

Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

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Dalla Costa/James and the Subversion of Marxism : A Critique

The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community

contains

"Women and the Subversion of the Community"
by Mariarosa Dalla Costa

"A Woman's Place" and "Introduction"
by Selma James

The pamphlet, "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community," by Mariarosa Dalla Costa (published jointly by the Falling Wall Press and a group of individuals from the Women's Liberation Movement in England and Italy, 2nd edition, February 1973), with a lengthy introduction by Selma James, has been the source of much controversy within many women's organizations, particularly in Europe and England. (See for example the latest issues of *Radical America*, Vol. 7, Nos. 4 and 5, which are entirely devoted to the questions raised by it.)

"The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community" is basically an attempt to go beyond the simple "Third-World" redefinition of class—i.e., that the most oppressed, the "wretched of the earth," are the new revolutionary forces. Abandoning this line, which formerly sufficed for radical feminists, and citing Marx's analysis of capitalism, the pamphlet attempts to prove that women play a central role in capitalist production and must therefore play a central role in the proletarian revolution. In this attempt it fails miserably—or rather, succeeds only through totally distorting Marx's analysis of capitalist production.

In terms of its theoretical contributions, this pamphlet is unworthy of serious consideration by Marxists, but since many subjectively revolutionary women are now searching for ways in which their feminism can be integrated with Marxism through some programmatic "missing link," it is important to refute this work's fraudulent claim to be a Marxist analysis, which, if believed, will only lead women down one more blind alley. The fact is that there is no "missing link" between feminism and Marxism! The two outlooks are fundamentally and implacably counterposed!

In addition to this pamphlet, there are two other works which are important expositions of Dalla Costa/James's theories. "Women, the Unions and Work, or What is Not to be Done," by Selma James (first printed by Crest Press, London; reprinted by Canadian Women's Educational Press, Toronto), is an explicit attack on the left and particularly the trade unions as narrow, divisive organizations which must be opposed by women. "Wages for Housework," by Giuliana Pompei, with contributions from discussion at a feminist conference in Padova, 1972 (Cambridge

Women's Liberation, translated by Joan Hall and reprinted by Canadian Women's Educational Press, Toronto), takes up Dalla Costa's central theme of housewives as productive workers and emphasizes the demand "wages for housework" (which Dalla Costa herself does not stress).

It is rather frustrating for a Marxist to attempt to grapple with these works, because they are so full of internal contradictions. Despite this, however, we have attempted to summarize below some of the more important aspects of the theory. (Although James gives Dalla Costa credit for the new discovery, *both* developed it, and James has in fact arguments for it other than Dalla Costa's.)

The Theories of Dalla Costa and James

1. Women are vital producers for capitalism, even when they do not work outside the home. "What we meant precisely is that housework as work is *productive* in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value."

2. They produce a commodity "unique to capitalism: the living human being—"the labourer himself". This laborer, by selling his labor power to a capitalist, allows the capitalist to use his labor to produce more than his wage is worth, thus producing surplus value. But women are the ones who really produce this surplus value, because they produce the workers and their labor power.

"The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floors swept, its lunchbox prepared, its sexuality not gratified but quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the night shift. This is how labor power is produced and reproduced when it is daily consumed in the factory or the office. *To describe its basic production and reproduction is to describe women's work.*"

"The labourer himself" is thus equated with his "labour-power" as the commodity produced.

3. This discovery that the family is a center of capitalist production has been obscured because Marxists have traditionally concentrated on the working class (which James and Dalla Costa constantly equate with men). However, this vital role has also been obscured because women have not been paid a wage for their work. "Inside the home we have discovered our *invisible work*... the invisible—because *unpaid*—foundation upon which the whole pyramid of capitalist accumulation rests" (Pompei, "Wages for Housework"). This leads to the demand "wages for housework" as a way to expose women's role.

4. This division of the proletariat into waged (men) and unwaged (women) created by the transition from

feudalism to capitalism was the fundamental break between men and women and the alienation of both from their children. This waged versus unwaged distinction must be broken down.

5. "Capital established the family as the nuclear family and subordinated within it the woman to the man... Capital constructed the female role, and has made the man in the family the instrument of this reduction." The creation of wage labor completed the subordination of women, who appeared to be excluded from social production by not being paid a wage.

6. Women must refuse to accept this role any longer. James says, "if your production is vital to capitalism, refusing to produce, refusing to work, is a fundamental lever of social power."

7. Women must oppose membership in trade unions, because "like the family, these protect the class at her expense..." The unions, because they exclude non-wage-earners, divide the class against itself and make any common struggle impossible. Also, capitalism uses the unions specifically to hold down the workers' militancy.

8. The left, too, must be rejected because it is "male-dominated." Moreover, the left sees the solution for women as simply acquiring "trade-union consciousness" or adopting "the forms of struggle men have traditionally used," i.e., the forms of the organized labor movement.

9. James and Dalla Costa offer "social existence to housewives other than another job—we can offer them the struggle itself." So women must refuse to work outside the home, and inside the home as well, and instead participate in "the struggle itself." "Those who advocate that the liberation of the working class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are

part of the problem, not the solution." How will women survive? The growth of the women's movement will provide their support.

Why Housewives Are Not Productive Workers

Two key concepts form the basis of Dalla Costa/James's theory of women as productive workers—their production of the laborer/labor power (i.e., child-raising and servicing the husband/worker) and their role in "consumption as part of production"—shopping, cooking, etc. The argument that these two aspects of housework are productive of surplus value ignores two crucial distinctions made by Marx. These are: 1) the difference between industrial and *private* consumption (i.e., family consumption) and 2) the difference between productive labor under capitalism, that is, wage labor for a capitalist generating surplus value, and simple work, which produces only use value.

James, after noting that "...so-called Marxists said that the capitalist family did not produce for capitalism, was not part of social production...", admits that "Marx himself does not seem to have said anywhere that it was." James is a classic revisionist; that is, she wants to use Marx's tremendous authority yet has the problem of trying to twist his words to fit her theories. She explains away his peculiar oversight in not explicitly stating her theory:

"Suffice it to say that, first, he is singular in seeing consumption as a phase of production: 'It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the labourer himself.' (*Capital*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1958, p. 572). Second, he alone has given us the tools to make our own analysis. And finally, he never was guilty of the nonsense with which Engels, despite his many contributions, has saddled us."

Private Versus Industrial Consumption

There are two kinds of consumption under capitalism—industrial and private. Marx writes:

"The labourer consumes in a two-fold way. While producing he consumes by his labour the means of production... On the other hand, the labourer turns the money paid to him for his labour-power, into means of subsistence: this is his individual consumption. The labourer's productive consumption, and his individual consumption, are therefore totally distinct. In the former, he acts as the motive power of capital, and belongs to the capitalist. In the latter, he belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions *outside the process of production.*" [our emphasis]

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 23

Of course this private consumption is taken into consideration by capitalists, as it is necessary in order to maintain and reproduce the labor force, without which capitalism could not exist, and as such it is considered to be "a necessary factor in the process of production." "But," as Marx noted, "the capitalist may safely leave its fulfilment to the labourer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation." The fact that it is necessary to eat, to live and to reproduce does not make the family a "center of social

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... Dalla Costa, James

production." These things take place *regardless* of the form of social production. Individual consumption in the home is not capitalist production, because the capitalist does not own the family. The worker *owns himself* and *sells* his labor power to the capitalist. The capitalist does not have to concern himself with how the worker reproduces and lives (except to ensure that workers will be forced to continue to sell their labor power). So, while in the broadest sense, this individual private consumption is a "factor" of production, i.e., is taken account of, mainly in the calculation of wages, it is in no sense capitalist production. That is why Marx said individual consumption takes place *outside the sphere of production*.

Productive Labor

The Marxist concept of "productive labor" is violently abused by Dalla Costa and James. It is not clear for *whom* this "productive labor" in the home is done, since the capitalist does not own the nuclear family. Clearly, Dalla Costa does not intend us to believe that the housewife is either a slave owner (since she "produces living human beings" which are commodities) or a mini-capitalist (since she owns the "means of production," her reproductive organs). Dalla Costa says women "produce" people. In the biological sense, this is true. But this "production" is not "productive labor" in the Marxist sense, as she claims.

James says that the commodity women produce is "the living human being." Elsewhere, this commodity is referred to as "labor power." But a distinction must be made. Under capitalism, human beings are not commodities (as they are in slave societies). Under capitalism workers are "free" to sell their labor power. It is precisely the alienation of the workers from their labor power and their sale of that labor power as a commodity on the market which characterize capitalist production:

"...labour-power can appear on the market as a commodity only if, and so far as, its producer, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale... In order that he may be able to do this, he must have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour, i.e. of his person."

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Chapter 6

But the other work women do in the home—the care, feeding and general maintenance of workers (husbands) is not Marxist productive labor either. The important question to ask about this domestic work is: Does this work produce value, and if so, how is the value of this "labor power" determined? Because if housewives' work produces value, it must be embodied in the commodity—labor power, according to Dalla Costa—which this housework supports.

The production of labor power is simple commodity production. Labor power is produced and sold in order to get use values in exchange, for the immediate satisfaction of human needs. Ira Gerstein, in "Domestic Work and Capitalism" (in *Radical America*, Vol. 7, Nos. 4 and 5), contrasts this simple commodity production to capitalist production:

"Production is limited, because the quantity produced is bounded by the finite human capacity, necessity and desire to consume. On the other hand, the aim of the capitalist is to continually increase his surplus-value. This has nothing to do with his personal consumption... Labor-power does not increase without limit as an independent way of piling up wealth."

Marx analyzes the value of labor power as follows:

"The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. So far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it... the sum of the means of subsistence necessary for the production of labour-power must include the means necessary for the labourer's substitutes, i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its appearance on the market... The value of labour-power resolves itself into the value of a definite quantity of the means of subsistence."

—Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chapter 6

Labor power is created by the consumption of material things (food, clothing) and of services (medical care, education). The sum of the value of these means of subsistence is the value of labor power. The domestic work done by housewives in processing these commodities is clearly *not* considered when adding up this total. Housework does *not add value* to the commodity labor power. This does not mean that women do not work inside the home—but this domestic drudgery is not *capitalist* production and is not considered therefore in analyzing capitalist productive relations.

The Production of Labor Power

According to Gerstein, "Labor-power is the single and unique commodity in capitalist society whose general production does not take place in a capitalist manner." However, there are other commodities which are not produced in "a capitalist manner" under capitalism; for example, natural raw materials such as fish caught from the sea. These exist and reproduce themselves, although not in a capitalist manner. And the production of human beings, who possess within themselves the capacity for labor, must be seen in the same way as these other natural products because the propagation of the human species is a natural act. The *self*-production of services and things consumed by the worker and his family lies *outside* capitalist political economy altogether. It is, moreover, a *universal* activity of living creatures ("the instincts for self-preservation" which Marx noted). James, by stubbornly insisting that "there is nothing in capitalism which is not capitalistic," covers up this crucial difference between the production of labor power and capitalist production.

In designating propagation a "natural act," it must be made clear, however, that the organization of the propagation of the family is not determined simply biologically, but socially.

