: hundreds of Nicaraguan women are being sacrificed on the altar of the FSLN dogma of "mixed economy, political pluralism and non-alignment," its refusal to carry through the revolution to the expropriation of the capitalist class.

As we wrote two years ago:

"... to this day Nicaraguan women are denied the right to abortion, in order to appease rampant *machismo* and above all the powerful Catholic church. By trying to appease the imperialists, by conciliating the Vatican's conservative Catholic hierarchy and the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, both of which are actively attempting to overthrow the revolution, the Sandinista FSLN government risks slitting its own throat."

—"Defend, Complete, Extend Nicaragua Revolution!" *Women and Revolution* No. 27, Winter 1983-84

Trotskyists fight for free abortion on demand, carried out by competent medical personnel; for effective, safe contraceptives; for truly socialized medicine and quality medical care, as part of a working-class program for socialist revolution, which can make it possible for women not only to defend themselves from misery imposed by unwanted pregnancies, but also to have healthy children who can grow up in a humane society.

Sandinistas Try to "Restore" the Nuclear Family

In a message to a rally of women workers in Moscow in November 1923, the Russian Communist Leon Trotsky declared: "The problem of women's emancipation, both material and spiritual, is closely tied to that of the transformation of family life." The capitalist ruling class everywhere cloaks the defense of its profits in the mantle of defending the family, and Nicaragua is no exception. In the 1984 elections, the right-wing Democratic Conservative Party (PCD) ran on a program calling for large families, and all over the country the PCD has erected large billboards proclaiming "Conservatism is *Patria Potestad*"—literally, "father power," the absolute right of fathers to control over their children, even after a marriage has dissolved. The Sandinistas present themselves as defenders of a more "democratic" nuclear family, in which women's rights are formally recognized. But the oppression of women in the family is rooted in the economic conditions of capitalism, and cannot be eradicated by mere juridical measures.

Already in the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels wrote that: "The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed correlation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of Modern Industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour." This is dramatically seen in Nicaragua, where according to a study carried out in 1978, the year before Somoza's overthrow, more than a third of all households were headed by women. In the poor barrios of Managua this proportion rose to a dramatic 60 percent. Moreover, marriage is a rarity among the Nicaraguan masses: three quarters of all children are born "out of wedlock." So

when the Sandinistas declare themselves "defenders of the nuclear family" (as in the FSLN's 1984 election platform), they are "defending" something most Nicaraguan women have never seen.

This phenomenon of families without fathers can be seen in slum areas all over Latin America, the product of a distorted economic "development" in which millions migrate to the cities but then find no stable employment for the supposed "breadwinner." There is also the ingrained *machismo* or male chauvinist mentality: leaving children by different women strewn around town is seen as a sign of virility. And in Nicaragua conditions have been made more dramatic as a result of the mass butchery by Somoza—which left more than 40,000 children orphaned, without either parent—and the disruption of the contra war. Today about half of all Nicaraguan families are headed by women with no man in the house. Yet few women are childless, and most start having children very young and have a large number.

The Sandinistas' "Law of Relations Between Mothers, Fathers and Children" formally abolished *patria potestad*, though the old Somoza divorce laws, which grossly discriminate against women, are unchanged. In this desperate situation, such laws as the government has tried to impose cannot possibly succeed in fundamentally changing the condition of women—further, their thrust is essentially an attempt to "restore" the nuclear family, consciously capitulating to the Catholic church.

This attempt to reinforce the nuclear family is reactionary and utopian. Particularly in the dramatic conditions of Nicaragua today, no amount of sharing the housework can make the nuclear family anything but a prison for women. The domestic enslavement of women is a pillar of capitalist social structure; women's main role is to bear and bring up the next generation of productive workers. With their nationalist program, the Sandinistas cannot break out of this framework; women still have to be home cooking the rice and beans.

Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Nicaragua's basic law, promulgated when the Sandinistas took power in 1979, declares that "the family is the natural unit of society." Marxists, in contrast, stand for international proletarian revolution which would lay the basis for a collectivized economy which can eventually *replace the family* by socializing its functions, thereby liberating women from age-old oppression. In his treatise on *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Frederick Engels wrote:

"With the passage of the means of production into common property, the individual family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not."

