

—A Proposal

to Move Backwards—

THE
GUARDIAN
ON
"WOMEN'S
EMANCIPATION"

The March 9th issue of the *Guardian* contains a statement which they present as their "Marxist-Leninist position on the question of women". Upon reading and studying the *Guardian's* presentation we find it necessary to dispute many of their conclusions.

The *Guardian* article, entitled "The Fight for Women's Emancipation," is not a historical analysis dealing with the role of women in society and in the revolutionary movements—which are the main ingredients in the development of a revolutionary outlook on women's oppression and liberation. Actually the article is more like an advance promotion of the *Guardian's* plan for organizing women into the revisionist party which the *Guardian* clearly feels that it is destined to lead. The timeliness of the *Guardian's* article must also be examined. In their thirty years of publishing, the *Guardian* has never had a statement on women's oppression and liberation. Now, at a time when women's revolutionary leadership is growing in strength and numbers in both the women's movement and in the white left, the *Guardian* chooses to deal with this most critical question. We feel that through their positions the *Guardian* exposes their true aims — to co-opt women's

narrow definition of "class struggle" to the US white working class.

The *Guardian* begins its "analysis" by stating that "Historically, the women question has been a test of every revolutionary movement." Later they explain to us how it is that "women's emancipation was inextricably bound up with the historical destiny of the working class." Most of us can read these formulations and think to ourselves that they sound right. Closer examination and thought reveal that these are tricky substitutions for the positions that Marx, Engels, and Lenin laid out. Lenin wrote: "the proletariat cannot achieve complete liberty until it has won complete liberty for women"; "the experience of all liberation movements has shown that the success of a revolution depends on how much the women take part in it." "There can be no

socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it." Marx stated: "Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment." In short, Marx and Lenin concluded that there can be no revolution without the liberation of women. None of this seems to figure into the *Guardian's* revisions of Marxism-Leninism.

Cited in the article are many of the abuses and inequalities daily heaped on women. Facts such as women constituting 40% of the total US work force, but on the average only earning 56% of what men's wages are; sexual segregation on the job; the double shift of waged labor in the workplace and unwaged labor in the home are all given as the basis for the *Guardian's* conclusion that "these are the concrete circumstances in the economic base of capitalist economy which *objectively* (our emphasis) unite the women's movement with the struggle for the overthrow of capital." And this is where the *Guardian's* concrete analysis of the material basis of women's oppression ends. The *Guardian* stops at this point because to continue on and analyze and determine why these conditions exist—would mean dealing with how imperialism profits indirectly and directly from the *oppression of women* in the home and in the workplace. It would mean confronting *male supremacy* head-on. The *Guardian* would have to deal with the institutionalization of women's oppression in the schools, hospitals, courts, jails and the welfare system. Further, if the *Guardian* squarely and honestly examined women's experiences within these institutions and compared them to that of men's, they could no longer evade the fact that there are economic, legal, psychological, physical, and sexual power/privileges that men have over women in US society. This would mean taking up the question of men's real stake in the maintenance of women's oppression—not as just the "petty privileges" or "illusory rewards" the *Guardian* would like us to believe are all that are gained by men. Recognizing male supremacy as a prin-

White women played a leading role in solidarity and support of the national liberation struggle of the Vietnamese people.

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cial form of competition in the white working class would mean that the fight for women's liberation would have to be viewed as a central part of the revolutionary struggle in the US. And most of all, it would mean that there can be no unified or winning movement without an attack on women's oppression and male supremacy—because these are in fact major pillars and bulwarks of US imperialism.

These are the conclusions that must be drawn from any serious analysis of women's economic, social, and political position and role in society. And these are precisely the conclusions from which the *Guardian* shrinks. The *Guardian* substitutes talk of men's "petty privileges" which divide the working class for actually fighting male supremacy and male privilege. The *Guardian* briefly mentions the super-profits that US imperialism gains from the oppression of women, yet it does not conclude that women, as waged workers in the workplace, and as unwaged reproducers and maintainers in the home, are both direct and indirect sources of essential super-profits for US imperialism. In other words, the oppression of women is extremely valuable to imperialism. Movements to struggle against this super-exploitation in the home, on the job and in all US institutions constitute an extreme threat to US imperialism, and are revolutionary struggles.

