


# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League  X-523

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**Race, Sex,  
Class:**

**Black  
Women  
Against  
Triple  
Oppression**

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# Race, Sex, Class Black Women Against Triple Oppression

Despite the triple oppression which black working women face in racist, sexist, capitalist America, they have never been attracted in significant numbers to the "women's liberation movement." This in itself is not surprising; the petty-bourgeois feminism which dominates the "movement" has very little to offer working women—black or white—and has had as little success in recruiting poor white women as poor black ones. Equal rights for working women under capitalism, while vigorously fought for by communists, promise no more than the "right" to be *equally exploited* instead of *superexploited*; to be merely a slave instead of "the slave of a slave."

It is not surprising, therefore, that many blacks, mistakenly equating women's liberation with petty-bourgeois feminism, have concluded that the oppression of women is essentially a middle-class white problem and the struggle for women's emancipation essentially a middle-class white struggle. Black nationalists, in particular, often argue that the only struggle for the black woman is the struggle for the liberation of the black race. Any movement which addresses the special oppression of black women is suspected of exacerbating sex role antagonisms in the black "community," sowing the seeds of disunity and diluting the effectiveness of the "black movement."

Frances M. Beal, editor of *Triple Jeopardy*, newspaper of the Third World Women's Alliance, writes:

"There is a great deal of ideological confusion in the women's movement and this is one of the major reasons you don't find very many black women taking this struggle seriously, or even worse, who see the women's liberation movement as a subversive phenomenon in opposition to the interests of the black struggle as a whole. In all too many cases, one would have to agree with this analysis."

—Frances M. Beal, "Slave of a Slave No More: Black Women in Struggle," *The Black Scholar*, March 1975

Quite right! Feminism *does* often undermine the aims of black nationalism, and vice versa. Both are ideologies which proceed from the concerns of particular sectors of the oppressed, which must come into conflict with one another in the pursuit of upward mobility within the confines of the capitalist system. In the matter of preferential hiring, for instance, blacks, women and representatives of other oppressed sectors of society are forced to compete for a handful of jobs. The competing claims of the various proletarian and sub-proletarian layers can be reconciled only by the revolutionary working class, whose historic interest in the destruction of capitalism itself is embodied in one revolutionary vanguard—the vanguard not simply of blacks nor of women nor of Chicanos nor of homosexuals, but of the independent and united working class, whose class rule alone can emancipate all the oppressed. Not preferential hiring, but a shorter workweek

with no loss in pay to insure jobs for all! Not preferential academic admissions, but free quality education for all, with pay, to enable every person who wants an education to get one! *Nothing less is acceptable!* Any other perspective means not merely "settling for less" but acquiescing to pitting one stratum of the oppressed against another and thereby ensuring that *no* real gains will be wrested from the bourgeoisie.

Like feminism, which undermines working-class solidarity by viewing the fundamental social distinction as one of sex, black nationalism undermines working-class solidarity by viewing the fundamental social distinction as one of race. Both by definition engage in class collaboration—the former with bourgeois women, the latter with bourgeois blacks—and both are therefore clearly counterposed to the class-struggle politics of Marxism, which offer the *only* hope of emancipation for all workers and oppressed people.

Feeding into the nationalist argument is the reactionary concept that the role of the black woman in the struggle for

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The Black Panther

**Bobby Seale, chairman of Black Panther Party, announces BPP's endorsement of "Sister" Shirley Chisholm for president of the United States, 1972.**

liberation must be subordinate to that of the black man; that the domineering "black matriarch" must step back to allow her man to take his rightful place in history. There have even been attempts to justify the abuse of black women by black men as a legitimate or at least understandable release for the men's resentment against their oppression. Although nationalist leader Ron Karenga has recently come out in favor of sexual equality, this earlier statement of his clearly captures the extreme male chauvinism so often prevalent in this milieu:

"What makes a woman appealing is femininity, but she can't be feminine without being submissive.

"The role of the woman is to inspire her man, educate their children and participate in social development.

"Equality is false; it's the devil's concept. Our concept is complementary. Complementary means you complete or make perfect that which is imperfect.

"The man has any right that does not destroy the collective needs of his family.

"The woman has two rights of consultation and then separation if she isn't getting what she should be getting."

—Ron Karenga in Robert L. Allen (ed): *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, p. 9.

In his *Message to the Blackman in America*—Elijah

Muhammed openly states that women are property:

"Our women are allowed to walk or ride the streets all night long with any strange man they desire. They are allowed to frequent any tavern or dance hall they like, wherever they like. They are allowed to fill our homes with children other than our own. Children that are often fathered by the very devil himself."

He orders the men of the Nation of Islam to put "their" women under guard in order to "protect" them. Inherent in the *Message* is the same warning which permeates Jewish and Christian religious texts: women are morally weak and will fall into sin unless they are kept from it by righteous men.

### The Myth of the Black Matriarch

The myth of the black matriarch and of black female emasculation of black males has been used to justify the lack of attention to the special oppression of black women. Although long accepted by many black nationalists as well as by bourgeois apologists for racial oppression, this theory has received widespread public attention since 1965 with

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## Black Women...

the publication of Daniel Moynihan's "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Moynihan, who was employed by the U.S. Department of Labor, sought in this study to shift the blame for the social problems of blacks from the capitalist system to the blacks themselves, and particularly to black women.

The Moynihan Report asserts that the conditions of slavery and oppression elevated black women to an abnormally dominant position within the family, i.e., forced them to assume the role of "head of family" (where there are both a husband and wife, the husband is *always* considered the household "head"). This female ascendancy to power, according to the Report, has resulted in the psychological castration of the black male and a multitude of social problems among black children, including poor scholastic achievement, personality disorders and juvenile delinquency.

Although one quarter of all black families are "headed" by women, a percentage considerably larger than any other racial minority in the U.S., one is hard pressed to demonstrate that this fact has either placed power in their hands or that it, rather than the capitalist system, is responsible for the effects of brutal racist oppression.

The so-called "black matriarch" is, in fact, the most oppressed of all. She is paid the least and relegated to the lowest paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement. Although she compares favorably with the black man in terms of formal education, her earning capacity is only 79 percent of his and 54 percent of the white man's with four or more years of college. The industries in which she is forced to work are among the most exploitative in the country—domestic service, hospitals and the garment and textile industries.

The inevitable conclusion of the myth of the black matriarch is that the solution to black social problems lies in the strengthening of the black family, i.e., in remodeling it along patriarchal lines. The family, in fact, *oppresses*

women in capitalist society. Despite the attempts of some black nationalists to portray the black family as performing a somehow more progressive function than the white family, all families in class society exist primarily to protect the property rights and facilitate the rule of the dominant class. All Stalinist rhetoric to the contrary, the family in capitalist society can *never* be a fighting unit for socialism!

### Birth Control—Family Planning or Genocide?

Male chauvinist attitudes within the "black movement" also surfaced over the hotly disputed issue of birth control for black women. Many black nationalists have taken a hard-line position of vehement opposition to black women using birth control, contending that it amounts to genocide. Birth control, it is argued, simply plays into the white man's attempt to control non-white populations; therefore it is the role and in fact the obligation of black women to have as many children as possible. While there are numerous examples of forced sterilizations of racial minorities within the U.S., it is important to make a distinction between voluntary birth control and government population-control schemes. The freedom to choose whether or not to have children and how many is an elementary democratic right. The fight for free contraceptives and free abortion on demand is an important part of the struggle for free quality medical care. The conception that black women are obligated to serve the revolution by creating warriors out of their wombs is little different from the traditional view that women's place is in the home, although it may be draped in radical verbiage.

The Black Panthers, as late as 1970, were guilty of a confused position at best regarding the democratic demand of women's right to free abortion on demand:

"The birth control pill is another type of genocide that the power structure has poured into the Black Community, telling us that it is unhealthy and or against the well being of the society to continue to have as many children as we do. What better way is there for the power structure to commit the criminal act of genocide (the systematic extermination of a group or race of people) than through some foul trick stop them from baring [*sic*] children. The youth make the revolution, they will go forth in our footsteps so that freedom will some day be gained."

—"Purged from the NCCF Detroit." *The Black Panther*, 19 May 1970

This article goes on to expose the so-called crime of Donnetta Brewer, a member of the party who had been wounded in the Fred Hampton massacre. Her "crime" had been to seek an abortion. "A true revolutionary cares about the people," the article preached, "—he cares to the point that he is willing to put his life on the line to help the masses of poor and oppressed people. He would never think of killing his unborn child."

The quip that the only position for the black woman in the black movement is prone, which was coined by Stokely Carmichael of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), is only the grossest extension of the argument that the woman's role in revolutionary struggle is that of a breeder.

### Black Feminism

Dismayed by the pervasive male chauvinism of many black nationalist organizations, yet reluctant to join the

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# Women and Revolution



Oneita Knitting Mills strikers celebrate victory, July 1973.

United Front Press

predominantly white "women's liberation movement," some black women have recently organized their "own" feminist organizations, notably the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). This petty-bourgeois assemblage, which closely parallels the National Organization for Women (NOW), has no more to offer black women than does feminism by any other name. At its founding conference in New York, keynote speaker Shirley Chisholm suggested, by way of a strategy, that black women get down on their knees and ask God for guidance.

Other black feminist organizations have been inspired by the same black nationalist organizations which not long

ago advocated the subordination of women. With the decline of nationalism in the "black movement," many cultural nationalist organizations, such as Amiri Baraka's Congress of Afrikan Peoples (CAP) have been forced to drop some of their earlier overt male chauvinism as they sought a new identity as "Marxist-Leninists."

CAP's initial position on the woman question had been similar to that of the Panthers. "Nature has made women submissive," said Baraka, "she must submit to man's creation in order for it to exist." The role of black nationalist women was neither to create nor to initiate, but to inspire and encourage her man and her sons. Within the organization women were largely relegated to non-political roles, such as child care. In 1973 Barbara Sizemore wrote in *The Black Scholar*:

"Sisters in this movement must beg for permission to speak and function as servants to men, their masters and leaders, as teachers and nurses. Their position is similar to that of the sisters in the Nation of Islam. When Baraka is the guiding spirit of national conferences only widows and wives of black martyrs such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Queen Mother Moore can participate. Other women are excluded."

—Barbara Sizemore, "Sexism and the Black Male," *The Black Scholar*, March-April 1973

One year later, however, CAP held a conference in Detroit for the stated purpose of forming an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist black women's organization. This founding conference was attended by a variety of organizations, including the Youth Organization of Black

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## Black Women...

Unity (now the February First Movement), the All Afrikan Peoples Revolutionary Party, the Pan-Afrikan Students Organization in the Americas, Ethiopian Students, the National Welfare Rights Organization and the Black Workers Congress. Out of the conference came the Black Women's United Front (BWUF).

But although CAP has published biting criticism of the bourgeois feminist movement for refusing to expose the class character of women's inequality and seeking merely formal equality for women—primarily white women—the BWUF program for women's emancipation which it supports does not distinguish it from the class-collaborationist bourgeois feminist organizations which it criticizes.

In the document *Black Women's United Front*, CAP indicates that the BWUF can take up the struggle for free and public day care, equal pay for equal work, an end to job discrimination, quality education, low cost public housing, free medical care and family planning, but it rejects the elaboration of a more comprehensive political program and strategy on the basis that this will evolve only through concrete practical activity. This agnosticism on the question of theory is a liquidation of the role of the party and is in reality only a cover for an already existent reformist theory and practice. None of the resolutions passed at the National Assembly went beyond the bounds of bourgeois reformism. In fact, the BWUF went on record not only in favor of these reformist demands but also in favor of the creation of independent women's trade unions for unorganized women and women's caucuses for women



The so-called "black matriarch" is among the most oppressed women in capitalist society.

The Black Panther

who are already organized and of the BWUF seeking membership in the National Black Assembly. It should be clear that CAP's primary concern is not the forging of a revolutionary party but the building of a mass reformist movement.

Marxists insist that class divisions are primary in capitalist society and the fundamental axis of social antagonisms. The attempt to unite all black women, like the attempt to unite the "black community" on the basis of a minimal common program clearly implies class collaboration, as it denies that the basis of struggle against all forms of special oppression is the independent mobilization of the united working class and its allies under the leadership of a multi-racial vanguard party.

While the special oppression of women, many of whom are isolated and trapped within the family, demands that a revolutionary vanguard develop special methods of agitation and special forms of organization to reach them, CAP, citing Dimitroff as its authority, explicitly defends the creation of separate women's organizations *not* linked to the party. CAP alleges that its goal is a women's movement under the leadership of the vanguard party, but asserts that this goal is presently unattainable. In the absence of a vanguard party, says CAP, it is necessary to put together a women's movement that is as broad as the common program will allow. *This is an argument for building a mass reformist movement!*

The Spartacist League, like Lenin's Communist International, has, as a strategic perspective, not the creation of autonomous women's organizations or on-going "united front" organizations, but the development of a women's section programmatically and organizationally linked to the vanguard party.

The struggle for the emancipation of women must be seen as an integral part of the fight of the working class for socialist revolution. CAP's proposal that revolutionists should undertake collective child care, collective shopping and eating, collective housing and transportation, etc., to begin to free black revolutionary women is not a realistic proposal for the masses of working people. It is not merely a question of transforming the *consciousness* of the workers, but of providing them with the basic material necessities—free day care centers, communal restaurants, laundries, hospitals, etc.—which are necessary to emancipate women from household slavery and enable them to realize their full creative potential. These necessities *cannot* be provided by capitalism.

The program for the emancipation of black working women is that program which enables the working class to forge a revolutionary international and smash imperialist rule. Concrete struggles against sexism and racism are a vital part of winning the oppressed and exploited to the understanding that these evils ultimately must be destroyed at their core, and their core is capitalist class society.

The only effective weapon of the black woman, therefore, is a revolutionary program based on unrelenting hostility to class collaboration, on proletarian internationalism and on absolute confidence in the historic mission of the working class. There is only one such program in the world which raises the consciousness of the working class and points the way forward, and it is the Trotskyist transitional program. The Spartacist League, the nucleus of the revolutionary vanguard in the United States, has before it the crucial responsibility of winning masses of black working women to this program. ■

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# Foundations of Communist Work Among Women: The German Social Democracy

## Part 2: 1900-1917

"The collapse of the Second International is the collapse of socialist opportunism. The latter has grown as a product of the preceding 'peaceful' period in the development of the labour movement. That period taught the working class to utilise such important means of struggle as parliamentarianism and all legal opportunities, create mass economic and political organisations, a widespread labour press, etc.; on the other hand, the period engendered a tendency to repudiate the class struggle and to preach a class truce, repudiate the socialist revolution, repudiate the very principle of illegal organisations, recognise bourgeois patriotism, etc. Certain strata of the working class... as well as petty-bourgeois sympathisers within the socialist parties, have proved the social mainstay of these tendencies, and channels of bourgeois influence over the proletariat."

