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WOMEN'S LIBERATION SPECIAL!

Labour

**Winning 'irreversible
gains' for women**

Profile

**Leading by example:
Minnie Lansbury**

International

**The fight for a woman's
right to choose**

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party has inspired hundreds of thousands of people to campaign for an alternative to the diet of austerity, racism and war force fed by previous governments.

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EDITORIAL

International Women's Day is returning to the radical social roots that inspired its foundation in the early twentieth century, and its rebirth in the 1960s and 1970s. From East to West, sexist violence and harassment poverty wages, abortion and contraception, attacks on social service provision, are being challenged by mass actions. The placards and slogans of this movement identify patriarchy, capitalism, wars and racism as the enemy.

This indicates a welcome return to the original spirit of the revolutionary women who launched International Women's Day. They argued that it was the common exploitation and oppression experienced by the working class under capitalism which provided the universal character that could unite people of different nationalities, skin colour and religion in the struggle for equal rights and liberation.

The new movement explicitly rejects what it calls the "one per cent feminism" exemplified by the Sheryl Sandberg book *Lean In*, which essentially means middle class women pushing themselves forward for promotion as "leaders" in business and politics. Hillary Clinton, Margaret Thatcher and the women CEOs sitting on company boards demonstrate in practice that equal opportunity, or free competition for the top posts, simply enables individual women to become responsible for, and beneficiaries of, the exploitation and oppression of their working class sisters.

Whilst socialists support demands for an end to all discrimination and march alongside women of every social class against sexual harassment and assault, our solution is based on raising the floor to collectively reduce inequality and oppression, not on individual escape through the glass ceiling.

That is why Marxists have fought for over a century not just for equal pay and equal rights, but for the abolition of the unpaid labour in the home, where the slaveowner is the capitalist but the slavedriver is all too often the husband, brother, father or son.

The replacement of isolated unwaged labour within the family with collective provision of high quality childcare, education and health and social care is the only way that working class women can free themselves from the burden of domestic slavery and the sexist violence and oppression that protects this institution.

Capitalist society in every country rests upon the the exploitation

of wage labour in the workplace and the unpaid labour of women in the home. In some countries, important victories have been won, but are now under attack. In most of the world, however, basic rights hardly exist and are at the forefront of revolutionary demands that working class men as well as women have to fight for.

The struggle against oppression always starts with the struggle to win limited reforms and to raise the consciousness of men and women within the working class to support them. But the nexus of economic, social and political repression, violence and exploitation that subjugates women, and makes working class men the beneficiaries of that subjugation, cannot be ended except by ripping up its roots deep within capitalism, class society and patriarchy. That is why we reject alliances with women of the exploiting and privileged classes. Women able to unload their childcare and housework onto proletarian women, so they can be CEOs or politicians, will not be part of the struggle for liberation, they will be in the camp of its enemy.

To build an effective new wave women's liberation movement will require the mobilisation of working class women worldwide; as those with the greatest power as well as the greatest burden. It must mobilise alongside all the other oppressed and marginalised; lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, whose oppression is integrally linked to the oppression and exploitation of women and the hegemony of patriarchal relations.

A 21st century women's liberation movement will be a movement of people of colour, especially in the west, where white workers will need to make special efforts to unite with black and ethnic minority women, especially those who are migrants or refugees, driven here by the imperialist policies of our rulers.

But to win, it will also be vital to mobilise male workers. Many already support women's rights, but more can be won when women give the lead. Together, as part of a common revolutionary struggle, we will end domestic slavery and wage slavery.

Finally, the struggle against the social evils inflicted on women must be taken up within our own movement. From birth, men and women are conditioned to accept and reproduce sexist behaviour. Labour movement parties and trade unions, dominated by men, with notorious cases of sexual abuse and discrimination, are a reflection of the enduring power of sexist and patriarchal relations.

Sexism, and its cousin, homophobia, are the most deeply rooted and widespread prejudices. Overcoming them requires a consistent and conscious effort. Within all labour movement organisations, women, and BAME and LGBT people, need their own sections, or caucuses, in which they can mobilise to fight sexism, and organise to ensure that women play a full role in all areas of the organisation's work. They can also make sure that men are not exempt from the need for political education and activity in the service of women's liberation.

A new movement, with working class women and the racially and nationally oppressed at its heart, and the methods of class struggle to the forefront, is absolutely vital but it will need to link itself to the building of a new party of the working class. This party will have to be one whose socialism is founded on transcending capitalism and all forms of exploitation and oppression. In its fight to defend past gains and make major new ones, its aim will be working class control, the power to veto the actions of the capitalists and to take over production and vital services. Preparing the transition to socialism in this way, however, will point to the necessity of seizing political power.

The slogan, "no socialism without women's liberation, no women's liberation without socialism" is as vital today as ever. Today's movement is one in which working class women will play their greatest role yet; for the first time in history they comprise a majority of industrial wage-labourers, and a majority in the semi-colonial world. This will give the movement the strength and dynamism to take the struggle for women's liberation and socialism to new frontiers in the years to come. ★

MAKING IRREVERSIBLE GAINS FOR WOMEN

REBECCA ANDERSON

A decade of austerity has undermined many of the economic, social and political gains achieved by women since the 1970s. Job losses, cuts to welfare and social care, and the rise in part time and precarious work, are just some of the factors intensifying the problems faced by women who have to work harder for less, whilst shouldering much of the extra domestic labour caused by our failing social care system.

By 2022, the Equality and Human Rights Commission says the average woman will have lost almost £1000 from benefit cuts alone. Lone parents will have lost fifteen per cent of their income. Study after study has shown women bearing the brunt of austerity.

This impact is not only financial. As the Tory government imposes swingeing cuts to council budgets, women's refugees are closing, making our lives much harder. Activists believe up to a third will be forced to close. Cuts to social care place a huge burden on the family, and therefore on women.

Black and minority ethnicity women, particularly Muslims, face a triple burden of racist and Islamophobic prejudice and discrimination through the media, on the streets and in the workplace.

Given the attacks women have suffered, it is hardly surprising the majority of Labour voters are women. The anti-austerity leadership and the hugely expanded membership of the Labour Party present an opportunity for women to demand more.

A new working class women's movement, campaigning in alliance with the unions and the Labour Party, can use the struggle to defend, restore and extend the limited gains women have made as a springboard for a discussion about how to achieve the fundamental and irreversible liberation of women.

FOR THE MANY, NOT THE FEW

Labour's 2017 general election manifesto promised some important steps forward for

women. Providing 30 hours free childcare for two-year-olds would mean more women could afford to work or study, providing an important measure of social and financial independence from the open prison of the nuclear family. The manifesto promises to extend this to "some" one-year-olds in future, but these half measures are not good enough. New parents should have the choice between free, universal, 24-hour childcare from the end of maternity leave - or a living grant until the child attends nursery.

It's not only children the Labour Party will provide care for: the National Care Service promises universal adult social care along the same lines as the NHS. Local Government social care budgets have fallen by over £5 billion under the Tories. Over six million people are providing unpaid care and 58 per cent of them are women. This means 1 in 4 older people who need social care don't get it - and the sexist attitudes, which prevail in society, mean women are left to pick up the pieces. This burden of care, with the rise of complex issues like Dementia and chronic health problems, places an intolerable burden on women, particularly the hundreds of thousands of school age "young carers".

A National Care Service would be a material step towards liberation for many women as well as those in need of adult social care. To make this achieve its ambitious goals, it needs to be integrated with the NHS within a 100 per cent publicly owned and government-funded service, democratically planned and run by workers and users, and given a sustainable foundation by nationalising the private pharmaceutical and healthcare companies.

The MeToo movement has exposed the extent to which women are subjected to sexual harassment and violence in every sphere of their lives. Labour's promise to make teaching children about respectful relationships part of the sex education curriculum is a step towards challenging the sexist ideas which young people absorb from popular culture, their families, and their peers. But tinkering with the

curriculum will be a token gesture, unless it is part of a radical reform of the whole education sector, which leads to universal comprehensive education, run under democratic control, involving the local authority, trade unions, parents and students.

Statistics show an alarming rise in sex crimes against women, which even police chiefs admit cannot be explained simply by increased reporting. All women are potential victims of male violence, but since most violence against women occurs within the family, cuts to childcare, jobs, and education, condemns working class women to economic dependence on the family, and therefore to suffer the brunt of sexual violence. In this respect, rape and domestic violence can be added to petty theft, drug dealing, and knife crime, which disproportionately blight working class communities.

Labour's promise to create a National Refuge Fund to "ensure stability for rape crisis centres" will bolster a proven method of helping women. But the revelations of police indifference and incompetence surrounding the investigation into serial rapist John Worboys, shows we need to go beyond an opportunistic pledge to replace Tory police cuts if we want a serious approach to safety and social problems in working class communities.

FIGHTING FOR MORE

The Labour manifesto advances many important and vitally necessary reforms that would materially improve the lives of millions of women. We should fight for these as a bare minimum.

But Labour's manifesto made a number of concessions to electoral calculation (properly known as opportunism) which prevented the leadership from setting out the kind of fundamental reforms needed to reverse the damage done by austerity, let alone open the road to a truly different form of economic and social organisation.

This took the form of standing on a "fully

costed” manifesto, but one whose spending pledges were completely inadequate if we really want to reverse the cuts to social security and local government funding, which have had the greatest impact in forcing women out the workplace, into poverty, and responsible for a greater burden of care, with fewer resources.

In an effort to appear financially “responsible” Labour limited itself to trivial tax rises on the rich, leaving most of its pledges funded from a crackdown on tax avoidance, and the fruits of a growing economy underpinned by borrowing to invest.

Needless to say, with the threat of a hard Brexit, with the threat of trade wars, and a new recession on the near horizon, this strategy is a gamble at best or a deception at worst. The level of spending needed to seriously reorganise the economy and redistribute the wealth hoarded by the bankers and billionaires cannot be secured by John McDonnell’s reassuring lunches with them. They will only be happy with promises not to touch their huge salaries, profits and accumulated capital.

If we are serious about getting the money needed to create high quality health and childcare provision, education and investment in reducing the burden of alienating labour whether domestic or waged, we will have to seize the wealth of the billionaires and banks. The bosses have been waging a ruling class offensive against the workers and poor since the 1970s - and winning. It’s time the labour movement showed up for the fight.

The privatisation of the NHS, the

destruction of pensions and social security, shows that there is no reform that is truly “irreversible” for as long as it exists in antagonism to an economic system run in the interests of the many, not the few.

If Labour wants its reforms to be durable and sincere, then it has to suppress the capitalist system which produces for private profit, and replace it with a democratically planned economy, organised to meet the needs of everyone - socialism.

By socialising childcare and domestic labour, a socialist society would progressively reduce the need for the private family to reproduce human labour, and in doing so tear up the material roots of sexism and open the road to the liberation of women and the end of social oppression.

To be carried through to the end women’s liberation means getting rid of capitalism and class society. That’s why we need to organise the participation of women in the class struggle, on the basis of a conscious recognition that there can be no socialism without women’s liberation, and no women’s liberation without socialism.

ACTION

The Labour Party and Momentum can take the initiative by launching a mass socialist women’s organisation, uniting women party members, trade unionists, and socialists, which campaigns for policies that meet the immediate needs of women - and open the road to a social revolution and women’s liberation.

