

# WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

## IWD or IWWD?



Both CORES (MLM) and LPR (ML) agree that we should participate in revolutionary activities and celebrations around women's issues in broad based coalitions and give communist leadership to these IW (W) D is one such celebration. We unite that we should strive to give it a revolutionary character and class content, and that we should struggle to promote working class leadership to the celebration (and to the women's movement in general). However, we are not united as to the name the celebration should have.

Both LPR and CORES recognize that we have fundamental unity on what the

essence of the celebration should be like that it should be a revolutionary celebration addressing the plight of all oppressed women while fighting for the leadership of working class women and placing in the forefront working class demands. We are also united that we should take up the woman question, not just on March 8 each year, but everyday and everywhere. Therefore, our difference is **not** of principle.

We also recognize that there are many other groups who utilize IWWD or IWD with whom neither organization unites with on important questions. This indica-

tes that although the name is important insofar as it reflects line, we cannot go by the name alone in terms of determining our unity. Since we are united on the essence of the celebration and on how we take up the woman question in practice, we feel that our difference is one that can be resolved by deepening our analysis of why we use one or the other name. At this moment, however, we feel that the difference is not an obstacle to merging but one that we should resolve.

We are printing here a brief explanation of how each of us views the question of IWD or IWWD. We do this consistent with

the line we have been practicing that in order to achieve **principled** unity it is necessary to put out both our unities and differences in an open and above board manner. Also, that we do this not only before our respective leaderships, but also among our cadres, contacts and the communist movement as a whole. In this way they can actively participate in the struggle for unity, and learn the lessons provided by this process. We welcome criticisms from comrades and friends on both positions and on how we are handling this or any other difference between our two merging organizations.

### CORES' POSITION

We use IWD because we see that day as speaking to all women's oppression—and that oppression crosses class lines. On that day we should be speaking to working class women, the secondary reserves which include non-working class women, lower petty bourgeois women and revolutionary women's movement. Speaking only to working women ignores the secondary and indirect reserves, excludes non-working women like students, intellectuals, oppressed nationality non working women, housewives, women on welfare, etc. Our task is to bring the whole women's movement under the leadership of the proletariat. We don't do that by excluding the non-working women on the only day which is set aside to address the plight of women.

As Lenin Stated

*"The Communist women's movement must itself be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movement. Not only of the proletariat, but of all the exploited and oppressed, all the victims of capitalism or any other mastery. We demonstrate thereby that we recognize these needs, and are aware of the humiliation of the women, the privileges of the man. That we hate, yes, hate everything, and will abolish everything which tortures and oppresses women workers, the housewife, the peasant woman, the wife of the petty trader, yes and in many cases the women of the possessing classes. The rights and social regulations which we demand for women from bourgeois society show that we understand the*

*position and interests of women, and will have considerations for them under the proletarian dictatorship (Lenin, On the Woman Question, pp 89, 91)*

The women's movement does not recognize that the source of women's oppression is the bourgeoisie and capitalism, and that the solution is socialism. LPR says the main danger in the women's movement is the liquidation of the leadership of the working class rather than the liquidation of the woman question. But this is not at issue. What LPR is describing is the level of consciousness of the women's movement and the working class on the oppression of women. But what is at issue is how we move the consciousness forward and defeat the opportunist lines. How do we develop the women's movement as a reserve, how do we link the two movements, and how do we strengthen the unity of the working class around the woman question.

CORES sees the way to do that is by addressing ourselves to all women's oppression and its roots. And even though we seek conscious women workers as leadership of the women's movement, we don't think calling the day IWWD will facilitate that strategic task.

Communists are champions of women's liberation as well as the liberation of the working class. When we say we strive for working class leadership of the women's movement, it implies a conscious leadership. It doesn't mean working class women are physically in leadership. That alone won't do it. It is when the consciousness

exists in the working class, among both women and men, as well as within the women's movement, that we are striving for will begin to exist.

We fight for proletarian leadership of the women's movement not by crowding out other demands, but by taking up demands that affect the masses of women and giving a proletarian analysis and solution to the problems of women. In that way the masses of women—students, professionals, office workers, service workers, welfare mothers, etc — will concretely be won over to the leadership of the women workers and working class.

LPR says that using IWWD links the question of women's oppression to the class question. Not really. The class nature of the woman question doesn't mean that working women suffer the most (In fact, oppressed nationality working women probably do). But instead, it means that only the elimination of class society will women's oppression be ended and in that, women's lot lies with the working class. Using the term working women, even if used in the sense of women workers, doesn't make that link because it's too mechanical, not the same scientific term, and belittles the question of consciousness.

The term working women is not scientifically defined and in fact is only a term that glosses over the class nature of society so that it cannot link the question of women's oppression to the class question. The term working women, as understood by the masses of people in the US at this time, lumps together professional women, office

workers, women workers, and for some includes any woman that does house work, and any woman who gets paid. Use of this term at this time doesn't indicate **which** segment of working women we are promoting as leadership. At the same time, the name IWWD would **not** include non-working women of the working class who in fact we do want to promote.

LPR says to use IWD to commemorate the proletarian content of the day. This we can unite with somewhat. But of course that commemoration can be done under either name.

