

Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

\$1.00

International Women's Day 1989

Labor Must Defend Abortion Rights!

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Letters

We print below letters to Women and Revolution written in response to "Criminal State Neglect as Epidemic Rages: The Agony of AIDS: A Review of Randy Shilts' And the Band Played On" and "In Defense of Homosexual Rights: The Marxist Tradition" in W&R No. 35, Summer 1988.

* * * * *

In the Beginning Was the Deed

Skokie, Illinois
8 July 1988

Dear Editors,

Your coverage of the AIDS epidemic is not surprisingly of the best outside of the gay press. I hope you can help more people to see the inextricable links between various forms of oppression through your analysis. I am writing not only to praise, however; I present the idea of revolution through linguistic change. My father whines that when he says "mankind" he includes women; I retort that he cannot know how exclusive "mankind" is. And what is so hard about saying "humankind"? By the same token, I would like to see W&R advance its language by structuring sentences around a non-gender-specific plural—i.e., "people... they" rather than "a person...he." Also: you obviously understand how charged language can be; after reading the insidiously "objective" mainstream press, it's a relief to read the "spiked" pages of W&R. I must request that you neutralize the phrase you use to describe people who have contracted the HIV which leads to AIDS. Calling them "AIDS victims" is oppressive; they are "people with AIDS." Neutrality can only help them in their struggle against the awesome forces that seek to grease the tracks of their obliteration.

In solidarity,
Susana C. Darwin

Women and Revolution

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

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Published by the Spartacist Publishing Company, Box 1377, GPO, New York, New York 10116. Telephone: (212) 732-7862.

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



W&R Photo

Spartacists at 11 October 1987 demonstration for gay rights, Washington, D.C.

W&R replies: Yes, we use the term "AIDS victims," but we don't insist on it. No one, however horrible his problems, likes to be constantly portrayed as a helpless sufferer. We also use "people with AIDS," "AIDS patients" or "HIV-infected people." People who are sick with HIV-caused infections are *victims* of a horrible disease compounded by witchhunting bigotry. "Neutrality" is *not* our goal when we write about this terrible, tragic scourge. We demand that all necessary social resources be expended to find a cure or containment for the ravages this virus is inflicting on humanity and to provide decent treatment to ease the suffering of the sick. We steadfastly oppose the vicious bigotry heaped on AIDS patients.

Darwin's objection to the term "AIDS victims" springs from her idealist feminist program, "revolution through linguistic change." This is reminiscent of the moralism of the New Left, one aspect of which was to reject conventional terms relating to oppressed social groups in favor of quite artificial, "new" terms (e.g., chairperson). Some feminists would object to Darwin's choice of "humankind" because it contains the dread letters, m-a-n. "Personkind"? Whoops—that has s-o-n. Gets to be a *reductio ad absurdum*, doesn't it? Oppression is rooted not in linguistics, but in social reality.

Many disputes over terminology reflect fundamental political differences. Spelled "People With AIDS" or "PWA," this term is popular with parochialists who advocate organizing solely and separately for gay rights. After the political wreckage of 1960s New Leftism, the Democratic Party became hegemonic in

Cover photo: Spartacist contingent at April 1988 New York City protest against attacks on abortion clinics.

the gay communities of San Francisco's Castro district, New York City's West Village and other large cities. Now these communities are devastated by AIDS, while the Democrats are entirely complicit in the deep-going reaction of the last decade, which has revealed in the victimization of homosexuals.

Recently some gay activists have been drawn into struggles for the defense of abortion rights for women, while the explosion of AIDS among the black and Hispanic urban poor has moved many to look beyond the narrow confines of the "gay community." While much could be done to fight AIDS within the confines of capitalism, it is capitalist social decay that is breeding the vicious oppression people with AIDS face. Sectoralism is counterposed to the necessary struggle for a united mobilization of the working class and all defenders of democratic rights against discrimination and social oppression.

Yes, language can have a political program: racist epithets, code words for terror against blacks, Asians, Jews, incite pogroms and lynching. But stopping that race-terror is no question of linguistics! It takes class-struggle action to stop the likes of the KKK. As Goethe said in *Faust*, "In the beginning was the deed."

Marx, Engels and Homosexuals

8 July 1988

Dear comrades,

I was rather shocked and surprised to see in a Spartacist publication, *Women and Revolution* No. 35, page 14, the statement that "Defense of democratic rights for homosexuals is part of the historic tradition of Marxism." It was not for Marx, or indeed for Engels, who is always regarded as the most enlightened of the two in sexual matters. I am surprised that the SL, which has such high standards in matters of historical record, made this mistake. I enclose the letter from Engels to Marx on the issue of von Schweitzer. Their attitude here is positively homophobic.

I was also surprised to see the statement that, "oppression of homosexuals is rooted in the patriarchal nuclear family" p. 12. I have always understood that what Marxists objected to was the "bourgeois" family, slightly different, I think, from the Mum, Dad and two kids model. The "nuclear family" was a term invented by later bourgeois sociologists.

Finally I do not think that Bernstein was defending homosexuals as a decent Marxist but simply as a decent liberal. Such liberal values should of course always be encompassed by Marxists. There is no contradiction between Bernstein's attitude on this issue and his later evolution.

I liked much of the article and it seems a pity to spoil it by slipshod scholarly work. Mind you I think that there is a difference between the oppression of gays and that of racial minorities or women. Whereas women and ethnic minorities play a particular role in the labour force and are systematically discriminated against in labour markets in the interests of late C20th [century]

capitalism, sexual preferences play no such role. They are a matter of consumption patterns rather than production patterns. There is no reason why Socialists would be any different from liberal conservatives in their attitudes to this matter. Our Monarch did after all send a note of condolence to Peter Pears on the death of Ben. Britten esq. Very right and proper but it only goes to show that you do not have to be a marxist to behave properly on this issue.

Reagan and his mates are a good deal more vicious and reactionary than that. I take your point on the truly disgraceful attitude of the blood banks and medical establishment.

frats
Ted Crawford

Note: Comrade Crawford enclosed an excerpt from an earlier translation of Engels' letter to Marx; we reprint below the same passage from the *Collected Works*, Volume 43 [International Publishers, 1988], which we consider the more definitive edition.

Manchester, 22 June 1869

Dear Moor,

[...]

The *Urning* you sent me is a very curious thing. These are extremely unnatural revelations. The paederasts are beginning to count themselves, and discover that they are a power in the state. Only organisation was lacking, but according to this source it apparently already exists in secret. And since they have such important men in all the old parties and even the new ones, from Rösing to Schweitzer, they cannot fail to triumph. *Guerre aux cons, paix aus trous-de cul* will now be the slogan. It is a bit of luck that we, personally, are too old to have to fear that, when this party wins, we shall have to pay physical tribute to the victors. But the younger generation! Incidentally it is only in Germany that a fellow like this can possibly come forward, convert this smut into a theory, and offer the invitation: *introte*, etc. Unfortunately he has not yet got up the courage to acknowledge publicly that he is "that way," and must still operate *coram publico* "from the front," if not "going in from the front" as he once said by mistake. But just wait until the new North German Penal Code recognises the *droits du cul*; then he will operate quite differently. Then things will go badly enough for poor frontside people like us, with our childish penchant for females. If Schweitzer could be made useful for anything, it would be to wheedle out of this peculiar honourable gentleman the particulars of the paederasts in high and top places, which would certainly not be difficult for him as a brother in spirit.

[...]

Your
F.E.

W&R replies: It is no big secret that the founders of scientific socialism were not immune from the prejudices—national, ethnic, sexual—common among their
continued on page 17

Bible Bigots Terrorize Women

Labor Must Defend Abortion Rights!

Abortion rights are in deadly danger! Nationwide there's a mass mobilization of terror and intimidation against women: arsonists and bombers destroy clinics; Operation Rescue bigots blockade clinics and harass patients and staff. Judges and legislators are the staunch allies of these thugs, and cops stand by while the "god squads" do their dirty work. The bigots are trying everything to abolish abortion rights—funding cuts, "parental permission" requirements for young women, banning the use of public facilities, medical restrictions on doctors. And with their friend George Bush in the White House, the anti-woman bullies think they can get away with anything.

They are besieging the country. No drug company will market the new pill RU 486, which induces abortion chemically, because of threats of boycott by "Right to Life" groups, who realize that this promising drug would make abortion what it should be: an entirely private matter between a woman and her doctor. In New York the nosy bigots even dared to interfere in the medical care of a comatose woman whose doctor advised an abortion to aid her recovery. Outrageously, her husband, Martin Klein, was dragged through the courts to defend his right to do the best thing for his own wife. Now "Right to Life" thinks it's got enough influence to finally get the Supreme Court to throw out *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision legalizing abortion nationwide. On January 9, at the urging of the Reagan/Bush Justice Department, the Supreme Court agreed to review a Missouri anti-abortion law which could lead to the overturn of legal abortion at the federal level. Falling to the purview of state and local statutes, abortion would then be illegal in most states.

What horror this would mean for American women is already a reality for millions across this planet. Abortion under decent medical conditions is one of the safest surgical procedures—ten times safer than childbirth. Yet worldwide 200,000 women die each year from unsafe, illegal abortions, and thousands more are made sterile or otherwise maimed and mutilated from massive infections and bleeding, the result of back-alley butchery. In Latin America, where abortion is illegal in every country except Castro's Cuba, close to a million women are admitted to hospitals each year for post-abortion complications. Africa's urban hospitals commonly see 40 to 50 cases of septic abortion each day. Family planning organizers blame much of this needless, tragic suffering and death on the Reagan administration, which in 1984 forced through a ban on funding to international organizations counseling women on abortion.

This vicious assault on women falls far more heavily on the poor and minorities, as was dramatically pointed out at a January 10 protest held in New York City in a Greenwich Village back alley. Bill Tatum, publisher of the city's largest black newspaper, the *Amsterdam News*, said, "I recognize this alley as the emergency room for women of my childhood. Unless we fight, this will become the emergency room of poor, black and Hispanic women of our future" (*Newsday*, 11 January). Many women already effectively have no "right" to abortion—they cannot afford one, any more than they can afford decent health care. Federal Medicaid funding for abortion vanished in 1976, when Congress banned it through the Hyde Amendment. By 1978 the number of federally funded abortions had fallen from



Hubbard/NY Times



Downing/Newsweek

George Bush saluted reactionary anti-woman fanatics at Washington, D.C. rally against abortion, January 1989.

W&R Photo



Boston, January 21: Spartacists at pro-abortion rally call for "Full Democratic Rights for Gays!" and "Women's Liberation through Workers Revolution!" Many demonstrators joined our chant, "Defend the clinics, take a stand, free abortion on demand!"

295,000 to 3,000 per year. Democrat Jimmy Carter, the sanctimonious born-again president, shrugged his shoulders in utter indifference to the plight of poor women when he commented: "There are many things in life which are not fair."

Ruling-Class Assault Targets Ghetto Poor

Reagan left office vowing to fight to end legal abortion—and to push one other "great achievement" of his eight years in the White House: welfare "reform." By this he means Congress' new "workfare" law, passed with the most overwhelming Democratic and Republican unity in years. Grotesquely named the "Family Security Act," this bill is simply *genocide*. Millions of single mothers on welfare will be cut off without a cent if they turn down a job—even if it's a "job" hours from their home, at minimum wage, with no benefits and almost no provision for childcare (an abominable six bucks a day)! Fathers will be hunted down through genetic tests; then their wages will be garnished or they'll be forced into the same phony job scheme if they can't cough up child support. Children will be abandoned to the mean streets or ripped away from their mothers through "protective payments" to unspecified "third parties." This plan could only mean death for whole layers of the minority population because this decrepit capitalist system no longer needs them.

This unspeakably cruel system will leave a woman on welfare with no access to abortion—and no way to feed, house or educate the child she is therefore forced to bear. Deep budget cuts have slashed funding for prenatal care for poor women. About 17 percent of American women of childbearing age don't have health insurance, while fewer than half the women under the official federal poverty line now qualify for Medicaid—and many obstetricians won't even take

Medicaid patients. The U.S. has the worst infant-mortality rate among 20 industrialized nations, higher even than such economically devastated nations as Ireland. At public hospitals serving the ghetto poor such as Martin Luther King Jr. General Hospital in Los Angeles, stillborn births are so common that "the labor and delivery unit harbors an isolated room—No. 3—to keep grieving would-be mothers from hearing joyous parents nearby" (*Wall Street Journal*, 19 October 1988).

If despite all this, poor people manage to raise children, what kind of life will they be able to make for themselves? The inner-city ghettos are wastelands of burnt-out buildings where the homeless shiver in the winter cold, where "schools" are more like prisons, where rates of diseases like tuberculosis and AIDS are soaring. In 1986 only 40 percent of all black men had full-time jobs. Over half of all black families are headed by single mothers, and the poverty rate for black kids under age 18 is a shocking 67.1 percent. If a single mother is working at all she's doing piecework at home (the U.S. Labor Department just lifted a 45-year-old ban on home-workers in five branches of the clothing and jewelry industries), or working in some sweatshop, or cleaning toilets for the wealthy at minimum wage. Because she can't afford childcare, she probably has to leave her babies at home alone, and she lives in fear that they'll be bitten by rats, preyed on by hoodlums, or shot by racist cops on a rampage through the ghetto—as happened to five-year-old Patrick Mason in 1983. After a killer cop gunned down her child in her own home, Patrick's mother was outrageously blamed and charged with child abuse and being an "unfit mother" by the Orange County, California D.A.

While these desperate conditions hit black people far harder in this viciously racist capitalist society, they are by no means the only victims. For over a decade, beginning under Jimmy Carter, the American ruling class has waged an escalating war on working people. Unions

Richards/Magnum



Ruling-class war on the poor: young woman and her family in devastated Washington, D.C. neighborhood.

are regularly at clinic blockades in California have appeared on fascist Tom Metzger's TV show. *The anti-abortion terrorists and the race-terrorists in white sheets have the same agenda:* to assault the working people, poor and oppressed of this country. In this they are the paramilitary servants of the capitalist state, whose armed guards—the rampaging cop terrorists in blue—have beaten and murdered with impunity in city after city across this land.

