

**Break the
Chains!**



**Unleash the Fury
of Women
as a Mighty Force
for Revolution**

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Chiang Ching

To Comrade Chiang Ching,

One of the Four revolutionary leaders in China who, carrying out the line of Mao Tsetung, fought to the limit for the revolutionary cause of the international proletariat against the revisionist bandits now leading China back down the road to capitalism and selling it out to imperialism;

Who blasted through all enslaving feudal and bourgeois traditions that held that women could not and should not march in the forefront of the proletarian struggle, surging forward with the masses of Chinese women and at the head of the Chinese people as a whole;

Who blazed new trails in driving the emperors, princes, sages and overlords from center stage and in waging a fierce two-line struggle to put art and culture firmly in the service of the revolution;

Who, as First Deputy Chairman of the Cultural Revolution Group, played a vital role in leading the Chinese people in scaling the heights, dealing head-on blows to the bourgeoisie (especially capitalist-roaders in the heights of the Party) and carrying the class struggle farther down the road to communism than ever before in history;

Who was hated and slandered by Hua Kuo-feng, Teng Hsiaping and their packs of revisionist dogs, and loved and revered all the more by revolutionary people everywhere;

Who stood firm in the face of vicious attacks, refused to capitulate to the enemy or "lay low" to save her own skin, put everything on the line and held high the red banner of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tsetung Thought as a clarion call to revolutionaries in China and worldwide to carry forward that banner;

To Beloved Comrade Chiang Ching who will never be silenced by prison walls,

We proudly dedicate this book, as we dedicated celebrations of International Women's Day, 1979, in cities across the U.S.A.

Introduction

“Break the Chains—Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution!” rang out at the 1979 International Women’s Day events that were held in over 20 cities around the U.S., sponsored by the Revolutionary Communist Party and other organizations. The tradition of International Women’s Day is not a new one. This international working class holiday was inspired by the strikes and massive demonstrations of working class and other women that took place in New York City in 1908—strikes and demonstrations that demanded the end of brutal working and living conditions for women, and for their right to vote. In 1910 the anniversary of these demonstrations, March 8, was declared International Women’s Day by an international conference of socialists and communists. V.I. Lenin, the great leader of the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution, was among those who voted at this conference to establish this tradition. Since then it has been celebrated world-wide by class conscious workers and all those seeking to make revolution.

For decades this revolutionary holiday went uncelebrated in the U.S. Like all other revolutionary traditions, International Women’s Day had been “taken away” from the U.S. working class through the degeneration of the Communist Party USA into a pitiful reformist, “quite content with capitalism” outfit. But the mighty upsurges in the late ’60s, inspired by revolutionary storms around the world, brought to the U.S. a new resurgence of revolutionary activity and thought.

The very foundation and fabric of U.S. society was being challenged by this upsurge and it was inevitable that as a part of this the oppressed and subordinate position of women in our capitalist society would not go unchallenged. Not only did a mass “women’s liberation” movement develop, but literally millions of women broke with traditional bourgeois models of

“womanhood” and many stood in the front ranks of the overall revolutionary struggle of the times and were a powerful component of that struggle.

In 1970 revolutionary forces around the country proudly re-established International Women’s Day as a revolutionary holiday in the U.S. The Revolutionary Union, the main communist organization that was the forerunner of the Revolutionary Communist Party, played an instrumental role in organizing the first International Women’s Day rally in the San Francisco Bay Area in years, and ever since then the RU, and the RCP upon its formation, have carried forward this tradition and have promoted the celebration of International Women’s Day around the country. The bourgeoisie, with the assistance of none-too-few phony communists, have also taken up the banner of “Women’s Day” and have tirelessly tried to reduce International Women’s Day to a respectable, reformist, “women need their piece of the pie” carnival. But the 1979 RCP-initiated International Women’s Day celebrations had nothing to do with this respectability and in fact were stamped with a more thoroughly revolutionary character than any of the previous contemporary celebrations. The earth-shaking events of the last few years, including especially the reversal of the revolution in China after Mao’s death, the deepening crisis of imperialism and the inevitable sharp two-line struggle in the revolutionary ranks which has followed on the heels of these developments, has brought to the fore a deepened understanding of the road to revolution in this country and how this road has nothing to do with the rut of easy accommodation to the framework and backward traditions of capitalist society. These International Women’s Day events reflected this deepened understanding and the boundless enthusiasm developing for what is an arduous but ever more pressing and promising task of preparing for armed revolution in the United States—and in particular the role of women and the woman question in that preparation.

The main body of this pamphlet consists of edited sections of speeches by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Central Committee of the RCP, USA; Joanne Psihountas, a leading member of the Central Committee of the RCP; and A.M., a spokesperson for the RCP in Chicago. These were three of the many speeches delivered at these events. They have been edited for clarity and organized into a composite to eliminate some redundancy and to highlight sections of the speeches which complement each other. As a composite there are some changes in tense and person in the various sections which reflect the fact that these sections came from different speeches. Not all of this could be

eliminated without seriously weakening the impact of the original speeches. To assist the reader, the initials of the speaker from whose talk a particular section of this document is taken are indicated in brackets, at the start of each section.

While these speeches are just that, speeches, and were not intended to be thorough statements of the RCP's understanding of the woman question, important aspects of line regarding this very important question are gone into and developed in the speeches. It was felt that reprinting these sections would be useful at this time in promoting a deeper understanding of the woman question and would stimulate further discussion, struggle and activity around this question, which is so vital to making revolution.

Reprinted also in this pamphlet is a solidarity message that was received by the Revolutionary Communist Party from the League of Fighting Women of Iran. This message is not only inspiring to all those seeking to make revolution, but is also illuminating on the very topic of this pamphlet, "Break the Chains—Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution!"

Break the Chains!

Unleash the Fury of Women As a Mighty Force for Revolution!