A new women’s movement should take up the pledges in For The Many Not The Few and extend them:

- Open the books to trade unions and impose punitive fines and compensation on bosses who flout Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination laws.
- Women’s caucuses in all mixed workplaces and labour and social movements, with legally guaranteed rights to publicise complaints of discrimination or harassment not dealt with satisfactorily by management or labour movement structures.
- Free 24 hour childcare, in creches and nurseries run under the democratic control of workers and users.
- A living wage and professional support for carers.
- Free abortion on demand, including Northern Ireland.
- Restore all the coalition and Tory benefits cuts and raise them to compensate for inflation.
- Zero tolerance for rape and domestic violence. Automatic prosecution of those accused, no humiliation of complainants by police or courts.
- A fully funded, comprehensive and secure network of rape crisis centres and women’s refuge run under the management of users and workers.
- Support for women facing discrimination and abuse on the basis of race, sex, gender, or sexual orientation. ★

A UNISON SCHOOLS CONVENOR

There are 1.3 million local government and school support workers – 78 per cent of them women. We are the housing officers, youth workers, social workers, teaching assistants, caterers and cleaners that keep hard-up families together and services running.

Austerity budgets, year after year, have wiped out over 700,000 jobs in the sector. But they haven’t eliminated the statutory care we provide, the work that still needs to be done. We work harder for less.

We are also the worst paid of any public sector group, having lost 21 per cent of our pay since 2009. The employers’ two-year offer of 2 per cent in April 2018 and another 2 per cent in 2019 would leave the great majority of us even worse off.

Yes, the Local Government Association offer breaks the 1 per cent pay cap of previous

years, but inflation is higher than before at 4.1 per cent a year, including housing costs. No one expects this figure to decline with Brexit on the horizon.

Yes, some on the lowest grades would receive more than 2 per cent a year, but that is not an act of generosity, rather a legal necessity to keep the workforce above the minimum wage. According to the Resolution Foundation, £14 billion of welfare cuts planned for the next two years will more than wipe out rises in the minimum wage.

And no, the offer is not funded, meaning it would lead to further cuts in services and more job losses.

CAMPAIGN

The three unions in the National Joint Council, which negotiates on our behalf, are Unison, the GMB and Unite. All three agree that this is the best offer they can achieve by

REJECT THE PAY DEAL – FIGHT FOR FIVE PER CENT

negotiation alone and are now consulting their members.

But only Unison and Unite are urging members to reject the offer. The GMB is officially neutral, though at least some of its officers are actively campaigning for acceptance and even exaggerating, i.e. lying about the offer's benefits in the process.

Consultative ballots close on 9 March.

Thousands of activists are working overtime to not only produce the biggest possible vote to reject the offer, but also to exceed the 50 per cent turnout barrier set by the Tories' Trade Union Act that would allow a legal strike to take place. This would be no mean feat, given that most branches have to

cover over a hundred workplaces with little or no facility time for activists.

Can we win the ballot? Railworkers, posties and lecturers have all recently smashed the undemocratic bars artificially set by the Tories. They are more militant, and have strong roots in the workplaces and an active grassroots membership. Most importantly their leaderships were committed to winning the ballot. If we learn from what helped those activists win, we can beat the threshold too.

Leaflets, posters, PowerPoint presentations are all available. Personalised emails and floorwalks (meeting the members at their workstations) can increase turnout and militancy. But workplace meetings, lunchtime

protests and rallies, with voting on the spot can do more: recruiting members and new stewards.

The spontaneous support for the lecturers from students, including occupations, shows how we could also raise support and broaden the struggle. Coordinated action by school support staff would put pressure on the teachers' NEU union to call strikes over increasing academy conversions and funding cuts. They should ballot their members now.

- Organise workplace meetings
- Recruit to the unions
- Develop links across branches and regions
- Reject the offer - fight for 5 per cent ★

FIGHTING SEXISM IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

REBECCA ANDERSON

Complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination by women officers and activists often go unresolved in the unions and the Labour Party. This is a shameful record and one that must be corrected immediately.

The campaign group LabourToo, has submitted a dossier of complaints about such behaviour in the Labour Party. It consists of 43 anonymised stories from women across the party, detailing everything from inappropriate comments, to harassment and rape. What these accounts all have in common is that nothing was done, and many offences were carried out by people

known to be serial offenders.

The problem of sexism does not stop at the Labour Party. The unions too can be very uncomfortable places for women to work, despite the fact that taking up grievances of unequal pay, sexist work practices and discrimination against women because they are women is a major part of any union's day to day work.

The problem got so bad that Unite, Britain's biggest union with an army of officers, commissioned an independent report into it, entitled, Women Officers in Unite. Then sat on it.

Ian Allinson, the victimised branch secretary

at Fujitsu and left wing challenger to Len McCluskey in last year's leadership election, leaked the report. It makes interesting, if somewhat disturbing reading.

The authors, Jennifer Hurstfield and Sarah Silcox, found that "almost 70% of women officers report they have experienced hostility at work because they are women" and 70% of those said Unite "members are primarily responsible for generating the hostility".

In addition, "over half of women officers have raised a bullying or harassment issue with the union in the past five years and, in half of these cases, do not believe that the issue was handled at all well" with 40 per cent feeling "frightened at

work because of a real or threatened incident". Underlying these shocking statistics is a macho, laddish culture that you don't complain, you "work hard, play hard" and this is part of what some male bureaucrats (because that's what they are, whatever their origins) think working class culture is. Well they're wrong.

ANTI-SEXISM

The dominant ideology of any society exists to justify the prevailing forms of class rule and exploitation - or as Karl Marx put it 150 years ago, the ruling ideology is always the ideology of the ruling class.

That's why an economic system which depends on the exploitation of the unpaid domestic labour of women through the family is saturated in sexism. Whatever the individual "feminist" views of bosses and politicians, for as long as they rule over a system in which women are an oppressed sex, sexist ideology will exist and manifest itself in various forms, whether that is sexual violence or the gender pay gap.

An ideology which is rooted in economic relations and reproduced through sexist popular culture and attitudes will inevitably find expression in the organisations of the left and the labour movement.

The struggle against sexism in the labour

movement takes two forms. Immediately it means grassroots members creating structures for self-organisation to challenge sexist behaviour, and overcome the barriers to political life faced by women.

As with most capitalist companies, there are formal rules that are supposed to help victims take out grievances, but these are nothing if, as discovered in the Unite report, women feel intimidated and vulnerable if they do so.

There needs to be the right to call women's caucuses - or Women's Forums in the Labour Party - at every level, where women can support each other and hear testimonies before engaging in a formal procedure. Such caucuses should be able to feed in any general proposals on sexism in the organisation or other issues affecting women, like pay, to the union or Labour Party leaderships.

But fact that many longstanding and prominent party members and trade union leaders stand accused of repeat sexist attitudes and behaviour is not just a question of individual rotten apples. It has its material roots in the existence of a conservative Labour Party and Trade Union bureaucracy, which sees its task as mediating the conflict between capital and labour, rather than overthrowing the political and economic dictatorship of capital over labour.

The labour bureaucracy is a privileged caste,

who, with few exceptions, draw pay and perks that insulate them from the lives of their members. The existence of a powerful caste at the top of the movement who derive material privileges from the conflict between capital and labour is clearly an obstacle to fighting the ideological hegemony of the ruling class within the working class movement. In the end, individuals not committed to the overthrow of oppressive capitalist social relations, cannot be consistent fighters for women's liberation and social equality.

That's why the self organisation of women must be allied to democratic reform of the labour movement. This is necessary not only to ensure women are represented and their concerns listened to and acted upon, but to break up the sclerotic and conservative bureaucratic castes that rule over the movement, replacing them with rank and file fighters, paid the average wage of those they represent and subject to election and recall.

Rebuilding the labour and social movements on these principles of anti-sexism and working class democracy, is a vital task for all socialists and feminists who want to see an offensive against sexism in our movement become the precursor to the final struggle for socialism and women's liberation. ★

HIJAB BAN IS SEXIST, RACIST, AND WRONG

BY A TEACHER

The recent decision by an East London primary school to ban pupils from wearing the hijab shows how Islamophobia subjects Muslim women to a double dose of racism and sexism.

Although protests forced the school to reverse the ban, this is not an isolated attempt to single out Muslims for discrimination

against religious expression. This is a textbook example of how Islamophobia normalises a specific form of racist discrimination.

The excuses for banning the Muslim hijab given by the school and its supporters in Ofsted and the government, were that as a symbol of "female modesty" it is oppressive to girls, especially if their families pressure them into wearing it.

The vast majority of Muslim women are no more "forced" to wear the hijab than non-Muslim women are "forced" by their parents to dress "modestly" on nights out, or in reverse, pressured by sexist social norms to wear "provocative" or revealing clothing.

BANS

Of course we want schools to be places where young people can learn and express themselves free of the patriarchal pressure of family life. But the question is can the state or the school liberate Muslim girls by forcing them not to wear it?

Banning them from wearing it is not liberation but another form of coercion. Religious and cultural beliefs - whether originating from children or their parents cannot be changed by state bans and constitute a form of oppression in itself.

Uniform policies and dress codes - insofar as they have any educational or equality merits, which is questionable - have to allow those forced to wear them to express their identity or beliefs without facing discrimination, punishment or exclusion.

There are signs too that many see it as an affirmation of community pride in a society where that community is under attack.

By targeting young British Muslims as especially prone to "extremism" or, indeed "sexualisation", supporters of the ban are reinforcing their fears that they are outsiders, excluded from the mainstream.

Like all religious persecution, bans and singling out certain religions for persecution only strengthens the influence of the clerics and

the family.

Socialists want to combat the reactionary role played by religious organisations in promoting sexist ideas. But we do that by demonstrating that working class organisation, socialist politics and internationalism, is a surer way of fighting the alienation and oppression in society than religion.

Making schools do the dirty work of the British state in its attempts to harass and forcibly “integrate” Muslims is a very bad idea.

REACTIONS

How did the authorities react to the ban? Universally they disgraced themselves.

The Department for Education hid behind a “colour blind” liberalism that “it is a matter for individual schools to... set uniform policies”, carefully sidestepping the real issue: do schools

have the right to set racist policies?

But the untimely intervention of Ofsted’s chief inspector Amanda Spielman is more worrying. She chose a Church of England conference (St Stephens is a church school) to issue a call for “muscular liberalism”.

Spielman labeled those who objected to the St Stephens ban as “vocal parental minorities” (19,000 of them?) who wanted to “pressure other parents and children to act or dress against their wishes”; introducing a fictional suggestion that there was a campaign to force other Muslim parents to adopt the hijab.

The Tory-appointed chief inspector declared that “Ofsted will always back heads” who want to ban the hijab in the future. The parents of girls who wear the hijab, according to Spielman, “want to actively pervert the purpose of education”:

“Under the pretext of religious belief, they use education institutions, legal and illegal, to narrow young people’s horizons, to isolate and segregate, and in the worst cases to indoctrinate impressionable minds with extremist ideology.”

We are now entering the territory of anti-Islamic extremist fantasy. There is no conspiracy among Britain’s million-strong Muslim community to take over schools, indoctrinate children and recruit them to terrorist organisations.

Teachers, parents and students can only draw one conclusion from this. Sack Spielman now before she does serious damage. Reversing this ban is a signal victory for democrats and anti-racists everywhere. Everyone should have the right to wear whatever items of clothing they want so long as it does not endanger themselves or others. ★

SYLVIA PANKHURST FIGHTER FOR WORKING CLASS WOMEN



KATIE PELIKANOU

Sylvia Pankhurst (1882 –1960) was a formidable figure; an internationalist and anti-imperialist, an anti racist, and for a period a revolutionary communist. But it is as a tireless fighter for the emancipation of women that she is best remembered. At the centre of this work, she dedicated herself to the self-organisation and activity of working class women.

Though active in the suffragette movement from its inception (the Women’s Social and Political Union, WPSU), which she founded with her mother and sister, when she moved to the East End of London, Sylvia came to understand that the struggle for the emancipation of women did not end with the vote.