Origins of the Family

How did women come to be enslaved in the home? This domestic slavery was not created by capitalism



Demonstration of Chilean housewives in 1972 against Allende government.

SIPAHIOGLU

but has far more ancient origins stemming from the development of private property and the social surplus accumulated by men from their work. According to Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, land in the stone age belonged to all members of the tribe in common. While there was a division of labor between the sexes, there was also equality, for each took part in productive labor and contributed to the economy. With the eventual increase in the capacity of human beings to produce, it became profitable to employ slaves—the first form of private property. Herds, land and other forms of property also became privatized for the first time, bringing about a revolution within the family. Men had always been responsible for procuring the necessities of life, but now, although the division of labor within the family remained essentially unchanged, the domestic labor of women no longer counted for much alongside the economic power of men. Engels concluded that women could achieve equality with men only when they took part once again in general economic production on a par with men.

James claims that Marx was "never guilty of this nonsense" of Engels. But if this is true, it is simply because he died (1883) a year before Engels' completion of this book which was intended as a joint work. Engels in fact states in his preface to the first edition that, "The following chapters are... the execution of a bequest... Karl Marx had made it one of his future tasks to present the results of Morgan's researches... I have the critical notes which he made to his extensive extracts from Morgan, and as far as possible I reproduce them here."

Dalla Costa and James hold differing views of the question of the origins of women's oppression—and both are wrong. James claims that primordial sexism is the root cause of women's oppression. Dalla Costa, on the other hand, argues that it is the result of capitalist economic relationships, a thesis which leads her to assert that woman's position in feudal society was in some ways more progressive:

"To the extent that men had been the despotic heads of the patriarchal family... the experience of women, children, and men was a contradictory experience... But in pre-capitalistic society, the work of each member of the community of serfs was seen to be directed to a purpose; either to the prosperity of the feudal lord or to our survival... The passage from serfdom

to free labor power separated the male from the female proletariat...."

Dalla Costa/James's insistence on the importance of the productive labor of housewives as central to their revolutionary potential contradicts the assertions: 1) that women were forced *out* of productive labor with the transition from feudalism, and 2) that feudalism was *less oppressive* to women than capitalism, because women were recognized as productive workers under feudalism.

Capitalism in fact laid the basis for the liberation of women because: 1) it opened the way for the participation of women in social production once again, creating opportunities for the development of social consciousness and for organized struggle against oppression outside the isolated single-unit family structure; 2) the rise of the bourgeois concept of the free individual—as opposed to medieval notions of bloodlineage, aristocratic privilege and religious domination which codified the belief that women were inferior—laid the intellectual groundwork for the recognition of women as full human beings with rights equal to those of men, a concept totally foreign to the medieval mind (and apparently irrelevant to Dalla Costa).

Capitalism created the basis for the emancipation of women through the development of the productive forces, but it has long outlived its progressive historical role and is now a barrier both to the further development of the productive forces and to the emancipation of women. Women cannot be free until scarcity is eliminated, classes are abolished and the family is replaced. In other words, women cannot be free prior to the establishment of socialist society.

The Family Under Capitalism

The perpetuation of the monogamous family unit under advanced capitalist society is not the result of some fiendish capitalist plot to extract ever more profit from the working class. Even the family as it exists today costs the capitalist more in dollars and cents than it would if its functions were socialized. The value of the family for the bourgeoisie does not lie in its *efficiency* in producing labor power, but rather in its usefulness as a reservoir of small private property and petty production which serves as an

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... Dalla Costa, James

ideological brake on social consciousness. It is for this reason, as well as to end women's enslavement to repetitious, dull and enervating housework, that one of the tasks of the socialist revolution must be to replace the family.

The original economic function of the monogamous family was to transmit private property through inheritance. This function is economically useful only for the propertied classes, not for the proletariat, which owns little of material value to pass on. It is therefore in the material interest of the working class to play the historically progressive role of socializing family functions after the revolution.

But aside from this, the reactionary ideology of the nuclear family also renders possible the organizing of working-class housewives for reactionary ends, since their consciousness tends to be centered around defending and extending whatever small private holdings the family has. Thus in 1971 in Chile the opposition Christian Democrats and the National Party were able to successfully organize large demonstrations of housewives (as housewives) against the Allende regime. There is nothing in the family structure which can lead one to assume, as do James and Dalla Costa, that "when it comes to a showdown, [housewives] just go ahead and do what they know is right" and that what they consider "right" is aimed at overthrowing capitalism and not at maintaining it.

Dalla Costa/James's answer to women's oppression is that women should withdraw from capitalist society entirely, thereby bringing about its collapse. If they are working in a factory they should get out, because the recruitment of women into the workforce is a capitalist plot designed to ward off revolution. "The government, acting in the interests of the capitalist class..., has created unemployment" so that "... we will be glad for the crumbs that the master lets fall from his table." This theory of history as a fiendish plot assumes that capitalists are totally free to do what they please regardless of the laws of motion of capitalist economy. The fact is, however, that it is *impossible* to provide full employment in conditions of decaying imperialist society, whether the capitalists want to or not!

And the workers—far from being simply dupes—have an economic *compulsion* to work! But James and Dalla Costa ignore this. Their conception of why people do things is grounded not in the material world but in an idealist conception of Fealty.

Trade Unions and the Left

Dalla Costa/James further argue that since working is exploitative and hence to be avoided, those organizations which center on organization at the workplace, i.e., the trade unions, are also bad. The trade unions are "divisive" because they take account only of wage workers and ignore the rest of the "proletariat" (such as old people, sick people, babies, housewives). This is nothing more than the old New Left practice of equating the most oppressed with the most revolutionary.

It was not the trade unions, however, which created

the hostilities among different social sectors—sexual, racial, employed/unemployed—which weaken the working class. These hostilities are part and parcel of *class society*—manifestations of bourgeois ideology which the trade unions do not create but (to the extent that they remain under conservative leadership) do reflect. Trade unions are basically defensive organizations of the working class to protect whatever economic gains it can wrest from the capitalist class. Marxists must therefore defend trade unions and seek to extend their protection to all workers. There is a crucial gap, which James ignores, between the appetites of the present-day trade-union bureaucracy, which serves as an agent of capital within the working class: in order to maintain itself in power, and the ranks of the unions, who have neither soft jobs nor fancy pension plans to protect them nor the opportunity for class collaboration with the ruling class.

Marxists have never said that trade-union organization or "trade-union consciousness" is sufficient in itself to make a revolution. There would be no need for a revolutionary vanguard party if that were so. James misleads her audience when she writes:

"We are told that we must bring women to what is called a 'trade union consciousness.' This phrase is Lenin's and it comes from a pamphlet called 'What is to Be Done?'"

This clearly implies that for Lenin trade-union consciousness is "the answer." But the whole point of *What Is to Be Done?* is precisely the need to *transcend* simple trade-union consciousness! Lenin writes:

"The spontaneous working-class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade-unionism, and working-class trade unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics."

—V.I. Lenin. *What Is to Be Done?*

It is true that some left and even ostensibly Trotskyist organizations opportunistically tail uncritically every "left" bureaucrat and adapt to the most backward aspects of working-class consciousness, but this is a *betrayal* of Marxism, which we in the Spartacist League have consistently exposed. Dalla Costa's blanket charge that "the left" is "male-dominated" is particularly insulting to female revolutionaries, for it assumes that men will *automatically* dominate any organization, that no matter what level of consciousness they attain, women are really incapable of speaking up for themselves. This accusation is also insulting to male revolutionaries, because it is predicated on their incapability of transcending a chauvinist worldview and making a common struggle with women. It all boils down again to a New Left dictum: that "only the oppressed can really understand their own oppression."

Conclusions

There exists in many women's organizations much confusion over the conclusions to be drawn from the works of Dalla Costa and James. This is because their rhetoric about "class struggle" partially obscures their real hatred of that struggle and their hostility to the proletariat. In truth, Dalla Costa and James have *no* program for women's liberation. Their "program" is solely one of *rejection*: women must reject work, must reject the left, must reject the

Feminism vs. Marxism: Origins of the Conflict

Contrary to an opinion still subscribed to in certain circles, modern feminism did not emerge full-grown from the fertile womb of the New Left, but is in fact an ideological offspring of the utopian egalitarianism of the early nineteenth century, which was in turn a product of the bourgeois democratic revolution. It is noteworthy that the most original theorist of utopian socialism, Charles Fourier, was also the first advocate of women's liberation through the replacement of the nuclear family by collective child rearing. Since utopian socialism (including its solution to the problem of the oppression of women) represented the ideals of the bourgeois democratic revolution breaking through the barriers of private property, it was historically progressive. However, with the genesis of Marxism and the recognition that an egalitarian society can emerge only out of the rule of the working class, feminism (like other forms of utopian egalitarianism) lost its progressive aspect and became an ideology of the left wing of liberal individualism, a position which it continues to occupy to this day.

Women in the Bourgeois-Democratic Vision

Without question, the most important bourgeois-democratic work on women's liberation was Mary

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written in 1792. Wollstonecraft was part of a circle of English radical democrats which included William Blake, Tom Paine and William Godwin, whose political lives came to be dominated by the French Revolution. A year before she wrote her classic on sexual equality, Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, a polemic against Edmund Burke's counterrevolutionary writings. A few years after, she was to attempt a history of the French Revolution.

While informed and imbued with moral outrage as a result of her own experiences as an unmarried, middle-class woman (she worked as a school teacher and governess), *Vindication* is essentially an extension of the principles of the Enlightenment and French Revolution to women. The first chapter, entitled "Rights and Duties of Mankind," sets the theoretical framework. *Vindication* rests heavily on analogies between the basis for the equality of women and general social equality:

For a contemporary reader, *Vindication* seems a highly unbalanced work. While the description of the role of women continues to be relevant, Wollstonecraft's solutions appear pallid. Her main programmatic demand, to which she devotes the concluding

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home, must reject their husbands, etc. And what substitutes do they propose? Only the purposely vague "struggle itself." Struggle for *what*? Pompei replies, "What we want is not to become more productive, not to go off and be exploited better somewhere else, but to work less and to have more opportunity for social and political experience." Certainly a legitimate desire, and one shared by all the oppressed and exploited. But to dream of its achievement apart from the smashing of capitalist class society is sheer utopianism. Without an understanding of how capitalism operates and of how it can be overthrown, all concrete programmatic demands become mere cosmetic reforms, whose effect is to buttress not overthrow the system.

At the heart of Dalla Costa/James's theses is the belief that women *can* withdraw from capitalist society, *can* find their own unique road to salvation outside capitalist relations. And why try to fit housewives into the capitalist economic system at all if their strength really lies outside it? This is the most glaring contradiction of all.