The *Guardian* ignores these facts because it does not want to conclude that the struggle for the liberation of women, and the struggle against male supremacy, is a leading force in the world revolutionary movement; that is, one of the main components of a revolutionary class stand. Instead, the *Guardian* substitutes the struggle for democratic rights of women, something it believes cannot be conceded by US imperialism because of super-profits. But, because of their unwillingness to recognize the actual revolutionary nature of women's struggles and leadership, the *Guardian* takes an attitude of 'Oh well,' at least this "helps to clear the battlefield of obstructions." And then they misuse Lenin to tell us that when women see

clearly that their problem is due to capitalism and not lack of rights, then we will all get down to the real fight. We agree that defeating imperialism, seizing state power, and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat are the ultimate aims of the revolutionary movement. Yet, we disagree that the battlefield can be cleared of obstructions. We don't even understand how the *Guardian* comes to that conclusion. If (as the *Guardian* says they believe) women's oppression is profitable to US imperialism, then how can imperialism equalize things between women and men (what the *Guardian* calls democratic rights)? The struggle for women's equality is not a struggle that can be won under bourgeois rule, and this is one place that we agree with the *Guardian*. What we don't agree with is that women's fight against their oppression is just "limited reform and consciousness-raising." We believe that women's struggle against oppression and for liberation is anti-imperialist and leading in the revolutionary class struggle among white working class people.

The *Guardian* covers all this by vague talk of super-profits, and the "double oppression of working women (and the triple oppression of working women of the oppressed nationalities)". With one hand the *Guardian* refers to the differences between the oppression of white and Third World women through the use of quantitative phraseology such as "double" and "triple"; yet on the other hand, nowhere in the article do we see any concrete analysis of the qualitative differences in the situations of Third World and white women. In fact the differences are liquidated.

This is all a smokescreen for long established practice and politics of the *Guardian*. The *Guardian* undermines the struggles of what it vaguely calls "the oppressed nationalities" within the US, by denying and opposing their struggles for national liberation. It continually subordinates these national struggles to the "real" struggle of the "U.S. multi-national working class." The *Guardian* wipes out the existence of oppressed nations within

the borders of the US. And when it talks of white chauvinism, it denies that the white working class gains material privileges from the super-exploitation of Third World nations inside the US and around the world. National liberation struggles and the demand for self-determination are reduced to "democratic struggles" and the "special demands of minority workers." All of this serves the *Guardian* as a model for this phony stuff we are now being handed about the struggle against women's oppression and the fight for the liberation of women.

The struggles being waged for national liberation, self-determination (which also includes Native American struggles for sovereignty) by Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and Mexicanos in the US are principal forms of class struggle within the US at this time. Combined with the struggles for national liberation around the world, they lead the world-wide proletarian revolution. No amount of talk about democratic rights, the multi-national working class, or fancy schemes contrived to build a united front of the multi-national working class and the nationally oppressed peoples of this country can change these facts or sugar-coat history. But they do serve our cause by revealing the white supremacy and opportunism of forces like the *Guardian* and whoever else masquerade as bearers of Marxism-Leninism, but who really use talk of anti-imperialism as a cover for blatant revisions of revolutionary anti-imperialist politics and struggle.

The *Guardian* revises precisely those Leninist principles about the characteristic features of imperialism that it claims to uphold. Unlike and contrary to Lenin, the *Guardian* maintains that to talk of oppressor and oppressed nations, to talk of the system of white supremacy which serves to give economic and social privileges to all white people in the US while keeping Black and Third World oppressed nations super-exploited, is to detract from the "real class struggle" — which, as the *Guardian* sees it, is limited to the struggle of the "multi-national working class." At this point it becomes clear just what

kind of class struggle the *Guardian* is really talking about. It is not what is reported in the internationalist news and analysis, which attracts many people to read the *Guardian*. What is really dear to the hearts of the editors of the *Guardian* is trade union struggle, reformist economic struggle—the struggle of the Sadlowskis.

From reducing the struggles of oppressed nations to the struggle for democratic rights and multinational unity, the *Guardian* moves on to liquidate the revolutionary struggles against women's oppression to a question of the unity between men and women.