—V.I. Lenin, *Conference Resolutions*, Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. groups abroad, February 1915

By the second half of the 1890's, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), based on the powerful industrial trade unions, had become a real social force capable of leading whole sections of the German proletariat and had thus gained preeminence in the world socialist movement. This growing social weight was a strong motive force behind both the reformist and revolutionary wings of the party; the left envisioned as a real possibility the party's leading the proletariat in socialist revolution, while the right sought increasingly simply to maintain its powerful bargaining position *within* capitalist society.

A study of this history sheds light on the woman question partly because of the ground-breaking theoretical and practical work done by the SPD in the pre-war period. But, just as importantly, the history demonstrates, in life, that a genuine solution to the oppression of women is inseparable from a revolutionary world view and that the struggle for women's liberation must be linked to a truly revolutionary party.

It was no accident that those, like Zetkin, who fought unswervingly for special, high-level, agitational and propagandistic work among women, were among the leading radicals in the SPD who staunchly defended their revolutionary proletarian vision against *all* forms of narrowness and chauvinism, from trade unionism, parliamentarianism and nationalism to male chauvinism and feminism. Many of these comrades were among those who formed the Spartacist group in 1916 and the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1919, the organizations which carried forward revolutionary work among women.

### The Foundations are Established

Following years of debate on the woman question, the 1896 Gotha Congress made major steps forward by passing

a lengthy memorandum on the woman question and codifying the approach of the SPD to the organization of the female proletariat in an eight point program including demands for equality in suffrage, education and wages. The same congress passed resolutions affirming the need for special work among women and established the organizational rudiments for the work. This approach was reaffirmed at an international gathering the same year attended by about thirty socialist women from England, Germany, America, Holland, Belgium and Poland, which was held in conjunction with the International Congress of Socialist Workers and Trade Unions. The 1896 conferences underscored the essential counterposition of the bourgeois-feminist to the proletarian-socialist women's movement, proclaiming that the latter must be organized as part of the revolutionary proletarian movement because of the unbreakable connection between women's human and social position and the private ownership of property. These resolutions, embodying a revolutionary perspective, laid the basis for the work of the SPD on the woman question at the turn of the twentieth century and stood as models for the rest of the world socialist movement.

### Special Organization for Women

The German party was particularly admired for its unique resolution of the organization question which reconciled the need for special work among women with the overriding importance of a unified proletarian party. It developed the conception of an internal division of labor in the party, consisting of a Woman's Commission or Bureau to oversee the work, combined with a separate organization or "section" led and organized by the party. Through special work directed at women, the section could extend the influence of the party to layers of proletarian women





Rosa Luxemburg flanked by portraits of Marx and Lassalle speaking at SPD meeting in 1907.

Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte

who might otherwise not join the movement. This form of organization had been developed after much discussion and was instituted only after much heated debate within the party. Because of the Laws of Association, which severely restricted the political activity of women and youth until 1908, separate socialist women's organizations, usually under the guise of "women's self-education societies," had been established; but leaders of this work insisted that special attention to work among women was necessary even in the absence of such oppressive legislation.

"If they [the women comrades] wanted to bring socialism to the mass of proletarian women, they had to take into account these women's political backwardness, their emotional peculiarities, their two-fold burden at home and in the factory, in short, all the special features of their existence, actions, feelings and thoughts. Accordingly, they had in part to adopt different ways and means in their work, and seek other points of contact, than the male comrades did in their educational and organizational work among the male proletariat."

—O. Baader, *Report for the First International Conference of Socialist Women, Stuttgart, 1909*

Later, members of the Russian Bolshevik tendency and socialist parties of other countries argued within their groups for special work on the German model consisting of a Women's Bureau, Committee or Commission to direct research, agitation and propaganda and produce special publications directed at women like the SPD newspaper, *Die Gleichheit*.

"However, in all countries the vital victory in this argument goes to the defenders of the German way of

working—the fusion of the male and female halves of the working class in the party organization, while retaining *the separation and autonomy* of agitation among the women of the working class."

—Kollantai, *Women Workers Struggle for their Rights*

The entire party organization was in the process of being strengthened and centralized during the late 1890's and early 1900's as the SPD became transformed from a small, illegal organization to a mass party. Partly as an expression of the growing preoccupation with electoral work, the loosely federated local groupings were urged to consolidate into regional organizations, generally contiguous with voting districts; however this was also a healthy attempt to construct a national party capable of united action. Representatives, known as Vertrauensmänner, had the task of linking the local groups to the Central Executive, and, as part of the organization of the female proletariat, provision was made in 1892 for specially elected female representatives in each area and a central representative to direct the work nationally and sit on the Central Executive. Because, in German, the word Vertrauensmann grammatically can refer only to a male representative, the party officially changed the word to Vertrauensperson.

### Debate Over Bernstein's Revisionism

During this period of relative prosperity and social peace in Germany, debate in the party centered on Eduard

*continued on next page*

## Social Democracy...

Bernstein's revisionist theory of evolutionary socialism. Abandoning a materialist view, Bernstein regarded the democratic capitalist state not as an organ of class oppression to be overthrown but as an instrument to be mastered and utilized for the realization of socialism. According to this theory the need for the organization of the working class *in particular* disappeared, since members of all classes were deemed equally capable of developing their finer ethical instincts toward the achievement of socialism. In Bernstein's view, revolution was simply a disruption to flourishing, prosperous, democratic capitalism which, left undisturbed, could provide the proper environment for the development of man. Though Bernsteinism was voted down at the party congresses of 1899 and 1901, a tendency within the party continued to support his theoretical framework. Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin and Karl Liebknecht were in the vanguard of the fight against the revisionists, and they were joined at this point by the main party leadership, including even the members of the Reichstag fraction.

At the first of a series of bi-annual SPD women's conferences held in 1900, the revisionist minority again attempted to "popularize" *Die Gleichheit* and generally depoliticize the party's work among women, advocating emphasis on agitation around issues such as protection, the eight-hour day and social welfare legislation. These efforts were vigorously and successfully fought by *Die Gleichheit* editors and other leaders of the work among women, who advocated, not the exclusion of this type of agitational activity, but its combination with general political education and the continuation of *Die Gleichheit* as a highly political journal for the development of party cadre.

Since the party's efforts were totally mobilized for the 1903 Reichstag elections women, who were still denied suffrage, were specially organized for door-to-door and factory electioneering under the slogan "If we can't vote we can still stir." This work was viewed by the revisionist minority as the main task of the women's movement, especially after the resounding success achieved by the party in the elections that year. Eighty-one seats were gained with over three million voters, or 32 percent of the electorate, casting votes for the Social Democracy. The revisionist wing fought hard for a policy of reconciliation with the Liberal Party in the Reichstag but was opposed by the majority of the party, including the executive, at the party conference that year.

### The Rift Widens

The impact of the 1905 Russian Revolution and the concurrent downturn in the economy brought strikes of unheard-of breadth, with half a million workers engaged in work stoppages during the year 1905 alone—more strikes than for the previous five years taken together and greater than the total for the 1890's. In this context issues dividing the lefts from the revisionists, such as the use of the mass strike tactic, were debated as life-and-death questions. The trade unions, breaking with their former neutral stance,

reacted openly against the spectre of "red revolution" and its advocates in the SPD, even to the point of urging those advocates to seek an outlet for their revolutionary energies in Russia! But still the anti-revisionists maintained a majority and the party passed a resolution at the 1905 congress at Jena declaring itself ready "under certain conditions" to resort to the use of general strike action. This conference was to be the last at which the anti-revisionist left wing included most of the party executive and was therefore able to win a majority on an important issue. One year later, the executive betrayed its own membership by concluding a secret pact with the trade-union leaders which not only denied any intention of fomenting a mass strike but further promised to try actively to prevent one to the best of its abilities.

Following a year of massive political strikes throughout Germany centering on suffrage reform, the executive pulled back in fear of the mass movement and maneuvered the passage of a motion at the 1906 Mannheim Congress which profoundly altered the relationship of the trade unions to the party. The resolution, declaring "parity" between the trade unions and the party on "matters of mutual interest," in fact gave the trade unions veto power over the party's actions and represented a decisive capitulation of the executive to the pressures of trade-union conservatism. As Luxemburg observed, the arrange-

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Participants in Crimmitschauer textile workers strike, 18 January 1904. "22 Weeks: Fighters for the Ten-Hour Day. Solidarity!"

ment was reminiscent of that by which one spouse would seek to regulate life with the other: "On matters of question between us, when we agree, you will decide; when we disagree, I shall decide." Thus the tension between the party's leftist heritage and the pressures of trade unionism was officially resolved in favor of the trade unions, bringing the debate over reform or revolution back into the party—with a vengeance.

### The Right Wing and the Woman Question

Not surprisingly, coincident with this rightward consolidation, debate on the woman question was renewed in the revisionist publication *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Edmund Fischer, spokesman for the revisionists, innocently posed the question "... is it unnatural, socially unhealthy and harmful for women generally to work, a capitalist evil which will and must disappear with the abolition of capitalism?" In the guise of a new theoretical contribution, he answers: "The so-called emancipation of women goes against the nature of women and of mankind as a whole. It is unnatural and hence impossible to achieve." Fischer, resurrecting the old, worn-out arguments from the 1860's as if the debate had never taken place, concluded: "Men's dependence on women must thus be at least as great as vice versa.... women's primary and highest aim in life, which is

deeply embedded in their nature as women, is: to be mothers, and to live for the care and raising of children, while as a rule only unmarried women want to have economic independence." This regressive, reactionary drivel was a clear reflection of the ascendancy of the reformist, conciliationist right wing of the party and, although these positions were ruthlessly excoriated in the party press and particularly by Zetkin in the pages of *Die Gleichheit*, they served as the theoretical justification for the party's inevitable official reversal on the woman question which took place gradually in the years after the split.

Other conciliationist tendencies, connected with leaders who sided with Bernstein's revisionism or, later with Kautsky's center position, manifested themselves on the woman question. Luise Kautsky, for example, considered the matter of protection for women workers important primarily because the demand would act as "a battering ram for the protection of men."

Lily Braun, though a supporter of the revisionist wing, was the author of a fairly orthodox book, *Die Frauenfrage* (*The Woman Question*), published in 1901. Her rightward bent, however, went hand in hand with her actual approach to the work among women where she stressed collaboration with bourgeois women in the establishment of

*continued on next page*

## Social Democracy...

household cooperatives. A hostile relationship existed for years between her and Zetkin who, after 1906, refused to print her articles in *Die Gleichheit*.

### The Battle Full Blown

But the right wing had little time for theoretical discussion on the woman question since the main battlefield, in its eyes, was the electoral arena where the party had recently achieved marvelous results. The left, in contrast, looked to the model of the Russian revolution and its reflections in the upswing of proletarian combativeness in Germany. For the left, the real success of the suffrage fight lay "not in the positive result but rather in the ever greater unification of the laboring masses, a unification which prepares the ultimate victory" (Zetkin quoted in Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism*).

In the following years the factions debated methods of opposition to militarism and nationalism and the organization of the youth who, under the leadership of Karl Liebknecht, represented another intractable section of the party. Behind the right wing stood the trade-union



Zentral Bibliothek, Zurich

Swiss cartoon of Kaiser Wilhelm battling with the many-headed monster "Social Democracy."

leaderships who used as a club their manifest ability to win significant gains for (and thus lead large sections of) the working class. They played a decisive, conservative role not only in the mass strike debate and later in the party's abandonment of the anti-militarist struggle, but also in its suppression of the radical youth movement.

### The Women's Work and the Radicals

The left maintained posts on the leading party bodies: Zetkin was a member of the powerful Control Commission; Luise Zietz was the representative of the women's organization on the executive and was the sole spokesman for the radical left in that important body; Karl Liebknecht was a member of the Reichstag fraction. *Die Gleichheit* was one of the major weapons of the left in these battles, as the radical grouping which later became the Spartacists crystallized within the heterogeneous anti-revisionist wing. The journal and the women's organization, firmly under the control of the radicals, were in the main responsible for the recruitment, education and development of female party cadres, and thus served as effective factional organizers. In fact, it was *only* the radical wing that devoted any energy to the special work among women although the importance of the work was still officially recognized by the SPD.

The years following the Mannheim "parity" resolution, 1905-1910, were politically stagnant for the proletarian movement as a whole, but for the women's movement they were years of dynamic growth. Female membership in the SPD grew from 4,000 in 1905 to almost 11,000 in 1907, although in these years official membership was still illegal for women and was therefore defined as participation in a study group or support group led by the SPD. After the modification of the laws in 1908 female membership spurted from around 25,500 to 82,700 in two years, while male membership almost doubled between 1905 and 1910. During the same period the circulation of *Die Gleichheit* rose from 23,000 to 82,000 subscribers. These dramatic successes were due in good part to the rapid increase in the number of women in the workforce, providing a fruitful arena for the energetic work of the Women's Section, which recruited through agitation around such questions as militarism and war, the growth of the military budget, rising food prices and suffrage, combined with revolutionary propaganda.

When the first International Women's Conference was held in Stuttgart in 1907, the German form of organization was extended internationally with the establishment of an International Bureau of Socialist Women of All Countries and the recognition of *Die Gleichheit* as the official organ of the international women's movement. While most of the debate was over war and militarism, a heated discussion also took place on the question of suffrage, indicating that the political polarization of the SPD was also becoming manifest in social-democratic parties of other countries. The Austrian representatives advocated delaying a struggle for female suffrage until universal manhood suffrage had been achieved. The German comrades led the fight against this conservative position, which was defeated at the Women's Conference and also at the International Socialist Congress held at the same time. Lenin, who



Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), left, and Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), right. Theoreticians of revisionism in the SPD.

Verlag Kurt Desch

followed the discussion carefully, commented on the debate and quoted from Luise Zietz's speech:

"In principle we must demand all that we consider to be correct," said Zietz, "and only when our strength is inadequate for more, do we accept what we are able to get. That has always been the tactics of Social Democracy. The more modest our demands the more modest will the government be in its concessions...." This controversy between the Austrian and German women Social Democrats will enable the reader to see how severely the best Marxists treat the slightest deviation from the principles of consistent revolutionary tactics."

—V.I. Lenin, "The International Socialist Congress In Stuttgart," *Collected Works*; Volume 13

At the Stuttgart International Congress there were sharp lines of demarcation between the left, represented notably by Luxemburg and Lenin, and the right wing, led mainly by Bebel of the SPD. Through a process of a compromising amendment, a resolution on war, containing the following memorable points, was passed:

"...first, that militarism was the chief weapon of class oppression; second, the task of agitation among the youth was pointed out; and, third, it was emphasized that the task of the Social Democrats was not only to struggle against the outbreak of war or for an early termination of a war which had already broken out but also to utilize the crisis caused by the war to hasten the downfall of the bourgeoisie."

