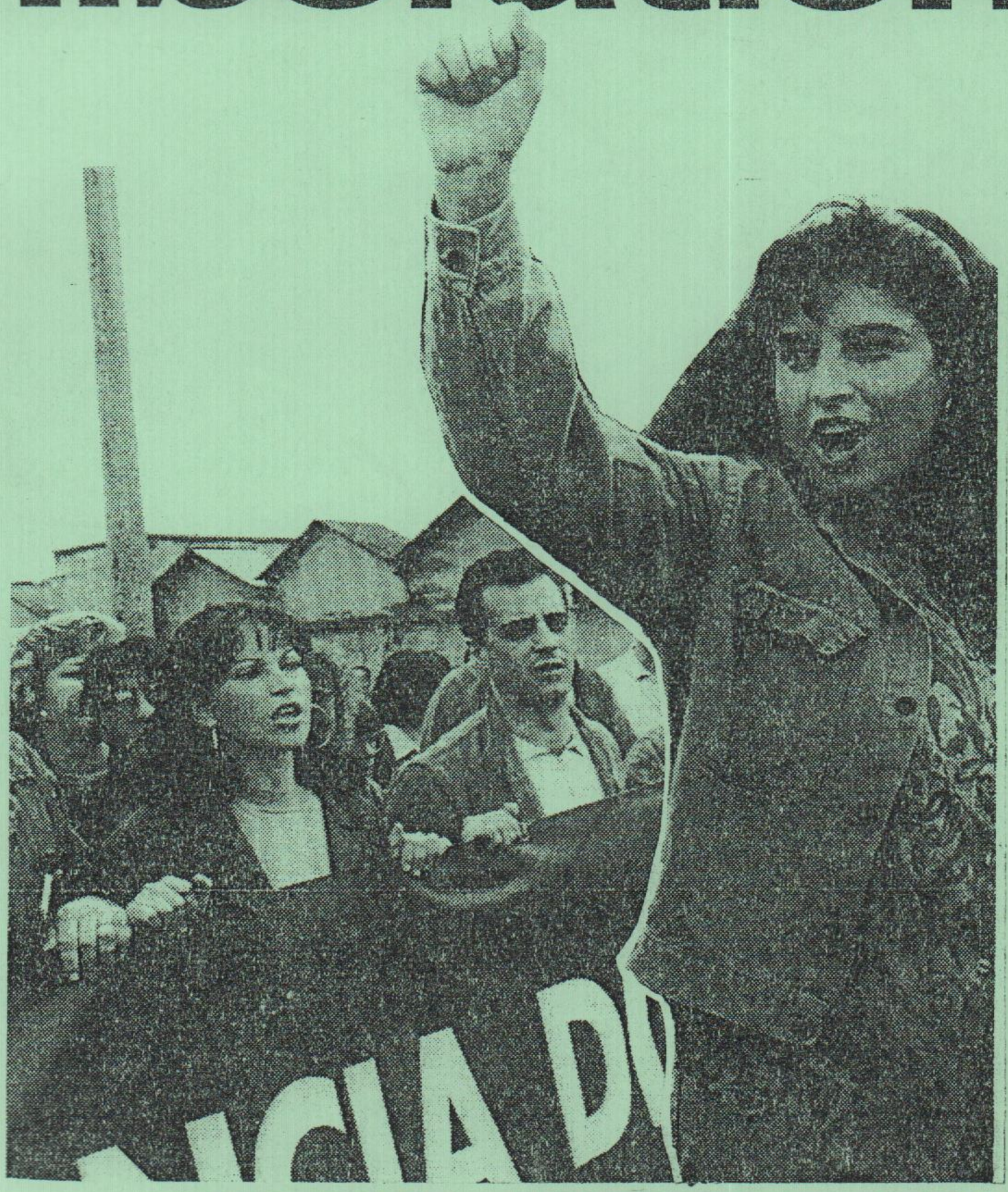
Marxism and women's liberation



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Introduction

WOMEN ARE ALMOST HALF of the world's population, carry out two thirds of the world's work, earn 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the world's property. The struggle for women's liberation is more urgent than ever.

Capitalism, the system that proclaims individual freedom and opportunity, has delivered worse conditions for millions of women around the world. Women who have left the difficult struggle for subsistence on the land for the impossible struggle for work and shelter in the overcrowded shanty towns. In the former "socialist" states of eastern Europe and the USSR the market promised prosperity an end to queuing, but has delivered mass unemployment, inflation, cuts in child-care and restrictions on abortion rights.

This pamphlet was originally adopted as a set of theses in 1989 by the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International, the forerunner of the LRCI. In it we trace the development of women's oppression over the ages, analyse the different forms it takes—economic, social, sexual—and outline a strategy for fighting back.

We provide the basis for understanding and fighting women's oppression wherever, whenever and however it shows itself. The analysis ranges from the "historic defeat" of women which coincided with the foundation of class society to the struggles of working class women on the eve of the 21st century, and provides an answer to the most omnipresent and ancient form of social oppression in the world.

The positions outlined start from the classical Marxist and socialist positions on women that link the woman question to the broader social issues in capitalism, and see liberation of women as inseparable from liberation of the working class.

Major changes have taken place in the world since the pamphlet was first published in 1989. The collapse of Stalinism, the eruption of nationalist war in Europe, the imposition of reactionary "settlements" in South Africa, Angola, the Middle East, Cambodia and elsewhere. The analysis and positions outlined here remain valid, indeed confirmed by subsequent events. But there are also new developments that will profoundly shape the lives of women.

The major change has been the collapse of Stalinism and the triumph of the restorationists in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. Women suffered enormous daily hardship under the old regimes as explain in chapter

four, and many women participated in the initial revolutionary upsurges that led to Stalinism's fall.

But the victory of the "democrats" has not alleviated any of this. Indeed it has revealed gains for women that are now being ripped apart as the market and its bourgeois leaders attack us. Abortion rights, nursery and health care provision and the right to work are all being attacked. We have written about these changes elsewhere, outlining an update programme for resisting the restoration and fighting for women's liberation (see Trotskyist International No 6).

There has also been a continued increase in the number of women who work outside the home, including a dramatic rise in married women's employment in the imperialist countries. In Britain between 1971 and 1990, the proportion of married women who worked outside the home rose from 50% to 71%. This change contradicts some predictions that women would be thrown out of work first in times of reccession. In fact women's jobs, mainly part time and insecure, have been retained or even increased as mens employment has declined.

In the semi-colonies of Latin America, Asia and Africa more and more women are being brought into work, often in appalling conditions with pitiful wages. From Mexico to the Philippines young women are being picked by the managers of large multinational companies to carry out repetitive, intricate and dangerous work in assembly plants. Women are chosen on the assumption that they are more docile and less likely to organise to resist the bosses. But in creating a concentrated female workforce the bosses are playing a dangerous game—women have staged strikes and protests and organised into unions, and will continue to resist the offensive.

Frederick Engels, Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai insisted that for the struggle for women's liberation was part of the struggle for socialism. They said that the pre-condition was that women be brought out of the home and into paid work to achieve economic independence and become an integrated part of the working class. So does the massive increase in women's employment in recent decades signify an end to women's oppression? Have women been liberated? Some women have certainly been able to take advantage of new opportunities—more women have become doctors, lawyers, and some have enetered business and politics. But they are the privileged few.

For millions of ordinary women the last two decades have just meant more work for little extra reward! Bringing an extra wage packet into the home has not made these families better off—women's wage rates are about two thirds of men's and millions work part time in order to balance job and family. Of course women have also lost many jobs, particularly in service industries which have been savaged by neo-liberalism. This creates additional burdens for women as public servies in health, social services and child-care collapse and women have to pick up the pieces.

But the early socialists were not wrong: work is an essential part of overcoming women's isolation and oppression. On its own, however, it is not enough. The responsibility of women for domestic work and the family has not gone away and underpins the continued oppression of women in all spheres—from low wages and poor conditions to domestic violence and rape.

The trade unions and official labour movement, in the imperialist countries and the semi-colonies, have a terrible record failing to take up the interests of women workers, but women are coming to the fore in many disputes. The call for a working class women's movement included in the pamphlet is essential to ensure that women are organised as a central and militant section of the working class, and will indeed be in the vanguard of many struggles.

What is missing is a revolutionary leadership to link the day to day struggles of these women workers with the broader questions of their oppression, of land hunger and of imperialist exploitation. This pamphlet outlines a strategy for building such a leadership and rooting it in the struggles and organisations of working women and poor peasants across the world.

No women's liberation without socialism—no socialism without women's liberation! ■

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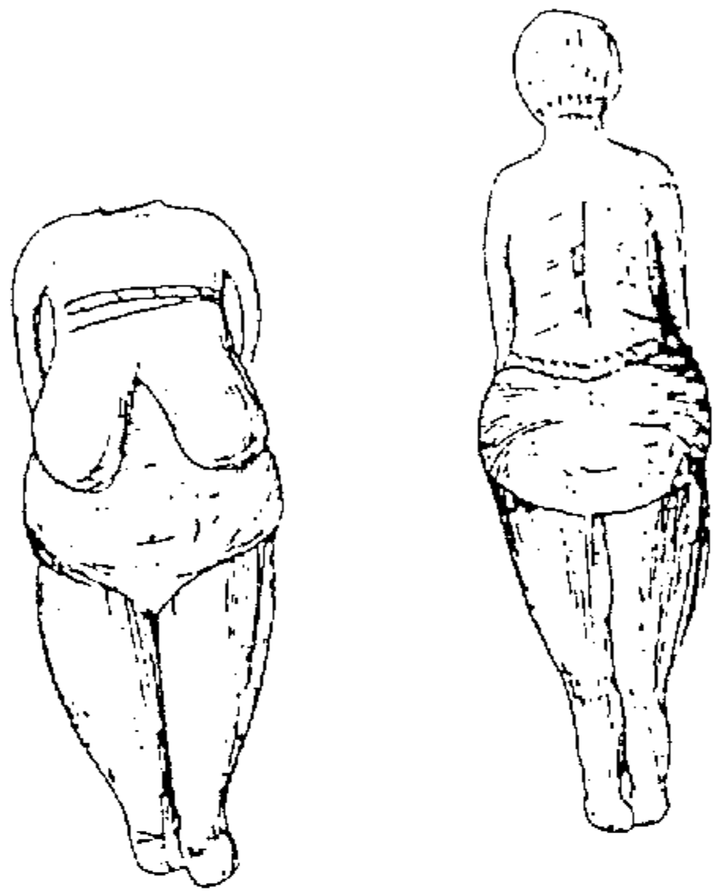
Before systematic oppression

Women in prehistory



THE SYSTEMATIC SOCIAL OPPRESSION of women is inextricably linked to the existence of class society. It was as a direct result of the development of private property and the cleavage of society into different classes that women came to be denied full social, economic and political equality with men. There is nothing "natural" or "eternal" about the subordination of women.

Human societies have existed during the stage of development that Engels terms "primitive communism", when women's contribution to, and role within, these societies were regarded as equal to (in some cases superior to) those of men. The proven existence of such societies by anthropologists and archaeologists confounds those who defend the subordination of women on the grounds that it "has always been so" and must, therefore, always be so.

It also exposes the errors of those feminists who regard the existence of women's oppression in different class societies as proof that this oppression is not based on the division of societies into classes.

Class society and its corresponding forms of property resulted from the disbanding of the gentile society. Kinship groups held possessions collectively or on a communal basis and it was households rather than families which formed the fundamental units of social organisation.

The kinship groups were often structured in a matrilineal way, but some were patrilineal. The basis of production for the communities was primarily agriculture and in part cattle breeding and herding. The oldest forms of human societies, however, were represented by foraging hordes who did not yet use the soil as a means of labour but only as an object of labour.

The land was not property even in a communal sense. These early human groups were initially based on hunting and gathering. Later horticulture and the domestication of animals became the basis for subsistence.

Within such societies there were various divisions of labour on the basis of sex and age. These were neither rigid nor formalised through ritual or custom. Such divisions were not identical in every group, but several common features emerged with regard to the roles adopted by males and females within this period of human society.

In general females were more likely to be involved in gathering than hunting. This stemmed from their role as

the reproducers of the species. Pregnancy and the subsequent suckling of infants (which was often very prolonged) explain why women tended towards gathering as the main element of their work. Although arduous, gathering was more compatible with carrying infants who were suckling. Males were involved in hunting and activities which involved wider mobility from the home base.

The division of labour between the sexes

Exceptions exist (and there are many cases of younger women, prior to their involvement in reproduction, being involved in the hunt) but the same general features are found in most hunter-gatherer societies which have been studied. However, this emerging division of labour was not either then, or inherently, oppressive.

Women's contribution through gathering was no less valued than that of men engaged in hunting. A rough equality between the sexes existed. In some situations in small clans where the reproduction of the clan was endangered by a shortage of women, women, because of their ability to bear children, were the intended victims of raiding parties, whilst male prisoners of war were mostly killed immediately.

In order to protect themselves against such seizure,

Engels' analysis in the light of modern anthropology

ENGELS' ANALYSIS of the origins of women's oppression was correct in its fundamentals. New anthropological evidence has called into question certain details of his analysis which we are therefore obliged to modify or supplement. These are as follows:

1) Engels' acceptance of mother-right as a universal stage of society and his implication that this stage involved a period of female domination in society is not borne out by modern archaeological and anthropological evidence.

While there is extensive evidence of matrilineal kinship groups there is little evidence to suggest that they were socially dominated by women. Rough equality existed.

Moreover this equality prevailed in the patrilineal kinship groups that also existed in the earliest phase of human society. However, insofar as the obliteration of matrilineality is always a feature of the development of class societies,

Engels was right to refer to a historic defeat for women. The point is that this defeat occurred as a result of a process rather than as a conscious and cataclysmic act against women, by men.

2) Engels' emphasis on cattle production as the primary area for the accumulation of a surplus should not blind us to the importance of the struggle over control of the land as a component of the process whereby women became oppressed as a sex.

The development of horticulture into agriculture made the land a vital source of surplus produce. While in many hoe-farming societies, women more or less maintained their equality, the later-developed nomadic herding societies represented the opposite extreme.

In such societies, cattle-herding, controlled by men, contributed more to the social product than did the labour of women.

In this context, essential features of patriarchy and the oppression of women were established, and in the course of wars and invasions, were imposed on defeated hoe-farming cultures. Male domination of warfare ensured that men were the chief beneficiaries of the struggles that took place over land.

3) Engels identified slave society as the first fully fledged class society in which the subordination of women was legally enshrined.

In fact the urban civilisations of Mesopotamia were class societies—dominated by large landowners and a priestly caste who extracted tribute from the mass of servile farmers—in which the patriarchal family was established and recognised in the laws of the state.

Their difference with the slave societies of the classical world was that they exhibited more and clearer traces of the communal kinship groups from which they had sprung (e.g. the idea that property belonged to the gods, rather than individuals and the priests were merely its administrators, the ability of women to escape aspects of their legal oppression through buying themselves into temple service etc).