She helped found the East London Federation (ELF) and fought within it “not merely for votes but towards an egalitarian

society - an effort to awaken the women submerged in poverty to struggle for better social conditions and bring them into line with the most advanced sections of the movement of the awakened proletariat.”

The ELF emphasised self-emancipation in the most practical of terms - the women themselves coordinated vital services in the poverty stricken streets and slums, setting up cost-price restaurants, a nursery, a toy factory

to provide work, medical clinics for women and children.

Organising against the impoverished and unjust conditions of this part of London, Sylvia recognised that the self-emancipation of working class women was fundamental to the wider struggle for social and economic freedom for working people, that the liberation of women was part of the struggle of the working class itself.

Sylvia and her comrades wanted women not to be submissive and grateful for charity dispensed by the fine ladies of the upper classes - but to seize control of and organise their own lives; to fight for themselves and so fight collectively. The ELF undertook all this work alongside publishing the Women's Dreadnought, a weekly newspaper, as an essential organ for the dissemination of socialist, anti-imperialist ideas.

The Women's Dreadnought and ELF would be instrumental in building working class opposition to World War One. Whilst the eruption of the war saw her mother Emmeline and sister Christabel quickly halt the WSPU fight for women's suffrage, throwing their lot in with ferocious patriotism and unreserved support for the war aims of British ruling class, Sylvia was wholeheartedly committed to fighting against the imperialist war, for socialism, and for the self-emancipation of women.

She worked within the ELF to convince working people that the war was not fought for their interests - that there must be a workers' opposition to the war. The deaths and terrible injuries of their husbands, their own further impoverishment convinced increasing numbers that Sylvia was right.

Via the Women's Dreadnought - renamed the Workers' Dreadnought in July 1917 - Sylvia was crucial in reporting the Easter 1916 Rising in Dublin and defending its martyrs like James Connolly, in disseminating news of the Russian Revolution as it unfolded and finally, building support in Britain for Bolshevism. This activity in wartime put her and her supporters at risk of arrest, or bans of the Dreadnought. Yet the paper continued to unrepentantly battle for socialism and internationalism.

As the war continued and the ELF continued to move towards the left, asserting broader political positions, it would rename itself the Workers' Suffrage Federation (1916) and then the Workers' Socialist Federation (1918) would become the first group in Britain to affiliate to the Communist International.

Sylvia Pankhurst remained a socialist and anti-imperialist for her whole life. But it was during the turbulent and revolutionary years of 1910-20 in which she showed to the full her indomitable character and set an example to follow for future fighters for women's liberation and socialism. ★

LEADING BY EXAMPLE THE LIFE AND STRUGGLES OF MINNIE LANSBURY

DAVE STOCKTON

Minnie Lansbury was born in 1889 in Stepney in the East End of London. Her parents, Annie and Isaac Glassman, were Jewish refugees from Poland, who had escaped the pogroms fomented by the Russian Tsarist police. Her tragically short life amongst the slums of the area where she was born was filled with struggle alongside the poor and the oppressed.

In 1911, Minnie became a teacher in a primary school in Whitechapel, where she became active in the National Union of Teachers (NUT). She also became a socialist and suffragette. These were the years of the "Great Unrest", a huge wave of strikes by dockers, rail and road transport workers and miners. In Ireland it saw the Dublin Lockout struggle led by Jim Larkin and James Connolly.

The East End saw strikes on the London docks in the summer of 1911 and again in 1912. Thanks to their syndicalist and socialist leadership, these strikes helped overcome the racism that had recently divided Irish and Jewish workers from each other. The families

of Whitechapel Jewish tailoring workers took in some 300 dockers' children during the latter three-month dispute. During the docks and transport strikes, schoolchildren marched in support of the strikers.

Only a decade earlier, a virulently anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic organisation called the British Brothers League had been established in the East End. Its poisonous agitation claimed the credit for Britain's first modern racist controls on immigration, the 1905 Aliens Act. Building bridges of solidarity during strikes was thus a vital weapon against this early precursor of fascism.

SUFFRAGETTES AND SOCIALISTS

Another component of the "Great Unrest" was the campaign of direct action by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the "suffragettes", led by Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst. Minnie became a militant in Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation of the WSPU, which focused on mass working class women's action for universal suffrage, adopting militant tactics and welcoming

support from men. For these tactics, Sylvia was imprisoned and went on hunger strike several times.

Minnie Glassman married Edgar Lansbury in 1914. Edgar's father George Lansbury (1859-1940) was already a prominent socialist in the East End. He became Labour MP for Bow and Bromley in December 1910, and started publishing the *Daily Herald*.

Originally a strike paper, the *Daily Herald* became the paper of the militant wing of the labour movement in 1912, giving unstinting support to the suffragettes. In the same year, George Lansbury even resigned his seat to stand on a platform of universal suffrage both for men (whose right to vote was still restricted by a property qualification) and women (who did not have the vote at all), but lost the ensuing by-election.

In 1913 Christabel and Emmeline expelled their far more radical sister Sylvia from the WSPU, for sharing a platform at the Albert Hall with George Lansbury and Jim Larkin, in support of locked out Dublin workers. Sylvia's grouping renamed itself the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS), and began to develop a more broadly socialist politics.

When the First World War started in the summer of 1914, the ELFS threw itself into campaigning and providing for the welfare of women suffering on the "home front". It organised milk distribution and ran a day nursery, cost-price restaurants and a toy factory to provide employment. It also fought for higher and more regular allowances for soldiers' wives, price controls and higher wages for women workers.

Minnie gave up her teaching job in 1915 to become Assistant Secretary of ELFS, where she brought suffragette-style direct action to these



Minnie Lansbury arriving at Poplar Town Hall to be arrested

new causes. Sylvia Pankhurst recounted one example of this as follows:

"Minnie Lansbury burst in, exultantly announcing 'a riot in the Roman!' A crowd of women had threatened to storm a fish and chip shop for potatoes. A policeman attempting to stop them had been swept aside and 'they tore off all his buttons!'; her black eyes twinkled with merriment. To save further disturbance the policeman had compelled the fishmonger to bring out his store of potatoes and sell them at three halfpence a pound from a table outside his door."

WAR, ELECTIONS AND REVOLUTION

As the war was coming to an end in 1918, another wave of class struggle broke out. Bus, tram and underground workers went on strike against their union officials' advice, demanding equal pay for women workers.

However, five days after the war ended on 11 November 1918, Prime Minister David Lloyd George called a snap election. This was the first to be held under nearly universal male suffrage, and with women over 30 voting for the first time. Lloyd George went to the country in alliance with the Tories, devastating Herbert Henry Asquith's wing of Lloyd George's own Liberal party, which had not endorsed this alliance.

Labour won only a limited number of seats, 57 compared to its 42 seats in 1910. However, it polled 2,385,472 votes, compared to 309,963 in 1910. And only a year later in 1919, Labour swept the board in many borough councils across London, and did well in elections to the London County Council and to the Boards of Guardians, which administered benefits to unemployed workers whose insurance had run out.

In Poplar, Labour had 39 out of 42 of councillors. Amongst them were seven dockers, seven railworkers, four labourers, two postmen, a toolmaker, a boilermaker and a lead worker.

Four of the councillors were women

(Jeannie MacKay, Jane March, Nellie Cressall and Julia Scurr), as also were two aldermen (sic), Susan Lawrence and Minnie Lansbury. George and Edgar Lansbury were also elected. Minnie opened her house to constituents every morning, and delivered significant improvements in maternity and child welfare provision. Poplar's Labour Council radically improved services for the working class residents who had elected it.

In the meantime, the Russian revolution in November 1917 had aroused considerable enthusiasm in the British labour movement. The ELFS, which had renamed itself the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF) in May 1918, took part in the unity discussions with Russia's Bolsheviks and other British revolutionary socialists that eventually led to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1920.

Minnie and Edgar remained in the WSF during these discussions, while also remaining members of the Labour Party. A key sticking point in these discussions, however, was the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin's advice that communists should stand for elections and seek affiliation to the Labour Party, remaining inside it where they were already members.

This was something to which Sylvia Pankhurst was completely opposed, and which left her and her supporters outside

of the CPGB's ranks after the conclusion of all the various "unity congresses" in 1921. Here Sylvia and Minnie parted ways. Minnie agreed that socialism would come through a revolution, but understood that working class representation in parliament and councils could provide a tribune for those waging the class struggle outside of it. Minnie was soon proved right.

THE POPLAR RATES REBELLION

In January 1920 a major depression broke out in the USA, hitting Britain in April. Unemployment soared to 17 per cent by 1921. And unemployment insurance only lasted a short time, following which the jobless were forced to undergo a savage "means test" under

in their support when the councillors marched to court, with Minnie in the front ranks. After a High Court ruling, Minnie was imprisoned at the start of September 1921, along with 30 of her fellow councillors. The six women went to Holloway prison, and the men to Brixton.

Minnie waged a ceaseless struggle inside demanding better conditions, especially for Nellie Cressall who was heavily pregnant. They both also exposed the terrible conditions suffered by "ordinary" prisoners.

On 21 September, Nellie was forcibly released, having previously refused release unless all her fellow councillors were released with her. Demonstrations outside the prisons kept up the pressure on the government. The remaining councillors were released on 12

October, six weeks after their arrest, without having yet "purged their contempt" of court.

The government backed down and rushed through the Local Authorities (Financial Provisions) Act 1921, which provided for pooling of local government funding. This benefitted Poplar council by £250,000 per year, as well as other poor London boroughs. It was a magnificent victory for both militant defiance and mass mobilisation.

But over Christmas 1921, Minnie developed influenza, which rapidly turned into pneumonia. Under normal circumstances, a healthy 32-year-old woman's body would have fought this off. Minnie's body was weakened by her six-week spell in prison. She died on 2 January 1922.

Thousands of East End workers – men as well as women – turned out for her funeral, many wearing red flowers. The Red Flag was sung, appropriately enough since, metaphorically speaking, she was one of those whose "hearts' blood dyed its every fold". ★



George & Minnie Lansbury

the 1834 Poor Law, to verify that claimants had practically no other resources.

Moreover, each borough (however rich or poor) had to provide for its own "paupers". Thus Poplar council faced a choice: to cut services, to raise rates or to defy an unjust funding system. It chose the third, and refused to collect the precepts for cross-London bodies (like London County Council, the Water Board and the Metropolitan Police), until measures were taken so that richer boroughs in the West End paid a bigger share.

The law was soon invoked against the Poplar councillors. Thousands demonstrated

“

Minnie, in her 32 years, crammed double that number of years' work compared with what many of us are able to accomplish. Her glory lies in the fact that with all her gifts and talents one thought dominated her whole being night and day: How shall we help the poor, the weak, the fallen, weary and heavy-laden, to help themselves? When a soldier like Minnie passes on, it only means their presence is withdrawn, their life and work remaining an inspiration and a call to us each to close the ranks and continue our march breast forward.”

George Lansbury's tribute to Minnie

100 YEARS AFTER WOMEN FIRST WON THE RIGHT TO VOTE WE STILL HAVE A WORLD TO WIN

On 6 February 1918 the Representation of the People Act extended the franchise to some women over 30 and all men over 21, so that for the first time in the history of Britain's 'centuries old democracy', a majority of the adult population had the right to vote.

Yet millions of the women who had worked in the fields, shipyards, and factories during WW1 were under 30 and were excluded from the franchise. About 22 per cent of women over

30 did not pass the property qualification for the right to vote. The centenary of women's suffrage being celebrated in 2018 was deformed at birth by the profound sexism and class oppression of British society.