This was the program of the Russian Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky, who set about—within the limits of



Meiselas/Magnum

State textile factory: Women being drawn into industry are among the most class-conscious fighters.

the material resources available to the young Soviet republic—establishing public housing, communal restaurants, laundries and day-care centers.

However, in the absence of a European revolution which could break the isolation of backward Russia, a bureaucratic caste crystallized under Stalin and carried out a political counterrevolution, which reversed the Bolshevik measures on the family, the most progressive in history. Speaking for a conservative mood which sought the illusion of stability and calm, Stalin “rehabilitated” the nuclear family, outlawing abortion, restricting the right of divorce. Even today, in the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet workers state and in bureaucratically deformed workers states such as Cuba, where important strides towards women’s equality have been made, the nuclear family is enshrined as the holiest of holies—and with it the continued oppression of women. While medically safe, free abortion is available, all domestic tasks—cooking, washing, childrearing—are relegated to the family, institutionalizing the “double shift” for the woman worker. To the extent that their vision extends beyond Nicaraguan nationalism, this is the program that moves the most “advanced” of the Sandinista leaders.

Speaking at AMNLAE’s celebration of the fifth anniversary of the Nicaraguan women’s movement on 29 September 1982, Comandante Tomás Borge declared, “Ideally, society should provide childcare centres, laundries, community canteens and other services which could free women from domestic tasks.” (The purpose, he says, is so “they can do everything that the Revolution might ask of them and at the same time be self-sacrificing, efficient and loving mothers.”) But so far the Sandinista government has managed to build only 43 nurseries in urban areas, providing day care for a very few thousand children. The impoverished

Nicaraguan economy by itself cannot provide adequate childcare, education and health services for the population. A tremendous development of the productive forces is necessary for the effective socialization of domestic tasks.

The international Spartacist tendency fights for the program of “Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution.” In Central America we raise the Trotskyist banner of permanent revolution, of workers and peasants governments which would pass from democratic to socialist tasks in an uninterrupted development. But, as a simple glance at the woman question reveals, this cannot be achieved within the narrow confines of impoverished Nicaragua or even Central America as a whole. It requires extending the struggle to the powerful Mexican proletariat and above all mobilizing the resources of the most advanced industrial countries, notably the United States. Nicaraguan women have the greatest interest in the completion and international extension of the revolution, for without it genuine liberation and emancipation of the oppressed are impossible.

A social revolution has begun. Engels stated that “the first premise for the emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry” (*Origin of the Family...*). This is occurring in Nicaragua today, where already three years ago 41 percent of the wage labor force was women, and with the conscription of men for the war effort, industrial workers are increasingly female. This means that from the Fabritex textile factory to the Victoria de Julio sugar mill, union organization cannot avoid “women’s issues,” such as the urgent need for day-care centers. As leaders and cadres of many of the mass organizations, women have often had contentious relations with the government and sometimes succeeded in pressuring it to the left. There are many “Norma Raes” in Nicaragua, class-conscious proletarian women fighters who will not retire quietly to the hearthside.

What’s urgently needed is a Leninist-Trotskyist party to mobilize the revolutionary energy of all the oppressed and carry this social revolution already underway to completion. In this former banana, coffee and cotton republic where the “free world” bayonets of the Somozaist Guardia ripped fetuses out of the wombs of women accused of being guerrillas, today those who only knew fear and misery now raise a gun to defend their land. Those whose lives were confined to four wooden walls with a tin roof (if they were lucky), whose destiny was determined by their role in biological reproduction not social production, have begun to act on the stage of history. “We used to be like mute people,” said Jesús López García, a wiry, 40ish woman and CDS activist in northern Nicaragua. “But now we can speak.”

But this is only the beginning. For women will not be freed from the double yoke of domestic slavery and wage slavery until the words of the communist anthem, the *Internationale*, are no longer a promise but a reality:

“No more tradition’s chains shall bind us,
Arise, ye slaves; no more in thrall!
The earth shall rise on new foundations,
We have been naught, we shall be all.”