It is no coincidence that in Dallas, in the same seven-day period that “mysterious” fires broke out in three abortion clinics, judge Jack Hampton outrageously awarded a lighter sentence—30 years instead of life in prison—to a convicted murderer because his two victims were gay men. Said the judge, showing utter contempt for human life, “I put prostitutes and gays at about the same level. If these boys had picked up two prostitutes and taken them to the woods and killed them, I'd consider that a similar case. And I'd be hard put to give somebody life for killing a prostitute” (*Gay Community News*, 25 December 1988). Emboldened by Hampton's remarks, six members of the KKK, wearing surgical gloves in a ghoulish, disgusting reference to the AIDS epidemic, threatened a lesbian and gay church by invading it during the regular Sunday service.

Democrats, Republicans Unite Against Women's Right to Abortion

In last year's presidential election, Michael Dukakis' paper support for legal abortion was about the only difference between the Democrats and the Republicans. But Dukakis did his best to bury the issue, while the reconfirmation of the ban on Medicaid-funded abortions, passed with bipartisan support in Congress

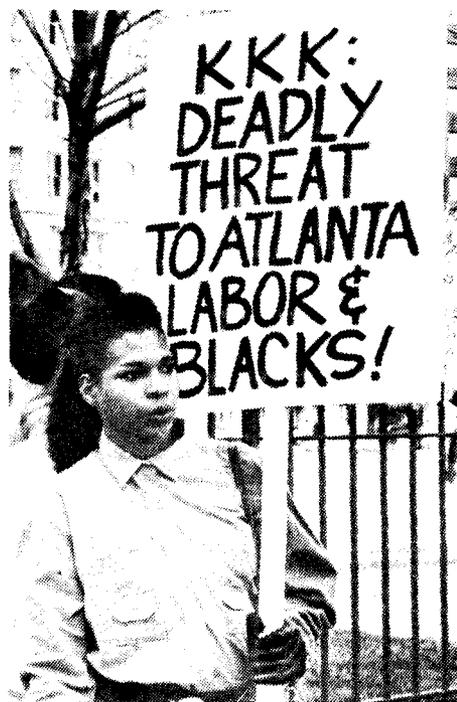
last fall, made clear once again that “abortion rights” are only for those who can pay.

Practically the first act in office of George Bush, the “kinder, gentler” ex-CIA man and control for the contra murderers, was to cheer on 65,000 “Right to Lifers” at their annual Washington protest against legal abortion. Bush's anti-abortion posture is a bloc with ultra-right-wing forces, whose support he cultivates. What does he care if women die from back-alley butchery or if there are more unwanted children wandering around or if women and doctors go to jail for abortions? Meanwhile, a showdown is looming over Bush's appointment as head of Health and Human Services of black doctor Louis Sullivan, whose promises to fight against legal abortion are not good enough for the “Right to Life.”

There are limits to how far the government can push its anti-abortion crusade. Despite repeated efforts, the “Right to Life” has never been able to get Congress to pass its “Human Life Amendment” to the U.S. Constitution, which would ban all abortions categorically. Congressmen with an eye to the next election realize that the right to abortion is popular and widely supported in this country; 1.5 million abortions are performed each year in the U.S. And while the bourgeoisie will always be able to pay for safe abortions (legal or not) for their wives, daughters and mistresses, in their racist mindset they figure that legal abortion means there will be fewer black people around.

Abortion Rights: What Strategy to Win?

Bourgeois feminist groups like the National Organization for Women are banking on this dispute in the American ruling class to “save” legal abortion. NOW and the National Abortion Rights Action League



Karen Dunigan



Workers Vanguard

Atlanta, January 21: Over 3,000 demonstrate in militant rally, responding to PDC call for labor/black mobilization against Klan/skinhead terror.

(NARAL) are organizing a march in Washington on April 9 and a grassroots petitioning drive to pressure the Supreme Court. They want to channel the anger and outrage felt by thousands into meaningless lobbying campaigns. They relegate a woman's right to abortion to nine black-robed judges.

The NOW crowd has struggled to limit the militancy of pro-abortion protesters who try to outmobilize and stop Operation Rescue from shutting down the clinics. Their "defense" strategy has been to organize escorts to lead patients through the shouting crowd of thugs, relying on the cops to keep the sidewalks clear. But in almost every instance of an attack against a clinic, the cops have gently arrested and removed the blockaders with such sluggishness that the clinic is effectively closed for the day.

These feminists accept the framework of capitalist politics, acting as pressure groups on the Democratic Party. They play the sectoralist game, bringing out their constituency at the polls in exchange for a few crumbs. The Democrats will not and cannot defend women's rights—any more than they can defend black rights. Despite more black and female faces in high places, life for many people in this country has become qualitatively more nasty, brutish and short.

We need a massive mobilization of labor, together with women and minorities, to keep the clinics open. Four hundred defiant auto workers or steel workers around a clinic would give the bullies pause. Such a show of strength would bring out many others in support of women's rights. This strategy of independent labor-centered mobilizations to stop the reactionaries has already been tested in action. Massive support for the Partisan Defense Committee's call for mobilizing labor/black power kept the killer Klan off the streets of

Philadelphia last November 5. And on January 21, as Bush and his cronies were celebrating in Washington, 3,000 blacks, unionists, students, gays and socialists protested a KKK march down the streets of Atlanta.

Mobilizing the power of labor in defense of the rights of all cuts through the poisonous divisions between sectors of the oppressed. Fostering ethnic, race and sex divisions is the bosses' game, played to keep the working class weak and unable to effectively struggle for its interests. What we need is a class-struggle workers party, independent of the Democrats and Republicans, a tribune of the people, which will fight for the needs of all the oppressed and exploited.

The millions of blacks and women in the ranks of the American proletariat will play a key role in awakening the workers' enormous social power. The struggle for women's emancipation is inseparable from the struggle for the emancipation of the working class from capitalist exploitation and oppression. In the U.S., where systematic, institutionalized racial oppression keeps black people on the bottom of society, the question of black freedom is the social tinder which could spark revolutionary struggle. Under the leadership of a multi-racial vanguard party, the workers and oppressed of this country must take power, establishing a workers government which would open the way for a new, socialist society where production would be for the needs of all, not profit for a few. In such a society the bourgeois family would be replaced by socialized childcare and housework, enabling women to be full participants in social and political life. Full employment, decent housing and free education would eliminate the material basis of racial oppression. Only then will we be able to provide a decent future for our children. For international socialist revolution! ■

Women and Revolution Interview

Bill Baird, Fighter for Women's Right to Abortion

For over 25 years Bill Baird has fought for abortion and birth control rights, ever since a black woman bled to death in his arms from the effects of a coat-hanger abortion. In an interview with *Women and Revolution* (edited for publication) held at his Hempstead, Long Island clinic on January 4, Baird recounted many of his battles against the forces of anti-woman reaction. He has faced threats to his life, eight arrests, personal tragedy and enormous financial costs. His story is a graphic description of the persecution facing someone who single-handedly struggles against racist and anti-woman bigotry.

In the 1960s and early '70s Baird worked to educate women—especially poor, minority women with little access to information—about the dangers of unsafe, back-alley abortion methods. He set up the nation's first free birth control and abortion counseling clinic. Baird's 1967 conviction under the medievalist "chastity" law in Massachusetts was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1972 in *Baird v. Eisenstadt*, which laid the constitutional foundation of the right to privacy on which *Roe v. Wade* is based. It has been rightly said that "Perhaps only Margaret Sanger, a heroine of his whose background was startlingly similar to Baird's, had as much to do with making birth control and abortion legal in the United States" (*Boston Globe Magazine*, 9 June 1985).

While W&R has real differences with Baird on a strategy to fight anti-abortion reaction (for example, we place no reliance on the cops or any other agency of the capitalist state to protect women), we agree strongly on the urgency of the question. We honor Bill Baird's courage and determination in his long struggle and salute his service to women.



W&R Photo

"I'm the only American in modern times who has been sentenced to prison, as a felon, for a speech on birth control."

W&R: You have a long, honorable history of fighting for abortion rights and against laws that restrict access to birth control.

Baird: And gay rights. I was one of the first in the country who called for the repeal of those laws.

W&R: Could you talk about how you got involved in this and what motivated you?

Baird: I grew up in the slums, one of six children. I know what it's like to be poor and I sure as hell know what it's like to be oppressed. I had a sister who died at the age of 12 because of our poverty. I was nine years old and that had a tremendous impact on me. I just couldn't believe that I would never see my sister again. She was like a second mother to me, so her loss meant a great deal to me. I had a brother who died at the age of

one, who I never even knew. My parents were immigrants, my father from Scotland, my mother from Germany. They got married at the age of 15 and 16 respectively. I vowed that if I ever made it from those poor days that I would try to help oppressed people.

In 1963 I was clinical director for one of the national birth control companies, Emko Vaginal Foam. Part of my job was to coordinate research between the hospitals and the company. In New York City I heard a woman scream, a bloodcurdling scream which I'll never forget. I ran into the hallway of the hospital. I saw this woman who looked as if she were covered with red paint from the waist down, covered with blood. She

had an eight-inch piece of wire coat hanger embedded in her uterus. I found out later she was a mother of nine children on welfare and she died. She died because in her own desperate effort and ignorance of her own body she had pushed the coat hanger through the wall of the uterus into her bowel and hemorrhaged.

In New York State it was against the law for single people to have access to birth control. Obviously it was against the law to have an abortion. In 1965 I had a mobile van. I drove from one area to another, from Harlem to Bedford-Stuyvesant, teaching poor women at night, in my spare time, about birth control, about abortion, VD, and so forth. [One night] I came right up the street here and the police were waiting for me. They dragged me out of the van, handcuffed me—this is May the 14th at 8:30 at night—charged me with indecent exposure of obscene objects, to wit, publicly showing birth control devices.

The following year a reactionary legislator by the name of Commissioner Daley, in a town called Freehold, New Jersey, had a brilliant idea of how he was going to stop women from “abusing the taxpayer.” He was going to jail every unwed mother in New Jersey. You ask, how could you jail an unwed mother? Under the charge of fornication; it’s a six-month jail term. He said, if I put them in prison, they can’t have intercourse, so it would lower the welfare costs. I said, Daley, you’re nuts. Those are my exact words, they’re on a public telegram. I said, I’m going to teach them birth control with my van. I came there and I was not only arrested; I was convicted and sentenced to prison for 20 days.

It’s important for women to understand how they got their right of privacy by the judicial system. In 1967 [Boston University student] Ray Mungo wrote me a letter signed by 800 people, asking me to come to Boston University to challenge a 150-year-old law called “Crimes Against Chastity.” The law said, if you print, publish or exhibit or distribute any information or—and this is the buzzword—any means whatsoever for birth control or abortion, it’s a felony conviction. Since my mother had not raised a stupid son, I said, why do I want to go from Long Island to Boston? You challenge the law. You know what happened? Planned Parenthood said, keep in your own backyard, don’t come here. I did a little research on Planned Parenthood. Their literature said that abortion was the taking of a human life; they were very anti-abortion in those days. I took over their headquarters in a sit-in to force them to support a woman’s right to abortion. In 1968 they changed their position.

I decided to challenge the law as cleverly as I could, not having any attorneys or anybody backing me. I held up *Time* magazine; on the cover I had pasted a birth control pill, a photograph of a pill and a St. Joseph’s baby aspirin. With the hope that it would be so vague that the law would be declared unconstitutional, I asked the police, will you arrest me for showing something that looks like a pill, that actually is the pill, or a photograph of a pill? I thought that was very clever. I was the only one who thought so, because the police made no move. Next I read the Bible, Genesis 38, verses 9 through 11, where God told Onan to have sex with his dead brother’s wife. Onan spilled his seed on the ground. I said, if you arrest me for reading the Bible, for giving this information, you must arrest every rabbi, every priest, every minister. Again I thought: very clever. They just stood there and laughed.

So I went to a department store; I bought a package of Emko foam. I gave out one condom, one package of foam to a minor (anyone under 21 in those days), a 19-year-old college student. Attached to it was a sales receipt that said \$3 and nine cents sales tax. I said, if you’re going to arrest me, you must arrest the attorney general for allowing an illegal sales tax on an illegal sale. I thought that was absolutely devastating. At that moment they handcuffed me, charged me with indecent exposure of obscene objects and distributing to an unmarried woman a condom and a package of foam.

I thought the students who invited me would stand behind me for the trial. What I didn’t realize was they graduated the next semester and they all took off. There I’m facing a ten-year prison term, five years on each charge. This is where I learned a lot about the movement. Planned Parenthood issued a public statement, orally and in writing: there is nothing to be gained by the Baird case; the only way to change the law is through legislation. All the support I thought I was going to get, Planned Parenthood had effectively cut out from under me. NOW, National Organization for Women, issued a statement, if William Baird’s name was Wilhelmina Baird we would back him.

Sexism to me has no place in any movement, so I attack women who are sexist pigs as I attack men who are sexist pigs. The women’s movement would not even file an *amicus* brief behind my appeal for the rights of

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women to have access to birth control. Because it was brought by a male, they would not back my case. I was sentenced to prison. I'm the only American in modern times who has been sentenced to prison, as a felon, for a speech on birth control. I have a conviction as a felon, which meant I lost my right to vote or run for public office. I literally was forced to chase rats out of my cell, I was stripped naked almost every day. I had to pick bugs out of my food. Ultimately the Supreme Court heard me and said very powerful words to young women: if the right to privacy means anything it is the right of the individual to be free to decide whether to bear or beget a child. The following year in *Roe v. Wade*, they quoted me six times on the right of privacy.

But my allies, like NARAL [National Abortion Rights Action League] and NOW who have still got hang-ups with a personality like Bill Baird, won't ever acknowledge that. Robin Morgan wrote in her book, *Going Too Far*, men like Bill Baird are in this movement because women will come across quicker and easier. There has to be an easier way to get you to go to bed with me than to go to jail eight times, be shot at, firebombed, spat upon, told that I would be dead before January 14.