—Lenin, *Proletarii*, No. 17, 2 November 1907

Enormous suffrage demonstrations once again rocked Germany in 1910 and were met with aggressive agitation by the SPD. As before, the upheaval posed most strikingly the question of whether the SPD would attempt to lead the mass movement beyond the suffrage issue through general strikes and possibly insurrection or would pull back. This was the breaking point of Karl Kautsky, formerly a left ally, albeit to the right of the future Spartacists. The political geography of the SPD was now further complicated by the emergence of a center tendency led by Kautsky.

*Die Gleichheit* raised strong objection in 1912 when the

SPD leaders effected an underhanded, opportunist electoral bloc with a bourgeois party that blurred "the clear lines of the principal struggle." Such open criticism of the party leadership's activity also appeared in Luxemburg's *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. But these dissonant voices were drowned by the enthusiasm generated in the wake of the successful 1912 elections which gained the SPD 112 Reichstag seats.

Directly following this wave of enthusiasm, the party went into a slump from which it did not emerge until after the split of the broad left wing. Demoralization swept over the party rapidly since the ranks had learned to understand success in terms of votes, Reichstag seats and trade-union bureaucratic support. Party membership had increased from about 400,000 in 1906 to almost one million in 1912 with 34.8 percent of the electorate supporting the party at the polls that year. The comrades were shocked when the executive reported that the party had grown by only 1.3 percent in the year 1912-1913. Furthermore, the growth that did occur was due largely to the work of the women's organization (10,000 of the 12,000 recruits that year were women) and thus also represented a numerical strengthening of the left wing. The party press also suffered in the downturn, losing 12,830 subscribers that year. The only official party newspaper to show a circulation increase was *Die Gleichheit*, which had attained a circulation of 112,000 by 1912. In 1913-1914 there were 23,000 new subscribers to the official press of which 13,000 were new subscribers to *Die Gleichheit*.

1913 marked the *de facto* end of a unified SPD; it was the last year a unified party congress was held; it was the year the broad left wing established its own newspaper, *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz*.

But this by no means ended the hegemony of the SPD over the advanced proletarian layers of Germany. The SPD was a mass party with 4,000 paid functionaries and

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## Social Democracy...

11,000 salaried employees publishing over 4,000 periodicals. The confidence of the working masses in "their" party could be threatened only by a felt betrayal of historic import; the reformist grip of the SPD could have been challenged only by an organized force of demonstrated leadership capacity. The betrayal came with the first gunshots of World War I; the challenge was the building of the Communist Party of Germany, part of the new Third International.

### The Historic Betrayal

The outbreak of the First World War internationalized the political divisions in the Second International by posing before the sections of all countries an identical problem of overriding importance: how will the social democrats respond to the call for military defense of "their own" countries?

The decision of the SPD Reichstag fraction—supported by the executive and opposed within the fraction by only Liebknecht and one other delegate—to vote for war credits on 4 August 1917, was therefore a decision which deeply affected the response of the world proletarian movement to the war. The International majority, betraying its own speeches and proclamations (such as that of the 1907 Stuttgart congress) chose the path of "national defense."

A minority of the Second International, however, maintained a proletarian internationalist stance, though the pressures of world events soon revealed the fissures within this minority. It was, above all, Lenin and the Bolsheviks who fought to organize the radical, antiwar social democrats of all countries under the slogan "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war!"

As the struggle developed, the centrists' positions were less and less appreciated, especially by Lenin, who wrote in 1914:

"At present I hate and scorn Kautsky more than anyone else. What vile, cheap, self-conceited hypocrisy; nothing has happened, he says, principles have not been violated, everyone has a right to defend his fatherland; internationalism, don't you see, consists in hating the workers of all countries shoot at each other in the name of the defense of the fatherland."

—Letter of Lenin to Shliapnikov, 27 October 1914

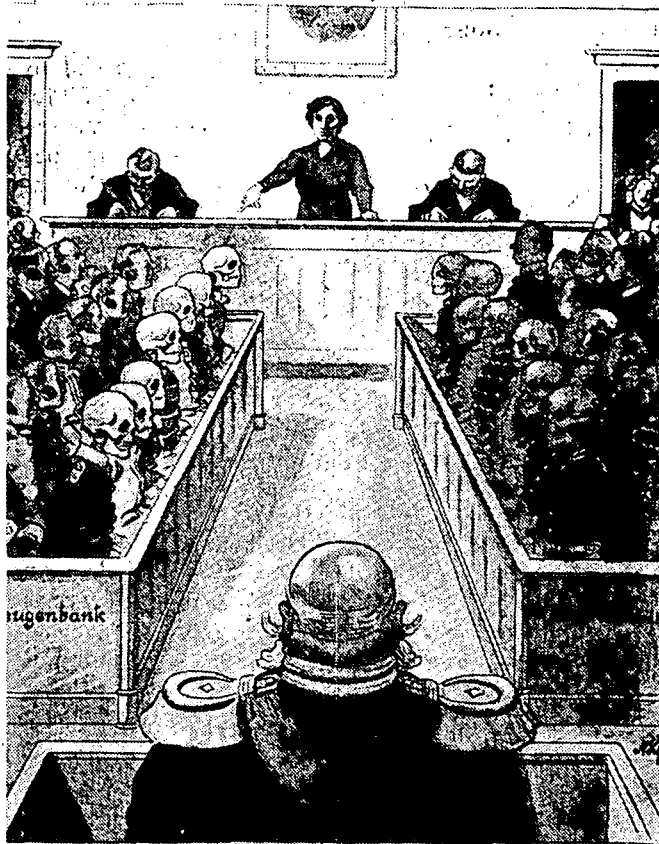
### Socialist Women Oppose the War

The women's movement played an important role in the faction fight. A majority of *Die Gleichheit* readers in Germany and a large proportion of women from other sections of the social democracy were sympathetic to the antiwar left. With this in mind, the Bolshevik Central Committee, through the editorial board of the women's paper *Rabotnitsa*, proposed to Zetkin in November of 1914 the calling of an unofficial socialist women's conference with the purpose of "draw[ing] the working women into the struggle against every kind of civil peace and in favor of a war against war, a war closely connected with civil war and socialist revolution." In January Zetkin replied, favoring a conference but protesting:

"First of all, it will be difficult to draw a line between the Lefts and the Rights, among the women. Many of them do not know themselves on which side they are; others will hesitate to make a decision; whereas still others will definitely refuse to take part in a conference of 'Left women only' [original emphasis].

Zetkin, Secretary of the Women's International, did call the conference and, along the lines suggested by the

Der Militarismus auf der Anklagebank.



Rosa Luxemburg against war. "Militarism stands accused," circa 1912.

Bolsheviks, invited only those groups known to be antiwar. The conference took place in Berne, Switzerland in March 1915, three weeks after a conference of Bolshevik exile groups held in the same place.

### Berne Women's Conference

It was at the Berne conference that the political differences among the antiwar social democrats became clarified, particularly the divergence between the "goody-goody pacifism of the English and Dutch" (as Krupskaya put it) and the revolutionary militancy of the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership. But even more striking was the intense battle that was led by Zetkin, recognized leader of the socialist women's movement, on one side, and Krupskaya, behind whom stood the authority of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, on the other side. Zetkin, assuming the role Kautsky played in the SPD dispute, acted as mediator between right and left and thus came under the heaviest fire of all.

"The English delegation, with an obvious feministic tinge, asserted that all women in England, even bourgeois women and suffragettes, were against the war and wished for peace."

—Report of the Berne conference by Olga Ravich, member of the Bolshevik delegation

Clearly it was impossible to "mediate" between this position and that of the Bolsheviks which called for *class war*! It was therefore Zetkin, acting as the compromiser, who assured the defeat of the Bolshevik positions at the conference while, as Krupskaya reports, "everyone criticized our [the Bolshevik delegation's] 'splitting' policy."

The Bolshevik resolution (written by Lenin who closely followed the proceedings from nearby) included a call for legal and illegal revolutionary activity by the masses, exposing the lies of the national chauvinists and an open break with the official social-democratic leaders. But the manifesto which was adopted declared in part:

"In these difficult days the socialist women of Germany, England, France and Russia have assembled. Your miseries and your sufferings have touched their hearts. For the sake of the future of your loved ones they call upon you to act for peace. As the will of the socialist women is united across the battle fields, so you in all countries must close your ranks in order to sound the call: peace, peace!"

—Manifesto of the International Conference of Socialist Women, Berne, 1915

Naturally the Bolsheviks were disappointed with the outcome of the conference though, as the first truly international meeting of antiwar socialists to take place since the war's beginning, it was also recognized as an historic event. The Bolsheviks evaluated the conference as "only a timid, irresolute step, but life will push them ahead and will take what is due it." This proved to be prophetic.

**The State and the SPD Move Against the Left**

During the year 1916 most of the leaders of the left, including the 70-year-old Franz Mehring, were jailed on various charges. The same year, Liebknecht was expelled from the Reichstag fraction for breaking discipline by voting against war credits; Zietz was expelled from the executive; Zetkin was forced to resign her post as *Die Gleichheit* editor. The last was an enormous victory for the right wing which for years had tried to silence this powerful mouthpiece of the opposition. A letter was published in issue No. 16 which gloatingly related:

"In our area *Die Gleichheit* has lost almost all its subscribers. Our women don't want it at all. Even before the war, the articles were unpalatable for the great majority of women workers. We need a popular women's magazine."

Later the new style of the publication was defended in the following manner:

"Generally speaking, the magazine was also eagerly read, but it became increasingly evident as time passed that the majority of women, especially the new ones streaming in, did not understand it, since the style of *Die Gleichheit* presupposed great intellectual experience on the part of the reader. Comrade Zetkin, who is owed a great deal by the women's movement, wrote the magazine in a manner that did not do justice to the needs of the masses who had no intellectual or political background. Only a relatively small number of women comrades could entirely follow Comrade Zetkin's style and thought processes. Ultimately, however, a large number also came to disapprove of her political views. The result was a decline in women's interest

in *Die Gleichheit*, and a simultaneous drop in the circulation of the magazine."

—*Die Gleichheit* No. 20, 1919

The "popularization" of *Die Gleichheit* did not go unnoticed by the Women's International movement. At the Informal Socialist Women's Conference at Stockholm in September 1917

"A strong protest was raised against the shameful suppression of *Gleichheit*, a blow against the Women's Socialist International. That this was not a Platonic protest could be seen from the fact that according to reports from various countries the women comrades have begun to raise money for a new *Gleichheit*."

—Official Report of the Sessions, 14-15 September

On New Year's Day 1916, the first national conference of the Spartacus group was held. Its program drew sharp lines between its policies and those of the official SPD.

"Not unity, but rather clarity on every point. No gentle tolerance—not even in the 'opposition,' rather the sharpest criticism, an accounting down to the last penny. Through merciless disclosure and discussion of differences, to unanimity on principles and tactics, and therewith to capacity for action and to unity."

After the second congress of the lefts, the SPD expelled its entire left wing in January 1917. Having abandoned the struggle against capital, the social democracy also necessarily abandoned the struggle for the liberation of women and all the oppressed. It was left to the inheritors of revolutionary Marxism to carry forward the battle in the Third (Communist) International, 1919-1923. ■

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# Fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat: **“Best Organizers” of Women’s Betrayal**

The so-called “United Secretariat of the Fourth International” (USec) is an international rotten bloc of revisionists which claims to represent the continuity of the revolutionary international founded by Leon Trotsky. Its “Trotskyist” pretensions are spurious, and it will not be “united” much longer. The USec is being ripped apart by a major factional cleavage between the *centrist* International Majority Tendency (based mainly on the European sections led by Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan and Pierre Frank) and the *reformist* “Leninist-Trotskyist Faction” associated with the U.S. Socialist Workers Party.

Although the factional division in the USec is deep and encompasses virtually every important political question, the political programs of *both* wings stand fundamentally counterposed to authentic Trotskyism. An examination of the policies of the USec toward the woman question reveals that these opportunists have vitiated the entire content of the Leninist approach to work among women.

## **USec Falsifies History of Communist Work Among Women**

In an internal bulletin of the USec’s French section, the head of the organization’s work among women wrote:

“...even at the beginning of the twentieth century, revolutionaries largely put off taking up the fight against women’s oppression until after the revolution. ... the fight essentially consisted in calling for women to join the ranks of the Communist International and in the class hostility to the *essentially bourgeois* mass feminist movements of the time. The analysis of woman’s oppression, even with the qualitative leap of Engels’ contribution, which viewed it as a social problem which could be overcome historically, remained marked by a frequently moralistic approach (cf. Engels’ remarks on homosexuality) and limited by the imprint of the dominant ideology, as yet only partially mastered. In addition, the orientation of revolutionary Marxists toward the women’s movement was dictated by the nature of the movements which had existed until then and their frequently hostile attitude toward the workers’ movement.

“For all these reasons, the advances of the Third International do not constitute a definitive answer, given the women’s movements which have developed in an entirely different context today and which stimulate a deepening of the Marxist analysis of women’s oppression.”

—Verla, Internal Bulletin No. 8, undated [mid-1974]

In order to pursue its opportunist appetites unhindered, the USec falsifies the work of German left Social Democrats (SPD) and the Russian Bolshevik Party prior to the Russian Revolution, as well as the positions of the Communist International (CI), which were codified in the Theses of its Third Congress (documented in “Bolsheviks on Women’s Liberation” *Women and Revolution* Nos. 2

and 3, September-October 1971 and May 1972). It rejects not simply the “moralistic” Engels, but also the fight of revolutionaries such as Clara Zetkin, V. I. Lenin and Alexandra Kollantai to have communist work among women directed by a women’s section of the party, *under the political leadership of the party and with the party’s program*. The USec is compelled to deny that this history exists, because its own program and practice stand flatly counterposed to the approach of the communist movement.

The USec’s policy is easy to define: simple capitulation to feminism—a petty-bourgeois, class-collaborationist current which is counterposed to the class-struggle politics of Marxism. The USec conceives of the women’s movement as a force independent of and at least implicitly co-equal to the workers movement. A special supplement on “A Woman’s Life” in the *Red Weekly*, newspaper of the British International Marxist Group (IMG), which supports the majority tendency within the USec, concludes:

“Only through the combined weight of the organized working class—fighting alongside women’s liberation groups... and any other groups willing to take action—will the fight for the liberation of women advance.”

—*Red Weekly*, 12 December 1974

This is nothing less than a declaration that the “organized working class” is not *the* qualitatively dominant political and organizational force in the socialist revolution, but merely one of many vanguards, the arithmetical sum of which will somehow provide revolutionary leadership.