The reason Dalla Costa/James attempt to fit housewives into the mold of Marxist "productive workers" is simply because they cannot cope with the challenge of Marxism to their feminist worldview in any other way. This thin veneer of "Marxism" is simply a cover for the same old New Left ideology that anyone who *works* has already sold out, in total ignorance of the

iron necessity, faced by most of the world, of working or starving. It is a reflection of the worldview of those privileged few, the petty-bourgeois "radicals" who have glorified primitivism to the extent of hailing the starving, diseased subsistence farmers of the "Third World" as the new revolutionary force. And while these armchair radicals refine their theories in air-conditioned comfort, the peasants whom they idealize are slaughtered *because* of their primitive resources. While it is nice that James is trying to "get over this guilt about having wall-to-wall carpeting," that is not the problem of most women (and men), who face the struggle to eat, to eke out a living somehow and to find a way to overcome the real material oppression they face, an oppression created by a society from which they *cannot* escape. James tells these working-class women to stop working, to reject their husband's wages and live on—what? Air? Or are they all supposed to come and sleep on her wall-to-wall carpeting? Is this what she means by "the movement will support them"? All of Dalla Costa/James's theories are mere playing at revolution without any real intention of actively seeking to smash capitalism. As Marx said, "All the philosophers have done has been to *interpret* the world differently, what matters is to *alter* it." And the point is not to walk away from capitalism or to create an alternative for the petty-bourgeois drop-outs within it—but to smash it forever and begin the construction of socialist society. ■

...Origins

chapter, is uniform education for girls and boys. Even when she wrote *Vindication* this was only a moderately radical proposal. In fact in the very year that *Vindication* was written, a similar educational program was proposed in the French Assembly. Yet generations after the establishment of coeducation and the even more radical reform of women's suffrage, Wollstonecraft's depiction of women's role in society continues to ring true.

Although Wollstonecraft was one of the most radical political activists of her day (shortly after writing her classic on women's rights, she crossed the Channel to take part in the revolutionary French government), *Vindication* has an unexpectedly moralizing and personalist character. Like many feminists of our day, she appeals to men to recognize the full humanity of women and to women to stop being sex objects and develop themselves. And there is the same conviction that if only men and women would really believe in these ideals and behave accordingly, then women would achieve equality.

The emphasis on individual relationships is not peculiar to Wollstonecraft, but arises from the inherent contradiction within the bourgeois-democratic approach to women's oppression: Wollstonecraft accepted the nuclear family as the central institution of society and argued for sexual equality within that framework.

By accepting the basic role of women as mothers, Wollstonecraft accepted a division of labor in which women were necessarily economically dependent on their husbands. Therefore, women's equality was essentially dependent on how the marriage partners treated one another. In good part, *Vindication* is an argument that parents and particularly fathers should raise their daughters more like their sons in order to bring out their true potential. But if fathers reject education for their daughters, there is no other recourse. Here we have the limits both of bourgeois democracy and of Wollstonecraft's vision.

Charles Fourier and the Abolition of the Family

The status of women in the nineteenth century represented the most acute and manifest expression of the contradiction between capitalist society and its own ideals. It was this contradiction that gave birth to utopian socialism. Early in the nineteenth century it became apparent to those still committed to the ideals of the French Revolution that liberty, equality and fraternity were not compatible with private property in a competitive market economy. As the most incisive of the pioneer socialists, Charles Fourier, put it:

"Philosophy was right to vaunt *liberty*; it is the foremost desire of all creatures. But philosophy forgot that in civilized society liberty is illusory if the common people lack wealth. When the wage-earning classes are poor, their independence is as fragile as a house without foundations. The free man who lacks



Victoria Woodhull, U.S. presidential candidate, 1872

wealth immediately sinks back under the yoke of the rich."

—Beecher and Bienvenu (Eds.), *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*

And when Fourier applied the same critical concepts to the status of women, he reached equally radical, anti-bourgeois conclusions. The importance that Fourier attributed to the condition of women is well known:

"Social progress and changes of period are brought about by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and social retrogression occurs as a result of a diminution in the liberty of women. . . . In summary, the extension of the privileges of women is the fundamental cause of all social progress."

—*Ibid.*

What is of decisive importance about Fourier's concern for women's oppression is that he put forth a program for the total reconstruction of society that would end the historic division of labor between men and women. In Fourier's projected socialist community, children were raised collectively with no particular relation to their biological parents, men and women performed the same work and total sexual liberty was encouraged. (He regarded heterosexual monogamy as the extension of bourgeois property concepts to the sexual sphere.)

Fourier's intense hostility to the patriarchal family in good part derived from his realization that it was inherently sexually repressive. In this he anticipated much of radical Freudianism. For example, he observed, "There are still many parents who allow their unmarried daughters to suffer and die for want of sexual satisfaction" (*Ibid.*).

Despite the fantastic nature of his projected socialist communities or "phalanxes," Fourier's program contained the rational core for the reorganization of society needed to liberate women. He was uniquely responsible for making the demand for the liberation of women through the abolition of the nu-

clear family an integral part of the socialist program which the young Marx and Engels inherited. Engels was more than willing (for example, in *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*) to pay homage to the primary author of the socialist program for women's liberation.

Utopian Egalitarianism and Women's Liberation

While not giving the woman question the centrality it had in Fourierism, the two other major currents of early nineteenth century socialism, Owenism and Saint-Simonism, were also unambiguously committed to sexual equality and opposed to legally enforced monogamy. The political life of the early nineteenth century was characterized by the *complete interpenetration* of the struggle for women's liberation and the general struggle for an egalitarian society. Those women advocating women's rights (no less than the men who did so) did not view this question as distinct from, much less counterposed to, the general movement for a rational social order. Those women who championed sexual equality were either socialists or radical democrats whose activity on behalf of women's rights occupied only a fraction of their political lives. The most radical women advocates of sexual equality—the Americans Frances Wright and Margaret Fuller and the Frenchwoman Flora Tristan—all conform to this political profile.

Frances Wright began her political career as a liberal reformer with a tract in favor of the abolition of slavery. She was won to socialism by Robert Dale Owen, Robert Owen's son, who immigrated to the U.S. to become its most important radical socialist in the 1820-30's. Wright established an Owenite commune in Tennessee modeled on the famous one at New Harmony, Indiana. In 1828-29, she and Robert Dale Owen edited the *Free Enquirer*, a newspaper associated with the New York Workingman's Party which championed universal suffrage, free public education, "free love" and birth control.

Margaret Fuller, whose *Women in the Nineteenth Century* was the most influential women's rights work of her generation, was a product of New England Transcendentalism and had edited a journal with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Like Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller approached the woman question from the standpoint of religious radicalism (the equality of souls).

Fuller was associated with the Transcendentalist commune, Brook Farm, about the time it was transformed into a Fourierist community or "phalanx," the year before she wrote her classic on women's equality. Shortly after that she went to Europe and became involved in the democratic nationalist movements that were a mainspring in the revolutions of 1848. In that momentous year, she went to Italy to run a hospital for Giuseppe Mazzini's Young Italy movement.

The most important woman socialist of the pre-1848 era was Flora Tristan. She began her revolutionary career with a tract in favor of legalized divorce, which had been outlawed in France following the reaction of 1815. (As a young woman Tristan had left her husband, an act which resulted in social ostracism and continual hardship throughout her life.) Her work on divorce led to a correspondence with the aging Fourier and a commitment to socialism. Among the most

cosmopolitan of socialists, Tristan had crisscrossed the Channel playing an active role in both the Owenite and Chartist movements. Summing up her political situation in a letter to Victor Considerant, leader of the Fourierist movement after the master's death, she wrote: "Almost the entire world is against me, men because I am demanding the emancipation of women, the propertied classes because I am demanding the emancipation of the wage earners" (Goldsmith, *Seven Women Against the World*).

In the 1840's the ancient French craft unions, the *compagnonnes*, were transforming themselves into modern trade unions. This process produced an embryonic revolutionary socialist labor movement whose main leaders were Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Auguste Blanqui and Etienne Cabet. Flora Tristan was part of this nascent proletarian socialist movement. Her *The Workers Union* written in 1843, was the most advanced statement of proletarian socialism up to its day. Its central theme was the need for an *international workers' organization*. (Marx met Tristan while he was in Paris and was undoubtedly influenced by her work.) The concluding passage of *The Workers Union* affirms: "Union is power if we unite on the social and political field, on the ground of equal rights for both sexes, if we organize labor, we shall win welfare for all."

The Workers Union devotes a section to the problems of women and its concluding passage indicates the integral role that sexual equality had in Tristan's concept of socialism: "We have resolved to include in our Charter woman's sacred and inalienable rights. We desire that men should give to their wives and mothers the liberty and absolute equality which they enjoy themselves."

Flora Tristan died of typhoid in 1844 at the age of 41. Had she survived the catastrophe of 1848 and remained politically active, the history of European socialism might well have been different, for she was

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Women and Revolution

... Origins

free of the residual Jacobinism of Blanqui and the artisan philistinism of Proudhon.

Contemporary feminists and bourgeois historians tend to label all early nineteenth-century female advocates of sexual equality feminists. This is a wholly illegitimate analysis—a projection of current categories back into a time when they are meaningless. As a delimited movement and distinctive ideology feminism did not exist in the early nineteenth century. Virtually all the advocates of full sexual equality considered this an integral part of the movement for a generally free and egalitarian society rooted in Enlightenment principles and carrying forward the American and

Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly, official newspaper of Section 12 of the First International.

particularly the French Revolutions. The American Owenite Frances Wright was no more a feminist than the English Owenite William Thompson, who wrote *An appeal of one half the Human Race, Women, against the pretensions of the other Half, Men, to keep them in Civil and Domestic Slavery*. Flora Tristan was no more a feminist than was Fourier.

In the 1840's, a Transcendentalist radical like Margaret Fuller, a nationalist democrat like Giuseppe Mazzini and a socialist working class organizer like Etienne Cabet could consider themselves part of a common political movement whose program was encapsulated in the slogan, "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." In its most radical expression, this movement looked forward to a single, total revolution which would simultaneously establish democracy, eliminate classes, achieve equality for women and end national oppression.

This vision was defeated on the barricades in 1848. And with that defeat, the component elements of early nineteenth-century radicalism (liberal democracy and socialism, trade unionism, women's equality and national liberation) separated and began to compete and conflict with one another. After 1848, it seemed that bourgeois society would continue for some time and that the interests of the oppressed, be they workers, women or nations, would have to be realized within its framework. Feminism (like trade unionism and

national liberation) emerged as a delimited movement with its own constituency, ideology and organization only after the great catastrophe of 1848 had temporarily dispelled the vision of a fundamentally new social order.

Marx Against Utopian Egalitarianism

It is sometimes written that Fourier regarded socialism more as a means of overcoming women's oppression than class oppression. This is a post-Marx way of looking at politics and not how Fourier would have viewed it. He would have said that he projected a society which would satisfy human needs and that the most striking thing about it was the radical change in the role of women. As opposed to the materialist view that different political movements represent the interests of different classes, utopian socialism shared the rational idealistic conception of political motivation characteristic of the Enlightenment—i.e., that different political movements reflect different conceptions of the best possible social organization. The idealism of early socialism was probably inevitable since it was produced by those revolutionary bourgeois democrats who maintained their principles after the actual bourgeoisie had abandoned revolutionary democracy. The social base of early socialism was those petty-bourgeois radicals who had gone beyond the interests and real historic possibilities of their class. This was most true of German "True Socialism" which, in a nation with virtually no industrial workers and a conservative, traditionalist petty bourgeoisie, was purely a literary movement. It was at least true of English Owenism, which had intersected the embryonic labor movement while retaining a large element of liberal philanthropism.

