

# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

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## “Family Values” Crusade Targets Women, Blacks, Teens

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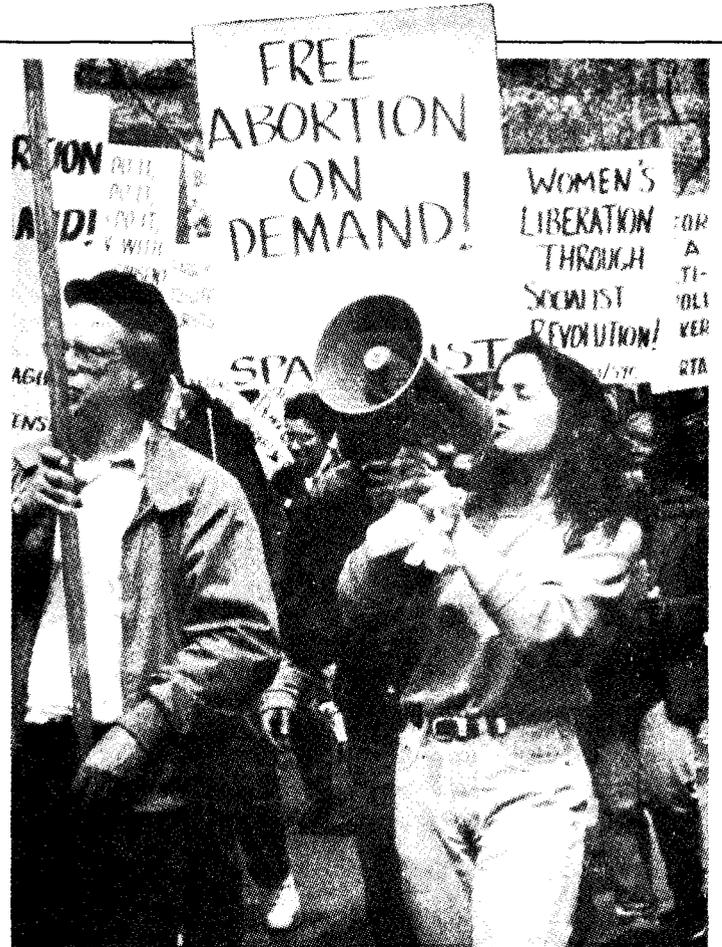
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## Editorial Notes

# Goodbye Columbus, Hello Cotton Mather

## Witches

This year, besides being the 500th anniversary of the now infamous 1492 journey of Christopher Columbus, is also the 300th anniversary of the mass witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts. The *New York Times* Sunday "Travel" section notes that the town is tourist-crazed: "witch kitsch" crams souvenir shops, while the image of a witch on broomstick adorns everything from police cars to potato chip bags. A housing development known as "Witchcraft Heights" abuts Gallows Hill, where many of those accused were killed. Where their bodies were buried, no one knows. This year

memorials to the women and men victimized in 1692 are planned around the town by those who oppose the cynical commercial exploitation of the witch trials.

In all, 14 women and 6 men were killed in the Salem trials, victims of a wave of Puritan hysteria which broke out in Salem Village in the winter of 1691. By June of 1692, over 140 people had been brought to trial before a court created to hear "witchcraft" cases exclusively. Significantly, the ones who were executed were overwhelmingly those like Susannah Martin and John and Elizabeth Proctor who defied the court and professed



**Salem witch trials, 1692: Mass Puritan hysteria led to hanging of 20 innocent townspeople, jailing of hundreds of others.**

their innocence. As an article in the Boston feminist journal *Sojourner* (January 1992) by Libby Bouvier points out, "Of the 50 people who admitted to the practice of 'witchcraft' including Tituba [the West Indian servant of the preacher], only 5 were condemned to death." And in fact only one of those who "confessed" to the witchcraft charges was actually killed.

The immediate causes of the Puritan witch trials of New England were different from those of the massive European witchhunting holocaust against women which raged for roughly 400 years from the 13th through 17th centuries. Nonetheless the authorities' goal of seeking to create social conformity remained the same. The period of the witch craze in Europe was also the period in which the Inquisition was at the height of its power, the Jews and Moors were expelled from Spain (and the adventurer Columbus set sail), the Protestants were expelled from France and the Puritans themselves were hounded out of England.

These vicious persecutions and bloody pogroms were unleashed by the rulers of various European regions in order to expel socially unassimilable peoples and consolidate religiously and ethnically homogeneous modern European nation-states. The scientific and economic advances of early capitalism were bought at a terrible price in human lives. In Europe alone, it's estimated that of the 30,000 killed in "witchcraft" trials, 85 percent were women (see "Witchcraft and Statecraft," *W&R* No. 7, Autumn 1974). In recalling the victims of the modern capitalist nation-state's genocidal birth—from the varied indigenous peoples of the Americas to those who perished in Europe's religious/ethnic holocausts—we remember too those slaughtered in the monstrous witch trials.

## Women and Revolution

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

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

## The Devil and Day Care

The terror engendered in Salem has its contemporary equivalent in the past decade's witchhunt against day-care workers. A vital necessity for working parents, day care ought to be a priority in any rational society. But in the loathsome miasma of state-sponsored fear and hysteria over sex in the "Reagan/Bush years," the state tries to guilt-trip working mothers by targeting day-care centers as hotbeds of "child abuse," with sensationalized charges spread through the media. The infamous McMartin Preschool trial cost \$15 million and lasted six years, the longest trial in U.S. history. Dozens of lives were scarred. The defendants were acquitted: there was not one shred of evidence for the lurid tales of drinking blood, raping and sodomizing children, making porn films, slaughtering bunnies and ponies.

Building on the relentless manipulation of young children by zealous prosecutors that marked the McMartin case, other day-care workers have been convicted. *Village Voice* columnist Nat Hentoff, in "Cotton Mather in Maplewood, New Jersey" (9 June 1992), writes of the continuing ordeal of Kelly Michaels, a teacher at the Maplewood Wee Care Nursery School, who has been sentenced to 47 years in prison on incredible charges of sexual abuse against 21 young children. Hentoff notes: "Why, one child swore that Michaels...had turned him, for a time, into a mouse" (the plot, incidentally, of the Anjelica Huston

movie *The Witches*). In Edenton, North Carolina, Robert F. Kelly, Jr., manager of the Little Rascals Day Center, has been sentenced to 12 consecutive life sentences, and will be eligible for parole in 240 years—the longest sentence in the history of North Carolina, if not the entire United States. Six more workers are scheduled for trial in that case. The defense lawyer for Kelly's wife Betsy, Joseph Chesire, says that before the trial, "Children were taken through the jail and placed in front of the male prisoners' cells. The children were told, 'Those are the people who did this to you'" (*Village Voice*, 16 June 1992). So day-care workers' lives are shattered, while children subjected to these inquisitions often develop a pervasive fear of adults—all in order to send a message that a woman's "place" is at home with the kids.

Real sexual abuse of children occurs in fact mostly within the confines of the "sacred" monogamous family. Witchhunts against day care, drugs, teen sex and porn are designed to manipulate the population into chasing imaginary devils, while hiding the fact that this society has done unimaginable harm to youth with its enforced inequality, poverty and deep cuts in everything from basic medicine to education. The biggest child abusers in America reside in the Fortune 500's capitalist enclaves and the White House. And 500 years after Columbus, our degenerate capitalist rulers can only run the videotape of history in reverse—thus as their economic system decays, it's back to the old witchhunting ways to try to enforce social conformity.

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## Porn

The "new Puritans" of today aren't after the devil directly, but rather "the demon porn," as author John Irving pointed out in "Pornography and the New Puritans" (*New York Times Book Review*, 29 March 1992). "The devil made me do it" doesn't make it in court today, so now it's "porn made me do it," as feminists like Andrea Dworkin and lawyer Catherine Mackinnon push legislation to allow so-called "pornography victims" to sue publishers of dirty books for having allegedly encouraged others to commit rapes and assaults. Predictably, Irving's common-sense defense of freedom of expression drew a lengthy blast from Dworkin; after all, his fictional feminist "Ellen Jamesians" who cut out their tongues to protest women's oppression in *The World According to Garp* surely demand revenge.

The idea that banning pornography will somehow protect women is dangerous nonsense. "Dirty books" or movies are not the enemy, and this latest ploy to ban them only encourages more repression from a capitalist social system that is the main oppressor of women. The government has already made clear that in any case it's not just "obscene" sex, but mention of any kind of sex that it wants banned. "U.S. Erases Section on Sex From Child-Rearing Book" headlined the *New York Times* (11 April 1992). The federal government distributed to some 257,000 employees a medical advice book, in order to lower insurance costs. However, the book as published contained a small section on sex, noting that preventive measures are a way to deal with that issue. This drove

the bureaucrats up the wall; as one said, it was "the notion that kids are sexually active" that was especially offensive. So the feds just eliminated the entire section in the version they distributed—this in a society where AIDS and diseases transmitted sexually are ravaging poor communities, where by age 17 the majority of teenagers have had sex, a million of them becoming pregnant every year.

Irving concluded his article with a quote from a famous resident of Salem, Massachusetts, Nathaniel Hawthorne, regarding the iniquity and viciousness of early New England morality (from the story "Endicott and the Red Cross"):

"In close vicinity to the sacred edifice [the meeting-house] appeared that important engine of Puritanic authority, the whipping-post—with the soil around it well trodden by the feet of evil doers.... At one corner of the meeting-house was the pillory, and at the other the stocks;...among the crowd were several whose punishment would be life-long; some, whose ears had been cropped, like those of puppy dogs; others, whose cheeks had been branded with the initials of their misdemeanors; one, with his nostrils slit and seared; and another, with a halter about his neck, which he was forbidden ever to take off, or to conceal beneath his garments.... There was likewise a young woman, with no mean share of beauty, whose doom it was to wear the letter A on the breast of her gown, in the eyes of all the world and her own children....

"Let not the reader argue, from any of these evidences of iniquity, that the times of the Puritans were more vicious than our own."

As Irving concluded, "In my old-fashioned opinion, Mr. Hawthorne sure got that right." ■

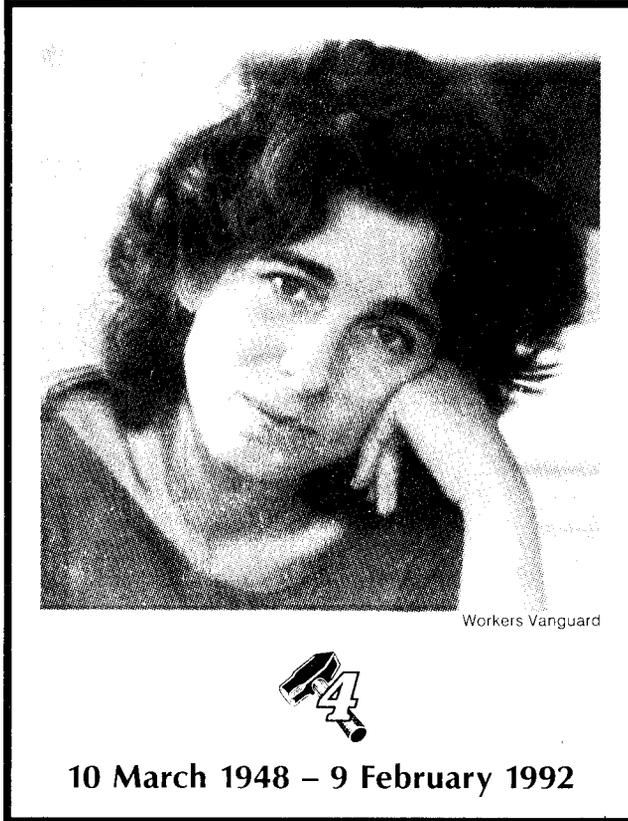
# In Honor of Our Slain Comrade Martha Phillips

Our beloved comrade Martha Phillips died on February 9 in Moscow. Although only 43 years old at the time of her death, Martha was a 20-year fighter for genuine Trotskyism and a leader of the Spartacist League. She was a cherished friend to those who knew her and worked with her, a teacher especially devoted to educating a new generation of youth, and a passionate fighter for women's liberation and black freedom. Martha was also the single mother of a handicapped child, Lael, who she deeply loved.

Martha Phillips was murdered. She was discovered by comrades who went to the apartment where she was staying. She had been very ill with a kidney ailment. Although it appeared she had died peacefully in her sleep, her comrades were baffled, since her health had been improving, and they requested an autopsy be conducted to determine the cause of death. The autopsy revealed that Martha had been brutally murdered—stabbed and strangled. This monstrous crime took place just hours before she was to join her comrades in distributing the Russian-language *Spartacist Bulletin* at a huge protest against Boris Yeltsin in Moscow that day.

We do not yet know who killed Martha Phillips, but it cannot be ruled out that the murder of our comrade was a deliberate political crime. Martha was the most prominent spokesman for the International Communist League (ICL) in Moscow. She addressed meetings of workers and leftists and spoke to the urgent need to forge a Leninist-Trotskyist party to rip political power out of the hands of the aspiring capitalists who are plunging the country into economic chaos and misery. As a woman, a Trotskyist, and a Jew, Martha was a courageous opponent of Russia's KKK—the Pamyat fascists who are emboldened by the Great Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism pushed by Yeltsin as well as by the Stalinist “patriot” milieu. Just three weeks before her murder, Martha was violently assaulted by a Pamyat fascist at a public demonstration near the Kremlin.

The murder of an American woman in Moscow would normally make “news” and suspects would energetically be pursued by the relevant authorities. But the murder



of Martha Phillips has been met with utter indifference and malice by the American embassy and U.S. State Department, while the Moscow militia (police) has been so incompetent and evasive that one has to wonder if there are not larger forces involved who do not want this heinous murder solved. After weeks of cooperating in good faith with the authorities and finding them to be deliberately unhelpful, the ICL and the Partisan Defense Committee and its international affiliates held protests in 13 cities around the world, in conjunction with the proletarian May Day holiday, to demand a serious investigation into the murder of Martha Phillips.

These protests succeeded in breaking the peculiar press blackout and put a spotlight on the Moscow authorities. Articles about Martha Phillips and the pro-

tests outside Russian embassies and consulates around the globe appeared in many prominent journals of record, including the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Japan Times*. The international campaign began with an April 27 press conference at the Trotsky Museum in Mexico City, the house where Trotsky himself was brutally murdered by a Stalinist assassin in 1940. Leon Trotsky's grandson, Esteban Volkov, said, “In meeting in this place, we do so precisely to add the name of Martha Phillips to the long list of Trotskyist revolutionaries who have fallen in the struggle to defend the working class.”

Martha Phillips was a link in the human chain of continuity of our movement. She was won to Trotskyism as a student opponent of the Vietnam War in Madison, Wisconsin in 1970. She joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) thinking it was still the party of the Russian Revolution founded by James P. Cannon. When she found that the SWP had thoroughly degenerated into reformism, she helped forge a political opposition and led a fight within the SWP which culminated in a fusion of several cadres with the Spartacist League in 1972.

The war in Vietnam was the “Russian question” in a particular historical period. While liberal “doves” and their left camp followers like the SWP pursued a bailout of U.S. imperialism from its losing war in Indochina, genuine

communists struggled for a victory to the Vietnamese Revolution and for class struggle at home against the warmongers in Washington. With this as her seminal political battle, it is no accident that Martha Phillips strove to master the Russian language and made her way to Moscow when the struggle for defense of the Soviet workers state was posed pointblank.

Martha spent the bulk of her political life as a comrade of the Bay Area SL, including a stint as organizer. She also spent periods in Los Angeles, Detroit, New York and Seattle. A powerful public spokesman and polemicist, Martha led the party in numerous campaigns. She was the Spartacist candidate for Oakland City Council in the spring 1983 election. A lifelong fighter for women's liberation, Martha was passionate and thoughtful on all questions of special oppression. She was heavily involved in launching the Bay Area Labor Black League for Social Defense and was an advocate of and spokesman for the Partisan Defense Committee.

Martha's years of struggle in a viciously racist country like America honed her sensibilities as a fighter for all the oppressed. Her letters home from Moscow spoke to the urgency of building a revolutionary party to serve as a genuine tribune of the people. Last June she wrote, "Lenin said on the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution that if the revolution had done nothing more than improve the status of working women it was proven worthwhile. Well, to put that in reverse, if Stalinism had done nothing more than to turn women, homosexuals, Jews, national minorities, back into less than human beings—how deeply it deserves to be 'superseded.' It makes you burn with anger at what they've done."

But in a degenerated workers state built on Stalinist lies and "blank spaces" in history, people didn't believe anything the government told them—including the rare truths that were spoken about the inequality, racism and degradation of capitalist societies. To combat the prevalent illusions in the so-called "free world," and to highlight the importance of fighting the special oppression of racial minorities, Martha brought the plight of America's class-war prisoners to the Soviet people. At Martha's suggestion, the Partisan Defense Committee's video, *From Death Row, This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal*, was shown to a Spartacist educational conference in Moscow last November. One Soviet worker was so moved that he wrote out a resolution, which was passed enthusiastically, demanding Jamal's release and concluding, "The working class will overcome racism and fascism and will win!"

Martha brought her experience of championing the causes of all the oppressed to the ex-USSR which is being rent by capitalist restorationists pushing the most fratricidal nationalism, social-chauvinism and bigotry. She pushed to get articles highlighting the special oppression of women, homosexuals and minorities published in Russian. The new Russian-language *Spartacist Bulletin* is devoted to these issues and dedicated to her.

Martha was a senior cadre of the Spartacist League; she was also an inspiration and guide for many of the younger women in the organization. As one comrade said at a memorial meeting to honor Martha shortly after her death: "She taught us how to fight, not only against our political opponents, but also, importantly, against the very real effects of internalized oppression." The murder of Martha Phillips is a horribly painful tragedy and an



Workers Vanguard

**Oakland, California, December 1975: Martha at Partisan Defense Committee forum where relatives of victims of racist police terror spoke.**

irreplaceable political loss. We will honor our fallen comrade by continuing the struggle to which she gave herself so ably and fully.

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*On 22-23 February 1992 the Spartacist League/U.S. held memorial meetings in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City to honor our comrade Martha Phillips. The speeches at the meetings, as well as written contributions received from other comrades of the SL/U.S. and International Communist League, testified to Martha's many and varied contributions to our party. Excerpts from the speeches and letters were published in Workers Vanguard Nos. 546, 547 and 548 (6 March, 20 March and 3 April 1992), which are filled with remembrances of this remarkable woman as well as the views, actions and methods of functioning to which she devoted her life. We print below an edited contribution from Women and Revolution editor Amy Rath.*

Many comrades have spoken and written about Martha's passionate understanding of special oppression. I wanted to say a few words to honor her invaluable contributions to the party's work around the struggle for the emancipation of women—a struggle to which Martha brought her rich talents of determination, insight and broad programmatic understanding of the class question—that is, the Russian question—as the key to liberation.

Martha was an activist for women's liberation from the beginning of her political life. Her rejection of bourgeois feminism was an integral part of her break from the reformism of the Socialist Workers Party in the 1970s, as you can see in this description she wrote of herself in a letter motivating herself as a speaker on the woman question to a conference of left academics:

"I first became involved in both the women's movement and left politics in Madison where I was studying Classics

WOMEN AND REVOLUTION WINTER 1971

**In the Revolutionary Vanguard of the Civil War**



**Harriet Tubman: Fighter for Black Freedom**

Harriet Tubman was a leading figure in the struggle for the freedom of the Negro people in the United States. She was a brave and selfless woman who risked her life many times to help her fellow slaves escape from the cruel and oppressive system of slavery. Her courage and determination inspired many others to join the fight for freedom.

WOMEN AND REVOLUTION

**Soviet Women Combat Pilots Fought Nazi Germany**

**The Story of the Night Witches**



Women pilots in the Night Bomber Regiment in being called "Night Witches" by the Nazis who feared their night attacks. They flew over 24,000 missions on bombing PG 2 bombers.

The story of the Night Bomber Regiment of the Soviet Air Force is a story of courage and heroism. These women pilots, known as the "Night Witches," fought bravely against the Nazi forces during the war. They performed daring night bombing missions that terrified the enemy.

WINTER 1971

**Interview with Soviet Women**

The Russian Revolution is a story of a people who rose up against a tyrannical system and created a new society based on equality and justice. The women of the revolution played a vital role in this struggle, fighting for their own liberation and the freedom of their fellow citizens.



**PAROXYSM**

Women's liberation is a struggle for the freedom of women from the oppression of men and the capitalist system. It is a struggle for equality and justice for all women, regardless of race or class.

**Martha was a frequent contributor to the work of *Women and Revolution*. She pressed for an article on the condition of Soviet women and then herself conducted, in Russian, the interview shown at right.**

at the University of Wisconsin. As a member of the Young Socialist Alliance I participated in building a group called Women's Action Movement which encompassed several hundred women. I considered myself a socialist feminist and went on several speaking tours throughout the Wisconsin region at what was then the height of the feminist movement. I was the women's liberation representative on the Madison City Council Committee for Free, 24 Hour Childcare, a rather nightmarish experience. As a feminist I was extremely active in organizing women, and spoke to many working women on the question of female oppression in capitalist society. Speaking to women in small towns throughout the mid-west I first began to question exactly how feminism was going to solve their problems. I knew I was also a socialist, but the link between the two was extremely hazy. Later I also had the dubious experience of working in the National Office of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition which organized several demonstrations for the repeal of anti-abortion laws.

"In mid-1971 I began to question not only feminism but the entire spectrum of politics of the Socialist Workers Party. In studying Marxism and the basic works of Lenin, Trotsky, and Rosa Luxemburg I moved considerably to the left and was part of a left opposition in the Socialist Workers Party."

Having been a part of the feminist movement—albeit certainly in its left wing—and having broken so decisively from reformist politics gave Martha a keen nose for the stench of bourgeois feminism. Her enormous talents as a polemicist and interventionist were brought to bear time and again in the women's arena. She was elected women's fraction head in the Bay Area Spartacist League in September 1974, when the party's work in this milieu was a key part of our public face and recruitment opportunities. That's reflected in the article in *W&R* No. 5, "The Myth of the 'Socialist-Feminist' Organization: Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union Expels Socialists."

In October 1976 Martha headed up an intervention team into a conference of the Freedom Socialist Party's Radical Women in Seattle, where she took on Clara Fraser, the former Trotskyist turned "socialist-feminist." At that time we were pursuing an opportunity to debate Clara on Portugal, China and "socialist-

feminism," which did not materialize. Martha was our comrade on the spot to push for the debate. She said in her report, "I spoke later in the session in a fairly heated reply to Clara's demagoguery, essentially counterposing the *W&R* and Spartacist program for women's liberation to the RW feminist/reformist/economist drivel that they pass off for trade-union work and Trotskyism." Later she says, "So they are a peculiarly eclectic variety of Pabloism, inbred in the rainy coastlands of Puget Sound. I would personally welcome a debate with them as I think in the last year or so I have begun to come to terms with unlearning the reformist/Pabloist background from which I came to Spartacism."

Our work in this milieu culminated in the fusion with the Red Flag Union in 1977. Martha played a leading role in winning the comrades over from left-wing gay liberation sectoralist politics to our revolutionary program, in competition with fake-lefts such as the FSP "socialist-feminists," the SWP and the Revolutionary Socialist League. She was the party spokesman at the "Stonewall '77 Conference" where the RFU comrades announced their intention to pursue fusion discussions with us. Martha effectively took on the lifestylers' attacks on our communist program:

"Yes, the SL says quite clearly that the question of discrimination against homosexuals, the question of 'gay liberation,' is not a strategic question. It is a secondary question, in terms of the great forces, the great programmatic issues that it is going to take, in terms of using the transitional program to mobilize the masses of workers in the crucible of struggle to bring down capitalism....

"But when we say this, this does not mean that we are saying that oppression is trivial. Oppression is deforming. It is precisely in order to build a party that can wipe out that kind of oppression that we in the SL are sitting in this room today, because we genuinely want to become the tribune of the people that rallies all sectors of the oppressed to the banner of communism."

And Martha was the SL spokesman at the San Francisco forum about our fusion with the RFU.

So in the early years of *Women and Revolution* our articles often reflected work that Martha was carrying

out in the field—carrying the party program in combat to recruit new comrades away from the pseudo-leftists of whatever variety. When with the demise of that milieu our work and the paper took on a different focus, Martha continued to be a main public spokesman on all questions of special oppression. She gave many International Women's Day forums. We have a transcript of one from 1983, when she was running for Oakland City Council, on the Russian question and the woman question. It is a broad-ranging, carefully researched talk on Russian feminism vs. Bolshevism.

Martha wasn't a writer. But she was someone whose opinion those of us who put out *Women and Revolution* always wanted for at least one major article each issue. She also motivated political questions to be taken up in the paper. So we sought out her contributions on articles like "The Story of the Night Witches: Soviet Women Combat Pilots Fought Nazi Germany" (*W&R* No. 36, Spring 1989) and "Palestinian Women and the Intifada" (*W&R* No. 39, Summer 1991), for example. And this became especially true in the last few years, as the woman question has again come to the fore with the rise of counterrevolution in the deformed and degenerated workers states. So Martha wrote in a January 1989 letter:

"I'm writing to suggest that *W&R* needs an article on the woman question in Gorbachev's Russia. I think/surmise/expect there to be increasing interest and we have as ever a great deal to say. It's not real to speak of our 'intervening' on the question in Soviet circles—still our articles seem one way or another to find their way into the country.

"Perhaps it is overly ambitious but maybe we could print some of Trotsky on the woman question in Russian, e.g. excerpts of Trotsky's chapter on woman and the family from *The Revolution Betrayed*. Or maybe sometime an excerpt of a programmatic article from the original *Rabotnitsa* [*The Working Woman*, published by the Bolsheviks before the Russian Revolution]. In any case while there's an awful lot we don't know, we could expand on points we've made previously on abortion (Soviet women average nine abortions), contraception, prostitution (which is glaringly widespread, like around the tourist hotels in Leningrad and Moscow) and its opposite number (the family), homosexuality and Stalinist prudery. And then there's a polemic to be made against the Russian feminists on Afghanistan. While we've certainly made a lot of these points before, they've gained particular currency now....