4) We must add to Engels' analysis an explanation of why it was women who were subordinated as a sex. This stems from the transformation of the original hunter-gathering division of labour from a predominantly co-operative one into a systematically oppressive one. The conflict between the developing family unit and the kinship group was the reason for this transformation.

5) One main idea of Engels' understanding of the origin of women's oppression was based on Darwin's principle of natural selection.

Engels saw this principle as being realised in a universally generalised incest-taboo.

Consequently, Engels understood the development of mankind as one of progressive stages: starting with the promiscuous ancient horde, via the Punalua-family and gentes to the coupling marriage, which was welcomed by the dominant patriarchs as fertile ground on which to establish the monogamous marriage by force.

However progressive it was for Engels to place the monogamous marriage as a later stage of human history, his given sequence of family forms was far from universal.

On this point Engels did not fully transcend the biological determinism because he could not link the development of reproduction and production according to the level of development of the social formation.

The development of family forms has to be studied with the historical-materialist method in the same way as the sphere of immediate production is, but not in a Darwinian way; incest-taboo and marriage rules have to be understood socially, i.e. as arising from the level of the forces and relations of production.

With these modifications and additions the origins of women's oppression can still be explained by the method of dialectical materialism utilised by Engels, and the woman question can be understood as, fundamentally, a class question. ■

women were reliant upon the protection of men of their own clan because they themselves were less practised in the arts of war. These facts are held by feminist writers to prove the oppression of women in primitive communist society. This is not true. Rather, this reliance formed one element of the interdependency of males and females in primitive society.

The decisiveness of reproduction in determining the nature of the division of labour does not mean that oppression was biologically determined. Reproductive roles played their part in shaping an initially non-oppressive division of labour.

The development of the forces of production and the changing relationship of reproduction to them, not the fact of women's reproductive role in and of itself, was central to the transformation of the division of labour into an oppressive one.

As the forces of production expanded with the development of horticulture, and later agriculture, the domestication and breeding of animals, and the development of metalworking leading to the production of better tools (and weapons) for carrying out such tasks, the conditions were created for the production of a surplus, i.e. more food and means of subsistence than were required for immediate consumption by the group.

The origins of class society

The existence of a surplus stimulated a struggle within the kinship groups. A stratum of individuals (emerging out of the complex ranking systems that prevailed in kinship groups) began to assert their direct control over the surplus in contradiction to the norms of communal possession that had previously held sway. Individuals acquiring and controlling an embryonic form of private property were thrown into conflict with the kinship group as a whole.

This struggle was not yet a class struggle, but rather the birth pangs of class society. The death knell of "primitive communism" had been sounded. It was during this period that the kinship group was replaced by the individual family and monogamy was imposed on women. It was as a result of this process that women became systematically socially oppressed.

Of course all sorts of "oppression" existed even during these early stages of human development—captives, male and female, for example, were often oppressed. And it was also here that the oppression of sexuality, above all of women, had its origin.

In societies struggling to maintain their existence within the framework of a subsistence economy, particular factors, such as demographic problems, resulted in the establishment of rituals and taboos that often had brutal consequences for women because of their role in reproduction, e.g. the Australian Aborigines.

However, such examples remain exceptions explained by contingent material causes and are not proof of the generalised social oppression of women.

The oppression of women in societies on the threshold of class division was very far from being a coherent

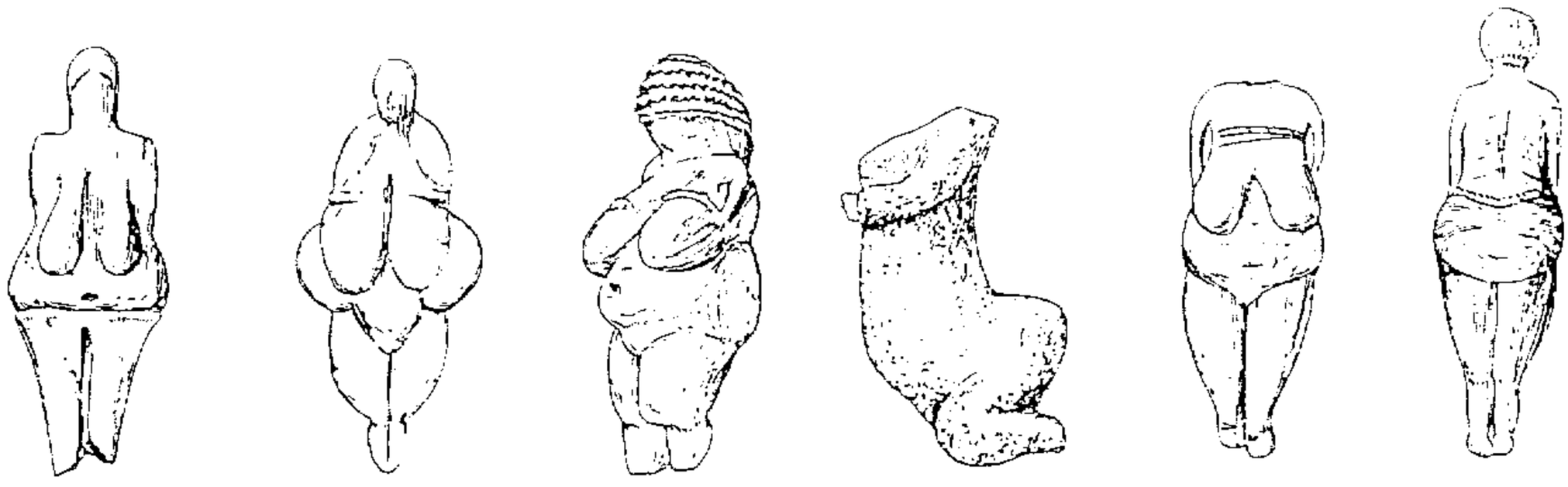
Rock painting of a woman collecting honey (Spain, 4,000—7,000 BC)

system of gender-specific oppression and discrimination. The dissolution of the original primitive communist equality of the sexes took place over the course of thousands of years and in many tribal societies it was accompanied by counter-tendencies to maintain the old order.

The systematic social oppression of women as a sex was a consequence of the struggle between communal possession and private property (or in the case of the Asiatic mode, property held by the state) and the triumph of the latter over the former. This social oppression meant that women were systematically excluded from an equitable claim on the communal social product and denied control over the product of their own labour.

This form of oppression, social oppression, can only develop where there has been prolonged production of a social surplus, where struggle for control over that surplus necessitates control of women's productive and reproductive functions. The social oppression of women was a result of the emergence of class society. As such it can only be consigned to the dustbin of history with the destruction of class society.

As the surplus was produced the process of exchange between groups, rather than the simple distribution for consumption which had occurred within the kinship groups, became more and more important. Trade developed and the value of the surplus became clear in terms of the ability to acquire produce from other groups.



Statuettes of women ("Venuses") made during primitive communism

Men, women and classes

The groups that came to control this surplus, and thereby developed into the ruling class of the new societies, were in general male due to their existing role in production. That is, the pre-existing division of labour although initially non-oppressive, was to be central in the creation of a ruling class. The legacy of men's role in hunting was decisive in three ways.

Firstly it meant men were in control of domesticated animals, a dynamic sphere of production in terms of the expansion of the surplus. Secondly, the increased importance of the land as a valuable resource led to struggles for land. Men had, by virtue of their hunting role, control over the weaponry (and related to this, tools) and had developed the skills in making and using it. Their role in warfare was not only to defeat rival kinship groups but also to destroy female control of the land.

Women still worked the land but men seized new lands and controlled the produce from it. The third advantage for men was that they tended to be the members of the group who travelled.

With the expansion of the forces of production travel involved not only war but trade. From early on men generally controlled trade (although there are exceptions such as certain tribes in West Africa).

Men enjoyed advantages in both production and exchange. Therefore a section of men who were best placed to take control of the distribution of the surplus product of the collective group became an embryonic ruling class. In the earliest class societies the transformation of the communal surplus into private property was often given a religious guise, with the owners being a priestly caste.

The idea that private property was in fact merely communal possessions controlled by representatives of the "gods" was a legacy of the kinship group traditions that had only recently been overthrown and an ideological justification for the new regime that had replaced them.

This process shaped the economic order of the private household. The division of labour between men and women became profoundly oppressive to women. The formerly social labour of women—gathering, agriculture and household management—was transformed into privatised labour in the service of the household unit, the early monogamous family.

It was women's role in production which consigned them to a subordinate position in society. Within this process the conflict between communal possessions and private property had a transforming effect on the social organisation and ensured in the systematic social oppression of women.

The accumulation of private property by a small caste required an end to the egalitarian distribution system which had existed in the kinship groups. The extensive network of claimants to the produce within the kinship group (a wide range of fairly distant relatives having equal claim) had to be ended if the surplus was to be concentrated.

The development of the family and of the state

A smaller social unit, within which direct descendants were the only legitimate heirs, was created as a result of the contradiction between communal possessions and private property. This group, the family as we now recognise it, developed through the transformation of what had been a temporary, easily dissolved, "pairing marriage" between a man and a woman of different kinship groups, into the permanent basis for the new household.

The pairing marriage became permanent, and for women this was, sexually, exclusive. This meant that all her children were necessarily those of her husband and therefore legitimate heirs to his wealth.

As this became the predominant form of social organisation so codes and laws were introduced which enforced the subordination of women and resulted in the loss of any equal rights either to possessions/property or within political and social life.

The collective household of the kinship group was transformed into the prison house of the monogamous family. Patrilineality became the norm and matrilineality was overthrown.

The clash between the kinship groups (gentile society) and the family, reflecting the clash between primitive communism and private property, created the objective need for a public power to adjudicate in the struggle.

The material basis for the state was created. Within the kinship groups no external power was required since the groups themselves operated co-operatively with all members having equal rights and responsibilities.

The external state reinforced the patriarchal nature of the family and inheritance. These developments—occurring over many thousands of years and in a profoundly combined and uneven way—created the earliest class societies (the ancient city kingdoms of Mesopotamia, Egypt etc).

These class societies were patriarchal. Women had suffered an historic defeat. ■

Class society and the oppression of women

THE EMERGENCE OF class society brought with it the monogamous (for the woman) family. The nature of marriage in primitive societies varied. Pairing marriages and group marriages were common. In the former case it was generally relatively easy to dissolve the marriage at the request of one partner. While the degree of sexual freedom in these marital arrangements varied enormously in primitive society, monogamy could not be said to be the prevailing norm. Its appearance as a prevailing norm in the earliest class societies marked a new historic period for both the family and for women.

It also added a new dimension to the sexual division of labour which intensified women's oppression and became a common feature of that oppression in every subsequent class society. That dimension was the privatisation, within the individual family unit, of domestic labour. As the anthropologist, Eleanor Leacock put it:

"The subordination of the female sex was based in the transformation of their socially necessary labour into a private service through the separation of the family from the clan. It was in this context that women's domestic and other work came to be performed under conditions of virtual slavery."

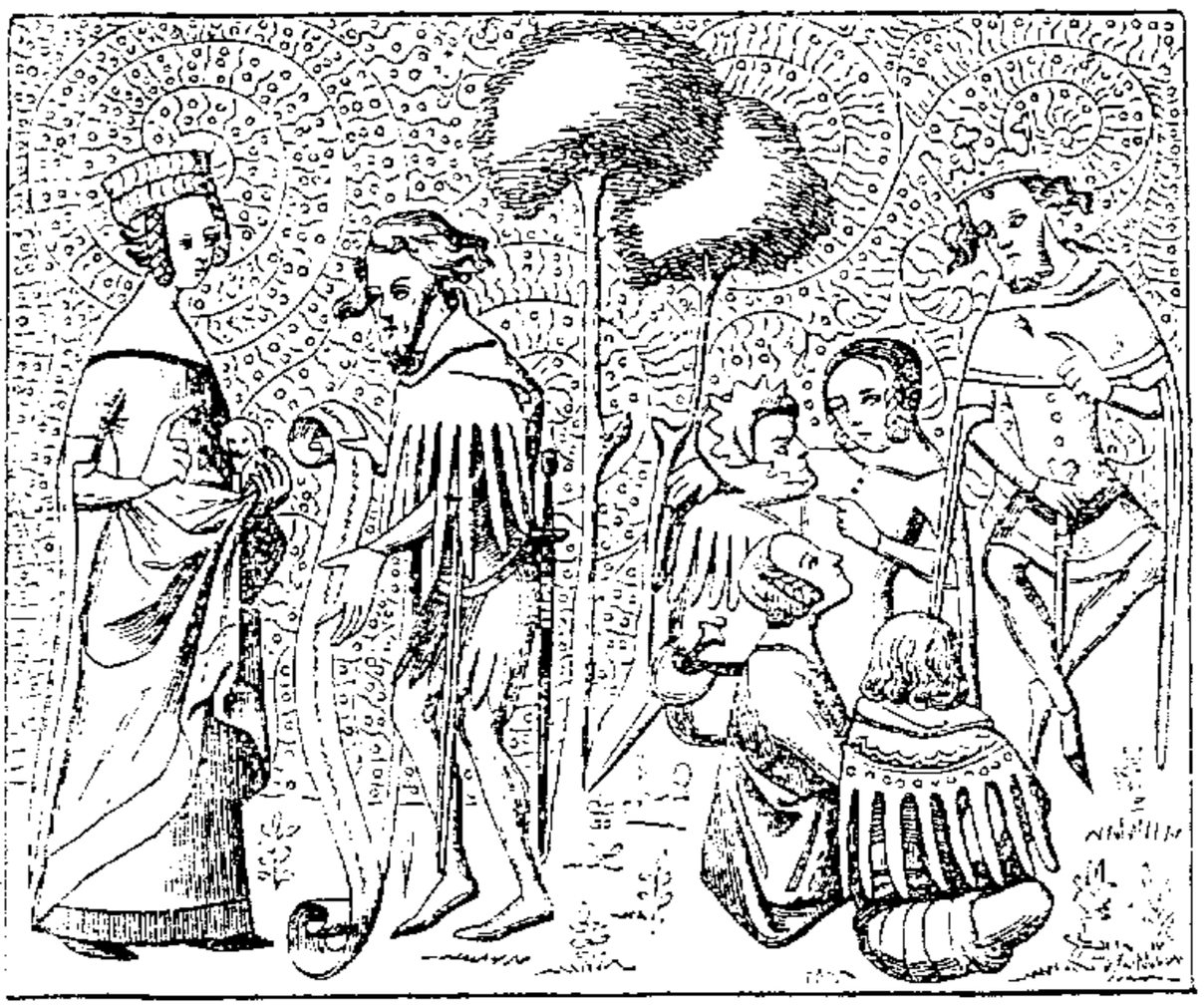
Despite the massive expansion in the productive forces since the time of the ancient cultures, women are still domestic slaves.

In slave society the family was not simply (or even primarily) parents and their children. In fifth century Athens the family of the newly emerging ruling class (the large slaveholders and land owners of Attica) was organised around the household, the *oikos*.