The struggle for universal, direct and equal suffrage lasted almost 100 years from the first 'Great' Reform Act of 1832, to the 1928 Equal Franchise Act. Its extension was resisted at every step of the way by the oligarchy of capitalists and

landowners ruling Britain.

Throughout the 19th century, Britain's ruling elites viewed the term 'democracy' with fear and contempt, associating it with the revolutionary upheavals and 'mob rule' that had overthrown numerous European rulers, and periodically threatened to do the same in Britain and Ireland.

Prior to 1832, just three per cent of the adult population made up the the total UK electorate.

In the 1831 election two thirds of constituencies returned their MPs without any ballot being held. As late as 1910 a quarter of seats were still uncontested. Even after the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts 40 per cent of men who failed the property qualification remained ineligible to vote. In Ireland the figure was 50 per cent.

At every stage, reforms were extracted as piecemeal concessions, with property qualifications that restricted the franchise to the middle classes and skilled workers. Whether reforms were made in response to, or to pre-empt popular unrest, the guiding principles were, firstly, that the extension should not challenge the elite's monopoly of parliament, and secondly – that there were no circumstances under which women could be granted the right to vote.

For most of its history, Britain's 'democracy' has been an instrument of managing the common affairs of the capitalists and landowners who ruled the country as an oligarchy through 'their' parliament.

This ruling class intransigently opposed virtually every extension to the franchise, until the social and political disruption brought about by WW1 and the socialist revolution in Russia convinced them to concede the franchise to the working class and women – rather than risk having it taken by force.

The struggle for the enfranchisement of women was seen by its opponents not simply as one about changing the electoral arithmetic, but as the thin end of the wedge of a challenge to the whole social order, which was being reshaped by the titanic struggle between the new proletariat and bourgeoisie.

This is the story of how the women's movements emerged, split, sought allies, fought

alone, and, eventually, won equal suffrage, overturning centuries of political subordination, and opening a new chapter in the struggle for the final emancipation of women and humanity.

VOTES FOR WOMEN

The demand for women to have an equal vote with men was first raised by the Radicals and Chartists during the 1830s and 40s, although the People's Charter itself only demanded universal male

Utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill was elected to parliament on a Radical ticket where he became a prominent advocate for women's suffrage and parliamentary reform. In 1866 he presented a petition for women's suffrage organised by Emily Davies and Elizabeth Garrett (Britain's first woman doctor), and in 1867 tabled an amendment to the Reform Act, which was defeated by 196 votes to 73.

The years after saw the emergence of the first women's political groups, such as the Conservative Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Associations, which weakened sex segregation, giving women from the middle classes opportunities to engage in political discussion. Working class women had participated in the Chartist movement, and the first women's trade union, the Women's Protective and Provident League was founded in 1875 by feminist and trade unionist Emma

Lydia Becker and Helen Taylor led the first attempt to found a truly national suffrage movement with the creation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867 but splits between Liberals and Conservatives rendered the campaign largely ineffective. For

20 years the women's suffrage movement remained local, parochial

and almost exclusively composed of women drawn from the landed gentry and urban bourgeoisie.

It wasn't until 1897, under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett, that 17 local groups were finally united under the banner of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), which campaigned for women's suffrage on the same terms "as it is, or may be" granted to men. Although many of its leaders were personally in favour of universal suffrage, the organisation's strategy of lobbying the Liberal Party for parliamentary reform led it to oppose a campaign to widen the franchise, fearing this would detract from securing the principle of



Sylvia Pankhurst.

suffrage, reflecting the views of the time before women were drawn into non-domestic labour in large numbers.

Interest in reform declined along with the Chartists, but by the 1860s, the new industrial working class in the cities was holding major demonstrations demanding the vote. For the first time, and following important reforms such as the right to divorce, the question of women's suffrage and public participation in political life started to be taken seriously.

The modern women's suffrage movement traces its origins to the formation of the Ladies Discussion Society and the Women's Suffrage Committee in 1865. In the same year, the

“some recognition for women”.

Liberal politicians generally declared themselves in favour of a limited extension of the franchise to some women and working class men. In practice, its leaders, like William Gladstone, always refused to insert women's suffrage into Reform Acts on the basis that the House of Lords, which had a huge Tory majority, would reject it outright. In this way the Liberals

out in the famous matchgirls' strike of 1889. When the Pankhursts returned to Manchester they were quickly attracted to the Independent Labour Party (ILP), which was founded in 1893. After Richard's death in 1898 Emmeline became more active in the ILP, even though she was the sole breadwinner for the family. She was soon joined in the ILP by her older daughters, Christabel and Sylvia.



Emmeline, Christabel & Sylvia

sacrificed the cause of women's suffrage in the interests of securing limited reforms for men – and avoiding a constitutional crisis.

THE NEW MILITANTS

On 10 October 1903, six women met at Emmeline Pankhurst's house in Nelson Street, Manchester, to found the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The women-only WSPU would become known as suffragettes, to distinguish them from the mixed sex suffragists of the NUWSS.

Emmeline and her husband Richard had been politically active in the 1870s and 1880s on the radical wing of the Liberal Party and had fought to extend the franchise to women. By the late 1880s, having moved to London, they were swept into the burgeoning unemployment and labour struggles in the capital. They marched with the unemployed on Bloody Sunday in 1887, where police killed two demonstrators in their attempt to disperse the 'illegal' demonstration, and Emmeline helped

branch, which was using the hall as a social club, did not admit female members! Sylvia reports her mother as declaring “We must have an independent women's movement!” and immediately calling the meeting which founded the WSPU.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND LABOUR

The founding of the WSPU was, however, not merely Emmeline's angry response to this example of gross sexism in the ILP, but the result of differences between the Pankhursts and the ILP/Labour leadership on equal electoral rights for women.

The WSPU was founded on the basis of fighting for an “equal terms” bill, whilst opposing the passive tactics of the NUWSS – which were clearly not working. On the other hand, the new Labour Party, (an alliance of trade unionists, the ILP, the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and Fabian Society, founded as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 and renamed in 1906), opposed the “equal

Following Richard's death a memorial fund was set up by the ILP in his name. Emmeline had asked for it to be used to build a hall in Salford for ILP meetings. The hall was decorated by Sylvia, already a trained and talented artist. But the opening was a disaster. Emmeline discovered that the local ILP

terms” position for both good and bad reasons.

It counterposed to it the demand for “full adult suffrage” for both men and women. While this was a correct position in itself, the problem was that Labour – many of whose MPs were elected thanks to a deal with the Liberals, did little to campaign or fight for it. They had few differences with Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George's reforming Liberal administration and certainly did not wish to destabilise it in any way. As a result it increasingly appeared to the Pankhursts, and to other women, that Labour was saying women would just have to wait.

As Christabel put it in a polemic in the ILP News in 1903, ‘One gathers that someday, when socialists are in power, and have nothing better to do, they will give women votes as a finishing touch to the arrangements. Why are we expected to have such confidence in the men of the LP? Working men are as unjust to women as are those of other classes.’

DEEDS NOT WORDS

Despite their differences, the WSPU developed alongside the growing Labour Party/ILP, supported by prominent leaders like Keir Hardie and George Lansbury. They spoke at the parties' meetings to get their ideas across. Indeed in its early years the WSPU acted as a women's section of the ILP, which unlike the trade union dominated Labour Party, was eventually won over to the WSPU's “equal terms” position. But it was the turn to militant direct action from 1905 onwards which transformed the WSPU from a small pressure group of a few dozen into a mass movement.

On 13 October, during a speech by leading Liberal Sir Edward Grey, at Manchester Free Trade Hall, Christabel and a new recruit, Annie Kenney, a Lancashire millworker, jumped up on their chairs, unfurling a banner demanding “Votes for Women”. They had to be forcibly removed from the meeting. For good measure Christabel slapped a police inspector in the mouth outside in order to get arrested. In court Christabel declared “We cannot make an orderly protest because we do not have the means whereby citizens may do such things”. Both were sentenced to seven days in jail after refusing to pay a fine.

The first militant steps had been taken. Two thousand protestors greeted the women when they were released from prison. Keir Hardie told a packed Free Trade Hall meeting, “20 years of peaceful propaganda have not produced such an effect.”

In 1906 the Liberals won a resounding victory with a massive majority in parliament, thanks to their alliance with Labour and John Redmond's Irish Home Rule Party. Although votes for women enjoyed increasing support within the party thanks in part to the pressure

of the WSPU, it was trenchantly opposed by the government, in particular by Asquith, who did not want to give the Lords an excuse to vote down radical welfare reforms developed as part of the 'People's Budget'. After Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman told a WSPU delegation to "go on pestering" and exercise "the virtue of patience", the suffragettes resolved to embark on a more aggressive campaign of direct action, under the slogan "Deeds not words".

Christabel Pankhurst increasingly moved into the driving seat of the WSPU's campaign, with her mother willing to defer to her in tactics and politics. Her actions shocked 'polite society' where middle class women were expected to be passive and act with decorum as 'wives and mothers'. Christabel broke all the rules and was denounced from all sides, by the leaders of the NUWSS and by the upcoming Labour leader and ILP member, Ramsey MacDonald. But her tactics struck a chord with tens of thousands of women who saw the refusal to grant the vote as a symbol of their oppression and who were determined to fight.

MOBILISING THE MIDDLE CLASSES

The WSPU had drawn its first recruits from amongst the women workers of Lancashire, many of whom, like Teresa Billington, Louisa Entwistle, and the Kenney sisters Annie, Jessie, and Nell, would go on to become prominent activists and leaders of working class struggles.

But the radical working class roots of the WSPU shifted following its first major rally at Caxton Hall in Westminster. There were many well off women from Chelsea and Kensington in attendance as well as a contingent of working class women from the East End who arrived singing the Red Flag.

For all her militancy when it came to tactics, Christabel had no doubt who should be regarded as central to the struggle. Politicians she said would be "more impressed by the demonstrations of the feminine bourgeoisie than of the feminine proletariat". The WSPU set about under her direction to recruit the rich and influential as well as large numbers of middle class women. Fred and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, well off ILP members, were important recruits to the central leadership. They added adept fundraising skills to the Pankhurst's flair for publicity and daring. They quickly took charge of bringing out a women's paper for the WSPU, *Votes for Women*, which by 1909 had a circulation of 22,000.

Militant action was extended from disrupting Liberal meetings to street protests at Downing Street and parliament. The tactic of "rushing parliament" was developed, turning apparently peaceful lobbies by hundreds of women into attempts to rush the chamber and disrupt proceedings. The activists of the WSPU

developed an enormous variety of methods of protest. Pavement chalking was used to advertise meetings and actions. The banner drop was invented with one group of women occupying the top of the Monument in the City and dropping a 'Votes for Women' banner. Barges were floated by parliament festooned with political slogans, while door-stepping ministers' offices was raised to an art form.

Because of these actions, 1906 and 1907 saw increasing numbers of arrests and imprisonments – Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia were all locked up for shorter or longer periods. In February 1907 the first 'Women's Parliament' was held at Caxton House to coincide with the opening of parliament. Hundreds of women poured out to march to Parliament and were charged by mounted police. The Liberal government was accused of using "Tsarist methods" by the popular press. The *Daily Mirror*, then a new "picture paper for ladies", was particularly supportive in part because the WSPU actions always provided newsworthy pictures and copy. It was the *Mirror* that popularised the term 'suffragette', originally a derogatory term, to distinguish the militant WSPU from the moderate 'suffragists' of the NUWSS.