By the 1840's a working-class movement had arisen in France, Belgium and England which was attracted to socialist ideas and organization. However, the relationship of the new-fledged socialist workers' organizations to the older socialist currents, as well as to liberal democracy and the political expressions of women's rights and national liberation, remained confused in all existing socialist theories. It was Marx who cut the Gordian knot and provided a coherent, realistic analysis of the social basis for the socialist movement within bourgeois society.

Marx asserted that the working class was the social group which would play the primary and distinctive role in establishing socialism. This was so because the working class was that social group whose interests and condition were most in harmony with a collectivist economy or, conversely, which had the least stake in the capitalist mode of production.

Marx's appreciation of the role of the proletariat was not deduced from German philosophy, but was the result of his experience in France in the 1840's. Socialism had manifestly polarized French society along class lines, the main base for socialism being the industrial working class, the propertied classes being implacably hostile and the petty bourgeoisie vacillating, often seeking a utopian third road.

For Marx the predominance of intellectuals in the early socialist movement was not proof that the socialist movement could be based on universal reason.

Rather it was necessarily a phenomenon partly reflecting the contradictions of the bourgeois democratic revolution and partly anticipating the new alignment of class forces: "A portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat and in particular, a portion of bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole" (Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*).

The propertied, educated classes could not be won to socialism on the basis of rational and democratic ideals even though objectively those ideals could only be realized under socialism. Along the same lines, women of the privileged class and the ruling stratum of oppressed nationalities cannot in general be won to socialism even though objectively sexual equality and national liberation can only be realized under socialism.

Closely related to the question of the class basis of the socialist movement is the question of the material conditions under which socialism can be established. Reflecting on pre-Marxist socialism in his later years, Engels quipped that the utopians believed that the reason socialism hadn't been established before was that nobody had ever thought of it. That Engels' witticism was only a slight exaggeration is shown by the importance of communal experiments in the early socialist movement, indicating a belief that socialism could be established under any and all conditions if a group really wanted it. The primacy of voluntarism for the early socialists again reflected the fact that their thinking was rooted in eighteenth-century, individualistic idealism which, in turn, derived from Protestantism, an earlier bourgeois ideology.

In sharp and deliberate contrast to the utopians, Marx asserted that inequality and oppression were necessary consequences of economic scarcity and attempts to eliminate them through communal escapism or political coercion were bound to fail:

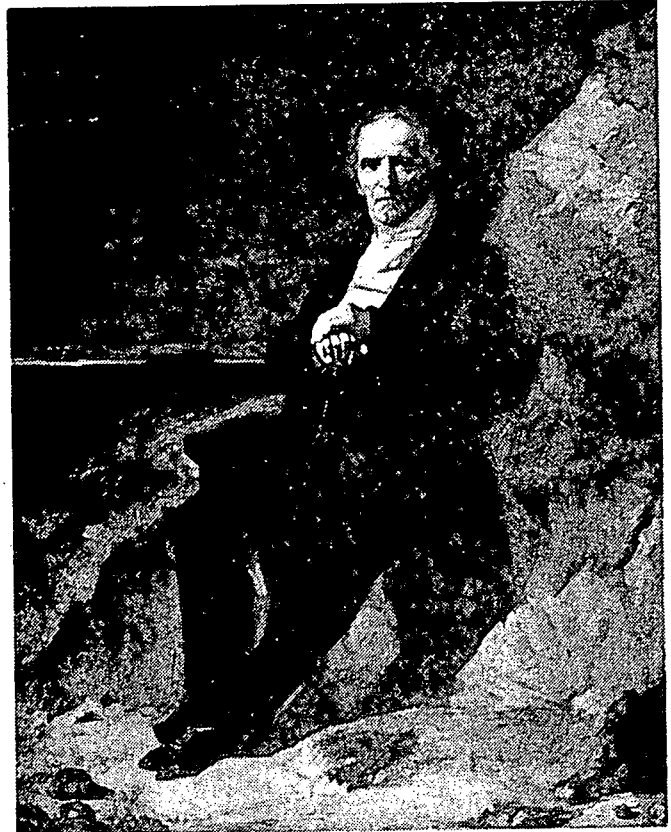
"...this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their *world-historic*, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and with *destitution* the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced..." [emphasis in original]

—Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Marx's assertion that inequality and oppression are historically necessary and can be overcome only through the *total* development of society, centering on the raising of the productive forces, represents his most fundamental break with *progressive* bourgeois ideology. Therefore, to this day, these concepts are the most unpalatable aspects of Marxism for those attracted to socialism from a liberal humanist outlook:

"... although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual; the higher level of individuality is thus only achieved by a historical process in which individuals are sacrificed..."

"...it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means;..."



Utopian socialist Charles Fourier called for the liberation of women.

slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and . . . , in general people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. 'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse. . . ."

—Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*

It is evident that "women" can replace "individuals" and "classes" in these passages without doing damage to their meaning, since Marx regarded women's oppression as a *necessary* aspect of that stage in human development associated with class society.

Marx's programmatic differences with the utopians were encapsulated in the concept of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" which he regarded as one of his few original, important contributions to socialist theory. The dictatorship of the proletariat is that period after the overthrow of the capitalist state when the working class administers society in order to create the economic and cultural conditions for socialism.

During the dictatorship of the proletariat, the restoration of capitalism remains a possibility. This is not primarily due to the machinations of die-hard reactionaries but arises rather out of the conflicts and tensions generated by the continuation of global economic scarcity.

This economic scarcity is caused not only by inadequate physical means of production. Even more

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importantly it derives from the inadequate and extremely uneven cultural level inherited from capitalism. Socialist superabundance presupposes an enormous raising of the cultural level of mankind. The "average" person under socialism would have the knowledge and capacity of several learned professions in contemporary society.

However, in the period immediately following the revolution, the administration of production will necessarily be largely limited to that elite trained in bourgeois society, since training their replacements will take time. Therefore, skilled specialists such as the director of an airport, chief of surgery in a hospital or head of a nuclear power station will have to be drawn from the educated, privileged classes of the old capitalist society. Although in a qualitatively diminished way, the dictatorship of the proletariat will continue to exhibit economic inequality, a hierarchic division of labor and those aspects of social oppression rooted in the cultural level inherited from bourgeois society (e.g., racist *attitudes* will not disappear the day after the revolution).

These general principles concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat likewise apply to the woman question. To the extent that it rests on the cultural level inherited from capitalism, certain aspects of sexual inequality and oppression will continue well into the dictatorship of the proletariat. The population cannot be totally re-educated nor can a psychological pattern instilled in men and women from infancy be fully eliminated or reversed.

The rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary transition period to socialism is the central justification for utopian egalitarianism (including radical or "socialist" feminism) in the era of Marxism.

The Battle over Protective Labor Legislation

Feminism was one of the three major extensions of utopian egalitarianism into the post-1848 era, the other two being anarchism and artisan cooperativism (Proudhonism). In fact, during the later nineteenth century radical feminism and anarchism heavily interpenetrated one another both as regards their position on the woman question and in personnel. The decisive element in common among feminism, anarchism and cooperativism was a commitment to a level of social equality and individual freedom impossible to attain not only under capitalism, but in the period following its overthrow. At a general ideological level, feminism was bourgeois individualism in conflict with the realities and limits of bourgeois society.

During their lifetimes, Marx and Engels had two notable conflicts with organized feminism—continual clashes in the context of the struggle for protective labor legislation and a short faction fight in the American section of the First International. While the question of protective labor legislation covered a great deal of ground at many levels of concreteness, the

central difference between the Marxists and feminists over this issue was also the central difference between Marxism and utopian egalitarianism—i.e., the question of the primacy of the material well-being of the masses and the historical interests of the socialist movement vis-à-vis formal equality within bourgeois society.

The feminist opposition to protective labor legislation argued and continues to argue that it would mean legal inequality in the status of women and that it was partly motivated by paternalistic, male-chauvinist prejudices. Marx and Engels recognized these facts but maintained that the physical well-being of working women and the interests of the entire class in reducing the intensity of exploitation more than offset this formal and ideological inequality. Writing to Gertrud Guillaume-Schack, a German feminist who later became an anarchist, Engels stated his case:

"That the working woman needs special protection against capitalist exploitation because of her special physiological functions seems obvious to me. The English women who championed the formal right of members of their sex to permit themselves to be as thoroughly exploited by the capitalists as the men are mostly, directly or indirectly, interested in the capitalist exploitation of both sexes. I admit I am more interested in the health of the future generation than in the absolute formal equality of the sexes in the last years of the capitalist mode of production. It is my conviction that real equality of women and men can come true only when exploitation of either by capital has been abolished and private housework has been transformed into a public industry."

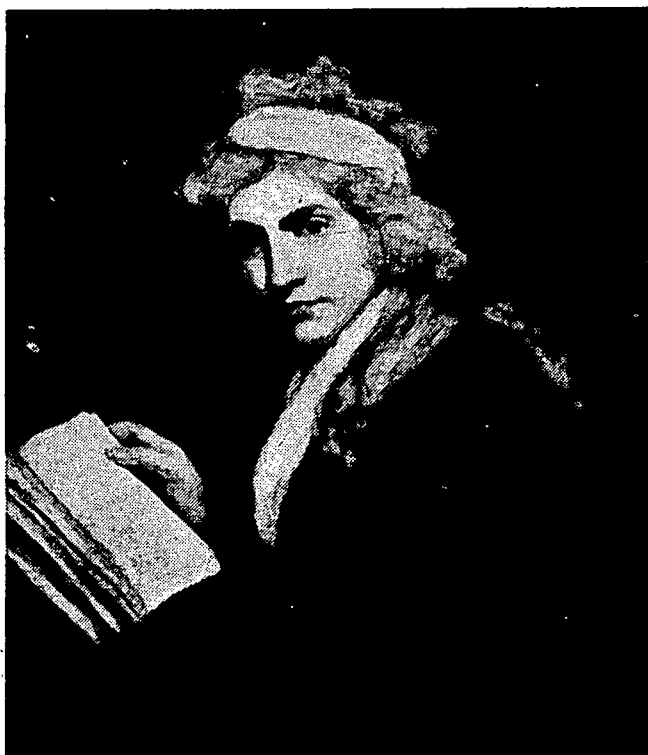
—Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Letter to Guillaume-Schack of 5 June 1855

Thus Engels recognized in feminism the false consciousness of the privileged classes of women who believe that since they themselves are oppressed only as women, sexual inequality is the only significant form of oppression.

Guillaume-Schack's conversion to anarchism was not accidental, for the anarchists also opposed protective labor legislation for women as an inconsistent, inegalitarian reform. Writing a polemic against the Italian anarchists in the early 1870's, Marx ridiculed the "logic" that one "must not take the trouble to obtain legal prohibition of the employment of girls under 10 in factories because a stop is not thereby put to the exploitation of boys under 10"—that this was a "compromise which damages the purity of eternal principles" (quoted in Hal Draper, *International Socialism*, July-August 1970).