"The uniquely well-educated Soviet women workers will likely play at least as important a role in the fight for a proletarian political revolution/construction of a Trotskyist party as their grandmothers played in 1917."

Martha was prominent in leading the way in our current assessment of how critical questions like women's oppression are in the fight for political revolution in the USSR. And she had a truly special, transcendent ability to explain our political program and intersect the consciousness of contacts and sympathizers. In that way she was an educator and propagandist of the highest order. You can really see this gift in how she carried out the "Interview with Soviet Women" which was published in *W&R* No. 40 (Winter 1991-92). This interview was conducted in Russian, which she learned with so much dedication and hard work. We had to cut a lot for publication, due to its great length, but even in the published form you see Martha in action, patiently taking up each political question and misunder-



Spartacist

**Moscow, 7 November 1991: Martha distributing ICL literature in Red Square on Revolution Day.**

standing, seeking to bring the program of Trotskyism to the Soviet Union.

One of the most popular things Martha ever did for *Women and Revolution* was, of course, "In the Revolutionary Vanguard of the Civil War: Harriet Tubman, Fighter for Black Freedom" (*W&R* No. 32, Winter 1986-87). This started out as a talk she gave in the Bay Area which laid the basis for the article later published in expanded form in the paper. What's especially powerful about Martha's talk is that she brought to the history of the Civil War and the struggle for the abolition of slavery the perspective of the anti-slavery vanguard of whom Harriet Tubman was a pre-eminent example. Martha saw the Civil War through the eyes of those who dedicated their lives to the conscious intervention to change history, to free the slave.

It's her dedication to making a difference, to breaking the chains binding this rotten class-dominated world, to building a new world free of oppression and exploitation, that I will always think of when I think of Martha. She was a recruiter, an educator, a teacher of the next generation of party members and leaders. There's a story about Harriet Tubman which Martha especially liked, that for me now is inextricably linked to Martha herself and her great contributions to the struggle for human freedom. It's a story told of Tubman as an old woman by a journalist who went to interview her:

She looked musingly toward a nearby orchard, and she asked suddenly: "Do you like apples?" On being assured that I did, she said: "Did you ever plant any apple trees?" With shame I confessed I had not. "No," said she, "but somebody else planted them. I liked apples when I was young, and I said, 'Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folks to eat,' and I guess I did it." ■

# "Family Values" Crusade Targets Women, Blacks, Teens



Downing/Newsweek



Romero/NY Times

**J. Danforth Quayle III, Hillary and Bill Clinton, Al and Tipper Gore: Would you buy a used country club from these people? The racist, anti-labor bigots in the two "property parties" uphold capitalist status quo.**

Like Siamese twins, racism and anti-communism are linked and frightful ideologies spawned by the capitalist ruling class. "There's reds under the beds" and "there goes the neighborhood" are old battle hymns of the exploiters who prop up their unjust system by keeping those who produce the wealth divided and deluded. But the bourgeoisie's moral firmament is as shaky as its bankrupt economy. The nationwide *and multiracial* explosion of anger at the racist cops' acquittal in the Rodney King beating trial tore a gaping hole right in the heart of Bush's "New World Order." And the "big red bogeyman" can't pack the punch he used to now that the imperialists falsely portray the collapse of Stalinism as the "death of Communism" and Boris Yeltsin plunges the Soviet masses into "free market" misery in the ex-USSR.

With whites, blacks and Latinos high-fiving each other on "free shopping" trips through L.A. supermarkets, what's a ruling-class ideologue to do? Instead of sweeping out a red under the bed, the White House declared war on the bed itself (and what people do in it), attempting to stir up a white backlash against the "immoral" sexual practices of Americans, especially ghetto blacks and other minorities. "The disintegration of the American family" was to blame for the L.A. riots, said "Poppy" Bush, who has declared "family values" to be the theme of his faltering re-election bid. Bush's vice president, J. Danforth Quayle III(e), an overgrown boy scout with Nazi social views, has been the ideological point man for a media

blitzkrieg on "right and wrong," "law and order" and family, religion and the flag—the icons held to have blessed Ronald Reagan with victory in 1980 and 1984.

Quayle told conservative Republicans at San Francisco's elite Commonwealth Club that the "lawless social anarchy" in Los Angeles resulted from "the breakdown of family structure." Quayle capped his "law and order" speech by ludicrously placing the blame for America's "declining moral values" on the heroine of the popular TV sitcom *Murphy Brown*. Murphy, he claimed, was "mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone" in the series' season finale. While the nation hooted with laughter, the show's producer, Diane English, had a good comeback: "If the Vice President thinks it's disgraceful for an unmarried woman to bear a child, and if he believes that a woman cannot adequately raise a child without a father, then he'd better make sure abortion remains safe and legal." But that is contrary to the whole aim of this crusade: of course Bush hailed the Supreme Court's gutting of abortion rights in the Casey decision as yet another triumph for "family values."

Quayle followed up his notorious debut as Mr. Morals with a series of similar tirades before the Southern Baptist Convention (where last year Bush wept as he recalled his prayers before ordering the vicious bombing attacks on the Iraqi people), the National Right to Life Committee and other conservative bastions. Praising "the America of Norman Rockwell and the small-town values he

celebrated," Quayle denounced the "cultural elite" (that's the anti-Semitic newspeak for "rootless cosmopolitans") who "scorn" values he claims "stand as our essential guide to a good and honest life."

Humorists have been having a field day with the hapless vice president. Painting a picture of a "typical" SF family (father, neurosurgeon mother, lesbian daughter who's an unwed mother, gay son and sharp-tongued little daughter interested in "sexual propaganda"), Arthur Hoppe of the *San Francisco Chronicle* (12 June 1992) called "The Bobbseys' Family Values" "a code phrase meaning let's preserve the white male establishment." In "The Latest Quayle Joke" (*New York Times*, 14 June 1992), Garrison Keillor commented, "A man connected with this Administration needs to be careful lecturing America on moral issues, just as a golfer who kicks his ball out of the weeds needs to do it privately, swiftly."

Nobody except stand-up comics in search of new material pays any mind to Dan Quayle, but "family values" is now the political terrain on which the Republicans and Democrats are duking it out to pull in right-wing votes in November. Although the Republicans are clearly in the forefront of the post-L.A. reactionary assault, the Democrats are running hard to catch up in the "traditional family values" ratings as they campaign to recapture the Old South and the presidency. Tipper Gore, the dowdy wife of the Democratic vice presidential nominee, is infamous for crusading against "violent," sexually explicit rock lyrics, and is considered an asset to the Democratic Party ticket.

In a barely veiled diatribe against "welfare mothers" and teen sex, the Democratic draft platform rails: "People who bring children into this world have a responsibility to care for them and give them values, motivation and discipline. Children should not have children. We need a national crackdown on deadbeat parents." While Clinton has reportedly had trouble buckling his own chastity belt, he's serious about the "crackdown" plank in the party platform. Across the country, Democrats are leading the assault on the poor with proposed welfare "reforms"—

fingerprinting welfare applicants and slashing the budget, as in New York, or denying mothers on welfare additional payments for each child, as in New Jersey. This last proposal is openly endorsed by Clinton, who also calls for a national policy of throwing people off welfare after a maximum of two years.

"Family values" is an ideological cover for the "democratic" police state—a call to action for the cops, preachers and puritanical busybodies to poke and pry into what they see as an unruly and sullen population whose degenerate practices are presumably sapping the will of America. The ruling-class drive to restore "morals" and "family" to America took off 15 years ago when "ethnic purity" Democrat Jimmy Carter launched Cold War II and Anita Bryant kicked off the "Save Our Children" witchhunt of gays after the Equal Rights Amendment stalled. Anti-abortion terror-bombings escalated. The politically bellicose religious movement emerged with Carter; by 1980 all three bourgeois candidates (including independent John Anderson) were "born again" and the stage was set for "creationism" and school prayer, AIDS as "god's punishment" for gays, witchhunts of "pornography" and erotic art.

Continuing this domestic reaction, the assault on abortion rights today is part of a massive government invasion of private life which has its culmination in the "jihad against people who use" drugs, in the words of Dan Baum writing in "The Drug War on Civil Liberties":

"While the violence and excitement of the War on Drugs hogs the spotlight, the Reagan-Bush-Quayle Administration is backstage building an unprecedented federal apparatus for putting people in prison. More Americans are in federal prison today for drug crimes than were in federal prison for all crimes when Ronald Reagan took office."

—*The Nation*, 29 June 1992

### "Bad" Girls and "Fallen" Women

While capitalism undermines the stability and living standards of working-class and middle-class families, the traditional family remains a key institution of the capitalist system. It is the means by which the next generation of workers is raised, based on the parents' wages and the

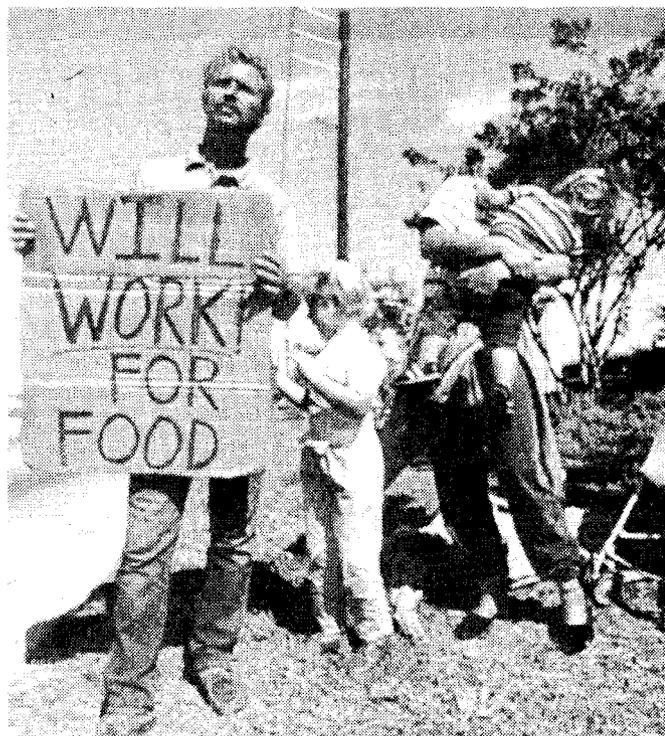


Workers Vanguard

**Striking janitors  
face LAPD  
attack in  
successful fight  
to win a union,  
June 1990.**

household drudgery of women. As we wrote in "Moral Majority Madness" ten years ago when Reagan was pushing his "Family Protection Act" (which sought, among other things, to cut funding for day-care centers and for shelters for battered women):

"Whether or not our upper classes, with all the 'sexual liberation' money can buy at their fingertips, really *like* the monogamous family is irrelevant—they are stuck with it. Precisely because capitalism cannot directly defend the enforced inequality and exploitation its profit system requires, it needs other, more ancient social justifications, and the powerful mystique of the family, propped up by religion's 'eternal verities' (that is, childish superstitions) is called into service to ensure social passivity, especially in periods of crisis. And in order to make it work, the state will step in to make laws against anybody stepping out of line. Outlawing any kind of sexual behavior other than



Connolly/Picture Group

**"Family values" the answer? Mother and father and kids, homeless and jobless in America.**

monogamous married life, imprisoning homosexuals, taking children away from 'sinful' mothers on the one hand, while making motherhood mandatory by outlawing abortion on the other—all these and more are on Reagan's agenda for America."

—*Women and Revolution* No. 23, Winter 1981-82

The institution of the family inculcates powerful anxieties and sexual fears which are especially prone to social control by reactionary forces. And in America, where the ultimate sexual taboo is interracial sex, the ruling classes have never hesitated to pull out all the stops in their manipulation of sexual fear in the service of racial oppression. Lynchings and other forms of brutal KKK terror were "justified" as necessary to protect "pure" white women from black men; in 1955 in Money, Mississippi 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered for the "crime" of having whistled at a white woman. The murder of Yusuf Hawkins in Bensonhurst in August 1989 is a more recent example.

The reactionary cloth woven from racial and sexual oppression envelops almost every social question in this country. In *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe v. Wade*, Rickie Solinger describes the different attitudes society took to white and black unwed mothers in the decades before legalized abortion. The white unwed mother (stigmatized as "neurotic" and as unable to accept a "healthy feminine role") was whisked away to some maternity home, where she "paid her debt to society" by giving up her baby for adoption. "Cured," she could then assume her "proper" role in marriage and legitimate motherhood.

For black women, the sexual double standard was compounded by vicious racial bigotry. Barred from "whites-only" maternity homes and the adoption network available for white babies, black unwed mothers tended to keep their babies, only to be hounded by the authorities when they needed help. According to Solinger, "in Chicago, in the same state that threatened women on welfare with jail sentences if they had a child out of wedlock, in the same city where unwed mothers were threatened with eviction from their homes, social workers in the Department of Public Welfare were forbidden to refer their clients to Planned Parenthood clinics." Bigots used black unwed motherhood as a "justification" for segregation. Charged one racist 1957 editorial in the *Richmond News Leader*, "The 'mere statistics' tell an eloquent story of promiscuity and behavioral standards; the figures underlie one of the more significant reasons for the South's resistance to integration of the schools."

### The Black Family: Blaming the Victim

For black people, "family values" means *their* family is of no value to the white racist ruling class. Intensifying racial oppression cannot but take a terrible toll on private life. In a society which identifies manhood as the ability to support a family, black men suffer double-digit unemployment even in the best of times. Unemployment, lack of education, cop terror, the degradation of life in a society that reviles you for your very existence—the fabric of life for the black poor has been shredded and they have few alternatives to fall back on.

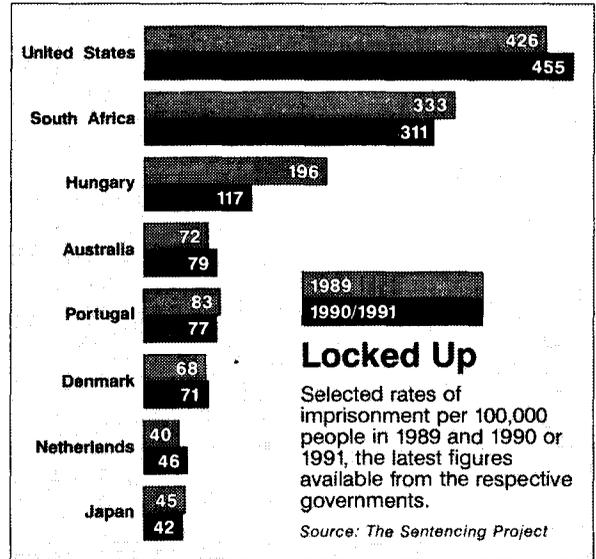
For all the talk of a woman's place being at home with her children in the "sanctity" of the home, white and black women have massively joined the workforce not only to make up for falling real wages but because often they are a family's sole means of support. And with affordable, decent day care basically nonexistent, many mothers have to leave the kids at home alone. For black women, that can mean their kids are left to be preyed upon by pimps and pushers and terrorized by cops in the ghettos. Just remember what happened to five-year-old Patrick Mason, the black child playing alone in his own home when an Orange County, California cop burst into the apartment and shot him dead. To top it off, his mother was charged with "child abuse" because she was out working at the time.

As the last U.S. census showed, there are 10.1 million single women with children, and they aren't engaging in an "alternative lifestyle" inspired by watching *Murphy Brown*. In Dan Quayle's topsy-turvy world, "Marriage is probably the best anti-poverty program of all." But in the real world, as unemployment skyrockets, real wages plum-



Nieto/Newsday

**Growth industry in racist America: Jail population has doubled in ten years. U.S. surpasses all countries, including South Africa, in rate of imprisonment.**



New York Times Graph

met and rents go through the roof, working-class people and minorities are waiting later and later to move out of their parents' homes or get married. Especially with sex education, contraception and abortion less and less accessible, "accidents are bound to happen." And if you're an unemployed woman with children, you can't get welfare if there's a man living in your house.

The notion that the poor and the oppressed bring their suffering on themselves is as old as class society itself, is as old as Adam and Eve, the guilty temptress. Today, there's an all-out offensive against "immoral" welfare mothers (unmarried, of course), scapegoats for everything from the L.A. riot to drugs to the U.S.'s inability to compete with Japan. Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has been a leading spokesman for such racist drivel since 1965, when in "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," he blamed the "breakdown of the family" and the "matriarchy" among blacks for causing ghetto poverty and degradation. Back then he suggested that one solution to ghetto unrest among unemployed black youth was to draft them for the Vietnam War. The drill sergeant was put forward as the substitute for the missing father figure to instill discipline and "family values." When the Vietnam War was escalating the capitalists wanted to ensure their supply of young blacks as cannon fodder.

In 1970 Moynihan coined the term "benign neglect" to justify Nixon's drive to dismantle the social welfare programs instituted under the Democrats' "Great Society/War on Poverty" programs whose purpose was to keep the ghettos cool following the 1964 Harlem, 1965 Watts and 1967 Detroit ghetto upheavals. As New York Senator, Moynihan was also a key craftsman of the 1988 "Family Security Act" (truly an Orwellian name), the genocidal "workfare" bill which mandates throwing millions of welfare mothers off the rolls if they do not take a job—in an economy where *there are no jobs to take*.

Under this racist capitalist system in deep crisis, welfare is the only means of survival for over 13 million people whom the ruling class has cut off from productive employment. Many of these people may never hold a job again. But what future do they have on welfare, dependent on

crumbs from a ruling class which couldn't care less if they live or die? And what of the millions of homeless people in America? To get welfare, you need a fixed address. Meanwhile, the continuing economic crisis leads to deeper cuts in the few remaining social programs for the poor.

**For a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

During the 1980s Wall Street boom, "junk bonds" and corporate raids filled the bosses' coffers while they continued gutting basic American industry as "unprofitable" and spent billions on the Pentagon. Now they try to pin



Steven Shames

**Single mother and kids in Holland Hotel, Manhattan, 1987. Welfare "reform" means throwing black mothers and children onto the street.**

the blame for the U.S. economic disaster on Japan, immigrant workers and "lazy" or otherwise unworthy Americans, seeking to stir up national and racial animosities to divert the workers from their real enemies: the capitalists, who have destroyed the wealth of this country built up by the sweat of the workers.

The rulers long for a return to the post-World War II "American Century" (which lasted about as long as Hitler's Third Reich and ended in the rice paddies of Indochina with the triumph of the Vietnamese Revolution over U.S. imperialism), when Uncle Sam was the boss, anti-communism ruled, the union misleaders toed the line, blacks knew where to sit and women knew where to stay. Today, the American capitalist class is running scared atop a social land mine of anger and discontent. The Pentagon's awesome military firepower, which laid waste to Iraq, rests on a shrinking and obsolete industrial base, a bankrupt financial system, and a working class whose conditions of life have been deteriorating for two decades. The patriotic hoopla over the Gulf War faded as yellow ribbons gave way to pink slips; a lingering recession adds to the overflow of economic misery. Bush's posturing as master of the world is increasingly resented by working people, who cannot make ends meet whatever they do.

As we wrote in "L.A. Upheaval Shakes America" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 551, 15 May 1992):

"It is true that the economic resentments of lower-class whites can be channeled by racist demagogues against the black poor. Witness Klansman David Duke's campaign for Louisiana governor last year. But the widespread outrage over the King verdict and the L.A. upheaval show that American society can also be polarized along different lines. An overwhelming majority of the population disagreed with the acquittal. And, significantly, the black nationalists had little to say to the conspicuously *multiracial* protests following the verdict....

"Poor black and Latino youths in South-Central L.A. and older white Caterpillar workers in Peoria, Illinois are victims of the same basic economic forces—an exploitative eco-

omic system, whose destructive effects are compounded by the decay of American capitalism as its rulers become ever more violence-crazed and rapacious. It is necessary to *polarize this society on the basis of class struggle*. It's become almost commonplace today to say that what's needed are jobs, decent medical care for all, quality housing and education. But the only way to get this is to smash capitalism and build a socialist economy, based on production for human need not profit."

Various schemes such as those promoted by bourgeois feminism or black nationalism necessarily end up pitting sectors of the oppressed against each other in a scramble for some piece of the shrinking capitalist pie. Essentially uninterested in poor black women who cannot afford abortions (legal or not), the liberal feminists in NOW (the capitalists' ladies auxiliary) are trying to cash in on the mass outrage over attacks on abortion rights in order to increase their clout in the political wheeling and dealing in Washington. Black nationalists guilt-trip black women who want abortions by calling abortions "genocide," thus promoting their own reactionary "family values." Justified anger against police violence and the whole racist system is being misdirected by demagogic political hustlers into schemes for "black capitalism," a deliberate campaign to foster anti-Semitism, and base bigotry, especially against Asian merchants.

With their lying schemes for how the oppressed can "make it" within the confines of this vicious system, none of these misleaders dares to really touch the potential for explosive class struggle revealed by the integrated eruption of pent-up anger in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict. To realize this potential, what is required is a multiracial revolutionary party—a *tribune of the people* that can link the ghettos and the factories in struggle, directing the anger and outrage that erupted in L.A. and reverberated across the country into a revolutionary working-class fight to sweep away this whole system of poverty, capitalist exploitation, racism and bigotry against women. ■



Gary Truman

**Labor rallies mobilized thousands of miners, auto workers and other unionists against union-busting against Ravenswood steelworkers. Strikers hung tough through 18-month lockout.**

## L.A. Racist Cops Walk

# There Is No Justice in the Capitalist Courts!



Workers Vanguard

The following is adapted from a Partisan Defense Committee statement issued on April 30.

The videotape of Los Angeles cops viciously pummeling black motorist Rodney King sparked a wave of outrage in L.A. and across the country. The amateur video caught the cops in their routine practice of terrorizing blacks and other minorities. Now the despicable verdict by a no-blacks-allowed Simi Valley jury acquitting the would-be killers is a green light for racist terror—from skinheads and KKKers to big-city and small-town cops across the country.

Moving the trial out of L.A. to virtually all-white Simi Valley—where active cops and their families outnumber the black population—was a sure way the racist capitalist state could come up with a not-guilty verdict. The jury watched the same videotape the whole world saw—they saw over and over again how Rodney King was stunned by Tasers, repeatedly beaten and kicked as he lay helpless on the ground. But it didn't matter. The judge instructed the jury to see the videotape "through the cops' eyes"



Chinn/SF Examiner

**Outrage swept the West Coast after the verdict in the Rodney King case. Top: marchers rally at Berkley Hall of Justice, April 30. Above: a San Francisco protester is seized by the cops.**

and that's what they did.

Now the rage and explosion over this hideous injustice will be used to justify more repression and more cop violence in the name of white racist "law and order." Already the National Guard has been placed in readiness to impose martial law. A state of emergency has been declared and a dusk-to-dawn curfew

imposed. We say: cops and National Guard, army of occupation—out of the ghettos and barrios!

This racist verdict was a provocation guaranteed to generate desperate outrage by the city's besieged minority population. The point is not to seize articles of consumption but to expropriate the means of production. That's a big leap, representing the shift in consciousness from that of outraged poor people to that of conscious and organized working people.

This country today "leads" the world in the percentage of its population incarcerated by its "justice" system, exceeding even apartheid South Africa. Unable to provide jobs and homes to millions of people, this country's rulers



George Holliday Video

**Amateur cameraman shows what happens all the time: L.A. cops repeatedly beating defenseless black man. Shown on TV, video of assault on Rodney King shocked millions who didn't know truth about racism in America.**

are willing to spend ever greater sums of money to lock up those the system has no use for, as well as those who want to fight for something better. The only "growth industry" in America today is construction of new prisons, where the number of blacks and Latinos behind bars is vastly disproportionate to their weight in the population.

This is life in the "New World Order." The beating of Rodney King took place just days after the U.S. mass murder mission in Iraq, prompting Bush to declare, "The kind of moral force and national will that freed Kuwait City from abuse can free America's cities from crime." Rodney King knows well the immoral force of the Los Angeles police, as does former Black Panther leader Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) who has spent over 20 years in prison framed by the LAPD and FBI, and the families of the 28 victims killed over the past 25 years by the Special Investigations Section (LAPD's secret hit squad). This is what black Democratic mayor Thomas Bradley calls "the finest large-city department in the nation."

The cops and courts are instruments of racist class oppression. This is how the thugs in blue "serve and protect" their capitalist masters, not just in L.A. but in the inner cities across the country. When not terrorizing the ghettos and barrios they are out busting picket lines, like the 1990 cop riot against striking Los Angeles janitors. Wednesday's verdict is a grotesque reaffirmation of Supreme Court Justice Taney's decision in the Dred Scott case 135 years ago that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." The message written in blood and bruises upon the body of Rodney King, and now buttressed with all the pomp of "due process," is that the racist cops can do *anything* they want to *anybody* they want *anytime* they want.

Black people in Los Angeles are increasingly vulnerable—shoved out of the labor force, they are pushed back and forced to survive on the shrinking margins of the dangerous inner cities. The working class must not allow the black population to be isolated—the *powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers should organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the black community* as the LAPD looks to spill more blood to "celebrate" their racist victory over Rodney King. It is a measure of the craven prostration of the pro-capitalist union "leaders" in the face of this racist crime that instead of organizing powerful actions against the cops who torture and kill black people, who arrest strikers and protect scabs, they are busy whipping up anti-Japanese protectionism and turning out

working-class votes for the Democratic politicians.

There is no justice in this racist capitalist country for Rodney King, for Patrick Mason, the five-year-old black child shot and killed inside his own apartment by a trigger-happy Orange County cop, for the countless victims of cop terror nationwide. Justice will come when the killer cops are tried by tribunals of their intended victims—when the power of the capitalist class and of their racist hirelings in blue is smashed by a thoroughgoing revolution so that those who labor will rule.