Within this framework women managed the household and engaged in weaving (for consumption and trade) while men conducted public affairs, trade, matters of state etc. Women were legally restricted from engaging in substantial trading themselves.

While they could, formally, own property, they could not control it. Control was recognised as belonging to their husbands or, in the case of daughters who had, because of a lack of sons, inherited the family wealth, male guardians (*kyrios*). The woman's father or guardian arranged marriages in order to attract wealth into the family.

Needless to say, slave women were oppressed at the hands of this fiercely patriarchal society by being used for the economic benefit and sexual pleasure of



"Courtly love" in Provence (XIV century)

ruling class men. They were denied all rights to having any family of their own, since the children of slaves were simply the possessions of the master.

This economic subordination was matched by a ruthless regime in social matters. Women in Athens (Sparta was less rigid in its attitudes, though the warrior culture was oppressive to women in a number of other ways) were segregated into their own areas within the household and regarded by their husbands as breeding machines.

Individual sex-love played no role in the matter. A cynical fourth century Greek orator summed up the attitude of the most highly developed slave society (Athens) before the Roman Empire:

"We resort to courtesans for our pleasure, keep concubines to look after our daily needs, and marry wives to give us legitimate children and be the faithful guardians of our hearth."

In ancient Rome women (of the ruling strata) did enjoy more personal freedom than their Athenian forebears. However, relative personal freedom in some matters did not mean that social oppression ceased to exist. In all essentials the Roman family, the *familia*, was, like the *oikos*, a household, within which women were responsible for all domestic concerns while having no independent control over the produce of the household.

The collapse of the Roman Empire and the slow and painful transition to feudalism altered the family structure considerably. The triumph of the barbarians meant:

a) the end of slavery as the dominant mode of production

b) the fusion of the barbarian family, still by and large harmonious with the clan, with the individual family unit of the conquered empire.

New mode of production, new family

Over a period of several centuries this process gave rise to a new mode of production and a new type of family. Feudalism, a mode of production that emerged out of the period of transition transformed the clan property of the Germanic tribes into the property of feudal lords and princes.

The serf household, working a plot of land on a feudal estate, worked co-operatively as a unit of production, constantly striving to improve the margin of produce they were able to enjoy after fulfilling their obligations to the feudal lord.

Of course life was miserable for the serfs and feudal lords sought to deny them anything other than the barest means of subsistence, but by eliminating slavery as the dominant mode of production and by transforming the serf family into a productive household, feudalism, a dynamic agrarian economy as compared with the late Roman Empire and with the primitive farming methods of the Germanic clans, played an important role in taking society forward after the collapse of the ancient world.

In this situation the form of women's oppression changed. For ruling class women household management became management of servants and was less decisive to the economy than the *oikos* or *familia*. In addition daughters of the ruling class were valuable assets in the construction of alliances, estate enlargement etc, through arranged marriages.

For the serfs, on the other hand, the family was the basic unit of production. The husband, wife and the children worked the land co-operatively to produce the means of subsistence for themselves and a surplus for their lord.

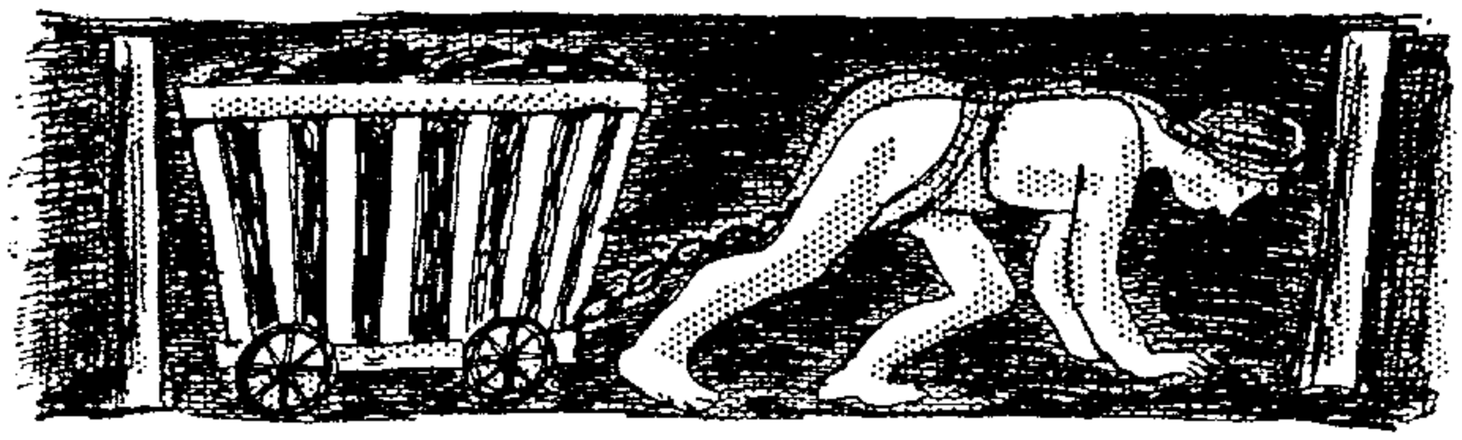
However, the pre-existing displacement of women from equal control of either the surplus or the means of subsistence could not be reversed by the serfs. The ideology of the feudal lords, refined and expressed by the church, consigned all women to an inferior status.

In medieval Europe sexual oppression applied differentially to women of different classes. Amongst the ruling class "courtly love" between a woman and a (noble/knightly) man other than her husband, was widely tolerated. For the great mass of serf women, on the other hand, the strictures of christian morality meant that sexual activity other than within marriage, was stigmatised. In particular adultery was punishable by torture or even death.

The implementation of rules by the church, such as the obligation to attend confession at least annually (a measure introduced in the middle ages), ensured that local priests could interfere directly in the private lives of the serfs. Of course, reality was more complex than christian morality and "deviant" sexual activity, including that of the priests with various married women of the village, often went unpunished.

On the economic plain serf women were still regarded as the property of the lord (a clear carry over from slavery) and in many places in feudal Europe male serfs were obliged to present their would-be wives to the lord so that he could excercise his "right of the first night".

The maintenance of privatised domestic slavery alongside co-operative social production in one and the same serf family was a decisive material factor in the perpetuation of oppression for the great mass of women during the feudal mode of production.



Young girl working in an English mine (1842)

The serf household could only survive as long as feudalism itself did. Taking Britain as an example (since it was the first modern industrial nation) the dissolution of feudalism led to the eventual destruction of the country's peasantry.

Landowners drove the small tenant farmers from the land and laid the basis for the creation of a class of free labourers, proletarians.

Dislocated from the land they worked co-operatively. Peasant families ceased to be households engaged in social production (although cottage industries did retain aspects of the household during the earliest phases of manufacture).

In the cities and towns during the industrial revolution the peasant family was undermined as all members of it were drawn into the factories or mines as individual proletarians working for an employer rather than for the maintenance of the household. Although the transition from feudalism to capitalism has not always followed this British model in every country, its essential features and their impact on the nature of the family have been generally the same.

For example, in the German lands and central Europe, a greater part of the serfs, who worked as servants on the manor, often had no families. The feudal lord had the right to allow marriage, deny it or require it.

Capitalism first dissolved these fetters of personal dependence. This led to loose forms of cohabitation which engendered a massive population explosion. Only later did the capitalist state grant most people the legal right of sexual activity but then only in the form of enforcing bourgeois monogamous marriage.

The pattern of development and transition described here is a predominantly European one. Clearly the forms and extent of women's subordination outside of Europe were shaped by the differing sets of social relations that existed (for example in the Asiatic mode of production).

Nevertheless, the oppression of women, located in their position within the family, is common to all class societies

The development of capitalism

Industrial capitalism revolutionised the nature of human production and with it the specific form of women's oppression. The household ceased to be the basic unit of production and was replaced by the capitalist factory and farm.

The working class family no longer produced the means of subsistence for themselves, they no longer owned any means of production. Capitalism thus created the proletariat, a class owning nothing but its capacity to labour. The sale of labour power became the only way for proletarians to survive. The introduction of machinery in industrial production allowed for all members of the working class—regardless of sex or age—to be used in the processes of production.

In the early period of industrial capitalism, first developed most clearly in Britain, the new productive relations broke up the old form of the family and household by drawing all members in to the factories, mines and mills.

The capacity of the workers to survive and reproduce was damaged by this development, since the time for the household labour necessary to reproduce labour power had been taken into capitalist production. This led to working class struggles over the length of the working day and the setting of limits on the labour done by children and women.

Although the household as the basic unit of social production had been destroyed by capitalism the family had not. It remained the means by which the new class of proletarians reproduced themselves and their labour power.

Capitalism was undermining the proletariat's capacity to do this. It was, by forcing every member of every proletarian family to work under appalling conditions for long hours, undermining the family itself. In the face of a determined struggle by the proletariat sections of the capitalist class recognised the need to act.

Objectively the maintenance of the proletarian family as a means of reproducing labour power and the proletariat itself was in the interests of the bosses. However, the profit motive blinds capitalists to their own long term objective interests.

Only when the action of the working class forces splits within their own ranks are sections of the ruling class compelled to override the objections of "reactionary" bosses and grant reforms that are designed to preserve the rule of capital itself. Thus in nineteenth century Britain, the prototype of modern industrial capitalism, the liberal bourgeoisie succumbed to the pressure of the proletariat and granted a reform that they themselves had come to recognise the need for.

Women and salaried labour

There was nothing automatic about capitalism's sudden outburst of "enlightenment" when it conceded legislation restricting the working day. It was split and granted a

reform to avoid something worse—the revolutionary action of the working class. Hence Marx rightly recognised these legislative reforms as a decisive victory for the political economy of the working class.

The introduction of legislation which limited the length of the working day for all workers, and specifically restricted the labour of women and children, allowed the working class the time needed for the reproduction of labour power. This was one factor reducing women's participation in production and taking responsibility for domestic labour.

The result was that the family unit, which had been shattered by the brutality of early industrialisation, was reformed, with the altered and limited function of ensuring the reproduction of labour power. This did not result in the total exclusion of women from socialised, capitalist production, but did result in this having a secondary role, co-incidentally providing a flexible reserve army of labour.

In the period of the mid to late nineteenth century in Britain the implementation of the protective legislation and the re-creation of the family was used by sections of the labour aristocracy in the craft unions to exclude women from production in a way that went beyond that which was necessary to preserve the reproduction of the class.

In this way the factory legislation, though both progressive and necessary for the working class, was implemented at the expense of women playing a fuller role in the employed workforce. The family became the only means of physical and social survival for the working class within the brutal capitalist system and was therefore defended by the class.

However, this haven was also a prison for women. It had become institutionalised as the means of reproducing labour power. This meant that the already existing division between domestic labour and social production was accentuated, and women's oppression was, thereby, reinforced.

The proletarian family unit was in this period, therefore, profoundly contradictory (and remains so to this day). On the one hand, it was the only place that workers—men and women—could retreat into for physical regeneration, relaxation and emotional sustenance. On the other hand its inherently oppressive structure very often negated its ability to truly satisfy these needs. It was therefore only a limited protection against capitalist devastation.

The role of the labour aristocracy

In countries such as Britain the prosperity of the labour aristocracy enabled them to have full-time housewives at home, replicating the "ideal" of the bourgeois family. Through the labour aristocracy this ideal was transmitted into the whole working class. Defence of this ideal became inscribed on the banner of political reformism.

Defence of the family as a means of survival was thus transformed by the reformist leaders based on the abour aristocracy into a defence of the reactionary bourgeois ideal of the family.

This partly explains why, contrary to Marx and Engels' expectations, the family of the proletariat did not disappear. Another reason, however, was that capitalism itself could not conceive of any other social structure capable of fulfilling its needs in relation to labour power and the labour force.

With the development of capitalism on a world scale, and in particular with the development of imperialism, the destruction of the family inherited from pre-capitalist periods has been repeated. In the course of its development capitalism has continually contradicted its "ideal" of the family.

In circumstances such as the African slave trade to the Americas the destruction of the family and of the ideology of family life took place. In the imperialised countries where in times of rapid industrialisation men, women and children are drawn into wage labour with little protection and scant regard for their ability to maintain any home or family life.

Similarly in times of economic crisis in industrialised societies, unemployment, poverty and the physical division of families caused by migration, undermines the bourgeois family "norm". However, the bourgeois state recognises the general social interest of the bourgeoisie in the maintenance of the family, and 'modernising' states promote the ideal of the family whilst often actually undermining its capacity to function as a unit for reproducing labour power.

In imperialist South Africa families are physically divided in order to facilitate the exploitation of black workers. With virtually no welfare provision to protect the working class family it is being torn apart in the shanty towns and ghettos that surround the urban industrial centres in the semi-colonies.

From the bands of homeless, foraging youth in São Paulo and Mexico City through to the ruthlessly exploited children who labour as semi-slaves in the sweatshops of Thailand, proof of capitalism's preparedness to sacrifice the working class family for the sake of profit abounds.

Only the struggle of the working class can stop this brutal process. Marx recognised the victory of the European workers in securing a legal limit to the working day, a measure of protection that facilitated the re-creation of the family, as a victory for the political economy of the working class over the capitalists.

Such a victory is necessary in the semi-colonies, but its achievement there will be inextricably linked with the destruction of imperialist domination through the achievement of working class power. This in turn can ensure that the working class does not seek recourse from misery in the bourgeois family, within which the woman is enslaved.

The bourgeois revolution and its consequences

The family of the bourgeoisie emerged in capitalism with a different role to that of the proletarian family. Its primary functions are the reproduction of the next generation of the ruling class and the transmission of wealth in a patrilineal fashion.

These functions required the continued control over women's sexuality and monogamy remained essential for the wife if the paternity of the husband was to be guaranteed. The bourgeois marriage was often used to secure the aggregation of capital by the most wealthy families. Bourgeois marriage was different from marriage in preceding epochs. Up to the triumph of capitalism marriage had always been arranged by people other than the partners involved. Even to this day arranged marriages are prevalent in a number of semi-colonial countries, a mark of the backwardness such countries remain trapped in during this, the epoch of imperialism.

For the emerging bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century arranged marriages were supplanted by the marriage contract, a contract signed by two free individuals who have made up their own minds as to who should be their partner. To justify this new arrangement in their struggle against the feudal aristocracy the bourgeoisie seized upon and romanticised the notion of individual sex-love as the motive for marriage.

However this notion was a hypocritical disguise for the real motives of the rising bourgeoisie. It provided them with moral cover against the "dissolute" aristocracy and, at the same time, enabled them to place their own particularly vicious stamp on the monogamous marriage.

The "contract" entered into freely by both parties, enshrined the dominance of the man within the family and ensured that individual sex-love was the means for guaranteeing a wife's fidelity within marriage. The contract still left the man free to practice individual sex-love with other women, particularly, as capitalism developed, with prostitutes. However, the early development of capitalism also included the bourgeois democratic revolutions which broke the economic and political fetters which hampered capitalist production.

These revolutions proclaimed the "rights of man" yet signally failed to grant, in practice, the "equality of woman", even though bourgeois revolutionaries were occasionally prepared to inscribe it on their banners for the purposes of enlisting the support of the whole people.