Woodhull versus Sorge in the First International

Because of the catch-all nature of the First International, the Marxist tendency had to wage major internal factional struggles against the most characteristic left currents in the various countries (e.g., trade-union reformism in Britain, Proudhon's cooperativism in France, Lasalle's state socialism in Germany and anarchism in Eastern and Southern Europe). It is therefore highly symptomatic that the major factional struggle within the American section centered around feminism, a variant of petty-bourgeois radicalism. In the most general sense, the importance



English radical democrat Mary Wollstonecraft

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of the Woodhull tendency reflected the greater political weight of the American liberal middle class relative to the proletariat than in European class alignments. Historically petty-bourgeois moralism has been more influential in American socialism than in virtually any other country. This was particularly pronounced in the period after the Civil War when abolitionism served as the model for native American radicalism.

The relative political backwardness of the American working class is rooted primarily in the process of its development through successive waves of immigration from different countries. This created such intense ethnic divisions that it impeded even elementary trade-union organization. In addition, many of the immigrant workers who came from peasant backgrounds were imbued with strong religious, racial and sexual prejudices and a generally low cultural level which impeded class—much less socialist—consciousness. In general the discontent of American workers was channeled by the petty bourgeoisie of the various ethnic groups into the struggle for their own place in the parliamentary-state apparatus.

The American working class's lack of strong organization, its ethnic electoral politics and relatively backward social attitudes created a political climate in which "enlightened middle-class socialism" was bound to flourish. Not least important in this respect was the fact that the liberal middle classes were Protestant while the industrial working class was heavily Roman Catholic. Indeed, an important aspect of the Woodhull/Sorge fight was over an orientation toward Irish Catholic workers.

Victoria Woodhull was the best-known (more accurately notorious) "free love" advocate of her day, ambitious and with a gift for political showmanship.

Seeing that the First International was becoming fashionable, she organized her own section of it (Section 12) along with remnants of the New Democracy, a middle-class, electoral-reformist organization, led by Samuel Foot Andrews, a former abolitionist. The Woodhullites thus entered the First International as a radical liberal faction, with an emphasis on women's rights and an electoralist strategy.

Section 12 rapidly retranslated the principles of the First International into the language of American liberal democracy. Needless to say, it came out for total organizational federalism with each section free to pursue its own activities and line within the general principles of the International. Section 12's political line and organizational activities (its official paper, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* preached spiritualism among other things) quickly brought it into conflict within the Marxist tendency, led by the German veteran of the 1848 revolution, Friedrich Sorge. Section 12 was able to cause much factional trouble, not only in the U.S. but abroad, because its radical liberalism fed into the growing anarchist, electoral-reformist and federalist currents in the International. The Woodhullites were part of a rotten bloc which coalesced against the Marxist leadership of the First International in 1871-72. Woodhull enjoyed a short stay in the anarchist International in 1873 on her way to becoming a wealthy eccentric.

The immediate issue of the faction fight was the priority of women's rights, notably suffrage, over labor issues particularly the eight-hour day. That for the Woodhullites what was involved was not a matter of programmatic emphasis, but a counterposition to proletarian socialism was made explicit after the split with Sorge: "The extension of equal citizenship to women, the world over, must precede any general change in the subsisting relation of capital and labor" [emphasis in original] (*Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 18 November 1871).

After splitting with the Sorge wing, while still claiming loyalty to the First International, Section 12 organized the Equal Rights Party in order to run Woodhull for president in 1872. The program was straight left-liberalism without any proletarian thrust. It called for "... a truly republican government which shall not only recognize but guarantee equal political and social rights to men and women, and which shall secure equal opportunities of education for all children" (*Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, 20 April 1872).

The general political principles of the Woodhullites were clearly expressed in their appeal to the General Council of the First International against the Sorge wing:

"It [the object of the International] involves, first, the Political Equality and Social Freedom of men and women alike.... Social Freedom means absolute immunity from the impertinent intrusion in all affairs of exclusively personal concernment, such as religious belief, sexual relations, habits of dress, etc." [emphasis in original]

—Documents of the First International, The General Council; Minutes 1871-72

This appeal was answered by a resolution written by Marx, which suspended Section 12. After cataloguing the organizational abuses and rotten politics, Marx

continued on next page

The Myth of the "Socialist-Feminist" Organization: Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union Expels Socialists

Throughout the period of the late 1960's and early 1970's the majority of women's liberationists, even those "radical" refugees from New Left politics, rejected socialist revolution as the solution to the problem of women's oppression. Engels' analysis of the family, while appreciated in the abstract by some, remained for them an inoperable theoretical contribution unconnected to the Marxist perspectives of integrating women into social production (and the collective power of the working class) and of replacing the nuclear family through the socialization of its tasks. The rotten politics of fake Marxist-Leninist organizations deterred many women's movement activists from seeking a genuinely Marxist approach to the struggle for women's liberation. Public abstention on the woman question (Workers League), puritanical attitudes toward homosexuality coupled with opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (Revolutionary Union), defense of the family as the "fighting unit for socialism" (Progressive Labor Party) and single-issue reformism (Socialist Workers Party) provided an excuse for feminist currents to reject the Marxist movement in favor of a determination to put "our own" struggle first.

Lately, however, there have been several attempts to combine the two historically counterposed viewpoints of feminism and socialism. This is the result of several factors, particularly the recent workerist turn of a section of the left. The recognition that there were important class distinctions among women called into question the concept of an all-embracing

"sisterhood."

But since feminism defines itself and its tasks in terms of sex and socialism defines itself and its tasks in terms of class, these attempts inevitably fail, although they occasionally result in alliances between feminism and one of the two reformist strains of "socialism"—social democracy or Stalinism—whose essence, like that of feminism, is class collaboration.

One of the so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations to emerge in the recent period has been the Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union (BOWU), an organization which originated in the dissatisfaction of some radical feminists with the orientation toward Berkeley electoral politics of the liberal Beyond Anger Conference held in December 1972. While calling itself "socialist-feminist," the organization has, at least on paper, frequently taken stands in favor of socialism and opposed to traditional feminism.

Feminists vs. "Socialist-Feminists"

Two distinct political tendencies soon emerged within the newly-formed organization—feminists and "socialist-feminists." The Feminist Caucus argued for a broadly inclusive organization of radical women based on no specific political program. This was consistent with its traditionally feminist view that capitalism and sexism were separate systems of oppression and that men were the immediate enemy whom women must fight. The "socialist-feminists" argued

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concluded by reasserting the central difference between democratic egalitarianism and proletarian socialism—namely, that the end to all forms of oppression must run through the victory of the working class over capitalism. Marx called attention to past International documents:

"...relating to 'sectarian sections' or 'separatist bodies pretending to accomplish special missions' distinct from the common aim of the Association [First International], viz. to emancipate the mass of labour from its 'economical subjection to the monopolizer of the means of labour' which lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms, of social misery, mental degradation and political dependence."

—*Ibid.*

While the Marxist case against the Woodhullites centered on their electoralism, middle-class orientation and quackery, the role of "free love" in the

socialist movement had a definite significance in the fight. While including personal sexual freedom in their program, the Marxists insisted on a cautious approach to this question when dealing with more backward sections of the working class. By flaunting a sexually "liberated" life-style, the Woodhullites would have created a nearly impenetrable barrier to winning over conventional and religious workers. One of the main charges that Sorge brought against Section 12 at the Hague Conference in 1872 was that its activities had made it much more difficult for the International to reach the strategically placed Irish Catholic workers.

The historic relevance of the Woodhull/Sorge faction fight is that it demonstrated, in a rather pure way, the basis of feminism in classic bourgeois-democratic principles, particularly individualism. It further demonstrated that feminist currents tend to be absorbed into liberal reformism or anarchistic petty-bourgeois radicalism, both of which invariably unite against revolutionary proletarian socialism. ■

for an autonomous membership organization based on political principles defining a unified struggle against capitalism.

During the course of the struggle which led to the eventual departure of the Feminist Caucus in June 1973, the "Principles of Unity" (PoU) was drawn up which was explicitly anti-capitalist and to the left of the politics of the largely social-democratic membership.

However, the PoU also contains much that places it more in the realm of utopian socialism than revolutionary Marxism, particularly a protracted discussion of the quality of life in socialist society stressing the necessity of beginning to build such a society *now!* This utopian conception that an organization capable of overthrowing capitalism must necessarily contain within it the social institutions and relations of the new society is counterposed to a Leninist understanding of the necessity of making a revolution with the means which capitalism has produced.

Only the organized working class and its allies have the power to destroy the system which sustains class oppression and exploitation. This system cannot be destroyed by idealist conceptions regarding human freedom and advanced social relations because these conceptions can become realities only *after* the destruction of capitalist society and the realization of socialism.

BOWU Seeks "Autonomy"

The central role of the working class and the need for its instrument—the vanguard party—to destroy capitalism is totally absent from the BOWU "Principles", and this is not merely an oversight, but a conscious policy:

"Although we feel connected to the struggles of the left, our experience and our history teach us that a male-dominated revolutionary movement can ignore our oppression in the name of its own priorities and expediency. Not defining ourselves in reaction to the left, we assume the legitimacy of our movement. We are an autonomous women's union which will embody and struggle for the new forms of organization and relations between people which we define as socialism."

Despite these weaknesses and distortions, however, the generally anti-capitalist thrust of the program laid a basis for the possible development of a class-struggle perspective.

After eight months of internal struggle the BOWU surfaced at a Suffrage Day celebration on 21 August 1973, distributed its "Principles of Unity" and advertised a public meeting on "Women and the Economic Crisis" the next day. Spartacist League members and supporters attended and arranged to participate in the "political groups," which were the basic units of the organization and to which members were assigned at random for a term of four months. It was here that political decisions and discussions of strategy were slated to take place.

The several months of SL participation generated a good deal of discussion, and political differences within the organization became apparent. During one discussion of the current economic crisis, for example, an SL supporter voiced differences with the New Left "anti-imperialist" analysis which asserted that this crisis began in the mid-sixties and was specifically associated with the Vietnam war. She contended that the crisis was actually part of a general and extended crisis of capitalism in the era of imperialist decay. She particularly objected to the Maoist proposal of seeking to weaken the bourgeoisie by allying with its liberal wing against the right.

These issues were raised again in a political group discussion on impeachment where an SL supporter and members of the Militant Action Caucus (MAC), an opposition caucus within the Communications Workers of America, which is supported by the SL, argued that simply calling for the impeachment of Nixon in the absence of a political party which represented the interests of the working class could only build support for the Democratic Party and that the call for impeachment must include demands attacking not only the crimes of the president but also those of the class which he represents. Arguments were also raised against the BOWU's joining any coalition which included representatives of either major bourgeois party—Republican or Democratic.

During a discussion on the class backgrounds of women in the BOWU a member of the MAC explained how her view of class divisions in society had changed between the time she entered the phone company as a women's liberation activist and her subsequent development into a militant struggling to replace the reactionary CWA bureaucracy in order to fight the company. The group exploded with hostility at the MAC member for "disrupting" the discussion of class backgrounds by drawing political conclusions from her personal experience.

But the incident which became a cause célèbre within the Women's Union occurred on 22 September

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Spartacist Local Directory

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Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union...