Trade unions and workers' organizations are given the primary responsibility for not conducting a struggle to win the male workers' support for the "democratic demands" of women. But what about the failures of the revolutionary movements in the white left? *Where is the Guardian's self-criticism for its failures to support the struggles for women's liberation?* No mention is made of women's withdrawal from the white male dominated left in the '60's because of men's failure and downright resistance to dealing with women's oppression, women's leadership, and fight for liberation. The *Guardian* first blames the trade unions for not supporting women's rights enough, twisting the relationship between the revolutionary movement and the masses, and blaming the workers for the revolutionary movement's own backwardness and failures.

All this serves to cover for the *Guardian's* criticism of what it thinks is the "real" problem: the white women's movement, with its "go-it-alone strategy." This is a term we became familiar with in I. Silber's party-building series where he uses the same word to put down revolutionary nationalist forms of organization, in order to deny Black and Third World nations the right to decide what forms of organization are appropriate for their struggles. It all adds up to a repudiation of the Leninist principle of self-determination. When applied to the women's movement it is a denunciation of women's right to an autonomous women's movement, and wipes out the importance



El Paso, Texas 1973: Farah strikers demonstrate to protest the police murder of 11 year old Santos Rodríguez.

"Farah, Oneita, and J.P. Stevens were not just struggles about union concerns, but struggles against Black, Chicana and other Third World women's super-exploitation."

of women's leadership in the revolutionary movement and the anti-imperialist content of the women's movement.

We are told that the real story of women's struggles is not to be found in legal reforms or in the "sensationalistic" sexual liberation themes for "sexual preference", but rather in the enormous numbers of women playing central roles in union struggles and immediate "class struggles," (which, given women's overwhelming exclusion from unions, is a questionable factual statement to say the least). These rewrites of history omit the fact that the "groundswell" of activity that the *Guardian* refers to — Farah, Oneita, and J.P. Stevens — were not just struggles about union concerns, but struggles against Black and Third World women's super-exploitation as nationally oppressed women.

These statements also reveal a blatant ignorance of the struggles that have been waged by the white women's movement. Sneers at "sexual liberation" by the *Guardian* are made to wipe out the revolutionary content of women's struggles for power and control over their bodies

and sexuality in male supremacist US society. These remarks are objectively anti-lesbian slurs. The *Guardian's* use of quotation marks around sexual liberation reveals that they don't believe in sexual liberation and makes us wonder if they have any analysis of the material basis of women's oppression at all.

The *Guardian's* statement ignores the fact that historically women's oppression has been rooted in the need to control women's reproductive functions to maintain bourgeois class interests, or in other words to maintain the continuity of men's property throughout generations. Virginity, marriage, fidelity, and heterosexuality have all served to keep women's sexuality and consciousness tied to their reproductive capacities.

Lesbianism is a statement that women do not have to be dependent on men. It is a statement that sexuality doesn't have to be based in the home, dependent on men because of our biological abilities to bear children. The *Guardian's* faulty analysis of the material basis of women's oppression is no accident, since they never do a forthright analysis of the family—its role in

the oppression of women, and the differences between the families of whites, and those of Black and Third World oppressed nations.

It is no surprise that the *Guardian* ignores all this, because as many of the *Guardian's* letter-writers have concluded, the *Guardian* denies the existence of gay oppression and basically only mentions the issue when it decides to grant homosexuals a place inside communist organizations as another concession to democratic rights.

It is also no surprise that the *Guardian* has no understanding of gay oppression, and in particular of lesbian oppression, since it has never taken a critical look at the role the bourgeois nuclear family plays among white people as a structure of women's oppression. The *Guardian* refers to the working class family as an "institution for survival and defense." Here again, they make no distinctions between the families of oppressed nations and those of whites.

We would agree with the *Guardian* that defense of the family for Black people and all Third World peoples is a critical necessity. Historically, imperialism has tried to tear apart families of Black and Third World peoples as part of a genocidal attempt to destroy national culture and identity, and ultimately destroy nations of peoples of color. This is one thing. However, among white people the family has played quite a different role. What the *Guardian* cites as a reason to defend the family—that it "remains the basic economic unit of society"—is precisely what is wrong with the family. The family remains an isolated, privatized economic unit whose purpose is to maintain and reproduce the workforce—a very *social* function indeed. The oppression of women in the double shift has roots in women's definitions in the home. To truly wage a struggle against women's oppression, we have to struggle against the role women are forced into in the home, and the very structure of the nuclear family in the oppressor nation.