The continuing legal restrictions on women denied them many things, such as their right to hold and control property, their right to vote, hold public office, divorce, gain admission to education and the professions and to have access to available methods of controlling their own fertility. This was in clear contradiction to the proclaimed ideals of bourgeois democracy.

The struggle for these rights was the basis for the bourgeois women's movement of the late nineteenth century. Despite exceptions the general resistance from the ruling class to grant these limited rights even to women of their own class reflects their need to defend the family form which produced heirs to inherit their property, and their reluctance to extend democratic rights which might be taken up by the subordinate classes and then used in their struggle against the bourgeoisie.

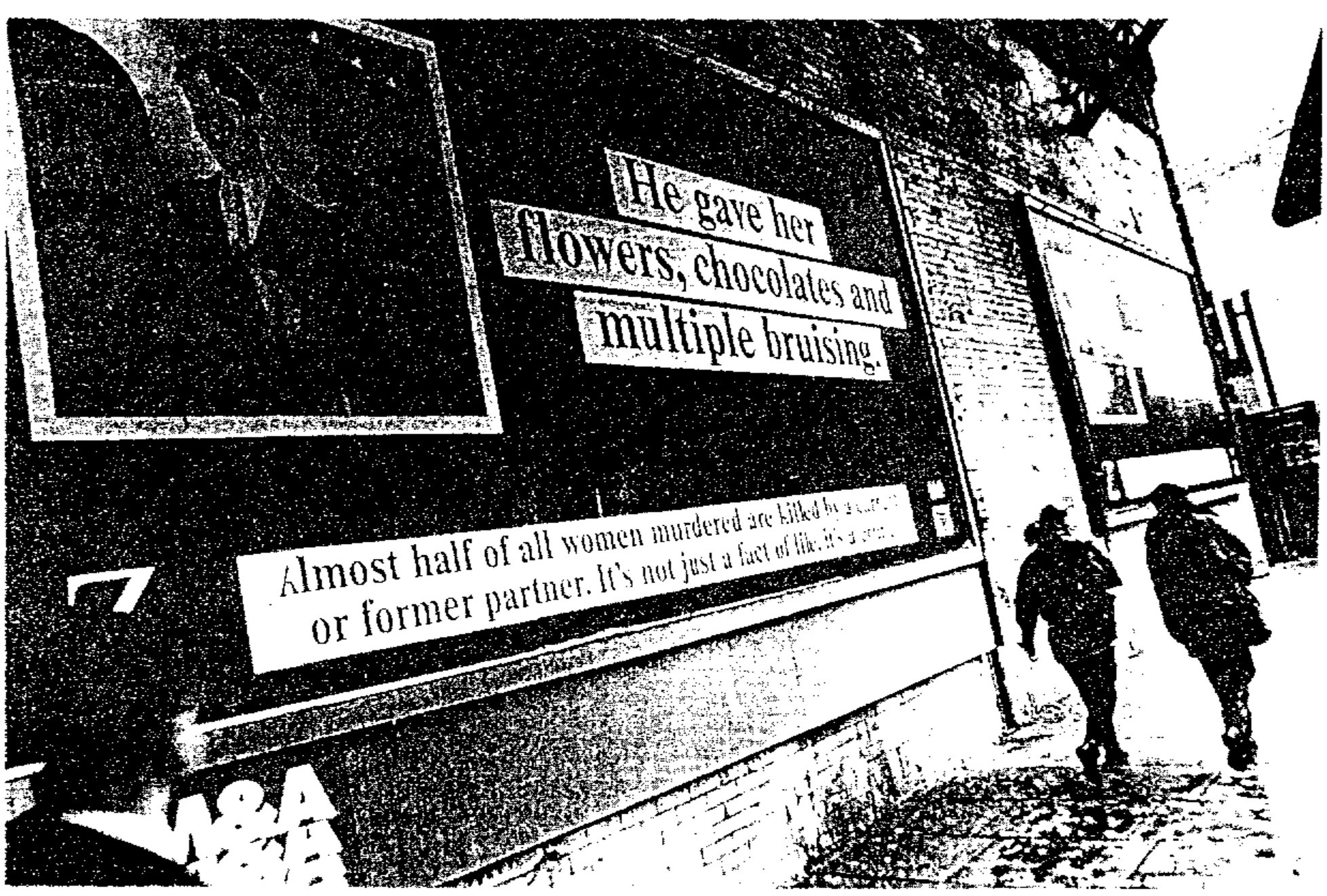
In most imperialist countries, during the twentieth century, women were granted many, if not all, of these formal, legal, democratic rights. However, these formal rights remain limited and open to frequent attack as capitalist crises require the bourgeoisie to reinforce the ideology of the family and women's unequal position.

Whilst this is primarily required to ensure that the working class family takes on increasing responsibility for care of its members, bourgeois women may be required to act as a model for the "natural" family role.

The rights gained by bourgeois women fall short of true equality, even for themselves, since they fail to attack the heart of their own, and working class women's oppression which remains the existence of the family. ■

Women's systematic oppression under capitalism

Family and sexuality



UNDER THE CAPITALIST MODE of production all women suffer from oppression. This is a result of their unequal relationship to production. For the vast majority of women, i.e. those who are part of the working class, their oppression is a result of their responsibilities within the family.

The material root of their oppression is the continued existence of domestic slavery. The allocation to women of the task of caring for children and performing the bulk of household work leads to women being unable to play a full and equal role within socialised production. Women are either excluded from social life, locked away in the domestic household, or where they are involved in social labour, they are often directed into areas of work closely allied to the domestic economy and its skills.

Thus in the major imperialist countries, despite the presence of large numbers of women in industry "women's work" is predominantly in the fields of retail distribution, clothing, catering, social and health services, cleaning etc.

Where women work alongside men in factories and offices they tend to be restricted to the unskilled, semi-skilled and lowest paid sectors. The education and training of girls and women is designed to reinforce this "specialisation". Above all, the family is presented as the centre, the first responsibility of women, to which waged work is subordinated.

The jobs which women perform have remained highly segregated, despite their increasing numbers. Women rarely work in jobs alongside men of the same grade. Pay and conditions reflect this segregation, so that equal pay legislation has failed to substantially improve women's average wages in most countries, and in some the average full-time wage of women has gone down relative to male wages over the past decades. In the public sector there are also large numbers of non-manual white collar female workers who are concentrated in the lowest clerical grades.

In some countries most of the increase in women's employment has been through part time working, which can fit in with domestic responsibilities, but also confines women to very low pay and poor conditions such as job security. In other countries, the expansion of part time work is less significant (e.g. France), and there are much higher levels of state child care which enable women with young children to work.

The picture in the semi-colonies is somewhat different. Imperialism is based on the super-exploitation of such countries and, in co-operation with rapacious indigenous capitalists, it is quite prepared to employ vast numbers of women, working long hours for very little pay, in manufacturing industry.

This "subversion" of its own ideological views on the role of women is necessary for imperialist capital's super profits and is compensated for by its political and economic domination of the semi-colonial countries.

The function of the proletarian family

The family of the working class is the dominant arena within which the commodity labour power is reproduced, both through the daily restoration of the labour power of each worker, the reproduction of the commodity labour power, and also through the raising of future generations of workers.

The labour necessary to produce this labour power is centred on the home, outside of socialised production. This domestic labour is overwhelmingly done by women, for which they receive no direct payment.

Rather, the working class as a whole receives a wage which provides for the reproduction of labour power. Where a woman is not employed in wage labour herself, it is assumed that her husband's wage will be used to provide for the whole family.

This leads to an extreme economic dependence of non-waged women on their husbands. The division of labour between the domestic labour of the household and the rest of socialised labour for capital which occurs in the factories etc, is the root of women's unequal position.

The nature of the work done in the home is generally repetitive, labour intensive and done by women in isolation from others in a similar position. This leads to their being separated off from the social nature of work under capitalism, a socialisation which is essential to the development of the working class as a collective, conscious class capable of carrying out social change. This remains true for women, children and some men engaged in productive labour in the home. Such labour is normally exacting, done in addition to domestic labour and involves the super-exploitation of the home workers involved. Capitalism has proved incapable of systematically socialising the labour done in the home. Although many elements of work which were previously done in the home such as making clothes and the preparation of food, have been turned into profitable industries under capitalism, the elements of domestic labour which relate to caring for children, the sick and other dependent members of the family, have never been adequately provided in a socialised way.

Domestic labour

It is this area of household labour which capitalism cannot fully socialise. The potential to socialise these areas of domestic labour clearly exists. During World War Two in Britain and the USA the capitalist class, through its state, were willing and able to pay for nurseries, communal canteens, laundries etc, so that women workers could be utilised to the full while the men were in the army.

However, the capitalist class treats such periods as exceptions. If such measures became the norm the drain on the total surplus value in capitalist society would be too great for it to sustain.

Those services which it is sometimes forced to provide, such as health care and welfare, are threatened as crises force the bourgeoisie to cut the "social wage" of the working class.

Another reason why capitalism will not and cannot fully socialise domestic labour is that irrespective of whether or not it can afford to to do so it would undermine the family completely.

The family is no mere decoration for capitalism. It is a social structure within which the oppression of women and youth is perpetuated and because of which the oppression of lesbians and gay men takes place. It is fundamental to the existence of capitalism itself.

The family and oppression

The family plays another important role for capitalism. It is an institution through which capitalism's ideology is transmitted to the working class. It is the social structure in which discipline, obedience, uncritical attitudes, faith in authority and subordination to social domination, modelled on patriarchal authority and female oppression, are imparted to and bred into children from the earliest age and in which, in the everyday life of married partners, this relationship of subjection is maintained and renewed.

The family represses resistance and ensures conformity with bourgeois morals. It is through the patriarchal family that the first identification of sex and gender roles occurs. The maltreatment of women and children within the family and its toleration by bourgeois society are also means of imposing reactionary morality, repressive sexuality and gender role identification within the family.

The repression of sexuality is an integral part of early character development, and as such plays a key role in the acceptance of reactionary bourgeois ideology and passivity in the heads of the ruled. Sexual repression takes place in the practice of gender-specific social behaviour, the denial of child sexuality, discrimination against female sexuality and the oppression of homosexuality.

The ideal nuclear family, although not the predominant "family" unit in society, is held up by the church, state, the mass media and schools, as being the model which all must aspire to attain. The family's role as a transmitter of ideology is made all the more effective because it is, or appears as, a haven for the working class in particular, a source of comfort, of emotional and material aid, a defence against the ravages of capitalist society.

We reject the notion that women in the family objectively create their own oppression or consciously collude with it. Their isolated situation in the home atomises working class women and leaves them vulnerable to backward ideas, perpetuated daily in the press, television and radio.

For these reasons housewives, their horizons limited by the immediate needs of maintaining the family, often express reactionary ideas and play a vital role in transmitting these backward and oppressive ideas to their children, especially their daughters who are brought up by mothers according to the sexist rules laid down by capitalist society.

But this is a reflection of their position in society, not an expression of their conscious collusion. It is a backwardness born of their oppression. But this should not obscure the true relations of authority within the family. It is paternal authority, supported by school, church and the dominant cultural norms, which determines the rearing of future generations, even if most of the practical work of child-rearing is done by the mother.

A further aspect which contributes to the political backwardness of women, and is found most strongly amongst those who are solely housewives, is that their husbands (even the politically active) obstruct their participation in political organisations and political struggle even if they do not actually seek to prevent it.

The political backwardness of housewives, just like male chauvinism, are unavoidable for the majority without a mass movement for socialist revolution, or that revolution itself, whose influence would reach right into the family, siding with women and children struggling against patriarchal relations.

The family and sexuality

The imposition of monogamy for women, which came with the development of private property and class society, has meant that women are sexually, as well as socially, oppressed.

The monogamy required of women in the working class is necessary for the maintenance of a stable family unit for the reproduction of labour power. The monogamous model of the bourgeois family, necessary for the ruling class in the transmission of wealth, is thus imposed on the working class but with a different social function.

The sexual oppression of women is primarily a consequence, not a cause, of their subordination within class society. The same applies for our understanding of the construction of gender roles. Although the processes by which gender roles are created have a profound psy-

Women's "double shift"

SINCE WORLD WAR Two the proportion of women who work outside the home has increased dramatically in the imperialist countries.

The increased proportion of women drawn into social production has a tendency to undermine some aspects of women's oppression, giving women who work some economic support and social contact with the rest of their class.

However, this tendency has not altered the fundamental features of women's oppression, which rest upon the continued existence of the family as a sphere of private labour for the reproduction of labour power.

Since women are still responsible for the rearing of children, and still perform most household labour, this has remained their primary responsibility. There is no alternative.

The state has provided certain services such as schools, nurseries, hospitals etc, to relieve women from some of the tasks they previously had to carry out in the home, but none of these replace the need for a central person in the family who takes responsibility for the social well-being of the rest.

The fact that women still have to perform this role means that their ability to participate equally in the labour force is undermined.

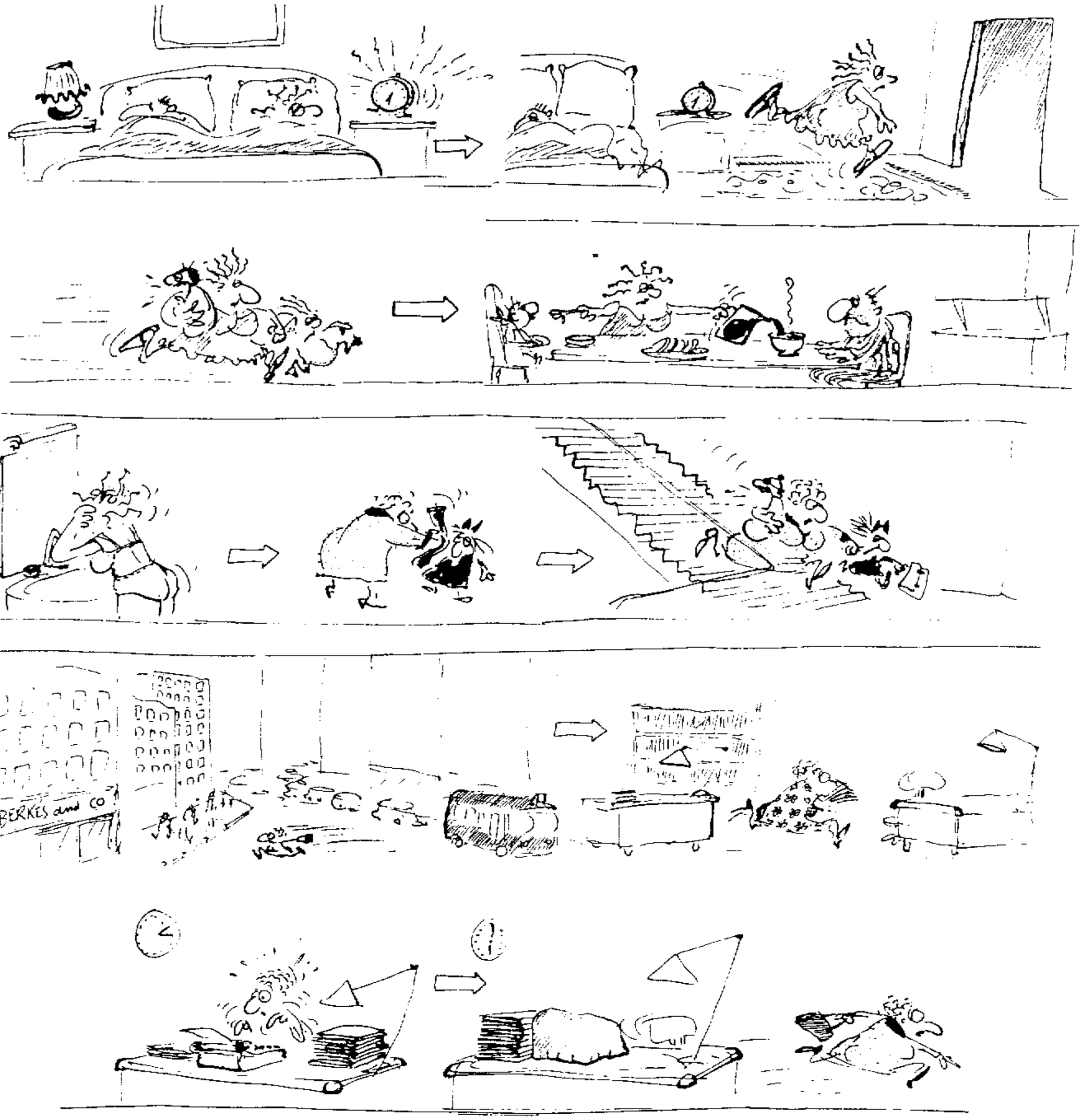
Women have to take time off, not only to give birth, but often to look after young children during school holidays, members of the family who are sick etc.