Over a century ago this country promised freedom to its black citizens, 200,000 of whom fought in the Union Army to smash the slaveholders' rule in the South. But that promise was betrayed by victorious Northern capitalism. It will take a third American Revolution, a revolution by the working people and all the oppressed, to win black liberation—in a socialist America.

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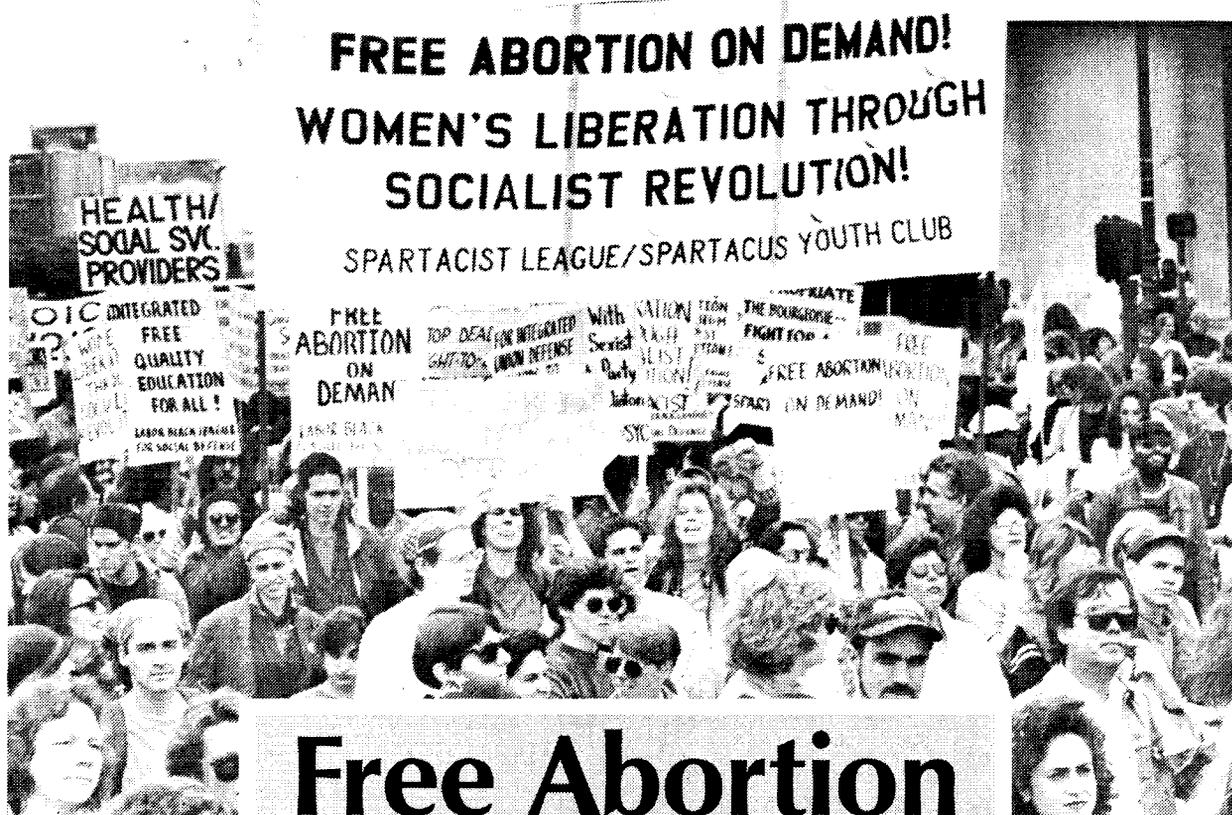
For more information about the Partisan Defense Committee and our program of class-struggle defense contact the PDC at P.O. Box 99, Canal St. Sta., New York, NY 10013, (212) 406-4252. ■



Workers Vanguard

**Spartacists at protest against racist acquittal of cops, Times Square, NYC, May 1.**

# Break with the Democrats—Build a Workers Party!



Workers Vanguard

## Free Abortion on Demand!

- Down with "Squeal Rules"— Abortion Rights for Teens!
- Drop the Ban on RU 486!
- Free 24-Hour Childcare!
- Billions for AIDS Research!
- Free Quality Health Care for All!

The U.S. Supreme Court's long-awaited ruling on abortion read like it was hatched in an underground parking garage halfway between the Supreme Court and the White House in a deal calculated to take the heat off Bush on the explosive abortion issue in the November elections. While refraining from an outright overturn of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion nationwide, the Court on June 29 endorsed an odiously restrictive Pennsylvania law mandating a waiting period for all women, "counseling" on fetal development and options, and teen "parental notification." The most succinct description of what the new ruling means came from New York City Republican Congressman Bill Green: "The Supreme Court didn't kill *Roe v. Wade*. It gave the states permission to strangle it to death with red tape." Even now *half* of all urban counties and *93 percent* of rural counties in the country have no abortion facilities at all, and the black-robed bigots have invited the states to further erode this already tenuous access to abortion.

With the bourgeoisie split wide open over the question of legalized abortion, both anti-abortion reactionaries and "pro-choice" liberals are pitching the presidential election as one which will determine the next appointment to

the Supreme Court and the fate of abortion. But it was not particularly the political composition of the 1973 court—whose chief justice, Warren Burger, was a Nixon appointee—which led to the legalization of abortion. This was a concession to an upsurge of mass social struggle. The women's liberation movement arose as hundreds of thousands of radicalized youth took to the streets in the struggle for black rights and in opposition to the dirty imperialist war in Vietnam.

Even the most minimal gains for working people, women and minorities have been achieved only as a result of social struggle, not through the ballot, and certainly not through lobbying Congress or arguing before the Supreme Court. Under capitalism, every reform remains eminently reversible, as the onslaught against abortion rights demonstrates. America's rulers continue to ban the RU 486 pill, which would enable women to have safe and convenient non-surgical abortions. On July 2 customs cops at New York's Kennedy Airport seized RU 486 from a pregnant woman who brought it for her personal use into the country in open defiance of the reactionary ban. In an emergency session July 17, the Supreme Court ruled 7 to 2 in favor of the U.S. government's right to confiscate

the "abortion pill," a drug in wide use in Britain and France where women vastly prefer it to the invasive surgical method of abortion.

The campaign to rip abortion rights away from American women is the spearhead for a general offensive, organized by the White House and its Supreme Court appointees, against women's rights and black rights. The American bourgeoisie, beginning with Democrat Jimmy Carter, launched an all-sided reactionary onslaught



aimed at reversing the gains of the civil rights movement, ending the "war on poverty" and crippling the labor movement. This was the domestic reflection of a drive to rearm U.S. imperialism and restore its erstwhile hegemonic power in the world following its humiliating defeat in Vietnam.

### Bourgeois Feminism: Power Lunching to Reform the System

The right to abortion, a simple and safe medical procedure, is a democratic reform, based on the premise that a woman has the absolute right to decide whether or not to bear a child. A few years back bourgeois politicians began to figure out that the ideological campaign to smear abortion as "murder" wasn't going over in America, and that a declaration of "pro-choice" views would win them elections. The "pro-choice" wing of the capitalist class has realized that the anti-woman campaign of the religious bigots has served to alienate a section of white, middle-class women in "Middle America" who would otherwise have no quarrel with the mainstream, racist American status quo.

It is this layer which the Democratic Party hopes to mobilize in the "Year of the Woman" in a calculated play for women's votes and an equally calculated snubbing of blacks and labor. And their main arm for carrying out this electoral plan is the organized bourgeois feminist groups like NOW and NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League), which are firmly tied to the Democratic Party. The bourgeois feminists are the self-conscious

expression of a layer of educated, largely white, middle-class professionals who seek to forge their niche in bourgeois politics. Their primary concern is to make it in bourgeois society and therefore they want *their* right to abortion officially sanctioned in bourgeois law; "Keep Abortion Legal" is as far as NOW will ever go. Well-heeled women have long been able to buy safe abortions.

But for poor, minority and working women, the racist Democratic Party offers nothing. Clinton glories in the fact that he returned home to Arkansas to personally supervise the execution of a brain-damaged black man. For that matter, "pro-choice" Clinton's home state has on the books one of the most invidious abortion laws in the country, banning virtually all abortions, as well as requiring parental notification and ruling out state funding.

Congressional Democrats will push for a vote on the "Freedom of Choice Act" before the Republican convention in August, knowing Bush will veto it and hopefully shoot himself in the foot. This is a pretty thin reed for defenders of women's rights to clutch at in order to salvage abortion. Initially designed as a simple affirmation of Roe, the Act has been watered down as the Democrats throw sops to their various reactionary constituencies. Thus the bill would impose parental notification requirements for teens, allow states to deny funding and to restrict abortion after "viability," and it says nothing about federal funding for abortion. The Democratic Party can indeed today vote for such limited legal abortion rights, but this already tenuous position changes with the political climate: thus the 1976 Hyde Amendment denying access to safe abortion to poor women was passed with bipartisan support. And when the Supreme Court ruled a year later that states could also deny funding for abortion, born-again Democrat Jimmy Carter callously intoned, "There are many things in life that are not fair."

### Where WAC and WHAM Go Wrong

Even among the overwhelmingly white and middle-class crowd who turned out for the mammoth "pro-choice" rally in Washington on April 5, which featured Democratic and Republican speakers as well as repeated attempts by NOW organizers to keep out leftist literature, many young protesters were far from enthusiastic about electoral politics. While NOW, NARAL et al. stick to the courts and the halls of Congress, these young women and men have time and again put their bodies on the line, defending abortion clinics against reactionary bigots in Wichita, Buffalo and elsewhere.

More activist, street-oriented feminists organized against Operation Rescue's threatened disruptions during the Democratic Party convention in NYC. On June 13, about 1,000 abortion rights activists came out against John Cardinal O'Connor, as he and the NYPD joined forces to terrorize women seeking abortions at the Eastern Women's Center in Manhattan. The NYPD arrested eleven people, including five members of the new feminist activist group WAC (Women's Action Coalition) and four supporters of the Spartacist League. Our militant contingent chanted and carried signs including "Labor must defend abortion rights!", "Down with Bush—Break with Democrats—Build a workers party!" and "1-2-3-4, free abortion's what we're for, 5-6-7-8, separate the church and state." As many others joined in with our chants, we were a revolutionary pole in the demonstration and drew the attention of the

Workers Vanguard



**New York City, June 13—Nine of the clinic defenders arrested when the NYPD went after abortion rights demonstrators.**

Cardinal's cossacks. As SL supporter Sheri Stoll, one of those arrested, said shortly after her release: "Where do these cops think they are? New York City is not Dan Quayle country. This isn't some Moral Majority backwater. The NYPD has a deserved reputation for gunning down unarmed black and Hispanic residents. Now they are being used as a praetorian guard for reactionary Cardinal O'Connor and his anti-woman, anti-gay bigots."

This action, like the earlier mobilizations in Buffalo where bourgeois feminists acted like junior G-men to keep more militant clinic defenders in line, revealed the deep split in the feminist movement over defending the clinics. WHAM (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) issued a leaflet saying that it "does not condone demonstrations at women's health facilities," even guilt-tripping demonstrators with appeals to "respect the women" against "violation of their privacy." WAC, in contrast, went to the clinic. NOW stayed away, while NARAL kept its contingent a block away from the clinic holding green Statue of Liberty signs and patriotically singing the national anthem.

Like ACT UP, WAC combines a certain tactical militancy with essentially liberal politics. The corollary to its faith in the effectiveness of "civil disobedience" is illusions in the cops to "play the game." Thus there was much shock June 13 that the cops actually arrested people when they hadn't "chosen" to be arrested. Many rad-lib feminists chant, "Not the church, not the state, women will decide our fate!" But under capitalism, the state—and the exploiting class it represents—does decide your fate. Coal miners don't "choose" to go down to work in the pits; they simply know they will starve if they don't.

Control over reproduction of labor power is a cornerstone of capitalism, and whether it is done through the Nazis' limitation of women to "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, church) or the social democrats' welfare state child subsidies to encourage working-class women to be incubators, the purpose is ultimately the same. But it's the ownership of production that makes capitalism what it is, and that's why the labor movement (by withholding its labor power) has the potential force to challenge the capitalist class and its government.

Around the Democratic Convention WAC activists chanted, "WAC is watching, we'll remember—We'll be voting in November!" However militant its tactics, WAC advocates the same "pressure the system" reform schemes

as NOW. Even the limited fight for legal abortion means a break from electoral illusions and a mobilization of the social power of the labor movement to defeat entrenched forces of reaction, from the Catholic hierarchy to the American Medical Association. To defend the right to abortion for all women means a struggle for *free abortion on demand* and *free quality health care for all*.

The big obstacle to bringing out thousands of union members is the bureaucratic misleadership of the union movement. It's noteworthy that at the New York June 13 protest, there was no organized participation from the labor movement. Dennis Rivera, whose 1199 union organizes some clinic workers, could have turned out thousands of hospital workers—a large section of whom are black women. But Rivera cherishes Cardinal O'Connor as one of his "mentors" in the city, while outrageously dictating that on abortion rights, "I have taken a position that the union should not have a position. Many women activist friends react in horror when they talk to me, but we've become so jaded, so uncivilized. It's like euthanasia. Where do we stop?" (*The New York Times Magazine*, 10 May 1992).

Those thoughtful activists who look beyond limited reforms to a wider goal of women's liberation must take on the question of a revolutionary transformation of society and the emancipation of women from slavery in the institution of the family. The Spartacist League fights to mobilize the working class to defend the rights of women and all the oppressed. We call on labor to defend abortion clinics, seeking to break away the ranks of the organized labor movement from the reactionary misleaders who wallow in all the social backwardness ordained by their bourgeois masters. We seek to build a revolutionary party which will serve as "tribune of the people," fighting all forms of social oppression as we organize to sweep away this disgusting system.

### **From Gloria Steinem to the ISO: "Feminists in One Country" Support International Reaction**

In contrast to the revolutionary politics of the SL, which we proudly carry on our banner for all to see, self-styled "radicals" like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) are buried inside WAC as its "best builders." Likewise, inside WHAM's New York Clinic Defense Task Force is the Revolutionary Communist Party's "Refuse and Resist," whose slogan is "Abortion on Demand and



**German Spartacists at East Berlin march against reactionary West German abortion law, 20 June 1992. Banner reads, "Capitalist Anschluss slavery for women! Abolish paragraphs 218-219!"**

Without Apology." Endless front groups and liberal slogans with a militant veneer—that is all these ostensible "socialists" and "revolutionaries" have to offer. They fundamentally reject the basic Marxist tenet that only the seizure of power by the working class can open the road to socialism and the liberation of the oppressed, and instead they seek to appease or accommodate that mythical beast, the "progressive" capitalist. And they all end up outside the Democratic Party convention begging this party of anti-communism, war, racism and exploitation to stand up for the rights of women.

Internationally, abortion rights have become a key battleground in the struggle between social progress and social reaction. The march of counterrevolution across East Europe has meant increasing attacks on women and minorities. In "reunified" Germany, the question of abortion rights is crucial. The German *Bundestag* voted recently for an abortion law which recognizes a woman's right to abortion in the first 12 weeks while imposing obligatory "right-to-life" counseling. This law is simultaneously an unambiguous defeat for women in the East (where abortion had been entirely free, as was contraception, and unrestricted before 12 weeks) and potentially a limited reform for women in West Germany (where abortion had been extremely restricted). This seemingly bizarre outcome is a product of the counterrevolution and glaringly exposes the social superiority of the workers state (albeit deformed) that had existed in East Germany.

Bourgeois feminists, of course, stand with their capitalist brothers in despising the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states that arose after World War II. Gloria Steinem's new best seller *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem* (1992) reveals no "inner child" re-emerging all dewy fresh, but a hardened Cold Warrior wielding her anti-Soviet battle-ax. It's easy to make fun of a book that has index entries for "Karnak, temple at" and "third eye," but the true reactionary core of the book is Steinem's defense of counterrevolutionary Boris Yeltsin and his ilk, who champion the anti-Semitic, fascistic Pamyat and anti-abortion Orthodox Church in the drive to consolidate

capitalist states in the disintegrating Soviet Union. Lying wildly by omission, she singles out Romania under the woman-hating maniac Ceausescu, implying that the repressive anti-abortion, anti-contraception laws there were the standard "Communist" position. In fact, it was Lenin's Soviet Union which in 1920 first made abortion legal and free for all women.

Of course Steinem, infamous in the women's movement for wittingly taking CIA money in her capacity as a youth festival organizer, is a mouthpiece for capitalist counterrevolution. But ostensibly "socialist" groups like the ISO are too. For years these pseudo-socialists supported the Vatican-run Solidarność of Lech Walesa, which is now shoving capitalist starvation programs down Polish workers' throats while fostering a reactionary mobilization against the right to abortion. In the Soviet Union, the ISO vicariously joined Boris Yeltsin's barricades for counterrevolution in August 1991. They stood with U.S. imperialism in opposing the USSR's deeply just and progressive invasion of Afghanistan to defeat the woman-hating *mujahedin* "freedom fighters." These fake-lefts profess to support abortion rights in America—but everywhere else in the world they have aligned themselves with anti-woman reaction.

Today, there's no lack of feminists or leftists complaining that women are getting shafted in the so-called "fledgling democracies" of East Europe. In fact, the explosion of rents and food prices, mass unemployment, destruction of childcare facilities, rising crime and violence and racism—these ills are the necessary accompaniments to the replacement of the mismanaged and inefficient centralized economies of the deformed workers states by "the magic of the marketplace." All those who hailed the capitalist counterrevolutionaries in the name of "self-determination," to the extent they have any influence on events, must share responsibility for the present deadly dangerous situation.

From Moscow to Warsaw to New York City, the battle for women's most basic rights is an international one: For women's liberation through socialist revolution! ■

# Vatican Leads Onslaught Against Abortion Rights

*This article was published by our comrades of the Lega Trotskista d'Italia (LTd'I) in Spartaco (No. 36, March 1992) and has been adapted and translated from Italian.*

Last December 28, a disgusting "monument to unborn children" was inaugurated in the city cemetery in Aquila. This macabre spectacle was directed by Aquila's Christian Democratic mayor Enzo Lombardi and Archbishop Mario Peressin. Peressin condemned women who have abortions, saying they are guilty of "murder." Catholic cinematographer Franco Zeffirelli was also on hand, presumably to lend a pseudo-intellectual cover to this affair. As if this weren't enough, a few days later it was revealed that anti-abortion doctors in Aquila kept files on women seeking abortions and turned over these lists to the reactionary squads from the so-called "Movement for Life."

This is only the latest act in the never-ending clerical crusade against abortion rights for women, against a woman's fundamental right to decide if and when to become a mother. Back in 1981, the "Movement for Life" sponsored a referendum to allow abortions only in cases involving a "serious health danger," but the Italian electorate defeated this referendum by a crushing majority. The Church, the ideological policeman of reaction, didn't give up after this scorching defeat. Enlisting the most backward sectors of the population, the Church mobilized against abortion rights and threatened to excommunicate doctors who perform abortions.

According to chief druid Karol Wojtyla, procreation is the only legitimate function of sex, and therefore he virulently condemns not only abortion but also contracep-

tion. The Church staunchly defends the family because it is a fundamental pillar of class society. In February 1989 the anti-sex fanatics of "Comunione e Liberazione" (an anti-abortion group linked to the Christian Democratic Party), with the help of their accomplices in the fascist student organization (FUAN), rallied in front of clinics to intimidate gynecologists who perform abortions. This alliance between religious fundamentalists and fascists isn't at all strange when you consider that every fascist regime has always outlawed abortion.

The recent events in Eastern Europe have encouraged these reactionaries to launch an all-out counterattack to wipe out even the smallest gains women managed to achieve in the past. The ridiculous lie about the "death of communism" conceals an unprecedented attack against the interests of the working class, women's rights, and civil rights in general. This attack is all the more dangerous as it is taking place in both the capitalist West and the East European states as part of Bush's plan for a "New World Order," inaugurated one year ago with the massacre of more than 150,000 Iraqis.

The gains of workers and women are seriously threatened in all the East European countries. In Karol Wojtyla's Poland, the clerical reactionaries tried to criminalize abortion and demanded prison sentences for women who have them. They have not accomplished this, but they have succeeded in making abortions more expensive and more difficult to get. Women were the first to pay the bitter price for the capitalist takeover of the ex-DDR. They lost their jobs, childcare centers were closed down,



Rome, March 1981—thousands march for abortion rights in protest against "Movement for Life" referendum.



**Cardinal Gasparri and Mussolini signing the Lateran Pact (Concordat), 1929. This deal between the Catholic church and the fascist regime set up Vatican statelet and granted church official status in Italian state.**

and abortion rights were restricted.

Every attack on abortion rights must be energetically fought by mobilizations based on the working class. In this period of profound capitalist decay, only a decisive intervention by the proletariat can effectively defend basic democratic rights against rampant social reaction. The workers movement and all defenders of democratic rights must take a stand against any interference by the church or state in the private lives of individuals. *Church and state out of the bedrooms! For the full separation of church and state!*

The separation of church and state is a fundamental gain of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. But in Italy, land of Papal reaction, more than 200 years after the French Revolution, the Vatican's special privileges and influence are enshrined and codified in the Italian Constitution. The "Concordat," the 1929 treaty drawn up between Mussolini's fascist state and the Pope, was incorporated into the Republican 1948 Constitution—with the approval of the class-collaborationist Italian Communist Party (PCI). The Concordat grants the Church a privileged position above other religions, providing the Vatican with billions of lire, and permitting it to propagandize in the public schools its reactionary ideology against abortion and contraception.

Today Rifondazione Comunista, which claims the heritage of the old PCI (now the Party of Democratic Socialism), worships this document and unabashedly proclaims itself "the people of the Constitution." Always seeking to collaborate with bourgeois parties and in particular with the Catholics, Rifondazione Comunista takes particular care not to fight for the abolition of the Concordat or for the separation of church and state. Rifondazione Comunista limits itself to pressuring the bourgeois state to make Law 194 more "effective." On the question of religious instruction in the schools, the left limits itself to declaring that the "alternative hour" (a school period for students who don't want Catholic instruction) has not been properly organized. The revolutionary democrat Garibaldi correctly stated that "the Vatican is the cancer of Italy." Still today, after over a century of Catholicism as the state religion, the left sees nothing wrong with this! *Down with the Concordat! Church out of the schools! Expropriate the Vatican and all its assets!*

The PCI's popular-frontist politics have meant always

looking for class collaboration with the Vatican. Thanks to this, divorce wasn't introduced in Italy until 1970 (and under terrible conditions!). Abortion was legalized—with difficulty—only in 1978, following the powerful working-class mobilizations of the late '60s and early '70s. Law 194, which allows abortion only in the first trimester (and only for economic, social or personal hardship), was really just another compromise with the Vatican and incorporated a clause for "conscientious objectors."

This clause allows doctors to declare themselves "morally incapable" of performing abortions, and has made it impossible for women to get abortions through the national health service in the South of Italy and wherever the Church is more influential. While "objecting" doctors often don't hesitate for a moment to perform abortions in private clinics for astronomical sums of money, thousands of working-class women are forced to resort to clandestine abortions and risk their lives at the hands of back-alley abortionists. As usual, when the bourgeoisie is forced to recognize a democratic right, the mechanisms of bourgeois society limit it considerably. *Abolish "conscientious objection"!* *Those who would practice medicine cannot also declare themselves "objectors"!* The Trotskyist League fights for *unrestricted, safe and free abortion on demand* and for the abolition of the "conscientious objection" clause.

Because it is every woman's right to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy, this same right must be extended to minors without requirements for parental consent or government permission. Safer, non-surgical methods such as the RU-486 pill, which would render abortion less traumatic, should be adopted and studied for further applications. Adequate information on contraception must be provided in all public and private schools, and free, safe and effective contraception provided. At the same time, the LTd'I demands paid maternity leave before and after childbirth, and 24-hour childcare at the workplace so that working women can have children without being fired or having to quit their jobs.

In 1981 the LTd'I was the only organization on the left to support the Radical Party's referendum which sought to legally extend abortion rights and allow abortions after the first trimester, abortions for minors, and abortions in private clinics as well as public hospitals. This referendum certainly had rather obvious limitations; in fact the Radical Party insisted on maintaining the "conscientious objec-

tion" clause. Nonetheless the LTd'I strenuously supported the referendum because in reality it would have made abortion much more accessible. The leftist parties were, on the contrary, opposed to the Radical Party's referendum, mainly because it reinforced the idea that *abortion is a woman's right*.

Faced with the Church's hysterical attacks, the PCI had nothing better to say than: "We have never questioned the right of the Church and the Pope to defend the moral principles of Catholicism." The PCI described the Radical referendum as a "grave error" which could lead to "electoral competition and the risk of a political and ideological confrontation." Preferring to avoid a head-on collision with the clergy, like the one over the divorce referendum in 1974, the PCI renounced any struggle to extend abortion rights. As usual, the PCI limited itself to its old strategy of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie, committing itself to defend bourgeois stability at any cost. The left tried to convince people that the existing Law 194 was the only possible protection against clerical reaction. When the Radical referendum and the "Movement for Life" referendum were both defeated, the left claimed this was a fantastic victory over the Vatican and the Pope's fanatical anti-abortion campaign.

The remains of the feminist movement, now reconciled with bourgeois society, limited themselves to defending Law 194 without modification. Thus they opposed any extension of abortion rights with arguments like "abortion

is not a contraceptive method" and "abortion is a social tragedy." These same feminists, who had collected signatures for the Radical referendum, by 1981 didn't support it, and instead voted to maintain the existing law unmodified.