[B.A.] Tonight we're celebrating International Women's Day, which is a revolutionary holiday of the international proletariat. It's not a holiday that belongs to the fine ladies or gentlemen of the bourgeoisie, no matter how much they're attempting today to appropriate it, as through their theft and armed robbery they take everything that is produced by the working people. International Women's Day was produced by the heroic struggle of working women in this country more than 70 years ago. The tradition of International Women's Day is a *revolutionary* tradition, a tradition of masses—masses of women joined by masses of men, especially from the working class—who all over the world are rising up to strike off all the chains that bind the working class as a whole and which degrade, humiliate and further enslave the masses of women in particular. And it is in this spirit and in this tradition that we are tonight celebrating International Women's Day—not in the spirit of the likes of Bella Abzug, Angela Davis and the other dinosaurs and troglodytes who tried to scar International Women's Day and create their own foul and abysmal tradition at a rally a few days ago [in the Bay Area]. It is not the carnival atmosphere which says, as was said yesterday at Golden Gate Park [in San Francisco], that equality for women, and the end of women's inferior position which this capitalist system creates and reinforces, lies in having women don a pig's uniform! We saw some of that equality in Washington, D.C., [in the demonstration January 29, 1979 against Teng Hsiao-ping's visit] where some of the pigs who attacked us were women. We know that the only heroic women were in the ranks of the march, righteously upholding revolution, striking a blow and making a real clear statement of what is real women's equality and what emancipation is actually all about, not only for themselves but for all the oppressed the

world over.

Our own Party has learned a great deal through the struggle that it has waged within its own ranks and within the ranks of the revolutionary movement as a whole over the past year and more against those whom we call the Mensheviks (because of their historic parentage in Russia during the time of Lenin); against those like these Mensheviks who would beg for only a few petty reforms and then even apologize for that; against those who would reduce the struggle, in particular with regard to the question of women, to one of acceptance of the position the bourgeoisie would cast them in and then ask for a few slight improvements in that position; and in general against those who would condemn the masses to eternal and perpetual slavery, oppression, humiliation and torment under the rule of capital; against those who would reduce the struggle of the masses to one to try to find a slight easing of the pain only to have it increase many times over in the long run. Through struggle against all these abominations in our own ranks and within the revolutionary movement in general, we have increased and deepened our understanding ten-fold of the importance of carrying on revolutionary work everyday and every way in this society, and in particular in relationship to the struggle for the emancipation of women—ending the centuries-old and even thousands-of-years-old degradation and subjugation of women—we have grasped more deeply how this is part and parcel of, is intimately and integrally bound up with, the ending of class society and all oppression and exploitation that the masses of people have suffered and endured ever since the beginning of class society, ever since society was divided into exploiters and oppressors on the one hand and the majority—the exploited and oppressed—on the other. And it is with this increased understanding and tenfold increased determination to wage revolutionary struggle around every question that we are taking up International Women's Day this year. It is in this spirit and with this deepened understanding that we raise this slogan that we see emblazoned on this banner, the slogan which has been chanted and repeatedly referred to this evening, the slogan, "Break the Chains—Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution!"

A little later on we will examine this fury and how different people and different classes view this fury—whether they welcome it or tremble in the face of it. But it is in this spirit that we are raising this slogan, and this slogan in turn reflects the deepened understanding we've gained of what the fight against the oppression of women is about and how it fits into the overall struggle to end this slavery and degradation the

masses of people of all nationalities, men and women, are subjected to under this barbarous system.

[J.P.] Karl Marx said, well over a hundred years ago, "Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment."

Every great proletarian revolutionary leader has pointed out the important and indispensable role of women in making *revolution*. But part of the very nature of the oppression of women—the role and position of women in class society—holds them back from their fullest participation. There are thousands of chains on women—economic, social, political and ideological—and the ideas of male supremacy are very widespread and deep-rooted, for the outlook of bourgeois society affects even those of the oppressed classes. Women have the social role of being the bearer of children and tender to man and household.

Now society is not so openly screaming so loudly "Woman keep in thy place," largely due to the impact of the women's movement of the late 60s (although the bourgeoisie still does quite a bit of such open screaming through the likes of Phyllis Schlafly and other such reactionary scum). But the reality of the situation is that overwhelmingly, even with more and more women working outside the home, the responsibility of tending children and household is the job of the woman and is supposed to be her center of attention, what she lives for, regardless of how many hours she puts into the factory or office. And of course this social role is one of the bourgeoisie's main "justifications" as to why women are concentrated in the lowest paying jobs, which is even more so for working women of the oppressed nationalities.

This household work wears you down even if you don't have another job—but not only is it drudgery, it is also very narrow and individualistic in character. Millions of women duplicating the same time-consuming tasks, wrestling with two-year-olds, cooking meals, doing laundry or what have you. "Women keep in thy place" may not be the ruling class' open slogan right now, but from the four corners of your apartment or house, to the messages of the "women's" magazines, to the soaps on TV to the hundred-and-one ring around the collar traumas, how white underwear should be, to be proud of your laundry and the thrill of squeezing soft toilet paper—the message is that women should be overwhelmingly concerned with the petty details of running a home and family.

There's also another aspect of "Woman keep in thy place" and that is her degradation as a sex object. While society in the

U.S. is largely beyond the stage of the literal buying and selling of wives or what was politely called fixed marriages that was the order of the day under feudalism (and hung on as a tradition long after people were gone from the land), the right to marry who you loved, which is an advance, brought with it another set of chains more in the form of "free market buying and selling." This, of course, takes its ugliest form in the ruling class, where marriages more often than not are nuptial business contracts (the most famous being the Onassis marriage, with the Marvin case vying for official recognition). But every woman who's been a teenager in this country (especially before the late '60s) remembers the hours wasted in front of the mirror, the dreams of hooking a wealthy man and escaping the misery of a hard life. And because of the overall nature of this class society—the economic realities and degradation the most oppressed sections of the people face—in many instances marrying who you love is made an impossibility.

Capitalist society has always been marked with decadence, but with the further decay of imperialism we see even more putrid decadence and the wholesale promotion of "free market" sex *without* love. Here I'm not talking about prostitution—which in and of itself is a stunning indictment of exploiting class society (nor am I on the other hand referring to sex based on love or at least mutual respect between a man and a woman whether they're married or not). What I am talking about is the outlook that all women, particularly young women, are at best baubles for men's enjoyment—or worse, pieces of meat. This crap permeates our society and affects women whether they willingly participate in this "free market" or not. I'm talking about how this is promoted in every propaganda form the bourgeoisie has control of, from TV to magazines to movies—selling everything from disco music to toothpaste with sex—let alone the billion dollar pornography industry. And the bourgeoisie has the nerve to hypocritically gasp in shock at the recent reports that rape is the fastest growing violent crime in major cities like Detroit!

If they're not already tied into so-called domestic bliss, women are supposed to be preoccupied with the great and "lofty" struggle to look sexy and appealing to men. And even if you are tied down to the tasks of running a household, you're supposed to emerge, like in the Aviance commercial, after a hard day with the mop bucket (which usually follows at least eight hours on the job) fitting competition for Farrah Fawcett... of course you can accomplish all this and still have time for some very "fulfilling" (if irrelevant!) extracurricular activities, if you just take Geritol!