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Middle Age Nears, and Rules Differ for Men and Women

We think our readers will appreciate the following article, reprinted from the New York Times' Home Section "Hers" column of January 16, by Katha Pollitt. Though the immediate perspective is limited to middle-class, white America, it reflects a certain reality, and struck a chord.

I'm 36. How old is that? Well, this year some of my work was printed in an anthology of "younger poets," so that makes me young, at least compared with some other practitioners of my craft. To my mathematical friend Maria, however, I've been middle-aged for years: take 75 as the average life span, she points out in her logical way, and the middle third begins at 25. And it gets worse: if I decided to have a child, I'd be positively decrepit, what obstetricians disapprovingly call an "elderly primigravida"—unless the doctor is very up to date indeed and refers to me tactfully as "reproductively mature."

Is it confusing to be simultaneously at so many different stages of life? Not really. Because when I look in the mirror I know exactly how old I am. I have gray hairs, many gray hairs. I have quite a few wrinkles, too, and though I'm not overweight, strange bulges attach themselves to my person in the middle of the night and refuse to let go even when deprived of dessert or taken for a vigorous walk. As a poet I may be younger, but as I am a woman I am definitely older. As a sex object, to put it bluntly, I am depreciating by the day.

* * * * *

In earlier times I would long ago have been urged to loosen my corsets and hang up my spurs—assuming I were still alive to do so, that is. Not today. Today I am urged

on every side to fight the encroaching decay of my person with large investments of energy, time and money. I should slather my face with makeup by day and collagen cream by night. I should take up running or aerobic dancing and resign myself to 1,200 calories a day for life. I should dye my hair. Advertising, which features no female who looks one minute over 25, tells me this, and so do women's magazines, which treat beauty care and dieting as a female moral duty: rich foods are "sinful," failure to exercise is "laziness." I did dye my hair once, and it did indeed look browner. But basically, I don't want to do any of these things. In fact, I resent very deeply the suggestion that I should.

Does this mean I accept my age gracefully? No, actually I'm furious. I'm furious when I think of all the time I wasted in my 20's, my glory years according to popular culture. Why didn't I write more, love more, live more? Take a job in Australia, translate Sophocles, learn Italian? And I'm furious—and frightened—when I think of the time down the road when I'll be elderly in more than the obstetrical sense. Will I end up tied to a bed in some horrible nursing home, or worse, be bundled off home to shift for myself, as is happening now under the Reagan Administration's harsh new Medicaid rules? In Holland, according to a recent segment of "60 Minutes," thousands of old people a year choose doctor-assisted suicide rather than prolong

their terminal diseases. Will the last human face I see be that of the physician who puts me to sleep like a sick old house cat?

Mostly, though, I'm furious when I think of how different aging is for women and for men. I know it's no picnic for men; how could I not with four dear friends nervously patting their bald spots all the time? Men too have to contend with regrets, with physical decline, with the possibility of a lingering or veterinary death, with the certainty of some sort of death, period. But socially and sexually, we are not in this together: an older man is a very different thing from an older woman. As Oskar Kokoschka is reported to have said, "Every man dies four times. Fortunately, there are always young girls."

Indeed there are. In the personals ads it's "Divorced male 55 seeks slim, beautiful, warm, intelligent, charming female 25-35." Sometimes I think of writing back: Just who do you think you are, buster? But he may well find what he's looking for. Statistics show that divorced men acquire progressively younger wives with each marriage. Perhaps they're only thinking of their health: as a recent headline in The Wall Street Journal proclaimed, "A Young Wife Saves Your Life—That's What the Researchers Say." An interesting pronoun, that "your." Could "your" life be saved by a young husband? Why aren't the researchers looking into that?

* * * * *

On bad days, I argue to myself that this demographic tendency makes marital equality a joke. A husband may be fairness itself—wash his share of the dishes, encourage his wife in her work, value her opinions, respect her individuality and all the rest of it.

But every eye wanders from time to time, and the moment comes when he is comparing his wife with other women while she is comparing him with solitude. In fact, now that changes in the divorce laws have lessened the financial obligations of men, and now that the social stigma of divorce has been reduced to zero, middle-aged men are vastly more likely than their wives to file for divorce. That doesn't mean middle-aged wives are thrilled with their husbands. It just means that both partners have looked at their options and he has a lot more than she does.