Incredible as the story may be, Planned Parenthood was awarded the right to argue half of my time before the U.S. Supreme Court [in] a very important case for teenage women, *Baird v. Bellotti* [a 1976 suit to strike down a Massachusetts law requiring parental permission for young women seeking abortions]. In my judgment they greatly weakened the argument. They're willing to compromise. I don't compromise on freedom.

W&R: Your clinic was the first of its kind in the country. Could you tell us about its history?

Baird: On the cover of *Sepia* [a black women's magazine] in 1967 I said, regardless of the law, I would help any woman get an abortion. That was announced publicly in the *New York Times* in 1967; I led the first abortion march outside St. Patrick's Cathedral that was reported in the newspapers. I would say: You're pregnant? Come to me for an abortion, we'll help you. Period. End of story. That was my school background, where I learned how women would take a douching bag and fill it with Lysol or bleach or turpentine. A good amount of my energy in the '60s was spent educating the public that if you take a bar of Ivory soap and chop it into little pieces and mix it with warm water and make emulsion out of it, soap being caustic might abort you. But if I asked you what could kill you in a matter of minutes in soap, would you know?

W&R: A fat embolism.

Baird: Most women don't know that.

W&R: Your message has gotten through.

Baird: I'm glad to hear that. Or they would take a baster where they would use a salt water solution and [die] by forcing the residual air that's trapped into a major blood vessel.

Every woman that I helped was a potential ten-year prison term. I had you sign a form, I'm not connected with the police department, I came here voluntarily, and I was charged no fee. Many people I helped were senators or mayors, police chiefs, as well as the regular



Newsday

"Right to Lifers" led by Catholic Bishop McGann target Bill Baird Institute, Hempstead, 1985.

public. So I let them think that I kept the records in my facility, which I didn't. I let them think if there was a raid, if their names ever reached the newspapers, it would be a source of embarrassment to them. This was my way of building a wall of protection and it worked.

In 1972 when we won the right to birth control, I predicted every abortion law would be repealed within one year. It happened. When we won in 1973 I predicted that if we didn't fight back we would lose the abortion law. The day of the Supreme Court decision, everyone thought that the victory was ours. I warned that the church would try this counterrevolution against this issue. For the next six or seven years I alone stood outside every "Right to Life" convention with a picket sign because I could see they were marshaling the troops for this counteroffensive. Our side was fast asleep, which is why the opposition has the power they do today. We've allowed them to build this tremendous, monumental ground of support as moralists, when they really are thugs.

W&R: We'd like to talk about Operation Rescue and what's been going on lately.

Baird: Just this past weekend 62 of them were arrested for invading an abortion facility in Boston. One of them tried punching a woman in the face to take away a list of the patients' names and addresses. When they find where the patient lives, they will place a call to her at two o'clock in the morning and play a baby's voice on a recording saying, "Mommy, Mommy, why did you murder me?" as a means of breaking down the woman to make her feel guilty for her free will and her free choice. Outside here you see them copy down the patients' license plates. In New York if you give the license number to the Motor Vehicle Bureau you can find out who owns the vehicle and then you can harass the people at home.

[Operation Rescue] has become in the last couple of months far more aggressive and far more efficient; they're getting superb training from someplace. Their

efficiency is based on the fact that they have much larger numbers now. They've got simultaneous raids going on all over the country, which proves my theory that this is a national conspiracy to obstruct the constitutional rights and freedom of women, which would evoke the [1871] Ku Klux Klan Act, which basically [out-laws] two or more people conspiring to violate the rights of a class of people.

We ask for federal marshals to safely escort women to buildings as blacks were safely escorted in the 1960s, with the full weight of the U.S. government and the civil rights statutes. [These] admittedly are selectively enforced, but nevertheless would be a much heavier charge than a \$25 disorderly conduct fine, which is all they currently are getting. [Operation Rescue] founder Randy Terry, a man I've debated some seven times—he's nothing but a little pompous used-car salesman, his peak year was 13 cars—is now wearing expensive suits, traveling all over the United States. He refused to pay the fine of \$50,000 that the judge ordered him to pay for the damage they have done.

This is a "holy war," orchestrated and financed by the power merchants of organized religion such as Jerry Falwell, who by his own public admission gave \$10,000 to Randy Terry in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm calling for a national investigation: who is financing and bankrolling this national conspiracy that suddenly out of nowhere in the last two years got something called Operation Rescue? Who is paying for their transportation from state to state? Where did Jerry Falwell get the \$10,000?

They've got the backing of this right-wing henchman, Cardinal O'Connor, who had the arrogance to suggest that Americans of a different moral persuasion are the equivalent of the Nazi Holocaust—when his church stood silently by while millions of Jews and

other people were slaughtered in the Nazi Holocaust. [Catholic] Bishop John McGann, this right-wing fanatic, stood outside this door two years ago two days after Christmas, [a day] called the Feast of the Holy Innocents. That was in reference to King Herod slaughtering male babies 2,000 years ago, implying that Bill Baird was the equivalent. I was able to get 500 people to counter-picket against their 4,000. [Bishop McGann] marched arm in arm with the D.A., Dennis Dillon, who refuses to prosecute these people. So it's open season. That's why I said, we will defend and protect those constitutional rights by whatever means necessary.

W&R: This clinic was bombed in 1979.

Baird: Not this building, it was on Main Street. Let me tell you how the authorities try to stop you. I endured for 25 years here in Hempstead, which is a black, poor community. In 1979 we were firebombed by a fanatic who said that in the name of Jesus Christ we will cleanse by fire Bill Baird. He threw gasoline, threw the torch, even though there were 50 patients there. Burned the place to the ground. We caught him, we brought him to trial. The man who prosecuted him was the same D.A. [Dillon], who said, these are good Christians. And in contrast to every other terrorist caught firebombing a clinic, given 10 to 20 years in jail, the man was given less than a year in a mental hospital.

We reopened the facility. A couple of years later I got a subpoena from the state saying, Bill Baird, we don't like you where you are. We're taking your building away by the law of eminent domain—to build a courthouse, which is the very place I'm picketing tomorrow. Of course they gave me a fraction of what the building was worth and that put us in such a hole economically. I'm still in debt for three U.S. Supreme Court cases. Try to get a loan where it says "Have you ever been arrested?" and you put down "Eight times."

"Right to Life" has become very sophisticated toward me. One of my chief sources of income is lecturing. I'm a pretty good speaker. I can generally move people fairly well, but that's only if I can be heard. When the "Right to Lifers" hear I'm going to speak at a college, they will call up the school, they will threaten bomb threats, demonstrations, picket lines. As a result, a lot of schools will say, who needs this headache? We'll get somebody from Planned Parenthood who doesn't get them so rattled. That's because Planned Parenthood doesn't take on the church aggressively as I do.

This Christmas I wept, I was in such pain, because I lost my wife and children over this thing. Every year I play Santa Claus for poor kids. And this year I was going to be with my children. When you can't attack the message, you attack the messenger. [In 1971] I was arrested on a morals charge. I gave a speech on birth control, which I've done hundreds of times across this nation, where a 14-month baby sat on her mother's lap. And the police said anyone under 18 will be corrupted by the speech. Could you think that a 14-month baby could be corrupted or get sexual ideas? The mother and I were handcuffed; the mother and I were put in a cell overnight. We had to go on trial and face a three-year jail term. I thought this was a joke. Then I started getting mail aimed at my little daughter, that they knew where she went to school, and they were going to kill

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Bill Baird shows photo of his Hempstead clinic, firebombed by an anti-abortion terrorist in 1979.

her. Since I don't believe in guns, I went to the FBI as well as local police and said, please protect my child. I don't want her killed for the work I did. And here's what the FBI said to me: Baird, these are crazy people. Ignore it, if anything happens, if they try to shoot at her, then we'll step in. I said, wait a moment, the person who pulls the trigger on a gun is usually crazy and suppose they don't miss. So I took my family many miles away to a farm town, where they're very happy, very secure. What I never dreamed would happen: they became like the farm people. They're ultraconservative, deeply religious. So they don't half understand what I fight for.

March 22, 1972 is the anniversary of legalized birth control for women in this country. I'm asking every woman in this country on March 22 not to show up at work [but instead] to picket a local church group that's anti-woman, or the federal government, to say that's the day of the right of privacy for women, for the right to birth control, that is under such savage attack. If we deprive women of the right to birth control, look at how many more women will suffer, how many more women will need abortions, how many more babies will be born that aren't wanted or can't be cared for. Not only is abortion under attack, but the birth control pill and the IUD, which works as an abortifacient. If they had their way they would make these a crime.

W&R: We consider [the drug] RU 486, for example, to be very important, because if it was legal, it would make abortion an entirely private act.

Baird: I agree. They're really not anti-abortion, they're really anti-woman. [RU 486] is a compound that could save the lives of women in Third World places.

I'm asking [in a letter] if I can conduct a seminar to raise the consciousness level of the police toward women. I said to them, how would you feel if we offered you a free vasectomy [and] we had a scalpel next to your scrotum and allowed people to scream "Murder!" while the doctor was making the incision? I have never met a man who thought that was OK. I have been calling for a 500-foot quiet zone by every single clinic. I don't think people have a right to demonstrate in front of clinics. The analogy that I use is the Soviet embassy. You cannot picket within 500 feet. You cannot demonstrate by an election booth within 300 feet; you cannot honk a car horn by a hospital within 150 feet. All those zones of privacy exist for other critters, but not for the rights of women. That's one of the things I want to establish in this country, that women have every right to medical care with dignity and without the fear of noise or without the fear of invasion as we saw this past week. Three clinics were firebombed in Dallas, Texas.

The other thing we're asking for is for people to fight back. I'm goddamn sick and tired of people coming up to me and saying, Bill Baird, what a great fighter you are. How did you endure 25 years? Keep up the good work. I look at them, shocked. Why do you ask me to keep up the good work? Why don't you join me and say, brother Bill, you're 56 and a half now, you take a rest and we'll take over for a while. You take a vacation, which I haven't had in 14 years. I'm asking people to become not a spectator to the cause of freedom, but a participant, and to realize that they can make a difference. I'm the most stubborn man you'll ever meet in your life. I'll never surrender one inch of your freedom to anybody. I have made a difference, so you can make a difference.

W&R: Thank you very much. ■

We urge our readers to contribute to the defense of Bill Baird's clinic and to help him defray his massive legal expenses. All contributions should be made payable/mailed to: Parents' Aid Society, 131 Fulton Avenue, Suite 306, Hempstead, NY 11550.

Support the Partisan Defense Committee!

The Partisan Defense Committee, which recently sent a contribution to assist Bill Baird in defending his clinic from the anti-abortion bigots, is a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal defense organization in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League. We urge our readers to support the work of the PDC. For a donation of \$5 or more, the PDC will send you a subscription to its newsletter *Class-Struggle Defense Notes*. Write to: PDC, Box 99, Canal St. Station, New York, NY 10013.

West Germany

Hundreds Pilloried in Anti-Abortion Witchhunt

Under the slogan "Abortion Is Death," the Bavarian state is mounting a mammoth witchhunt. Dr. Horst Theissen, a 49-year-old gynecologist in Memmingen, Allgäu, West Germany, has been on trial since 8 September 1988 for performing "illegal" outpatient abortions; he faces a minimum of 15 years in prison and disbarment from his profession. Over 500 of his patients also face prosecution. The trial is expected to be longer than all but the most spectacular murder trials.

The witchhunt began in late 1986 when, following an anonymous lead, the state seized 1,500 of Dr. Theissen's patient records. In 1987 Theissen was arrested and held for six weeks in "investigatory detention" before being released on \$160,000 bail. Now the state is using the stolen files as the basis for prosecution. "Investigations," including interrogations by the police and courts, have so far resulted in charges against at least 277 women for seeking and having abortions; those convicted have been fined \$500 to \$1,750. More than 80 male companions have been charged as "accomplices in prematurely ending pregnancy."

Dr. Theissen, a Liberal (FDP) delegate to the Unterallgäu district council until 1983, has for years courageously defied the reactionary abortion statutes. Even the state prosecutor praised his irreproachable work as a doctor: "There were never any complications." *Stern* (23 June 1988) noted Theissen's compassion and conscientiousness: "The patients paid between \$130 and \$270 for an abortion, including time-consuming consultations, ultrasound examination and post-operative visits; poor women were treated free." Knowing that the operations were against the law, Theissen "accepted this risk because he considered it 'unworthy, humiliating and medically irresponsible' to submit to the medievalist laws.

In a moving statement to the court, Dr. Theissen defended his treatment of poor, working-class and particularly foreign-born women on an outpatient basis, which circumvented the obligatory five-day hospital stay. His primary reason was to help his patients "in the most uncomplicated way possible, considering their views in general and their religious beliefs.... They came to me mostly after they had already been left on their own somewhere else, demoralized and disappointed" (*Die Zeit*, 23 September 1988). One patient described Theissen as an "ally of the women, who didn't get rich, either" (*Der Spiegel*, 19 September 1988). This man is no criminal—he's a hero. Drop the charges against Dr. Theissen and all the Allgäu women and men immediately!

Foreign-Born and Working Women Targeted

The state subpoenaed 156 women as witnesses against Dr. Theissen, and over 130—all of those whose

convictions stand—are being forced to testify. Even before Theissen's trial, these women had been humiliated and branded by anti-abortion diatribes written into their convictions. The court sent out 170 twelve-page questionnaires to Theissen's patients, demanding the most intimate details of the length and nature of the woman's relationship with her partner, financial status and obligations, etc. Even the failure to fill out the form completely carries the threat of further prosecution!

In the convictions, the women are cursed for being pathologically selfish, for "not taking the rights of the child into consideration." One Allgäu woman was met in midafternoon by two cops at her front door. Within earshot of her children, they demanded: "Are you aware that you have committed murder?" Another woman was obscenely interrogated: "Why were you so slovenly about contraception?" A judge replied to a mother who said she didn't want to bear another child: "So instead you decided to kill it." A mother of three was told that "for her it would be much more appropriate to accuse herself of taking a human life."