1973 at a Maoist-led demonstration against martial law in the Philippines. The Maoists both slandered and attacked physically supporters of the SL and its youth section, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), including SL supporters of the BOWU, who were selling an issue of the *RCY Newsletter* (No. 18) which contained an article critical of Maoist class collaboration in the Philippines. (See *Workers Vanguard* No. 31, 26 October 1973, for the complete story of the incident.)

Members of the BOWU were horrified, not at the Maoist attacks, but at the audacity of Trotskyist criticism. Their denial of elementary workers democracy, including full freedom of political criticism for all working-class tendencies without fear of gangsterist reprisals, and their failure to see the necessity of *polemical* struggle for leadership within the working-class movement while maintaining a united defense against the class enemy is consistent with the Women's Union's polyvanguardist conception of autonomy. That is, the BOWU posits the necessity of each oppressed sector of society—women, blacks, Chicanos, homosexuals, etc.—struggling autonomously against its own oppression under the leadership of its own mini-vanguard. Behind this methodology is the political fantasy that all of these separate vanguards will somehow merge on the day of the revolution into a single, united anti-capitalist force. But the reality is that the isolated struggles for special interests within the working class can only prolong the racial and sexual divisions and make the defeat of the well-organized common enemy impossible.

The Purge Begins

The exclusion of the SL from the BOWU began in the political groups, from which SL and MAC spokesmen were ousted following political confrontations on the class and childcare issues. Then an SL supporter's article on childcare was rejected by the Newsletter Committee. An article entitled "Lessons of Chile" submitted by a member of the MAC was also rejected. Finally at a meeting of the entire membership a proposal was made by one of the political groups to change the essential qualification of membership from acceptance of the written principles to acceptance of their "spirit," which was defined as "the willingness to build Unity" not through the struggle of political ideas but "by working out *our* politics *together*." This proposal was intended to serve as a basis for excluding supporters of the SL/RCY and the MAC from membership in the union as a whole. However, there was no time for discussion, and a motion to vote without discussion was overwhelmingly rejected.

Although steeped in activism, the BOWU had failed to develop a strategy to drive forward the goals stated in its principles. Overpacked agendas which focused on organizational issues limited the political discussion necessary to clarify political differences on crucial issues. This blocked the possibility of

mobilizing the organization for united action. Members committed to specific issues burned themselves out working on their pet projects with little support from the organization as a whole. When a Women's Union member was fired trying to organize her shop, few Women's Union members responded to the call for picket support, and support from the soon-to-be-excluded SL and MAC supporters was greeted coolly by the Women's Union members involved, although official trade-union pickets welcomed their militancy.

It was becoming increasingly clear that anti-communist prejudices focusing on the concept of a disciplined vanguard party were being whipped up by the central clique of the BOWU, and on 2 December 1973 a second attempt was made to purge the SL and the MAC from the organization.

To familiarize the membership with the political reasons for its proposed exclusion, the SL distributed a position paper, the controversial article on childcare originally censored by the Newsletter Committee and a response to it by the children's project. MAC members also presented a short written statement entitled "Against Our Exclusion," which said:

"As militants in the phone company union, as women committed to the fight for women's liberation, as members of the Militant Action Caucus, we have constantly struggled in the company and the union against sexism and for the rights of women workers. The phone company, which employs more women than any company in the world, has over the years perfected a system of heavy repression based on their ability to exploit women's oppression: the primacy of the private identity, a concern for the ladylike image, etc. Our work

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in our union demonstrates that there is no contradiction between militant unionism and the fight for women's liberation.

"Within our union we have faced the grossest of sex-baiting (we were publicly attacked in a leaflet as the 'feline chorus,' all we needed was a sadistic man like Sam Yorty, etc.), and we were able to successfully mobilize and defeat attempts by the leadership of the union to red-bait us out. We are pained to have to wage a similar struggle within the Women's Union. At this time the many political differences within the Union are being clouded in order to wage a campaign against ourselves and our politics. We feel that our expulsion within the Women's Union will commence a political drift to the right, away from the struggles of masses of working women, as we have seen happen time and again in the union movement after such expulsions.

—"Against Our Expulsion," signed by three members of the MAC

The accusers stood solely on their original motion and refused requests to discuss the political points in question.

An SL supporter brought a representative sampling of SL literature on the woman question to allow the membership to read for itself the politics in question, but members of the planning committee objected to the presence of literature from another organization even though that same literature was quoted in their presentation for exclusion! The relegation of the literature to a less central location aided the avoidance of political discussion.

The pro-exclusion presentation prepared by members of the BOWU planning committee raised four political positions of the SL alleged to be in extreme contradiction with the PoU, three of which—opposition to autonomy as a principle, opposition to feminism and the concept of programmatic intervention as a means of political clarification—were accurately characterized with appropriate quotes from "Toward a Communist Women's Movement" (*Women and Revolution*, No. 4, Fall 1973). The fourth assertion, that the SL does not recognize the personal aspect of women's oppression, was distorted. The evidence given was that SL spokesmen disrupted meetings by bringing in "alien" politics from a mixed organization, thus showing contempt for the organization, the membership and their personal lives.

The SL speaker affirmed opposition to feminism which, presumably, all who agreed with the PoU also opposed. She affirmed the SL's strategic perspective of a women's section of the vanguard party and explained that it was largely through combatting women's special oppression and building transitional women's organizations that the Bolshevik party had been able to mobilize women in support of the October Revolution. She challenged the BOWU to adhere to its stated goal of a unified struggle against capitalism.

The MAC speaker outlined her history of fighting for women in her union, argued for a class position on childcare and opposed joining the Impeachment Coalition which included Democratic Party representatives. She ended with a prediction that the exclusion of her views and those of the SL would hasten the drift of the organization to the right.

The discussion which followed was practically devoid of politics. A New American Movement (NAM)

member noted that the PoU was about to be politically revised and thus a political exclusion was not in order, but a leading BOWU member encouraged others to relate their experiences with the SL, and this started a harangue of SL supporters on their "nerve" of publicly criticizing traitorous misleaders like Chavez and the Filipino Maoists. The pro-exclusion speakers never attempted to explain or motivate their political disagreements with the SL. MAC members were viciously red-baited, exposing them to possible retaliation by their employers and the union bureaucracy.

The major political statement was an eloquent anti-communist denunciation of the concept of a vanguard party by an ex-member of the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC). Throughout this the Maoists (including one who had led a split in Oakland Women's Liberation on the basis of opposition to mass organizations in the absence of a vanguard party) kept silent or emphasized unity and, to avoid their own expulsion, hid their political differences. They called for the expulsion of the SL on the basis that raising political differences was "disruptive."

The SL was not allowed to place a counter-motion against the expulsion on the floor. The vote was 38 in favor of expelling the SL/RCY, eight opposed and five abstaining. The vote on expelling the MAC was inconclusive with 17 abstentions and a good deal of sentiment in favor of the continued participation of MAC members, who were seen as representatives of acceptable union militancy rather than agents of the dreaded vanguard party. The BOWU was fearful of MAC's politics, yet fearful of expelling union militants with such an impressive record of struggle for the rights of women workers against company exploitation and the unresponsive and sexist union bureaucracy. The feminists' dilemma was resolved when the MAC members denounced the BOWU's betrayal of the crucial principle of workers democracy and announced that they could not support an organization which excluded communists. Two independents also walked

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These temporary employees had little interest in honoring the union picket line.

Female operators who crossed the picket lines often cited the extreme wage differentials between men and women telephone workers, which made it relatively easier for craft workers to afford the loss of a few days' pay, and the union's record of failing to fight for those demands which are of particular importance to operators, such as fewer suspensions, provisions for sick leave and an end to compulsory overtime.

While the local union bureaucracy under Anthony Candopoulos, which has consistently ignored the special oppression of women workers in the telephone company, proposed fines for those who crossed the picket lines, two opportunist groups within the union, Strike Back and Harper's Ferry, capitulated to the scabs on the grounds that women have been so abused by the union that they cannot be blamed for scabbing. The other workers, they argued, should try to *understand* these women's motives and to *communicate* with them. This feminist apology leads directly to dual-unionism and the undermining of class solidarity. These excuses for scabbing and justifications for women's hostility to the union lead easily to the dual-unionist line that operators should have their *own* union which organizes them as *women* rather than as *workers*. This position capitulates to the company-engineered division of the work force along sex lines and only perpetuates the oppression of women workers, who suffer the most from the inability to wage a united struggle against the company.

In strike situations scabs, whatever their motivation, must be stopped by a mobilization of the organized workers. The special oppression of women *means*, in part, low consciousness, i.e., a lack of class consciousness which allows them to be used as strike-

breakers. A campaign to raise this consciousness, through presenting a strong, united union as the operators' greatest weapon must at the same time educate the male workers about the need for sensitivity to the double oppression of women workers. But this sensitivity can never be instilled by capitulation to anti-union backwardness and outright strikebreaking. A hard class line must be drawn at the gates of the workplace. At the same time militants must explain that sexual divisions will continue to weaken the *entire* working class so long as the union leaderships refuse to wage struggles against women's special oppression.

Many locals now going into the 1974 contract negotiations are preparing the ground for blaming the operators for the CWA leadership's failure to win gains in the contract. But it is the failure of the CWA bureaucracy to fight against the special oppression of women which makes it possible for these operators to remain unorganized, thus crippling the entire union. The operators cannot be fully mobilized by a union bureaucracy which has consistently refused to fight for their needs.

What is needed is a union leadership committed to a program of militant struggle in the interests of the entire work force. Such a program would include demands for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay to end unemployment; an end to restrictive educational requirements; equal access to job training, hiring on a first come, first served basis under union control; free, 24-hour childcare paid for by the state or the employer and under worker-participant control. Demands such as these would undercut the sexual and racial divisions within the union and facilitate the organizing of all workers. But such a program implies *class struggle* against AT&T and against the entire capitalist system, the merest suggestion of which causes CWA International President Joseph Beirne to break out in a cold sweat. So the Beirne leadership clings instead to a policy of job trusting for one section of the work force at the expense of another and main-

Berkeley/Oakland Women's Union ...

out with the three MAC members and the one SL supporter present.

Political Questions Remain Unanswered

Supporting "autonomy" in the struggle for women's liberation and limiting that struggle to women means negating in practice the socialist political perspective and adopting the feminist line, "women's liberation now—socialism later."

The desire of some members to reform the flawed politics of the PoU or to force the organization to adhere in practice to its politics would require a thorough political struggle which would split this supposedly non-sectarian organization into its remaining political components—social-democratic supporters of the NAM and *Socialist Revolution*, Stalinist supporters of the Communist Party, October League and Revolu-

tionary Union and feminists who would like to exclude all these elements. Attempts to mobilize the whole organization around any common activity such as strike support, community organizing, providing services or organizing at the point of production would again pose the underlying sharp divisions in the group and raise the basic questions of program and strategy to which the excluded SL supporters were addressing themselves.

Members of the BOWU must deal with these questions, for they cannot be ignored, and suppression of the necessary clarifying discussions can lead only to endless organizational squabbles and clique fights resulting in fragmentation, demoralization, cynicism and the gradual attrition of any remaining serious, subjectively revolutionary elements of the membership.