Joking aside, most women in the working class and among the oppressed masses generally, after serving some time trying to implement these illusions as an adolescent, see through the contradictions in these models. Escape is often found in looking for greener pastures through divorce, Harlequin romance novels or other avenues. And after some time on a physically exerting job, or after having a few kids, any aspirations to look like Sophia Loren or Diahann Carroll fade into the sunset. But the outlook that woman's role is principally defined by her position as property of man and tender of children and household runs much deeper than the silly domestic idiocy of TV commercials or ridiculous leisure class models we're supposed to strive for.

The Family

Probably one of the most deep-going outlooks in our society that women are supposed to keep well into great-grandmotherhood, is that everything is for *my* family, to protect *my* family, to sacrifice for *my* family, family first and foremost. We must break with this illusion, and it *is* an illusion, that the individual's will to work for the good of and the protection of the family, are stronger than the forces of society.

A friend of mine had an argument with her mother when she and her husband went to the demonstration against Teng Hsiao-ping's visit. Her mother said it was irresponsible that she and her husband go to such a demonstration where the stakes were so high, because they had a responsibility to their children. My friend and her mother had a shouting match. My friend tried to point out that imperialism and its war moves were not so healthy for her baby and that it was ridiculous to think that diligently being with her children every day of their lives was going to make that much of a difference in the short or long run.

[A.M.] The first time that women's main responsibility should be to her family ever was challenged in my mind was during the civil rights movement, which I really knew little about at the time. I must have been in high school, but I didn't pay any attention to what was going on in the world. Still I'll never forget how upset one of my teachers was one day, he was ranting and raving, which he never did, about this woman, and this hit me so hard. I still remember her name, Viola Liuzzo. A woman from the north (Detroit) who was killed because of her civil rights activities in the South. And I remember my father saying, "What the hell was that woman, a mother with little

kids at home, doing down there. She had no business doing that. If she had stayed home where she belonged, that never would have happened." And I thought to myself, what would make a woman leave her kids to go all the way down there and risk her life?! It sure must have been something important. And in fact, it *was* important! What the bourgeoisie was doing with this stuff (which I'm sure my father was just repeating) was to say "Get back to where you belong."

These bloodsuckers are just a bunch of hypocrites. They don't give a damn about our kids or anybody else's. They're just trying to prevent us from overthrowing *them*. Those low-life dogs who killed that little 11-month-old baby in Texas because they refused to give him medical treatment in the emergency room without insurance (and that goes on every-day). These dogs whose decadent society promotes child pornography and child prostitution. These vampires whose society takes these little babies and turns them into junkies and vandals and rape victims and even suicide victims by 12-years old.

Overthrowing Capitalism Must Be Our First Concern

[J.P.] Despite our diligent parental care, children are going to live in this dog-eat-dog system until it's overthrown. They are going to be raised to be future exploited laborers for the bourgeoisie, until capitalism is overthrown. They will be possible victims of dope and other degeneracy until it's overthrown. And they are going to be potential cannonfodder for these bloodsuckers, until capitalism is overthrown. Youth will be subject to police terror, especially if they are oppressed minorities, until capitalism is overthrown, and even parents will be subject to not being able to sell their labor power when it's unprofitable for the capitalists, until capitalism is overthrown. It's ridiculous to think that individual attention to one's family is going to change the course of these things one iota. No Phyllis Schlafly, *Women's Day* magazine's brilliant expositions on stretching the shrinking dollar to feed a family, nor Reverend Jesse Jackson's preachings can alter this reality.

Not only is this individualistic and narrow view toward the family—"Every family for itself"—a cruel diversion that sets women's and often men's sights low. It can be the basis of very conservative and even downright reactionary crap that divides the working class and assists the bourgeoisie in their oppression and rule. For example, it's not unusual to hear a backward white working class man or woman justify their support for some reactionary activity like keeping Blacks out of the

neighborhoods or schools on the basis that he or she is just looking out to protect "my family." This reactionary national chauvinism and vicious pragmatism refuses to look at what really is going on in the world, but instead cops for what these people think will be, in the most immediate and narrow sense, the way to "protect their own," even if it means assisting the ruling class in oppressing other people.

And even in the ranks of revolutionaries it's not that infrequent to hear "taking care of my family" as the reason someone is backing off the revolutionary road. But what makes our own children any more precious than any other children in this country or for that matter in the world? Sure we love our own children—but it's the children of the world who are a joy to the proletariat—who are going to continue the struggle to change this world after us. Are we making a better world for only our own children? Or is our aim to lift off the fetters of oppression and exploitation for all mankind! If our orientation is principally, or deviates toward, "a better life for *my* child" then we are no different in outlook from the bourgeoisie, whose world is cut up into fragmented, competing units. I think we can draw inspiration on this question from an elderly Iranian woman who lost her only two sons in the revolutionary struggle and was asked if she had any regrets. And she replied something like, "The only regret I have is that I am too old to bear any more children to fight and if necessary die in the struggle to rid our people of the reactionary Shah."

This ideological chain of pouring out all one's energy, time and emotion in what in reality is a hopeless cause—protecting the individual family from capitalism's crushing might—is one of the main fetters holding back the fullest participation of women. It stems from the very framework of bourgeois society that defines the narrow parameters of women's principal tasks. But this chain—and the others I've mentioned—can and historically have been broken with.

Women going to work has helped break these narrow confines, but it is the overall struggle of the oppressed that has drawn women into the ferment of struggle. "*Women's place*," especially the women of the oppressed classes and groups in society, should be fighting to change the world, to make revolution!

Through the centuries the oppressed have exposed the lie that it is biology, god's will or maternal instinct that has dictated the position of women, and not the framework of class society. Women are half the population—and as was said in revolutionary China, they can hold up half the sky and, like the men of the oppressed classes, have a tremendous amount of

anger and determination to fight against the way things are under capitalism, not just or even mainly around their own oppression, but to end the whole damn sick mess.