The rest of the *Guardian's* remarks about the white women's movement and the role of women in the revolutionary struggle

amount to exaggerations and contempt. And we see that once again the white women's movement is accused of something that the rest of the white revolutionary movement is supposedly not guilty of—white supremacy (which the *Guardian* equates with racism). Bourgeois feminism is targeted as the main danger of opportunism in the white women's movement. This only serves to cover the *Guardian's* refusal to deal with history—that, in fact, not fighting white supremacy and male supremacy are the main forms of opportunism in the white left, and for that matter in all social movements of white people, including the white women's movement.

And finally the *Guardian* pays lip service to the fact that there is some revolutionary content to women's struggles, after it has tried its very best to tear down and bury this reality.

HOW DOES THE GUARDIAN SEE THIS REVOLUTIONARY CONTENT?

The working class will liberate women. *Men will cement class unity between women and men workers* according to the *Guardian*.

With men taking up the fight for women's special and democratic demands, there is no need to have an autonomous women's movement, there is no need to fight male supremacy and male privilege, and most of all there is no need for revolutionary women's leadership. Here again, the *Guardian* turns history on its head—**THE FACTS ARE THAT THE LEADING FORCE FOR WOMEN IN THE US HAVE BEEN WOMEN. WOMEN THROUGH THEIR DETERMINATION HAVE FORCED MEN TO TAKE ON THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION, MALE SUPREMACY AND MALE CHAUVINISM.** As much as the *Guardian* would like to be blind to the facts—these are the real truths.

The real truths are that the liberation of women is a central part of the revolutionary struggle. This is something the *Guardian* never deals with. Instead it flips-flops all over the place, and first tells us that capitalist development has brought into existence the material conditions that

make the total and complete emancipation of women possible. Then it tells us, (realizing its exaggeration) in its concluding remarks that "socialism will not automatically 'solve' the woman question," but that the whole matter will be transformed when the working class seizes state power. All of this talk serves to deny that the women's movement and the struggle against male supremacy and male privilege and the fight for women's liberation will form the material force for women's liberation. These struggles also constitute a mighty contribution to the abolition of imperialism/capitalism—and an essential one. The seizure of state power will form the political conditions for women's liberation, but the women themselves will create the material force for women's liberation by leadership and struggle within the movement at all its stages.

What all this comes to is that the *Guardian* says it wants to struggle for women's rights but only on the condition that the women's movement stays within the narrow limits drawn by the *Guardian*. The condition to be imposed is that we don't get to the heart of the matter, which is fighting male supremacy and male chauvinism and establishing an anti-imperialist women's movement. The condition is that we remain silent on the necessity of and material basis for con-

solidating women's leadership in all forms of revolutionary struggle and organization.

All this adds up to a refusal to deal with facts, and a refusal to draw conclusions that are critical to the development of a revolutionary movement in the white left and to the formation of revolutionary class consciousness in the white working class. If there is to be a revolutionary struggle for women's liberation, there have to be revolutionary feminist communist women to lead it. There has to be a communist party committed to fighting for a revolutionary women's movement. The only way that a communist party can be committed to this struggle is for it to understand the necessity of a revolutionary line on women, one that places women's oppression in the context of an analysis of imperialism, that fights in support of the oppressed nations and fights women's oppression. And that understanding must also express itself in women's leadership.

We believe these are the major elements to a working class approach in the US white oppressor nation, and no amount of *Guardian* imitation "Marxism-Leninism" is going to change our minds. We intend to fight more resolutely for these principles in all aspects of our work, and this includes pointing out the absolute necessity of exposing the blatant opportunism of the *Guardian*.



Philadelphia, 1976:

Lesbians at a demonstration in support of Susan Saxe.

"If there is to be a revolutionary struggle for women's liberation, there have to be revolutionary feminist communist women to lead it."