The fact that so many women with dependents do work does not indicate a real reduction in the household responsibilities of women.

Rather it shows the increasing dependence of the working class family on the wage of two adults where previously they could manage, for periods of their lives at least, on the income of one.

Women with children need to work in order to support their families. The work they do is generally organised to fit in with home responsibilities—the shifts women work, such as evenings, nights, school hours—to allow women to combine their two roles at the expense of social time for themselves and their family.

When a child is ill, or a relative becomes more dependent (such as the elderly and invalids), it is generally women who have to give up their jobs. ■



chological effect on people and are often carried through by a variety of subtle psychological means they cannot be overcome by purely psychological or therapeutic methods.

It is utopian to believe that a social/psychological liberatory practice inside the party or other workers' organisations can resolve the profound contradictions that arise from gender role construction in capitalist society.

These gender roles, above all, serve a social purpose. They are a necessary means of maintaining the family under capitalism. Unless this is understood then we will lapse into a struggle to create the perfect personality, free of the constraints of a constructed gender role, on a purely individual basis. This is utopian and diversionary.

While it is necessary to overcome some of the constraints of our gender roles, in order to make us better fighters against capitalism (an achievement that generally results from the collective solidarity of the party rather than from efforts of individual will or psychological treatment) our personalities will bear the scars of the society we live in. We must transform that society before we can hope to fully transform our personalities and destroy the material basis for the gender roles that capitalism has imposed on us. Sexual oppression and character formation are, however, at the same time, means to maintain class society in general. They make an important contribution in creating preparedness for subordination and obedience to authority.

Sexual oppression also plays a regressive role in transforming class struggle aggression into frustration and even neuroses which find their expression in various forms of, from the standpoint of the class struggle, irrational behaviour, or passivity in the face of the reformist leaders. However, even if these psychological factors play such a role, the "false consciousness" of the working class cannot be reduced to the level of psychology. The atomising effects of capitalism and the demoralising consequences of the reformist leaders are, for us, the decisive political factors.

For these reasons we reject the claim by many feminists that the major battlefield in the struggle for liberation is around issues of sexuality. This view leads to an emphasis on personal politics, to the belief in individual solutions to oppression and to utopian schemes for sexual liberation. Furthermore it is a view which presents

medical science, in particular psychoanalysis, as equal, if not superior to, collective class struggle as a means of ending oppression.

Marxists do not ignore the valuable contributions to human understanding that advances in the field of psychology have made. Personal problems can be alleviated by various forms of psychological treatment. However, we insist that psychological insights cannot resolve the fundamental social contradictions that actually lead to personal and sexual unhappiness.

The key to understanding these contradictions and to resolving them lies in the study of the history of classes. Case studies of individuals have to be understood in their historical contexts and are of supplementary value in eradicating sexual oppression. The same is true of mass and politico-psychological analyses.

The limits of a psychoanalytical approach were shown by the career of Wilhelm Reich. By identifying the importance of sexual politics as one element of capitalism's oppression of the masses Reich paved the way to various insights into the way in which capitalism shapes, or rather distorts, the human personality.

However his failure to understand the relationship between social life, the class struggle and sexuality led him into fatal errors. He elevated sexual politics above the economic and political class struggle and began to define the key to liberation in purely sexual terms (hence his later obsession with the orgone as a source of energy).

Sexist ideology and pornography

BY PERPETUATING THE SEXUAL misery of all and by objectifying women's bodies, class society has always rendered women vulnerable to extreme acts of aggression at the hands of men—namely systematic physical abuse, rape, and the threat of such abuse.

Unlike the radical feminists, we do not regard male violence as the real essence of women's oppression or, in their terms, an expression of "male power" over women.

Acts of sexual abuse and physical violence are not a simple extension of the "normal" oppressive relations between men and women. The high levels of sexual abuse of women reflect the particular influence of sexist ideology which degrades women.

The relative tolerance by the state, and bourgeois ideology (including the church), of such physical, sexual and mental abuse of women in the family, at work and in social life, reflects the institutionalised sexism of class society. In the working class such abuse reflects the demoralisation and divisions which set workers against each other, combined with the general brutality characteristic of class society.

The existence of oppressive, sexist restrictions and their damaging effects on human beings, give rise to rape and systematic brutality. The existence of sexual violence and physical abuse is a real factor in intimidating women (resulting in women being afraid to go out at night etc).

Sexist ideology is rampant in capitalist society. Its purpose is to legitimise women's subordination in social and sexual matters. In media images of women the objectification of the body often leads to its degradation. A human being becomes a mere sex machine at the service of men and with no independent will of her own.

The existence of such images and the extent of sexist ideology in the media has led some women to regard pornography as the quintessential expression of women's oppression.

"Porn is the theory, rape is the practice" is a popular maxim amongst many feminists, radical and socialist alike. In fact targetting pornography as the number one enemy of women is wrong on several counts.

First it equates all sexual images of women with images which do degrade women. It equates all pornography with violent pornography. This is a totally subjective approach which theoretically precludes the possibility of non-oppressive erotic representations. It denies to women their potential enjoyment of the erotic representation of their sexual desires and fantasies. In a word it is a feminist form of prudery. Thus we are not in favour of calling for a legal ban on pornography regardless of whether it is defined as oppressive or non-oppressive.

The second problem with the anti-porn campaigners is that the only way of realising their goals is to call on the state to ban pornography. In practice this means strengthening the state's repressive power, its ability to interfere in people's private lives in an oppressive manner.

The state, as one of the guardians of a reactionary moral code will invariably use its powers to ban porn against lesbian and gay publications. The state will be the arbiter of what is "obscene".

The third problem that making an attack on porn central to a strategy for fighting sexism, is that sexist imagery is a symptom of women's oppression, not the cause of that oppression.

Campaigns against porn are therefore wrong in portraying it as "the theory", i.e. the cause, behind rape and oppression in general. These errors concerning pornography have had disastrous political consequences.

In particular they have led sections of the feminist movements in Britain and the USA into alliances with the Moral Majority and the Mary Whitehouse brigade.

However, as revolutionaries we are not neutral in battles over sexist imagery inside the labour movement and the media.

We are resolute fighters against sexist imagery and support all campaigns to end the publication of pin-ups in the labour movement's press, the efforts of women to get offensive posters or ads taken down in the workplace, campaigns against the sexual harassment of women at work and for concrete measures to protect women against the threat of rape, such as better lighting and transport facilities, free self-defence tuition etc.

In the media we support the fight for the right to reply to articles or pictures which degrade women. We call on print workers to help realise this demand by refusing to print such articles or pictures unless the right of reply for the union, its women's section or a relevant campaign/organisation is guaranteed.

These methods, the methods of direct action, actually lead to fruitful arguments with male workers on the nature of sexism and why it is divisive, as well as an actual curtailment of propaganda for the subordination or degradation of women. ■

In reality just as sexual oppression is a consequence of class society and women's oppression within that society, so complete sexual liberation will come as a consequence of the socialist revolution, not in advance of it. Each class society has developed ideologies that justify exploitation and oppression.

A reactionary ideology with regards to sexuality has always, to one degree or another, been a feature of societies in which women are oppressed. The dominant moral values of a particular society are, like its ideas as a whole, the moral values of (or rather that serve) the ruling class. As class society has developed so too have the means for perpetuating and enforcing a morality that is profoundly oppressive to women.

Within the family itself this morality is enforced on women by their husbands and on children by their parents. At a society-wide level the church and, increasingly, the mass media are powerful propaganda machines for reactionary morality.

They lay down the pernicious moral laws on sexuality that determine what is "normal" or "abnormal" and they stigmatise, often with savage results, those who do not conform to these laws (in particular lesbians and gay men).

In capitalist society bourgeois morality is, despite its occasional liberal periods, a means of oppressing women. In bourgeois society the free and full gratification of the sexual appetite is thwarted or distorted. While all people suffer sexual misery as a result of bourgeois morality, women are particularly affected.

The restrictions placed on women's sexual activity are far more extensive than those placed on men. To sanctify the institution of the family capitalism denies women full control of their own fertility and attacks female "adulterers" or single parents far more systematically than it does male equivalents. The "whore" and "stud" syndrome still exists amongst wide layers in capitalist society.

As a norm, therefore, women are discouraged from engaging in diverse sexual relationships. Their right to sexual pleasure (at times denied altogether) is defined as proper only with a single partner and within marriage.

Stereotyped roles have been fashioned which clearly repress women's potential for equal and enjoyable sex lives. Women are either virtuous or immoral, whereas men are allowed to be (and granted respect when they are) sexually adventurous yet still held to be "good family men". Women's bodies are objectified and treated as things to be enjoyed by men, either freely so, in marriage, or at a price, in prostitution. Women's bodies are used to sell products that have nothing to do with their bodies at all, to men.

With such a callous attitude to the female body it is little wonder that abuse against women is so widespread. Women who reject the stereotyped image and attempt to express any independent sexuality, either through lesbianism, bisexuality or by having multiple male partners are abused, denied legal rights to their children and treated as social misfits.

Women without male partners or without children are pitied and regarded as inadequate. And the overwhelming majority of women are forced to conform to the norms of family life, with all the resulting frustration and unhappiness that are attendant upon those norms.

Prostitutes

Women who earn their living as prostitutes are stigmatised by society, treated as outcasts and in many countries as criminals, while their male clients are excused all guilt. What clear testimony to capitalist morality's stinking hypocrisy!

Despite vast differences of culture and tradition women all over the globe suffer sexual oppression. The epoch of world economy has torn down any protections that women in primitive societies might have enjoyed.

In Brazil, for example, women from primitive Indian tribes in the Amazon are literally stolen and used as prostitutes to satisfy the needs of the men from a civilisation that is expanding into every corner of the rain forest. In more developed semi-colonies the sexual subjugation of women may appear more subtle, but it is nevertheless brutal, wide-ranging and degrading.

As in the imperialist countries examples of institutionalised sexual oppression abound. In addition, however, in certain semi-colonial countries (Thailand and parts of East Africa for example) prostitution has been transformed into a mass industry in which thousands of women are super-exploited, forced to work in terrible conditions, and left highly vulnerable to (often fatal) sexually transmitted diseases. ■

Women's systematic oppression under capitalism

Social class and religion

AN IMPORTANT BATTLEGROUND against sexist ideology is the field of religion. In all class societies religious ideas, perpetuated by organised churches which are often tied in with the state, play a key role in sanctioning and enforcing the ideology of women's oppression.

In the west Christianity and Judaism, both based on ideologies consolidated in pre-capitalist and intensely patriarchal societies, have, for centuries, preached the doctrine of women's subordination. This doctrine has practical results for millions of women.

The Catholic Church's rulings on contraception and abortion are a clear example. In the imperialist countries these rulings can produce the misery and hardship associated with unwanted pregnancies and children. In the semi-colonies these results are compounded by the greater degree of poverty that exists.

In Latin America, a continent dominated by the ideology of catholicism, the church's reactionary doctrines, liberation theology notwithstanding, lead literally to the mass murder of women. For the denial of free abortion on demand does not eradicate abortion. It merely opens the door to the back street butcherers and the needless deaths of many women.

The purpose of such rulings against abortion and contraception is to ensure that women do not control their own fertility. Moreover, because sex is merely for the purposes of reproduction, women are taught by the church that sexual activity outside marriage and sexual activity for pleasure is forbidden. The elaborate mythology of both Christianity and Judaism back up their reactionary teachings on women. The Eve myth, the tale of Lot's disobedient wife in the Old Testament, the cult of the Virgin Mary, all portray women as the willing servants of men's domestic needs, punished, like Lot's wife, when they disobey orders from the patriarch.

The bottom line of these religious ideologies is the sanctification of the family and its structure around a dominant male. The nature of the family has changed in different class societies and religion has reflected this in subtle changes of doctrine.

But the reactionary content of religion's teachings on women and the family has not qualitatively altered over centuries. They are the clearest manifestations of the tendency of the dead past to weigh heavily on the living present.

This is true even where religious ideology adopts liberatory trappings. Of late this has occurred inside the Catholic Church with the development of liberation theology, particularly in Latin America. Yet, despite justifying violence against imperialist oppression, this theology re-

mains tied to the church's reactionary teaching on all of the key social questions affecting women.

In the end all religion, regardless of nuance, is reactionary from the point of view of human progress in general and from the point of view of women's liberation in particular, because they delegate self-activity and the responsibility for human action to a power lying outside the human being, they reinforce the sense of powerlessness of humans and thereby limit the possibility of self-determination of humans.

Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism

The religions of the east are not an exception to this. They are not qualitatively different from those of the west. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam may differ in many respects to Christianity and Judaism, but, like all religions, which are all invented by man in order to justify the existing order of things, their teachings consign women to a subordinate role within society and within the family.

Today Islam is in the vanguard of the counter-revolution against women in North Africa and the Near East. The treatment of women as chattel in Afghanistan, where the bride price is still in force amongst the Islamic rebel tribes, and the eradication of "western" influence on women in Iran's Islamic Republic through the enforced re-introduction of the veil and laws punishing adultery, both indicate the dangers for women that Islam poses.