Material Basis for the Oppression of Women

[B.A.] Why is it that women in particular are forced under the present system to bear the greatest burden of trying to hold the family together and to have the most direct responsibility for seeing that the children are fed and clothed and their basic necessities are met? Why is it in fact that women are put in a position, even more so than men, let's be honest about it, where the marriages are miserable and, even where the right of divorce is formally granted, they are often times forced—if not physically then through intimidation or through economic compulsion to remain in those kinds of relationships which have become miserable. Let's face it, fellows out there, it's not that we're really all that irresistible. There's something much more fundamental going on out here. We've got to just get rid of, put aside and put down, all these old bullshit ideas about what it is that makes a person have some pride, in particular what it is that makes a man be a man—and how he's not really supposed to be a man unless he's getting over on some lady. We've just got to put all that crap in the garbage can and look at society the way it really is. Let's look at the struggle we got to wage to get rid of every form of oppression and degradation of any section of the people.

With the first development of private property and together with it the system of slavery in ancient times, there arose a need for people to know specifically who their heirs were, who their children were, in order to pass on to them the private property, including their slaves, that was owned by a small group of people. And from that time the position of woman has been one of being subordinate to a man in the household and in society. Within the division of labor in society as a whole, owing to biological functions which could not be overcome in those ancient times, the women would be the ones to tend to the homes, because after all they were the ones who had to and did have the children. This original division of labor arose in primitive society—communal society before there arose slavery, before there was even an abundance with which it would make sense to have slaves working to produce. This original division of labor was between the man who went out and procured the livelihood and the woman who stayed home and tended the fires, literally, and took care of the children and had the children.

But with the emergence of private property and the taking of slaves to produce, this division of labor turned from merely that into one of subjugation of women, to where their position became an inferior one; to where all the wealth, cattle, slaves, land, produce, etc. belonged to the man, who was the one who was directly involved, either through his own production or increasingly through driving slaves, in the production of this surplus. And down through the different forms of class society that have emerged and successively replaced each other—from slavery to the feudal system of peasant-serfs and landlords, down to today's capitalist system—this division of labor has meant that women have been kept in a subordinate position, forced to be responsible for the tending of the household and degraded and crushed with the grinding individual, isolated (and let's face it) the not very uplifting work of keeping the house in order.

Society Must Advance to Communism

Today when capitalism is on its last legs, when we can see on the horizon a new and far higher system and the bright future beginning to dawn for people in their great majority in society—the socialist system and beyond it the communist system, where classes and the exploitation and oppression or the subjugation of any section of society will be finally eliminated—against this, the oppression of women and the need to end it and to smash it as part of smashing the capitalist system altogether stands out all the more sharply. But we cannot wait until the entire material foundation of the oppression and subordination of women has been eliminated. We cannot sit around and wait for the advance to communism for the oppression of women to be “automatically” eradicated—or there will be no advance to the socialist revolution and ultimately to communism. There will be no such advance except through the most determined struggle against the capitalist system and its oppression of the people on every front, and a most important front within that is the oppression of women.

This is a great task that history has presented the proletariat, the first class in history which in rising up and overthrowing its own oppressors and exploiters is in a position to and must make thoroughgoing revolution—not to replace an old system of exploitation and oppression of the people with a new one, but to advance and continue the revolution until it has uprooted every basis for oppression, for the exploitation of the people and for the division of society into classes. And we

can say that the period of history of people on the earth in which society has been divided into classes, and in which together with that women have been subordinated and oppressed, that this period is a very brief one indeed—only a few thousand years. This is very short compared to the long period of primitive society, primitive classless society, before that. And it pales in significance compared to the period that lies ahead with the abolition of class society, with the abolition, together with that, of the oppression of women, and with the opening up of the new dawn of communism, when men and women together, people throughout the world, will march together to consciously struggle—yes, struggle—but consciously take up the task of transforming and remaking the world.

But as I said, we cannot simply wait for the advent of communism, we cannot wait for this to be handed to us as a gift by history. It is up to the proletariat and its party in particular to consciously educate the masses of people to their interests and lead them in making revolution—and as a crucial part of this to take up the fight against every manifestation of the oppression of the people as a whole, and in particular the oppression of women.

And we must recognize very clearly that our aim is not in fact to go backwards. Ours is not the aim simply to eliminate classes, nor will it be the result of our struggle to go back to the kind of primitive condition that existed more than 5,000 years ago when classes were first arising, a condition which because of the backwardness of production and what people could do in confrontation with nature was bound to give rise to class divisions, was bound to give rise to a situation where there were slaves and slave masters, the exploited and those exploiting them, and was bound to give rise to the subordination of women. Look at it even in terms of what society is now capable of doing. Not only have the productive forces of society, the tools and instruments we use, tremendously advanced in the past several thousand or even the past several hundred years, but even in the specific realm of women and the family we see tremendous advances which certain so-called reformers and even self-proclaimed communists are trembling at the sight of, but which genuine communists and more and more of the masses of people welcome.

And I'm talking in particular about the steps being made, which—horror of horrors!—will separate the creation of children from the human body. This is supposed to be a terrible thing. Well, I've taken a survey among women I know that have been pregnant and they don't think it's so goddamn terri-

ble. What the hell's so terrible about the fact that we can advance to the point where a person doesn't have to go around swollen up for 9 months? What's so terrible about eliminating that burden and even certain biological differences will be done away with—now I'm not saying they're all going to be eliminated, don't get me wrong—but those that have a social role and character and which still mark the period in which the division of labor can be turned into a position of subordination.

What is so terrible, and in fact why isn't it fine, that society will be able fully and consciously under the rule of the working class to do this, in a progressive and revolutionary way to break down even further these divisions? Because we are not striving to go backwards and re-create primitive conditions. No! We are building on the progress that has been made through thousands of years of people sweating and groaning under the various backward conditions and the divisions of society into classes. We are building on it, but we're going forward to a qualitatively new and higher form of society, not back to primitive communalism, but to a whole new dawn, to communism, where for the first time, there will not only be actual equality between men and women but no longer any basis for that equality to be replaced by the subjugation of women.

And as I've stressed several times, while this is our goal and it's a lofty one and one we must keep forever in front of us and forever the bright light guiding us, at the same time we must recognize that at every stage we must do everything we can to push the revolution forward, to advance the most at each point.

Women in the Revolutionary Struggle

[A.M.] There's an old saying that "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." We say hell is nothing compared to the fury of women in the revolutionary struggle.