The WSPU now had a national profile. Branches were being set up throughout London and the south. Full-time organisers were sent to Scotland and towns in the north to set up new branches. With the wealthy patrons money poured in. By 1909 the WSPU had an income of £21,000 a year, while the Labour Party had to make do on under £10,000.

THE BREAK FROM LABOUR

The WSPU's turn away from working women led to growing tensions with the ILP and Labour Party. Labour had returned 40 MPs in 1906, often only successful because the Liberals stood aside. In the Commons they appeared largely as a tail to the Liberals. This aided Christabel's desire for a split. She increasingly looked to the Tories as a weapon against the Liberals.

At the Cocker mouth by-election in 1906, where the Labour Party was standing, Christabel arrived and announced that the WSPU would not be supporting the Labour candidate. In 1907 Emmeline and Christabel resigned from the ILP. This change of policy, accompanied by the 'exclusion' from the WSPU of ILP women who continued to support Labour candidates, led to the first split. Teresa Billington, the Scottish organiser, and Charlotte Despard, both ILP members, decided to challenge the decision at a planned WSPU national conference, which was due to discuss and adopt a constitution that Emmeline had asked Billington to draft. But the conference was cancelled and a London meeting convened by Emmeline and Christabel

appointed a new national committee excluding the rebels.

Emmeline explained her attitude to democracy within the movement: "The WSPU is simply a suffrage army in the field. It is purely a volunteer army, and no one is obliged to remain in it". And of course Emmeline and Christabel were the self-appointed general staff!

Although the new cross-class Women's Freedom League (WFL) grew rapidly to about 4,000 members, it failed to dent the rise of the WSPU, which was half the size. June 1908 saw the first great suffragette demonstration in Hyde Park; 30 trains were laid on to bring in demonstrators and 20 platforms of women speakers were set up. The march set off from 7 separate locations in London with over 700 women's banners. The official colours of the movement, "purple for dignity, white for purity and green for hope", received their first outing.

The papers estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 gathered in Hyde Park. The march was the first of a series of mass demonstrations, pageants and exhibitions organised by the WSPU to propagandise for women's rights.

FROM DIRECT ACTION TO TERRORISM

For all its militancy and influence amongst wealthy circles of women, the WSPU found that it could not shift the Liberal government on votes for women. Christabel had turned away from the only force that could have brought about radical change, the millions of working class women and men who had the power to bring the country to a standstill. This was no pipe dream. In Belgium full manhood suffrage had been won in 1893 only as a result of a series of general strikes, and Britain in the pre-war period was moving into an unprecedented upsurge of trade union and syndicalist led struggles that would become known as the Great Unrest.

Having turned their backs on the working class, in 1912 the WSPU resorted to acts aimed at intimidating the government and the Liberal Party into granting the vote for women. Individual politicians were targeted and had to be given police protection. Windows in government buildings and Oxford Street stores were smashed. Pillar boxes were set ablaze with burning rags. MPs homes were set on fire. Old Master paintings were slashed with knives in the National Gallery. Emily Davison, originator of many of the more militant tactics, threw herself in front of the King's horse at the 1913 Derby and was killed. A huge martyr's funeral was organised by the WSPU.

Police repression increased massively. Their press and papers were seized, their offices regularly raided. More and more women were jailed. The suffragettes went on hunger strike and the government resorted to forced

feeding. Later 'the Cat and Mouse Act' was introduced allowing the prison authorities to release ill prisoners only to arrest them at will when they had recovered enough to be locked up again. Between 1905 and the start of WW1, over 1,000 women were imprisoned for their part in the women's suffrage campaign.

At the same time bourgeois women were engaging in heroic but futile acts of individual self-sacrifice, women confectionary workers in Bristol, garment and department store workers in London and textile workers in Clydebank were taking collective action as part of a wave of industrial militancy. Individual WSPU members made great sacrifices, but their tactics and isolation from the mass of working class women meant that between

1910 and 1913 the WSPU went from being a mass movement to a tightly knit guerrilla organisation, working largely underground. Christabel fled to Paris in 1912 to avoid arrest and continued to direct the movement from abroad.

Further splits and purges ensued, even extending into the direct family. Adela Pankhurst was regarded as 'too socialist' and was despatched to Australia where Emmeline thought she would be out of the way. In fact she became a founder member of the Australian Communist Party.

Sylvia Pankhurst developed a very different view from her mother and older sister of how the vote for women could be achieved. Although she did not speak out against it, she was opposed to the 'terrorist' turn which she believed "retarded a wonderful movement which was rising to a great climax". For Sylvia a successful fight to win women the right to vote had to be based in the mass forces of the increasingly organised and politicised working class – both men and women.

In 1912 Sylvia chose to return to work in the East End of London where, in 1906, the WSPU had organised the first working class women's demonstration of 500 women to march from the East End to parliament. The new campaign took off when George Lansbury, Labour MP

for Poplar resigned his seat in 1912 and ran again on the single issue of 'votes for women'.

However the opportunity to seize this chance and build a mass campaign was thwarted by Christabel's increasing resistance to working with men and, in particular, working class organisations. After an initial flurry of activity, the WSPU did little to support Lansbury who was defeated by a Conservative. After the defeat, the WSPU wanted to close down their operation in the East End, but Sylvia and other WSPU activists were determined to carry on the work they had started. After speaking in support of the Dublin Lockout in 1913, Sylvia was summoned to Paris in 1913 and told that the East London Federation was no longer to be part of the WSPU. In 1914 the group was renamed the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) and founded a newspaper, the Women's Dreadnought.

FROM EXILES TO PATRIOTS

The outbreak of war in August 1914 was to change the situation of the WSPU dramatically. The Home Secretary's amnesty for all suffragette prisoners was enough to allow Christabel a return to England. Whilst the moderate NUWSS continued campaigning and eventually split over its refusal to support the International Women's Peace Congress, Emmeline quickly



Suffragette demonstration, 1910

ordered the suspension of all militant activity and the publication of the WSPU's paper The Suffragette ceased. When it reappeared in 1915 it was as a pro war paper called Britannia. For the rest of the war Emmeline and Christabel became ultra-patriots urging men to join up, handing out "white feathers" to shame men into volunteering for the slaughter, and ferociously condemning shirkers and pacifists.

In 1917 after the

February Revolution

Emmeline travelled to Russia at Lloyd George's suggestion to combat the Bolsheviks' call for Russia to leave the war. She lionised Alexander Kerensky and the Women's Battalion of Death, set up to shame war weary Russian soldiers into continuing the war at all costs – ie at the cost not only of wounded and dead soldiers but the hungry women in Russia's bread queues whose demonstrations had triggered the overthrow of the Tsar. After the October Revolution she lobbied the government for a British military intervention to crush the world's first workers' state.

By contrast, the WFL, and many of the women members of the ILP, the British Socialist Party and the Labour Party joined the antiwar and pacifist movement, as did Sylvia and the ELFS (which became the Women's Suffrage Federation in 1916, the Workers Socialist Federation in 1918 and a founding component of the Communist Party). Minnie Lansbury – George's daughter in law, future imprisoned Poplar councillor and founder member of the Communist Party – became active in the antiwar movement in 1915. They suffered repression and imprisonment for their antiwar activities as they had so recently done in their struggle for women's suffrage.

As we have seen, the last year of the war finally saw the House of Commons and the Lords

offer votes for all men and for women over the age of 30. An important factor throughout 1917 when Westminster was debating the measure was the unfolding Russian Revolution. Even the repulsive Lord Curzon came round to the view that the franchise had to be extended to women and working class men if a revolution was to be avoided, and so the Tories too became sudden converts.

FROM PROTEST TO PARLIAMENT

The first woman to be elected to the Commons at the December 1918 election was a militant patriot of a very different sort. Constance Markievicz was a revolutionary Irish nationalist who had been sentenced to death for taking part in the 1916 Easter Rising as a member of James Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army. Her sentence was commuted to life and she was released in an amnesty in 1917. In 1918 her anti conscription activities landed her in a Holloway prison cell, from where she was elected as a Sinn Féin MP. In line with the Republican strategy she refused to take her seat at Westminster, instead sitting in the First Dáil, the revolutionary Assembly which declared Ireland an independent Republic.

The first women take her seat, Nancy Viscountess Astor, was a different character altogether. Never involved in the campaign for women's suffrage, she was elected as a Tory in 1919.

Two days after women gained the right to vote, Emmeline Pankhurst sat down to breakfast with Lloyd George, now Prime Minister, and declared, "Now we must work harder than ever to keep women out of the clutches of Macdonald and Co," i.e. the Labour Party.

But in the post-First War world the WSPU leaders no longer had any hold over militant women. Despite standing for parliament – Christabel as the head of a short lived Women's Party, Emmeline as a Tory – neither was elected.

Nevertheless the Suffragette movement they helped lead had changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of women. A woman's role in society was never seen in the same way again. The movement had broken the shackles of decorum and passivity in the most startling way possible.

WHAT DID THE VOTE DO FOR WOMEN?

In the first years after the war and the enfranchisement of women a number of progressive laws were passed, including the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, which made it illegal to exclude women from jobs because of their sex. This mainly benefitted educated, middle class women who had previously been barred from many of the professions. The 1919 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act forced most working class women to leave their wartime jobs as men came home and factories switched to peacetime production.

Nevertheless, during the war many women developed new labour skills; war employment boosted self-confidence and social solidarity. Some were able to retain these gains after the war in terms of greater freedoms both at work and in personal relationships.

The Liberal feminist Millicent Fawcett, president of the NUWSS, said in 1918: "The war revolutionised the industrial position of women

principle of 'equal pay for equal work' for the first time. But equal pay for equal work had to wait till 1970, and almost half a century on there remains a 9.1 per cent gap.

The 1920s, 30s and 40s saw further incremental gains in the economic and social rights of women, with the foundation of the NHS in 1948 being one of the most important. But there was a gap of almost four decades between

the mass movement of suffragists and suffragettes in the decades before and during the First World War, and what is usually called the Second Wave of the women's movement. Shelia Rowbotham in her classic 1973 work *Hidden from History*, helped to uncover these earlier struggles. In 1974 they were brought to a wider audience by a groundbreaking six part BBC TV television serial, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, and more recently in the film *Suffragette*.

Whilst the vote gave women a voice in politics and a key part in pressing for major social reforms what it could not do – as Marxist women were clear from the beginning – was actually liberate women. It could a means to this end but not the means.

For that a social revolution and the construction of a socialist society, where the material foundations of oppression were overcome, would be necessary.

The right to vote was a historic advance in the struggle for the emancipation of women, but the capitalist system, with its family and age-old patriarchal ideology

continues to condemn one half of humanity to systematic exploitation and oppression based on their sex.

Today, as Theresa May celebrates the centenary of women's suffrage wearing the purple, white and green of the WSPU, a new generation of fighters for women's liberation should instead take their cue from those women, like Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst, who fought under the red banner of socialism.

The great Russian revolutionary Inessa Armand put it most succinctly when she said,

"If women's liberation is unthinkable without communism, then communism is unthinkable without women's liberation."

In Britain, women eventually won the vote – but we still have a world to win. ★



Annie Kenney & Christabel Pankhurst

– it found them serfs and left them free." Here she reveals her class standpoint. It is true that for example, the number of women in the civil service increased from 33,000 in 1911 to 102,000 by 1921. But for working class women things were very different.