No amount of anti-imperialist rhetoric, no amount of cant about Islam's respect for women, can alter the fact that its practical impact on women's lives is destructive.

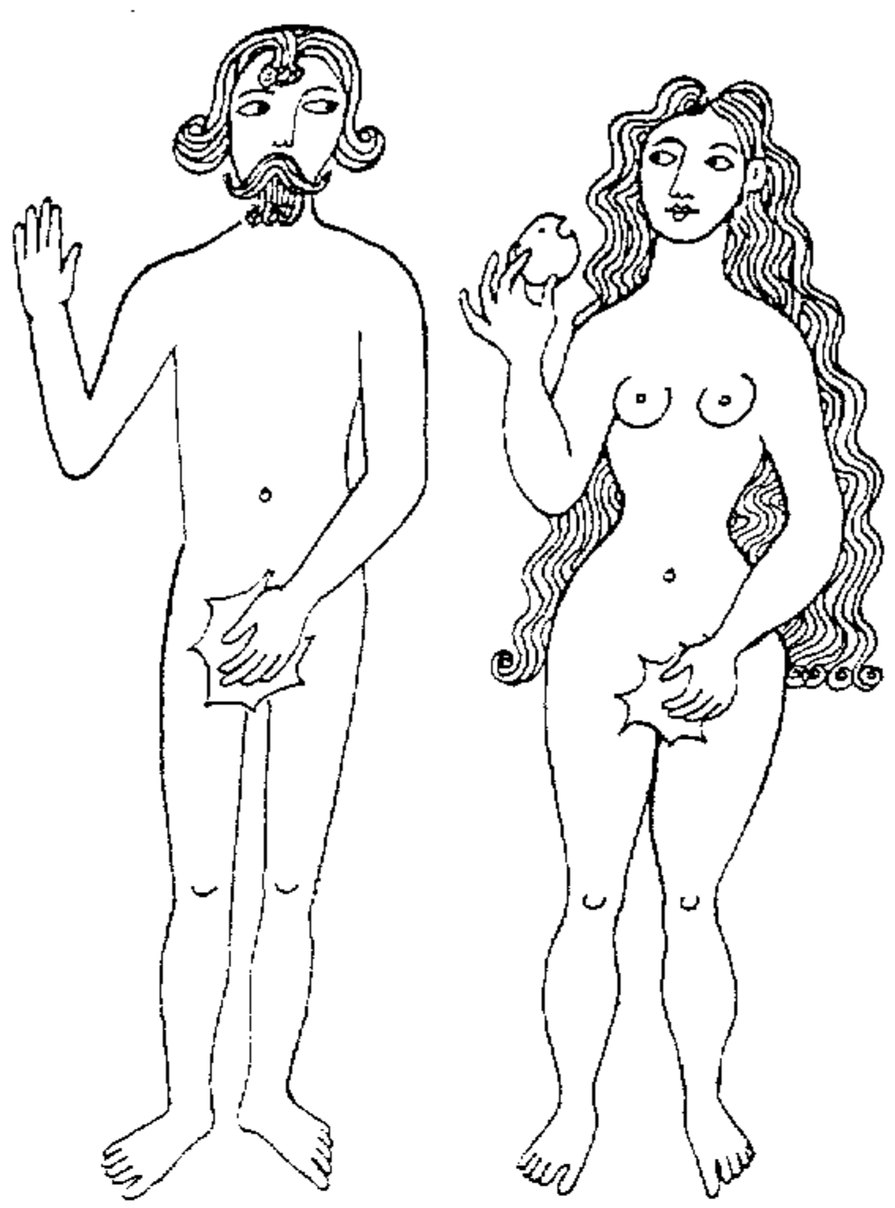
Marxists have a clear duty to combat organised religion whilst respecting the right of individuals to freedom of religious belief and worship. We cannot regard religion as simply a private matter. We campaign to break the hold of religious ideology through militant materialist propaganda. We fight the attempt by the churches to control people's private lives by fighting for religion-free sex education, free abortion and contraception on demand for women etc. And we fight to realise the basic bourgeois democratic demand of the separation of all churches from all states.

Once again, the question of class

The experience of women's oppression is different for women in the different classes. For ruling class and some professional women many aspects of life and work that were previously denied to them—such as management posts, access to the professions etc. are now more open to them.

They are also able to buy certain "freedoms" through employing women workers to perform their domestic labour and raise their children. For the women of the top wealth owning families this leaves them free to be as idle as their aristocratic predecessors were.

This does not mean they are equal to the men of their class however. They are still denied many rights in law regarding inheritance and ownership, and their role



remains essentially one of subservient wives or daughters, beholden to the male heads of their families.

In that sense ruling class women are not excluded from the oppression of their sex. However, they remain part of a non-productive ruling class, and often play a key role in perpetuating the ideology of women's subordination through their work in churches, charities or as members of ruling or royal families upon whom the working class are supposed to model themselves.

The situation of the women of the traditional petit bourgeoisie (handicraft workers, peasants, small family businesses) is entirely different. There is wide variation within this class, but for many social exploitation and sexual oppression coincides with the personal relations between men and women.

These women are often directly exploited as employees in the family firm, do the household work for husbands and children.

The traditional authoritarian nuclear family structure has maintained itself without encroachment right up to today; the minority of such women face a situation of multiple exploitation and oppression which is mitigated to a small extent by a higher living standard compared with that of the average working class.

For women of the professional middle classes improved access to education, careers and property has allowed a considerable improvement in their lives.

In the imperialist countries the availability of better contraception and safer abortion allows a degree of control over fertility which enables a career to be combined with a sexual and personal life, which in previous generations were considered mutually exclusive. In addition, those women whose incomes allow them to buy the services of other women to perform their domestic and child care tasks can now combine work with a family life.

But their apparent equality has not emancipated them completely from their oppression. Women are still very

under-represented in the higher levels of the professions, promotion prospects are made difficult by the prejudice of male bosses, and careers are not usually flexible enough to allow women to have even short periods of time off to have children and yet maintain their pay and position.

Within the household these "middle class" women are still subjected to domination by their husbands, and may be subject to sexual and physical abuse. Like their truly bourgeois sisters however, their experience of oppression can be offset to a much greater extent than that of most working class women, since they can buy themselves out of much drudgery and even violent situations. Thus the conditions for the better paid and qualified approach those of the middle class and petit bourgeoisie as far as family structure, ideology, role models and living standards are concerned.

At the other extreme, within the lumpenproletariat, within the long term unemployed and the most exploited and most wretched layers of the working class, prostitution, the break up of the family, violence and criminalisation are daily features of women's oppression.

The oppression of proletarian and peasant women

For the great mass of working class women, and this includes many non-professional women who may refer to themselves as middle class because their jobs are not manual (e.g. white collar workers, teachers, nurses etc.), their oppression is experienced in a different way.

The majority have to combine work in a factory or office with primary responsibility for the housework and childcare in the home. This double shift can be arduous especially for those women who work a night shift, then come home to work most of the day doing housework and preparing meals. They end up getting inadequate sleep and no relaxation time.

Working class women rarely have adequate child care arrangements to meet their needs as workers (unlike the nannies or private nurseries that bourgeois and professional women are able to hire), and their low pay and poor job security means they continue to be economically dependent on their husbands.

Obviously the increasing number of women who receive an independent wage allows some financial independence, but rarely enough to enable a woman to choose to leave her husband if she wishes and continue to keep her children without major finance and housing problems. This is even more the case for women who depend on state benefits, which in all the major imperialist countries are based on a belief that the family unit is one with a male head of household plus dependent wife and children. Hence benefits are often only able to be claimed by the husband. Single women parents frequently have great difficulty with benefits and housing.

Peasant women, who number millions in the imperialised world, suffer extreme oppression. The idea that a Latin American peasant woman has a fundamental common cause with the women of the world's ruling classes is laughable.

The oppression suffered by peasant women, especially poor peasant women, is manifold. In the course of work a peasant woman will be obliged to attend to the crops, to the animals, to the maintenance of the household and the management of its budget and to take the produce of the land she works to the market, sell it and purchase the goods she and her family need to live on.

Add to this endless round of chores the functions of child bearing and rearing she performs and we can see clearly the extent of the oppression suffered by the peasant woman. The peasant woman, even more so than the peasantry in general, is indeed the "pack-horse of history".

Violence against women

Working class women are vulnerable to the brutality of violence and sexual abuse against them both in the home and through sexual harassment at work. Whilst sexual and physical abuse is by no means confined to working class women, they are less able to "buy" themselves out of the situation by moving out of the house, leaving their job, using cars etc, which give some security against street attacks.

Of course we do not confuse (though nor do we excuse) the occasional violence that flares up in families because of the tensions of daily life in capitalist society, with the systematic brutality of some men against some women.

But domestic brutality, however terrible for the individuals concerned, must be kept in perspective. It is not an expression of, or means of perpetuating, "male power". It is a product of the frustrations that make daily life under capitalism miserable and unrewarding. It cannot be compared with the systematic use of violence, in particular by many dictatorships in the semi-colonial world, directed against women and men and designed to maintain the power of the semi-colonial bourgeoisie and their imperialist paymasters.

In these countries the dictators, not the husbands, are the real perpetrators of systematic violence against women. So, we do not overstate the question of violence against women in the imperialist countries, in the way feminists do, in order to propound the idea that male power exists and is enforced by systematic male violence.

There is nothing inherently male about violence anyway. To suggest there is is to concede to the thoroughly reactionary ideology that portrays women as inevitably weak, unresisting passive objects.

Women class fighters the world over, from Nicaragua during the revolution against Somoza to Britain during the miners' strike of 1984-85, have shown themselves capable of fighting physically against the real enforcers of their oppression, the capitalists and their states.

Differences within the working class

The relationship between men and women is also different for the working class. The family often remains the

last haven for the working class where capitalism is unable to provide, through social provision, the communal support necessary for individuals and particularly dependents. It is also an arena where most socialising, support and love is found for working class women and men. The family is therefore something which is defended by workers, male and female. Unlike professional and bourgeois women, it is not husbands or working class men in general who are the fundamental origin of their problems. For ruling class women it is their own class which produces their inequality and subordination. It is the obstruction of men which denies them true equality.

But for working class women it is not working class men who are their "enemy". It is the capitalist system, and therefore the ruling class men and women, that creates both the exploitation and oppression of working class women.

This is demonstrated in the joint struggles of men and women, such as where women in a community are active in building support for a struggle of their husbands (the tin miners in Bolivia and the coal miners in Britain are excellent examples of this unity). For both men and women it is the bosses who are their true enemy.

However, it is true that male workers generally have better pay and working conditions than women. They also benefit from the fact that women do most of the tedious domestic chores, often in addition to waged work.

The structure of the family, the male dominance within it and the overwhelmingly sexist ideology which helps perpetuate this situation, lead to men acting in ways which directly oppress women. They deny women control over their combined family lives, they determine how much of their wages are to be used for "housekeeping". In some cases they brutally physically and sexually abuse their wives and other women.

This division within the class weakens its collective strength. It has led to instances of male workers organising to prevent women having access to certain jobs, particularly crafts and other skilled work, and men scabbing on women's strikes over equal pay. These male workers believe that women workers are a threat to their own wages and conditions and therefore they can act as a reactionary obstacle to women.

Who profits from the oppression of women?

There is no doubt that men do enjoy real material benefits as a result of the oppression of women. However, these benefits are either ephemeral (status as the man of the house), transient (access to certain jobs during certain periods) or, on a historic scale, minor (not having to do as much domestic labour).

Certainly the ideology of male dominance—the "macho identity" that often exists inside the working class and is bolstered by the material privileges that male workers do enjoy and do, on some occasions defend—needs to be constantly combatted by the revolutionary party and the mass proletarian women's movement.

However, the material advantages of men do not mean that they exploit women economically. They do not appropriate and control the fruits of women's domestic labour. And as against the relative privileges male workers do enjoy in the home or at work the disadvantages that they face as a result of the social oppression of women are immense.

The divisions within the working class that are opened up as a result of the oppression of women weaken the class as a whole and leave it vulnerable to economic, social and political attack from the bosses. The possibility of overthrowing the system that both exploits all workers and socially oppresses women is retarded by these divisions.

In this sense, then, male benefits are not decisive. They do not mean that men have a historic stake in the oppression of women, any more than the benefits enjoyed by some workers as against others give them a historic stake in capitalism.

On the contrary, male workers have a historic interest in overthrowing capitalism, and in so doing destroying the basis for the social oppression of women. They are then, the real strategic allies of working class women in the fight against oppression and exploitation. In fact the working class is weakened by this division, and the ability to collectively struggle to overthrow the system which produces both their exploitation and oppression is weakened.

The gains that working class men will receive from the final liberation of women from the family—the collective responsibility for welfare, freedom in relationships, sexual liberation and the economic gains of socialism—all mean that working class men ultimately draw no decisive benefit from, but rather suffer as a result of, the oppression of women.

Their perceived advantages over women leads to individual men, and men collectively in the trades unions, wrongly believing that their situation will be best served by continuing to participate in the oppression of women. ■

Imperialism and women's oppression

FROM ITS INCEPTION capitalism has been expansionist. It has created a world capitalist economy. But throughout its history it has developed in a combined and uneven way.

Colonialism and then imperialism (from the late nineteenth century on) divided the world amongst the great powers, plundering resources and labour, and exploiting the dominated areas—the colonies or semi-colonies—for the benefit of monopoly capital.

Through its expansion and domination of the world, imperialist capital destroyed both the existing economies and the social relations of the pre-capitalist modes of production in the imperialised world.

It wrecked subsistence agriculture, brought ruin to domestic textile industries, destroyed the systems of obligation and support in peasant villages and undermined feudal and religious authority.

But where capitalism "beats down Chinese walls" it also tears apart the social fabric of the old societies, including the family structures, not in order to further progress, but to facilitate the colonial enslavement of the peoples it has conquered.

The consequences for women

For women, as for the toiling masses as a whole, these developments created the material conditions for liberation from the often brutal patriarchal family structures that prevailed before the arrival of imperialist capital, yet at the same time deepened and sharpened the exploitation and oppression that they suffered. The introduction of capitalist industry, the invasion of the countryside by capitalism, the loosening of feudal ties, lead to the creation of the working class, the one class capable of ending exploitation, oppression and class society altogether.

In the imperialist epoch this road has been opened to the mass of peasant and working women of the colonies and semi-colonies. Subordination to the male head of the family, superstition, ignorance and enslavement—the norms of family life for centuries—can be abolished once and for all.

Yet, precisely because we are in the epoch of imperialism the potential for such progress is blocked and indeed prevented altogether in some countries, areas and sectors, by imperialism's reactionary stranglehold.

Combined and uneven development has created the material pre-requisites for, and the obstacles to, the liberation of women in the imperialised world. Only revolutions led by the working class and directed towards the destruction of capitalism altogether can utilise those pre-requisites and destroy those obstacles.

Women and the family under imperialism

The role of women in production and reproduction is severely affected by imperialist exploitation. Proletarianisation can mean an endless hell of migrant or landless labouring, or unemployment and a shanty town home for millions of women.