The bourgeoisie tells us that women should be passive creatures—concerned only with their family and themselves, too addlebrained to know or care about the world. Or at best, they promote self-centered career women concerned only with their own advancement. Is that the picture you got of the women revolutionaries in Washington, D.C., rage burning in their hearts against the two-bit hustler Teng Hsiao-ping? No, they, like their men comrades, were motivated by fierce determination to expose that revisionist dog to the world, to expose the war moves of the U.S. imperialists and their new junior partner. Fists held high, carrying the Red Book of Mao Tsetung—how the bourgeoisie cringes at such a sight! Revolu-

tionary women, smashing all the bourgeois notions about what a respectable woman should be. To the bourgeoisie nothing could cause more revulsion—how “unladylike,” how improper, how traitorous to the revered image of womanhood. How *unslavelike* is what they really mean.

To the proletariat what a glorious sight! Ranks filled with women and men together, full of revolutionary spirit and determination to overthrow the oppressor, willing to overcome all obstacles and difficulties thrown in their way by the putrid society they live in.

This is what it means to unleash the fury of women as a force for revolution. . . .

. . . What has powerfully blown away a lot of the bourgeois notions about women is the struggle in Iran. Some of the people here were at the conference on Iran held by the ISA a couple of weeks ago. They showed two very inspiring movies about the struggle there. In one was a huge demonstration of, I think, at least one million people. One contingent was made up of women. These women had on veils and these long dresses.

What was inspiring to see was that, despite all the restrictions put on these women about staying in the kitchen and covering their face, these women had come out to demand “Death to the Shah,” in defiance of martial law, the guns of the military and thousands of years of tradition that said women don’t do things like this.

But what was even more inspiring was the march of over 100,000 (and that’s just what the U.S. press says) women on International Women’s Day with clenched fists and bare heads held high—saying we’re carrying the revolutionary fight forward.

What a glorious sight. Hell hath no fury like women revolutionaries in struggle against the enemy.

One more picture from Iran which says more than a thousand words is the picture that’s in the *Revolutionary Worker* of a woman loading a howitzer. No veil for her, she wears a helmet. And it’s not a mop in her arms but a gun. And the men comrades who are loading the gun with her look very proud and very strong.

This is what we’re talking about when we say, “Break the Chains—Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution!”

Developments Toward Revolution

[B.A.] We have raised another slogan in the face of the situation today, we’ve raised it in Washington, D.C., and we con-

tinue to raise it in the face of the tremendous development toward revolution as exemplified by the heroic Iranian people—and take note, fellow workers and oppressed people, and take note bourgeoisie: Iran was supposed to be a stronghold of the imperialists. It wasn’t supposed to be even a weak link of the imperialists. Take note, Iran was a “stronghold”—“There won’t be a revolution in Iran. We know that at least that one’s secure for a while,” chortled the rulers of this country, only a short time, only a year, ago. We know there are differences between the conditions in Iran and here. But take note and take a lesson. So we raised a slogan in the face of developments toward revolution and of the increasing developments toward world war that can be seen through the actions of the two superpowers especially—in the jockeying, maneuvering and fighting through proxies and members of their blocs which is going on in the Middle East, in southeast Asia, in Europe and other parts of the world, in fact all parts of the world. We see the gathering storms and earth-pounding developments that are accelerating. We can hear the drums of another war, but we can also hear the tremendous beat of the revolutionary struggle gathering not only in Iran but in other places. And the bourgeoisie is attempting more and more to say, “forget all that. That stuff was all right in the ’60s but it’s over now.” And what we’ve raised is—“If you thought the ’60s was heavy, check out the ’80s. If you liked the ’60s, you’ll love the ’80s, ’cuz we’re really going to try to go all the way this time.”

And what that means is we’re going to build on the strengths of the ’60s, but we don’t want to go back, any more than we want to go back in general, back to primitive communalism. No, we want to go forward to communism. We don’t want to go back and repeat the ’60s—that would be impossible anyway. We want to go forward—always forward. What we want to build on and learn from and advance from is the positive, revolutionary spirit and the inspiring developments and contributions of that period, including the struggle against the oppression of women and the growing involvement of women in the overall revolutionary movement. But we also want to learn from and overcome the ways in which the outlook of our class, the proletariat, was not fully represented in all those various movements and how they were not united on the basis of recognizing a common enemy and uniting around the banner of the class that can lead them forward to make revolution, the proletariat.

In particular, we know that there has been a most significant development and advance over the ’60s which must be cherish-

ed, upheld, and more than that, built and built upon—and that is the creation of a genuine vanguard party of the revolution, the vanguard party of the proletariat in this country and the vanguard of the proletarian revolution, which is determined to build on the lessons of the '60s, to bring forward the advanced fighters and to rally the broad masses of people, going into their midst exposing the system, uniting with them but leading them forward and as a crucial part of this bringing forward the advanced fighters from among the women and enabling them to take their rightful place in the front ranks of the revolution, bringing the ranks of women and men along together.

The Bourgeoisie on the Woman Question

[J.P.] While the women's movement of the '60s and early '70s had some important impact in the sphere of breaking down some of the backward ideas in U.S. society toward women, within that movement, even among its most revolutionary sections, besides different male chauvinist tendencies there developed a marked tendency toward feminism—isolating the woman question and raising it above the question of revolution. And in its less revolutionary sections there were tendencies toward seeing men, and not capitalism, as the source of women's oppression and, part and parcel of that, reformism. Today, what was a mass movement composed largely of radicalized student women is in the main dominated by spokeswomen for the bourgeoisie like Bella Abzug. There are progressive forces in this movement that we should try to unite with and bring under the influence of a proletarian revolutionary line, but the current dominant line can be characterized as "what's wrong with this system is that it has some flaws—the inequality of women is one of these flaws—and we need to go and pressure Congress to pass laws and also work to get women politicians (like us) more seats in Congress or other important government positions." Their main focus of attention is the Equal Rights Amendment, the ERA, stating that the hope of the women of America lies in this Constitutional amendment. At the same time the bourgeoisie is tirelessly promoting reactionaries such as Phyllis Schlafly as a pole of "motherhood against the ERA."

We have to see this situation for what it is—dual tactics on the part of the bourgeoisie—actively trying to get progressive-minded women and men to bank their hopes on the idea that such a bill will make some real changes in society and at the same time building up a right wing to reinforce backward

ideology. In the meantime, the real root, the source of the misery of women, their inequality, domestic servitude, and degradation—the capitalist system—gets off scot free. Already—*on paper*—especially with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, there is much "formal" equality for women. This formal equality has not changed the reality of super-exploitation and it does not change the fact that it is not profitable, nor does it fit into the narrow production and social relations of capitalism to liberate the masses of women from domestic drudgery. And even since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, the degradation of women as sex objects has skyrocketed.