During the war women's earnings had risen relative to men's thanks in part to wartime equal pay regulations. But by 1931, a working woman's weekly wage had returned to the pre-war situation of being half the male rate in most industries. In 1918, women workers on the London buses and trams struck for equal pay, demanding the same war bonuses as men. They spread the strike to the London Underground and towns across the South East. This was the first strike for equal pay in British history, and led to a government report that accepted the

**THE
BOLSHEVIKS
AND
WOMEN'S
LIBERATION**



Working women were central to the February revolution of 1917. They were highly visible, gathering in a mass protest on 22 February, International Working Women's Day, to call for bread and peace. That morning, a few hundred women textile workers had assembled in their factories and resolved to call a one-day political strike. Women tram workers stopped public transport, sending a citywide signal that strikes were underway. The strikers sent delegates to neighbouring factories with appeals for support. By noon, an estimated 90,000 had followed the women out on strike.

Three days later, it was women who persuaded the soldiers, who had opened fire on the demonstrators the day before, to lay down their arms; this was a crucial moment in toppling the Tsarist regime.

Later in the year, coinciding with the October Revolution itself, the First All-City Conference of Petrograd Working Women was organised by the journal *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker) and attended by 500 delegates, elected by 80,000 working women. The conference was to prepare non-party women for the coming uprising and to explain the Bolshevik programme, which the new Soviet government would pursue after victory.

Its business was interrupted by the outbreak of the armed uprising. The delegates recessed to participate in the revolutionary struggle along with many other working women, who bore arms, dug entrenchments, stood guard and nursed the wounded. Soviet women were members of Red Guard units from the first days of the October revolution, and they fought side by side with men on every front during the civil war.

Just after the October revolution, Lenin said: "In Petrograd, here in Moscow, in cities and industrial centres, and out in the country, proletarian women have stood the test magnificently in the revolution. Without them we should not have won, or just barely won. That is my view. How brave they were, how brave they still are! Just imagine all the sufferings and privations that they bear. And they hold out because they want freedom, communism. Yes, indeed, our proletarian women are magnificent class warriors. They deserve admiration and love."

THE BOLSHEVIK PROGRAMME

The Bolshevik programme to free women from their domestic drudgery and bring them into the Party as activists was based on four primary precepts:

- Free union
- Women's emancipation through

wage

- labour
- Socialisation of housework
- Withering away of the family

A number of laws, such as universal and equal suffrage, were introduced immediately to give women equality in the legal sense and also in the workplace; equal wages was first on the list.

In December 1917, illegitimacy was abolished in law, making fathers, whether married or not, co-responsible for their children and freeing mothers from the burden of a double standard which had punished them for the consequences of shared "mistakes".

The Bolsheviks established a range of far-reaching reforms, specifically the 1918 Family Code, which established civil marriages (to reduce the power of the church) and simple divorce on demand (which could be requested by either partner). The Code was followed in 1920 by the legalisation of abortion, which was also free on demand. Directly after the decree there was a mass wave of divorces as unhappy partners took the opportunity to relieve themselves of their other half.

The young legal scholar Alexander Goikhbarg, drafter of the Code, believed that the fetters of husband and wife would become obsolete. Although women had entered the workforce, they were still responsible for child rearing, cooking, cleaning, sewing, mending, all the mindless drudgery of housework essential to the family. This work would be taken over by paid workers in communal dining rooms, laundries and childcare centres. Women would be free to enter the public sphere on an equal basis as men. They would be equally educated, waged and be able to pursue their own individual goals and development.

Goikhbarg believed that free unions based on love and respect for one another would gradually replace marriage, and this was a view shared by many Bolsheviks. He believed children, the elderly, and the disabled would be supported under socialism by the state; housework would be socialised and waged; and thus women would no longer be economically dependent on men. Meanwhile, the Family Code of legal duties would provide protections as long as they were still necessary.

The Russian revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai, said: "The family, deprived of all its economic tasks, not holding responsibility for a new generation, no longer providing women with the basic source of their existence, ceases to be a family. It narrows and is transformed into a union of the marital pair."

The Bolsheviks believed that the abolition of the family, rather than the gender conflict within it, held the key to women's emancipation.

Importantly, with communal kitchens and laundries, the Bolsheviks concentrated not so much on challenging men to share in women's work but rather sought to transfer that work into the public domain.

The Code was the most progressive family legislation the world had ever seen; it abolished the inferior legal standing of women and created equality under the law. However, the Bolsheviks were well aware that this was legislation for a transitional period. They knew that the law alone could not liberate women, any more than it could create socialism, but the elimination of antiquated family laws was the essential first step towards liberation. They believed that law, like the state, would wither away. There was tension and heated debate within the Party as to how fast this could happen.

Between 1923 and 1925 the Family Code was redrafted several times, and publicly debated in a manner which lawmakers today would find unfathomable.

In addition, the Bolsheviks aimed to revolutionise peasant life by passing the Land Code. This abolished private ownership of land, water, forests and minerals, and placed them all in hands of the soviet state. It recognised the role of the village commune, the *mir*, in distributing land between all its citizens, regardless of age, sex, religion or nationality; all had the right to use the land and to participate fully in the decision-making of the *mir*. Under the Land Code, women could now be heads of households.

WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

In addition to legislation, the Bolsheviks set up the Zhenotdel, or Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Bolshevik leaders Inessa Armand and Konkordiiia Samoilova argued that the party needed "to organise from among the most active working women of the party special groups for propaganda and agitation among women in order to put the idea of communism into practice".

Kollontai, Armand, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Samoilova, Klavdia Nikolayeva, and Zlata Lilina organised the First National Congress of Women Workers and Peasants. They argued that they sought not to separate women's issues from men's but rather to weld and forge women and men into the larger socialist liberation movement.

One reason motivating Kollontai in particular was a fear that if the Bolshevik Party did not organise an effective women's movement, Russian women living under conditions of war and deprivation might well be drawn into the remnants of the pre-revolutionary feminist or Menshevik

movements. Many Bolsheviks knew that if they did not recruit women into the official party, women's backwardness would make them easy targets for counter-revolutionary forces. Finally, the early party-state desperately needed to mobilise every woman and man to support the Red Army in the Civil War.

The Zhenotdel made significant gains in the area of organisation building during the period from 1919 to 1923. Often working in special interdepartmental commissions, they established relations with the Maternity and Infant Section (OMM) of the Commissariat of Health, as well as with the Commissariats of Education, Labour, Social Welfare, and Internal Affairs. They addressed issues of abortion and motherhood, prostitution, childcare, labour conscription, female unemployment, labour regulation, and famine relief. They argued vehemently with the trade unions that there should be special attention to female workers.

Under the leadership of Kollontai, the Zhenotdel spread the news of the revolution, enforced its laws, and set up political education and literacy classes for working-class and peasant women.

The Zhenotdel offered women practical political experience. In annual elections women chose their delegates – one for every 10 working women or for every hundred peasant women or housewives. These delegates attended classes in reading and writing, government, women's rights and social welfare, and they took part in the organisation of conferences, meetings and interviews designed to arouse the interest of their constituents and draw them into political activity. They were entitled to representation on the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, and those who were elected to represent Zhenotdel pursued a special programme of political education, which included reviewing the reports of district committees, co-ops, trade unions and factory directors.

The Zhenotdel also carried out propaganda campaigns through its publications. By 1921, it was publishing a special page devoted to women in 74 weekly newspapers. In addition, it published its own weekly bulletin and the monthly journal *Kommunistka* (The Communist Woman), which had a circulation of 30,000. In addition, Zhenotdel's literary commission supervised the publication of leaflets and pamphlets dealing with party work among women – over 400,000 pieces of literature during the first six months of 1921 alone.

They also set up co-operative workshops for women, organised women who had been laid off from factories and established orphanages for homeless children.

BALANCE SHEET

Within a few years Zhenotdel had succeeded in creating out of the least well educated sector of the working class and peasantry an organised, active, politically conscious stratum of women citizens supporting the Soviet republic.

The Bolsheviks were only partially successful in implementing their visionary programme. Foreign invasion and civil war led to famine in 1921 and the introduction of the New Economic Policy, which allowed a controlled re-introduction of trading in agricultural produce and consumer goods. This unavoidable retreat, combined with the backwardness of Russia's economy and its overwhelmingly peasant population, meant that their ambitious reform programme could not be fully carried out.

Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks established the goal of a society in which communal dining halls, childcare centres and public laundries would replace the unpaid labour of women in the home. Freed from their domestic burden, women would achieve equality with men. Mutual affection and respect would replace legal and economic dependence as the basis for relations between the sexes. They were the first to legalise abortion in 1920 and made it available to women, free of charge.

This was a conscious effort to liberate women, and the new laws reflected the aim of the withering away of the family. Many of the gains that were made, such as equal pay, have never been attained in “democratic” societies, even though they are enacted in law. It would be interesting to discuss what the main demands would be today for women's liberation and how much they would overlap with the programme the Bolsheviks advanced. In fact, the vast majority of their programme would be still be valid today. For all the claims by the ruling class, women have not achieved the level of freedom they had in 1918 in Russia.

CIVIL WAR AND REACTION

After the civil war 4 million men returned to their homes; there were massive layoffs due to industrial cutbacks. Women accounted for 60 per cent of the unemployed, and during this period almost 280,000 women left the workforce. This was combined with a deadly famine in 1921, which affected 25 million and left millions of starving orphans.

With the introduction of the New Economic Policy in 1921, Zhenotdel activists faced a new problems: rising and disproportionately female unemployment; cutbacks in budgeting for local party committees that prompted them to try to liquidate their women's sections altogether; and cutbacks in social services (childcare, communal kitchens, etc.).

This meant that ideas of a rapid advance towards socialism, the imminent withering away of the state, classes and the family, all common during the “utopianism” of the period of War Communism, gave way to debates about what should be done during a prolonged transitional period. The backwardness of Russia's economy, its overwhelmingly peasant population, the temporary (it was hoped) isolation of the Russian revolution, all meant that ambitious social programmes met major obstacles.

The New Economic Policy often prompted managers to fire women and to replace them with men, as women were considered more costly to employ. And although the Bolsheviks issued decrees against discrimination against women at work, these had little effect on the sexist practice of factory managers. The cutbacks meanwhile had the effect of shifting women away from heavy industry, and back into traditional roles and jobs that they had held before the war.

There was also an increase in prostitution. As Lenin's widow Krupskaya wrote: “Poverty compels women to sell themselves. They are not prostitutes who make an enterprise out of this, but mothers of families.”

The state retreated from socialised child rearing and reversed the prohibition against adoption in 1926; older children from the orphanages were placed with peasant families as agricultural workers, opening new places for younger orphans. The Bolsheviks had previously abolished adoption in 1918, so that peasants couldn't use adopted children as slave labour.

And most women could not take advantage of “free union” as long as marriage frequently represented a form of security and survival for unskilled and illiterate mothers. The material conditions during the civil war and afterwards did not foster “free union”, particularly in the countryside where the woman was still very much tied to the “dvor”, the kitchen.

However, the reversal in Soviet family policy by the mid-1930s was not primarily the result of Russia's backward economy, or the lack of state facilities. The turn was primarily due to an ideological shift, which went hand-in-hand with Stalin's reactionary policies in other areas.

In 1926, a new Family Code was introduced. It imposed greater responsibilities on parents for looking after their children after separation and divorce. It also granted the same legal status to de facto marriages as to legally registered ones, and made divorce even simpler.

The purpose of this legislation was to ensure that the families of un-registered marriages were supported by fathers. This was opposed by Kollontai, but supported by many women

who believed that the growth of less formal relationships had enabled men to avoid their paternal responsibilities.