For women in the more developed semi-colonies, like South Korea, it can mean super-exploitation while young followed by destitution once your capacity to work has been drained from you as a result of years (often starting when you are aged ten) of long hours and miserable pay.

And for millions of other women this process leads inexorably towards prostitution (a vast industry in places like Thailand) or to being exported as a servant/wife (in fact slave) of men in the west (the Filippino brides for sale and the export of young women from Sri Lanka are both sickening examples of this trade in women).

Peasant women are left with a double burden of caring for the household and working the land. Where land is seized or where class differentiation in the countryside leaves the poorest without land, women can be left to fend for the family with no means of support except the hope that some wages will be sent home from a husband working in the city.

Marriages and traditional family structures are destroyed or re-created in forms that intensify the oppression suffered by women. And proletarian women who escape the countryside often find their incomes drained anyway by the need to support the landless family they have left behind. Most frequently though, women drawn into production work for lower rates of pay than men and are often confined to seasonal work. All of this increases the risk of forcing women into prostitution or submission into actual slavery as the only alternatives to starvation.

Oppression in the countryside

For those women who remain in the countryside, especially in Africa, the introduction of modern agriculture, and in particular cash crops, has led to women losing control of (matrilineally inherited) land and food production, despite the fact that they still do most of the work.

The compulsion to continue working in these adverse conditions is the necessity of producing the means of subsistence for young and old dependents. Previous forms of women's oppression—dowry, bride price, female circumcision, polygamy—are not eradicated by imperialism although their social basis may be undermined.

Millions of women, particularly in Africa and in some Islamic countries, suffer clitiderectomy or infibulation. Tens of thousands in southern Asia bear the burden of toil in the husband's family household.

The partial destruction of the traditional family structures and obligations can leave women less protected, leading, for example, to such horrors as an increase in bride burning in India. And the advances capitalism does bring, such as education and health, really benefit only a small handful of people in the imperialised world.

Women's literacy is still below men's. And, despite medical advances, the mass of women in the semi-colonies have no control over their own fertility at all. In Africa and Asia half a million women die every year in childbirth.

Given these conditions of oppression it is no wonder that women have joined, in their thousands, the struggles against imperialism in the colonies and semi-colonies. In Vietnam, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Angola and Mozambique women have taken up weapons in courageous struggles against the heavily armed imperialist or imperialist backed regimes.

Yet time and again the interests of the working class and peasant women have been betrayed by either the petit bourgeois nationalist leaderships who, in power, have been driven to seek a new accord with imperialism, or by the Stalinist leaders whose bureaucratic rule reproduces many of the worst features of capitalist family life.

In some cases, such as Iran, the traditionally subservient role played by women meant that after the revolution against the Shah they were subjected to a fearful counter-revolution at the hands of the mullahs.

In other cases women have made real gains, especially in terms of literacy, health care and, sometimes, even democratic rights. However, without the overthrow of capitalism or of the Stalinist rulers of the degenerate workers' states that have emerged from anti-imperialist struggles, all gains made by women will prove temporary, checked, eliminated or made meaningless by continued imperialist exploitation, the demands of the IMF or the needs of the parasitic bureaucracy presiding over the planned economies.

The willingness of the PDPA in Afghanistan to sacrifice the women's literacy programme as part of its deal with the reactionary Islamic rebels, is but one example of the treachery to the cause of women's liberation that Stalinism is capable of.

Petit bourgeois nationalism has and will again betray in exactly the same fashion. Only the programme of permanent revolution, in which the achievement of meaningful democratic rights and of a progressive solution to the agrarian question are inseparably linked to the achievement of working class power and socialism, can bring to women the prospect of a successful conclusion to their struggle against oppression.

Slavery, racism and women's oppression

A feature of the early colonial period was the wholesale forcible removal and enslavement of west Africans by European traders and plantation owners in the Americas. Families and communities were literally torn apart.

Both the labour power and reproductive capacity were strictly controlled and exploited by the slaveholders. Enslaved women were denied all freedom of choice in sexual and personal relations and, as the property of the owners, systematically raped and abused by them.

Enslaved women were almost entirely responsible for the rearing of their children but had no control over their future. Not surprisingly, black women were at the forefront of the battle against slavery in the US.

Slavery has left its mark on the societies it affected. In particular, it contributed to the growth of racism and thus to the triple burden of oppression suffered by black women of the working class in the Americas and in Europe.The indentured labour system did not produce such extremes of subordination and oppression but it too imposed extra burdens on women who were left responsible for the family without support, when male labour was required by the imperialists.

In the twentieth century, the devastating effect of imperialism on the economies of the semi-colonies has created global migrant labour. Women in this group suffer specific forms of discrimination and a terrible weight of oppression in the "host" countries.

Institutionalised racism and general manifestations of racism in the form of national chauvinism, prevent most of these women from benefitting from some of the gains that women in the imperialist heartlands have won within the context of bourgeois democracy. Racism in most cases forces these women to retreat back into the migrant communities.

Wherever, for cultural or religious reasons, patriarchal ideology dominates these communities women may then face extra obstacles that prevent them claiming their full democratic rights, participating in the labour movement and struggling against their own oppression. They are therefore unable to take up issues of women's oppression within the working class organisations as a whole. Immigration controls guarantee a subordinate position for immigrant women since they are categorised as dependents of men within the context of marriage. The weight of this oppression and subordination also make it doubly difficult for these women to fight oppression within their own communities and families.

Another effect of immigration controls in imperialist countries is that it keeps thousands of women separated from their partners and therefore neither the country of origin, nor the country where the male is employed accepts responsibility for their welfare.

The weight of oppression, combined with racism within the labour movement and the failure of existing women's movements to fight consistently for the interests of black women, create the conditions in which support for strategies proposed by separatists and black nationalists can grow. These strategies propose the separation of black women's struggles from those of all black workers and the class as a whole. But black women have, time and again, taken the lead in struggles for unionisation, welfare rights and against racism. This shows the potential for black and other migrant women to fight for a class solution to their own specific oppression. ■

How Stalinism oppresses women

IN THE SOVIET UNION women remained oppressed, even though it was a workers' state resting on post-capitalist property relations.

The central feature of women's oppression—the existence of a separate sphere of domestic labour within the family for which women are largely responsible—remained as prevalent in this degenerated workers' state as it does in the imperialist heartlands.

This was not a result of some "natural" basis for women's oppression which is distinct from class society. Rather it reflected the way that the Soviet Union degenerated from a healthy post revolutionary period to its stagnant condition.

The Bolshevik programme

The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 had, as a key part of its programme, a commitment to the full liberation of women.

Immediately after taking power legal changes were brought about which went further than any bourgeois "democracy" had done before, or since, in abolishing the inequalities of women at the level of political, legal or civil rights.

By December 1917 civil registration of marriage and easy and free divorce was granted, abortion was legalised in 1920 and made available, free, in Soviet hospitals. In addition the Bolsheviks attempted to remove the fundamental features of women's oppression in the home. Plans were made for the socialisation of childcare, communal dining facilities, laundries etc. Propaganda encouraging communal living arrangements was disseminated.

In addition a large and active Women's Department ("Zhenotdel") was built which drew millions of working class and peasant women into the discussions, decisions and practical work of trying to carry out the programme for liberation.

But these plans were never realised on a really serious scale, primarily because the ravages of civil war and famine placed the young regime under enormous economic pressure.

Communal canteens were established in the Civil War, not through any great plans to socialise and improve the quality of life, but rather to more efficiently distribute

the scarce food supplies. After the war the period of New Economic Policy was introduced which had the effect of creating mass unemployment, with women suffering most of this.

The bureaucratic counter-revolution

By the mid 1930s the regime had abandoned any vestige of the Bolshevik programme for the socialisation of housework. With the growth of the bureaucracy amidst general scarcities—intensified by the first Five Year plans—the poorly equipped and staffed facilities for childcare, catering and laundry were even further restricted and the emphasis once more placed on private domestic methods of household labour.

For the bureaucratic stratum too domestic servants became common. An intensive hypocritical campaign for the building of the "new family" sought to legitimise the return to domestic slavery as a programmatic goal. Claims that the "socialist family" was based on love alone were dragged through the mud with the introduction of restrictions on love and divorce. In fact, as Trotsky pointed out, the whole logic of Stalinism was to increase the frequency of "marriages of convenience" as a means of gaining access to privilege or scant resources.

The failures of Stalinism to meet the contraception and abortion needs of the mass of women led to the growth of backstreet abortions and loss of life through septic abortion. The bureaucratic response was to illegalise abortion altogether in 1936 rather than provide adequate facilities. Only in 1955 in the context of an epidemic of septic abortion casualties was the law reformed. The dire nature of the Soviet economy meant that many of the domestic appliances which reduced the time needed for housework and food preparation for women in many imperialist countries were not available to Soviet women.

This, combined with frequent food shortages, could make the experience of the double shift even more oppressive for Soviet women than for many women in the imperialist countries. The net result of this betrayal of the Bolshevik Revolution has been to discredit socialism in the eyes of the working class of the world, and particularly women workers who see this "communist" society meaning more of the same for them.

The collapse of Stalinism

The "reforms" of Gorbachev, far from involving a renewed attempt to socialise housework and liberate women from domestic drudgery, were argued for in part, on the basis of strengthening still further the role of the family as a social unit, and pressure is increasingly being put on Soviet women to give up work.

The bureaucracy argued that it was the "de-feminisation" of women through their extensive role in factory and other work, that was at least partially responsible for many of the ills of society. This reactionary ideology is still being pumped out alongside reports of the appalling condition women workers face. The bureaucracy pretended to act in the interests of women by encouraging them to stay at home.

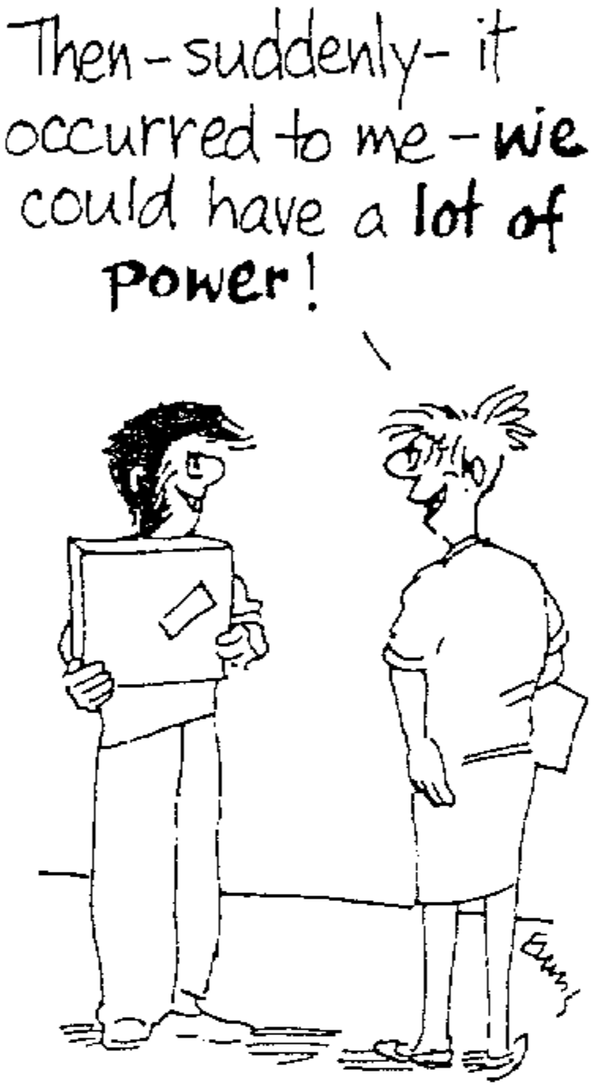
Even if the ruling bureaucracies of the degenerate workers' states of the world have shown an active interest in preventing the actual emancipation of women and have proved their own reactionary character through their protection of the family and maintenance of a sex-specific division of labour, the huge steps forward which have been made in these countries in comparison with their pre-revolutionary periods and the present imperialist world cannot be denied.

In China and Cuba, for example, women were granted legal rights, and provided with improved health care and social services. Extreme forms of barbaric oppression, such as the sale of women and girls in China, were outlawed by the state.

Notwithstanding this, the leading social positions in the party, trade union and other public organisations, remain predominantly the domain of men. Precisely this shows that the involvement of women in public production although it is a precondition for their liberation, is alone not sufficient to secure real liberation and that, in the face of the bureaucracy's mishandling of the economy, all the achievements of women are constantly put in danger.

In these countries women's role has remained that of serving the state and society through domestic toil combined with other work as necessary for the regime. The role of the church in Poland, for example, was never effectively challenged by the Stalinist bureaucracy and it continued to shape the ideological and sexual oppression of women. ■

Women's liberation and socialism



FOR WOMEN TO ACHIEVE full political, economic and social equality with men, the social and economic basis of their oppression must be destroyed. The existence of the family as a privatised sphere of labour must be abolished.

This can only be achieved by the full socialisation of child-rearing and household labour. For this reason we reject Stalinism's idealisation of the "proletarian family" which is in reality a replica of the bourgeois family in which privatised domestic labour is maintained, in this instance in the interests of the bureaucracy.

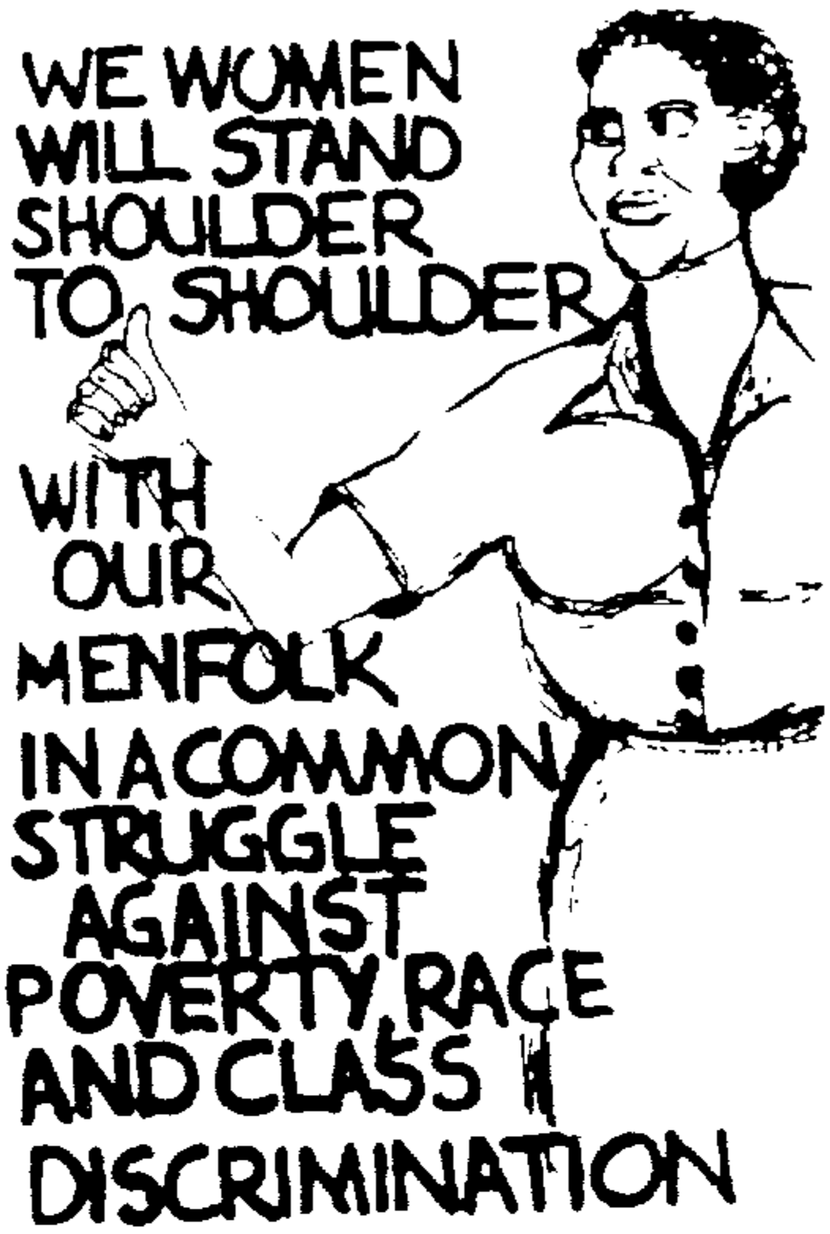
The tasks of providing food, shelter and the comfort necessary for the reproduction of labour power must be undertaken collectively by society, ending the individual responsibility of each separate family to try and cope. Only when relieved of this domestic slavery can women be drawn into socialised production fully and equally alongside men. However, this socialisation will only have a really socialist character if it is accompanied by the destruction of the gender-specific division of labour (and the corresponding roles) in socialised production.