What gains that have been made, such as the opening up of some jobs for women, particularly for the more privileged strata, the right to abortion, even the changes in dress codes in the high schools, were a by-product of the struggle of the '60s—and not just the struggle around women's rights. They were not a product of a piece of legislation or even a Constitutional amendment. On the contrary, the legislation was a by-product of the struggle. And even with the Civil Rights Act, with the crisis of imperialism intensifying, some of the few small gains from the 60s—for example around enrollment of minorities and women in medical schools—are being rapidly taken away. For two hundred years our rulers have been talking about making a few changes here and a few changes there that will make everything better. They even sent down, not one, but two contemporary "messiahs"—Roosevelt and Kennedy—to implement these changes. . . . But lo and behold, the anarchy, oppression, and exploitation of capitalism has not been altered one fundamental iota.

Women—A Mighty Force in Overthrowing Capitalism

[B.A.] . . . And I'd like to speak to one of the ways that the bourgeoisie is trying to play both sides of the street, and that is around the question of women in the military. "How horrible!" say the Phyllis Schlaflys and others. "Making women not only put on uniforms, that might be alright, but taking up guns and fighting in the war." And of course the bourgeoisie also has another answer, "Oh, it's fine, let women be cannon fodder as well as men, that's true equality." But we say, as Lenin said more than 60 years ago, about the youth in general and about women in particular: go ahead, bourgeoisie, train them in military techniques, arm them with your most advanced weapons, teach them how to shoot, teach them all the military knowledge that you can possibly teach them; and we,

the proletariat, men and women alike, we'll teach them the one thing you never can—who their real enemy is and where and how to use those weapons to do the real thing that has to be done—to make revolution to change the world entirely.

And today we can see more and more that this capitalist system is historically obsolete, that it's headed for extinction, that it's long since outlived any historic usefulness, and indeed it becomes clearer every day that its functioning is like a backed-up sewer spewing forth crap and crud all over the society and drenching and bathing us in this crap and crud every day. And it's against all this stinking filth that they call the greatest country in the world and the greatest possible system that the hatred of women as well as of men is burning. And of course the bourgeoisie, as much as it tries to paint the picture; as much as those who rule over us try to drum into our minds, that the masses of people in general and women in particular can play no positive role, can have nothing to say and especially nothing to do about all this; as much as they preach that there can be no way to bring about change and especially that the masses cannot sweep away at its foundation the capitalist system which gives rise to and backs up like a sewer spewing forth all of this; as much as they try to convince the masses of this, still in their own perverted and twisted way the bourgeoisie fears the masses of people. They fear that another nightmare (for them!) like happened in Iran can happen yet again in another stronghold of theirs and even in their own homeland. Much as they don't understand the masses of people and never can really or fully understand the masses of people, they can sense, like an historically obsolete beast headed for extinction, they can sense the hunter tracking them down.

As Mao Tsetung once so powerfully put it, they are like people who are frightened at the mere rustle of leaves in the wind. The mere sign of rebellion, of people standing up and determining not to be crushed and broken into slaves but to be free and rise up and cast off this burden of oppression, sends the bourgeoisie into a frenzy. Look at Houston, Texas. The lengths that the bourgeoisie is willing to go to, the degree that it is willing to drop its so-called "fair and impartial" procedures, and the degree to which it is willing to let drop its tattered "democratic" mask, indicates the fear that these slave-drivers of capitalism have in their hearts for the slightest sign of rebellion. And whenever the slaves become restless and begin to rise up and demand to live like people and no longer to live like slaves, as much as the capitalists encourage backward tendencies, as much as they bring to the fore their own spokesmen and spokeswomen, they still fear the rumbling and

the rustling and the gathering of discontent and anger among the masses.

Unite with and Lead the Struggle against Women's Oppression

They certainly fear the masses in this country, and they are paying particular attention and have since the upsurge of struggle against women's oppression in the 1960s and early '70s, to promoting the most backward tendencies, to promoting the most reformist schemes, the most utopian and unworkable notions of how women's emancipation and equality can be brought about. They're working overtime to promote their spokeswomen—from the emptyheaded people like Rosalynn Carter to the loudmouths like Bella Abzug—and it should be stated that dialectics teaches us that there is not necessarily a contradiction between an empty head and a loud mouth. The capitalists are working overtime to promote these people and their own program, the program of a decadent and increasingly desperate ruling class, which at most grants a few tokens and the shows and varnish of equality in the upper reaches of society, in the boardrooms and in the military circles (and not even there fully), while the position of the masses of women is one of being further subjugated and oppressed and degraded by the functioning of this system and its rotting decay. And this makes it all the more important that the working class—the proletariat, the people in this society who are truly propertyless, who own no means to live except our ability to work—who really and truly and in fact (no matter how much they mock it, they will learn and they will be taught not to mock it!) have nothing to lose but our chains, it is of the utmost importance that the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard party, the Revolutionary Communist Party, stand at the forefront and provide concrete leadership and direction to this struggle, as well as all others, give leadership and direction to the struggle of the masses of women and others against their actual inequality, against the thousand and one ways in which they are broken and degraded by the system. And more than that it is essential that our Party give leadership and direction and conscious guidance to the masses of women together with the masses of men in the all-around struggle against this system, uniting all who can be united under the leadership of the working class and its party, in order to bring this bloodsucking system down once and for all.

We have deepened our understanding through the struggle against that reformist and capitulation-minded cancer in our own ranks—those Mensheviks, sniveling sycophants of this

system—that we cannot stand aside wherever the people are rising up against oppression. Of course we understand there will be erroneous ideas, just as there are even in our own ranks and just as there always are in the ranks of people first awakening and arising in struggle against oppression. Naturally, there will be mistaken ideas and erroneous ideas, reactionary or at least backward tendencies and influences, and the bourgeoisie will everywhere attempt to gain control and misdirect these struggles. But this is not a reason and must not be a reason for the class-conscious forces of the revolutionary class, the proletariat and its Party, to stand aside from, and to chastise and wag its finger and to criticize from the side, the struggle of any section of the people—and tonight in particular we are speaking of the struggle of women, a most important struggle in this society. No! It is all the more reason for the class-conscious forces of the proletariat, led by the vanguard Party, to plunge into the ranks of the struggling masses wherever they rise up against their oppression, to carry on all-around exposure of this system to lay bare the actual foundation and roots of the oppression people are striking back against and to develop that spontaneous outrage and outpouring of struggle into a conscious battle, united with all the various forces and strains of struggle to form the powerful battering ram that can knock and shatter this system apart and replace it with the rule of the working class and advance through socialism to classless society, communism, and actually fully begin human history for the first time in the history of the world.