At the trial the names and addresses of all 156 women who were subpoenaed, many of whom had concealed their identities until then, were read aloud to a full gallery of spectators. During the entire agonizing 20 minutes the only female on the panel of seven judges stared shocked at the floor. The last witch was burned in Memmingen in 1656, but in 20 minutes the state has targeted these women and their families in a witchhunt that is destroying hundreds of lives. Several women have broken down completely under the pressure. In this rural, conservative area, where two-thirds of the population is Catholic, social hatred and ostracism of any woman suspected of having an abortion is rampant. In the face of resurgent fascist activity, these women have been declared fair game for right-wing terrorists.

The state is targeting the most vulnerable: those patients of Dr. Theissen who are foreign-born. The Memmingen Women's Center, which has organized a network for their support and defense, reports that many had no legal counsel and no idea of their democratic rights, afraid to withhold even the most intimate details from the court. Many have been forced to take out loans to pay the stiff fines.

Der Spiegel quotes a Turkish patient whose sole income supports three children and a husband who has been denied work papers:

"When I got pregnant again I went to Dr. Theissen. I didn't think that it is forbidden, because at home in Turkey you are allowed to have an abortion officially until the third month. According to the Koran it is a sin, but I'm not that religious. There was no way I could have this baby, because then I would have to give up



Memmingen, West Germany, 10 September 1988: At demonstration to defend Theissen and others, TLD speaker (right) said, "The organized workers movement is the one force that can do away with this witchhunt... the entire workers movement must fight against it."



Spartakist

my job. If I had lived on welfare, I would surely be deported before long....

"I have to prove to the foreign police that the apartment is big enough for us, otherwise I get no residence permit. If I had another child now, I would have to prove we had eight square meters more space. That means I would have to have a new apartment. But with four children and a husband who doesn't work, it's as good as impossible to find an apartment here."

The Memmingen immigration authorities threatened all foreign-born women convicted under the abortion statute with deportation. After Liberal Bundestag (parliament) delegates sharply condemned this step, the police said that *this time* deportation would not follow. With convictions on their records, these women are in danger. Stop the witchhunt!

Paragraphs of Shame

The West German abortion law, known as Paragraph 218, permits abortions only when there are "indications of serious need" for medical or social reasons (not including poverty) and only in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. And Bavaria's ten-year-old "Counseling Law," now a model for a projected federal law, forces women to run a gauntlet of doctors, counselors, health officials, clergymen and psychiatrists before the state will certify "serious need."

In Memmingen, the state has declared for hundreds of women that their need was not serious. The trial of Dr. Theissen, conducted with a blithe disregard for even bourgeois legality, much less simple decency, is intended as a "pilot project" for a wholesale assault on the minimal abortion rights of women throughout West Germany. Defense motions presenting overwhelming evidence that the panel was biased were waved aside, as the judges cynically certified each other's "impartiality." A suit to drop the charges against Theissen, based on the fact that all evidence has stemmed from unconstitutional invasion of privacy,

was defeated. Theissen's patient files were also illegally passed from the tax authorities to the police, orchestrated by the ministry of "justice." The judiciary shrugs this off, determined to push through hundreds of convictions. The government's real position was given by the head of the Bavarian State Medical Chamber: "Their bellies do belong to them, but what is also in that belly [in pregnancy]—that does not belong to them."

Memmingen is not an isolated case. In Nuremberg two gynecologists have been convicted on abortion counts, one sentenced to four years in prison. In the Rhineland Palatinate a doctor faces charges on 180 violations of Paragraph 218. In Catholic areas of Hessen on December 28 church bells rang for 15 minutes for the "victims of the infant holocaust," and "abortion counselors" torment women at their bedside after pre-abortion sedatives have already been administered.

This brutal coercion has provoked an angry outcry from groups ranging from the Liberals to the Social Democrats (SPD) and the left, with abundant references to Hitler's Germany. This is no joke, especially in Bavaria. The ruling Christian Democrats recently advocated a "year of social service" for young women, modeled on Hitler's "League of German Girls." Article 47 of the Bavarian constitution, as anti-abortion hardliners like to point out, "proceeds from the standpoint that the death penalty still exists." Hitler made abortion punishable by death in 1943.

Now Hitler's heirs in Munich and Bonn gloat at the prospect of forcing poor and working women to choose between draconian prosecution and dangerous illegal abortions—or both. Yet the SPD, which in 1974 sabotaged the strong movement to strike Paragraph 218 from the books, still refuses to raise this demand and has consistently suppressed the widespread outrage in their trade-union base over the abortion witchhunt.

The abortion statutes in the West German penal code

fall under "crimes against human life," following the statutes against murder, manslaughter and infanticide, and right before...genocide. They are based on the Pope's 16th-century assertion that from the instant of conception, human life is endowed with a soul. Since there has never been a successful bourgeois revolution in Germany to achieve such gains as the separation of church and state, Hegelian idealism and clerical obscurantism permeate legal and constitutional relations between citizens and the state, and condition particular conceptions about life itself. The deeply reactionary character of this state comes to the fore over precisely such questions as the legal and social equality of women.

This "public exposure of a criminal, reminiscent of medieval pillories" has made abortion a public matter (Gerhard Armendt, *Criminalization of Abortion*). But a woman's decision whether or not to bear a child is a deeply private matter. The state has no business prying into private lives. Down with Paragraph 218 and all the reactionary abortion statutes!

For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

In West Germany the *Kinder-Küche-Kirche* (children-kitchen-church) frenzy is part of a generalized attack aimed at drugging the population with nationalist poison. The organizers are the same reactionaries that seek to deport immigrants en masse and

give Nazi goons a green light to attack immigrants, leftists and women's centers. They impatiently await the day that tanks will again roll eastward. To accomplish that, Germany must be "Aryanized": this means "Foreigners Out," "Ethnic Germans In," and that German women must bear children. Ominously, in late January the Bavarian-based neo-Nazi "Republican Party," headed by an officer of Hitler's SS, won eleven seats in the West Berlin legislature.

A class-struggle perspective is urgently needed to defend Theissen and his patients against the state's onslaught. At an abortion rights demonstration in Memmingen on September 10, a spokesman for the *Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands*, German section of the international Spartacist tendency, spoke to this need:

"... Paragraph 218 was introduced into the penal code in 1871 when Bismarck founded his *Reich*. That means that this capitalist class society has inscribed on its banner the oppression of women—to the death. It is necessary to do away not only with that, but also with the witchhunt against immigrants....

"There is one way to get rid of this witchhunt. And that is through class struggle—the entire workers movement must fight against it. But to do that, we need a new, a revolutionary leadership, a real workers government that really represents the interests of women and all working people. That is what the *Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands* fights for. And on our banner we inscribe: Women's liberation through socialist revolution!" ■

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Letters

(continued from page 3)

contemporaries. On one occasion Marx wrote that a Mexican was nothing but a "degenerate Spaniard." Seizing upon some comment or another in Marx's voluminous writings and correspondence, Zionists have accused him of being anti-Semitic, black nationalists have denounced him as a racist.

The fundamental fact remains that from its inception the Marxist movement has been the strongest defender of the democratic rights of *all* oppressed social groups; this stand is a necessary corollary flowing from the logic of its method and goal. During the American Civil War, the First International under Marx's leadership rallied the European working classes in support of the North in the Civil War, which destroyed black chattel slavery. (Incidentally, Marx raised no objection when his daughter Laura married a Cuban-born mulatto, Paul Lafargue.) Engels' 1869 letter to Marx, of which Crawford makes so much, was a piece of personal correspondence. Especially in the era before telephones, such private correspondence had much the character that an offhand personal conversation does today. Marx and Engels' personal antipathy to homosexuality remained just that, a personal antipathy. It had no effect on their *political* behavior.

The principles of scientific socialism and the movement inspired by it transcended the subjective prejudices of its founders. The Marxist movement is rooted in Enlightenment humanism and materialism with the programmatic extension: the advocacy of democratic rights and individual freedom, including sexual freedom. Engels' 1847 "Principles of Communism" states that the communist order of society "will make the relation between the sexes a purely private relation which concerns only the persons involved, and in which society has no call to interfere."

Both Marx and Engels recognized that the German Lassallean J.B. von Schweitzer, whose homosexuality was well known, could and did play a leading role in the workers movement. Marx made every effort to induce von Schweitzer to join the First International. Thus he wrote to von Schweitzer in 1868: "I recognise, without reserve, the intelligence and energy with which you are active in the workers' movement. I have concealed this view from none of my friends" (Marx/Engels, *Collected Works* Vol. 43 [New York, 1988]).

The Engels letter cited by Crawford is politically disoriented in that Engels, underestimating the degree to which anti-homosexual bigotry is inherent in the bourgeois social order, predicted the imminent abolition of laws against sodomy in Bismarck's Germany. In reality, just the *opposite* happened. In 1871 the illegalization of homosexuality was incorporated into the basic legal code of the Bismarckian Reich.

It was the Marxist Social Democrats that were the main defenders of homosexual rights, not simply Eduard Bernstein as an individual. In 1898 a petition demanding the abolition of the criminalization of homosexuality was presented to the Reichstag. The *main spokesman* for this petition in the Reichstag was

none other than August Bebel, the leader of the German Social Democratic Labor Party, the recognized principal Marxist organization in the world at the time. He argued:

"The number of these persons [homosexuals] is so great and reaches so deeply into all social circles, from the lowest to the highest, that if the police dutifully did what they were supposed to, the Prussian state would be obliged to build two new penitentiaries just to handle the number of violations against Paragraph 175 committed within the confines of Berlin alone."

—quoted in John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)* (New York, 1974)

These words so incensed right-wing Reichstag deputies that they tried to shout Bebel down.

Crawford does not recognize Engels' disorientation because he himself *shares it*. In fact, Crawford does not believe that the oppression of homosexuals is endemic

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Oscar Wilde, jailed for two years under British anti-homosexual laws, was defended by Marxist German Social Democrats.

to class society; therefore he can only hope for some kind of classless decency or there's no hope at all.

Homosexuals play no "particular role in the labour force." Unlike women and racial minorities, they are not *per se* a reserve army to be called up in times of high employment. What they have in common with women is their trans-class character. The oppression of both groups is, however, integral to bourgeois society precisely because the labor force has to be regimented, disciplined, indoctrinated, brought up healthy enough to be the labor force and reproduce a future labor force. This is the role of the bourgeois nuclear family, and any transgression—e.g., homosexuality—represents a *threat* to the ruling class.

The Bolshevik socialist revolution in 1917 immediately abolished the tsarist law against homosexuality, and the basic legal code of the early Soviet government explicitly refused to discriminate against so-called "unnatural sexual acts." It was no question of personal predilections—it's ironic that Lenin, who led the first successful proletarian revolution, was in his personal life rather conservative. Lenin, Trotsky and the other Bolsheviks were here acting as good Marxists, i.e., humanists, not good liberals. The early Soviet legislation on homosexuality was not simply an empirical response by the Bolsheviks to the responsibilities of state power but rather the application of the then *generally accepted* position within the Marxist movement on this and related questions. ■

Black Freedom, Women's Rights and the Civil War

This article is based on a talk given by W&R associate editor Amy Rath at a public forum held 5 April 1988 at Howard University. For additional historical material on women in the anti-slavery struggle, see "The Grimké Sisters: Pioneers for Abolition and Women's Rights" (W&R No. 29, Spring 1985) and "Harriet Tubman: Fighter for Black Freedom" (W&R No. 32, Winter 1986).

The talk discusses the movement for women's rights in the U.S. prior to the Civil War, its link through the radical abolition movement with the fight against black slavery, and the destruction of that link to produce the antecedents of the present "feminists." It centers on the ideology of the antebellum abolitionists, the most far-sighted of whom saw that all democratic struggles were vitally linked and that deeply revolutionary changes would be required to establish equality. These men and women were not Marxists but bourgeois radicals of their time; for many, the primary political motivation was religion.

Northern anti-slavery activists espoused "free labor" and accepted the idea that if legal barriers to equality were removed, the American dream would be possible for anyone, given talent and hard work. In antebellum America, in the context of steady immigration and an expanding frontier, a propertyless farmhand could perhaps acquire land of his own, while a (white) laborer

might look to becoming a small-scale employer of labor in a generation. But if the "free labor" ideology imagined a democratic political system of economic equals based on a society of skilled artisans and yeoman farmers, this model rapidly became a fiction. A capitalist class of Northern industrial, finance and railroad capitalists had the ascendancy. Though still a predominantly agricultural country, America was the fastest-growing industrial power (with the second-highest industrial output, after Britain). America was already the world's technological leader, very much feared as a competitor by Britain, birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

The slave society of the South existed in the framework of a powerful Northern industrial sector which purchased staple crops from the South, first of all cotton. The rich plantations which possessed the South's best land and dominated the region politically were built on a pre-capitalist class relationship of black chattel slavery; at the same time they were part of a money economy in the world's most dynamic capitalist country. The conflict of social systems between the ever more powerful North and the backward South was a profound contradiction heading for collision, exacerbated by America's undemocratic "states' rights" political system which had given the South dis-



Harper's Weekly

Southern election campaign in 1868: Revolutionary ferment during Radical Reconstruction brought black men and, to a lesser extent, black women into political life for the first time.

proportionate control of the national government (especially the presidency and Supreme Court) since Independence.

The Progressive Bourgeoisie and the Limits of Reconstruction

The "irrepressible conflict" exploded in the Civil War, in the course of which Lincoln, the Northern bourgeoisie's ablest political leader, found himself obliged to go much further than he had intended in the direction of adopting the emancipation program of the abolitionists. Fifteen years before, abolitionists had been viewed as an isolated, if noisy, crew of radical fanatics.

The Civil War smashed slavery and left behind in the South a chaotic situation and four million ex-slaves who had been promised "freedom." But the war and its aftermath underlined that a truly egalitarian radical vision of social reconstruction already could not be promoted by a capitalist ruling class.

In her talk, comrade Rath emphasized the birth of a "feminist" women's movement as a rightward split at a crucial moment in American history: the era of "Reconstruction." Reconstruction posed a possibility of socially revolutionary transformations in the South: the regional ruling class, based on the ownership of land and slaves, had been militarily defeated; under the occupying Northern power, political rights were exercised by the former slaves and those willing to be allied with them.