This petty-bourgeois notion that everyone should “do his own thing” stands in the sharpest possible contrast to the position argued by Clara Zetkin at the Third Congress of the Communist International:

“No separatism [Sonderbündelei], no doing your own thing [Eigenbrödelei] which would in any case lead to splitting the revolutionary forces and diverting them from their great goals of the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the construction of communist society. The communist women’s movement means nothing other than the planned apportionment, planned organization of the forces, men as well as women, in the communist party, in order to win the broadest masses of women for the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat, for the struggle to overthrow capitalism and for communist construction.”

—*Protokoll des III. Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Moskau, 22. Juni bis 12. Juli 1921

The USec has thrown overboard both the programmatic and organizational norms of the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky. Programmatically, these opportunists reject the CI’s insistence that women’s sections be active in all areas of interest to the working class



and "put forward the most important tasks of the proletariat, fight for the unabridged slogans of the Communist Party," rather than centering their activities around reform struggles. The section of the "Thesis on Methods of Work Among Women of the Communist Party" dealing with "Capitalist Countries," states:

"Communist women should strictly adhere to the tactics of the party, not concerning themselves so much with the realization of reforms within the limits of the bourgeois world order, as taking advantage of every live question and demand of the working women as watch-words by which to lead the women into the active mass struggle for these demands, through the dictatorship of the proletariat."

While fully recognizing the need for commissions to carry out work around the special oppression of women, the Third Congress repeatedly took pains to make it clear that this did *not* mean the organizational separation of the women's commission from the party leadership. The resolution on "Forms and Methods of Communist Activity among Women" is definitive on this point:

"These Women's Committees are not to form isolated nuclei within the Communist Party, but should serve as administrative organs thereof for certain definite tasks. These are to mobilize and agitate the masses of working women for the struggle for the conquest of political power and for Communist construction."

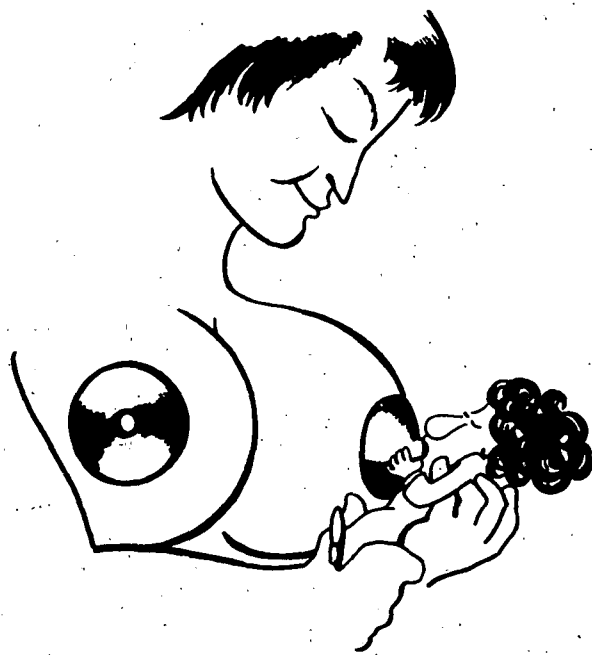
If any further amplification were necessary, Clara Zetkin's presentation to the Third Congress provides it:

"Comrades, the conference [the Communist Women's Conference] was guided in the discussion of these questions and in formulation of its decisions by a supreme principle. There is no special communist women's organization. There is only a movement, there is only an organization of women communists within the communist party, together with male communists. The tasks and goals of male communists are our tasks and goals."

### USec and Feminism: "Create Two, Three, Many...Vanguards"

The communist approach to work among women begins from the understanding that *the class question is primary*. It is the task of the communist vanguard of the working class to organize all sections of the oppressed to fight for their liberation through the struggle for socialist revolution under the leadership of the working-class vanguard. But the USec propounds a *polyvanguardist* conception: separate organizations of separate "vanguards" jealously guarding their "independence"—from the working class but not from the bourgeoisie. Tail-ending reformism, presenting feminism as a kind of "Marxism," preaching the "self-organization" of women separate from the revolutionary party and even within the party itself—this is the program of the USec for women's emancipation.

The reformist SWP is well known for its contention that the "most consistent" feminist must also (or eventually) be a revolutionary. This "theory" is nothing but an excuse to capitulate to the lowest levels of feminist consciousness, so that in fact the SWP has frequently been attacked *from the left* by "socialist-feminists" for its insistence on single-issueism and its refusal to mention working-class issues. And the USec majority shares this conception, although its application is accompanied by a more "militant," "working-class" rhetoric occasioned by the presence of mass reformist parties in Western Europe.



Rouge

### USec "humor": Alain Krivine "draws nourishment" from breasts of Arlette Laguiller.

In France, the women's movement developed after the U.S. movement and was originally not male exclusionist. By its own admission, the French USec group first took an abstentionist attitude toward the women's movement and did not in fact become involved in it until about 1972.

One of the first major interventions of this leading section of the USec majority—and the one which set the tone for its hypocritical attempt to distinguish itself from the SWP-led minority—was the "Bobigny trial," in which a 16-year-old girl was tried for having an illegal abortion. The propaganda of the French Ligue Communiste (now Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, LCR) consisted mainly of demanding free abortion on demand and the abolition of the 1920 anti-abortion law. A few days after the trial, it "supported" a demonstration but had no organizational contingent or banners of its own. Nor did its newspaper *Rouge* utter a single word of criticism of "Choisir" (Choose), a bourgeois organization in many ways similar to the American National Organization for Women (NOW). (One of Choisir's organizers is Claude Servan-Schreiber, whose husband briefly held a ministerial post in the Giscard d'Estaing government.) *Rouge* (13 January 1973) simply recommended to its readers that they "participate in and support the Choisir defense groups."

The Ligue also went along with having the SWP—through its WONAAC conduit—invite Mrs. Servan-Schreiber on a speaking tour of the U.S., during which the SWP newspaper, *The Militant* (23 March 1973), uncritically presented her as "a journalist in France and foreign correspondent for *Ms. magazine*" representing the French women's movement.

Rather than seeking to intervene in the confused feminist milieu to fight for a class-struggle program, the French

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## United Secretariat...

leadership *systematically retreated* from such a course, while at the same time claiming to be very critical of the SWP's single-issueism. But its "Contribution to the Debate of Work Among Women" repeats the SWP's central argument—that feminism and Marxism are *complementary* and not mutually exclusive:

"For a long time we had an attitude of distrust, of rejection toward feminism. The entire history of the women's movement is the history of this conflict with the workers' movement. At the present time we should be able to bring about the juncture between feminism and Marxism, both at the level of theoretical analysis as well as of political practice; this juncture can be enriching in both directions. We must appropriate for ourselves the gains of feminism. We should lay claim to the stimulating movement of authentic revolutionary feminists."

How can the LCR criticize the SWP for this anti-Marxist adaptation to feminism while expounding the same opportunistic line itself? Because, says the LCR, French feminism is more "progressive" than American feminism: "The MLF [Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes] has always—contrary to American women's Lib—situated itself in the framework of radically calling into question bourgeois society." But with the exception of a few decorative holiday speeches, this is no more true in France than in the U.S.

The only way to claim that feminism and Marxism are mutually "enriching" is either to adopt a reformist minimum program and pretend that it is "anti-capitalist" or to reject program altogether. The British International Marxist Group (IMG), which supports the USec majority, has adopted the first course. For almost a full year it centered its work among women around a campaign in favor of the "Working Women's Charter." The "Charter" contains demands for a number of minimum reforms, such as equal pay for equal work and equal opportunity in various areas: improved maternity leave, day care, availability of contraception and free abortion "to be readily available." The final point of the "Charter" contains the clause which presumably indicates the need for "political action":

"(10) To campaign amongst women to take an active part in the trade unions and in political life so that they may exercise influence commensurate with their numbers and to campaign amongst men trade unionists that they may work to achieve this aim."

On the basis of this vague reformist statement, the IMG's *Red Weekly* (27 June 1974) unabashedly asserts that the Working Women's Charter "tried to tackle *all* aspects of women's oppression...."

To the extent that the USec majority does adopt a program for women in an effort to differentiate itself from the highly developed reformist political and trade-union apparatuses of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties of various countries, it is calculated to be only slightly to the left of them. The line of the majority is to "reform" the reformists' program—the logical extension of the USec methodology of pressuring the bureaucrats to the left.

In France, for example, the Ligue rightly attacked the CP and SP Common Program, which calls for 1,000

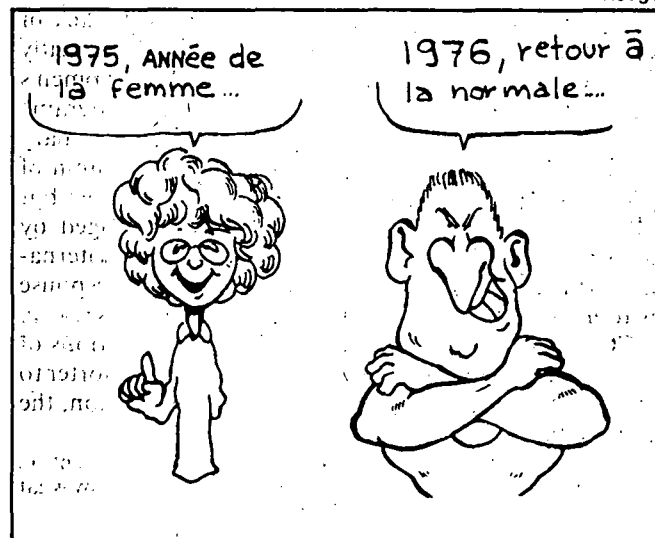
additional child-care centers, on the grounds that multiplying inadequate facilities is no solution. But what does the Ligue counterpose to the Common Program?

"What we have to do is to demand the multiplication of public day care centers, of small, free units, open 24 hours a day, with a qualified male and female personnel and controlled by the parents."

—*Rouge*, 19 April 1974

Although this single demand is acceptable, it hardly amounts to a counterposed *political program*. In fact, the Ligue has *no* program at all for *communist* work among

*Rouge*.



USec cartoon furthers the message that "men are the enemy" by caricaturing most backward elements of working class.

women, but only for capitulating to the petty bourgeoisie. The special Women's Day supplement of *Rouge* contained no programmatic demands whatsoever.

The contradictions facing the USec majority are even more flagrant in Sweden, both because of a relatively highly developed social welfare system and because the Swedish group, the RMF, is on the left end of the USec spectrum. The RMF gives uncritical support to "Group 8" (an umbrella title used by most women's groups in Sweden), as for example in a recent issue of *Internationalen* (21 March 1975), which simply endorses a meeting demanding "good" day care centers and calls for men and women to "get together." (For what purpose, one might ask.) It is indicative that the RMF raised the demand of a 30-hour week for 40 hours' pay only *after* the women's group of the dominant Social Democratic Party had raised the same demand.

"The attempt to pose a left pole of attraction (not to mention an alternative!) within the women's movement conflicts with the need of the USec to capitulate to whatever "mass vanguard" happens to be at hand. The result is that the RMF calls for a political program for the women's movement and at the same time complains that if there were such a program, the "women's movement" would be destroyed:

"Experience shows that Group 8 organizes a large number of women who otherwise would not be active in the revolutionary movement. Group 8 spontaneously has a good view of unity work. On the other hand, ... Group 8

has no developed strategy for the transition to socialist society, a limitation which is at the same time its strength, because it means that women from various political camps can work together."

—*Internationales*, 26 April 1974

This willingness to liquidate the Trotskyist program on the woman question for the sake of the "unity of all women" and in the praise of the ability of "women from various political camps" to "work together" is indicative of the USec tendency to liquidate the party itself when it is opportune to do so.

Although the International Majority Tendency frequently makes verbal attacks on the SWP for its lack of program and/or militancy, its leading section explicitly states that there should be *no* program in the women's movement. A concrete application of the "no program" line was visible in the work of the Canadian Revolutionary Marxist Group (RMG) in Vancouver. In the autumn of 1974, the RMG started a women's group in Vancouver, but RMG leadership of the group was soon challenged by sympathizers of the Canadian Committee of the international Spartacist tendency (CCiSt). The RMG's response was to dissolve the group while at the same time attacking the CCiSt for trying to introduce "irrelevant questions of program." In answer to a challenge by a CCiSt supporter to write a statement of position on the woman question, the leading RMG'er replied:

"We cannot make a revolutionary communist intervention at this point in time. If you want to say we don't know what to do, o.k., we don't know what to do."

### Work Among Trade-Union Women

The capitulation to petty-bourgeois feminism which marks the USec's work in the women's movement transforms itself in trade-union arenas into the classic social-democratic capitulation to the trade-union bureaucracy. The IMG's campaign around the "Working Women's Charter" is one good example of this phenomenon. The SWP's intervention into women's trade-union work, recently centering almost exclusively on CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women) is another example of the USec's programmatic liquidation. CLUW represents an attempt on the part of the union bureaucracy to channel and control the militancy and discontent which is increasingly being expressed by women workers. But the SWP celebrates this creation of the union bureaucracy:

"The structure and program of CLUW provide a vehicle for reaching out to the masses of rank-and-file women workers and involving them in action. CLUW's program, which includes fighting for equality on the job and within the union, organizing the unorganized, child-care legislation and maternity benefits, and ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, is a good one. Our approach to CLUW is very simple: Build CLUW!"

—*International Socialist Review*, November 1974

Just to be sure that the union bureaucrats get the message, the same article patiently explains why union members must *not* fight the union leadership:

"To take the picards on and win requires a different approach. First of all, the ranks as a whole must be mobilized in struggle, and that requires a struggle unambiguously directed against the class enemy: the bosses. *That means concentrating our fire on the employers, not on the union officials.* [Our emphasis] "Trying to organize a fight directly against the

bureaucrats—that is, around demands like 'Dump I.W. Abel' or 'Down with Leonard Woodcock'—is a near-hopeless cause....

"The defeat of the Meanys and Shankers and all the rest will be a *byproduct* of the workers' struggle, a problem solved in passing as workers engage in the real class battles."

Perhaps one of the few merits which the SWP has in relation to the majority tendency is the virtue of clarity. For the SWP, *the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership is no longer the central task of Trotskyists; but merely a "problem" to be "solved in passing."*

In France, the line of the LCR has been an open invitation for the bureaucrats to form a kind of CLUW with a slightly more militant rhetoric, corresponding to the domination of the labor movement by a mass Stalinist party. Thus a major article in *Rouge* on women's unemployment concludes with the resounding call:

"Today, when an autonomous women's movement is being built, when factory women's groups are being created, it is up to them to develop propaganda concerning women's unemployment and to get the whole of the workers' movement to take up the defense of women."