A February 1 demonstration in Aquila shows that the situation has gotten even worse. Rifondazione Comunista limited itself to defending the current law with slogans such as "Defend 194!" and "Hands Off Women's Self-Determination!" Feminist leftovers like "the sexual city of women of Rome"—in reality subordinated to bourgeois ideology—consider women's oppression to be a consequence of a masculine mindset and pursue a separatist and cross-class strategy.

The origins of women's oppression is in the family, the economic unit and guardian of private property in capitalist society, where women's role is relegated to reproducing and raising legitimate children, and in general to carrying out all the domestic tasks which the capitalist state needs performed. Genuine liberation for women is possible only through the replacement of the institution of the family. The struggle for women's liberation must be inextricably linked to the struggle of the proletariat to build a communist society. The Lega Trotskista d'Italia, Italian section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), fights to build the revolutionary party that is needed to bring this perspective to the working class. *Women's liberation through socialist revolution!* ■

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## 80 Million Women Maimed

# The Crime of Female Genital Mutilation

One early morning in an African village not far from Nairobi, Kenya, young girls are roused from sleep and taken to a nearby river. The waters are cold, helping to arrest the bleeding from a first menstrual cycle, making their genitalia stand out and slightly numb. Soon an elder village midwife takes the children one by one and with a rusty razor, scissors or shard of glass cuts out the clitoris, slices off the labia and applies ashes, herbs or cow dung to staunch the flow of blood. As the girl writhes in pain, other women hold her arms down, her legs apart, her mouth shut tight so that she cannot run away or alarm the other unsuspecting children waiting in their cool bath.

Over 80 million women in the world today have been subjected to similar barbaric mutilation, a traditional practice that continues unabated in at least 28 African countries. According to the Minority Rights Group International, 90 percent of women in northern Sudan, Ethiopia and Mali, and nearly 100 percent in Somalia and Djibouti, undergo ritualistic genital excision. In these countries women are also infibulated, the two sides of the vulva sewn together with catgut or held with thorns, a match stick shoved in place to ensure an opening the size of a pinhole. Lesser mutilations are performed on women in parts of the Middle East and Pakistan, and among some Muslims in Malaysia, India and Sri Lanka.

Typically the mutilations occur at puberty. But in many countries the procedure is performed on infants and in many others on girls between the ages of 7 and 10. Increasingly girls are excised at a younger age with none of the traditional ceremony associated with ritual initiation into womanhood. These young women are deprived of the organs of sexual pleasure, subjected to hideous pain in urination, menstruation and intercourse, and suffer multiple medical complications throughout their adult lives.

These practices have gone on for centuries, yet most of the world remained ignorant of them. In 1976 the British liberal humanist Jill Tweedie wrote in her column for the London *Guardian*:

"Those who do it, those to whom it is done, those in whose countries it is done and those outside who know it is done all too often collude in a conspiracy of silence engendered by an odd but very potent combination of ignorance, custom, shame, poverty, and academic aloofness."

In the late 1970s a number of Western feminists, together with several outspoken African women, drew attention to these barbaric acts against women and forced reluctant United Nations agencies to take up the issue.

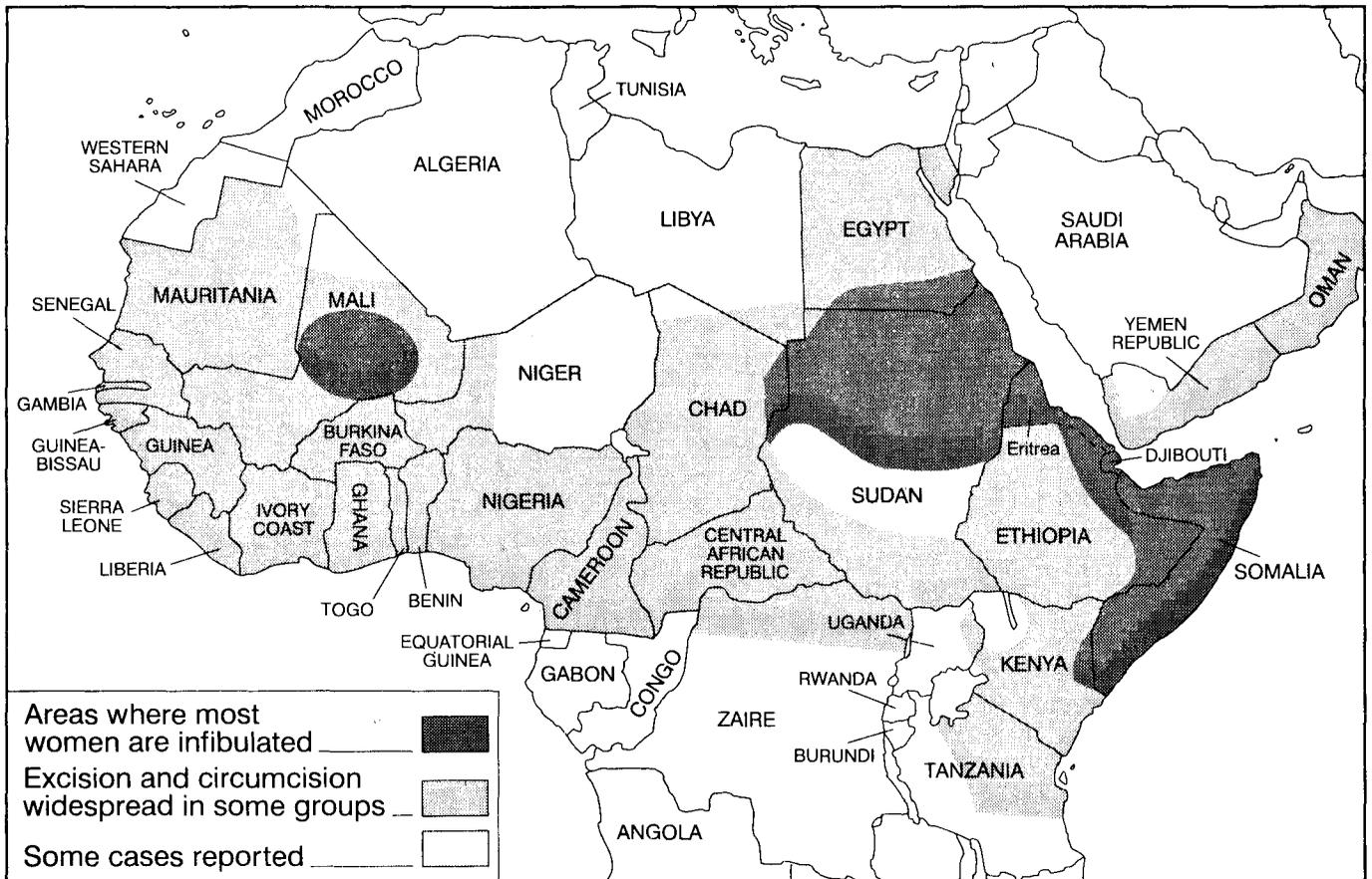
A wave of emigration from the desperate poverty and



Jania/Sipa Press

**Seven-year-old girl, mutilated in a ritual clitoridectomy. Two million victims are maimed each year.**

social upheavals in Africa during the '80s has made the question a concrete reality in Europe as African immigrants and refugees continue to excise their children, either by importing a native midwife or by sending their girls home to have the operation performed. Recently the refusal of the French state to grant asylum to a 22-year-old Malian woman fleeing ritual genital mutilation in her native village has received worldwide coverage. And liberal black feminist Alice Walker has just come out with *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, a powerful novel (surprisingly muted in male-hating bourgeois feminism) depicting the attempt of an African woman to grapple with life after being genitally mutilated. While some of the international reaction to the practice of female genital mutilation is clearly



Source: Minority Rights Group International

motivated by racist and hypocritical moralism, the practice is a heinous barbarity which must be categorically and unconditionally opposed.

### Inhuman Savagery

Three forms of mutilation are generally found in a triangular band stretching from Egypt south to Tanzania in the east and across to Senegal in the west. Although often referred to as "female circumcision," there is no equation with the removal of the penile foreskin that is practiced among all males in Muslim and Jewish societies and in the U.S. Only the most modified version, *Sunna* ("tradition"), can correctly be called circumcision. It affects only a small proportion of women, largely in non-African countries. *Sunna* can entail a simple pinprick of the clitoris; more often the hood of the clitoris is removed.

The Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi, author of *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*, wrote about the terrifying experience of her own circumcision at the age of six. She also described her work as a doctor in rural Egypt in the 1950s:

"There I very often had to treat young girls who had come to the out-patients clinic bleeding profusely after a circumcision. Many of them used to lose their lives as a result of the inhuman and primitive way in which the operation, savage enough in itself, was performed. Others were afflicted with acute or chronic infections from which they sometimes suffered for the rest of their days."

Excision, the most common practice in Africa, entails the cutting of the clitoris, sometimes its removal, and slicing of some or all parts of the labia minora and majora. An inexperienced hand or poor eyesight can lead to punc-

turing of the urethra, the bladder, the anal sphincter and/or the vaginal walls. Heavy keloid scarring can impair walking; the development of dermoid cysts is not uncommon. A ritual frequently justified as a guarantor of fertility can lead to sterility.

Most women in the Horn of Africa are also infibulated. In addition to clitoridectomy, the reduced labia majora are sewn together, leaving a trivial opening. After the operation, the girl's legs are bound together from hip to ankle for up to 40 days to permit the formation of scar tissue. Urination and menstruation are excruciating ordeals: it can take up to 30 minutes to empty the bladder; the retention of urine and menstrual blood guarantees infection.

For infibulated women, sexual intercourse becomes a practically unbearable burden, especially on the wedding night. Consummation may take weeks, beginning with the husband having to open his wife's infibulation with fingers or a knife or ceremonial sword. The woman must lie still with legs spread through repeated, bloody penetrations until a large enough opening becomes permanent. Many women see pregnancy as an escape from these painful and pleasureless sexual encounters, yet childbirth itself is traumatic. Scar tissue is often ripped up as the baby pushes out. Those who have access to hospitals need both anterior and posterior episiotomies. Many infants die or suffer brain damage in the second phase of delivery because thick scarring prevents sufficient dilation of the cervix. In many countries custom demands reinfibulation after each pregnancy to ensure women remain "tight as a virgin." Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, a social psychologist who spent six years studying female genital



Angela Phillips

**Egyptian novelist Nawal El Saadawi, imprisoned in 1982 and dismissed as head of public health for her defense of women's rights. We protest the September 1991 ban on her organization, Arab Women's Solidarity Association.**

mutilation in Sudan, notes that women without reinfibulation fear their husbands will leave them. Some claim to prefer it; in her 1989 book *Prisoners of Ritual*, she writes: "A tight fit makes the most of what is left after an extreme excision."

The practice transcends all class, national and religious bounds. In areas where it is the norm, it is so not just for the women of the bush but for those from the elite petty bourgeoisie, professional government bureaucracy and intelligentsia as well. All women in northern Sudan are infibulated, yet the practice has been anathema among the southern peoples. Among every religion on the continent—Coptic Christians, Muslims, animists, the "Black Jews" of Ethiopia, both Catholic and Protestant converts in Nigeria—there are peoples that persist in female mutilations. Moreover, it is practiced in Burkina Faso among tribes with both patriarchal and matriarchal cultures.

### Prisoners of Ritual

Various, often contradictory explanations exist for the tradition. In the main, rationales reflect prevalent mythology, ignorance of biological and medical facts, and religious obscurantism. Almost every reference links the custom to the family's fear that their daughter won't be "marriageable." Unmutilated young girls are ostracized, labeled as "unclean" or branded as whores; children born to unexcised women are considered bastards in many societies, and unscarred genitals are associated with prostitution. Often unmutilated women are considered illegitimate; they cannot inherit money, cattle or land, nor do they fetch an adequate bride price. One Somali woman defended her granddaughter's wish to be infibulated, saying it "takes away nothing that she needs. If she does not have this done, she will become a harlot." The girl's father, a college-educated businessman, expressed his uncertainty: "Yes, I know it is bad for the health of girls. But I don't want my daughter to blame me later on because she could not find a husband."

Different religious and social groupings see genital mutilation as the only way to protect women from unbridled sexual passion and promiscuity. Sir Richard Burton, a 19th century British adventurer/ethnologist who spent many years studying the culture, language and sexuality of east-

ern Africa, wrote that "all consider sexual desire in woman to be ten times greater than in man. (They cut off the clitoris because, as Aristotle warns, that organ is the seat and spring of sexual desire.)" Unfortunately, a good portion of Burton's research was destroyed by his devoted, but Roman Catholic, wife.

Overwhelmingly the practice is linked to virginity before marriage and fidelity afterward. Among almost every one of the peoples where the practice exists, polygamy is the norm. One argument for female excision is that no man can satisfy all of his wives, so it helps to have women who don't desire sex. While the truth is that most men in these societies are too poor to afford more than one wife, the social reality of male dominance in every sphere of day-to-day existence is the backdrop to the ritual mutilation of women.

The origins of this grotesque practice are not known. While often found in Islamic countries, the procedure is not prescribed in the Koran. In 742 AD the prophet Mohammed was said to have proposed a reform of genital mutilation; his call to "reduce but not destroy" has been taken as an instruction to perform only Sunna, the norm today in Egypt. While Muslim fundamentalism enforces brutally medieval conditions on women, including confinement to the home and the stifling veil, only one-fifth of the world's 600 million Muslims practice female genital mutilation.

It is clear that genital mutilations date back to ancient times. The Greek historian Herodotus noted in the fifth century BC that female circumcision was practiced by the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Hittites and Ethiopians. The Sudanese refer to infibulation as "Pharaonic circumcision"; the murky origins of the practice, however, may be inferred from the fact that in Egypt it's called "Sudanese circumcision."

Ritual genital mutilation has been found to have existed at one time in various forms among different peoples



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**Male circumcision as performed in ancient Egypt, about 2300 BC. The relief suggests that boys were ritually circumcised in groups.**

Peter Menzel



**Mogadishu, Somalia—civil war has devastated this backward country, destroying in the process a pioneering program for the eradication of female genital mutilation.**

on every continent. Quite independently of the tradition in sub-Saharan Africa, infibulation was performed by the Conibo people of Peru. The Australian aboriginals used to practice introcision, an enlargement of the vaginal opening. Anthropologists agree that female mutilation has only occurred in societies which also practice male circumcision, generally in cultures where the sexes are strongly differentiated in childhood. Thus some believe that the practice originated to highlight the difference between male and female at puberty. The Bambara in Mali, for example, believe that all people are born with both male and female characteristics; excision rids the girl of her "male element" while circumcision removes the "female element" from boys.

The ritual is the norm in an area south of the Sahara and north of the forest line; this corresponds generally with the area of Africa where, with no shortage of land, women and children (and slaves) were once needed to cultivate the fields and tend domestic animals and were easily absorbed into polygamous households. While the nature of the means of production does not determine how humans live in a social/sexual sense, it does set elastic limits. Thus it seems reasonable to assume that female genital mutilation has its roots in agricultural society which enabled the development of a social surplus and then private property. It is only when the determination of paternity for the purpose of inheritance becomes relevant that society puts a premium on virginity and marital fidelity on the part of women.

Female mutilations continue to occur in the rural areas which maintain a subsistence agrarian economy based on a tribal structure. What's at stake are traditional property rights in societies where women are sold like cattle, based largely on their ability to reproduce. The practice is only somewhat less prevalent today in the cities. Over the centuries it has become an unquestioned, ingrained custom. In *Prisoners of Ritual* Lightfoot-Klein reflects on these woman-hating practices as merely "a fact of her life, just as tremendous hardship, poverty, scarce water and little food, back-breaking labor, overwhelming heat,

dust storms, crippling disease, unalleviated pain, and early death are facts of her life." Whatever the rationale for the mutilation of millions of young girls, whatever its origins centuries ago, female genital mutilation is today a burning symbol of the all-sided sexual, social and economic oppression of women.

### **Colonialism, Nationalism and Social Reality**

Attempts to eradicate female genital mutilation in Africa go back a long time, at least to the 16th century, when missionaries first came to the continent. Both British colonial governments and some of the independent African states passed laws against the practice. In the past decade, efforts have intensified, particularly following the United Nations' proclaimed support to the many non-governmental organizations that have been fighting against ritual mutilations within the different African countries. Presently 20 countries out of the 28 where the practice exists have outlawed it; educational programs, particularly in the medical field, have been established in some areas.

But by and large these efforts have been unsuccessful. To begin with, the entire process is bound up with the question of sexuality. Sexual customs and taboos touch at the very heart of a person's being; discussion about them, not to mention challenge, engenders the darkest anxiety and fear. Moreover, the ritual plays a significant role in family lineage and tribal relations within the village. Ironically, the practice has been defended most jealously by the women themselves. The elder midwives, a powerful stratum in the village social structure, depend for their livelihood on the income generated by these operations. In a society where there are no rights and few privileges, ancient traditions considered in the "women's sphere" are often the only means of power that a woman can attain. Above all, female genital mutilation is so integrally linked with the economic and social realities of everyday life that its eradication requires a fundamental transformation of the societies where it exists.

In the 16th century when Jesuit missionaries came to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), they tried to stop ritual mutilation



Der Spiegel

**AIDS patient in Uganda. In many east and central African cities, more than 10 percent of all young adults are infected. AIDS epidemic increases burden of poverty and backwardness under imperialist world market.**

among converts. But the men refused to marry women who were not excised and conversions stopped. At the urgent advice of the Pope, the church, "preferring souls to sexual organs" (as Benoîte Groult so graphically put it in her book *Ainsi Soit-Elles*), sanctioned the practice as "medically necessary." Fran Hosken, a U.S. feminist who helped initiate international concern over female mutilation, reports that since then all Catholic missions have permitted the procedure on daughters of converts. Today medical missionaries actually perform the operation in African hospitals.

Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in Kenya in the late 1930s tried to refuse admission to the church to any girl who had been excised. In response, Kikuyu tribalists set up independent churches and schools that survive today. After the wife of one white missionary was abducted and mutilated, the Church of Scotland called off the campaign to abolish the ritual. Jomo Kenyatta, the darling of Pan-Africanist liberals, endorsed genital mutilation as a form of nationalist resistance to European colonial domination (and had it done to his own daughters, in hospital). In 1938 he wrote in *Facing Mount Kenya*: "No proper Kikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised...this operation is regarded as a *conditio sine qua non* for the whole teaching of tribal law, religion and morality." Although the current president, Daniel Arap Moi, banned the practice in 1982, health care workers have noted an upsurge in mutilations in urban centers among educated women—a phenomenon linked to growing economic chaos and reaction against increasing independence for women.

Under joint British/Egyptian rule, Sudan banned genital mutilations in 1946. The law simply drove the practice underground, with more women circumcising their daughters at an earlier age, leading to considerable fatalities. Lightfoot-Klein writes that a political backlash was instigated by Muslim fundamentalists against colonial control in response to the law. Riots against the government followed the prosecution of a traditional practitioner whose client had died. There have been no prosecutions under the law since. In 1974, 18 years after independence, Sudan passed its own law, forbidding infibulation but allowing clitoridectomy. The most noticeable result has been the refusal of women to take their daughters to a

hospital when complications result from the procedure.

Given the widespread acceptance of genital mutilations, very few African rulers have attempted to enforce legislation even where such laws do exist. In recognition that legal action alone won't stop the practice, the focus of international groups and non-governmental agencies has been to beg the UN and World Health Organization for more educational programs that concentrate on health consequences of mutilations.

All things being equal, it is probably better to have the United Nations spend its resources on education and diffusion of medical knowledge among the peoples of the Third World than to pursue the goal for which it exists, which is to promote the economic and military interests of the imperialist powers across the globe. But to expect these agencies to effect a change in the condition of women in Africa is worse than a pipe dream: The UN has just completed fronting for the United States' bloody slaughter of 100,000 Iraqi men, women and children as the U.S. demonstrated that it had the military power and ruthlessness to destroy a Soviet client state in the Middle East, a region whose oil wealth makes it valuable for American imperialism. In passing, the war ensured the preservation of the Saudi royal sheiks, who consider women chattel and too degraded to mix with men in public and not even permitted to drive a car. In any case UN organizations have already made their intentions on female mutilation abundantly clear. In 1958 a subcommittee of the UN asked the World Health Organization to take up the question; it refused, claiming that the "cultural" nature of these ritual operations placed them outside its competence. Neither body did anything at all for 20 years. Then, pushed by dedicated humanists in Africa and the West, they set about to organize...conferences.

Without question education is desperately needed in Africa on all levels; certainly it is one of the first things that a victorious social revolution would try to implement. But under the conditions of poverty and backwardness, a legacy of imperialist rule, reinforced by African despots and exacerbated by tribal divisions, the ability to provide even rudimentary instruction is remote. It is not simply hedging for government officials to claim that they cannot deal with female mutilation when much of the population

is starving to death. For much of the last decade the countries of central Africa have seen rates of infant mortality increase while the nutrition, health and literacy of its peoples declined, aggravated by the rapidly spreading AIDS epidemic. According to the World Bank, the average income in African countries has dropped by 25 percent in the last ten years. The value of Africa's exports fell by 45 percent from 1980 to 1987, but \$1 billion had to be sent to the IMF in 1986-87 alone. With the end of the Cold War, what little aid Africa received from the imperialist West is being cut off.

A graphic example is Somalia. As the 1992 edition of the Minority Rights Group pamphlet "Female Genital Mutilation: Proposals for Change" indicates, the Somali Women's Democratic Organization had pioneered an educational project and begun to train religious and paramedical personnel in an anti-mutilation campaign in the Somali language (which has only had a script for 20 years). They had won both the technical support of an Italian human rights organization and at least moral approval from the Somali government. By the end of 1991 tribal upheaval had overthrown the ruling party and the technical underpinnings for the project had been destroyed.

The Sudan for many years has been torn apart in a war between the ruling Muslim north and the Christian/animist tribes in the south. Recently the London *Independent* reported on a split between the two factions of the southern opposition: "The surviving population of Bor and Kangor—the total was estimated in a 1983 census as 33,000—fled east into a swamp but hundreds of women and children have been abducted on the way. Women are a valuable commodity here: a stolen woman is a cheap wife and can save the abductor the 30 or 40 head of cattle he would have to pay in bride-price." This is not an atmosphere conducive to incremental educational endeavors on women's rights. Efuia Dorkenoo, co-author of the Minority Rights Group report and director

of FORWARD (an African women's support group in Britain), reports that as a result of the civil war and the imposition by the Islamic fundamentalists of their traditions on the non-Muslim peoples in the south, female mutilation is occurring among the Nuer and Dinka tribes who have never before practiced it.

### Eritrean Struggle Brings Social Advances to Women

It is a striking fact that the one area in Africa where there seems to have been some success in combatting female genital mutilation is Eritrea, a strip of land on the Red Sea which had a small but indigenous working class until it was destroyed in 1958 by U.S.-backed Ethiopian forces. Eritrea's 28-year war of national liberation against Ethiopia shattered cultural traditions, ripped up the fabric of normal village existence, and impelled the integration of women into social life. Lel Ghebreab, chairman of the National Union of Eritrean Women, explained the effects on the status of women under these conditions: "When a woman proved herself a successful fighter at the front, she could go back to her village with authority. Men had to listen to her. She could influence other women."

Eritrea is an area in the Horn of Africa where in the past 90 percent of women were infibulated. Approximately 20 percent die in childbirth, often as a result of birth-canal obstruction from scar tissue. Before the civil war, women were not allowed to own land or attend school. Child marriages and polygamy were common. A man could divorce his wife simply by throwing her out; a woman's request for divorce was rarely granted since it required her family returning the bride price. Women were excluded from village politics. Those who worked outside the home did so in Israeli- and Italian-owned textile and food processing factories at less than half the wages of men.

Women began fighting in 1973. The Eritrean People's

Newsweek



**Women fighters in Eritrean Liberation Front. Guerrilla struggle against Ethiopian domination shattered traditional social norms and reduced practice of infibulation.**

Liberation Front is now 30 percent female; half of them served on the front lines. These fighters incorporated women's rights into the constitution of the EPLF, including "progressive marriage and family laws" and "full rights and equality with men in politics." Women in the EPLF are barred from entering into polygamous marriages and from allowing their daughters to be mutilated. Muslim-Christian marriages, unthinkable traditionally, are now fairly common. The National Union of Eritrean Women has focused on educating women about the health dangers of infibulation. Nonetheless, as one birth attendant trained by the guerrillas admitted, "it is a difficult job" to convince women to abandon the tradition; if women insist, she will do the procedure "hygienically." Nor has the recent collapse of the military dictatorship in Ethiopia aided the cause of Eritrean liberation. The new "democratic" regime in Addis Ababa has already backtracked on support to Eritrean independence, while the guerrilla fighters in the neighboring province of Tigre are viscerally hostile to a separate Eritrean state. With all-sided ethnic strife, whole regions have been depopulated and the survivors pushed past the brink of starvation, threatening devastation that cannot be described by statistics.

But even if successful, national liberation is not sufficient to ensure real or lasting rights for women. This was graphically demonstrated in Algeria in its eight-year war for independence from French colonial rule. Many women had fought, both as auxiliaries and commandos, in the FLN, and the manifesto of the Algerian "revolution" had vaguely promised formal equality. In 1962 the mainly peasant fighters won their liberation from France, but they did not destroy capitalism. Colonial rule was replaced

by a native bourgeoisie which kept women out of politics and denied them higher education. The FLN cynically used the veil as a symbol of resistance to French imperialism. They declared in the official government newspaper, "Our socialism rests on the pillars of Islam and not on the emancipation of women with their make-up, hairdressers and cosmetics, from which arise unchained passions harmful to humanity."

### The Politics of Culture

It has become an accepted policy among liberals that in discussing Africa one must approach the subject from the standpoint of "cultural relativism," and female genital mutilation has not escaped that framework. An African doctor addressing a World Health Organization seminar in 1979, in an attack on Western women who have focused on the brutal infibulations in the Sudan, called the practice "a Sudanese problem—a problem of which we are aware and which must be solved by us." UNICEF found it necessary to add a footnote to its 1981 field manual (prepared to exhort its staff to pay some attention to the issue): "This statement has since been modified to reflect the following position: female circumcision, excision and infibulation should always be taken within the context of cultural realities...."