Right now IWD work doesn't achieve what we would want it to achieve because of the low consciousness on the woman question among the masses, and the dominant bourgeois ideology. How are we to resolve the contradiction? By holding events called IWWD and then struggling with the professionals, petty bourgeoisie, office employees, secretaries, etc, who consider themselves women workers to show them why they are not the leadership we are talking about? By struggling with working class women who are not working to show them that IWWD means them too? Isn't that being sectarian, idealist and voluntarist? We want IWD to be a revolutionary holiday that will move our work on the woman question forward—that will unite the class, develop allies and educate and train women workers in the revolutionary struggle for the emancipation of women and the working class. We see this accomplished not through limiting of the name but through a series of tasks.

## LPR's POSITION

LPR believes that IWWD is a revolutionary celebration of the working class. Its main purpose is to hail the struggles of oppressed women throughout the world and help us move forward the struggle for the emancipation of women. It provides a day in which to sum-up victories and failures in that struggle, and lay out the tasks ahead.

We do not consider the name of the celebration a matter of principle. We can unite and participate with others in celebrations that use either name, based on what their content is. However, we understand that although with some the difference is only in the interpretation given to the name, with others the difference in name reflects a deeper difference in line and approach on the woman question. Further, we believe that the name should correctly reflect the character and content of the celebration. And we believe that IWWD reflects more accurately than IWD the revolutionary character of this day.

The woman question is a class question. This means that the root cause of the oppression of women is in the capitalist system itself, and therefore the emancipation of women is intimately connected with the emancipation of the working class. In fact, although women are oppressed by this system because they are women, independently of whether they are workers, housewives, students or professionals, it is the working class women who suffer the most, especially those of oppressed nationalities. To speak of the emancipation of women then, without referring to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the final solution is plain and simple reformism. As Lenin says

*"The thesis must clearly point out that real freedom for women is possible only through communism. The inseparable connection between the social and human position of the woman and private property in the means of production, must be strongly brought out. That will draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our policy and feminism. And it will supply the basis for regarding the woman question as part of the social question, of the workers' problem, and so bind it firmly to the proletarian class struggle and the revolution."*

(Lenin, Conversations with Clara Zetkin)

In an advanced capitalist country like ours, where the women's movement is so infected with the ideology of the bourgeois

feminists, where its leadership is in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie, and where the demands of working class women are pushed into second place, the revolutionary character of the celebration becomes even more critical. Calling for the celebration of a "Women's Day" leaves the content of the celebration wide open. It is not the mere fact of being a woman, it is not all women that we are honoring, but the great majority of them, that is, those that are



oppressed and are struggling against their oppression. And this oppression falls most of all upon the women working in the factories, the mines, as well as in the offices, and hospitals, and on the wives, mothers and daughters of the workers. IWWD reflects their struggles and sufferings and shows that the oppression of women overall is intimately linked with the struggle and oppression of the working class. This is something that women of the higher classes, who are also oppressed, must learn to recognize, and gain consciousness of the fact that the end of their oppression is in fact linked to the end of all oppression. We must thus help women gain consciousness of the nature of their oppression "and so bind it firmly to the proletarian class struggle and the revolution", as Lenin says

IWWD celebrations should focus on the struggle and oppression of working class women (focus does not mean exclusively, but it does mean to address the oppression of all women linking up their oppression to the oppression and the struggle of the class). Accordingly, the name given the celebration, should reflect our focus, the es-

sence of the celebration, the main content of it. That is, one which links the oppression of women with the oppression and emancipation of the working class as a whole, one which promotes working class leadership of the women's movement, and one which puts working class women's demands in the forefront, while addressing the plight of all oppressed women.

It is argued that IWD should be used because women's oppression goes beyond

ked to the oppression of working class women. In fact, the widespread use of IWD is reflective to a great degree of the reformist character of bourgeois feminism and of many IWD celebrations of the past.

Using IWWD, and of course this must be accompanied by an active struggle for revolutionary celebrations showing the class nature of the oppression of women, helps to create consciousness around this question. Our tasks as communists are to, first of all, take up the woman question every day, everywhere. We are to actively take up the woman question in all its aspects, including the struggle for the immediate demands of women in order to concretely demonstrate that we recognize the immediate needs of women and are willing to struggle for them. It would be sham to limit ourselves to giving lip service to the oppression of women on March 8th. By concretely showing that we are staunch defenders of women's rights we gain the confidence of the masses of women. But we must do this, again, everyday and everywhere. Only in this way can we effectively point out the connection and help them recognize that we must fight together, for revolution and socialism.

Secondly, we must fight against all kinds of opportunist deviations in our movement on this question. We have to watch against the "left" error of liquidating the woman question by either not taking it up consistently throughout the year, or by only addressing the plight of working class women, failing to see manifestations of oppression among women outside the working class. We oppose those who only speak of the oppression of the working class, or only speak of socialism without fighting for the immediate needs of women. This is at best a poor understanding of the woman question, and a misinterpretation of the term IWWD.

On the other hand, and most especially, we have to watch against the right error of liquidating the roots of the problem, the class nature of the oppression of women, forgetting to make the connection between that oppression and the struggle for socialism. This is what will "draw a clear and ineradicable line of distinction between our policy and feminism", as Lenin says. This is the error that best characterizes the women's movement in the US today. It is this error of reformism on the woman question that we are combating and it is one of the reasons we are strongly advocating for the revolutionary character of the celebration on March 8th, under the name IWWD. It is one way of firmly binding the proletarian class struggle and revolution, with the struggle for the emancipation of women. ■