This re-emphasis on individual responsibility for childcare was a retreat from the goal of socialisation. It was a cruel proof that rights can never be higher than the material circumstances of society allow for. As Trotsky wrote:

“To institute the political equality of men and women in the Soviet state was one problem and the simplest. A much more difficult one was the next – that of instituting the industrial equality of men and women workers in the factories, the mills, and the trade unions, and of doing it in such a way that the men should not put the women to disadvantage. But to achieve the actual equality of man and woman within the family is an infinitely more arduous problem. [...] As long as woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking and sewing, all her chances of participation in social and political life are cut down in the extreme.” (From the old family to the new, 1923)

THE RISE OF STALINISM

Isolated and faced with a growing parasitic bureaucracy, the Russian revolution slowly succumbed to a bureaucratic counter-revolution. As the working class lost political power, Stalinism organised a forced march to the right. Real reverses occurred in the position of women. These were not justified as a forced short-term retreat, but rather were sanctified as the natural order of things.

Trotsky designated this period a “Thermidor in the family”. The advanced revolutionary cutting edge of the Bolsheviks’ programme – the socialisation of domestic work, the responsibility of society for the care of children, the mobilisation of women into political and social life, the challenging of the old sexist and patriarchal structures in family and sexuality – all of these were abandoned and indeed denigrated by the bureaucratic usurpers of the revolution.

With the introduction of the industrialisation and collectivisation programmes of the late 1920s women became viewed not as a force to be mobilised for their own liberation, but as a workforce to be organised to meet the targets of the Five Year Plan. They were subordinated to production through work in the factories and fields, and to reproduction through giving birth to large families. The needs of bureaucratic planners were thus placed before the interests of women and of the working class.

Women’s participation in social production was massively increased. Between 1928 and

1949, the number of women workers in the Soviet Union increased from 3 million (24 per cent of the workforce) to over 13 million (over 50 per cent). Meanwhile, the responsibility of women for domestic labour in the family was massively reinforced.

This was a “double shift” with a vengeance. The Stalinist interpretation of women’s liberation through work is a caricature of the revolutionary position. The Bolsheviks never regarded women’s emancipation as an automatic process that would arise solely as a result of women being given paid jobs. They saw it as something that required a conscious struggle to transform work, home life and the political organisation of society. Stalinism however would have none of this.

In 1930, Stalin abolished Zhenotdel on the grounds that it was no longer necessary. The individual family unit was actively promoted and glorified. It became a way of reasserting control and discipline over the working class. The ideology of the “socialist family”, the “base unit” of society from which everyone worked as one to construct the “Soviet motherland”, was a central part of the atomisation of the working class, and of the rising dictatorship over it by the new ruling bureaucratic caste.

SEXUAL COUNTER REVOLUTION

The sexual counter-revolution and glorification of the bourgeois family included the re-criminalisation of male homosexuality. The new Article 121 of the criminal code enacted in March 1934 imposed up to five years of hard labour in prison for gay men; although like the British statute under which Oscar Wilde was imprisoned in 1895, it made no mention of lesbianism.

Divorce was made more difficult in 1936. Abortion was re-criminalised for first pregnancies in 1935 and made completely illegal in 1936. The Stalinists claimed that because “socialism” existed in the USSR and because the “woman question” had now been solved, so women no longer needed to avoid having children. The failures of Stalinism to meet the contraception and abortion needs of the mass of women also led to a rise in deaths as a result of botched backstreet abortions.

With all of this came an assault on all that had been progressive in the early Bolshevik debates on sexuality. Pravda led a campaign against these ideas, now such a threat to Stalin’s authoritarian state:

“So-called ‘free love’ and all disorderly sex life are bourgeois through and through, and have nothing to do with either socialist principles or the ethics and standards of conduct of the Soviet citizen. [...] The elite of our country [...] are as a rule also excellent

family men who dearly love their children. And vice versa: the man who does not take marriage seriously [...] is usually also a bad worker and a poor member of society. [...] A woman without children merits our pity, for she does not know the full joy of life. Our Soviet women, full-blooded citizens of the freest country in the world, have been given the bliss of motherhood.”

Stalinism fostered a strong sexist culture to support the continued centrality of women’s role as mothers and wives, in addition to their work outside the home. And while the regime applauded women tractor drivers and exhorted women to be good workers and “heroine” mothers, the role separation of male and female workers was continually stressed.

Sexism in education and stark job segregation were the norm. Girls and women were encouraged to be mothers and workers in unskilled or in “caring” professions. Opportunities for women to enter male-dominated professions were provided only for a few women, who could then show to the world outside what “equality” for women looked like.

The USSR in the Stalin period thus continued to repeat some of the words of Bolshevism on the emancipated woman, but this was now measured by her contribution to the “socialist” industrialisation project, by how much grain and by how many children she could produce.

The family was reinforced in order to increase discipline within the working class. Thus the one aspect of the Marxist programme that was retained, the increased participation of women in production, came to represent not a first or second step along the road to liberation but, when tied to continued domestic slavery, an inordinate burden on women.

Trotsky described the results in terms that would ring painfully true even today:

“The 40 million Soviet families remain in their overwhelming majority nests of medievalism, female slavery and hysteria, daily humiliation of children, feminine and childish superstition. [...] The marriage and family laws established by the October revolution, once the object of its legitimate pride, are being made over and mutilated by vast borrowings from the law treasuries of the bourgeois countries. And as though on purpose to stamp treachery with ridicule, the same arguments which were earlier advanced in favour of unconditional freedom of divorce and abortion – ‘the liberation of women’, ‘defence of the rights of personality’, ‘protection of motherhood’ – are repeated now in favour of their limitation and complete prohibition.” ★

CHALLENGES OF THE WOMENS MOVEMENT IN SRI LANKA

HEMAMALI WIJESINGHE

Sri Lanka has had a developed culture and literacy for many centuries. As far back as 1931, when it was still a part of the British Raj, the right to vote was won by a campaign that mobilised women as well as men. In 1933, when the British government launched the Poppy Appeal to commemorate World War I, the two main working class parties, Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Lanka Communist Party, launched the Suriya-Mal Movement against British colonialism and these campaigns together produced a number of revolutionary women intellectuals. Among these were Doreen Wickramasinghe, Celina Perera, Vivienne Gunawardena, Theja Gunawardena, Heidi Keuneman and Florence Senanayake. This was reflected in a significant level of women's representation by such figures as Adeline Molamure in the first Senate.

Yet, today, 84 years later, the political development of Sri Lankan women is in a pathetic state. Although women make up 52 per cent of the population, their political representation in parliament is only 5.8 per cent. In provincial institutions, it is only 2.7 per cent. It is also a reason for dismay to see how men who not only engage in abusive acts against women but actually boast about it, continue to hold positions of power in such bodies.

The 30 year war against the Tamil people in the North and East was brought to an end in a victory for the government. Women in those regions now make up 65 percent of the population. Tamil-speaking women and children, not only suffered the direct effects of the war, but also the physical and mental pressures of the postwar occupation of their lands.

Even though the women's movement initially had a number of currents, today, it has become mainly an opportunist puppet of global neoliberalism. There are two major reasons for this. One is the funding being pumped in by voluntary groups as well as capitalist countries and organisations that call themselves global liberals. Within the country, this finances

organisations dominated by upper class, English speaking women who mislead and even deceive poor women through the non-governmental organisations which give them a degree of independence and the freedom to travel.

Reports reveal that only 25 per cent of the funding received is spent on eliminating poverty. Certainly, some women have gained employment, but this has blunted their commitment to a real struggle for all women. It is true that these organisations have done some excellent work in matters such as racism but now public confidence in NGOs has deteriorated and Sinhalese chauvinist racists are again raising their heads.

The other major problem is the lack of understanding of women's struggles on the left. Despite their commitment to socialism, most men still accept the traditional ideologies, they do not exclude themselves from the general patriarchal perspective they are used to. They have to learn that those who wish to become revolutionaries cannot make that journey while excluding women.

This is not simply a theoretical issue. Women are the majority of workers in the three sectors that earn most foreign income; the factories of the Free Trade Zone, the domestic servants in the Middle East and the tea pickers on the plantations. Yet it is these women who suffer the worst pay and working conditions. On top of that, like most women, they are burdened by family responsibilities, breaking their backs out of sight in their homes.

The left in Sri Lanka has to rediscover not only the real role of women in the history of the working class but also the role of socialists in developing the women's movement. At the present time, both are dominated by political forces that deny the centrality of class and the working class movement is weakened by its failure to recognise the centrality of women in its own struggles. What we need is a working class women's movement that will mobilise the social and economic force of women workers for women's rights and the socialist reorganisation of society. ★

THE COLONISATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN THE USA

MICAELA

The colonization of Indigenous women has persisted even in the 'post-colonial' era. Specifically, colonialism promoted a shift from an egalitarian society to a patriarchal societal structure which resulted in a legacy of violence against Indigenous women, and specific colonial sterilization policies not only affected women's role in Indigenous society, it severely limited the size and sovereignty of Native societies today.

Prior to colonization, the concept of balance, twinning, and equal gender roles was emphasized in the egalitarian community structure of Eastern Woodlands Cosmology. However, as Native Americans assimilated to Western culture, the matrilineal and matrifocal community structure that existed in Native American nations switched to a patriarchal structure (Sellers, Stephanie). The distinction between the colonists' and Natives' view of gender roles is illustrated through the Euro-American narrative of the Lenni Lenape society. The original ethnologists who reported on this tribe, clergies in the Jesuit Church, recorded the Lenni Lenape's lifestyle with a particular emphasis on the value of women in society. Claims, such as "men and women played complementary roles in their daily lives and in their cultural matrix...the key dynamic was not domination and subordination between the sexes" (47), "A women could not be forced to marry; the choice was hers" (48), and "husbands did not make decisions for wives" (Caffrey, Margaret). Western culture not only rejected gender equality and the matrifocal and matrilineal structures, the paradigm surrounding women within Native society shifted to view women as inferior to men. In fact, the Cherokee Nation rewrote their

constitution to exclude women and women's positions in order to align with the colonists (Sellers, Stephanie).

The introduction of unequal gender roles has had inter-generational consequences as the legacy of colonial patriarchy continues today and is manifested through domestic and sexual violence experienced by Native American women. Over one in three Native American women will be raped over the course of their life; and most women do not report the incident, because they know there will be inaction or indifference towards handling the report. The denial of justice for survivors of sexual assault and violence has actually caused Native American women to be more targeted than women of any other ethnic group (Lobo et al. 184).

Additionally, young Indigenous girls were particularly targeted and coerced to attend Indian boarding and mission schools in the early 1900s as a means of committing cultural genocide: "[Mission school's] goal was to alienate girls from the cultural values and practices of their mothers and turn them instead to Christianity and the Anglo-American work ethic and material culture" (Lobo et al. 290). Further, the sexual abuse present in the boarding schools also caused young girls to be accustomed to victimization. Thus, the legacy of victimization facilitates the transition from victims of sexual abuse in school to victims of domestic violence in the home for many women (Indian School: Stories of Survival). Thus, it can be seen how Native American women today are so undervalued, especially compared to their community standing pre-colonization.

Additionally, sterilization efforts in the 1970s by the U.S. government has had intergenerational effects to the extent that they completely eliminated the potential for

future Indian generations. A 1975 General Accounting Office (GAO) report revealed that between 1973 and 1976, 3,406 sterilizations on Native American women were performed in Indian Health Services (IHS) facilities. The Native American population is already small, so this number has the same impact to if 452,000 non-Indian women had been sterilized. It is important to note that this number only accounts for four of the twelve IHS facilities and only covers the three years between 1973 and 1976; thus, it is likely that more Native American women had also undergone sterilization procedures. It is also unclear to what extent this statistic reflects informed and consensual sterilization procedures. There was no written record of consent for many of these procedures, and language barriers between Native women and IHS physicians could have also made it difficult for Native women to give informed verbal consent. Women interviewed later stated that public and private welfare agencies had threatened to put their children in the foster care system if the women did not comply with the sterilization procedure, and some women gave consent while they were in child labor and under the influence of pain medication (Lobo et al. 175-184). Sterilization has led to emotional trauma for Native American women as the primary role for women in the tribal community is to be a mother (Sellers, Stephanie).