For several centuries Africa has been subjected to colonial rule and the forced imposition of a Western, racist moral code. *National Geographic*, magazine of the "enlightened" bourgeois establishment in the U.S., is famous for its depictions of the idiosyncracies of village life among the natives (much to the titillation of many youngsters in America where puritanical righteousness prohibited any other view of a naked female breast). This grotesque patronizing of the "primitive peoples" of the Third World was probably the least offensive form of imperialist ethnocentricity.

It has become a popular academic stance not to impose Western cultural standards on the rest of the world—surely a better way to study and understand the human condition. But often those who speak in the name of "cultural relativism" condone some of the most brutally inhumane practices. At its extreme are the liberal American anthropologists of the '70s who, in an effort not to appear racist, denied the existence of cannibalism among dark-skinned peoples. Cannibalism of course has existed in a variety of forms, among many different peoples and until fairly recently. (The Maoris kept European colonizers out of New Zealand for a hundred years: as soon as whites were seen, natives killed and ate them.)

The truth of the matter is that humans have engaged in some pretty brutal practices over the millennia. As Karl Marx said in "The India Revolt" (1857), "Cruelty, like every other thing, has its fashion, changing according to time and place." Nor are such practices all traditional customs held over from a dark and primitive past. Castration, for example, was practiced in such centers of civilization as Byzantium and China. The Roman castrati were the result of the biblical proscription against female voices in church; castrated males sang in Italian choirs until the Pope abolished the custom in 1878. Less than a century ago, Victorian moralism fueled an anti-masturbation frenzy in Europe and the U.S. Young women deemed "oversexed" were excised by their doctors. A 19th century London physician, Isaac Baker Brown, jus-



Peter Webb Collection

**Farinelli, famous Italian castrato singer of the 18th century. The Catholic church used castrated male sopranos until 1878.**



Carol Beckwith/Angela Fisher



Jorden Bisch



Popperfoto

**Ritual mutilation in pursuit of enhanced sexual attraction: lip disc in Ethiopia, neck elongation in Burma, footbinding in China.**

tified cutting off the clitoris as a cure for insomnia, sterility and "unhappy marriages." Some mental hospitals in the U.S. performed excision as a cure for psychological disorders as late as 1935. And of course male circumcision, a procedure that is vastly less deforming but has no proven medical value, is performed on one-half the men in the world today.

People do vary in their habits. The Chinese eat dogs and the French "garden pests," practices that many others find appalling. There are a multitude of customs that different peoples have adopted for aesthetic purposes that the rest of the world thinks of as positively unattractive. Purposeful elongation of the neck, lip plugs and penis bars have been used in societies ranging from the highlands of New Guinea to sub-Saharan Africa. In stark contrast to some African peoples who consider women's genitalia disgusting, the Bushwomen of the Kalahari Desert pull constantly at their labia majora so that they will be longer (missionaries called it "the Hottentot apron"). Thousands of women in the U.S. have undergone silicone implants to enlarge their breasts. Women on the Indian subcontinent pierce their noses, and some young people in North America these days seem to pierce almost every bodily protrusion. Scarification, dying out now among the peoples in Africa, is used as decoration as well as tribal identification, much as the dueling scars so sought after by German youth in the 19th century bonded them with the elite military establishment. Elaborate tattoos are a tradition among some Micronesians and at one time became popular among young Japanese men and women, mimicking the practice of the *yakuza* underworld.

Most of these customs fall within the realm of accepted cultural diversity. One could say that ritual mutilation in the pursuit of sexual enhancement forms a continuum, from the very benign like the use of cosmetics, to the

horribly degrading and permanently crippling like the binding of women's feet in China before the revolution. But clitoridectomy and infibulation have nothing to do with aesthetics.

There are standards in the evolution of human culture. Americans fought a civil war over the "quaint cultural tradition" of its Southern states; while the Confederacy argued that it had a right to self-determination, few today condone the practice of slavery. Similarly, female genital mutilation is not a relative cultural trait but a violent act of savagery. Those who have over the years covered the systematic mutilation of young girls in a shroud of silence because it is "an African tradition" are in fact promoting a kind of racism and are sacrificing women on the altar of liberal guilt.

There is a story from the time of British colonial rule in India that captures an element of the situation here. A British officer, trying to stop an act of *suttee*, was told by an Indian man, "It is our custom to burn a woman on the funeral pyre of her husband." The Englishman replied, "And it is our custom to execute murderers." As with the British subjugation of India, Marx initially regarded the intervention of the capitalist states into the backward regions of the world as historically progressive; he thought that their advanced economic and social institutions would inevitably accompany the Western colonization. But, as later became clear to Marx, this did not happen. The British Empire colonized India in order to reap profits and had very little interest in the lives or well-being of the people who lived there; indeed enhancing communal frictions was a conscious policy of the Raj. Nonetheless, the 1829 British law against *suttee* and the attempts to suppress the ritual in practice were supportable.

Britain had had a bourgeois revolution and the resulting capitalist state represented in some aspects an advance



Museum of Natural History, Vienna

**The Venus of Willendorf, one of many such enigmatic figures dating from the Stone Age, long thought to be a fertility symbol.**

for mankind which the warring feudal princedoms and empires in India had not provided. Industrial capitalism destroyed the agrarian economies upon which female servitude was based, and bourgeois revolutions legally and formally wiped out the more abhorrent aspects of women's oppression. But the Western "democracies" did not bring these bourgeois-democratic reforms with them into the colonial countries. As in Africa, the penetration of decaying capitalism into the Third World has fostered the most reactionary aspects of degenerated tribalism. The imperialists today perpetuate general impoverishment the better to reap profits themselves.

The bourgeois revolutions in the advanced industrial countries were carried out by radical Enlightenment thinkers who attacked Western cultural standards defended by Christianity and the feudal order. They believed that society's control over nature could liberate all people from the centuries-old stranglehold of religion, superstition and barbaric rituals. In the epoch of imperialism, the nationalist, neocolonial politicians, like Jomo Kenyatta or Algeria's Ben Bella, might mumble rhetoric about "African socialism" but they cannot provide economic independence or even the most basic democratic rights avowed by the bourgeois revolutions in the last two centuries. In order to mobilize sufficient support to establish themselves as the ruling class in their own countries, bourgeois nationalists must rely on backward-looking "cultural traditions."

Either the "national principle" or the principles of communism will have a defining character in the Third World. This is no abstract question. An imperialist-dependent ruling class, subcontractor for plundering "its own" impoverished workers and peasants for the benefit of the IMF and the capitalist world market, merely offers the masses a new flag; its "anti-imperialism" consists of embracing the "glorious past" and "protecting" the dominant nationality at the expense of minority peoples. Hindu chauvinists in India take "revenge" on former Mogul emperors by trashing impoverished Muslims; blacks in eastern Africa were promised self-determination by the expulsion of Asians brought to Africa under the old British

Empire and abandoned.

In "independent" India, such atrocities as *suttee*, dowry murder and female infanticide are actually on the rise; in the name of cultural self-defense, urban Iranian women and Palestinian émigrées in the West have been forced back into the veil. Only the victory of communism, which looks toward a fundamental reshaping of society on new lines, can guarantee equality for all peoples and free women from the "traditional" degradation prescribed by religious obscurantism and precapitalist cultural practices.

The question of female genital mutilation is intrinsically bound up with the social oppression of women. Emancipation is a material act; without a fight for social liberation, the masses must remain ground down by poverty and subjugated by imperialist exploitation. In order to uproot prefeudal autocracy and imperialist domination, the working class must play the central role and fight for a social transformation through proletarian revolution. This requires a party which can wage such an international struggle, a party led by Marxist revolutionaries who alone today apply the universal values of freedom and equality of Enlightenment humanism.

The banner of revolutionary socialism seems an empty reference in sub-Saharan Africa, where the Marxist conception of "combined and uneven development" would only encompass marginal pockets of industrialization.

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There are oil workers in Nigeria, dock and rail workers in Kenya, miners in Zambia. They are presently isolated and politically subordinate to demagogic nationalist regimes, but they represent a strategic industrial workforce. It is the challenge of an international revolutionary party

to transform this sector into a human link to the workers movements of the Near East and the industrial proletariat of South Africa. Mobilized against their capitalist exploiters, these vanguard layers can launch a struggle to emancipate the cruelly oppressed men and women throughout Africa.

## France: Racial Segregation Perpetuates Ritual Mutilation

There are now widespread reports of female genital mutilation throughout Europe as economic devastation and ethnic strife in Africa force thousands of people, most of whom have not broken from their native customs, to flee north. Most notable in France and Britain, cases have also been reported in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Italy. Often a number of immigrant families will pool their resources to pay for a "circumciser" from their homeland to come and perform the ritual on all of their female children at once. Those who can afford it send their daughters back to their countries of origin to ensure that the mutilations are done. There have also been numerous tragic stories of immigrant parents, who oppose the practice themselves, going back to visit relatives who secretly seize the daughters and have them excised.

According to the July 1992 FORWARD Conference on Female Genital Mutilation in Western Countries, thousands of infibulated women are now living in North America. In the U.S., where the practice is ignored by both government and health workers, many are afraid to seek care from physicians who lack any knowledge of the medical complications. Nor is it always a furtive process: until a law against mutilation was passed in 1985, the more affluent immigrants in England had the procedure done by Harley Street doctors, who charged £800-1700 per operation. There is now a movement to *legalize* Sunna circumcision in Holland.

However, when immigrants from Africa come to the

U.S. and Europe, they are no longer eking out a subsistence living in the countryside but become wage workers in an industrial economy, albeit horribly oppressed and superexploited. Genital excision thus loses its principal socio-economic function. Moreover, while the ruling classes in these countries are hardly champions of women's liberation (as the current attack on abortion rights testifies), women in bourgeois society do have certain formal legal rights, like voting and marrying whom they choose. And contrary to the most sacred traditions of all patriarchal agrarian societies, bourgeois law stipulates that parents have no right of life and death over their children, nor the right to do with them as they please. These social values are pervasive in all classes in bourgeois society, and female genital mutilation is not likely to be tolerated very long.

This sets the stage for rooting out the practice of female mutilation outside the African continent. It is not, however, an automatic process. Racial prejudices have been whipped up in every country as capitalists seek to derail working-class struggle against increased exploitation to counter worldwide recession. The resulting racist backlash works against the necessary social integration of African immigrants. Laws against performing the procedure, on paper nothing more than a simple assertion of the integrity of a human being's sexual organs, are enforced in a completely racist and undemocratic manner. Thus what ought to be a straightforward process of integration

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**Social-democrat Mitterrand has declared war against minorities, immigrants, workers. Left: protest against deportation of 101 Malians, Paris, 1986. Above: Aminata Diop, who fled from Mali to avoid mutilation, was denied refugee status by France.**

becomes a question fraught with implications for civil liberties and racial equality.

### "Circumcision on Trial"?

The question is posed particularly clearly in France, where there is a large and established immigrant population, lured from the former French colonial holdings by the prospect of higher wages. At the same time, there is a French fascist movement that finds increasing support in the context of a historically combative working class which has been prevented from waging a successful fight against capitalism by the popular front of social-democratic president François Mitterrand.

The French have no law against female mutilation, but in 1980 the state prosecuted Foussayni Doukara, a Malian sanitation worker living in a Parisian suburb, under Article 312 of the penal code for "assault and battery to a child of under 15 years by a legal guardian." Doukara had been turned in by a doctor to whom he had brought his three-month-old daughter after she started to hemorrhage from an excision he'd performed himself. The case was delayed for 27 months while the courts searched for "medical expertise." The bourgeois press sensationalized it as "Circumcision on Trial," but Doukara was given a suspended sentence of one year by the court. In doing so it established a phony hierarchy of mutilation: because he did not infibulate his daughter, Doukara's act was put in the category of a harsh spanking. The proceedings were a show trial of hypocritical posturing, with the courts pretending that genital mutilations had never been heard of in France and that African immigrants were tainting a pristine culture. The case became a spectacle of French chauvinism, with a heavy dose of voyeuristic titillation over African "sexuality."

Five years later the courts brought similar charges against Sory and Semite Coulibaly, a Malian couple, and Aramata Keita, the midwife whom they had brought in to excise

their six daughters. It took two years for a magistrates court to claim it wasn't qualified to handle the matter. By 1990 when the case was brought before the assize court (roughly equivalent to a jury trial in the U.S.), the misdemeanor of which they'd been accused had been made into a felony and the Coulibalys were accordingly retroactively tried. The parents spoke through an interpreter in the Bambara language and the midwife in Soninke, but the rest of the proceedings rambled on in French; in true chauvinist fashion, no one bothered to translate for the defendants. Like Doukara (who had testified that "in our country it is done, it's a custom...all Africans who have a daughter do it"), the Coulibalys had no conception that they were doing anything wrong and no knowledge that it was a crime in France. Claude Meillassoux, an ethnologist who had visited the Coulibaly home and testified at the trial, gave an explanation: "Their place was very clean. But they were camping there. They were still in Africa." The jury came down with a verdict of five years suspended sentence plus two years probation for the parents; the practitioner, who had profited from the procedure, was sentenced to five years in prison.

The French state's professions of concern for the well-being of immigrant children are very shallow. Just a few months before the verdict in the Coulibaly trial, a 22-year-old Malian woman was denied political asylum in France. Aminata Diop had escaped genital mutilation because she'd been living in the Malian capital with an aunt. Upon her arranged marriage to her lover, a son of her father's friend, she was to be excised. But Diop had seen a friend die three days after the procedure and refused to undergo it herself. Her father beat her savagely when she appealed to him. She fled to France and applied for refugee status under the terms of the Geneva Convention. She was called a liar because her economic status (she owned a motorized bicycle!) made her claim of subjugation "unbelievable" and because the French Women's Group for the Abolition of Sexual Mutilations had come to her aid. The panel that turned down her application informed her that genital mutilations were not a violation of the accords. In 1991 the refugee appeals board relented and recognized genital mutilation as a form of persecution. Diop however was *denied* refugee status; she was told instead to seek protection from the Malian government!

Diop's lawyer, Linda Weil-Curiel, told our comrades in the Ligue Trotskyste de France that excisions were seen by the French government as a "cultural problem" rather than a crime. This is nothing more than a cover; the scandalous rejection of Diop's plea for asylum is an anti-woman and grossly racist statement that the French government doesn't want to open its door to more African immigrants. The same hypocritical smokescreen was used in Italy. In 1988 Secretary of Health Elena Marinucci, a Socialist who'd made her name in politics as a feminist in the '70s, said: "We try to explain to them that this custom is absurd. But it's extremely necessary to be tolerant and understanding." Marinucci was defending the Italian state against an international human rights group exposé that the National Health system had for years been performing clitoridectomy and infibulation on girls of African origin.

Efforts by the bourgeois state to eradicate female genital mutilation are tainted with imperialist "white man's burden" nostalgia for colonial rule. In fact it's unlikely that



## Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985

1985 CHAPTER 38

An Act to prohibit female circumcision. [16th July 1985]

**B** EIT ENACTED by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1.—(1) Subject to section 2 below, it shall be an offence for any person—

(a) to excise, infibulate or otherwise mutilate the whole or any part of the labia majora or labia minora or clitoris of another person; or

(b) to aid, abet, counsel or procure the performance

**British law explicitly prohibits excision, infibulation or any other mutilation of female genitalia. Pseudo-feudal style, perhaps, but supportable.**

Le Bolchéviek



**Subway cleaners, overwhelmingly from northern or sub-Saharan Africa, on strike in Paris, 1989, against starvation wages, poor working conditions and racist company dictates. Full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers!**

any law would be enforced if it weren't for the anti-immigrant frenzy that has swept the European continent. Nonetheless, we are in favor of laws against the hideous mutilation of women despite the fact that they are promulgated by our class enemies and casually applied in a racist and hypocritical manner.

### **For Multiracial, Class-Struggle Workers Parties!**

The imperialist bourgeoisies have a tendency to import a reformed version of the colonial system into their metropolitan centers. Their policies of racial segregation most effectively *promote* the continued mutilation of African immigrant children. For immigrant workers there are two contradictory social pressures: on the one hand those of the society where they live and of the class to which they belong, even though they are relegated to its lowest rungs; on the other hand those of the tribal society from which they come and to which they are attached by strong family ties. Race discrimination and prejudice isolate immigrant workers and their families from the rest of the working class, reducing integrationist tendencies and reinforcing pressure from the culture of origin.

In France the failure to integrate the postwar ex-colonial immigrants into the rest of the French working class must be laid squarely at the door of the union misleaders. Foussayni Doukara held a unionized job in a country where the unions are run by the Communist (PCF) and Socialist (PS) parties. Yet he was so isolated from social life in France that he had no idea that the excision of his daughter was illegal. Several years ago a comrade of the LTF, noticing that few Arab workers at the Billancourt factory could read our paper, *Le Bolchéviek*, asked a bureaucrat from the Communist-led union why they didn't have reading classes for its immigrant members. His reply: "We don't want them to be able to read; they're easier to control like this." This appalling bigotry toward the foreign workers from the former colonies is a result of decades of support and sometimes administration of France's colonial policies by the PCF and PS. In 1981 the Stalinists cemented their role as shock troops of anti-immigrant racism when the PCF mayor of Vitry led a raid to destroy a housing project where 300 black Africans were living. The PS has run the country for over ten years on a policy of austerity, strikebreaking and racist terror. These rotten workers parties don't want integrated

class struggle, but class peace in the service of a popular front with imperialism.

The eradication of the barbarous practice of female genital mutilation demands a conscious fight against racist segregation and for the integration of immigrant workers and their families into the Western proletariat through class struggle. Over the past decade immigrant workers have shown themselves to be the most combative layer of the European proletariat. What is required is a revolutionary party which can break the current sway of the reformist workers parties and lead a struggle against capitalism. Effectively integrated into the organizations of the working class and also into its vanguard party, immigrant workers will be in the forefront of revolution in the industrial West. They will also create a human bridge toward social revolution in their home countries; as such they are a strategic factor in finishing, once and for all, the abomination of female genital mutilation. ■

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# The Russian Revolutionary Tradition

W&R is pleased to present the edited transcript of a talk given by a member of our editorial board, Joseph Seymour, at an educational conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. held in the Bay Area on 2 May 1992.

## Roots of Bolshevism

The origins of this talk go back a few years to conversations I had with two comrades who were most directly and actively involved in seeking to build a section of the International Communist League in the Soviet Union. We talked about how wretched the present-day Russian intelligentsia was, both the pro-Wall Street self-styled "democrats" and the Stalinist self-described "patriots." Particularly disturbing was the depth of women's op-

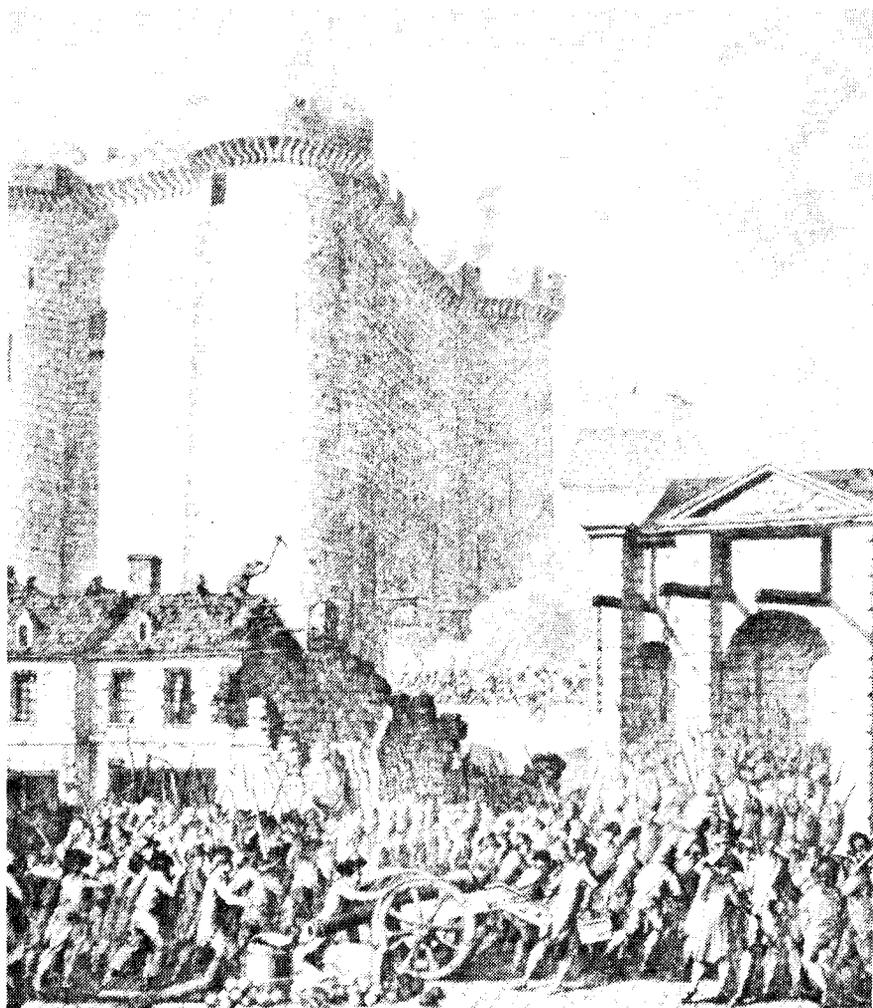
pression and the pervasiveness of male chauvinism, not only in Soviet society at large but even among people who considered themselves communists, Leninists, would-be Trotskyists.

As we were talking, it occurred to me that the present-day Russian intelligentsia is not only profoundly alienated from Bolshevism, but from the many generations of Russian revolutionaries who preceded and culminated in Bolshevism. If the ghost of Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who was the greatest Russian socialist of the pre-Marxist era—a man who had a profound influence on Lenin—could return to his old intellectual haunts in the universities and editorial offices of Russia today, he would not be

able to understand how anyone who called himself a democrat could want to transform Russia along the lines of Western capitalism. For him, to be a democrat meant to be for social equality. It meant to be for the rule of the lower classes in society. The Russian revolutionaries despised the bourgeoisie, both the Russian version and the Western version.

Chernyshevsky would be even more uncomprehending about how anyone could call himself a communist and yet be a Russian nationalist, a male chauvinist and an anti-Semite. Because to be a communist meant by definition that you were an *internationalist*, you were an extreme partisan of women's equality and liberation, and you welcomed Jews as equals and as comrades. From the 1870s onward, Jews played a prominent role in all of the Russian radical movements, all of the wings of populism and later all wings of Marxism.

And women played a far more prominent role in the Russian revolutionary movement than they did in any other country in the world. Women like Vera Zasulich and Sofia Bardina of Land and Liberty, which was the principal populist organization, were hard, tough, dedicated revolutionaries. From the shooting of the police commandant Treprov in 1878 to the assassination of the tsarist general Luzhenovsky by Maria Spiridonova in 1906, Russian women carried out some of the most spectacular acts of terrorism. After the



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**The Great French Revolution, symbolized by the storming of the Bastille in July 1789, inspired generations of Russian revolutionaries from the Decembrists to the Bolsheviks.**



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**Women revolutionaries from Vera Zasulich (left) to Maria Spiridonova carried out spectacular acts of terrorism.**

Revolution of 1905 a tsarist prison official in his own way recognized the equality of women: "Experience shows that women, in terms of criminality, ability, and possession of the urge to escape, are hardly distinguishable from men."

If we could get into a time machine and go back to the world of Chernyshevsky and Land and Liberty, we would have big fights about peasant socialism and the efficacy of terrorism. But at a deeper level we would feel ourselves among comrades. So what we are trying to do is to reinsert in Russia today its own great revolutionary tradition, a tradition which has been perverted and degraded or simply forgotten after decades of Stalinist rule and the pressure of Western imperialism on the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state.

### French Jacobins and Russian Decembrists

That tradition begins with the Decembrists, a group of revolutionary democratic military officers who sought to overthrow the tsarist autocracy in December 1825. But the Decembrists themselves begin with the French Revolution, which is the fountainhead of radicalism in the modern world. It is one of the ironies of history that the Russian army which the tsar sent into West Europe to crush the French Revolution in its Napoleonic phase became a transmission belt back into Russia for the ideals of that revolution. One of the Decembrists later wrote:

"During the campaigns through Germany and France our young men became acquainted with European civilization, which produced upon them the strongest impression. They were able to compare all that they had seen abroad with what confronted them at every step at home: slavery of the majority of Russians, cruel treatment of subordinates by superiors, all sorts of government abuses, and general tyranny."

So the Decembrists were a belated attempt to extend the French Revolution into Russia. One of their principal leaders had been the son of the Russian ambassador to Napoleonic France; he grew up in a milieu shot through with former Jacobin revolutionaries, among them Napoleon himself. Another prominent Decembrist, when he was stationed in Paris in 1815, went around to the leading intellectuals, among them Henri Saint-Simon, a pioneer



Ullstein

**Women political prisoners board train to exile in Siberia.**

theorist of socialism. Saint-Simon attempted to convince this young Russian nobleman to introduce socialism into his homeland.

The most radical of the Decembrists, Pavel Pestel, had not personally been to France although he identified himself wholeheartedly with the French revolutionaries. But he went beyond Jacobinism. By the 1820s the ideas of socialism were beginning to gain currency among the European intelligentsia. Pestel attempted to combine a radical bourgeois-democratic revolution with elements of socialism. He proposed that the land be taken from the nobility and given to the peasants—half given to the peasants to farm privately, the other half to farm collectively so that no peasant family would go hungry. And Pestel called this the Russian Law. After the insurrection was suppressed, the tsarist authorities discovered the Russian Law among Pestel's private papers. Instead of publicizing it at his trial, they thought it was so inflammatory and attractive that they buried it in a secret archive. It did not see the light of day for almost 100 years.