That very inequality, though, is what makes women's straining to look younger so demeaning and undignified. If it were just fashion, like glitter nail polish or blue fake fur, it wouldn't be so bad, but it isn't like that at all. It's based on sheer

fear. And that women encourage this fear in each other, in women's magazines, in advice books, and then sell each other illusory solutions, makes me angry. We accuse men of devaluing older women, but Brooke Shields is not a Playboy centerfold, she's a Vogue model. When it comes to the female body, in fact, women are much stricter than men. Women think the Playboy centerfold looks fat.

It's true that in recent years there's been a certain vogue for older women as sex symbols. But what does that vogue really mean? Joan Collins and Linda Evans may be goddesses after 40, but what makes them "beautiful" is precisely that they don't look middle-aged, they look embalmed. These actresses' popularity is no tribute to mature femininity, but to the dubious arts of the makeup man and, I suspect,

the plastic surgeon.

* * * * *

Why do we put ourselves through these hoops? We can't do anything about demographics, or about the fact that a man can father a whole second family while collecting Social Security. But at least we can recognize that all the night creams of Arabia won't help; they won't even cure wrinkles. We can stop glorifying female youth to ourselves. We can stop thinking that wrinkles make men more interesting, but make women look ugly, as though the ideal female face should be a blank page for a man to write his fantasies on.

Because the funny thing about getting older is that I like it just fine. I'm happier now than I've ever been in my life; and all my younger-older-middle-aged-elderly-mature friends feel exactly the same way. ■

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Rafael Diaz

Defend, Complete, Extend the Revolution!

Nicaraguan Women in Struggle

On the International Day of Working Women, 8 March 1986, the condition of women in Sandinista Nicaragua is truly a measuring rod of the progress of the revolution—both of its conquests and its contradictions. The mass insurrections which overthrew the tyrant Somoza awakened the downtrodden and impoverished population to political life. When the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) marched into Managua on 19 July 1979, it was at the head of the first popular revolution against a U.S.-backed right-wing regime in Latin America since Castro ran Batista out of Havana 20 years earlier. In the wake of victory they brought important social gains in education, health care, women's rights and other areas. Today even these limited achievements are under attack by Reagan's counterrevolutionary terrorists, who take sadistic pleasure in destroying day-care centers and rural schools.

The flight of Somoza's bloody National Guard spelled the destruction of the existing bourgeois state apparatus of one-family dictatorship, opening the historic possibility of sweeping away capitalist exploitation. But what replaced Somoza was a petty-bourgeois government, presiding over a still capitalist economy, while the class character of the Nicaraguan state is yet to be determined. The nationalist FSLN sought to freeze the Nicaraguan Revolution in a limbo between a capitalist state and a workers state, sanctified by the trinity of "mixed economy, political pluralism and non-alignment." And today, in its seventh year, Sandinista

Nicaragua, the prime target of U.S. imperialism's anti-Soviet war drive, is still stopped short of thoroughgoing social revolution, leaving open the possibility of bloody counterrevolution. What's urgently needed is the proletarian leadership of a Leninist-Trotskyist party built on the program of permanent revolution.

Nicaraguan women, who provided some of the most battle-tested cadres in the struggle against the Somoza tyranny, are today held in thrall by continued conciliation of social reaction on every front, from family life to military defense of the revolution. While Sandinista apologists have turned a blind eye to the limitations of the revolution on the woman question—to this day abortion is outlawed except where the mother's life is endangered—Western feminists have frequently posed a contradiction between the interests of women and the interests of the revolution. On the contrary, the emancipation of Nicaraguan women requires the completion of the revolution, the expropriation of the capitalist "fifth column" inside the country and above all the extension of workers revolution throughout Central America and into the advanced capitalist countries.

Compañeras in the Struggle Against Somoza

Nicaraguan women, guns in hand, wrote some of the most stirring chapters in the struggle against Somoza. Dora María Tellez became world famous as the slight, 22-year-old Comandante Dos in the dramatic

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