*Rouge*, 13 December 1974

The total lack of any programmatic alternative to reformism is, of course, simply the extension of the USec's trade-union work in general; of the notion, so well expressed by the SWP, of "starting from where the workers are" and the LCR which, in the internal document cited earlier, *praises* female LCR supporters at Renault for being *inactive* for an entire year on precisely the same grounds: "...the women's group at Renault...did not appear publicly for a year, did not intervene, respecting the rhythm at which the women who made it up were gaining consciousness."

### "Humor"

In the USec press and slogans the role that "humor" plays characteristically reveals (as Freud noted) a deep ambivalence toward the subject matter to which it is applied. Thus, at bottom, the cartoons of Krivine in the *Daily Rouge* during the FCR election campaign basically reveal that the FCR could not take its own candidate seriously.

USec attempts at humor are characteristically either meaningless, in a misplaced effort to be "cute," or fundamentally anti-working-class and in some instances anti-communist. At best, they represent a refusal to take themselves—and more significantly, their program—seriously.

The analogous slogans of the French and German USec sections concerning abortion are typical of the effort to appeal to a petty-bourgeois sense of self-importance: "Toute politique sur notre ventre ne se fera sur notre dos" ("Any policy on our belly will not be on our backs" [i.e., at our expense]), and "Keine Entscheidung über unseren Bauch hinter unseren Rücken" ("No decisions on our belly behind our backs"). These slogans are politically meaningless—or, to the extent that they mean anything, are a liberal appeal for "participation" or "consultation," rather than a specific demand. Thus the political appeal is to petty-bourgeois feminism, in an effort to attract new

*continued on next page*

## United Secretariat...

forces not on the basis of political program, but on the basis of liberalism.

A not-so-innocuous example is the cartoon published by the paper of the pro-majority Portuguese Liga Comunista Internacionalista (LCI), *Combate*, as well by *Rouge* (in a special Women's Day supplement) and the *Red Weekly*. The contrast between the "nice young girl" referring to the United Nations' "International Woman's Year" and the stupid-brute-male-proletarian waiting for 1976 to get "back to normal" is presumably supposed to constitute an attack on the bourgeoisie. In fact, however, the cartoon simply furthers the message that "men are the enemy"—and in particular the reactionary proletarian who wants "his" woman "in her place." The "humor" is directed against the working class by caricaturing its most backward elements. Particularly since the cartoon was first published in Portugal, where Latin machismo is dominant, it is impossible not to suspect that the artist (and the political leadership which printed the cartoon) secretly sympathize with the sentiments of the "proletarian." The USec's humor appeals to its members only because they too share the ambiguities toward working-class politics which are manifested in it.

Finally, what can one say of the cartoon which appeared in the *Daily Rouge* during the French presidential elections

of 1974, in which Alain Krivine (who received 0.36 percent of the votes on the first round) is shown "drawing nourishment" from the enormous breasts of Arlette Laguiller (the candidate of Lutte Ouvrière, who received 2.4 percent of the votes)? There is no rational explanation for this cartoon; it is simply in utter bad taste and disgustingly male chauvinist.

Small wonder that the USec majority organizations tend to have few women in their leadership. They demonstrate a complete inability to approach the question of women's oppression seriously either within their own organization or in their public work. When they do approach the question, they merely reveal their ambiguity and lack of seriousness.

### Women Within the USec

Female comrades within USec sections have had good reason to complain of male chauvinist behavior on the part of their male comrades and in the orientation of the organizations as a whole. Because the USec revisionists do not take seriously the question of women comrades as leaders within the revolutionary movement itself, they can only capitulate to the concept of an "autonomous women's movement" as a means of "protecting" women from broader political activity—both outside the party and within it. Thus the December 1974 conference of the French Ligue voted to set up organizationally independent male exclusionist "women's groups" *within the party* (Sand's Amendment). And the same practice has been followed at least by the Austrian USec group, whose women's organizations apparently spend a large part of their time complaining to sympathizers about the conduct of their male comrades. Meanwhile an article in *Rouge* was presented as merely a personal opinion "to the extent that we have not yet had time to discuss it in women's groups," which can only be taken to mean that editorial policy is determined, not by an editorial board which is in turn elected by the organization's Central Committee, but by some "women's groups" whose members may not even be party members.

The logical outcome of the USec's "autonomous organization" for each component of the "new mass vanguard" is to reduce the revolutionary party to a federation of interest groups. This is not some novel innovation, some "creative" application of Marxism to a new context. In fact, it recalls the Socialist Party of the Second International in the U.S. before World War I. Leninism developed out of and subsequently counterposed itself to the social-democratic movement whose traditions the USec now unconsciously recapitulates. The USec has *rejected* Leninism.

### For a Women's Section of the Reforged Fourth International

The Spartacist League has fought to defend in practice the programmatic and organizational guidelines set forth by the first four congresses of the Communist International by intervening in the women's movement on the basis of a class program. We say openly that to the extent that the women's movement is dominated by petty-bourgeois feminism and political unclarity, it must be polarized and eventually split around a transitional program of class-

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Daily World

# Joan Little Must Not Be Sent to Death Row!

—reprinted from Workers Vanguard No. 72,  
4 July 1975

Joan Little goes on trial for her life July 14 in Raleigh, North Carolina. This 20-year-old black woman, while waiting in jail on appeal of a breaking-and-entering charge, fought against being raped by a 62-year-old white jailer. She fled in fear after the early morning struggle, leaving the ice-pick-wielding attacker in her cell—pants off, covered with semen and stabbed with his own weapon. Aware that under a draconian North Carolina statute escaped prisoners can be legally shot on sight, Little turned herself in to the State Bureau of Investigation, accompanied by her lawyers, when she learned her attacker was dead.

Although it is a clear case of justified self-defense, Little was indicted for first-degree murder by a grand jury in September of last year. Her lawyers charge that the jury was selected on a discriminatory basis and that this hand-picked body was denied important evidence (e.g., that the body of the dead jailer was naked below the waist and that he was stabbed on the legs yet there were no stab marks on his trousers which were found in

the corridor). A motion to dismiss the indictment was denied, but defense lawyers have succeeded in moving the trial from Beauford County, the jailer's home, to Raleigh.

After the Supreme Court struck down "capricious" and "arbitrary" death sentences in 1972, North Carolina and 32 other states rewrote their murder laws in order to retain capital punishment. North Carolina currently has 72 convicts on death row, the highest number of any state in the country. Socialists and labor militants must oppose the death penalty in the bloody hands of the capitalist class. The murder charge against Little must be dropped!

The Partisan Defense Committee, legal defense arm of the Spartacist League, supports Joan Little against the state's outrageous and vindictive murder charge and has sent a contribution to assist with legal fees. For additional information on this case, contact: Southern Poverty Law Center (Julian Bond), 119 South McDonough, Montgomery, Alabama 36101.

struggle demands for women. It is artificial, therefore, to separate more general "political" slogans from questions of more specific concern to women, since the "bourgeois reforms" concerning abortion, day care and other areas in which women are especially oppressed can be resolved only under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the trade unions, women unionists must be an integral part of the struggle to build an alternative revolutionary leadership. To do this, they must fight against demands which divide the working class as a whole, such as the demand for preferential firing (of male workers) so that women workers can keep their jobs.

The Women's Commission of the Spartacist League therefore undertakes its work among women under the leadership of the Central Committee. Only in this way will women comrades not be forced to assume the entire burden of carrying out party work among women while the men lead the "real" fight for state power. Only in this way can women comrades play a full and leading role in the common struggle to build the revolutionary parties and reforge the Fourth International which alone can successfully lead the struggle for world revolution and lay the basis for the full emancipation of women and all oppressed sectors of society. ■

# Sheila Rowbotham: Hiding From History

Rowbotham, Sheila.

*Hidden From History: Rediscovering Women in History From the 17th Century to the Present.*  
New York: Pantheon Books, 1971

Sheila Rowbotham's latest book, *Hidden from History*, is a collection of historical sketches dealing with English women from the time of the Puritan revolution in the mid-17th century to the 1930's. As the title implies and the text confirms, Rowbotham holds the idealist position that women have played as important a role as men in history, but that we do not know about them because male historians have not written about them much. While it is certainly true that the history of women, as of other oppressed sectors of society, has often been neglected or distorted by historians, to argue that women's oppression can be significantly alleviated by "writing women back into history" actually denies the reality of that oppression because it denies that it had any real *effect* on women's abilities to develop their potential and function effectively in the world.

The book attempts to be not merely a historical narrative, but one which "traces the historical origins of the critical problems with which the women's movement is grappling." While neither Rowbotham nor the social-democratic British group, International Socialists, which she supports, would *dream* of imposing their views on women in the form, say, of an unambiguous political program which could provide *solutions* to their problems, a careful reading of the book does turn up a number of hints which, when carefully collected, do begin to assume a programmatic shape. As in her earlier books, Rowbotham advances a program of feminism, reformism and anti-Marxism.

## Rowbotham: Another "Socialist"-Feminist

At the beginning of her "Introduction to the American Edition" Rowbotham writes: "I hope this will be helpful to anyone concerned with developing a marxist [sic] feminist view of history..." She thus helps to perpetuate the deception that Marxism, the essence of which is class struggle, and feminism, the essence of which is class collaboration ("all women are sisters," remember?) are in any way compatible.

Like the Socialist Workers Party's Mary-Alice Waters, whom she cites uncritically, Rowbotham seeks to cover this contradiction by defining feminism as simply "the assertion of the need to improve the position of women." But despite this apparently artless explanation, the book makes it clear that Rowbotham's feminism is more than just an unfortunate misuse of language.

Carried to its logical extreme, the feminist counterposition to Marxism is that of sex war to class war. While Rowbotham does not extend her program to a call for total sexual segregation—as the most consistent feminists do (see "The C.L.I.T. Papers—Feminism Ad Absurdum," *Women and Revolution* No. 7, Autumn 1974)—she shares the New Left polyvanguardist notion that only women can liberate women, and she is more than sympathetic to the exclusion of men from organizations fighting for women's liberation. Thus she is critical of the position of Thomas Shaw, a weaver, who said at Ruskin College in 1916:

"I think there is a danger that existed even before the war of a feeling growing up amongst the women that unless they are organised, officered and managed separately their interests cannot be attended to... I deprecate the tendency of so many people to think that unless a woman represents a woman the woman worker cannot get representation at all."

Rowbotham comments:

"He completely by-passed the problem of women's interests sometimes being different from men's and the difficulty of women organising within the male-dominated union for their special point of view."

It is the spectre of male domination rather than that of bourgeois oppression which haunts this "socialist"-feminist. In her discussion of the suffragist Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) which was active in the period preceding World War I, for example, she says that women were forced, through their participation in illegal activities, to see through the myth of the impartiality of the law because they were "tried and judged by men." It is only as an afterthought that she adds: "The state and the laws were not only controlled and created by men in their own interest: they also represented the coercive power of the class." Also! Marxists understand that all laws and the state agencies which enforce them are above all else the apparatus which the ruling class uses to maintain its domination and to suppress other social classes. At the same time, class rule is constantly reinforced through the news media, the educational system, the church and other cultural institutions. But this most elementary Marxist premise has escaped Rowbotham, for whom the fundamental social distinction is that of sex rather than class. "It is evident," she writes, "that the rediscovery of our history is an essential aspect of the creation of a feminist critique of *male culture*" (our emphasis).

## The Origins of the Conflict

In her efforts to blur the overriding contradiction between socialism and feminism, Rowbotham advances the fabrication that "there was a close connection between feminism and socialism in the early years of this century and the divorce between the two was long, painful and protracted." In reality, the emergence of Marxism and the

recognition that an egalitarian society can emerge only out of the rule of the working class clarified the irreconcilable differences between the two tendencies at an early date (see "Feminism vs. Marxism: Origins of the Conflict," *Women and Revolution* No. 5, Spring 1974).

By the turn of the century there had been no question of a "close connection" between feminism and socialism for decades. On the contrary, both in terms of its social composition, which was overwhelmingly bourgeois and petty-bourgeois, and its individualistic, reformist and class-collaborationist ideology, feminism had demonstrated itself to be outside and often hostile to the working-class movement, a fact which is borne out in the 1904 pamphlet of "socialist feminist" Isabella Ford whom Rowbotham quotes approvingly (p. 93). Ford, who was arguing that the emancipation of women and of labor were "different aspects of the same great force," nevertheless noted that feminists and socialists seemed unconscious of their "kinship":

"In the Labour Party a prejudice one finds exists against the women's party because it owes its origin and its growth to middle class women mostly, if not entirely. On that account it is branded by many as a middle class affair, possessing no fundamental connection with the Labour movement...."

This situation grieved Ford, who complained of the socialists' "anti-socialistic" attitude toward the feminists and explained that middle-class suffragists were determined not to gain political emancipation only for "middle class purposes." But socialists know better than to rely on such promises.

Class composition is not, of course, in itself a guarantee of correct political program, but it is certainly one important factor. While Rowbotham pretends that the class composition of the suffrage movement "remains unclear" and hypothesizes that "very probably many suffragette supporters came from the same social strata as many of the members of the Fabian Society," she does admit that "the movement for the vote was undoubtedly, mainly middle class." She then proceeds to explain this not in terms of political program but in terms of personal *inconvenience*: "It must have been difficult for most working-class women to travel around on delegations or go to meetings."

While it is undoubtedly true that middle-class women were more mobile than working women, this is hardly an adequate explanation. Far more significant was the fact that organizations like the WSPU—despite Isabella Ford's protestations to the contrary—were clearly fighting in the interests of bourgeois women and had little to offer working women. The true class character of the WSPU was conclusively exposed in 1915 when it changed the name of its newspaper from *The Suffragette* to *Britannia*, abandoned all suffrage activities for the duration of the war and turned instead to handing out "white feathers of cowardice" to male civilians on the street. An even more striking confirmation of its subservience to capitalism—which Rowbotham, who has written extensively on Russia in the revolutionary period, does not even mention—was the journey of WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst to Russia in the spring of 1917 in order to campaign among women

there for support to the Kerensky government and in opposition to the Bolsheviks.

### Hidden From Feminism

Rowbotham spends a great deal of time attempting to prove that orthodox Marxism (as opposed to New Left reformism) is an outdated product of nineteenth century capitalism which has been insensitive to the needs of women. Her major complaint appears to be that Marx devoted more time to the study of wage labor and commodity production than to sexuality, maternity, production and reproduction in the household and the family. This criticism is hardly surprising in view of her demonstrated failure to grasp the primacy of the class struggle in history, but it creates an overwhelming contradiction which—conveniently enough—makes militant action in *any* direction impossible. On the one hand, as a nominal socialist, she is forced to concede that "feminism alone is not enough to encompass theoretically the forms of oppression women have shared with men." On the other hand, having defined the Marxist movement as a product of 19th century, bourgeois male consciousness with an overemphasis on the class struggle, she places herself outside it.