We have deepened our understanding, and we're not ashamed to openly and publicly say that our Party must criticize itself for failing to fully unite with and at the same time give leadership to all of the various struggles of the masses of people, and in particular to the struggle of women against the thousand and one ways in which they are oppressed and in their rising determination to take up struggle alongside of men, equally in the front ranks against the capitalist system and all of its vicious crimes against the people here and internationally. We must not only recognize this shortcoming on the part of our Party, we must educate the broad ranks of the masses, and in particular we've got some ideological work to do among the men (which I want to speak to in a second) as well as carrying on ideological struggle among the ranks of women in order that our Party can play its true vanguard role.

Ideological Struggle

And that takes me to the next question I want to speak

to—the question of ideological struggle. We've talked about, or touched upon the material and social conditions that form the basis of the oppression of women and the historical tasks before the working class in eliminating this oppression and how it's linked with the overall historical mission of the working class. But here, briefly, I want to touch upon the ideological questions that arise in connection with this, particularly among men.

Now I don't know all about it, but it was reported to me that in one city comrades and others working on International Women's Day made up a T-shirt with the slogan "Break the Chains—Unleash the Fury of Women as a Mighty Force for Revolution." And we found, at least in one place, and I'm sure it wasn't unique there, that one of the most controversial things that anybody could have done was to wear that t-shirt to work. Apparently some guys, even in the Party as well as others, didn't want to go in and be called a "faggot" and everything else. And many people at work, including guys who had advanced positions on many other questions, took a backward line on this. And we know that the indoctrination of the masses socially, culturally and in other ways includes a heavy dose of the idea that women's place, if it's put politely, is in the home (and if it's put impolitely I'll leave it to your understanding of what's said). We know that this is drummed into the masses of people, and this is one of the sharpest contradictions that hits literally right at home—this division between men and women that has its roots in the basic social division in society as a whole.

There has to be ideological struggle. How can we go out and educate the masses of people to the historic mission of their class, the proletariat; how can we talk about abolishing all exploitation, all oppression of the masses of people; how can we talk about sweeping away every remnant in which one section of society rides upon and lives parasitically off another; how can we talk about sweeping into the garbage bin all of the inequalities left over from capitalism—except one? How can we talk about doing all that and yet at the same time leave intact or take a liberal attitude toward one of the most important cornerstones of the foundations of capitalism—the oppression of women and the whole ideology of male superiority and the degradation of women that goes hand-in-hand with it and must go hand-in-hand with it? There is no way we can do this.

I want to tell you a story. A comrade worked in a particular plant, and through the struggle that's been waged in our ranks against this Menshevism and its influence which I've referred to, he'd begun to carry out revolutionary agitation in an all-

around way among his fellow workers. Things were developing, but they were developing unevenly, and one day one worker who's fairly advanced came to him with a so-called "joke"—a petition which he was supposed to sign, along with others, for the workers to take up money and go hire a prostitute for one of the other workers at the plant who was supposed to be lackluster in the area of sexual relations with women. (I'm putting it politely.) And when this "petition" came by the comrade, he was disgusted and he didn't sign it, but he was kind of liberal and he let it go until he noticed that someone he had been involving in the work around Moody Park, a guy who had taken a very advanced position struggling with other people, and someone who buys the *Revolutionary Worker* consistently, had signed his name on the "petition."

So this comrade mustered up his ideological understanding and went up to the guy and said, "Listen, man, either take your name off of that or else I ain't selling you no more *Revolutionary Workers* in this plant, 'cause there ain't nobody buying *Revolutionary Workers* signing reactionary crap like that." And this led to a lot of struggle, and the comrade got a number of brothers in that plant to take their names off that "petition." Because he made it clear that this is not a joke, this is aiding the people that we're fighting against, the people we have to overthrow. Even if it's in a joking form it's just another way that their reactionary ideology and poison that they spread is being bred and reinforced among the masses of people and we've got to go straight up against this.

No More Tradition's Chains Shall Bind Us

[B.A.] The revolutionary proletariat in this country needs the fullest participation of all the oppressed. "No more tradition's chains shall bind us" is how the *Internationale* goes, and this should be our outlook too. The masses of women who are awakening to political life today and the millions more who will enter the political arena, the arena of class struggle, need to have their energies and concentrations channeled away from domestic drudgery and other traditional tasks and channeled toward our revolutionary tasks.

There are some programmatic steps we can take today that can help make this a reality. We need to combat liberalism in the revolutionary ranks that has people tailing behind or even joining in with our fellow workers around backward crap around the woman question so that we can be accepted as "one of the guys" (This applies mainly to men, but women can fall

into this too!) Of course this crap is a contradiction among the people and should be handled that way—but blindly going along with it fosters age-old divisions in the working class, corrupts the proletariat's ranks and holds back the full participation of women.

We need to pay more attention in our agitation and propaganda to the political and ideological questions that hold back or stand in the way of women participating in the struggle. We need to do more exposure around the oppression of women and to unite with the masses in progressive struggles around this question, and we also need to take whatever practical steps we can to make it possible for women, especially those with young children, to participate as fully as possible in the proletariat's revolutionary activities.

These steps are small, but are nonetheless important ones, aimed at bringing forward the masses of women into the overall political struggle to end the tyranny of this capitalist system. Until class society is overthrown, the chains on the masses of women cannot be totally eliminated—but they will be weakened tremendously as we build up our mighty movement to overthrow this system that has not only caused tremendous suffering for the masses of this country, but the world over. We will overthrow these bloodsuckers and break through their shackles. The working class will liberate the productive forces from these dinosaurs and the absurdity will no longer exist of gigantic socialized production controlled, fettered and strangled by individual ownership—where society can send people to the moon but tells each family to scrape and fend for itself. Gone will be a society of untold waste of the physical and mental activities and even the lives of the masses of people in the capitalists' endless drive for profit and in their wars over who shall rule the roost and plunder the most.