An old reactionary general was on his deathbed when he heard of the Decembrist uprising, and it perplexed him. He said: before we have had uprisings of peasants who want to become noblemen; now we have an uprising of noblemen who want to become shoemakers. The Decembrists did not want to become shoemakers; they were not concerned with their future personal status. But this old reactionary understood something: that this was



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**Nikolai Chernyshevsky (left) and Alexander Herzen, the founding figures of Russian populism in the 1850s and 1860s.**



Radio Times Hulton

a movement of an elite, isolated from the peasant masses in whose interests they spoke and attempted to act. And this would be true of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia throughout the 19th century. Initially this milieu consisted mainly of the sons of noblemen, later on the sons and daughters of what was called the "middle class," the children of tsarist bureaucrats or like Chernyshevsky, of Russian Orthodox priests. It was only at the end of the century, in the mid-1890s, that the Marxist wing of the intelligentsia acquired a mass base among the rapidly growing industrial proletariat.

The Decembrists were the first revolutionary bourgeois-democratic movement in Russia. They were also the last such movement. That is, they were the last movement that attempted to overthrow the tsar in order to remodel Russian society along the lines of contemporary West

Europe or North America. After that, those people who wanted to transform Russia along the lines of Western capitalism did not call themselves democrats because they were not democrats; they called themselves liberals. They did not want to overthrow the tsarist autocracy. Rather they wanted to pressure the tsarist autocracy to modernize Russia from above. Their goal was a constitutional monarchy in which the monarch remained strong and the constitution guaranteed the rule of the propertied classes. As Chernyshevsky put it: "The liberals absolutely refuse to allow the lower strata any preponderance in society."

### The First Russian Socialist Movement

Following the suppression of the Decembrists it took another generation for a new revolutionary movement to emerge. This was the so-called Petrashevsky Circle, a group of a couple of hundred radicals around Mikhail Petrashevsky. At that time the Russian Orthodox Church was sexually segregated, and in order to show his support for the equality of women and his defiance of the state church, Petrashevsky donned women's clothing and he attended a ceremony of the church exclusive to women. However he had forgotten to shave off his beard! He was approached by a policeman who said, "Madam, I think you are a man." Petrashevsky replied, "Sir, I think you are an old woman." The policeman was so flustered, Petrashevsky made his getaway.

Whereas the Decembrists had viewed West Europe in the afterglow of the French Revolution, a generation later Petrashevsky and his comrades only saw in West Europe an arena of the horrible exploitation of the lower classes by the propertied classes. They identified with the socialist opposition to Western bourgeois society and defined their goal as the application of Western socialism to Russia. In light of everything that's happening in Russia today, it's important to emphasize that this very first Russian socialist movement was implacably opposed to Russian nationalism in all its manifestations. They of course opposed the Slavophiles, who idealized Russia before Peter the Great and counterposed the spirituality of the Russian people to the crass materialism of the bourgeois West. But Petrashevsky

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and his comrades also opposed radical democrats like Belinsky who argued that the progress of humanity goes *through* nations, not by transcending nations. Against this view they argued, "Socialism is a cosmopolitan doctrine, which stands higher than nationalities...for socialists differing nations do not exist, there are only people."

The Petrashevsky Circle was the exact contemporary of the German League of the Just, out of which came the Communist League for which Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto. Like Marx, Petrashevsky and his comrades believed that the spectre of communism was haunting Europe. And Russia was part of Europe. They looked forward, in the near future, to a pan-European socialist revolution, predominantly proletarian in the West, predominantly peasant-based in the East. They believed that the outbreak of the revolutions of 1848 in West Europe was the beginning of that development, and they immediately wanted to get in on the act. They started discussing how they were actually going to overthrow the tsar. But before they got very far, the tsarist authorities simply crushed them. Nicholas I was panicked in his own way by the spectre of communism and moved to destroy its meager reflection among a small section of the Russian intelligentsia.

### The Origins of Populism

The revolutions of 1848 and the ensuing counter-revolutions by the combined forces of bourgeois and monarchical reaction are the great historic watershed of 19th century Europe. Among other things they gave rise to Russian populism as a distinct current of European socialism. Petrashevsky and his comrades had believed that socialism would come to Russia as part of a general European revolution. That vision was defeated on the barricades in Paris, Vienna, Rome and elsewhere.

A witness to that defeat was Alexander Herzen, the

founder of Russian populism. Herzen had been a radical democrat who emigrated to West Europe, and he experienced the revolutions of 1848 in France and Italy. But Herzen remained optimistic about the prospects of revolution in Russia. If Russia was going to have a revolution in advance and independently of West Europe, however, it would have to be a predominantly peasant revolution because the industrial proletariat was minute. A German conservative, Baron Haxthausen, who had visited Russia in the 1840s, wrote a book saying that Russia didn't need a socialist revolution, it already had socialism in the form of the traditional peasant commune. After 1848 Herzen accepted this premise and argued that what would require a proletarian revolution in the West could be achieved on the basis of Russian rural institutions if the society were sufficiently democratized.

It is important to emphasize that while the Russian populists saw a different *path* to socialism in Russia, they had the same goal as Western revolutionaries. Thus Marx was always held in extremely high regard in the Russian populist movement. One of the early underground populist groups wrote to Marx in London and proposed that he represent Russia as well as Germany in the leading council of the First International. The first language into which *Capital* was translated was Russian. It got through the tsarist censors, who figured that a book so dry and abstract as *Capital* could not inspire anyone to revolutionary passion, and it became an instant best seller. At the end of his life, Herzen stated that he had always been faithful to the ideas of Saint-Simon, who had an extremely technologically advanced conception of socialism.

Herein lay the fundamental contradiction of Russian populism. The populists projected onto the peasant commune not only economic egalitarianism, but social equality at all levels—the equality of women, a libertarian

**Troops of Prussian monarchy overrun barricades manned by petty-bourgeois democrats in Frankfurt, Germany in late 1848. Defeat of the European-wide revolutions of 1848 led to the development of Russian populism as a distinct current of European radicalism.**





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**The traditional patriarchal, peasant commune was idealized by populist intelligentsia as the basis for an enlightened socialist society.**

conception of sexual relations, a belief in materialism and the progress of science. They believed that the tsar-worshipping, priest-ridden, wife-beating Russian peasant could be won to the outlook of a Saint-Simon or a Marx. Such an illusion could survive only as long as the populist movement was exclusively a movement of the intelligentsia. And in fact the "To the People" movement marked the beginning of the end of Russian populism.

Revolutionary populism went through four distinct phases. The first phase was ushered in by the Crimean War of 1853-55 in which Russia was defeated by England and France. This defeat sent shock waves through the Russian upper classes. Tsar Nicholas I died in 1855 (some say he committed suicide out of a sense of shame). His successor, Alexander II, appeared to be a liberal, and in

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the late 1850s Russia experienced the tsarist version of glasnost and perestroika. Censorship was relaxed very considerably, and the tsarist government began talking about fundamental reforms of the system of serfdom.

Initially populist intellectuals like Herzen and Chernyshevsky demanded that the tsar expropriate the landed nobility and give the land to the peasantry. Some believed that the tsarist autocracy would achieve from above what the French Revolution had achieved from below. However, it soon became clear that the legal emancipation of the serfs was going to be done in a way which perpetuated the exploitation of the peasants at the hands of the landlords and the absolutist state. In the first years after the abolition of serfdom, the economic conditions of the peasantry were actually worse than they had been. When the Emancipation Edict of 1861 was read, it provoked scattered peasant uprisings; the peasants thought it was a counterfeit document by the local bureaucrats and the landlords. The so-called Emancipation Edict marked the beginning of revolutionary populism. The intelligentsia became convinced that in order to establish peasant-based socialism they would have to overthrow the tsarist autocracy and create a democratic republic.

### **The "Common Cause": Women in the Revolutionary Movement**

In the 1860s the first underground revolutionary organizations came into existence. These were easily crushed. Chernyshevsky himself was imprisoned and then exiled. Yet the tsarist repression in no way suppressed the revolutionary populist movement. Over the course of the next decade, a group of perhaps two or three hundred intellectuals became a mass movement of the intelligentsia numbering thousands of activists and perhaps ten times as many sympathizers.

A three-sided political struggle developed during this period within the Russian intelligentsia who opposed the existing social and political order to some degree: the Slavophiles, the liberals, and the revolutionary populists. In this struggle the populists won hands down, and by

David Mowshowitch



**Orthodox priests lead a demonstration of pogromist thousands, 1907 (left). Jewish children murdered in pogrom in Ekaterinoslav.**

**Women barge haulers  
on the Volga  
in tsarist Russia,  
1910.**



the early 1870s Russian universities were a bastion of revolutionary populism.

Perhaps the decisive reason for the victory of populism is that they were able to mobilize the vast reserves of the women of the educated classes. This movement literally liberated thousands of women from the shackles of the patriarchal family. A woman was not legally allowed to live on her own without the permission of her parents, or her husband if she was married. To circumvent this, the fictitious marriage became a sort of standard activity within the radical movement. Some young male student would be told by a friend that he knew of a woman of advanced views who wanted to go abroad to study medicine (a woman couldn't study medicine in Russia). And they would meet for the first time in front of a church; they would go in, get married; they would come out, and he would hand her her passport, of which he had control, and say, "Now you are free to go and study medicine and do what you like."

During the 1860s the Russian revolutionary movement acquired the participation of women to a far greater degree than their counterparts in Western Europe. These women at the same time consciously rejected Western-style feminism, that is, the idea of building a separate movement predominantly of women in order to pressure the existing government to pass laws in favor of women's equality. They saw women's equality coming about through what was called the "common cause," a total social revolution in which they would participate on an equal footing with male revolutionaries. Vera Figner, who became the principal leader of the terrorist People's Will in its final phase, recounts how she and her fellow Russian radical students at the University of Zurich viewed this question:

"Generally speaking, as a group the female students abroad were not advocates of the woman question and smiled at any mention of it. We came without thought of pioneering or trying to solve the woman question. We didn't think it needed solution. It was a thing of the past; the principle of equality between men and women had been achieved in the sixties."

Now of course what Figner meant was that it had been achieved within the revolutionary movement, not in Russian society at large. The Russian populists, called "Narodniks" in their own language, were acutely aware of the terrible oppression of women. At a mass trial of populists in 1877, the tsarist prosecutors denounced them for undermining the family. Sofia Bardina replied to this:

"As far as the family is concerned... isn't it being destroyed by a social system which forces an impoverished woman to abandon herself to prostitution, and which even sanctifies this prostitution as a legal and necessary element of every civilized state? Or is it we who are destroying the family? we who are trying to root out this poverty—the major cause of all society's ill, including the erosion of the family?"

### "To the People"

In the mid-1870s the populist intelligentsia who were organized in Land and Liberty, which was an all-Russian, fairly highly centralized organization of the Narodnik vanguard, made a heroic attempt to overthrow what Bardina called the "social system." This was the "To the People" movement. Thousands of revolutionary intellectuals flocked to rural villages trying to incite the peasants to rise up in a radical democratic and social revolution. The response was not favorable. One of the leading veterans of this movement reported:

"I noticed that any sharp sallies against the Tsar or against religion made an extremely disagreeable impression on the peasants; they were just as deeply perplexed by energetic appeals for a rebellion or uprising."

When the Narodnik intellectuals said that the peasants should have the landlords' land, they got a favorable hearing. But the peasants were unwilling to defy the state to achieve this end.

While the main body of Narodnik intellectuals went to the rural villages, some remained in the cities and sought to agitate and organize among factory workers. Here they were distinctly more successful. They were able to win over some advanced workers, such as Stepan Khalturin, who joined the leadership of Land and Liberty

and set up small but significant allied organizations of workers.

One of the leading populist intellectuals involved in organizing the workers was Georgi Plekhanov. Initially Plekhanov accepted what could be called the conventional populist line: factory workers are simply peasants doing seasonal work in the factories, which had no effect on their sympathies and ties to the rural villages. But Plekhanov's own experience caused him to question this. In 1879 he wrote:

"The question of the city worker is one of those that it may be said will be moved forward automatically by life itself, to an appropriate place, in spite of the *a priori* theoretical decisions of the revolutionary leaders."

The "To the People" movement, which necessarily operated quite openly, exposed the Narodniks to massive state repression. This repression, combined with the frustration that the movement had not achieved its basic aim, paved the way for the last phase of revolutionary populism: the turn toward terrorism.

In 1878 Vera Zasulich heard that one of her comrades had been almost beaten to death in prison. She put on her best clothes, walked to the prison, requested that she present a petition to the head of the prison, and when she went into his office she pulled out a gun and shot him pointblank. She did not however kill him. The tsarist authorities thought this was such an open-and-shut case that instead of trying her for a political crime before a special tribunal, they tried her on an ordinary criminal charge before a jury drawn from the St. Petersburg upper classes. And she was acquitted, because the jury found this a justifiable act of moral outrage!

The acquittal had a far more shocking impact than the shooting. Count Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace*, expressed the views of the educated elite when he called Zasulich's acquittal "a harbinger of revolution." The populist leaders drew the same conclusion: that if even an upper-class jury will acquit an overt terrorist, then a campaign of terrorism would have enormous popular support. Marx and Engels in London similarly concluded that in the particular conditions of Russia a campaign of terrorism could incite a popular revolution.

The one populist intellectual who dissented was Plekhanov, who warned that the only effect of shooting Alexander II would be to replace him with another Alexander with another digit after his name. He wanted to continue to propagandize and agitate among the rural

and urban masses. In 1879 Land and Liberty split, a small minority going with Plekhanov, the main body changing its name to Narodnaya Volya ("People's Will"), whose stated aim was to assassinate the tsar in order to incite a popular revolution. Two years later, after numerous unsuccessful attempts, they succeeded in assassinating Alexander II.

A few days before the planned assassination, the principal organizer, Andrei Zhelyabov, was arrested in a routine police roundup. Fortunately, his companion Sophia Perovskaya was fully aware of the plans and took over the operation. The basic idea was they thought they knew where the tsar's carriage was going to run a few days later. And they had two guys with bombs who were known as thrower number one and, in case he didn't work, thrower number two. So the carriage sped by, and thrower number one threw the bomb. It unfortunately landed a little behind the carriage. It wounded a cossack bodyguard, the carriage halted, and the tsar got out to see what had happened. And everybody standing around said, "Oh Sire, praise to God that you are safe!" The first thrower, who at this time was being held by the cossack bodyguards, said, "Don't be too quick to praise God!" And just at that instant the second thrower comes up, throws the bomb, and blows Alexander II away.

Emotionally satisfying as this spectacular act of regicide seemed—and even Plekhanov broke out the champagne when he heard about it—the bomb which blew up Alexander II also blew up the illusions of revolutionary populism. It did not incite a popular uprising, and those responsible were quickly rounded up and executed. It had an interesting aftermath. The leadership of People's Will wrote to the new tsar and said that they would not disturb his coronation if he freed Chernyshevsky, who

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**Sofia Perovskaya  
organized the 1881  
assassination of  
Alexander II,  
Tsar of All Russia,  
by the People's Will.**



Radio Times Hulton



had been in prison and then in exile for almost 20 years. The tsarist regime had sufficient respect for the effectiveness of People's Will that they did in fact free the old man of Russian socialism. But in the following years Russian populism was basically broken, not so much by the tsarist repression as by demoralization. Neither mass agitation nor terrorism had seriously affected the tsarist autocracy, which emerged if anything even more reactionary than ever.

### From Populism to Marxism

The 1880s were the low point of the Russian revolutionary movement. In 1889 a student in St. Petersburg, just ten years earlier a hotbed of revolutionary activism, reported: "There were few self-sacrificing participants who completely consecrated themselves to the cause.... All wanted to finish the course as soon as possible and then to live entirely within the law." Yet just a few years later, a new generation of Russian revolutionaries would enter the scene and finish off the tsarist autocracy once and for all.

Most accounts of the transition from populism to Marxism within the Russian intelligentsia focus exclusively on Plekhanov and his comrades. It's important, however, to place this transition in its international context. During the 1870s Russia appeared to be the one country on the verge of a radical upheaval. The bomb-throwing Russian Narodnik seemed the model of the European revolutionary. When Zasulich fled to West Europe after being acquitted for shooting Trepov, she was greeted as a heroine not only by socialists, but even by many Western liberals who hated the tsarist autocracy. Yet a decade later the Russian populist movement had almost evaporated. In 1878, the same year that People's Will was formed, the Bismarck regime in Germany passed the so-called Anti-Socialist Laws aimed at breaking the power of the German Marxist movement. The leaders, Bebel and Kautsky, were driven into exile and many activists were imprisoned. Yet unlike the Russian populists, the Marxists became the mass party of the German proletariat *despite* the repression. So Plekhanov's influence among a new generation of Russian revolutionaries was not merely because of the intrinsic brilliance of his polemics against populism, but also because he was a cothinker of the strongest, most effective socialist movement in Europe.

After the split in Land and Liberty, Plekhanov attempted to establish a small propaganda group called "Total Redistribution," but the tsarist persecution was so intense that he and his comrades were forced into exile. This compelled them to rethink their basic theoretical premises and strategic perspectives, and in the early 1880s Plekhanov made the transition from populism to Marxism. That transition contained two basic elements, one negative, the other positive. Instead of just idealizing it, Plekhanov looked at what was happening to the peasant commune, and he saw that since the emancipation of the serfs, the collective elements of the Russian peasantry were rapidly being undermined. A new layer of rich peasants, known by the insulting term *kulaks*, or "fists," was increasingly dominating the life of the village because they had the money. That was the negative element. The positive element is that Plekhanov generalized from his own experiences in the 1870s that there was a fundamental difference between workers and peasants, that



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**Formerly a leading populist militant, Georgi Plekhanov became the founding figure of Russian Marxism in the 1880s.**

they were not just part of the *narod*, the "people," and that only the workers in their mass were receptive to the socialist program. He concluded that a socialist party in Russia must be based centrally on the slowly but steadily growing proletariat.

In rejecting the conception of peasant-based socialism, Plekhanov concluded that Russia at that point in its economic development could not have a socialist transformation of any kind. He conceived a theory of what later came to be called the "two-stage revolution." In the first stage the working class, guided by the socialist intelligentsia, would lead the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy. The liberal bourgeoisie, such as ruled in the West, would then come to power. In turn the workers would gain the political freedom to build a mass proletarian party and allied trade-union movement. Plekhanov also believed that a radical democratic revolution in Russia would enormously accelerate capitalist development, thus increasing the numerical weight of the industrial proletariat and creating the objective economic conditions for a socialist revolution in the future. Thus the program of the Emancipation of Labor group, formed in 1883, stated:

"Present-day Russia is suffering—as Marx once said of the West European continent—not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from insufficiency of that development.

"One of the most harmful consequences of this backward state of production was and still is the underdevelopment of the middle class, which, in our country, is incapable of taking the *initiative* in the struggle against absolutism.

"That is why the socialist intelligentsia has been obliged to head the present-day emancipation movement, whose immediate task must be to set up free political institutions in our country...."

Plekhanov's two-stage revolutionary schema was accepted within the Marxist movement until the beginnings of the Revolution of 1905, when it was confronted, as Plekhanov would have said, "by life itself." It was then challenged in different ways by Lenin's conception of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution.

### "From a Spark a Flame Shall Be Kindled"

In the first decade of its existence, the Emancipation of Labor group was a mere handful of exiles. This reflected



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**St. Petersburg, 1897:** Lenin (seated at center) with the other leaders of the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, one of the first Marxist groups to engage in mass agitation among the proletariat. The future Menshevik Martov is seated far right; Krzhizhanovsky, who was to be a leading economic administrator in the early Soviet Union, is seated to the left of Lenin.

both the apolitical mood of the Russian intelligentsia and the continuing dominance of the populists over the diminished radical movement. Slowly Plekhanov began to influence a new younger generation of Russian intellectuals, personified by Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. According to his own account, the future Lenin was an apolitical youth until 1887, when his older brother was executed for participating in one of the last populist attempts to take the tsar's life. Alexander Ulyanov's execution radicalized his younger brother, who, however, did not follow the same path in a programmatic and strategic sense. In the early 1890s the young future Lenin consciously rejected pop-

ulism in all its contemporary manifestations, and considered himself a Marxist.

By the mid-1890s, revolutionary populism was a thing of the past and what passed for populism had merged with liberalism. In the 1890s the only people who were calling for a democratic republic were the Marxists, called the Social Democrats. Thus Lenin could write at this time: "All true and consistent democrats in Russia must become Social Democrats." The Russian Marxists had achieved a position in some ways comparable to the revolutionary populists of a generation earlier. They had become the dominant current among that section of the Russian intel-

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ligentsia which was fundamentally hostile to the existing social and political order. They had also acquired a small layer of advanced workers. But they had to break outside the narrow circle. This was called the transition from propaganda to agitation. Plekhanov defined propaganda as the explanation of many complex ideas to the few, and agitation as the explanation of a few basic ideas to the many.

The attempt of the Marxist propaganda circle to involve itself in agitation among the workers happened to coincide with a major strike wave. As a result they got a far more favorable hearing and greater influence among the workers than they had initially expected. Lenin, Martov and the other leaders of the movement sought to direct the workers' economic resistance to the employer toward the ultimate goal of a radical democratic revolution against the tsarist autocracy. In a popular pamphlet on factory fines written in 1895, for example, Lenin wrote:

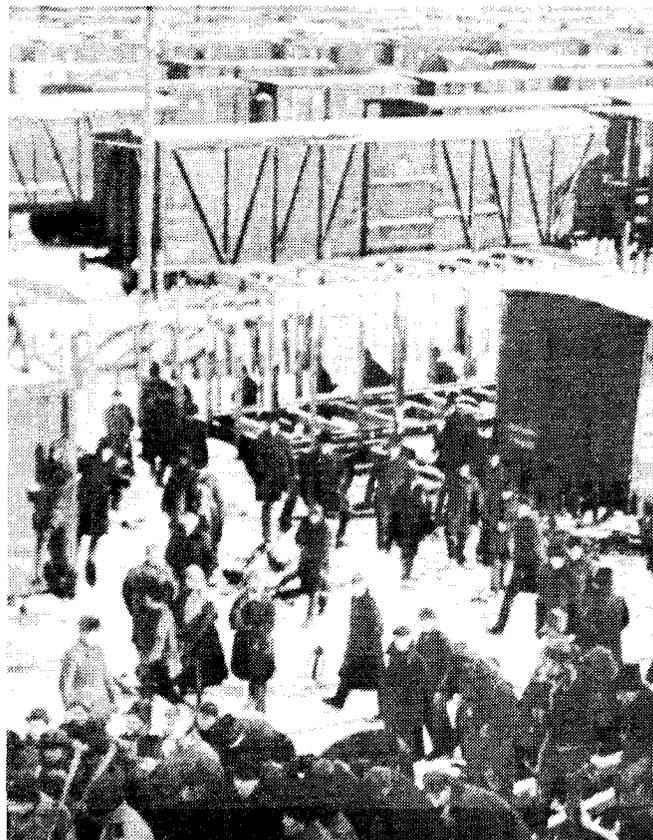
"[The workers] will understand that the government and its officials are on the side of the factory owners, and that the laws are drawn up in such a way as to make it easier for the employer to oppress the worker."

The turn toward agitation incurred increased tsarist repression. Lenin, Martov and the other leaders of what were called the first generation of Russian Marxist "practicals"—that is, the Russian Marxists who actually organized the workers, as opposed to the older veterans like Plekhanov and Axelrod who provided the theoretical direction from exile—were arrested. The movement passed into the hands of younger people whose formative experience was their involvement in the mass strikes. They became so enthralled with increasing their influence among the workers that they decided to drop the demand for a democratic republic, which they argued was remote from the immediate concerns of the workers and was unpopular among the more backward sections who still had illusions in the tsar's benevolence.

Plekhanov denounced this tendency as "economism," which a colleague of Lenin, Potresov, defined as the utopian notion of building an effective trade-union movement under tsarist absolutism. Nonetheless in the late 1890s economism became the dominant current within Russian Social Democracy, both the underground circles in Russia and the exile organizations in West Europe.

In 1900 Lenin, Martov and Potresov were released from Siberia, where they had been sent into exile. They joined Plekhanov and his comrades in West Europe to form what was called the Iskra group. "Iskra," meaning "spark," was taken for their journal; it derived from a letter that was written 75 years earlier by the imprisoned and condemned Decembrists to their friend, the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. In justifying their actions, the Decembrists said: "From a spark a flame shall be kindled." In choosing this name the Iskra group was stating that the proletariat was and must be the heir to the tradition of revolutionary democratic struggle against the tsarist autocracy. The very name was an attack on economism.

Although Plekhanov was one of the towering figures of European socialism, it was Lenin who was the real driving force and principal organizer of the Iskra group. Its immediate goal was to wrest control of the movement from the still dominant economists. The Iskra group won rather rapidly, in part because Russian society was begin-



Novosti

**Striking railway workers during the Revolution of 1905 shut down the entire railway system.**

ning to experience revolutionary ferment at all levels. Factory workers in large numbers spontaneously joined student strikes and protests, thereby giving the lie to the economist notion that workers would take to the streets only when their own personal livelihood was involved—a very narrow and degrading conception. The narrowness of the economist perspective was discredited even among the economists themselves.

For Lenin, the leadership of the movement was only the first step. The second and decisive step was to cohere the localized propaganda circles into a centralized party with a clearly defined program, strategic perspective and leadership. Describing the need for a such a party in his principal work of the Iskra period, *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin used a metaphor from construction:

"Pray tell me, when a bricklayer lays bricks in various parts of an enormous structure, the like of which he has never seen, is it not a 'paper line' that he uses to find the correct place to lay each brick and to indicate the ultimate goal of his work as a whole.... And aren't we passing now through a period in our party life, in which we have bricks and bricklayers, but lack a guiding line visible to all?"