The politics of revolutionary Trotskyism, i.e., the politics of the Spartacist League, are necessary both to clarify the contradictions inherent in so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations and to expose the Stalinist and social-democratic currents which use such formations as vehicles for their class-collaborationist politics. ■

taining at all costs its policy of peaceful co-existence with capitalism.

How then can militants struggle for these demands within the trade unions? The initial form of class-struggle organization within the union is the caucus, which is the nucleus of an alternative, militant leadership for that union. A class-struggle caucus must be based first of all on a full political program and it must ruthlessly expose the union bureaucrats as unwilling and unable to fight for the class interests of the workers. Transcending simple bread-and-butter demands, it must use its program to raise proletarian class consciousness and demonstrate in practice the necessity for united class struggle against capitalism.

The Militant Action Caucus

What is needed in CWA throughout the country is a militant rank-and-file caucus, based on a class-struggle program such as that of the Militant Action Caucus (MAC) of Local 9415 in California. The work of these militants should serve as a model for unionists throughout the telephone company.

To understand what the MAC is, it is necessary to know something of its political history since its inception in 1969. At the same time it is instructive to draw a comparison between the MAC and the Operators Defense Committee (ODC), a New Left feminist group with which it maintained a parallel existence for three years. Many of the questions which were debated between the two organizations—methods of consciousness-raising, dual unionism, minimal-maximal vs. transitional program, male exclusionism, nationalism, syndicalism, feminism—continue to be debated by militants.

Like many of today's so-called "socialist-feminist" organizations, the ODC wanted to organize workers, for according to its "mass line" correct political program flows naturally through the veins of true proletarians.

That the ODC would be male-exclusionist was simply assumed, since the enemy was believed to be men

as well as capitalism. The ODC felt that women's groups would *eventually* have to unite with men, but that it was first necessary to go through a period of struggle to strengthen women's position in the working class relative to that of men. The ODC's formula was "unity without equality is not unity." Equality within the work force was seen as a prerequisite for the fight for socialism.

On the question of working within the CWA, the ODC wanted to intervene in the union during strikes, but at the same time wished to build women telephone workers' organizations independent of the CWA, aspiring at some future point to form an autonomous women's telephone union linked to other unions through Oakland Women's Liberation.

The ODC oriented toward women in the working class through its eclectic combination of New Left, Maoist and syndicalist politics embodying all the components of workerism adapted to the women's movement. It argued that struggling for gains for women is equivalent to and can never conflict with a fight of the whole class and that "correct ideas" and roots in the masses are by-products of immersion in the struggles of real workers. These politics were tested out alongside those of the MAC during the 1971 telephone strike.

In contrast to the ODC, the MAC was organized along class-struggle lines and argued that so long as the working class is unconscious of its social power, it is simply material for exploitation. Only after it becomes conscious of itself and its historic tasks can it oust the bourgeoisie and institute its own class rule.

The Fight for Sick Leave and the 1971 Strike

The initial work of the ODC in late 1969 was extremely primitive, consisting of organizing discussions of all operators who, for any reason, disliked the telephone company. MAC members attended these discussions at first to try to win operators to their political program, but they were eventually expelled on the grounds that the MAC was open to men. The discussion group fell apart shortly thereafter.

The ODC reconstituted itself shortly before the 1971 contract expired and surfaced during the struggle, arguing for the inclusion of sick leave as a CWA demand. The ODC called meetings to discuss the question of sick leave, and a number of operators came on their night off to hear what the ODC had to say. For its part, the ODC was delighted by this large turnout and simply waited for a strategy to flow spontaneously from the workers. After one or two agonizing meetings, however, the ODC decided that whether or not correct ideas flowed automatically from the workers, the ODC itself had better formulate some ideas to present to them at the next meeting. Thus the ODC broke empirically from the "mass line."

During the strike, members of the ODC realized that popular single-issue campaigns such as the fight for sick leave do not inevitably grow over into the fight for socialism. They saw that to win even the simplest reform required a concentrated, nationally organized fight against AT&T which presupposed a struggle to throw out the CWA bureaucracy.

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While the ODC, like the supporters of the Progressive Labor Party, served the picketers free food, the MAC concerned itself centrally with the politics of the strike and held daily strategy meetings. After one week the union bureaucrats called a special meeting to convince the workers to return to their jobs. The workers, however, voted overwhelmingly to stay out. The bureaucrats then simply abandoned the union hall to the rank and file. The MAC immediately organized strike committees and picket lines, but the wildcat dissolved after about 18 hours because no group had the earned authority in the local to maintain the strike. Only where union stewards came out on the picket lines did the workers stay out. The ODC learned several lessons from the strike: that the union leadership is the acknowledged leadership of the working class which cannot be ignored but must be defeated; that the class must be politically broken from the bureaucracy which maintains its hold, despite its sellouts, in the absence of a proven alternative; that militants cannot simply assert the correctness of their politics but must demonstrate in crises their ability to lead; that the union is the organization not only of white males, but of all workers, who look to it for leadership during upsurges in the class struggle.

After the Oakland local had been back to work for two days the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in the building, mainly Yellow Pages employees and some electricians, went out on strike. The CWA local president led scabs across the picket lines and the union advised members to "use their own consciences" in deciding whether or not to cross. The ODC saw women from the Oakland Women's Liberation "consciousness-raising" groups cross the IBEW lines and the ODC put out a leaflet calling for respecting the lines, thus breaking from the position still held by the reformist Socialist Workers Party that consistent feminism develops spontaneously into communist consciousness.

Following the contract strike, the wildcat and the IBEW strike, whose main results were defeat due to the union leadership's sabotage, the local entered a period of demoralization. The ODC, having learned that militants must fight for leadership in the union, toyed with the idea of waging a campaign to change the local bylaws to provide for the election, rather than the appointment, of stewards and they proposed a bloc with the MAC on this issue. While the MAC supported the proposed bylaw change, it argued against initiating a mass campaign in a period of demoralization and insisted that the ODC and other militants should consider the lessons of the strike and determine their intervention in the context of an overall strategy and program. This debate over tactics for mass work led to a series of discussions about program between the ODC and the MAC.

The decision to talk with the MAC generated an internal fight in the ODC in which two tendencies emerged—a pro-MAC wing and the Women for Armed Revolution (WAR) tendency, which argued that blacks should organize blacks and whites should organize whites and that all leadership was elitist. Eventually

WAR split from the ODC and retreated to the comfort of a semi-clandestine study group.

Giving up on Women

The remaining ODC members had become convinced that even elementary reforms could not be won without a union-wide strategy. But they remained apprehensive that MAC's conception of a caucus aimed at the most militant and conscious layers of the working class meant abandoning the organizing of women, who are frequently the most backward sector of the class. For a while the ODC adopted a policy of dual recruitment—recruiting "political" women to the MAC and "apolitical" women to women's liberation discussion groups. But the organizations had counterposed politics—one said capitalism was the enemy; the other said it was men.

It became increasingly clear to the ODC members that it was the MAC's program, and not feminist empiricism, which could generate a real struggle against the oppression of women, a struggle necessary both for the development of class consciousness among women and for the raising of the general level of consciousness in the class as a whole. The MAC program not only raises demands which advance the struggles of workers at the point of production but also addresses itself to the question of the family, seeing the fight against women's oppression intimately linked to such demands as the socialization of household work, free 24-hour childcare paid for by the state or employer under worker-participant control and free medical care. Throughout, the MAC continued to demonstrate in practice its programmatic commitment to the needs of women workers. When a black operator was fired for having struck a manager who made a racist remark, the MAC called for a strike. When the local president was fired and the entire executive board suspended, the MAC called for a strike to reinstate them despite its clear and well-known political opposition to these bureaucrats.

"Affirmative Action"

The acid test for militants in the phone company on the question of program for women and minorities is their response to the "Affirmative Action" Program under which AT&T has agreed to establish quotas for the upgrading of women, thus sidestepping the union seniority system. The ODC, like every other political tendency in the industry with the exception of the MAC, stood for preferential hiring.

The practice of hiring, upgrading and organizing the work force under union control on the basis of seniority, as opposed to "merit" or favoritism, is a hard-won gain of the working class which must be defended at the same time that a fight is waged against unemployment and discrimination. This is critically important in a period of rising unemployment to insure that union activists are not singled out as the first to be laid off. Since the "affirmative action" rulings went into effect last January, CWA has charged that the company has been using them as a carte blanche to promote whomever it chooses while refusing to reveal the details of any individual case to the union.



Militant Action Caucus, opposition caucus within the Communication Workers of America, marches in San Francisco labor rally—28 April 1973

WV PHOTO

The MAC contends that the bourgeoisie's manipulation of ethnic and sexual antagonisms—to which the conservative union leadership is a too-willing accomplice—is central in maintaining political backwardness in the American working class. To defeat these antagonisms and fears, it is crucial to demonstrate that the gains of oppressed racial groups and women will take place not at the expense of other workers, but at the capitalists' expense. Categorically opposing government interference in unions and preferential hiring schemes as a pretext for union-busting, the MAC demands replacement of job trusting and discriminatory seniority systems by plant-wide seniority, equal access for all workers to job training and apprenticeship programs, a fight for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay and union-controlled hiring on a first come first served basis.

The question of preferential hiring was critical for the ODC. Only after the ODC had been won to the MAC position was a decision made by the two groups to fuse.

"Dear Mummy"

By late 1972 the MAC, which had succeeded in getting its candidate elected to the office of alternate representative to the executive board on the basis of its militant program, was becoming something of a threat to Local President Loren Blasingame and his retinue, and they retaliated with a series of vicious attacks culminating in the notorious "Letter to the Editor" which appeared in *Labor News*, the Local newsletter.

The so-called "letter" (reprinted in full above) was actually nothing more than a compilation of vicious slanders laced with male-chauvinist woman-baiting and sexual innuendo, all designed to discredit the MAC through ridicule, particularly in the eyes of the male workers, and to intimidate any potential opponents of the Blasingame regime.

The MAC responded with an answering letter to *Labor News* which, needless to say, was never printed and subsequently with a leaflet which said:

"The savage content of this anonymously authored letter renders everything else in the issue fraudulent, dishonest and patently self-serving. . . . Faced with the possibility of being voted out of office by a hostile membership, the paper is a cheap gimmick, revived by the local bureaucrats as part of their election machinery to ridicule and smear the only principled opposition in CWA."

After the publication of the leaflet the bureaucracy escalated its campaign against the MAC. MAC members were frequently denied speaking rights at union meetings and then, after one tense meeting, three bureaucrats waited until the hall had emptied and physically assaulted Caucus members.

In January 1973 the MAC was brought up on charges for causing "disunity" in the union, but a successful defense campaign was waged which proved that, far from "bringing the union into disrepute," as the bureaucrats had charged, the MAC had been tireless in its efforts to build and defend the union. It had encouraged members to grieve every contract violation, had signed up new employees, had fought for the democratic election of all union offices, had defended the president when he was fired, had fought to reinstate the fired black operator, had struggled to defend the picket lines of Western Electric and IBEW workers as well as CWA and had waged campaigns against layoffs and relocation. The MAC had in fact demonstrated what class-struggle politics for the union meant and in so doing had threatened the bureaucracy's hold on the local.