What, then is the path to the emancipation of women? Sheila Rowbotham does not say. And while she and other "socialist"-feminists pursue their futile quest for a mythical missing link between feminism and revolutionary socialism, the women who look to them for leadership are left to grapple ineffectively with the same problems which beset them a hundred years ago. Nothing has been learned.

It is not only the achievements of women which have been hidden from history, but also the program and strategy for the emancipation of women. They do not come to light in this book. ■

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# French Prostitutes Protest Police Harassment

At 5:45 a.m. on June 10, 200 French police in civilian clothes raided the church of St. Nizier in Lyon to evict 70 prostitutes who had occupied it to protest their persecution by the government. According to local press accounts, the women refused to leave, whereupon their leaders, Ulla and Barbara—now celebrities in France—were clubbed over the head. The two were taken to a hospital for treatment as the remaining prostitutes agreed to leave the church in response to the threat of an attack with police dogs.

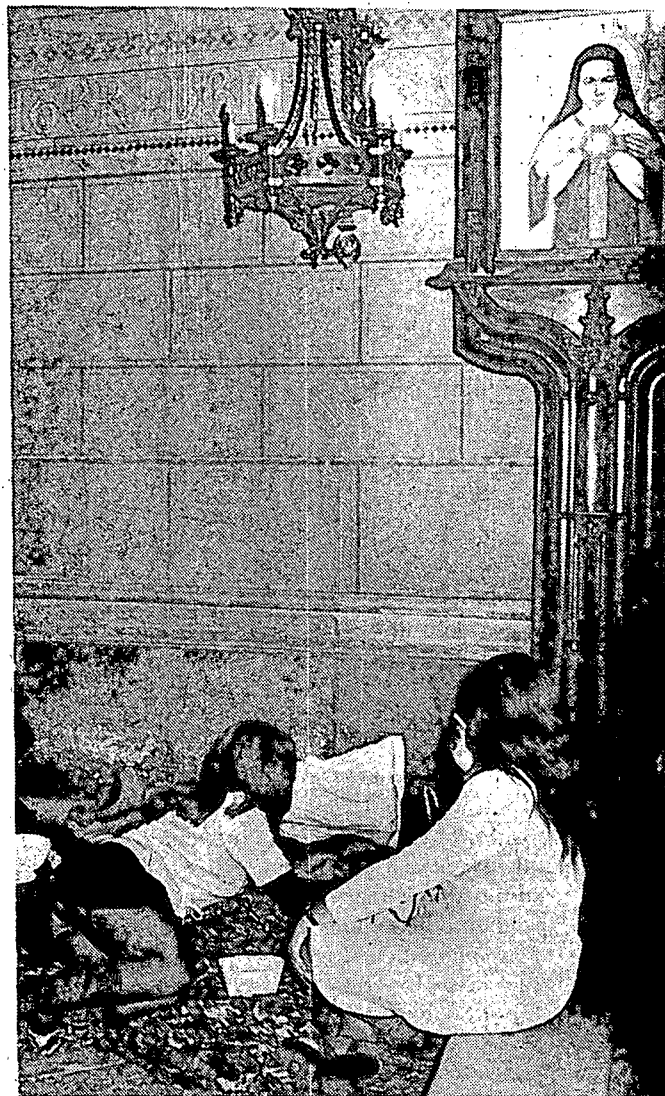
The dawn raids, ordered by Interior Minister Michel Poniatowski (who charged that pimps were behind the movement), took place at churches in Marseilles, Paris, Dijon and Grenoble as well. The prostitutes' sit-in, originating at the beginning of June in Lyon, had gained a great deal of support and spread rapidly. Poniatowski had heard that six more churches, including the Cathedral of Notre Dame, were scheduled for occupation that day.

The nine-day action of the prostitutes against stepped-up police harassment received considerable publicity and support beyond the clerical "soul-savers" of the Catholic Church—from feminists and homosexual organizations as well as the women's branches of France's two largest labor organizations. The prostitutes' legitimate protest against their persecution by the capitalist state deserves the support of working people—not because "one might as well recognize that prostitution serves a necessary social function," as the cliché goes, but because it epitomizes, to the point of caricature, capitalism's exploitation and degradation of women. Prostitution is criminal, but the prostitutes are not the criminals; they are the victims.

It is naïve to wonder what motives drive women to prostitution. Not "moral turpitude" but economic need forces a certain number of women onto the streets each year to make their sex a commodity. Though cavaliers, even among the better-situated and well-publicized "happy hookers," romanticize their lot, a good look at the facts dispels illusions.

The material condition of prostitutes, ninety percent of whom are mothers according to *Paris Match*, is often deplorable. They are mercilessly exploited by pimps and madams—disgusting social parasites, whose prosecution Marxists welcome. As in past social revolutions, they can expect to meet with summary justice when the workers take power. It is a measure of capitalist society's moral hypocrisy and male chauvinism that prostitutes are victimized for the crimes of their exploiters and also that they are objects of contempt while the men who buy the commodity they sell are generally considered neither immoral nor criminal.

French law is contradictory, as the prostitutes have emphasized and public officials, including the mayor of Lyon, have admitted. Prostitution is legal, but soliciting, procuring and the rental of premises for the purpose of prostitution are not. Normally the laws against prostitutes' soliciting on the streets are conveniently ignored. A recent



French prostitutes occupy a church.

Paris Match

crackdown in Lyon, however, hit the prostitutes hard. As Barbara explained in an interview in *Paris Match* (21 June):

"Our problem is that we can average three citations a day at 160 F [\$40] each plus three to eight days in jail for each citation. When we're in prison we can't pay the babysitter and the police take our children and hand them over to Public Assistance.... One citation per day per girl is 150 billion F a year for the state."

Though other grievances are involved, the prostitutes are most vehement over this question of fines and prison terms which threaten their survival. They also oppose all attempts to increase state control over prostitution, whereby they would become quite literally "sexual civil servants."

The defiant prostitutes have demanded a hearing from



# ERA SCOREBOARD

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would abolish any law that discriminates on the basis of sex, was passed by Congress in March 1972, but ratification by 38 states is necessary to make it part of the Constitution. Such ratification had been considered a sure thing in 1975, but the resistance of political reactionaries, religious fundamentalists and other social conservatives—supported by such ostensibly revolutionary organizations as the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Union—has delayed it once again. Only one state—North Dakota—has ratified the ERA this year, while 13 others have voted against ratification, with the net result that it remains four states short of the required 38.

The most concerted opposition has come from "Stop ERA," a group organized by Phyllis Schlafly, a right-wing Republican from Illinois. "Stop ERA" has strengthened its position in many states through alliances with various reactionary religious and political groups, including the John Birch Society.

Not surprisingly, the tactics of this slimy crew are as despicable as their politics, consisting for the most part of flooding communities and legislatures where the ERA is under consideration with busloads of right-wing housewives and scare pamphlets which appeal to the most backward social consciousness. This literature warns that passage of the amendment will legalize homosexual marriages, force women into the military and require men and women to use the same public toilets.

Despite these efforts, however, it seems likely that the

ERA will win the necessary ratification in four more states before the March 1979 deadline. A mid-April Harris survey revealed that there is a national trend toward popular support for the ERA, especially among men (56 percent of the men surveyed favored passage of the amendment, as contrasted with only 48 percent of the women), young people, blacks and residents of the East and West Coasts.

The Spartacist League supports the ERA (see "Why We Support the E.R.A.," *Women and Revolution* No. 4, Fall 1973). We have not the slightest illusion that it represents anything more than a token gesture on the part of the bourgeoisie, yet it would provide some genuine, if limited, advances in women's civil and economic rights and employment opportunities. As Marxists, we reject the ultra-left notion that legal reforms such as this are meaningless. Bourgeois-democratic rights are of real significance for the working class.

To those who oppose the ERA because they fear that it will destroy the protective labor legislation for women which has been won through hard working-class struggle, we say that the proletariat has its own weapons for protecting and extending its social gains. The maintenance of protective labor legislation for women and its extension to men can no more be ensured by bourgeois law than can equal rights. They will both be ultimately decided by class struggle. But this is no excuse to abandon the struggle for democratic rights. Legalistic and tokenistic affirmations of equality on the part of the bourgeoisie must be transcended in struggle—not opposed. ■

Françoise Giroud, secretary of state for women's affairs and have sent letters to church authorities seeking their support. To President Giscard d'Estaing, "president of all the French, also president of prostitutes," the Prostitutes' Collective of Lyon addressed a letter (quoted in *Le Monde*, 4 June) demanding "the end of all prosecution which victimizes us. Otherwise the police will have to massacre us in the church. Not one among us will go to prison, Mr. President."

But while the women have temporarily gained a public forum to make clear their position, the social power they wield to enforce their demands is negligible.

Engels explained the function of prostitution in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*: like adultery, it is the reverse side of the coin of the artificial and hypocritical monogamous ethic of the nuclear family (the basic unit of economic/social organization under capitalism). In this sense, prostitution, like racism and other forms of chauvinism, is necessary to capitalism. Marxists know that, contrary to bourgeois ideology's depiction of the nuclear family unit as the embodiment of the "universal natural order of things" (because it serves the bourgeois order), it is but one form of organization among many. With the abolition of capitalism, it becomes possible to

gradually replace the obsolete and repressive nuclear family with alternative social institutions.

Likewise with prostitution. Unlike the Stalinist philistines who continue to be infected with bourgeois moralism, communists are not interested in judging or policing the sexual activities of individuals. Although prostitution will be smashed as an *institution* under workers' rule, the main point is that it will no longer serve a social function. ■

## CORRECTIONS

"Foundations of Communist Work Among Women," Part 1, which appeared in *Women and Revolution* No. 8, mistakenly cited Kautsky as a leader of the right wing in the SPD leadership. As is shown in Part 2 of this article, Kautsky who became the leader of the center tendency was at odds with most of the right-wing party leadership.

A photograph in the same article was erroneously captioned "Wilhelm Liebknecht with his wife Eleanor, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx." The two were not married.

## 1922/1975: German Communists Fight Same Anti-Abortion Law

# Position of KPD on Abortion

[Editor's note: The struggle against Article 218, under which abortion is illegal in West Germany, is entering its second century. Thus this barbarous statute, first enacted in 1871, virtually contemporaneously with the founding of the Bismarckian Reich, is still taking its toll of working-class women by forcing them to risk often dangerous illegal abortions. (Only the well-to-do can afford the \$600-1,000 cost of an illegal abortion and/or the travel expenses to Switzerland, Britain or Scandinavia, where abortions are legal. Conservative estimates of the number of abortions performed on German women vary between 300,000 and 500,000 annually.)

A timid attempt to modify Article 218, a law legalizing abortion only in the first three months of pregnancy, was passed by the SPD-FDP popular-front government. Promptly challenged by the Christian Democrats (CDU), it was invalidated in late February of this year by a 6-2 vote of the Bundesverfassungsgericht (Supreme Court) as violating the "right to life" guaranteed by the Basic Law (Constitution). The majority justified the need to defend such "basic moral values" by historical references to the horrors of Hitler's Germany, somehow, however, managing to overlook the fact that under fascism abortion was subject to the death penalty as an "attack on the vital powers of the Volk."

A recent attempt by the SPD-FDP popular-front coalition to circumvent the court decision provides only a single "medical" justification for abortion, which is meant to include: the danger of severe damage to the health of the unborn child; rape; and the "danger" of extreme need which would arise from the mother's bearing the child. However, since the court had virtually ruled out economic hardship as grounds for abortion, it seems clear that this sole progressive aspect of the legislation will be invalidated.

Thus the situation in the Federal Republic (abortions are legal in the East German DDR) remains in its essentials similar to that of 1922: the Marxist analysis and tactics advanced by the then revolutionary KPD maintain their validity across over a half-century's distance in time.

Of the various "left" and ostensibly Trotskyist groups in present-day Germany, it has been only the Trotskyist League of Germany (Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands, TLD), sympathizing section of the international Spartacist tendency, which has pursued the same uncompromising revolutionary policies in its struggle to liberate all women in the only way possible, through proletarian social revolution. In a May Day (1975) supplement to its paper *Kommunistische Korrespondenz* the TLD explains:

"The oppression of women is a twofold oppression. They are exploited and oppressed as proletarians. Even now the demand for 'equal pay for equal work' is not realized. At the same time women are, however, oppressed by the institution of the bourgeois family. This sexual oppression does, to be sure, cut through all classes, but it particularly

affects proletarian women, keeping them in the status of dependents or minors; it serves to divide the working class, to atomize it into discrete individuals. The illegalization of abortion is an essential part of the bourgeois ideology of the family."

Regarding the tactics for overcoming this division of the class through bourgeois ideology, the TLD had written (in an article, "The Woman Question and Revolutionary Marxism," reprinted in *Women and Revolution* No. 6, Summer, 1974).

"With the needs of proletarian women as a point of departure (simple repeal of Article 218 is such a need!) transitional slogans must be developed which lead to the goal of the seizure of power by the proletariat. This in no way means that there is a special program for women; there is only one program.... Nonetheless this program takes as its point of departure demands which are particularly significant for working women. Isolated from one another, many of the slogans it raises would not go beyond the framework of reformism; conversely the slogans in which the program culminates would [in isolation] have an utterly abstract character. Taken together they constitute a concretization of the Trotskyist Transitional Program...."

The revolutionary propaganda of the TLD around the abortion issue constitutes a first step in the struggle to organize women as part of the working-class vanguard in Germany. At this time when our German comrades are once again waging a fight against these oppressive laws, we take the opportunity to make this important historical document available in English to our readers.]

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—translated from *DIE INTERNATIONALE*, journal of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), 1922, No. 20, pp. 462-465.

The paragraphs on abortion are a disgrace of the old imperial Germany which even the so-called November Revolution did not erase. Even today in the German republic the police and courts are using paragraphs 218 and 219 in their rampage against proletarian women, women compelled of necessity to resort more and more frequently to abortion.

The Secretariat on Women's Rights of the KPD has discussed this question in numerous meetings and has made clear its position in a memorandum to the Party Center [Zentrale], which the Center then adopted as its own position in its meeting of 19 April [1922]. The text of the memorandum is as follows:

Section 218 of the Penal Code reads:

"A pregnant woman who intentionally aborts her fruit or kills it in her body is punishable with a penitentiary term up to five years. In the case of mitigating circumstances, then the prison term is to be no less than six months. The same penal provisions apply also to any person who, with

the agreement of the pregnant woman, applies or supplies the means for the abortion or killing."