Let's cast away the silly illusions, phony hopes and ridiculous models that our rulers give us. Getting "into" soap operas, reading tons of books on how to raise a good child or even burying our heads in some textbooks at a university to try to get ahead in this rat race—none of this is going to change the course of what's going on in the world: the inevitable clash of reactionary decadent war-mongering capitalism with the most revolutionary class the world has ever seen—the proletariat. Let us join this struggle and this struggle alone—pouring our energies into the fight, the work and the study that will allow the working class to emancipate itself and all humanity.

**Break the Chains – Unleash the Fury of Women as a
Mighty Force for Revolution!**

Message of Solidarity with RCP,USA from Iranian League of Fighting Women

Comrades:

Please convey our warmest revolutionary greetings to the heroic working class and especially the millions of oppressed women of the U.S.A.

It is with the greatest sense of pride that we the League of Fighting Women of Iran, speaking for the exploited and oppressed women of Iran, are able for the first time in over three decades to express to you and through you to the fraternal working class people of America our unwavering solidarity with you in our common fight against the common enemy.

It is only through our steeled unity that we can help bring about the complete overthrow of imperialism and reaction and thus free all mankind. It is only in the course of this struggle that we shall be able to carry out the revolutionary fight to win real and final emancipation for women all over the world. In this struggle we shall never forget the great contributions of the American working class and progressive women, whose valiant struggles have always been a source of inspiration to our people. It is to the determined fight for the emancipation of women that March 8th, International Women's Day, is dedicated.

Comrades, our valiant people, the courageous masses of workers, peasants, students, women and progressive clergy and patriotic businessmen, and revolutionary soldiers, have scored brilliant successes in their long fight to free themselves. We are sure it won't come as news to you that during the last year and a half the people of Iran gave close to 100,000 lives to win independence and democracy and that with the valuable support that we were able to receive from the people worldwide we were finally able to overthrow the monarcho-fascist regime of the Shah and its U.S. imperialist masters.

The world should know that throughout the decades of struggle by the bold people of Iran, our women stood shoulder-

to-shoulder with the revolutionary men of our country and fought heroically in the front ranks to achieve the great aims of our people. Overcoming all political, social and traditional barriers, we withstood the long imprisonment and vicious torture, firing squads and wholesale slaughter, in complete unity with all the oppressed people of Iran who finally took up arms to smash our enemy, and now are keeping to the orientation in helping to consolidate the great achievements of our movement and to deepen the democratic revolution. We are continuing the fight to eradicate the remnants of feudalism and imperialist social relations that still weigh heavily on our shoulders. In unity with our oppressed masses, we are taking the lead to free our women from these two reactionary forces that act as the main pillars of all that is antiquated and reactionary.

Needless to say some forces within our movement are still clinging to backward ideas and due to their narrow class interests adhere to the positions which only help to keep us down. By offering us special positions strongly resembling feudal ties, these forces are only demonstrating their vacillating nature and their inability to lead our people to complete victory. We have no doubt that through a resolute struggle against these backward and sometimes reactionary tendencies, we will be able to win to our side those who are honest but have not yet grasped the essence of our revolutionary cause and to isolate and crush those who despite all our patient efforts still continue to stand in the way of our total emancipation.

There is also a completely different trend that has attempted to infiltrate our ranks. We are speaking of course of feminism. This reactionary imperialist trend that is now being propagated by the Iranian version of the SWP [Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party—ed.] has imported for its cause the feminist mercenary Kate Millett, who is nothing but a thinly disguised tool of the remnants of the reactionary ruling classes of Iran. This trend which attempts to pit men against women in the abstract and which negates the historical necessity for women to seek their emancipation in the context of a united struggle of all oppressed social classes and strata, to bring about the revolutionary transformation of the society as a whole, serves only to disunite the ranks of revolution and to allow the reactionaries and imperialists to elevate the contradictions among the people to an antagonistic level and carry out their worn-out policy of divide and conquer. The League of Fighting Women will resolutely beat back these trends at every step of the way while delivering its main blow where it

should, at imperialism and reaction.

Comrades, you can rest assured that we did not travel this long and tortuous road only to stop halfway. Quite the contrary. One could say we have only just begun. Let all imperialists and reactionaries be warned that the Shah and his boss Carter were mere obstacles for the bright future of men and women alike. After they are finally swept away there still remains the lofty aim of building an Iran free from all exploiters and oppressors. Our country up to now has been a bastion of reaction. It needs to and it will become a staunch bulwark of revolution, with the unwavering support of oppressed people of the world, men and women alike.

Finally, comrades, allow us to once again openly declare our deep admiration of your heroism and ever deepening solidarity with your sacred cause. We hope you will forgive us for not being able to send a representative to your festivities. We hope to remedy this situation in the future.

Long live the Iranian revolution! Long live the great solidarity between the Iranian and American people! Death to imperialism! Death to reaction! Women of the world in unity with all the oppressed rise up in revolt!

*League of Fighting Women of Iran
On the occasion of
International Women's Day, 1979*

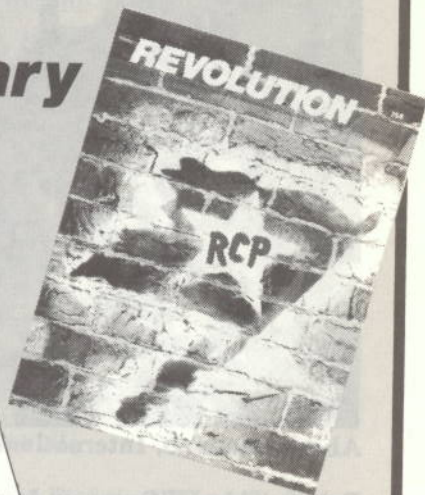
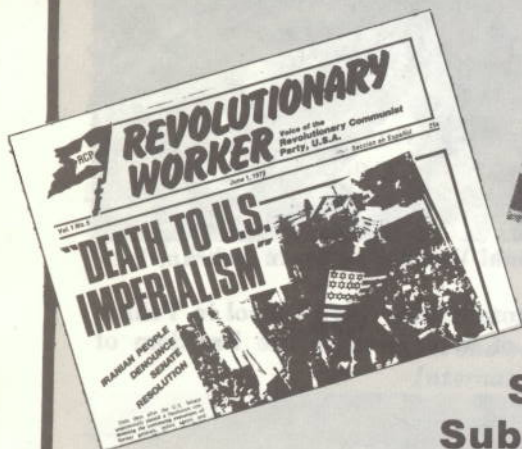


Above: March 8, International Women's Day in Tehran, Iran

Below: This IWD poster from a girls' high school in Tehran reads: "For the Freedom of Women—For the Freedom of Society."



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