Reconstruction brought not only black enfranchisement but significant democratic reforms: the 1868 South Carolina constitutional convention drafted the state's first divorce law, while Reconstruction legislatures established the South's first public schools and went to work on liberalizing the South's draconian penal codes and reforming the planters' property tax system (which had taxed the farmer's mule and the workman's tools while all but exempting the real wealth—land). But the Northern capitalists betrayed the promise of Reconstruction, allowing it to be physically smashed by forces such as the Ku Klux Klan, even though that meant the destruction of the Republican Party in the South. Replacing slavery, a new system of racial subordination took shape: a refurbished system of labor discipline through such measures as one-year labor contracts and "vagrancy" laws to bind ex-slaves to the plantations, and a rigid system of Jim Crow segregation. The defeat of Reconstruction shaped the post-war South into modern times: the sharecropping, the poll taxes, convict labor (the chain gang), the "separate but equal" unequal facilities.

While the woman suffrage leaders described in comrade Rath's talk took a stand *against* the great democratic gains that hung in the balance, many women mobilized by the anti-slavery movement served honorably in Reconstruction, for example as freedmen's schoolteachers who risked their lives to participate in freeing black people from the chains of bondage.

During Reconstruction, debate raged over the agrarian question: the radical demand raised by the freedmen and destitute white Unionist Southerners that the secessionists' estates be confiscated and distributed to

them. Some abolitionists saw that racial democracy could not be achieved if a class of whites continued to own the land where a class of blacks were laborers. They argued for justice to those who had been slaves (who created the wealth of the plantations, beginning by clearing the wilderness).

But the tide had turned: the triumphant Northern rulers would not permit such an attack on "property rights" (especially as Northerners directly and Northern banks were coming to own a good deal of Southern property). Fundamentally, the federal power reinvested political power in the hands of the former "best people" of the old Confederacy. In the sequel, intensive exploitation of black agricultural labor, rather than industrial development or capital investment in the modernization of agriculture, remained the basis of the Southern economy.

What was the alternative? Working-class power was shown by the 1848 and 1871 upheavals in Europe to be the alternative to bourgeois rule, as Marx and Engels explained from the *Communist Manifesto* onward, but conditions were not mature even in Europe for the small proletariat to seize and wield state power. In mid-19th century America, the Northern bourgeoisie under the pressure of a revolutionary Civil War possessed a genuinely progressive side, the basis for the abolitionists' support for the Republican Party. The abolitionists' great debates revolved around how far out in front of the progressive bourgeoisie they should be. There were "radicals" and those with a more "realistic" appraisal of what the Republican Party would support. Today, more than a century after Reconstruction, that debate is transcended. The ruling class long since passed firmly over to the side of reaction; the federal government is no defender of the oppressed. Those who look to find support for an egalitarian program in any wing of the ruling class are doomed to disappointment. To complete the unfinished democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution is a responsibility of the modern working class.

When the post-Civil War suffragettes chose to focus on the narrowest political rights for middle-class women and turn their backs on the rights and survival of the most desperately oppressed, they prefigured all of today's "constituency" and "reform" politics which refuse to attack the profound class inequalities ingrained in capitalist society. Sojourner Truth's classic "Ain't I a Woman" speech (see below) today stands as a powerful indictment of these ladies as much as of the outright sexists she was debating. Those who renounce the revolutionary content of the demand for women's liberation so as to advance their schemes for election of female politicians or advancement of women in academia are direct descendants of those first "feminists" who refused to challenge the power structure of their time on behalf of justice for two million of their sisters who were freed slaves.

But there is another women's movement: the women who have joined in the front ranks of every revolutionary struggle on this planet, from the 19th-century radical abolitionists to the women workers who sparked the Russian Revolution to the communist women of today. When the October Revolution of 1917 smashed the old tsarist society in Russia, militant

women were among the first recruits to communism in dozens of countries where women were oppressed by semi-feudal conditions and "customs." Young women radicalized around questions like women's education, the veil, wife-beating, religious obscurantism, arranged marriages, etc., recognized a road forward to uprooting social reaction and building a society freed from sexual, racial and class inequality. Our heroes are the revolutionary women who have shared in making all of revolutionary history, from the first moment that slaves rose up against the Roman Empire to the great struggles of today.

It was 1863, and the bloodiest war ever fought by the U.S. was raging. Abraham Lincoln had finally realized he must pronounce the destruction of slavery as the North's goal in this civil war. On 22 September 1862, his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation declared that on the first of January, 1863, all slaves in the Confederacy "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."

Although the Emancipation Proclamation did not free the slaves in the border states loyal to the Union, it turned the tide of battle. The war was now indisputably a war to end slavery, not simply to repair the Union. Soon thereafter, the government began to enlist blacks into the army; these ex-slaves and sons of ex-slaves tipped the military balance in favor of the Union. It was a matter of time until black soldiers singing "John Brown's Body" marched into Charleston, South Carolina—the "soul of secession," as Karl Marx called it—after Sherman's march through Georgia to the sea.

In May of the revolutionary year 1863, the first convention of the Women's Loyal National League met in New York City. Its most eminent speaker was a woman whose name is little known today: Angelina Grimké Weld. As part of her address she gave a keen analysis of the war:

"This war is not, as the South falsely pretends, a war of races, nor of sections, nor of political parties, but a war of Principles; a war upon the working classes, whether white or black; a war against Man, the world over. In this war, the black man was the first victim, the workingman of whatever color the next; and now all who contend for the rights of labor, for free speech, free schools, free suffrage, and a free government... are driven to do battle in defense of these or to fall with them, victims of the same violence that for two centuries has held the black man a prisoner of war.... "The nation is in a death-struggle. It must either become one vast slaveocracy of petty tyrants, or wholly the land of the free."

—Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*

A resolution was presented: "There can never be a true peace in this Republic until the civil and political rights of all citizens of African descent and all women are practically established." Angelina Grimké defended it against those who thought it too radical:

"I rejoice exceedingly that that resolution would combine us with the negro. I feel that we have been with him.... True, we have not felt the slaveholder's lash; true, we have not had our hands manacled, but our hearts have been crushed.... I want to be identified with the negro; until he gets his rights, we shall never have ours."

It was only after the Civil War that an ideology arose which was later named "feminism": the idea that the main division in society is sex. In response to the debate over the role of the newly freed slaves in U.S. society, the leaders of the woman suffrage movement—Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—sided with the counterrevolutionary assault on Reconstruction. *The birth of bourgeois feminism was part of a right-wing process which shattered the vision of the left wing of the revolutionary democracy into separate, feeble bourgeois reform movements.*

The Second American Revolution

The Civil War was one of the great social revolutions in the history of the world, destroying the slaveholding class in the South and freeing the black slaves. Not only Marxists saw that. The best fighters of the day—the Grimké sisters, the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, the Radical Republican Congressman Thaddeus Stevens—knew that the war would have to become a revolution against slavery before the North could win. They hated the feudalistic society of the South, with its degraded slaves, its cruelty, its arrogant, leisurely gentlemen planters, its impoverished rural whites, its lack of education, industry and general culture. The radical abolitionists wanted to wipe away that society, and also saw much wrong in the North, such as the subservience of women, and legal and social discrimination against blacks. Their ideology was to create a new order based on free labor and "equality before the law," a concept brought to the U.S. by the Radical Republican Charles Sumner out of his study of the 1789 French Revolution.

In Europe after the French Revolution the status of women was the most visible expression of the contradiction between capitalist society and its own ideals. But in the U.S. that was not so true, because of chattel slavery. The United States—the first country to proclaim itself a democratic republic—was the largest slaveholding country in the world, a huge historical contradiction which had to be resolved.

The Industrial Revolution

It was the Industrial Revolution, fundamentally, that generated what William Seward called the "Irrepressible Conflict." In broad historical terms the Industrial Revolution had created the material conditions for the elimination of slavery in society. Technological and social advances made possible a much more productive capitalist agriculture and industry. In 1854 the abolitionist clergyman Theodore Parker described slavery as "the foe to Northern Industry—to our mines, our manufactures, and our commerce...to our democratic politics in the State, our democratic culture in the school, our democratic work in the community" (quoted in James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*).

The Industrial Revolution had a contradictory effect on the condition of women. Production of goods had been primarily through cottage industry, but with the invention of the spinning jenny, the power loom and the steam engine, cottage industry was ended. The men left home to go to the factory, while women stayed



Leslie's Illustrated Weekly

Lynn, Massachusetts women workers in 1860 strike rally carry banner: "American Ladies Will Not Be Slaves."

home to do the housework, raise the children and to buy at the local store what once they had made at home. Women's labor ceased to be productive labor in the strict Marxist sense. This is the material basis for the 19th-century ideology of the "women's sphere." While the material advances of the Industrial Revolution made life easier for women, it also locked them into the stifling confines of domesticity in the isolated nuclear family. Women also worked in factories, but even in the industries in which they were concentrated (in textile production they made up two-thirds of the labor force) generally they worked only for a few years before getting married.

The Fight for Women's Legal Rights

Slaves were a class, but women are a specially oppressed group dispersed through all social classes. Although all women were oppressed to some extent because of their position in the family, the class differences were fundamental between the black slave woman and the slave plantation mistress, or the Northern German-speaking laundress and the wife of the owner of the Pennsylvania iron mill. "Sisterhood" was as much a myth then as it is now. Women identified first with the class to which they belonged, determined by who their husbands or fathers were.

Before the Civil War, women were basically without any civil rights. They couldn't sue or be sued, they couldn't be on juries, all their property and earnings went to their husband or father. Although women did have the vote for a few years in New Jersey and Virginia after the American Revolution, this advance was quickly eliminated. (This was part of a general right-wing turn after the Revolution, when suffrage was restricted gradually through property qualifications. In New York State, for example, with some restrictions blacks could vote up to about 1821.) For the wealthy

upper-class woman, this lack of legal rights loomed as a terrible injustice because it prevented her from functioning as a full member of the ruling class (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the mother of American feminism and the daughter of a judge, felt this keenly). For the working-class or slave woman, if her property legally belonged to her husband it didn't seem a problem—she didn't have any property.

Though the legal question was a small matter for poor and slave women, nevertheless legal injustice is not insignificant for Marxists, and it is bound up with multi-layered social oppression. This was true for the position of women in pre-Civil War society. Until the 1850s wife-beating was legal in most states. Divorce was almost impossible, and when it was obtained children went with the husband. The accepted attitude toward women was assumption of their "inferiority," and the Bible was considered an authority. When anesthesia was discovered in the 1840s, doctors opposed its use for childbirth, because that suffering was women's punishment for Eve's sin.

The Anti-Slavery Struggle and Democratic Rights

But how were women to fight for equal rights in this society divided between slave and free? Angelina Grimké was precisely correct when she said, "until the negro gets his rights, we will never have ours." It was necessary to destroy chattel slavery, which was retarding the development of the whole society. The movement for women's rights developed in the North out of the struggle to abolish slavery. It could hardly have developed in the South. In the decades before the war, in response to the growing Northern anti-slavery agitation, the South was becoming more reactionary than ever: more fanatical in defense of the ideology of slavery and more openly repressive. There were wholesale assaults on basic democratic rights, from attacks on the rights of the small layer of free blacks, who were seen as a source of agitation and insurrection, to a ban on the distribution of abolitionist literature.

In the South, there were no public schools. It was illegal to teach slaves to read, and almost half of the entire Southern population was illiterate. But in the North over 90 percent of the residents could read and write. Girls and boys went to school in about the same proportions, the only country in the world where this was true. So while in the North women teachers were paid less than men, and women factory hands received one-quarter the wage of men, in the South there were few teachers at all, and few industrial workers.

As a young slave in Maryland, and later while he was trying to earn a living as a refugee in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Frederick Douglass came to understand the common interests of all working people in the South, slaves and free blacks and whites. He learned a trade on the docks, where he experienced racist treatment from white workmen, who saw black labor as a threat to their jobs. But Douglass realized that the position of the workmen, too, against their boss was eroded and weakened by slavery and racism. As Marx said, "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded." And indeed, the working-class movement met with little success in the

antebellum U.S., whereas after the war there was an upsurge in unionism and labor struggle.

The vanguard of the abolitionist movement—the radical insurrectionist wing—believed in the identity of the interests of all the oppressed. John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, the great activist of the Underground Railroad, and the Grimké sisters were all inspired by a vision of human equality based in revolutionary democracy. Although their egalitarian principle was based on a religious view and ours is based on a Marxist understanding of society, we honor their essential work in leading the anti-slavery struggle. The abolition of slavery did profoundly alter the United States, it did open the road to liberation by making possible the development of the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard, which will establish justice by abolishing the exploitation of man by man.

The Grimké Sisters of South Carolina

Penetrating insights into the situation of women in pre-Civil War America came from women who were committed abolitionists. Sarah and Angelina Grimké are examples, as is Sojourner Truth who is better known today. The Grimké sisters were unusual members of the ruling class who defected to the other side. As daughters of one of South Carolina's most powerful slave-holding families, they had grown up in luxury, but left the South because of their revulsion for slavery. The Grimké sisters became famous in 1837-1838 as agents of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The power of their personal witness of the atrocities of the slave system drew huge audiences. The sisters were quick to point out that as upper-class white women, they had seen only the "better" treatment of the house and city slaves, and not the more brutal treatment of plantation hands in the fields. But one of the things they did know about was the sexual exploitation of women slaves and the brutal breakup of black families through the slave trade.