Section 219 of the Penal Code reads:

"Whoever, for monetary compensation, supplies, applies or provides to a pregnant woman, who has aborted or killed her fruit, the means for this act is punishable with a penitentiary term of up to 10 years."

The movement of proletarian women against these barbarous paragraphs is growing in the whole Reich. In part, this is occurring without our intervention, through the reactionary attitude of the authorities, who are persecuting proletarian women for violating these paragraphs; in part it was the campaign we put forward in the week of International Women's Day that set the whole thing in motion. Thus our comrades in Stuttgart made an attack on these paragraphs in the [state] assembly in a detailed speech by our cde. Stetter. This speech was also published as a pamphlet under the title "The White Disgrace." In Stuttgart, München and in other cities of Bavaria and Württemberg mass meetings on the theme "Protest against Paragraphs 218 and 219" were held without special instructions of the Party Center or the Secretariat for Women's Rights.

The KPD has the duty to mobilize proletarian women via this concrete question and to win them for the class struggle. It is in just such cases of persecution oppressing working-class women that we must reveal the whole *sham of democracy*, with its claims of equal rights for all, where in reality the sanatoria doors stand open for abortions to the ladies of high society, while proletarian women are delivered into the hands of incompetent quacks, that is, to just the places where the police go sniffing about. The poor victims of police persecution are stuck into prisons, their children left at home, subject often to hunger and neglect. Thus in Württemberg, for example, the number of convictions for abortion, according to a statement of the Minister of Justice in the State Assembly, has *greatly increased*. Whereas in 1920 only 277 persons were convicted there, in 1921 796 persons were victims of this provision of the penal code. This increase is attributable less to the spread of abortion than to an *increasing persecution of proletarian women*.

In spite of the strict enforcement of these barbaric paragraphs of the penal code *abortion has been increasing immensely in the very recent past*. It is impossible to obtain exact statistics, since the majority of cases is unknown even to doctors, a great number of them being carried out by women themselves with the most primitive means and at the risk of their lives. The number of *deaths from unsuccessful abortion* carried out by untrained quacks, unskilled midwives or even laypersons cannot be ascertained. An estimate by medical circles is that *in Germany 20,000 women die annually from the results of abortions undertaken by untrained personnel*. Very frequently a different cause of death is listed—where there is no suspicion of abortion doctors often assume some fatal illness even when an autopsy is undertaken. Unskilled abortions result in many thousands of women becoming *permanently incapacitated* or incapable of bearing children, although they would be glad to be mothers at some other time.

This proliferation of abortions especially in the period after the war, when normally a rise in the birth rate has



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German feminist protest against recent illegalization of abortion. "Judges put us in chains. We are the only ones who can save ourselves. Women united are strong."

always been noted, can be explained by the *increasing misery of the working class*. A large number of children depresses the family's whole standard of living; in times of inflation and need, such as we are now going through, the fact that more children are born does not raise the actual number of surviving children. For the more children that are born, the sooner do the young mothers go to an early grave. Those children who survive the time of misery and need turn out sickly and are doomed to an early death. *The decline of the birth rate is one of many signs of collapse of the whole of present day society*. In a time of emiseration the working class is unable to reproduce itself and in its need seizes on the most immediately available means to make possible even the lowest standard of living.

In and of itself *abortion is an uneconomical and, for the women affected, a horrible means of regulating births*. It is only because of the hypocrisy and mystification of present day society that the masses remain unacquainted with contraceptives, that these are made difficult to obtain and the mass of proletarian women have to resort to this last means so as not to bring into the world children for whom there is no bread. *The KDP is far from recommending abortion as an ideal*. But we must decisively oppose proletarian women's being forced by the capitalist social order to bring children into the world for whom the state cannot provide a living. To the paragraphs of the police forbidding abortion we must counterpose the demand for *homes for mothers and nursing infants, for free doctors' and midwives' assistance*. As long as a society is incapable of rendering maternity materially possible, it does not have

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## KPD...

the right to demand of women that they assume the suffering and burden springing from motherhood. The *low wages* for women workers, the *ostracizing of unmarried mothers*, which found expression just recently in the last Reichstag debate on women civil servants with illegitimate children, are among the many motives driving women to abortion.

Our proposals in the Reichstag on abortion *do not demand merely the striking of paragraphs 218 and 219* but also adequate *public care for pregnant women and mothers who have just given birth, for nurslings and children*. In the event that the state cannot provide this assistance then we demand for women the right to have the fetus removed in free, public institutions by approved doctors.

The USP [Independent Social Democratic Party] demands that paragraphs 218 and 219 be stricken, but without including in its resolution our positive suggestions, that abortion be carried out by approved doctors in public institutions. Their proposal would thus drive women into the arms of quacks and charlatans even more than is the case today.

The SPD [Social Democratic Party of Germany, the "Majority Socialists"] propose that abortion in the first three months, if carried out by an approved doctor with the consent of the pregnant woman, be legal. Thereby it demonstrates its entanglement in the Christian world-view, whereby after a certain number of months of pregnancy the fetus acquires a soul so that abortion must then be regarded as murder.

The bourgeois parties defend these disgraceful paragraphs and want to maintain them in force.

We must unmask the hypocrisy of bourgeois society as expressed under various pretexts against abortion—whether this be from the *medical* standpoint, where it attempts to prove that abortion is a threat to health (whereas among women belonging to the bourgeoisie it is carried out without hesitation by the best-known professors of medicine) or whether it be from the moral standpoint, which presents abortion as murdering a being with a soul. All these various pretexts are in reality *dictated by the class interests of bourgeois society*, which sees a declining birth rate as a danger for itself. The bourgeoisie fears lest the objects of its exploitation diminish in number, lest *in periods of boom* it lack the necessary large work force which, in times of crisis and depression as well, it welcomes as an *industrial reserve army* depressing the living standard of the entire working class. But even more it fears lest, for lack of *sufficient cannon fodder*, it lose out in its next war over division of the world.

In fighting this special law against proletarian women the KPD must accord all woman the right to decide such matters for themselves, to determine whether they are capable of bringing up a new being as long as society refuses to assume care for the mother and for child rearing.

In doing this we must in particular *point to the danger* that abortion constitutes for women, in their falling into the hands of medical quacks and often losing their lives in such an operation. Nor can we forget that a major drop in the birth rate can in the last analysis decrease the numbers and strength of the working class and is thus *not in the*

*interest of the class struggle*. But we are also conscious of the fact that these abuses cannot be combatted by legal paragraphs but only by planned care for mother and child.

For this reason we take this concrete case to demonstrate the hypocrisy and baseness of all bourgeois society, the contradictions of this society, which would like, in the most wasteful fashion, to bring into the world human beings who are at best doomed to continuing sickness and an early death.

Present day capitalist society is no longer capable of assuring its slaves even a minimal existence: it is no longer capable of guaranteeing to them the most basic right of human beings to reproduce themselves and multiply.

We fight for *eliminating these shameful paragraphs* which are directed especially against women. Using them as a starting point we wish to *mobilize* proletarian women *against the present social order*, to win them for the class struggle. But the contradictions which rest in the whole social order and come to the surface in this question as well can be fully eliminated only with the elimination of the capitalist social order itself. Thereby we are mobilizing women for the struggle against the entire social order of capitalism. ■

## Anti-Abortion...

(continued from page 32)

1820's. The distinction between souled and unsouled fetuses was not abandoned until the mid-19th century under pressure of scientific advances in the understanding of conception, although some present efforts to prohibit abortion after the first trimester are rooted in this idealist notion.

Although the ostensible motivation for the anti-abortion legislation of the 19th century was medical (to protect the mother's life from dangerous surgery) the far more significant underlying motivation was the maintenance of the family, an institution which provides the capitalist ruling-class with an excellent means of social control. To prop up the capitalist order, the Church has opposed anything, including abortion and birth control, which might weaken the family. In this reactionary and repressive scheme, sex must be procreative.

With the decay of capitalism and the breakdown of bourgeois morality, the defense of the family has been carried out in an ever more frenzied fashion. The Church's interpretation of abortion, for example, has become increasingly narrow, so that the existence of the fetus is now seen as equally important as, if not more important than, the mother's life. Medical treatment for such diseases as nephritis, which involve risk to the fetus, has been prohibited.

As its authority erodes in an increasingly secularized world, the Church directs its appeal increasingly to the more backward sectors of society and particularly to women, whose traditional lack of involvement in industrial production and isolation in the home have fostered ignorance and superstition among them and made them easy prey for manipulation by reactionary forces. This is particularly the case in primarily Catholic countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal and France, where many women still

look to the Church for political as well as spiritual guidance. On the eve of the recent Portuguese elections the Church, directing its appeal especially to women, admonished its membership that "a vote for Communism is a vote against the Catholic Church and the Christian concept of man."

In France abortion was not banned until 1920 after a strenuous campaign by the Catholic Church. The law which was enacted called for stiff fines, heavy jail sentences and total press censorship. (Prosecution was directed almost exclusively against working-class women.) In 1972 an acquittal handed down in a highly publicized abortion case gave the pro-abortion movement a strong impetus, but after a frantic proclamation by the Vatican on the eve of the French vote, it took another two years before the 1920 ban was overturned, and then only in the most absurdly restricted form. Abortion would be permitted only before the tenth week and only for permanent residents, with the provision that no social security funds be used. Although this certainly amounts to a gain for women, the chief beneficiaries will be those women with the ability to pay, which is hardly an innovation—bourgeois women have always had easy access to safe abortions. For working-class women the cost of an abortion will remain prohibitive even if they detect pregnancy early enough to obtain one.

The restriction on residency becomes particularly significant in light of the recent ruling of the German Supreme Court, declaring unconstitutional the law passed by the West German parliament in June 1974 which legalized abortion in the first trimester. Exceptions will be made in cases of rape, danger to health, prospect of deformity or "grave hardship." Another round of legal action will undoubtedly ensue in an attempt to interpret broadly the "grave hardship" clause. But whatever the outcome, working-class women will be denied easy access to safe abortion. The hand of the Church was unmistakable in this decision when the court termed the fetus a "human being" from the moment of conception—a basic tenet of Catholic dogma.

In Italy, where the Vatican dominates politics through the Christian Democratic Party, a battle similar to last year's fight over the divorce referendum is shaping up around the legalization of abortion. The Vatican suffered a slight setback in February when the Constitutional Court eased the ban on abortion enacted during Mussolini's regime and allowed abortion when the mother's physical or mental health is endangered. This predictably prompted an impassioned response from the Church. Between one and a half and three million abortions per year are performed illegally on Italian women, to whom contraceptive information is virtually unavailable.

The Italian Communist Party, in its efforts to cement its "historic compromise" with "all healthy forces," including the Christian Democrats and the Vatican, has gone so far as to oppose legalized abortion. At a conference of the Union of Italian Women in the autumn of 1973, the Union's leadership put forward a proposal demanding that the ban on abortion be lifted and that government-supervised clinics be allowed to terminate pregnancies upon request. CP representative Leonilde Iotti—a Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and widow of CP leader Palmiro Togliatti—opposed this proposal. She told the conference that "abortion is always a traumatic experience for a woman" and that it was never easy for a woman "to rid herself of the fruits of love" (*New York Times*, 5 November 1973). Like the Communist Party in the U.S., which opposes the Equal Rights Amendment, the Italian CP has demonstrated many times that it is willing to sacrifice not only socialism but even the most elementary democratic rights in order to pursue class collaboration.

### "That Nigger is Guilty as Sin"

In racially polarized Boston, with the elections not far off, District Attorney Flanagan undertook with relish the prosecution of a black abortionist. Dr. Kenneth Edelin was one of only two physicians who had agreed to perform abortions in Boston City Hospital, working overtime on Saturday with no pay in an attempt to meet the needs of his primarily black patients. With only two doctors willing to do abortions at the large city hospital and with contraception not always easily accessible, it is hardly surprising that women are forced to seek late-term abortions.

The racial slurs of the jurors ("That nigger is guilty as sin") and constant harassment by the district attorney dispel any doubts that this was a witchhunt encouraged by the Catholic right wing. Flanagan consistently referred to the fetus as an "innocent unborn child"—the unmistakable terminology of the Church.

The impact of the case was felt almost immediately. Four days after the guilty verdict was delivered, the Coalition for Life sought prosecution of a similar late-term abortion case at Nassau Medical Center on Long Island. Doctors, fearing indictments for homicide, promptly voted to suspend all abortions after the twelfth week of pregnancy. Numerous other hospitals have followed suit. Although women are legally entitled to abortions after the twelfth week, "right-to-lifers" are making late abortions increasingly difficult to obtain, once again forcing women to the slaughterhouses

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## Abortion Laws...

of back-alley abortionists. The "right-to-lifers," in their hypocritical "reverence for life," will have the satisfaction of watching as deaths from illegal abortions mount.

In their attempts to overturn, either in part or in full, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling, the "right-to-lifers" have pursued four major courses, campaigning for: 1) restriction of the use of federal funds to finance abortion; 2) so-called "conscience clauses" permitting doctors, other medical personnel and hospitals to refuse to perform abortions despite receipt of federal funds; 3) requirements of parental or husbands' consent; and 4) prohibition of advertisements of abortion services.

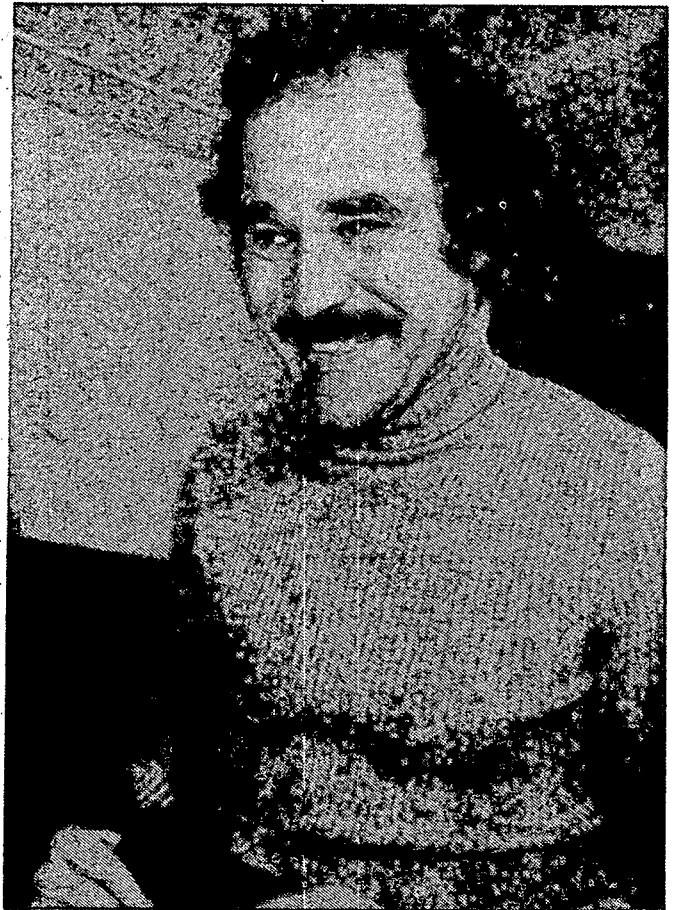
The main focus of their agitation is, however, three proposed Constitutional amendments—the Buckley and Hogan amendments, which declare a fetus to be a human person from the moment of conception, entitled to full constitutional protection, and the Whitehurst amendment, favored by Ford, returning to the states the power to legislate on abortion. "States' rights" are always an opening to conservative elements.