At the CWA national convention in Miami in July 1973 a section of the bureaucracy tried to reverse its defeat by ramming through an amendment to the CWA Constitution which would have given the International bureaucracy the power to persecute "reds"

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and "disrupters" in all union locals. The MAC responded by organizing a "No on 19-2C" Committee, sent delegates to the convention in order to marshal trade-union forces against this threat to all militants and led the floor fight which resulted in the defeat of this proposal.

The Militant Action Caucus is one of several rank-and-file caucuses within CWA but, as the struggle against the red clause illustrated, it is the only one which has demonstrated the capacity and the determination to lead telephone company workers in a successful fight against the capitalists and their "labor lieutenants," the CWA bureaucrats.

The "No on 19-2C" Committee initiated by the MAC was also formally supported by *Yellow Pages* (San Francisco), *Bell Wringer* (Oakland) and the United Action Caucus (New York), but from beginning to end the MAC carried the brunt of the work while the others rendered only token assistance at best. Of the \$125.00 which the Committee raised to help send two representatives (both of whom were MAC members) to the

Miami convention, *Yellow Pages* supporters contributed only \$5.00. The United Action Caucus in New York refused to take part in the struggle at all beyond a pro-forma endorsement. Another caucus, Traffic Jam (San Francisco) showed up for only one Committee meeting and left after half an hour with no explanation. Faced with a witchhunt which threatened their very existence these so-called "militants" did nothing or next to nothing.

Rejecting the single-issue reformism of many of these caucuses, the MAC stands on a comprehensive program which includes calls for the nationalization of the telephone company under workers control, full union democracy, the ousting of the trade-union bureaucrats and the formation of a labor party based on the trade unions to fight for a workers government.

The need for a nation-wide Militant Action Caucus within CWA is clear. Additional information concerning MAC's program and strategy for trade-union struggle as well as the Militant Action Caucus Newsletter may be obtained by writing to:

Militant Action Caucus
P.O. Box 462
El Cerrito, California 94530

666 Unwholesome Street
San Francisco, California
June 1, 1984

Mother "Ma" and (69% of) Pacifier
"Baby" Bell
132 Tawdry Street
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Dearest Mummy:

Reports from the Coast are super! Your girls have done it again. Union busting was never so fun. With their neurotic whines, the Mac Pac (better known) as the "mini-muddy-murky-multi-purpose racus [*sic*] clawed their way through another union meeting. This was the one I told you about for the strike vote. Only this time the feline chorus managed to convince the sheep that their leadership was wrong for not calling a strike without the raucus' permission. Another great job done for our company by your broads. Mac's policy is very effective. They inform the company through their rags about who's who in union politics, thereby making it easy for us to spot out the leaders of the latest walkouts, etc. (Strange their initials spell out a man's name—might be some deep, subconscious lack here. After all, the only men I've seen them with are pale, shaking, downtrodden types—they need somebody like Sam Yorty, William Buckley (some fascist sadist maybe).

Nevertheless, they are approaching the credibility gap with some of their stuff. It might be well if you keep an eye on them—someone may start getting wide [*sic*]. For instance they call for the end of government control of unions, yet where did your star, Kathleen Strichnine, go when she was sus-

pending—to Uncle Sam N.L.R.B. Maybe the raucus ought to be tipped off that this is the government too, or are they under the impression that the NLRB are our agents also? We better set them straight.

Yet there's the great rag they put out after the "holiday." The Ms. Yellow journalists explained the officers lied to the stewards by saying the "holiday" was sanctioned (whatever that means). They they [*sic*] discredited the "holiday" which was frighteningly successful with the members and we'll probably never have any trouble with honest union support again. Your girls call for strike action at every meeting and have successfully convinced the membership that strikes are impossible without raucus permission, never mind any democratic strike votes.

It's amazing how the mini's [*sic*] manage to get one of their cronies, Golem Sarcophagus—someone like that suspended by only spending a mere hour in front of the Franklin Street building. Well they had to make at least one martyr for this election in traffic against Karen White. Naturally the people who spent the whole day in front of the building and were suspended don't count. The raucus will probably come out with an article explaining that since a lot of them were plant, they make much more money than Marbles or Go-List or whoever she is.

Well boss, that's about all. Hope the raucus keeps it up, I'll be able to retire.

Sincerely, your loving and devoted

T. Kafuzzle
Special Agent & Consultant to the
Mini-Muddy-Murky-Multi[*sic*]-Purpose Raucus

Letter

Chicago
10 December 1973

Comrades:

I read with interest the exchange between Barbara Zelluck of the International Socialists and Comrades Reissner and V.Z. of the Spartacist League. I can attest to the scrupulous accuracy of the translations of V.Z. from my own research into the Comintern Theses and Resolutions (that is, the German originals, not the French or English translations), as well as on the basis of corroborative evidence, which I would like to submit. Obviously, theses and resolutions are condensed expressions of a political position and therefore—taken in isolation—may be open to various interpretations (especially when there are vested interests involved in such "interpretations," like deriving Bolshevik authority for a fundamentally Menshevik position). Although there can be little legitimate doubt about the Comintern Theses on the "Woman Question" taken in themselves, any such question must disappear in the light of the discussion at the Third World Congress itself.

The principal reporter on the "Woman Question" at the Congress was Klara Zetkin, long-time member of the SPD left-wing, member of the Spartacusbund, and co-founder of the German Communist Party. Zetkin had also been, for three decades, one of the prime movers of the proletarian women's movement. Her remarks on the relation between the "Women's Committees" and the party are quite specific and deserve to be quoted at length:

"The goals and the tasks of what one calls the communist women's movement are given in the goals and the tasks, in the principles, in the tactics of the Third International—to which we are proud to belong [emphasis mine—F.B.]. For the conference [The Communist Women's Conference] it was a matter of creating the weaponry to defend these principles, [to defend] these tactics in struggle against the capitalist world, in struggle against all that supports it. Therefore, the conference dedicated a large part of its work to the two questions, which forms and methods should be utilized for communist work among women, and how *the closest and firmest international relations* [emphasis—K.Z.] may be established between the women communists of the individual countries and their parties, as well as with the Communist Women's International in Moscow and through its mediation with the Executive of the Third International as the common, unified direction and leadership [emphasis mine—F.B.].

"Comrades, the 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* [emphasis mine—F.B.]. 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, our goals. No separatism [*Sonderbuendelei*], no doing your own thing [*Eigenbroedelei*] which would in any way 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.

"[Because of the special oppression of women and their concomitant relative political backwardness]... special organs, special measures are required, in spite of the joint character of the organization, in order to reach the masses of women and collect and educate them as communists.

"As such organs, we recommend that in the directing and administering party instances committees for women's agitation, or commissions, or whatever the party wants to call them, be established. Indeed, such committees should exist starting with the leadership of the small local groups on up to the highest central leadership. We call these organs *Women's Committees*, because they should carry on the work among women, but not because we lay weight upon their being composed solely of women. On the contrary. We welcome it, when men with their greater political experience and their ability also belong to the women's committees. What matters to us is that these committees be active in a planned fashion and continually amongst the masses of women; that they take a position on all the needs, all the interests which touch upon the lives of women; that they intervene with knowledge of the facts and energy in all areas of social life for the well-being of the millions upon millions of proletarian and semi-proletarian women. These women's committees can and must, of course, work only in the closest organizational and ideological community with the organs of the party as a whole. But it is also self-evident that, if they are to fulfill their tasks successfully, they require the right of initiative and a certain freedom of movement."

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

The message couldn't be much clearer: Bolsheviks oppose parochialism, separatism and dual vanguardism. While the women's committees or commissions must have room for initiative in their field of work, they remain fundamentally an arm of the party—a part of the common movement. There is one enemy, there must be one revolutionary vanguard—any other conception is menshevism or worse. Comrade Zelluck has shown that she fits snugly and comfortably in the ranks of the Mensheviks.

F.B.

Forum

International Women's Day: 1917

WOMEN AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Speaker: D.L. Reissner
Editor, *Women and Revolution*

Friday, March 8 at 8 p.m.
Norton Union
University of Buffalo

BUFFALO

Class Struggle in the Phone Company

Questions of program and strategy for the women's movement often find a focus in the work of militants within the telephone company—and with good reason. Not only is American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) the largest employer of women in the United States, but over the years it has developed and honed to precision its ability to harness the specific qualities of women's oppression to maximize its rate of exploitation and preserve its ideological cover as a community service.

American Telephone and Telegraph finds it useful to maintain its image as a "public utility." Herein lies one important role for women at Ma Bell. The operator (who is almost always female) is used as a buffer between the consumer and the company. She is the soft, sweet "voice with a smile"—warm, motherly and overflowing with concern for the public. Moreover, as part of a marginal pool of labor, women work at lower wages than men, are less fully organized in (and are often ignored by) trade unions and allow themselves to be disciplined more easily than men.

Working conditions are extremely oppressive. The operator is required to sit on a chair of a certain height and at a prescribed distance from the switchboard. She may not cross her legs or swing her arm over the back of the chair, nor may she smoke, chew gum or turn her eyes. In one office it was common practice for the supervisor to sneak up from behind and hold a pencil alongside an operator's head. If the operator turned around and saw the pencil, she could be reprimanded for looking around too much. Management has the license to pull operators into the "glass cage," from which the operating floor is observed, and give out advice on how to dress, whether to take an aspirin or not, whether to use deodorant, what kind of hair style to wear, vocabulary to use and life insurance to buy. There is constant secret monitoring of the private conversations between operators.

Women and the CWA

Any attempt to organize women workers in the telephone company must necessarily deal with their special oppression as women. The question is an important one for the Communications Workers of America (CWA) because of the deliberate separation of women workers from the rest of the telephone company employees, their relegation to the lowest paying jobs and their organization into company unions or separate CWA locals—factors which have resulted in operators' scabbing on plant strikes and plant employees' scabbing on operators' strikes.

In New York City, for example, where operators are represented by company unions, the company was able to hold out for seven months during the 1971 CWA strike because of widespread operator scabbing. As



LEONARD KAMSLER

Woman cable-splicer at work in the Bronx

long as the operators are working, calls are going through and revenues are coming in, so the company can afford to take its time reaching a settlement until the striking union is demoralized and exhausted. It takes several months before repair, installation and craft skills become critical for continued operations.

This strategy of attrition also seems to have been employed by the company in the recent New York Long Lines strike called by CWA Local 1150. The strike was called in response to the Christmas Eve assault by a company supervisor on two plant employees.

The key strategic question in this strike was the woman question, because, due in part to its insensitivity to the special oppression of women, the local union leadership was incapable of calling out the women workers and building a solid strike. This weakened the union's position vis-à-vis the company and also led to its inability to convince other locals to support the strike. While 100 percent of the craft workers walked out, most of the operators, who viewed the action largely as a "craft issue," scabbed.

At least 40 percent of these operators are unorganized and many of those hired since 1971 have come under the modified agency shop plan in which union dues are deducted from their paychecks but they do not become union members unless and until they pay an initiation fee. This deal between company and union insures an expanded dues base without concomitant voting or attendance rights at union meetings. In addition, large numbers of temporary, unorganized student employees (many of them relatives of management) had been hired during the Christmas season.

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