Overall, the psychological and emotional damage caused by these colonialist policies and events has persisted through many generations and has led to a lack of emotional development, sexual and domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and severe economic distress. Thus, not only has the impacts of colonization persisted today, it has caused disproportionate emotional and physical trauma for Indigenous women today. ★

USA

OUR BODIES, OUR CHOICE

MEKDELA EJIGU

The limited legal abortion and women's reproductive rights available in the United States exist in a permanent state of siege enforced by the Republican party and religious conservatives across the country.

During President Obama's terms, Republican House and Senate members repeatedly attempted to block abortion clinics from operating in their districts with varying degrees of success. Under Donald Trump's presidency, the government has nationally defunded Planned Parenthood forcing branches to close or survive off donations.

It is not a coincidence that Planned Parenthood, a non-profit organisation that provides sexual healthcare, birth control, sex education and family planning to predominantly low income, minority women, is under fire.

Conservatives have been explicit that their crusade to shut down Planned Parenthood clinics is due to abortion being part of their services. The reality, however, is that abortion accounts for only 4 per cent of the life saving services these clinics provide.

In this climate of reaction, the US can expect wide reaching and fundamental attacks on abortion, women's rights and all civil rights for the remainder of Trump's presidency.

Roe v. Wade, the 1973 US Supreme Court case that legalised abortion, has been threatened by anti-abortionists ever since. Trump's administration is the next in line to declare that it will overturn the landmark decision; with conservatives now in the majority on the Supreme Court, this looks like a possibility.

Republicans and conservative Christians oppose abortion on the grounds of being "pro-life" or protecting the life of the unborn foetus. Other talking points include restricting or altogether removing women's access to birth control because sex is not a recreational activity and should be restricted to sex within marriage for the purpose of conceiving only.

This argument tramples over the rights of married women who need family planning resources like birth control and abortion because they do not want to or are unable to raise children.

Regardless, Republican Senators and Congress members continue to introduce bizarre and psychologically abusive legislation intended to discourage women from seeking abortions. This includes a bill that requires women to get ultra sounds before being permitted to have an abortion, a bill requiring women to bury the foetus after having an abortion, and a bill requiring women to provide written permission from their husbands to have an abortion.

Anti-abortionists are so determined to stop abortions that they operate crisis pregnancy centres and deceive women into attending them. At these centres, women who need scientific and impartial medical advice are instead given false and alarming information meant to dissuade them from getting abortions. According to the Guardian, Google Maps has directed American women searching for abortion clinics to crisis pregnancy centres instead. This kind of misinformation is unacceptable and dangerous; a woman's right to control her own body is a fundamental human right that should never be interfered with. Women that have been raped, or get pregnant at a young age, or simply cannot afford to have a child deserve to spare themselves and their future children from a life of heartbreak.

The closures of Planned Parenthood and abortion clinics around the country hit low-income women of colour the hardest. The reality of having a child or more children than one can afford perpetuates the cycle of poverty, and a child born into poverty is more likely to stay in poverty.

The U.S. healthcare industry is privatised and so expensive that only the relatively wealthy can afford to have health insurance. Yet twenty six states prohibit private insurance plans from offering coverage of abortion. People on

low incomes who rely on Medicaid instead of private insurance have even more limited access.

The closure of Planned Parenthood clinics means that low-income people who cannot afford healthcare will have even fewer ways of accessing the life-saving care that they need.

Predominantly white anti-abortionists have smeared Planned Parenthood for carrying out a genocide of African-Americans through abortion. According to this theory, Planned Parenthood's white female founder Margaret Sanger intended to use abortion to wipe out the African-American population. However, Planned Parenthood debunked these allegations on their website as untrue. Regardless of Sanger's racist beliefs, today Planned Parenthood provides life-saving medicine to minority populations who need family planning and sexual healthcare. This anti-abortion argument erases the genocide of Indigenous people and the eugenics used against both African-American and Indigenous women. These eugenics include forced sterilisations and unethical experiments conducted on African-American and Indigenous people. In fact, the "father of modern gynaecology" J. Marion Sims, is an American physician that created the field of gynaecology by performing unethical, nonconsensual experiments on Black female slaves without using anaesthesia.

Historically, the U.S. banned abortion to force white women to repopulate the country while sterilising women of colour. The US must recognise its violent history and the negative effects of denying its marginalised populations the human right of healthcare, including abortion.

- Defend Roe v. Wade
- Defend a woman's right to choose
- For free, safe and legal abortion on demand
- For a massive programme of sex and health education, organised by women's and labour movement organisations, funded by taxation of the rich. ★

THE FIGHT FOR A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE



Abortion rights protest in the United States

ELLA MERTENS

Whether in Chile or Ireland, Germany or Poland – all over the world – women are protesting for their right to control their own bodies. A new generation is standing up to say that we can decide for ourselves whether or not to have a child in the event of pregnancy.

Poland shows just how successful such a campaign can be. Just under two years ago, “Ordo Iuris”, a pro-life organisation, demanded five year prison sentences for abortions, as well as the prohibition of the “morning-after pill” – even in cases of rape or danger to life for mother or child.

Poland already has the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe but the new law would have condemned thousands of Polish women, especially young women, to lose the right to stop a pregnancy within 120 hours of sexual intercourse.

Health minister Konstanty Radziwiłł first

“time to develop”. These comments were condemned by European health agencies and publicly ridiculed.

Nevertheless the right-wing populist PiS (Law and Order) government initially chose to support the Bill. However, when more than 100,000 people took to the streets to protest against the law and many women walked out of their workplaces, Radziwiłł performed a spectacular U-turn and spoke out against it during the debate – not because he spontaneously changed his mind, but to improve his chances in the upcoming election.

In Chile, too, a partial victory for the pro-choice movement last August secured the right to abortion under “three circumstances”: if the woman’s life was at risk; if the foetus suffered from a terminal condition; or if the woman was raped. The notorious dictator, General Pinochet, introduced an absolute prohibition in 1989.

The protests in Ireland have a similar background. Here women who order an abortion pill over the Internet face a 14-year prison sentence. A referendum on the liberalisation of the law introduced in 1983 will now be held in May this year. (See page xx for

of all tried to claim that the morning-after pill was injurious to women’s health, then that it was tantamount to abortion because it would not allow the pregnancy

more details.)

Although it may seem surprising, in Germany the legal situation regarding abortions is also not particularly progressive. For example gynaecologist Kristina Hänel provided abortion information on her homepage. She was fined €6,000 for this under paragraph 219a of the Penal Code because apparently medical and legal information about abortion constitutes “advertising”.

But that’s not all. According to paragraph 218 of the Penal Code, abortion is illegal if a) a period of 12 weeks is exceeded or b) the pregnant woman does not undergo any supposedly neutral counselling. If such counselling does not take place and an abortion is still carried out, the pregnant woman or the doctor can go to jail for up to five years.

In addition, many hospitals under church management refuse to carry out abortions. While in a big city you can choose another treatment centre, in rural areas it can mean having to travel 100km to the nearest centre, i.e. out of reach for many young and poorer women.

However, things are moving. The verdict on the gynaecologist brought the debate to the Bundestag, where on 22 February three amendments to paragraph 219a were debated.

But, for three reasons, that alone is not enough. First Angela Merkel’s CDU party oppose any change, as does the pro-life far-right AfD, so the parliamentary route is blocked. Second we need to abolish paragraph 218 and fight for free and legal abortion for all who request it, if we are to ensure all women who become pregnant have a real choice.

And third we need to link up the national movements into an international campaign for a woman’s right to choose. ★

LIBYA: A SILENT DEADLY SUFFERING

JAQUELINE KATHERINA SINGH

While within Fortress Europe right wing agitation and violence against refugees are on the increase, its external borders are increasingly impenetrable. People who flee from hunger, war, violence and exploitation are drowned in the Mediterranean or herded into massive camps on the borders of Greece or Turkey.

War zones such as Afghanistan have been declared “safe” so those who have made it to Europe can be sent back there. Agreements have been concluded to oblige countries through which the main escape routes pass not to let refugees through. Meanwhile activists, who try to rescue people from drowning, are criminalised, accused of people smuggling.

There is a great deal of regret expressed about the failure to deal with the suffering, often caused by the EU itself. It is therefore not surprising that there was only a brief media outcry, which quickly faded back into silence, when last year journalists revealed what the practical implementation of “escape prevention” really looked like. In Libya we are talking about prison camps and slave auctions.

MODERN DAY SLAVERY

Since the overthrow of the dictator Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has been under the control of militias, rival warlords and two competing governments. But this did not prevent the EU from renewing its cooperation with them in 2016. After all, this was already a tradition.

According to a report by Amnesty International, cooperation to prevent migration has been in place between Italy and Libya since the 1990s, and it is still continuing to this day in the form of joint patrols in the Mediterranean, for example. Currently, these patrols are

controlled by one of the warlords.

Although the European Union has “only” been involved since 2005, it has so far invested hundreds of millions of euros Libya’s in border protection. In addition, there are training courses and support for the police and military there.

All this is done in the name of the fight against people trafficking. But if you look at the situation, you notice that it is more likely to finance traffickers, the slave trade, torture and death than to end these evils.

People who come to Libya from other African nations are, per se, illegal. The current figure is 700,000 to 1,000,000. Usually human traffickers lure them with the promise of a job offer. They often come from Nigeria, Niger, Bangladesh or Mali. Many die on the way or are sold on to other traffickers or militias. Once caught in the clutches of such people, they are completely at their mercy.

Then they have to work off the costs for their escape. Men are sold as workers for around \$400, women as sex slaves or prostitutes. Escapees caught by the Mediterranean patrol boats end up in internment camps. The violence experienced there can hardly be put into words. In terribly cramped spaces, on one meal a day, they are subjected to arbitrary violence by the prison guards.

In 2017 Oxfam published a survey in which 80% of respondents reported that they had suffered violence and abuse. All female respondents claimed to have become victims of sexual violence. Many said that it does not matter whether they are pregnant or not.

According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (2016):

- 65.6 million people are displaced, the highest number on record. On average, someone somewhere is forced to flee every

three seconds.

- One in 113 people worldwide are affected by flight and displacement.
- 50% of the world’s refugees are children.
- 75,000 unaccompanied refugee children applied for asylum in 2016.
- 82% of refugees live in developing countries.

There are millions of people worldwide fleeing war and poverty. Many of them are women and young girls who face sexual violence. For those who make it to Europe, the terror does not stop.

Depending on where you land, you have to deal with mass round-ups and camps, lack of privacy, etc. In addition, there is the increasing violence of right wing thugs and racist laws. In order to fight against this, we need an anti-racist movement on a pan-European level.

This should be directed against Fortress Europe itself and opposed to racist anti-asylum seeker laws, deportation and migration agreements as well fighting for safe escape routes, open borders and citizens’ rights for all who come. In addition, it must stand up for women’s rights: the extension and free use of women’s shelters; helping women and children apply for asylum independently of men; and the provision of medical facilities.

To end the horrors in Libya, it is not enough to hope that this “failed state” will develop into an orderly society with a central government. Rather, this disguises the problem. After all, a new bourgeois central government would continue to implement policies in the interests of the EU – or be forced to. The inhumane treatment of refugees would therefore continue.

To tackle the root cause of the problem, we must oppose imperialism as a world system, for it is responsible for the poverty, war, environmental degradation and oppression that are major drivers of forced migration. ★

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