Because the sisters addressed the issues of sexual exploitation frankly and often, it was one of the issues the opposition used to try to shut them up. The clergy

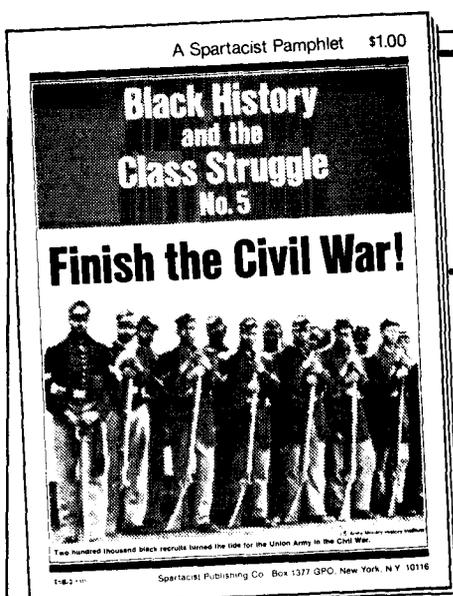
complained that the Grimkés brought up a subject "which ought not to be named"—how dare these delicate blossoms of Southern womanhood talk about sex! The very idea of women speaking publicly represented an attack on the proper relationship between the sexes and would upset "women's place" in the home. Contemporary observers were shocked by the sight of women participating actively in the debates of the anti-slavery movement, as they did especially in New England, the birthplace of radical abolitionism. The Grimkés replied by pointing out that the same argument was used against abolition itself: it would upset the established order of social relations. They effectively linked up women's rights and emancipation of the slaves.

Sojourner Truth: "Ain't I a Woman?"

Black women got it from both sides, as the life of Sojourner Truth shows. She was born a slave around 1797 in New York State and was not freed until 1827, under the "gradual emancipation" provisions of the state law. As a slave she was prevented from marrying the man she loved, who was brutally beaten for daring to visit her (they were owned by different masters). They were both forcibly married to other slaves. Her son was sold South as a small child, away from her. After she was freed, she lived a backbreaking existence in New York City, one of the more racist cities in the North and a center for the slave trade.

Sojourner Truth went to all the women's rights conventions. The famous story about her dates from 1853. The usual crowd of male hecklers had almost shut down the proceedings. The women were unable to answer their sneers of how delicate and weak women were. Sojourner Truth asked for the floor and got it, despite the opposition of a lot of the delegates to the presence of a *black abolitionist*. You have to keep in mind what this woman looked like in this gathering of ladies: she was six feet tall, nearly 60 years old, very tough and work-worn. She said:

"The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the



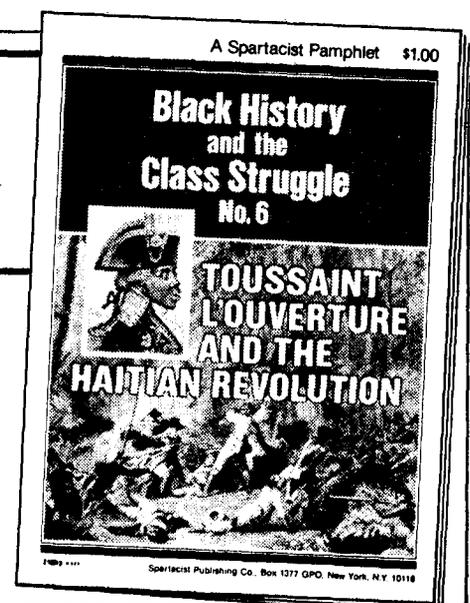
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"Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have born... children, and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me—and ain't I a woman?"

—Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*

Sojourner Truth put her finger on the heart of the contradiction between the stifling idealization of women and their oppression as housewives and mothers and exploitation as slaves and workers.

Women's Rights and the Abolitionist Movement

Support for women's rights was tenuous within the politically diverse anti-slavery movement. Many free-soilers were not anti-racist; some opposed slavery because they didn't want blacks around. Even some of the most dedicated abolitionists argued that "women's rights" could harm the anti-slavery cause, and in 1840 a split in the American Anti-Slavery Society was precipitated by the election of a woman to the leading body.

That same year at an international anti-slavery meeting in London, women members of the American delegation were denied their seats. In the audience was the young Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Out of this experience she decided to begin organizing for women's rights. Eight years later, in 1848, at Seneca Falls, New York the first women's rights convention in the world was held. At first Stanton wasn't going to put forward the vote as a demand—she was afraid it was too extreme. She had to be argued into it by Frederick Douglass. It was the only demand that didn't get unanimous support at the meeting; it was considered too radical.

The role of Douglass was not an accident. The best fighters for women's rights were not the Elizabeth Cady Stantons and the Susan B. Anthonys—the ones who "put women first"—but the left-wing abolitionists. The most militant advocates of black equality, the insurrectionist wing, the prophets of the Civil War, were also the most consistent fighters for women's rights, because they saw *no division of interest between blacks and women*. Frederick Douglass not only attended all the women's meetings, arguing effectively for full equality for women, but he brought the message elsewhere. He put forward resolutions for women's rights at black conventions, and they were passed. He used to advertise the meetings in his paper and print reports on the proceedings. His paper's motto was, "Right is of no Sex—Truth is of no Color—God is the Father of us all, and we are all Brethren."

The Fight Over the 14th Amendment

Stanton and Anthony had suspended their woman suffrage campaign for the duration of the war. They circulated petitions for a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery, which became the 13th Amendment. After the war Stanton and Anthony set up an Equal Rights Association to agitate for the vote for both blacks and women. They thought because of the broad social



NY Public Library

Ex-slave Sojourner Truth said: "I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?"

upheaval the time was ripe for woman suffrage. But this proved not to be the case.

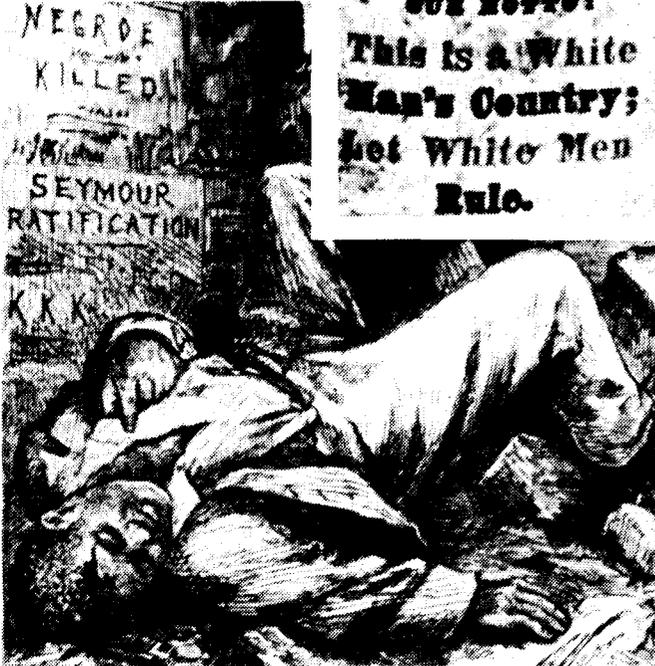
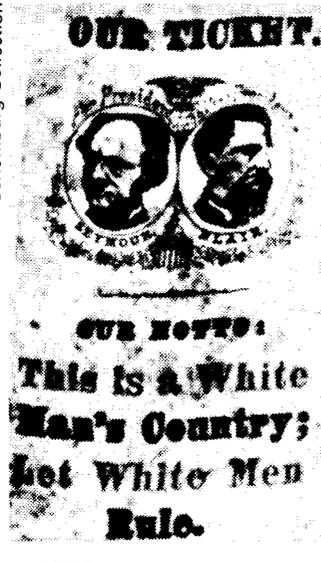
The question here was citizenship rights under capitalist law, specifically voting. Compare it with how voting rights and citizenship were looked at in another revolution at the same time: the 1871 Paris Commune, the first proletarian revolution (whose example dramatically reinforced ideological conservatism among the American bourgeoisie). The Commune subsumed nationality and citizenship to class considerations. Anybody who got elected from the working class, whatever country they were born in, sat on the legislative body of the Commune, while the industrialists and the bourgeois parliamentarians fled the city and were "disenfranchised" as their property was expropriated.

This was not on the agenda in the United States in the 1860s. The historical tasks of the Civil War and Reconstruction were to complete the unfinished bourgeois revolution, to resolve questions like slave versus free, national sovereignty and democratic rights. In his novel Gore Vidal calls Lincoln the Bismarck of his country, and this is justified. For example, before the Civil War, each state printed its own money. Greenbacks were first made by the Union to finance the war. The Supreme Court regularly said, "the United States are." Only after the war did this country's name become a singular noun—one national government.

But the big question was what to do with the newly emancipated slaves, and this question focused on two things: land and the vote. The debate over the vote represented, in legal terms, a struggle to determine what "citizenship" meant in relation to the state. Many Northern states did not allow blacks to vote, either. The 14th Amendment, which was passed to answer this question, says that all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. are citizens of the nation and of the state in which

Democratic Party poster in 1868 (right). In post-Civil War period the Democrats campaigned to restore white-supremacist rule in the South. KKK terror killed hundreds, as illustrated by Thomas Nast (below).

Schomburg Collection



Harper's Weekly

they live, and that states can't abridge their "privileges and immunities" or deprive them of life, liberty, or property without "due process of law" or deny them "equal protection of the laws."

The Republican Party, which was founded as an anti-slavery party, contained within it many shades of political opinion. It has been argued that the only reason the Republicans gave the vote to blacks was to maintain political control over the states in the conquered Confederacy. This was true of some Republicans, but the men who politically dominated Congress during the period of Radical Reconstruction were committed revolutionary democrats, as observers of the time said of Thaddeus Stevens, who was called the "Robespierre, Danton, and Marat of America." There were good reasons for Douglass' loyalty to the Republicans, given after much early hesitation and sometimes combined with scathing criticism.

But there were a lot of contradictions. The party that was trying to implement black rights was also the party that was massacring the Indians in the West, breaking workers' strikes in the North, presiding over a new scale of graft and corruption, and trying to annex Santo Domingo. In the fight to replace slavery with something other than a peonage system which mimicked bondage, the land question was key. And the robber barons—the moneylords, the triumphant ruling class—rapidly got pretty nervous about the campaign to confiscate the plantations and give them to the blacks. It

was an assault on property rights, in line with what those uppity workers in the North were demanding: the eight-hour day, unions, higher wages. The ruling class was quite conscious about this; an 1867 *New York Times* editorial stated:

"If Congress is to take cognizance of the claims of labor against capital...there can be no decent pretense for confining the task to the slave-holder of the South. It is a question, not of humanity, not of loyalty, but of the fundamental relation of industry to capital; and sooner or later, if begun at the South, it will find its way into the cities of the North.... An attempt to justify the confiscation of Southern land under the pretense of doing justice to the freedmen, strikes at the root of all property rights in both sections. It concerns Massachusetts quite as much as Mississippi."

—Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*

This question was not resolved quickly, but over a couple of decades. But to collapse a lot of complex history, the revolutionary tide receded under the weight of triumphant capitalism. In 1877 Union troops were withdrawn from Southern occupation as part of the compromise making Rutherford B. Hayes president. The Civil War did not establish black equality, and the 14th and 15th Amendments which codified in law the war's revolutionary gains were turned into virtual dead letters. Nor did the Civil War liberate women, not even in a limited, legalistic sense. They continued to be denied even the simple right to vote (although in some districts in South Carolina in 1870, under the encouragement of black election officials, black women exercised the franchise for a brief time).

From the defeat of Reconstruction was spawned the kind of society we have now. On top of the fundamental class divisions in the U.S. is pervasive and institutionalized racial oppression. The black slaves were liberated from bondage only to become an oppressed *race/color* caste, segregated at the bottom of society—although today, unlike the immediate aftermath of Reconstruction, blacks also constitute a key component of the American proletariat.

The Birth of American Feminism

Many Radical Republicans were critical of the 14th Amendment, which was a true child of compromise. Sumner called it "uncertain, loose, cracked, and rickety." Opposition centered on a loophole that allowed a state to opt for losing some representation in Congress if it chose to restrict black suffrage—and Southern states exploited this concession. But what Elizabeth Cady Stanton didn't like about it was that for the first time, the word "male" appeared in the Constitution. And this fight was the birth of American feminism.

Of course the 14th Amendment should have given women the vote, and the importance of suffrage for *black women* was not inconsiderable. But a Civil War had just been fought on the question of black freedom, and it was indeed the "Negro's Hour," as many abolitionists argued. The biggest benefit for women's rights would have been to struggle for the biggest expansion possible in black freedom—to campaign for the land, for black participation in government on the state and federal level, to crush racism in the North, to integrate blacks in housing, education, jobs—to push

to the limit the revolutionary possibilities of the period.

But Stanton and Anthony sided with the right-wing assault on the revolutionary opening that existed. They wrote:

“Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Ung Tung who do not know the difference between a Monarchy and a Republic, who never read the Declaration of Independence or Webster’s spelling book, making laws for [white abolitionists] Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, or Fanny Kemble.”

Stanton and Anthony embraced race-hatred and anti-immigrant bigotry against the Irish, blacks, Germans and Asians, grounded in class hostility.

They took this position at a time when blacks in the South faced escalating race-terror. The Ku Klux Klan was founded in 1866 to terrorize Southern blacks; hundreds were murdered. Republicans of both colors were targeted, and a special object of Klan hatred was the schoolhouse and the schoolteacher (many of them Northern women). In the North as well there was a struggle over the vote, over integrated schools. There was a fight to end Jim Crow in the Washington, D.C. trolley system (after the law desegregating streetcars was passed there in 1865, Sojourner Truth herself went around the capital boarding the cars of companies that were refusing to seat blacks). The freedmen’s struggles for a fundamental transformation of race relations triggered in the North what some historians have called the first racist backlash. Frederick Douglass’ home in Rochester, New York was burned to the ground; Republican and abolitionist leaders routinely received death threats.

So in this period of violent struggle over the race question, the feminists joined forces with the Democrats, the political party of the Klan and the Confederacy, who hoped to exploit the women’s issue against blacks. Henry Blackwell (Lucy Stone’s husband) argued that white women voting in the South would cancel out the black vote. Stanton and Anthony teamed up with George Train, a notorious racist, who financed their newspaper, *Revolution*. They adopted the slogan “educated suffrage”—that is, a literacy test for voters—which was deliberately formulated against non-English-speaking immigrants and ex-slaves.