To establish such a guiding line and a centralized party, the Iskra group called a congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party in mid-1903. As is well known, this congress ended in a deep split between the Bolsheviks (the majority, or "hards"), led by Lenin, and the Mensheviks (the minority, called at the time the "softs"), whose principal leader was Martov. At first it appeared that the split was over narrowly organizational grounds: whether to have a highly centralized party consisting of people who are committed revolutionaries, or, as the Mensheviks

wanted, a looser party open to all workers and intellectuals who actively supported the movement in some degree. However, as Russia moved toward a revolutionary crisis it became increasingly clear that the difference over the internal nature of the party was linked to differences over the course of the role it would play in the revolution, in fact differences over the revolution itself.

### The Permanent Revolution

In 1904 Russia engaged in a war with Japan over which country would control the Far East. The tsarist autocracy had expected that a wave of popular patriotic solidarity would dampen the growing social discontent. Instead the defeats of the Russian army at the hands of the Japanese further undermined the tsarist autocracy. "Bloody Sunday," the January 1905 massacre of peaceful workers who were petitioning the tsar, ignited a wave of mass workers strikes, peasant uprisings and military mutinies throughout the year. The Romanov throne tottered wildly, although in the end it did not fall. However, in the early months of 1905 the demise of the autocracy seemed imminent, and therefore the various factions and tendencies of Russian Social Democracy were forced to spell out much more concretely their conceptions of the course of the revolution and its aftermath.

The Mensheviks translated Plekhanov's initially rather abstract conception of a two-stage revolution into support for the liberal wing of the Russian bourgeoisie, organized in the Constitutional Democratic party or Cadets. The last thing that the Cadets wanted was a popular insurrection to overthrow the tsar. What they aimed at was to use the turmoil from below to pressure the tsarist



David King

**Leon Trotsky, leader of the Petrograd Soviet, in jail in the aftermath of 1905.**

autocracy to create quasi-parliamentary bodies in which the propertied classes would have the dominant place. In practice the Mensheviks' adherence to a two-stage revolution, in which the first stage meant the workers were supposed to march arm in arm with the democratic bourgeoisie against tsarist reaction, turned out to be a *no-stage* revolution because there was no democratic bourgeoisie with which to march.

Lenin recognized that all wings of the Russian bourgeoisie were anti-democratic and anti-revolutionary, that a radical bourgeois-democratic revolution therefore would have to occur against and not in alliance with the Russian bourgeoisie. This was the core of his conception of the revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. He projected that a workers party, supported by the mass of the peasants, would be able to purge Russia of all the feudal-derived backwardness, the tsarist autocracy, bureaucracy and the state church. It would eliminate the oppression of nationalities as well as of the Jews and end the exploitation of the peasants by the landed nobility.

This conception was clearly influenced by the Jacobin dictatorship in the Great French Revolution. Yet the question remained: could the proletariat replay the Jacobin dictatorship in the Russia of 1905; was it possible to take economic actions which would harm the interests of large sections of the propertied class and at the same time not economically expropriate the bourgeoisie? Lenin insisted that this was not a stable form of government, but rather "only a transient, temporary socialist aim." He argued at the time (although he later changed his view) that in the absence of proletarian revolutions in West Europe, a revolution in Russia, no matter how radical, could not go beyond the framework of capitalist economic relations.

The person who uniquely argued at the time that the Russian Revolution could and had to go beyond bourgeois economic relations was Leon Trotsky. Trotsky had been one of the younger leaders of the Iskra group; in the split he initially sided with the Mensheviks. He played a prominent role in the Revolution of 1905, and in the course of that revolution developed what he called the



Swan Publishers

**Tsar Nicolas II blesses soldiers heading to fight Japan in 1904. Defeat in Russo-Japanese War was to shake the autocracy.**

doctrine of permanent revolution, in part based on Marx's writings in the immediate aftermath of the revolutions of 1848.

In a preface which he wrote in 1921 to his writings on the Revolution of 1905, Trotsky summarized the doctrine of permanent revolution:

"This rather high-flown expression defines the thought that the Russian revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims; the revolution could not solve its immediate, bourgeois tasks except by putting the proletariat into power. And the proletariat, once having power in its hands, would not be able to remain confined within the bourgeois framework of the revolution. On the contrary, precisely in order to guarantee its victory, the proletarian vanguard in the very earliest stages of its rule would have to make extremely deep inroads not only into feudal but also into bourgeois property relations....

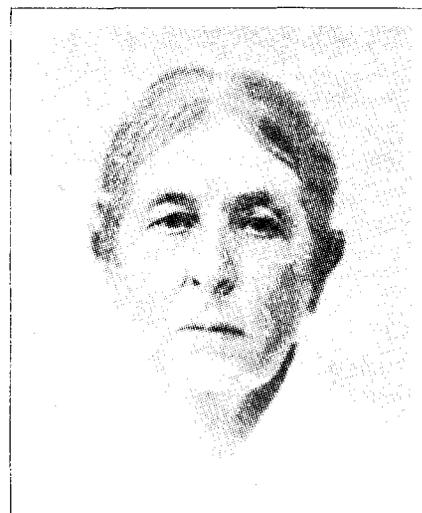
"The contradictions between a workers' government and an overwhelming majority of peasants in a backward country could be resolved only on an international scale, in the arena of a world proletarian revolution. Having, by virtue of historical necessity, burst the narrow bourgeois-democratic confines of the Russian revolution, the victorious proletariat would be compelled also to burst its national and state confines, that is to say, it would have to strive consciously for the Russian revolution to become the prologue to a world revolution."

In 1905 the permanent revolution did not go further than the beginnings of dual power between the proletariat and the tsarist autocracy. However, Russia's defeats in the first imperialist world war broke the back of the tsarist



Novosti

**Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party banners in workers' demonstration during 1905 Revolution. Front banner reads: "Workers of all countries, unite!"**



International Publishers

**Vera Figner, a former leader of the terrorist People's Will, in old age became a loyal defender of the Soviet workers state.**

autocracy and paved the way for the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, the greatest victory of the world proletariat in history. Today that victory is being desperately threatened by the ascendancy of capitalist counterrevolutionary forces.

But I would like to end this talk rather with a story. After the assassination of Alexander II the leadership of People's Will came into the hands of Vera Figner. It was she who negotiated with the tsarist regime for the release of Chernyshevsky, and she managed to hold together an underground group in Russia for the next two years. The police official who finally tracked her down had gained so much respect for her that he requested to kiss her hand before sending her to prison. But sent to prison she was, where she stayed for the next 22 years. She was only released in the amnesty of 1905. When she came out of prison she was a kind of Narodnik Rip Van Winkle; she could not understand or orient to the radically changed political and social conditions. Nevertheless, she remained active within the left, where she was universally respected.

In 1917 many prominent old populists joined the counterrevolutionary camp and went into exile. Figner, the old Narodnik terrorist, faced with a fundamental choice of political loyalties, chose to stay in Soviet Russia. In the 1920s she devoted herself to writing her memoirs and to an organization called the Society of Former Political Prisoners, who were old populists who considered themselves loyal citizens of the Soviet Union. In that capacity she sought to induce populists who had emigrated to return to Soviet Russia and to serve the interests of the workers state. This eminently worthy organization was disbanded by Stalin in the early '30s.

Figner was still alive and kicking at the age of 89, living in Moscow, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. As the Wehrmacht approached Moscow, the Russian authorities turned to Figner and said, "We will move you to safety further east." She refused, saying, "I am very old. I will die soon anyway. Save your efforts for people who are living, who still have a life to give to the cause." So the last member of the famous Central Committee of the People's Will died the following year in Moscow, a heroic and self-sacrificing revolutionary right to the end, and in that sense an inspiration for us all. ■

# Opportunist Left Paved Way for Khomeini

## Iran: Social Struggle Shakes Islamic Dictatorship

As Iran's "Islamic Republic" was staging fake elections last spring, spectacular social protest continued to erupt

across the country against the whole reactionary mullah dictatorship. The most recent reports tell of cops being disarmed and used as shields against government troops, police stations torched, and copies of the Koran burned. Now hundreds arrested as "enemies of the revolution" face the bloodthirsty vengeance of Islamic Revolutionary Courts.

Fueling these bitter struggles is a 13-year reign of theocratic terror founded on the unrestricted right of capitalist exploitation, peasant dispossession and the all-encompassing oppression of women. At least half a million Iranians perished in the squalid eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War. Genocidal terror greeted Kurds and other oppressed nationalities striving to exercise their right to self-determination. Now, as the counterrevolutionary breakup of the Soviet degenerated workers state unleashes reactionary forces throughout the region, Iran is drawn into a maelstrom of bitter national rivalries threatening to explode.

As the Iranian oppressed masses enter the field of struggle their urgent need is revolutionary leadership that can show the way to victory. The immediate task in Iran is the construction of an authentic Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard, regrouping subjective revolutionaries who have digested the bitter lessons of the bankruptcy of Stalinism and the wholesale capitulation of the Stalinist, Maoist and fake-Trotskyist left to Shi'ite religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. The prostration of the "left" behind Khomeini paved the way for the disaster of the "Islamic revolution."

### Fundamentalists Come to Power

Iran's Islamic clergy rode to power in 1979 on the back of a massive popular upheaval that brought an end to the bloody dictatorship of the hated U.S.-backed shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Backed by the class of merchants (*bazaaris*) who detested the shah's centralizing program of pro-imperialist "modernization," the *ulema* (religious hierarchy) also mobilized support among Islamic students and urban poor, migrant workers and unemployed who had flocked to the cities in the wake of the shah's fraudulent "land reform" of the 1960s and '70s. But the masses who poured into the streets week after week sought a regime of social justice, not religious obscurantism. In the end it was the political strikes waged by the proletariat—most importantly 37,000 oil workers who seized the refineries in the fall of 1978—that toppled the shah.

**Workers, Women, Kurds:  
Build a Revolutionary Leninist Party!**

The mullahs were able to reap the fruit of this political revolution in part because their leadership was not

opposed but *hailed* by most of the Iranian left. The international Spartacist tendency (now International Communist League) uniquely opposed this bloc with Khomeini with the slogan: "Workers Must Lead Iranian Revolution! Down With the Shah! Down With the Mullahs!" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 219, 17 November 1978). We warned that subordinating the working class in an "anti-imperialist" bloc with the mullahs was "a recipe for a disastrous defeat for the Iranian proletariat. There is no common denominator between the demands of the mullahs and those of the strikers.... The mullahs' opposition to the shah is a reactionary one, no matter how it plays on the crimes of the shah's dictatorship." Against Khomeini's Islamic Republic we counterposed the struggle for a workers and peasants government of Iran.

The mullahs never made a secret of what they intended to do: "Death or *hejab* [women's seclusion]," chanted Khomeini's followers in the streets in the months leading to his assumption of power. But the left blinded itself to reality even as the *ulema* in power proceeded to carry out its program. In the winter of 1979, Khomeini abolished the minimal reforms of the shah's Family Protection Act, which had restricted polygamy and granted women the right to divorce. In March 1979 "revolutionary guards" fired on hundreds of thousands of women marching against the imposition of the *chador* (veil) in government institutions, a struggle sneeringly ignored by virtually the whole left as a middle-class feminist diversion. Members of the fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat (USec) even called the veil "a symbol of national liberation" and chanted "Allah akbar" (God is great) along with other Khomeini supporters. In contrast the genuine Trotskyists of the ICL argued that defense of women's rights was central to a revolutionary perspective in Iran and organized an international speaking tour by a Near Eastern woman of Muslim origin to sound an alarm over the threat to women and working people posed by Khomeini's new Islamic order.

During the 1979 upheaval Iranian left organizations consistently ignored the *special oppression* of women. According to Val Moghadam and Ali Ashtiani, "Because the struggle against imperialism and dependent capitalism was considered paramount, the socialist organizations gave short shrift to democratic concerns, including 'bourgeois feminism'.... None of the socialist groups dealt specifically with the problems and needs of women" (see

"The Left and Revolution in Iran," *Race and Class*, July-September 1991). But in fact the Iranian left dismissed the emancipation of women, along with every other revolutionary perspective, because they all, to a greater or lesser extent, *liquidated into the reactionary Islamic mobilization*, putting forward justifications such as "anti-imperialism" or claims that the "mass movement" encompassed a "revolution within the revolution" through which the "progressive" forces could "later" come to power!

The Stalinist Tudeh Party posed the choice as between two sides: the bloody U.S.-backed shah or the vile seventh-century cleric Khomeini, and they threw the weight of their organization, historically the mass party of the Iranian proletariat, fully behind the mullahs as "anti-imperialists." Behind this stands the Stalinist dogma of the "two-stage revolution," wherein a section of the bourgeoisie in the backward colonial countries is "progressive" and slated to lead a democratic struggle against imperialist domination.

One of the central doctrinal elements of Bolshevism was that the proletariat was the *only* consistently democratic class in tsarist Russia; the petty-bourgeois masses, including the peasantry, could potentially be drawn to anti-democratic, anti-working-class movements. This understanding was no mere theoretical speculation, but found living expression in the Black Hundreds. In Iran a decade ago, the "left" hailed the contemporary counterpart of the Black Hundreds, which had broken with the shah and was fighting for power in its own name, using nationalist-populist demagoguery. No section of the "left" dreamed of rallying the proletariat independently on the basis of its own class program, flatly counterposed to the anti-woman, anti-worker program of Khomeini of religious fundamentalism and "death to Communism." Neither Tudeh, the totally shameless, nor the "lefts" with their whispered "criticisms" and fictions of "independence" ever considered for a moment the possibility of swimming against the stream of the existing, reactionary "mass movement."



Gamma

In the fall of 1979 Tudeh, the guerrillaist Fedayeen and the USec's fractured supporters in the HKS/HKE hailed the takeover of the United States embassy in Teheran by Islamic students as a blow against imperialism. Garbing theocratic reactionaries in "anti-imperialist" clothing was a policy of suicide: even as the Khomeini regime received the fulsome support of these same groups in its nationalist land-grabbing war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1980, the government turned on the left with a vengeance. Over the next decade thousands of leftists were executed and many more were jailed, tortured and exiled. The left was eliminated from Iranian public life.

### Impoverishment Under the Mullahs

While smashing all domestic political opposition the mullahs made a pretense of instituting populist and "anti-imperialist" reforms on behalf of the Iranian masses. Extensive properties belonging to the shah and his henchmen were taken over by the state, and the government tolerated spontaneous land distributions carried out by the peasants. These activities came to a halt around 1983, when the *ulema* began to assert the sanctity of private property under Islamic law, and lands were returned to their former owners or concentrated in the hands of religious foundations. A new exodus of landless Iranians to the cities began; in Teheran the proliferating shantytowns pushed the population to eleven million from four million in 1979. In the urban areas the nationalized sectors of the economy simply became a means of aggrandizement for the Shi'ite hierarchy. The Foundation of the Oppressed, for instance, amassed *billions of dollars* in cinemas, factories, hotels and other real estate. Even the *bazaaris*, backbone of the "Islamic revolution," have begun to grumble that "middlemen," i.e., the clerics, are making all the money.

For working people the economic situation has become intolerable. While billions in oil profits pour into the country, some 65 percent of the population live below the government's own official poverty line. In rural areas,



Kaveh Golestan

Iranian left liquidated into reactionary mass movement for Ayatollah Khomeini (left), 1979, beheading class struggle against the Islamic regime. Above: women protest government imposition of the *chador* (veil).



AP  
Iranian firing squad executes Kurds after abortive 1979 uprising. Shah's war against national minorities in Persian "prison house of peoples" continued unabated under Khomeini.

two-thirds lack adequate sanitation while one-half lack safe drinking water, conditions which are replicated in the burgeoning urban slums. Inflation has been running around 50 percent, and when the government recently floated the rial (Iran's currency), it dropped some 2,000 percent in value—while the price of a liter of milk shot up to one-tenth of the minimum daily wage (*Labor Solidarity*, April 1992)! Housing prices doubled in Teheran in 1990-91. "The more difficult the economic situation gets, the more people lose their religious beliefs," said a mother of six during the April elections. "I don't think any of the promises of the revolution have been met. For the poor, nothing has changed. Our lives have gotten worse" (*New York Times*, 11 April 1992).

While most Iranians greeted the elections to the *majlis* (parliament) with cynicism and indifference, imperialist spokesmen pinned their hopes on the "moderate" faction of Iranian president Rafsanjani. Elected in 1989, Rafsanjani negotiated an end to the Iran-Iraq War. When U.S. president Bush launched his genocidal "desert storm" against Iraq in 1991, Rafsanjani maneuvered Iran into a posture of favorable neutrality toward the former "Great Satan." Building on this diplomatic "success," he helped free American hostages in Lebanon. In an attempt to lure \$20 billion in foreign investment, Rafsanjani has tried to paper over Iran's theocratic oppression with some superficial reforms. Notably, however, the Islamic Republic persists in its criminal demand for the murder of Salman Rushdie, author of the "blasphemous" *Satanic Verses*.

"Poverty must be spread and divided among all," said multimillionaire Rafsanjani in defense of his domestic program (*New York Times*, 14 August 1991). Under his economic "reforms"—privatization, ending food subsidies and price controls, eliminating rationing—poverty has spread indeed. Rafsanjani's electoral opponents, the so-called "hardliners," basically agreed with his austerity measures—"Eat carrots, they're cheap," advised one "hardline" candidate (*Guardian Weekly*, 3 May 1992)—but objected to minuscule social reforms the president has instituted, like raising the minimum female marriage age from 9 to 13! One construction worker summed up the attitude of many toward both wings of the ruling *ulema*: "Many Iranians have to work two jobs just to get food

on the table. And most of us have had enough of the clerics and their restrictions."

### Social Struggle Breaks Out

This mass resentment and anger, pent up through more than a decade of social reaction and impoverishment, was ready to erupt when the Iran-Iraq War came to an end in 1989. In January 1991, the oil workers—strategic heart of the Iranian proletariat—shut down the industry nationwide, starting in Isfahan and Abadan and spreading to Teheran, Shariz and Tabriz. One year later Teheran refinery workers walked out again for two weeks, winning a 25 percent pay increase.

During the last half of 1991, according to an exile spokesman of the People's Mujahedeen, there were over 200 demonstrations against the regime in some 150 different locations. Last fall 20 people were reported executed after revolts flared up in the eastern city of Zahedan (Baluchistan). In January of this year students at the pres-



Workers Vanguard

**New York City, January 1989: Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee called for worldwide emergency protests against Khomeini's mass executions in Iran.**

tigious Nassir-ol-din Toussi engineering school in Teheran blocked traffic and boycotted class to protest the government's appointment of a new dean. In March a reported 20,000 teachers, students and others staged an anti-government march in Ramhormoz in the southwest. *Pasdarans* ("revolutionary guards") shipped into the city killed at least one person and wounded more than 30.

Last summer and again this past spring crowds of urban poor waged pitched battles against government forces seeking to raze their shacks and oust them from the land they occupy—just as they fought the shah's evictions 14 years ago. Protests took place in Teheran, Khorramabad, Shiraz and Arak. In Arak, a significant industrial city southeast of Teheran, squatters took to the streets in May after a 12-year-old boy was run down by a government vehicle involved in the demolition of makeshift homes. Police were disarmed and forced to shield the demonstrators against military troops; banks and government buildings were torched. The demolition was canceled. On May 29, 4,000 residents in the northeastern city of Meshed stormed police stations to stop their eviction from land owned by the powerful religious foundation Astan Qods. Hundreds were arrested; in early June eight people were hanged as "foreign conspirators," and others were sentenced to long prison terms and flogging. In mid-June there were further revolts in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan.

An incident in the central Iranian city of Isfahan in July 1991 showed that the seething popular hatred of the Islamic government runs far deeper than the economic questions of housing, jobs and prices. When fundamentalist thugs in the city's central square tried to punish women for violating *hejab*, thousands rushed to defend the women and trounce their assailants. An all-out battle ensued that ended only after police fired at the angry crowd. This spontaneous action pointed to a powerful lever in the proletariat's fight against theocratic reaction: the struggle for the liberation of women.

### Enslavement of Iranian Women

Upon coming to power the mullahs drove women out of the factories and barred them from almost any type of productive employment. All aspects of life were sexually segregated, from public transit (women ride in the back of the bus) to the schools. Legally required to cover all but their faces and hands, women became subject to 70 lashes for wearing make-up or jewelry. A woman can be stoned for so much as *touching* a man who is not a relative. Squads of religious police (*komitehs*) patrol in vans, beating and arresting women who defy *hejab*. During only two months in 1991, 3,400 women were arrested for wearing "indecent attire" and 600 couples were charged with having "illicit relations." After the Isfahan riot, Iran's prosecutor-general declared that violation of the dress code was apostasy punishable by death!

The core of women's oppression is the institution of the family, and under the Islamic fundamentalists of Iran the family has become a lifelong torture chamber for women. "One of man's greatest happiness[es] is to know that his daughter has not had her first period in her paternal home but in that of her husband," intoned Ayatollah Khomeini (quoted in Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement*

*in Iran*, 1982). Indeed the mullah government legalized the selling of little girls into marriage. Women were required to get their husbands' permission to leave the house or to travel. Contraceptive devices and abortion were banned. It was the women who bore the burden of a 4 percent annual population explosion that rocketed the Iranian population to nearly 60 million from 34 million in 1976—despite a high rate of infant and maternal mortality. Sold into bondage, kept illiterate, confined to the master's home, denied medical treatment—Iranian women are enslaved. In the absence of a program of struggle, suicide is escape. "Only a dead woman is a free

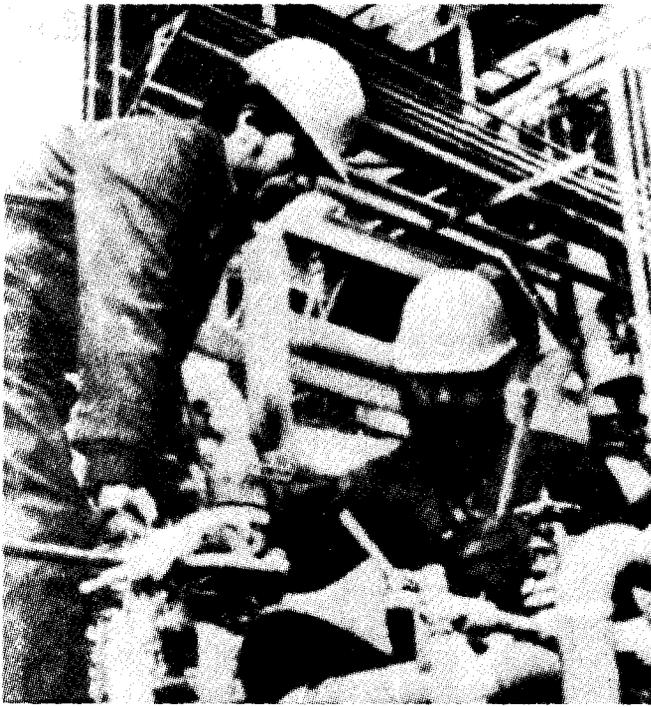


Planeta Publishers

**Afghan women, liberated from the veil, marching together with men in 1984 Kabul rally. Red Army defended Afghan women against Muslim enslavement.**

woman," comments a female peasant quoted in Erika Friedl's sociological portrait, *The Women of Deh Koh: Lives In an Iranian Village* (1989).

During the Iran-Iraq War the government revived the Shi'ite custom of *sigheh* (temporary marriage), promoting its supposed virtues in mosques, high schools and the mass media. Under *sigheh*, a man may contract as many temporary marriages as he likes, paying each woman an agreed-upon price for a set period of time—which can range from an hour to a lifetime—and paying a mullah a fee for a certificate. Cherishing this source of income, the mullahs push *sigheh* in order to prevent that most evil of acts, *zena* (fornication), i.e., sex between consenting individuals. To accept without severe punishment even a single case of *zena* would be to explode the fundamentalist view of women as unfeeling and thoughtless domestic animals. "Islamic virtue" is thus defended



**Oil workers, key sector of proletariat, have enormous social power in oil-rich Iran. Workers revolution is the road to liberation for national minorities, women.**

through a form of state-sanctioned prostitution that preys upon desperate widows and divorcees. To get the full flavor of this abomination, one need only remember that during the 1989 blood frenzy in which the mullahs executed thousands of political prisoners, prison guards "married" and raped the younger female captives so they wouldn't have to kill virgins (see "Stop Executions in Iran!" in *Workers Vanguard* No. 469, 20 January 1989).

### Leninism vs. Economism

The Communist International under V.I. Lenin's leadership recognized that the working-class woman faces "double oppression (capitalism and her home and family subservience)." The Comintern organized a special Women's Section to draw women into struggle under the Communist program. In the Muslim Soviet East, the Bolsheviks' Women's Department played a key role in revolutionizing society by encouraging women to discard the veil, learn to read and become revolutionary leaders and activists. As one leading female Communist said:

"Our Eastern Republics are bordering directly on a number of Eastern lands (Persia, Afghanistan, and others). Every veil that is torn away, every Uzbek or Turkmen woman who is drawn into a soviet, or recruited into the party or the komсомол [youth group], or even into a school, becomes a revolutionizing factor in those foreign lands."

—quoted in Gregory J. Massell,  
*The Surrogate Proletariat*

Only Lenin's communism has ever offered a liberating program to women hideously oppressed in the Muslim East; even the minimal and reversible reforms put in place after World War I by bourgeois nationalists like Ataturk and Reza Shah were a fearful response to the sovietization of the neighboring lands to the north. And the 1979 intervention in Afghanistan by the degenerated Soviet workers state held out the prospect of women's

liberation from feudal/obscurantist reaction for the first time.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan posed a crucial test for the Iranian left. Afghanistan embodies all of the backward wretchedness of Iran—the tyranny of the landlords, khans, money lenders and mullahs—but without the internal social resources (i.e., a modern industrial proletariat) for its own emancipation. The Red Army intervention not only posed the military defense of the social gains of the October Revolution against an imperialist-backed counterrevolution on the southern border of the USSR. It also posed the extension of those gains to the oppressed Afghan peoples. But even as they faced the lash of the mullahs they had helped bring to power, the Iranian left *opposed* the Red Army intervention against the same reactionary forces in Afghanistan. And now the mujahedin victory there is bringing to women and minorities what Khomeini's bloody reign brought to Iran.