What all this shows is the fact that "right-to-lifers" are more interested in restricting the availability of abortion than in their sanctimonious defense of the fetus. Depending on the circumstances and political milieu, they are willing to bargain—in terms of time (early vs. late-term abortion), use of federal funds, consent, and so on. Every one of these measures discriminates most intensely against the poor, the young and the uneducated. Affluent women will, as in the past, be able to secure safe abortions by competent doctors. The poor will resort to illegal, dangerous abortionists, risking sterility or death. Clearly the fundamental issue is the democratic rights of women, not health or viability.

A second anti-abortion current, less politically influential but not insignificant, is that which maintains abortion to be a genocidal attack on blacks and other minorities. Although this view was initially appealing to some elements on the left, its main proponents today are right-wing black leaders, ranging from Jesse Jackson to the reactionary Black Muslims, who urge black women to produce as many children as possible. That non-white women account for 75 percent of all deaths from illegal abortions is apparently unimportant to these demagogues dedicated to perpetuating the oppression of black women.

While it is possible that abortion could be used genocidally, sterilization is much more effective for this purpose. A great deal of the anti-abortion legislation now being pushed is blatantly racist, particularly bills denying use of federal funds for abortion. Key to much of this legislation is the distinction between family planning services, which are reimbursed by the federal government to the states at the rate of 90 percent, and medical services, which are reimbursed at the rate of only 50 percent. Abortion is considered a medical service, whereas sterilization is a family planning service. According to some plans under consideration, abortion would be prohibited to low-income women unless they also consent to sterilization.

Although technically illegal, involuntary sterilization is not uncommon. Even more widespread is "consent" coerced from women by the threat of loss of welfare



UPI  
Dr. Kenneth C. Edelin leaving court after being sentenced for manslaughter.

benefits. One HEW official has admitted that 100,000 welfare mothers were sterilized in 1973 under this threat. The true figure is probably much higher.

### The Right to Abortion in the Deformed Workers States

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviet state did everything possible to ensure that mothers—wed or unwed—had adequate resources to raise their children. Under these conditions, some women who might have sought abortions under the old regime probably opted to have their babies, and the birthrate rose from 17.8 per 1000 inhabitants in 1917 to 36 per 1000 inhabitants in 1921.

Nevertheless, in a country where birth control was practically unheard of, many women considered the right of abortion essential to their independence. Tsarist law had allowed abortion only when medically necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. This law was maintained by the Soviet Government until 1920 on the grounds that abortions endangered the health of women, but the many medical complications and high mortality rate resulting from the widespread practice of illegal abortions persuaded the government to revise the law. Abortions were therefore legalized with some reluctance on 18 November 1920:

"During the past decades the number of women resorting to artificial discontinuation of pregnancy has grown both in the West and in this country. The legislation of all countries combats this evil by punishing the woman who

chooses to have an abortion and the doctor who performs it. Without leading to favorable results, this method of combatting abortions has driven the operation underground and made the woman a victim of mercenary and often ignorant quacks who made a profession of secret operations. As a result, up to 50 percent of such women are infected in the course of the operation and up to 4 percent of them die.

"The Workers' and Peasants' Government is conscious of this serious evil to the community. It combats this evil by propaganda against abortions among working women. By working for socialism and by introducing the protection of maternity and infancy on an extensive scale, it feels assured of achieving the gradual disappearance of this evil. But as the moral survivals of the past and the difficult economic conditions of the present still compel many women to resort to this operation, the People's Commissariats of Health and Justice, anxious to protect the health of the women and considering that the method of repression in this field fails entirely to achieve this aim, have decided:

"1 - To permit such operations to be performed freely and without any charge in Soviet hospitals, where conditions are assured of minimizing the harm of the operation.

"2 - Absolutely to forbid anyone but a doctor to carry out this operation.

"3 - Any nurse or midwife found guilty of making such an operation will be deprived of the right to practise, and tried by a People's Court.

"4 - A doctor carrying out an abortion in his private practice with mercenary aims will be called to account by a People's Court.

N. Semashko, People's Commissar of Health  
Kursky, People's Commissar of Justice

-Decree on the Legislation of Abortions of  
November 18, 1920

With the degeneration of the Soviet workers state under Stalin, the right to abortion was one of the many social gains which women lost. The Stalin regime employed a variety of coercive measures from illegalizing abortion to awarding "Mother Heroine" medals in order to implement a policy of population growth. The prelude to the illegalization of abortions began in the early '30's with a campaign in the press. Magazines and newspapers began asking, "Do we not enjoy a free and happy life? Why should women spurn the joys of motherhood?" Medical authorities proclaimed that abortions were injurious to health, while old peasant women came forth to proclaim to interviewers the joys of having raised a dozen children. The matrimonial laws of 1936 included a Decree on the Prohibition of Abortions.

Only in 1955, after Stalin's death, was this ban lifted, although there remains a stigma attached to abortions sought for social, rather than medical reasons. Abortion on demand is limited to the first trimester; thereafter it is performed only for medical reasons. Whereas the Bolsheviks insisted that abortion be free of charge, a Soviet woman must now pay roughly a day's wages, and she receives no paid sick leave unless the abortion is medically advised.

The planned economies of Stalinist-ruled deformed workers states have without doubt opened more productive roles for women in society. But when the need for an increase in population has arisen in these states, the bureaucracies have resorted to most reactionary measures, outlawing abortion and reinforcing the nuclear family unit. Depending on the prevailing manpower needs, the Stalinists have alternated between liberal and restrictive

abortion laws at the expense of the rights of women. With few exceptions these repressive laws are presently in effect.

Czechoslovakia has never legalized abortion on demand, and instead requires "justified medical and social ground" as evaluated by an abortion commission. In an attempt to spur the declining birth rate, a more restrictive interpretation of such justification is now being applied. Rumania, in its efforts to counteract the decline in births, has strictly enforced its 1966 ban on abortion, except under special circumstances. In 1974 Hungary reversed the 1958 legalization of abortion and now permits it only under certain conditions.

East Germany, although repressive in the past, is at the moment the only Stalinist country which has attempted to increase its potential labor force without reversing the gains made by women. The birth rate has been stimulated through cash grants and other material incentives to parents, but contraception and abortion are also available.

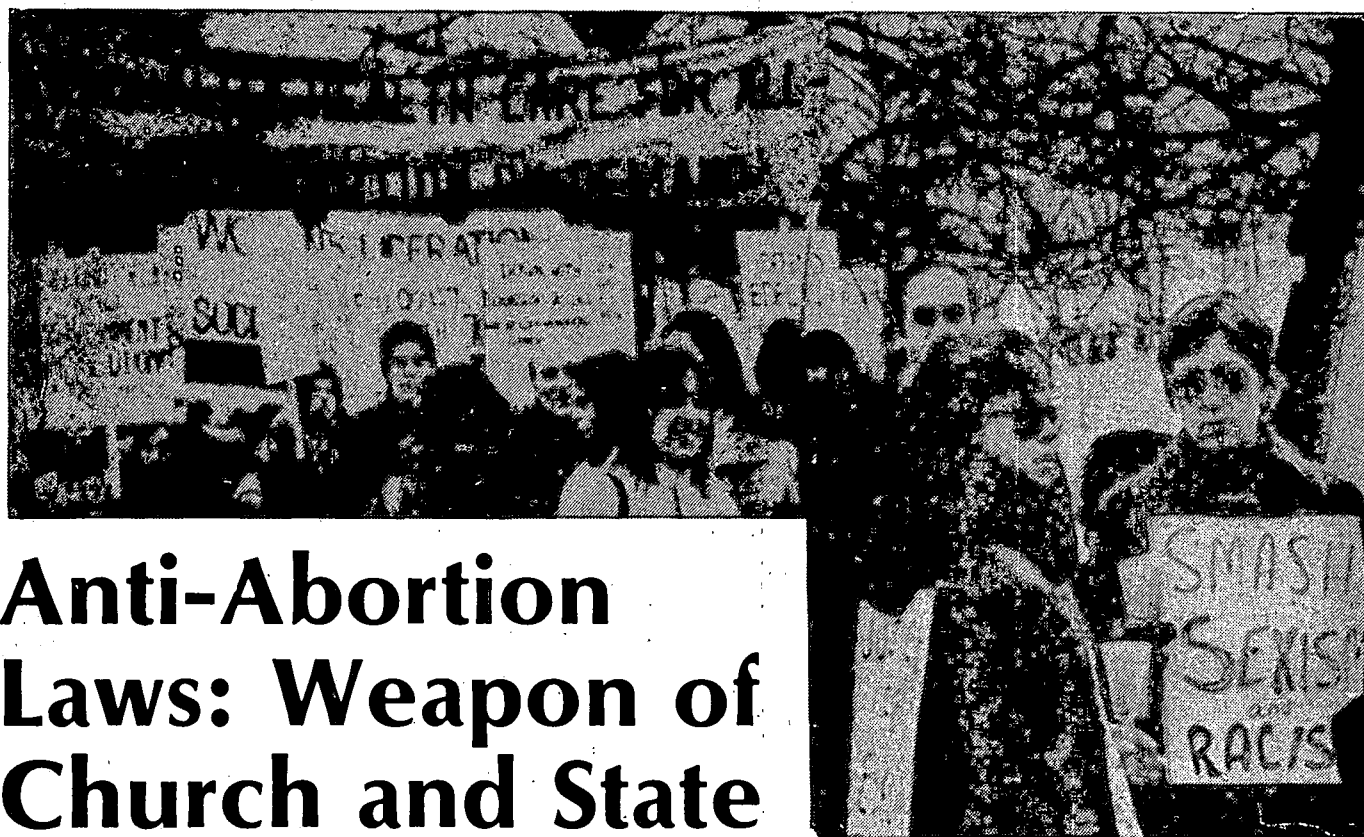
China has made tremendous advances in the field of contraception and abortion, inventing vacuum aspiration and a new birth control pill. Free abortion is available during the first trimester and the woman is entitled to from 10 to 30 days' sick leave at no loss in pay. But abortion is not encouraged until after the birth of two children, and abortions are rarely performed on single women. The nuclear family is further reinforced through such measures as late marriage, state-enforced pre-marital chastity and the restriction of contraceptives to married persons.

In Cuba free abortion is available if the pregnant woman requests it within *one month* after conception (Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, p. 229). Furthermore, the fact that the family is notified deters many women from requesting the operation.

As evidenced by these periodic shifts in abortion legislation in the deformed workers states, the bureaucracies act according to their particular national interests, using women and the family to further their aims. The continued rule of the Stalinists and their pursuit of "peaceful coexistence" with world capitalism pose the gravest dangers to the gains won by women with the overthrow of capitalism. The Spartacist League defends these gains unconditionally against imperialist attack and calls at the same time for workers' political revolutions to throw out the bureaucrats and institute a Bolshevik policy of proletarian internationalism.

Communists must continue to agitate for free abortion on demand by competent medical personnel, for the massive dispensation of safe and effective contraception and against forced sterilization. For medical, not moral, reasons contraception is undoubtedly preferable to abortion as the primary means of birth control, but abortion will for some time be an indispensable backup to contraceptive failure. At the same time, we insist upon extensive maternity benefits—paid maternity leave before and after birth, free quality health care for all and free 24-hour child care under parents' control at the workplace so that working women can opt to have children and retain their jobs.

As the success of recent restrictive legislation on abortion makes clear, reforms are always reversible under capitalism. Only in a genuinely socialist society can gains for women be consolidated, maintained and extended. ■



Spartacist League contingent in Boston defense rally for Dr. Kenneth Edelin.

## Anti-Abortion Laws: Weapon of Church and State

The recent conviction of Dr. Kenneth Edelin in Boston for manslaughter by a predominantly Catholic jury has strengthened the general right-wing offensive against the basic democratic right of women to abortion. The "right-to-life" committees across the nation are largely financed by the immensely wealthy Catholic Church, but the movement is by no means limited to the Catholic right wing. Abortion is an issue around which a variety of reactionary forces have rallied in defense of the family and against the "breakdown of moral standards." It is significant that in the midst of the Boston busing fight, the Ku Klux Klan for the first time in its history opened its ranks to Catholics.

In most southern states and parts of the Midwest, pressure from the right and the Catholic Church has effectively reduced legal abortions to a bare minimum, a large number of doctors and hospitals simply refusing to perform them despite the Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion on request during the first 28 weeks of pregnancy. Five states perform 45 percent of all legal abortions. Working-class organizations must oppose this offensive of the forces of reaction and defend the basic democratic right of women to abortion without legal restrictions.

Abortion has always existed—sometimes tolerated and practiced widely, other times prohibited and driven underground. In many primitive societies, abortion was widespread, particularly among adolescents before marriage. Tribal sanctions were directed not against pre-marital sex, which was tolerated and even encouraged, but against pre-marital pregnancy, which resulted in social disgrace for the pregnant woman. Because the fetus was not considered

a person, abortion was not subject to social taboos.

Plato and Aristotle favored abortion under certain conditions.—Plato, when a woman had passed her prime procreative years; Aristotle, when there were enough people in the state. For Aristotle, the fetus was part of the woman's body, thus involving no crime when aborted. It was Catholic dogma, which viewed life as a metaphysical phenomenon, that introduced the idea that the fetus is a human being whose independent existence begins with the birth of its "soul"—although exactly when that birth occurred was a problem with which theologians wrestled for centuries. According to Jerome and Augustine, the *male* fetus was endowed with a soul 40 days after conception, but the female was not so equipped for 80 days. More serious sanctions were provided for abortions after ensoulment. Abortion and contraception were both condemned—mostly on account of the implication of "lust" (i.e., non-procreative sex) on the part of the woman—but abortion was *not* considered murder.

### The Role of the Church

For centuries the Church's position vacillated. In the 16th century Pope Sixtus V declared abortion to be murder, only to have his dictum reversed three years later. Despite changing papal opinion, the fact that abortion was prohibited only by ecclesiastical law suggests that it was tolerated by common law. In England the first laws making abortion a crime were passed only in 1803, and in the United States no such legislation was enacted until the

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