Frederick Douglass made a valiant attempt to win the feminists over to support for the amendments at a meeting of the Equal Rights Association in 1869, where he argued for the urgency of the vote for blacks:

“When women, because they are women, are dragged from their homes and hung upon lamp-posts; when their children are torn from their arms and their brains dashed to the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot.”

—Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle*

At this convention Douglass proposed a resolution which called the 15th Amendment the “culmination of one-half of our demands” while imploring a redoubling of “our energy to secure the further amendment guaranteeing the same sacred rights without limitation to sex.”

But by this point, a split was inevitable. The feminists



Library of Congress

New York City, 1912: Bourgeois feminists focused narrowly on right to vote.

blamed the Republican Party and the abolitionists for the defeat in Kansas of an 1867 referendum on woman suffrage. They decided that “men” could not be trusted, and for the first time argued that women must organize separately for their own rights. They even flirted with male exclusionism. The movement split in two, one maintaining a formally decent posture on the race question as a cover for doing nothing. The main wing led by Stanton and Anthony wanted to address broad issues, but their capitulation to racist reaction defined them. They claimed the ballot would solve everything. Their paper was printed in a “rat” office (below union scale). Anthony urged women to be scabs to “better” their condition, then whined when the National Labor Congress refused to admit her as a delegate! Stanton said it proved the worst enemy of women’s rights was the working man.

After Reconstruction went down to defeat, the first “feminists” dedicated themselves to the reactionary attempt to prove woman suffrage wouldn’t rock the Jim Crow boat. But in the South, the restabilization of a system of overt racist injustice set the context for all social questions. In the South, any extension of the franchise was feared as a threat to “white supremacy” stability. By 1920, when woman suffrage was passed nationally—largely because of World War I which brought women into industry and social life—not a single Southern state had passed the vote for women, although almost every other state had some form of it.

Today, the bourgeois feminists like to hark back to the struggle over the 14th Amendment as proof there must be a separatist women’s movement. They claim Stanton and Anthony as their political mothers. Let them have them! We stand in a different tradition: the heritage of Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Harriet Tubman, the Grimké sisters, of revolutionary insurrectionism against the class enemy. Today, to complete the unfinished tasks of the Civil War and emancipate women and blacks from social slavery requires a communist women’s movement, part of a multiracial vanguard party fighting for workers power in the interests of all the oppressed. ■

Soviet Women Combat Pilots Fought Nazi Germany



The Story of the Night Witches

Women pilots of the Night Bomber Regiment at briefing. Called "Night Witches" by the Nazis who feared their nightly sorties, they flew over 24,000 missions in biplane PO-2 bombers.

The three all-women air combat regiments of the Soviet Union were an integral part of the mass mobilization of the entire population against the Nazi invasion of their country in World War II. Our purpose in recalling the exemplary courage and personal sacrifices of these women is not to show that women are equal to men in even that most terrible of human struggles, war. We honor these women for their brave defense of the USSR, homeland of the first workers revolution in history.

As the capitalist powers plunged the world into a nightmare of slaughter to determine whose imperialism would prevail, the Soviet Union fought to defend the gains of the October Revolution and its socialized property forms. In this vital and desperate battle, women once again came forward, as they had in the Russian Revolution of February 1917, when a strike of women workers sparked the insurrection that overthrew the tsar. During the bitter civil war that followed the Bolsheviks' October Revolution, the Red Army included riflemen and women armored train com-

manders and gunners (though most women served as medical personnel). Some women were also partisan fighters and leaders, including the colorful Bolshevik Larissa Reissner. It is these fighters against capitalism that we hail. When bourgeois feminists like NOW took up the plight of U.S. military career women, we took our stand "with the Red Army soldier who has marched to liberate the masses of Afghanistan, rather than with the U.S. female officer who may one day direct bombing raids over Soviet Central Asia" ("No to the Draft!" W&R No. 20, Spring 1980).

The story of the Soviet airwomen, the first women in history to fly planes in combat, is told in Bruce Myles' *Night Witches* (paperback published by Panther Books, 1983; unless otherwise noted, quotes are from his book). Myles, a Scottish journalist, interviewed veterans of the women's units: the 586th Fighter Regiment, the 587th Bomber Regiment, and the 588th Night Bomber Regiment, known as the "Night Witches" by Nazi troops who feared their nightly sorties.

These women were not unique. Almost one million

Soviet women served at the front in all capacities—including as partisans—constituting about 8 percent of total Soviet military personnel at the end of 1943. In daring missions behind German lines, women pilots helped supply partisans fighting in Russia's forests—they even carried passengers, who slid themselves out of plywood tubes rigged under the wings into deep snowdrifts as the planes flew only feet above the ground! Women pilots also helped relieve the 900-day German siege of Leningrad, flying food to the starving city.

Stalinism and Women's Struggle to Volunteer

When Hitler launched his "Operation Barbarossa" invasion of the Soviet Union in the early morning hours of 22 June 1941, the USSR was criminally unprepared. Stalin had beheaded the army in his bloody purges, while refusing to believe the Nazis would attack, despite desperate warnings. Sixty percent of the Russian combat air force was destroyed on the ground; by November, the Germans were only 20 miles from Moscow, Leningrad was besieged, and three million Soviets had been taken prisoner, as Hitler sought another "lightning victory." But the Nazis fatally underestimated the will and capacity of the peoples of the USSR to defend the gains of their revolution, and got bogged down in the Russian winter. As the Soviets scrambled to recreate huge military factories back of the Urals out of German reach, hundreds of thousands of volunteers, many in the *Komsomol* youth groups, overwhelmed the military recruiting centers—including teenage girls with flying experience gained at paramilitary flying clubs across the USSR.

The first response of harassed officials to the young fliers was summed up by the initial rejection of one young woman who later became a Hero of the Soviet Union. She was told: "Things may be bad but we're not so desperate that we're going to put little girls like you up in the skies. Go home and help your mother." The October Revolution which overthrew capitalism opened up tremendous liberating potential for women, promising them freedom at last from subjugation to the family hearth. The Bolsheviks abolished all the old legal impediments to women's equality and sought to provide alternatives to the family, through socialization of housework and childcare. However, the bloody civil war which decimated the proletariat and the failure of revolutionary uprisings internationally, especially in Germany, led to Stalin's political counterrevolution. Without the necessary international economic basis for socialism, the real liberation of women is impossible in an isolated workers state. But this defeat was glorified ideologically by the Stalin regime as part of its defeatist and socially retrograde policy of "socialism in one country," while the Bolsheviks' commitment to replacing the oppressive nuclear family was reversed.

The deeply contradictory nature of the USSR—where the Stalinist regime had politically expropriated the working class, yet was forced to defend the planned economy—made it possible, when the very survival of the workers state was posed, for the official policy of rejecting women as fighters to be reversed. In contrast,

in the imperialist West, to the extent women were officially mobilized it was in noncombat roles. In Britain, for example, some 450,000 women were in uniform, but limited to tasks like road building, ferrying planes, or spotting on antiaircraft sites, where they were forbidden to actually fire the guns.

A call went out over Radio Moscow in the fall of 1941 from the country's most famous woman aviator, Marina Raskova, for volunteers for all-women air regiments. Three 400-strong air regiments were formed, each comprising three squadrons of ten aircraft. Mechanics and armament fitters were all female as well. Before leaving for their training base at Engels on the River Volga in October 1941, the women had their first struggle trying to get into the military clothing—to hysterical laughter they stuffed sheets of *Pravda* and *Izvestia* into their boot toes, and trimmed trailing pants legs and coattails. More serious adjustments were needed as they learned to handle their aircraft. The 587th Women's Bomber Regiment flew the Petylakov twin-engined PE-2 light bomber, which had a crew of three. One pilot, Katerina Fedotova, recalled:

"Fully loaded with fuel and bombs, the PE-2 needed someone with a lot of strength to pull back on the stick at the appropriate moment to get the nose off the ground. Most of us had to get our navigator to stand beside us on take-off to help yank the stick back on a given command.... And some of the girls with particularly short legs had to have special blocks put on the rubber pedals so that they could reach them with their feet."

The pilots of the 586th Fighter Regiment learned to fly the Yak-1, a single-seat machine, while the "Night Witches" bomber regiment flew Nikolai Polikarpov's PO-2. The PO-2 was a veteran biplane trainer pressed into service as a bomber. Beneath its fabric-and-wood wings were loaded racks of small bombs (maximum load only 800 pounds), released by a wire inside the cockpit. It was incredibly slow—top speed only 100 miles per hour!

By May 1942 the women were ready for their first combat assignments. The 588th bomber regiment had its first test from male Soviet pilots: sent to escort the women to their first airbase, the men dived down at the inexperienced formation, many of whom panicked and

Sovfoto



Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, Red Army hero, murdered by Stalin in purges that beheaded the Soviet army on the eve of Hitler's "Operation Barbarossa" invasion of USSR.



VAAP, Moscow

Fighter aces Lily Litvak (left) and Katya Budanova (center) totaled 22 kills before they died in combat.

broke away. But the women quickly recovered from this embarrassment, and soon proved their worth to their male comrades.

Stalingrad, 1942-43: "Achtung, Litvak!"

In the summer of 1942, Hitler launched a new offensive, against the Caucasus oil fields and against Stalingrad, splitting his forces on the southern front. By winter, Hitler's obsession with taking Stalingrad led the German 6th Army under General Paulus into a trap, dooming the German army to eventual encirclement inside Stalingrad as Soviet reinforcements arrived on the scene late in the year. Among them were the women's day bomber regiment, which had already faced combat in Kirshatz, the "Night Witches" and several of the best women fighter pilots, who joined the men of the 73rd Fighter Regiment in furious air battles over the city.

One of these was Lily Litvak, the daughter of a railway worker, who as a teenager had joined a flying club. Lily Litvak joined up with pilot Alexei Salomaten in the Soviet fighters' standard two-plane formation. By Christmas she had personally shot down six German aircraft over Stalingrad—three fighters and three transport aircraft running the gauntlet of the Russian air defenses in a vain attempt to supply the trapped German 6th Army from the air.

Lily became famous as the "White Rose of Stalingrad," as she had the fuselage of her Yak painted with white roses, one for each plane she shot down. Soviet monitors of air radio could hear German pilots warning each other, "Achtung, Litvak!" Her beloved partner Salomaten had crashed and died, but Lily kept on as a "free fighter"—her tenth "kill" brought down a German ace. As K.J. Cottam recounts in "Soviet Airwomen in Combat in World War II" (MA/AH Publishing, Kansas State University, 1983), the arrogant pilot could

not believe what had happened:

"The middle-aged German ace from the Richthofen's 4th Air Fleet whom Lilya [Litvak] forced to bail out from his burning plane was taken to her regimental HQ. Here he sat, a haughty officer decorated with a number of iron crosses and medals, feigning indifference. He had yet to collect himself, to come to terms with what had happened; he was shot down so quickly, so unexpectedly, and in such an audacious manner!... The German saw a small girl, looking about 16, enter the dugout. She wore a headset with goggles and a flying suit. His curiosity soon changed to disbelief and then indignation. 'What a humiliation!' exploded the Nazi pilot. 'This is nonsense and I demand a proof.' Then the Major requested that the girl tell the German some of the details of their dogfight, known only to the antagonists. Soon the prisoner was completely convinced; he glanced at her with new respect and reportedly silently hung his head."

While "free hunters" like the glamorous Lily Litvak received the most publicity in the Soviet press, the women ground crews were vital—the pilots' lives depended on them. Ina Pasportnikova, a mechanic at Stalingrad, recalled the excruciating 40° below winter temperatures, which combined with handling burning-hot metal parts left mechanics' hands permanently scarred as they raced to repair aircraft at top speed during half-hour breaks between sorties: "Sometimes the only way to get, say, a little nut into part of the engine with numbed fingers was to spit on the finger and, as it froze, attach the nut to the finger. Then you'd fumble around the screw, using your finger like a screwdriver to attach it."

The "Night Witches" in the Caucasus and Kerch Peninsula

The 588th women's night bomber regiment fought over the Soviet southern front. In the summer of 1942 as the Nazis pushed toward the oil-rich Caucasus, the women shifted bases quickly, seeking to slow the enemy advance, sleeping anywhere from in haystacks to under the wings of their planes. The Germans quickly learned to recognize the approach of the

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women night bombers: the little PO-2s made a distinctive “pop-popping” sound as they approached (later the women learned to turn off their engines and glide over the target). The PO-2s’ slow speed and low flying altitude enabled the crews to drop bombs with an accuracy unmatched by other Soviet aircraft. The Germans called the planes “night devil,” “sewing machine” or “Russian plywood,” and the pilots “night witches.” The Russians themselves referred to the little trainers as “coffee grinders,” “kitchen-gardeners” or “flying bookcases.” Incredibly, until the summer of 1944, the women bombers flew without parachutes in order to take on an extra 42 pounds of bombs!

The German advance in the Caucasus was finally halted; on 31 January 1943 the Nazis surrendered at Stalingrad. By then the “Night Witches” had flown in combat for over eight months. At their headquarters in the North Caucasus, they were awarded the title of “46th Guards Regiment,” the first women’s unit to receive this high honor, placing them among the elite of the Red Army’s fighting units. They flew more than 24,000 sorties during the war; of the 30 “Hero of the Soviet Union” awards won by airwomen, the “Night Witches” received 23.

They remained in the Kuban area for another eight months, where they took heavy casualties. Navigator Ira Kasherina was awarded the order of the Red Flag for her heroic efforts in bringing her plane home, the pilot dead, after a bombing run on enemy troops at Novorossisk on 22 April 1943. Ducie Nosal, the pilot who was killed, had lost her first-born son at the war’s beginning in the ruins of a maternity hospital. She had flown over 354 combat missions, and was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union, the first Soviet airwoman to receive this honor. On 9 April 1944, the regiment lost one of its favorites, Zhenya Rudneva, chief navigator and a former astronomy student, over Bulgansk in the Crimea. She has an enduring memorial in the skies; the Soviets named an asteroid after her some years later. Lily Litvak, too, fell in battle in 1943 over the Donbass region as eight German fighters zeroed in on her Yak fighter with its white roses.