In contrast to the fake-lefts, the International Communist League said: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend Social Gains of October to Afghan Peoples!" We bitterly denounced Gorbachev's 1989 pullout as a betrayal of the Afghan and Soviet peoples; today fundamentalist guerrillas own the streets of Kabul, while once-proud women cower under the head-to-toe *chadri* (Afghan veil).

### For a Trotskyist Party in Iran!

As followers of the Maoist-Stalinist strategy of two-stage revolution, Rahe Kargar (Organization of Revolutionary Workers of Iran) and the CPI (Communist Party of Iran) reduce all questions of strategy to the proletariat's struggle for economic survival *under capitalism*. In their myopic eyes, the question of women's emancipation won't be on the agenda until the Socialist Hereafter—i.e., never. The stagist strategy of revolution means the "postponement" (betrayal) of other social questions as well. Last year the CPI itself came apart, apparently over the conflicting stagist appetites of its component groupings: the core group, the guerrillaist Komala, upholds Kurdish nationalism, while its opponent group, now called the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (WCPI), capitulates to Persian chauvinism. According to WCPI leader Mansoor Hekmat, the struggle for a "just society" of democratic capitalism stands above "the question of borders" in relation to Kurdistan (*Worker Today*, November 1991). Indeed, a program restricted to the confines of capitalism necessarily means abandoning the struggles of the Kurds, as well as other minorities in the area.

In Iran the national and religious minorities (Kurds, Azeris, Turkomans, Ba'hais and others), constitute a majority of the population, as they did in tsarist Russia, the "prison house of peoples." From Teheran to Istanbul, the struggle for a truly just society of *proletarian* power is directly tied to the right of national minorities to self-determination. For Kurdistan, this means the question of the imperialist-imposed borders that divide this nation into four different countries. In 1984 we said to a European conference of Kurdish militants: "The Kurdish masses must look to an alliance with the Arab, Persian and Turkish proletariats, who in turn must be made to become determined champions of the Kurdish right of self-determination against the great power chauvinism

of their own bourgeoisies" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 362, 14 September 1984). Revolutionaries must forthrightly champion a socialist republic of United Kurdistan in a socialist federation of the region.

Rahe Kargar has carried the stagist theory to its logical conclusion, renouncing the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and calling for a "pluralistic route towards democracy" in "a democratic international order" (*International Rahe Kargar*, November 1991). Practically quoting from the renegade Kautsky, Rahe Kargar says that once universal suffrage is achieved, democratic socialism will come about by "adding economic to political equality"—the typical social-democratic nostrum!

The core cadre of these groups came from organizations which hailed the 1979 Islamic revolution along with the rest of the opportunist left. In subsequent years, they were able to fashion a roughly left-reformist line—critical of Khomeini, not supporting Iran's war against Iraq—during a period when the existence of a presumably powerful Soviet degenerated workers state to the north stayed the hand of imperialism to some extent. This was basically a pacifist/neutralist opposition which fell far short of the Leninist position of revolutionary defeatism. Meanwhile they denounced "Soviet imperialism" and opposed the Red Army's progressive intervention in Afghanistan. But the collapse of the Soviet Union has brought about a New World Order that's not very favorable to left reformism. Their political response is to look to their own bourgeoisie for cover. Thus in its 20 January 1991 statement on the Gulf War, the CPI condemned "the attack by the US and its allies against the people of Iraq," but studiously avoided calling for the *defense* of Iraq, arch-

enemy of the Iranian ruling class, and "evenhandedly" counseled that "the occupation of Kuwait [by Iraq] must be settled within a regional framework," that is by the region's rulers, including Iran's Islamic Republic.

Integral to defending the interests of Iranian workers is *defense of the Soviet workers state from counterrevolution*. This means *workers political revolution* to overthrow Yeltsin's pro-capitalist, starvation regime (and its non-Russian counterparts fracturing along national lines). The outbreak of all-sided nationalist war among the national components that comprised the USSR would be a calamity that could easily draw Turkey, Iran and Pakistan into a bloody maelstrom. Only a revolutionary party based on the politics of Lenin and Trotsky, leaders of the 1917 October Revolution, can prevent such a defeat.

Like Russia, Iran was drawn into the world imperialist system before it could complete its own bourgeois revolution. And like the Russia of 1917, Iran's bourgeois-democratic tasks—land reform, religious freedom, national self-determination, the emancipation of women from feudal servitude, separation of church and state—can only be accomplished in a proletarian revolution leading to the formation of a workers and peasants government. With almost every sector of Iranian society feeling the lash of the mullahs, the burning task confronting Marxists is the construction of an internationalist revolutionary party, a tribune of the people, to lead the working class and all the oppressed in socialist revolution, the only answer to capitalist misery. The International Communist League has no doubt that from among the women of Iran will come many of the most courageous fighters. ■

## International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

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## Japan...

(continued from page 56)

by claiming the *ianjo* (the filthy shanties used as "comfort houses" and called "public lavatories" by the soldiers) were operated by private entrepreneurs, thus relieving the government of responsibility. This bald-faced lie was exposed in January when Yoshiaki Yoshimi, professor of history at Chuo University, uncovered documents buried in the archives of the "Self-Defense Force" library which directly link the government and military to the establishment and maintenance of the "comfort women" system. Yoshimi is also an expert on the infamous Unit 731, the secretive section of the Imperial Army which conducted Nazi-like chemical and biological warfare experiments on Korean, Chinese and Russian prisoners.

Within weeks other documents were made public, including a telegram to then War Minister General Hideki Tojo from a Japanese commander in Taiwan requesting permission to establish "brothels" in Borneo. These materials detail army regulations on the kidnapping of women and on *ianjo* personnel, locations, prices, hygiene and scheduling priorities for various units and ranks. Recent accounts report that the Japanese government began to draft Korean women as "comfort women" in 1937 after the start of the Sino-Japanese War. But in his 1973 book, *The Ianfu Belong to the Army* (recently republished), Kako Senda writes that the *ianfu* originated following the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, when the military commissioned doctors to devise a program to protect soldiers from venereal diseases. And the *Korea Times* claims the abductions started as early as the 1920s. The story of the "suicide cliff" in Hakodate, Hokkaido, named for the Korean women who killed themselves there after being forcibly taken to military supply plants, dates from this time.

As the Japanese Imperial Army pushed across Asia, *ianjo* came into existence, from Okinawa and Fukuoka to Nagano and the front lines stretching from the Phil-

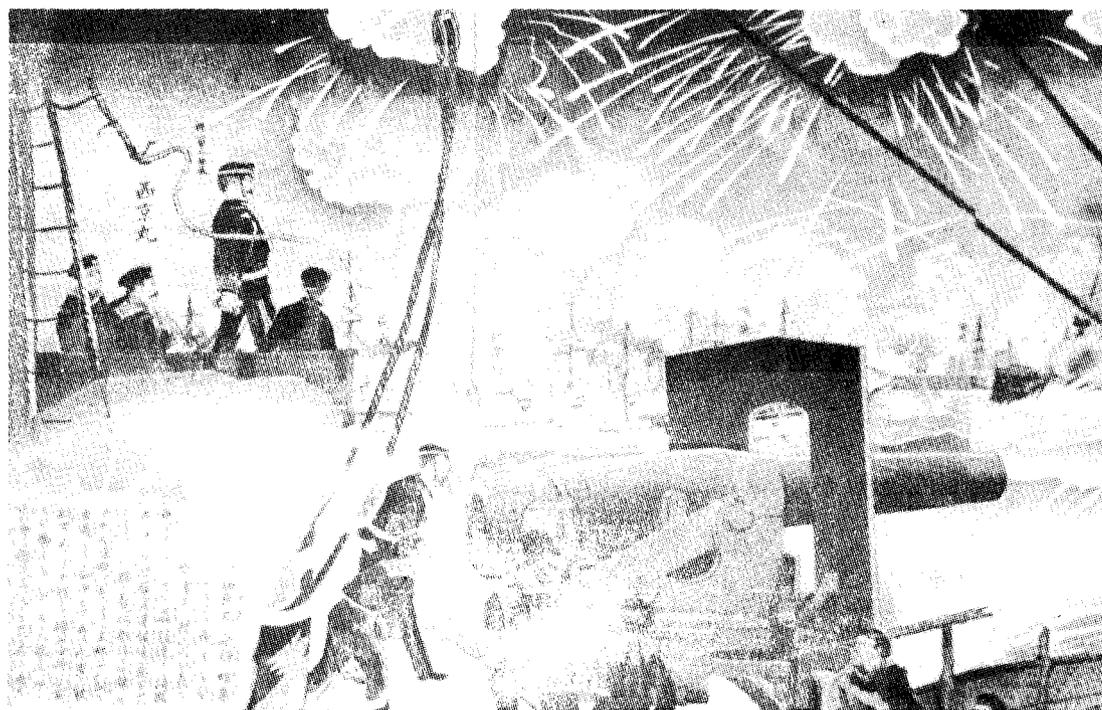
ippines to New Guinea, Indonesia and China. Many women were "recruited" nominally to provide "comfort" to soldiers at the front by visiting the wounded and rolling bandages. Others were told they would be employed in Japanese factories; still others thought they would be working on the Thai-Burma Railroad—all for high wages which they could send to their impoverished families. The majority were brutally captured on "virgin hunts" by organizations such as the Patriotic Labor Association and handed over to army personnel. Roh Chung Ja, enslaved as a "comfort woman" for six years, told her story:

"I was 17, and there was big virgin hunting at the time. My grandmother told me to hide in a deep mountain. I was in a cave when the Japanese military policemen arrested me.... They took us by train all the way through China. We were somewhere near the front. At first I did not obey what I was told. I was hit, and blood came from my mouth. After that, I was forced and did what I was told."

—*San Francisco Examiner*, 16 January 1992

Unmarried Korean women aged 17 to 20 were first conscripted through trickery and intimidation, but by the war's end, women and girls were taken regardless of marital status or age. Some were as young as 11 or 12.

The *ianjo* slavemaster received 50 to 60 percent of the woman's gross earnings and the remaining portion was used to buy moth-eaten rotten rice or clothes, or was put into "savings." Soldiers and army civilian employees were rotated through in intervals of 20 to 30 minutes or 30 to 40 minutes, according to their unit and rank. Officers were allotted more time, the freedom to go every night, and, in certain locations like Taiwan, the "privilege" of being serviced by Japanese, not Korean, women. Fees were based on nationality: one yen for a Chinese woman, one and a half for a Korean woman and two yen for a Japanese woman. On an average weekday, a woman would be raped "until she loses her mind," 20 to 30 times, while on weekends the number was doubled. Venereal disease examinations were required once a week; those diagnosed as "diseased" were either killed outright



Robert Hunt Library

**The Battle of the Yalu River (China) during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 marked Japan's entry onto the road of imperialist conquest.**

Pantheon Books



**Korean women students demonstrate in Seoul, 1919. On 1 March 1919, one to two million protesters demanded end to Japanese rule over Korea; some 7,000 were killed.**

or expelled without food—a virtual death sentence. Hwang said, “I had many miscarriages in my life because I received injections many times for treatment of syphilis. Many ‘comfort women’ who were diseased were killed by Japanese soldiers who thought that such women could no longer satisfy soldiers’ desires.” Taiwanese women had the *kanji* character for “comfort” tattooed on their arm. In Thailand, the only days off were during a woman’s menstrual period, when a *hinomaru* (rising sun flag) would be placed on the outside of her door. Those that were caught trying to escape were beaten. In addition to the atrocious punishments imposed officially, nobody knows how many women were tortured and murdered by sadistic individual soldiers.

As the military began losing battles and retreating, the Japanese vice home minister sent a secret order urging local administrative units to burn all documents related to *joshi teishintai* (“Women’s Submit Body Units”). Much of the living human “evidence” was probably dispatched along with the documents. Surviving *ianfu* were either turned over to the advancing U.S. military forces to a fate which has not yet been made public, or were left penniless. Stigmatized, those who did make it back to their native country almost never returned to their families. They have lived out their lives in isolation and poverty.

### **Korean Forced Laborers**

The story of the *ianfu* underlines the Japanese bourgeoisie’s intense hatred of women and of national and racial minorities. That 80 percent of the *ianfu* were Korean flows from the 1910-1945 Japanese occupation, modeled on the Russian tsarist colonization of Poland. The Korean peninsula served as a “forward logistical base” that was to supply natural resources and manpower for Japan’s imperialist expansion into mainland Asia. To this purpose, Koreans had to be “assimilated”; the teaching of Korean history, culture and language was replaced with Japanese history, culture and language. Initially all political organizations and meetings were banned; Korean-owned newspapers were forcibly bought out; all arms were confiscated. All instruction was geared toward *kokutai meicho* (national polity) and loyalty to the Japanese emperor.

After the Pacific War started, a general draft was implemented and by July 1944 an estimated 242,000 Koreans were forcibly dispersed throughout the Japanese front to be used as bullet shields, laborers and prison guards. Some were later tried as “war criminals” under the Allied-imposed “victor’s justice” and jailed or hanged.

Until 1910, the Korean community in Japan consisted mainly of students and consular officials, as labor laws (like those in existence today) forbade entry of unskilled laborers. With the annexation, immigration laws ceased to apply to Koreans and many emigrated to work in “3-K” (dirty, difficult and dangerous) jobs like textiles and mining. Mining jobs had previously been reserved for prisoners and *burakumin* (descendants of feudal-era outcasts). As one official report stated, “Their first feelings on arrival in Japan are probably best expressed by the phrase ‘it sounded like paradise but when I saw it, it was hell’.” By 1923 more than 90,000 Koreans were in Japan, subjected to systematic, brutal discrimination and living in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions resembling those of the early feudal Nara period (910-944). In the aftermath of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, right-wing hysteria resulted in the massacre of as many as 6,000 Koreans by the police, military and racist *jikeidan* (vigilante groups).

The number of Koreans in Japan grew between 1939 and 1945 when they were conscripted as slave laborers to toil from Sakhalin (then a Japanese territory) to Kyushu. Even the most conservative sources place the number conscripted at almost one million, while other sources say two million. By 1944, an estimated 32 percent of all miners in Japan were Koreans, enslaved in concentration camps with little food and token pay. There are no records of how many Koreans were killed or maimed in work-related accidents, starved to death, shot while trying to escape, or incinerated during the atom bombing of Hiroshima by the vengeful U.S. imperialists.

### **Compensation Is Not Enough!**

The South Korean “comfort women” survivors have demanded from the Japanese government a “sincere apology,” public information on all aspects of the issue of “comfort women,” compensation (currently ¥20 million



Stanford University Press

**Woman leading protest of workers against the Fuji Spinning Mills in Kawasaki, ca. 1915. Class struggle in Japan demands fight against oppression of women and “non-Japanese” workers.**

per person, about \$160,000) for the victims and their families, coverage of the “comfort women” in school textbooks and the erection of a memorial to the victims. In his January address to the National Assembly in Seoul, Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa mouthed a few hypocritical words of sympathy for the victims of Japan’s imperialist aggression in Korea. In July, the government finally bowed to pressure and admitted it had set up and run the *ianfu* system, but it is standing by its claims that the matter of compensation was settled with the 1965 Treaty of San Francisco, whereby Seoul agreed to accept compensation for individual personal losses in the form of development aid.

The atrocities suffered by the *ianfu* were not simply imperialist “excesses” and no compensation can atone for these crimes. Nothing will, as Hwang asked, “Give me back my youth.” Racist contempt for the rights of “our little brothers” (and sisters) in the less developed countries of Asia was an essential feature of Japan’s war policies. A memorial to the victimized *ianfu* will hardly see the light of day as long as the ruling class that raped Nanking, seized Korea and inflicted the horrors of imperialist war upon its own people remains in power. For years a memorial to the Korean victims of the atom bombing of Hiroshima has been refused placement in the “official” peace park and is periodically desecrated by fascistic right-wingers. We say, the living perpetrators of the crimes against the *ianfu* should face a tribunal comprised of their victims!

As more information about the *ianfu*, forced laborers and victims of Unit 731 comes to light, right-wing nationalists have launched their own propaganda campaign to alibi their imperialist masters and to refurbish the face of reascent Japanese militarism. An attempt by the Kanagawa Prefecture municipal government in April of this year to hire a researcher to collect information on *ianfu* and Korean forced laborers met stiff opposition from

racist assemblymen. These chauvinists had the audacity to claim, “Under the Emperor’s everlasting rule, Koreans were equally treated with Japanese so that such allegations were baseless.” In the 29 February 1992 *Weekly Post*, right-wing critic Fuyuko Kamisaka claimed, “People from the Korean peninsula were also Japanese in those days, so we can’t say that the *ianfu* issue is one of racial discrimination by nationality.”

What lies! Even today, Koreans whose ancestry in Japan goes back as far as 1910 are denied the basic rights of citizenship—the right to vote, to run for public office, to become citizens without changing their name or renouncing their heritage. Miyazawa’s government claims it is liberalizing its treatment of Koreans; in January 1993 a bill will go into effect which suspends the mandatory fingerprinting of non-Japanese permanent residents. This cruel hoax mandates that the *gaijin* card, Japanese version of the hated South African passbook, must still be carried at all times, while a prison term of at least one year or a stiff fine of up to ¥200,000 will be imposed for refusing to sign the card. A similar fine will be meted out to those who don’t report an address change within two weeks of moving.

The links between the oppression of women and of minorities are readily seen in the treatment of immigrant workers here. Today an increasing number of young women—*Japayuki-san* (“Ms. Go to Japan”), mainly from the Philippines and Thailand—are coming to Japan to work the lucrative *mizu-shobai* bars and hostess clubs in the cities. These women, who can potentially earn in a sleazy Japanese hostess club ten times what they can at home, are easy marks for the *yakuza* sex trade vultures. Recruited to work as “entertainers,” most wind up in the *yakuza* prostitution trade where their passports are confiscated and their wages withheld. They are kept in *ianfu* servitude in a xenophobic country that denies any semblance of civil rights to foreigners, especially non-Caucasian immigrants from Asia and Africa. Male laborers from Africa, Asia and, more lately, South America—including even *Nikkeijin*, ethnic Japanese whose families emigrated to Latin America—are segregated into the worst, lowest-paying “3-K” jobs and subjected to systematic discrimination in housing, medical care and social services.

### For a Workers Republic in Japan

The intense exploitation and oppression of workers in Japan demands militant, multiracial class struggle! But the labor lieutenants of Japan, Inc. are wedded to the system of capitalist exploitation, which is sustained by racist and chauvinist ideology and practices. None of the three labor federations have fought to break the racist “Japanese only” employment system in major industry or to organize the non-Japanese workers into common unions with Japanese. Nor have the fake-leftist union leaders lifted a finger to fight the vicious part-time labor system that effectively bars women workers from full employment status and union protection.

The Japanese left, from the reformist Diet opposition parties to the New Leftovers, rarely concerns itself with questions of special oppression. In the main narrow, nationalist and chauvinist, leftist parties are content, when it suits their purpose, to tail protests by minorities or women, but they never attempt to link the struggles of

the oppressed to a perspective of socialist revolution in Japan. Thus, while all the left, even the pro-imperialist Tanabe wing of the Japanese Social Democratic Party, supports the *ianfu* demands for compensation, this voiced support was a pressure point on the Liberal Democratic Party government in a feeble attempt to block the recently enacted PKO ("Peace Keeping Operations") bill that "authorizes" the use of Japanese troops abroad.

Indeed, that the governments of South Korea and Taiwan, which have known about the existence of the *ianfu* for decades, are supporting the *ianfu* demands has nothing to do with the suffering these women endured and everything to do with fear of a resurgent and re-armed Japanese imperialism. Kim Il Sung's government likewise maintained silence until the recent revelations. These Stalinists have always insisted that North Koreans living in Japan should not get involved in internal Japanese politics but should meekly accept their oppression in accordance with subordination to the principle of *Juche* ("self-reliance," that is, "peaceful coexistence").

Revolutionary Marxists maintain that anti-imperialism abroad means class struggle at home. The question of women's oppression and the struggle to end racial, caste and national oppression is a central component of a socialist revolution here. The political and social condition of Koreans in Japan is a barometer of this fight. It is this link the reformists and New Leftovers consistently ignore. In the early postwar years most Koreans either actively sought to return to the homeland they were barbarously ripped away from, or fought to retain their national identity under the hammer blows of Japanese forced assimilation schemes. But this is changing. The newest postwar generation, the third, no longer dreams of returning to the vicious police state south of the 38th parallel or the bizarre Kim Il Sung cult society in the North. They are beginning to wage a fight for their civil, social and political rights



Asiaweek

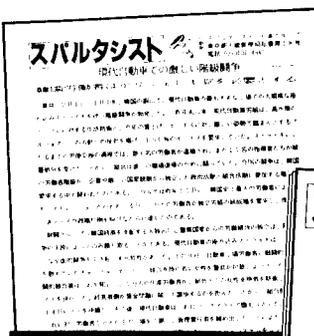
**Tokyo—Korean protesters demonstrate against brutal discrimination in Japan, where chauvinism brands all "non-Japanese" as second-class citizens. Sign reads, "For equality between foreigners and Japanese."**

in their real homeland—Japan! Indicative of this new, potentially militant trend among third-generation Koreans is the formation of the Osaka-based Foreign Residents Party, *Zainichi-to*, which is running Korean Lee Young Hwa for a Diet seat in the July Upper House elections. Lee succinctly summarized the attitudes of militant young Koreans in Japan today: "I have no desire to return to North Korea. Japanese is my native tongue. Japan is my home country. I can't understand why I can't vote here." And in assessing the response among Japanese to Korean aspirations for citizenship rights Lee revealingly said, "Ordinary people seem to support me, but the main political parties, unions, even the leftwing, are doing nothing" (*Japan Times*, 9 June 1992).

Lenin's Bolsheviks, fighting within the Russian "prison house of nations," understood that they had to be a *tribune of the people*, not just a narrow Russian labor party, to topple the tsar and the Russian capitalist class. The same Bolshevik conception of "tribune of the people" is essential to any successful socialist revolution in Japan. The countless vestiges of Japan's feudal past, grafted onto modern-day society through the maintenance of the *tenno* (emperor) as a symbol of Confucian submission to hierarchal rank and discipline, must be a central target of any proletarian revolution, which is the basis of our fight for a workers republic. Korean activist Lee's assertion that the "left" is doing nothing for Korean rights is for the most part true. The Spartacist Group Japan, as part of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), stands in sharp contrast to the narrow and chauvinist Japanese left. We seek to build a multinational and multiracial Leninist party in Japan that will aggressively recruit women, minority workers, students and activists who want to topple this arrogant and racist ruling class, avenge the unspeakable crimes committed against the *ianfu* and countless other victims of Japanese imperialism, and end the capitalist system that spawns imperialist war. For a revolutionary workers republic in Japan as part of a socialist world! ■

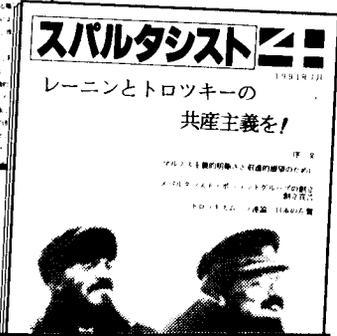
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# Korean Women Expose "Comfort Girl" Atrocities

## Japanese Imperial Army Enslaved Women



Left: Korean girls as young as 11 or 12 were conscripted into Japanese Imperial Army and forced into sexual slavery.

Below: former "comfort women" demand justice for victims of Japanese army, Seoul, December 1991.

Korea Report

"The powers of the state used the police to trap and kidnap helpless women from Japan's colonial territories and ship them off to the battlefield where they were held as prisoners and gang-raped for one to two years, then abandoned by the retreating Japanese Army. Of the Koreans I was responsible for enslaving, I think half of the men died and all [950] of the women."

—Seiji Yoshida, mobilization chief of the Shimonoseki branch of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Patriotic Labor Association, quoted in *Asahi Evening News*, 31 January 1992

TOKYO—In December 1991, three Korean women, Kim Hak Soon, Sim Mi Ja and Hwang Kum Ju, courageously came forward to tell the story of their living nightmare of enslavement as *ianfu* ("comfort women") for the Japanese Imperial Army. An estimated 100,000 to 200,000 victims were forced, under threat of death, into sexual slavery during the Pacific War as the Japanese imperialists vied with their American counterparts for mastery of Asia and the Pacific. While women were rounded up across Asia, over 80 percent of the *ianfu* were Koreans, long subjected to vicious bigotry and chauvinism by Japan. The true extent of the Imperial Army's enslavement of the *ianfu* may never be known, as the military—which meticulously recorded the number of horses, dogs and even pigeons transported—covered up the "comfort women" by listing them as "military commodities" or ammunition.

The revelations sparked an international outcry. Diverse voices from areas occupied by Japanese imperialism during the Pacific War—from officials of the repressive Tai-



AP

wanese government to Filipino leftists—have demanded that Tokyo pay compensation, while the Western news media has used the story to get in some cheap Japan-bashing. The Japanese bourgeoisie tried unsuccessfully to hush up the story with various damage control measures, but the crimes of the brutal, racist and male-chauvinist Imperial Army were too widespread to cover up.

The women-hating bigots in the government seat at Nagatacho, who once again want to enslave the workers of Asia in a new "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," had hoped they could ignore this "unfortunate incident." At first they tried to alibi these atrocities (continued on page 52)