By October 1943 the Germans had been pushed out of the Caucasus, and the “Night Witches” went on to drop supplies to army and navy troops in one of the Soviets’ largest amphibious operations that fall, the seizing of a beachhead on the Kerch Peninsula in order to liberate the Crimea. The landing party at El’tigen near Novorossisk was surrounded by enemy troops on three sides, with the sea at their back, their radio smashed, their supplies running out. In these difficult night flights, the pilots glided in from the sea with their engines cut off, guided by flashlights or bonfires in the rain and wind. Men from the landing party later met the “Night Witches,” embracing them enthusiastically and telling them over and over that they had saved them.

The Battle of Kursk

Meanwhile, in central Russia, the key battle of Kursk raged in July 1943. Hitler’s “Operation Citadel” sought to inflict a decisive defeat on the USSR by smashing the “Kursk salient”—a bulge driven by the Russians into the German lines, centering on the town of Kursk. On July 5 nearly a million German troops, 2,000 tanks and



Sovfoto
587th Women's Bomber Regiment flew PE-2s, shown here releasing their 2,200-pound bombloads over rail junction.

over 1,800 aircraft attacked, driving to surround Kursk, in the biggest tank battle of the war. The women of the 586th Fighter Regiment were drawn heavily into the mass battles in the air, as over 4,000 aircraft operated in an area only 12 by 30 miles—battles involving up to 150 aircraft at a time were common. Galia Boordina recalled:

“German and Soviet fighters were whirling and diving everywhere.... The risks of collision were enormous—even with your own side. It was a complete melée, and most of the aircraft were flying at very high speed. I broke out of the fight briefly to gain height and look for a target. I dived down and pulled up underneath a Messerschmitt 109 and raked it with machine-gun and cannon fire. It fell away immediately, burning. I had shot down two other Germans before that—a bomber and a transport—but that was my first fighter.”

Two women of the 586th took on an entire attack group of Germans during the buildup to Kursk. The women were alone in the sky in their two Yak fighters when they spotted a cluster of black dots, materializing in seconds into a group of 42 Junkers 88 and Dornier bombers. Despite the fantastic odds, they dived on the leading formation from out of the sun, seeking to break up the Germans before they reached their target. Two bombers fell away in flames on the first pass; the Yaks

pulled up and got one more bomber each on their second pass, while the enemy jettisoned their bombs and broke formation.

When the smoke of the massive tank battle finally cleared, the two German spearheads were still forced 100 miles apart. Hitler had lost his huge gamble, and from that point the offensive passed to the Red Army. Essentially alone, the Soviet Union had broken the back of the mammoth Nazi military machine. Then began the long and hard-fought Soviet advance, retaking its own territory and then liberating the Eastern European nations from fascist occupation. In May 1945 the Red Army triumphantly entered Berlin. Many of the troops wrote their names on Hitler's bombed-out buildings, including a Soviet front-line nurse and fighter, who told an interviewer many years later: "I wrote that I, Sophia Kuntsevitch, Russian daughter of a welder, came here and defeated fascism" (Shelley Saywell, *Women in War*, Penguin Books, 1986).

The USSR had defeated Hitler—at a terrible cost. Twenty million people—one-tenth of the population—were dead. As the men and women of the Red Army advanced westward, they uncovered the horror of the Nazi Holocaust: smoldering ruins of villages, whole towns massacred, then finally the fascist death camps where millions had perished in the barbaric Nazi "technology" of mass murder.

The Fight for Women's Liberation Today

The women of the Soviet Union, arms in hand, were vital to the defeat of fascism. They proved in blood that they were equal to men in even that supposedly most "masculine" preserve, air combat. Yet even as women like Lily Litvak were shooting down German aces, the Stalinist regime continued its reactionary and shameful glorification of "women's true role" as domestic slave to the family. The Stalinist bureaucracy even introduced "Motherhood Medals": "Motherhood Glory, First, Second and Third Class" (nine, eight or seven children) and "Heroine Mother" for ten children. As Leon Trotsky noted in 1936 in *The Revolution Betrayed*, "The most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations."

In 1944, as women fought alongside men at the front, coeducation was abolished in the USSR. A director of the Moscow Municipal Department of National Education wrote, "It is essential to introduce in girls' schools such additional subjects as pedagogics, needlework, courses in domestic science, personal hygiene and the care of children," while another Stalinist ideologue added, "what we must have now is a system by which the school develops boys who will be good fathers and manly fighters for the socialist homeland, and girls who will be intelligent mothers" (quoted in Tony Cliff, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*, Bookmarks, England, 1984). In 1944 a law was passed with heavy financial sanctions against divorce, including the right of the court to reject divorce petitions. Women's right to abortion, which the Bolsheviks had granted in 1920, had been abolished in 1936 (it was reinstated in 1955). At the end of the war, women were taken out of combat positions.

Today, the Bolsheviks' great liberating goals for women remain unfulfilled. Gorbachev, like the other Stalinist bureaucrats before him, believes he can "appease" imperialism's unrelenting hostility to the Soviet Union, which still retains its socialized property forms. So now he's pulled the Soviet army out of Afghanistan, abandoning women and leftists there to a threatened bloodbath by feudal fanatics. While the women of the Soviet Union today are a world—and a social revolution—away from the barbaric enslavement Afghan women have suffered under the veil, they still must bear the burden of working and simultaneously being saddled with childcare, housework and endless standing in shopping lines, still in the grip of the bureaucracy's policies.

Working-class women have proven in every revolutionary struggle that they are among the best fighters for the liberation of their class. Certainly the women of Afghanistan, some of whom received military training, have shown they would be a real component of an army under revolutionary leadership. Our fight for women's liberation means a struggle for socialist revolution against capitalism. In the USSR and other bureaucratically deformed workers states we fight for political revolution to oust the conservative bureaucracies and to restore the revolutionary internationalist goals of Lenin and Trotsky. Among the best cadres in this struggle will be new generations of women, drawing inspiration from the heroic work of their predecessors—including the "Night Witches" of World War II. ■

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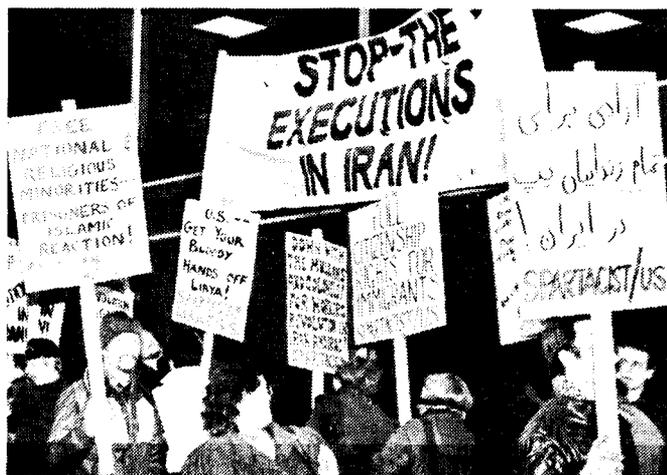
(continued from page 32)

universal education—it instantly outpaced the social forces available in Afghanistan to enforce them. The tribal chiefs and mullahs, driven to a frenzy by the government's teaching young girls to read, launched a reactionary *jihad* (Islamic holy war).

In this situation, the Spartacist League recognized that it was only the Soviet military intervention of December 1979 which opened the road to the liberation of the Afghan toilers. We said then, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend gains of October Revolution to Afghan peoples!" We noted that the Kremlin bureaucracy reluctantly intervened simply to stabilize a strategically placed client state, and might well do a deal with the imperialists. Nonetheless, sending troops into Afghanistan was an unambiguously decent and progressive act, cutting across the grain of the reactionary Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country."

Bloodbath in Khomeini's Iran

The bitter experience of Khomeini's Iran exposes the deadly dangers of a mullah victory in Afghanistan. Thousands of leftists and other opponents of the bloody Khomeini regime have been slaughtered in Iran's prisons, a massacre on a par with the mass murder following the counterrevolutionary 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile. Last winter, as repeated accounts of chilling horror against every left group in Iran poured out, the Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee initiated emergency demonstrations around the world, raising an urgent cry of outrage against these unspeakable crimes. Under the slogan "Stop the Executions in Iran!" in Australia, Italy, the U.S., France, Britain, West Germany and Canada, groups of exiled Iranian leftists joined our united-front protests in mid-January outside offices of representatives of the murderous mullah regime. As a Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands speaker declared at the Hamburg demonstration: "It is not an accident that this bloodbath in Iran comes now, as the Red Army is withdrawing from Afghanistan. The regime



Workers Vanguard

New York, January 19: SL/PDC protests Khomeini's bloodbath.

in Teheran is giving us a foretaste of what the *jihad* in Afghanistan has promised."

A decade ago, as the hated shah of Iran, creature of the CIA, was tottering on his throne, the Spartacist League stood alone on the left in demanding: "Down with the shah! Down with the mullahs! For workers revolution in Iran!" Because for us the liberation of women from barbaric oppression in countries like Afghanistan and Iran is a vital question, we never had the slightest illusion that Khomeini's "mass movement," which demanded "Death or the Veil," could be anything but deeply reactionary. We said "No to the veil!" insisting the key need was for the powerful Iranian working class to forge a revolutionary party in opposition to its "own" bourgeoisie and the reactionary mullahs. A victorious workers revolution in Iran would have been a powerful impetus for revolution throughout the Near East; instead, Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, fueling the onslaught of the barbaric mullahs everywhere.

Women of the East: Proletarian Revolution or Slavery

Today, because of the Bolsheviks' October Revolution, the condition of women in Soviet Central Asia is literally centuries removed from the oppression their sisters in Afghanistan face. In a civil war, politics is primary. An internationalist, revolutionary leadership in the Soviet Union would not only have committed sufficient troops and matériel to a fight to win, but would wage a political offensive to win Afghan women, peasants, intellectuals, the few proletarians in Afghanistan, to the cause of social revolution. Had the USSR campaigned for women's liberation, through such actions as recruiting women of Soviet Central Asia and throughout the USSR into the Red Army, it would have had a tremendously inspiring effect. A Soviet fight to extend the gains of the October Revolution, centrally the planned economy, to Afghanistan could have won solidarity from workers and the oppressed masses around the world, not least in Iran and Pakistan. This is the program of international Trotskyism, which must be restored to the Soviet Union through proletarian political revolution against the treacherous Kremlin bureaucracy.

The Bolsheviks recognized that in backward regions like Central Asia, the fight for women's rights was a great motor force for revolution, which must be centered on the proletariat, the only class which can transcend and at the same time incorporate the appetites for social and national liberation. They believed that women, having the most to gain, would be the link that broke the feudal chain in the East. As Trotsky wrote in 1924 about the Muslim women of the Soviet East:

"... the Eastern woman, who is the most paralyzed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of slaves, she, having at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak, will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress. She will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas and new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the Revolution and for the ideas of Communism than the awakened woman worker." ■

Smash Islamic Reaction! No to the Veil!

Battle for Afghanistan

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is a cold-blooded betrayal of the Afghan and Soviet peoples. The CIA's cutthroat Islamic fanatics yearn to carry out mass slaughter of Afghan women, teachers and other intellectuals, left-nationalist activists and peasants, while George Bush intends to supply these fanatics with arms as long as the left-nationalist Kabul regime remains in power. If the mullahs win, an orgy of revenge, torture and mutilation, including new civil wars along ethnic/religious lines, will inevitably break out. The imperialists intend to create an Afghanistan that will be an imperialist dagger pointed at Soviet Central Asia.

But the battle for Kabul doesn't look like a walkover. The government is well supplied with Soviet bombers and missiles and has distributed arms to the people, including young women, creating a 30,000-strong civilian militia for the life-and-death struggle. Throughout the world every class-conscious worker, socialist and believer in human decency must materially aid the Afghan government against the CIA's Islamic murderers. Gorbachev's criminal appeasement of U.S. imperialism must not be paid for with the blood of Afghan women who dared to take off the veil! Smash Washington's "holy warriors"! Fight to the death against the Islamic reactionaries!

Even some Western bourgeois journalists (especially women) are concerned about the fate of Afghan women; as Mary Williams Walsh of the *Wall Street Journal* (19 January) notes:

"The plight of Kabul's women is a poignant reminder that the West's vicarious victory over communist expansion here isn't without its ambiguities. In a backward country where the female peasantry still toils like medieval serfs, Kabuli women have managed to hold on to many 20th-century freedoms.... Instead of staying at home behind purdah walls, they emerge each day and work in offices, hospitals and schools. At Kabul University, more than half the student body is female."

Walsh contrasts these Kabuli women to Afghan women, secluded in mud huts in the refugee camps in Pakistan, who have the highest birthrate in the world. She reports that "foreign doctors working among the refugee women tell gruesome tales of husbands leaving them to die, rather than permitting diagnosis by a male obstetrician." This is how the *mujahedin* treat their "own" women; what they intend for the women of Kabul is clear from the acts of supporters of *mujahedin* leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar: before 1978 they threw acid at young women at Kabul University who did not wear the stifling *chadori* (the head-to-toe veil). Shamefully, Western so-called "leftists," because of



Reuters/Bettmann

Kabul, February 5: Members of Afghan women's militia, armed with Soviet-supplied rifles, face life-and-death struggle.

their anti-Soviet prejudices, have supported the Afghan cutthroats. They elevate national independence to the highest political principle—sheer cynicism in the case of Afghanistan, which isn't even a nation. Afghanistan is a feudal-derived state composed of a mosaic of nationalities, ethnic and tribal groupings. For revolutionary Marxists, the furthering of social revolution, which necessarily includes women's liberation, as well as the defense of the USSR against capitalist imperialism, stands higher than the bourgeois-democratic right of self-determination.

When the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) came to power, there was only about one industrial worker for every eight mullahs in the country. The peasants were totally in thrall to the khans, who controlled the sources of credit, seed, fertilizer and even water. Thus when the PDPA government initiated a program of minimal democratic measures—land reform, elimination of the bride price for women,

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Gorbachev's Pullout Is a Betrayal