Women will not be the only historical subject for this special transformation, for the conscious dissolution of the bourgeois family and the overcoming of gender-specific forces, but they will be the section of the working class pushing forward this tranformation with the greatest energy and determination.

Of course in this struggle women, as an undifferentiated mass, will not act in a uniform fashion to destroy male dominance and the bourgeois family. To believe this would be to collapse into the spontaneist idea that the very fact of oppression will automatically generate uniform resistance amongst the oppressed.

In this struggle, as in all others, the vanguard will play a decisive role. The revolutionary party itself, and crucially the women members of the Party, will be in the forefront of this struggle. Communist women will organise the most advanced layers, including non-Party class fighters amongst the working class, especially women, to combat sexism, to fight for equality and to mobilise the whole mass of working women to play their role as the historical subject of socialist transformation and women's emancipation.

These tasks are inseparable from the overthrow of the private ownership of the means of production. Then, and only then, will it be possible on the basis of a



planned economy, to systematically eradicate all aspects of women's oppression, legal, economic, social and political.

To initiate this process the seizure of state power by the working class, armed and organised into workers' councils and workers' militias, and the suppression of the resistance of the exploiters, is necessary.

The weight of womens' oppression

Women's subordination and the centrality of the family in everyday life have been features of all previous class societies. The true liberation of women and children from their oppression, plus the transformation of life for everyone under socialism, will require a long and difficult struggle against the ideas and norms of the past.

The transformation of the personality, of the psyche, which will be necessary for people to live collectively and co-operatively, will take generations to achieve fully. The deep psychological scars of being raised and then working in a society based on profit, greed and struggle will not disappear overnight.

A conscious struggle for change will be required for many years. But with the material basis for collectivity established through the creation of a workers' state, planning for need and not profit, the destruction of the lonely prison of the privatised household, the "struggle" for the new psyche, for the new, truly human being and for really liberated sexual relationships, will be possible.

In 1848 Marx and Engels raised the demand for the abolition of the bourgeois family. In Russia after October 1917, it became clear that the family relations built up by capitalism could not, however, be abolished in one stroke. The workers' state created the economic basis upon which domestic labour could be socialised (though Stalinism has thwarted the realisation of this gain as it has so many others).

By socialising many aspects of domestic labour the workers' state does not immediately abolish the bourgeois family, but provides the means by which women could free themselves from the family prison and from privatised labour.

To the extent that this process of socialisation (through communal child rearing, cleaning and eating facilities) is successful the basis for the "old" family inherited from capitalism is eradicated. In this sense the "old" family, like the state itself will wither away with the advance towards communism.

However, just as we will not be drawn into predicting, in a utopian fashion, the nature of sexual relations under communism, we will not be drawn on painting a picture of what the "family" will look like under communism either.

The bourgeois family will disappear. What will replace it is something that people of the future will determine, free from the material and ideological constraints that characterise (and torment) familial relations under capitalism. By the same token the conditions for real sexual liberation, in which people are at free to determine their own sexuality, will be created.

Working women and the socialist revolution

The role of women in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism is essential. As part of the working class women must be involved in the struggle for power.

Women all over the world have demonstrated their capacity for struggle. Indeed it is often the case that women workers, faced with the severe problems of managing a family and working, are an explosive force within the class struggle (Russia in February 1917 for example).

Moreover because women are often unorganised, or only recently organised, they can, for a period of time, combine explosive militancy with freedom from bureaucratic rules and regulations that characterise the "normal" trade union routine.

Precisely because of the burdens and tasks that our bound up with housework and child-rearing, independent

women's organisations such as (housewives) women's price control and food distribution committees, play a decisive role, as part of a proletarian women's movement, in the establishment of organs of workers' power in pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods.

Failure to positively win working class women to the struggle can leave them prey to the arguments of the ruling class and allow them to act as a backward force within the working class. As the people most centrally involved in the raising of children, the provision of daily needs and as the primary "home-makers", women's experience and contribution will be vital in the planning of social provision for these tasks.

Working class women are central to the struggle for the emancipation of both women and the working class—they are the most oppressed section of their sex. Amongst women they have the most radical interest in the overthrow of their oppression in capitalism.

The achievement of equal rights and opportunities, or utopian schemes for individual sexual and psychological liberation, will not satisfy the fundamental needs of proletarian women. Within the working class they have no aristocratic privileges: they are comparatively less skilled and do not have high wages that might serve to reconcile them to capitalism.

All too often, though, the best organised women workers are misled by reformist trade union leaders, who have themselves made their peace with capitalism. This, plus the traditional backwardness of many women due to their isolation in the home, prey to the ideas of the mass media and the church, indicates that intense oppression and exploitation are not sufficient on their own to throw women into the leadership of the struggle for liberation. This remains true even in the semi-colonies where the oppression of women workers and peasants is even more acute than in the imperialist countries.

However, the working class is the first exploited class capable of ending all exploitation. This is not simply because it is the most exploited and oppressed class, but because capitalism itself organised it at the centre of socialised production, enabling it to become conscious of itself as a class, to organise itself against the capitalists, to overthorw them and to re-organise production.

Women form part of the working class with precisely this potential. Though capitalism has never been able to draw all proletarian women into production, women do form a vital component of the workforce and it is this section, partially released from the stultifying effects of domestic isolation, which can act as the vanguard of all proletarian women. ■

The errors of feminism

THE TERM FEMINISM DESCRIBES the ideas and practices of both the modern Women's Liberation Movement (of the 1960s and 1970s),and of liberal women's rights campaigners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Fundamental to the followers of these movements is the idea that the struggle for women's rights can be distinct from the fight against other inequalities, exploitation and maifestations of oppression. That is, that there is a separate "woman question", equally affecting all women regardless of their class and solvable by all women acting together, regardless of their class.

This notion of a separate woman question, separate from the class struggle, is the unifying feature of all brands of feminism.

Marxists, however, believe that the origins, continuation and precise forms of women's oppression are inseparably linked to class society. Since class society and women's oppression are inextricably bound together there can be no separate woman question, and therefore no distinct sphere of struggle.

The nature of feminism, although riven by splits arising from competing theories and practices, is to separate off into a distinct sphere those issues which relate to women.

This does not mean that all feminists reject the issues concerning class exploitation and imperialist oppression, but their theories, and most centrally their programme for liberation, do not link the various struggles in a coherent fashion.

Feminism is therefore unable to provide a revolutionary challenge to women's oppression. In attempting to provide a strategy for women's equality or liberation without a strategy for working class power, feminism remains a utopian ideology.

The origins of feminism

The bourgeois democratic revolutions raised the expectations of sections of the liberal bourgeoisie and intelligentsia for true equality. This was extended to women's rights and formed the stimulus for the bourgeois women's movement.

The first impressive examples of this were the women's rights campaigners, under Olympe de Gouges, who,

at the height of the French Revolution, demanded full juridical and political equality for all women and, as a consequence, were sent to the scaffold by the Jacobin dictatorship.

In the 1830s and 1840s this suppressed tradition of a radical-democratic women's movement allied itself with the developing labour movement as in the case of Flora Tristan and her Saint Simonian comrades. The bourgeois women's movement achieved mass influence in the 1880s and 1890s, especially in Britain, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, around women's suffrage campaigns.

Despite the determination and militancy shown by the suffragettes, which brought down on them the most brutal repression from the bourgeois state, and despite the achievement of partial gains and suffrage reforms around the turn of the century, this bourgeois women's movement refused, because of its own bourgeois democratic limitations to attack the actual social roots of women's oppression.

Although these movements put forward a historically progressive set of demands, there was a contradiction between the class interests of these women, and their aspirations for sexual equality which could not be fully achieved under capitalism.

Simple demands for equal rights—women's suffrage, access to education and the professions, property and divorce rights—were often militantly fought for, but the movements led by bourgeois women could never get beyond the struggle for a reform programme.

Such a programme inevitably stopped well short of tackling the real roots of women's social oppression, namely capitalist society itself. As such it was in no sense a programme for the emancipation of women. The avowed aim of improved rights for all women would destabilise the capitalist system from which bourgeois women gain their class privileges, even though these are less than those of their male counterparts. This contradiction led to the bourgeois women's movement splitting at key moments in history.

For example in Great Britain at the outbreak of the First World War, a few women, such as Sylvia Pankhurst, were won to the side of the working class, whilst others, including Emily and Christabel Pankhurst, demonstrated that their class interests were dominant and leapt to support their "fatherland", dropping their feminist demands for the duration of the imperialist war.

They were prepared to sacrifice the rights of the great mass of women to suffrage in return for sops from the capitalists that granted political rights to petit bourgeois and bourgeois women based on property qualifications.

The dangers of class collaboration

So, in decisive historical situations the bourgeois women's movement split or, as in the case of the German's women's movement, went over as a whole to defence of the fatherland. Worse still, it was characteristic of the bourgeois women's movement that it itself formed a feminist form of class collaboration which leading women's rights campaigners certainly used to demand voting rights—but for women of the ruling class, not a general right for women of all classes.

They also counterposed to the paternalism of individual employers a feminist programme of social reform and guardianship for the women of the "poor and uneducated" classes.

With the achievement of women's suffrage and other equal rights for women in the imperialist countries, the bourgeois women's movement in most cases faded from the political scene, the most right wing elements in Germany later going over to National Socialism.

The danger of bourgeois feminism for the working class was its attempt to incorporate all women into its ranks in the struggle for equal rights. In suffrage societies this often meant working class women being used as supporters for the campaigns for suffrage for women with property.

The linking of working class women to the bourgeois women's movement was a form of class collaboration which undermines the independence of working class women struggling for their own rights. Socialist women's movements have always been in sharp opposition to the attempts of bourgeois women to utilise their proletarian "sisters" for their own aims.

In addition to the dangers of class collaboration the demands of the bourgeois feminists were in some cases used to attack the working class. In particular in the USA the demands for equal white women's suffrage was argued for by the leading feminists on the basis that black men had no right to a vote that the white daughters of the bourgeoisie did not have. Their racism, and the support many of their leaders had given to the continuation of slavery, made them clear enemies of the working class.

Modern feminism

The second major phase of feminism emerged in the late 1960s and formed the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in the USA and western Europe which continued into the 1970s. The movements emerged as a result of the dramatic change in the material condition of women which had occurred since the Second World War.

The expansion of education and increasing employment opportunities for women in the long post-war boom led to a large number of women entering higher education and professional or white collar jobs. Improved contraception methods and better provision of abortion alongside this expansion of opportunities led to an increasing expectation by many of these women for equal rights.

The clear discrimination against women in education and employment, plus the social isolation they found when they left work to look after young families, were a stimulus to them to fight their oppression.

The militancy of the working class, particularly in May 1968, plus the radicalisation of students and youth through the civil rights and anti-war movements in the USA, the Vietnam solidarity campaigns in the USA and

western Europe acted as a spur to the mobilisation of women. Women workers took up their own demands for equal pay and improved conditions, union rights contraception and abortion rights, and women in the radical movements and in the organisations of the old and new left rebelled first against the sexism of their male "comrades", and later took up their own demands for equality and liberation. The WLM which grew in this period, unlike the first phase of feminism was, in political terms, petit bourgeois in character. It derived this character from its mass base amongst women of the intelligentsia, the upper white collar sections of the proletariat and students.

The composition of this new women's movement was a fragmented reflection of the political traditions and contemporary strengths of the workers' movements of the different countries. Likewise, the intensity of the class struggles influenced the direction and content of their interventions.

Feminism in the USA

In the USA, where the WLM grew first, there was a strong bourgeois element around the National Organisation of Women which was similar in composition, aims and methods to the early bourgeois feminists. In those parts of western Europe, where there were stronger organised labour movements, important sections of the WLM identified with the working class movement.

The major influences in the early WLM were the radical feminists of the USA, around groups such as the New York Red Stockings. These groups, in western Europe and the USA, were radical and militant, making a significant impact on the media and labour movement which had for so long ignored the question of women's oppression.

Combined with pressure from organised women workers for equal pay, childcare etc, there is no doubt that the early WLM made an important contribution to raising the question of women's liberation to the fore. In the face of the dominant sexism in the labour movement the organisation and mobilisation of women certainly represented a limited step forward.

But based as they were on a false ideology, feminism, they were unable to achieve fundamental changes in the position of women in society. Since the ability of the bosses to grant limited reforms to women depended upon the fortunes of the economy, the end of the post-war boom and the onset of recession forced the most progressive sections of the women's liberation movement to realise that they were fighting, not simply prejudice, but the whole nature of capitalist society.

Attempts to develop a theory and programme to deal with such fundamental questions led to major splits and divisions within the movement.

The origins of modern feminism

The feminism on the 1980s had its origins in these early splits, primarily from radical and socialist feminism, but increasingly a strand of liberal feminism has emerged.

Radical feminism

RADICAL FEMINISM emerged as a coherent and influential force as the WLM itself began to come up against the limits of its own programme and organisation.

It is based on attempts to theoretically define women as a distinct oppressed and exploited caste or class who should organise separately in opposition to their class enemy—men.

This is a consciously anti-Marxist approach which identifies working class men as enemies and bourgeois women as allies in the struggle for women's liberation.

There are various theoretical strands of radical feminism, but they are united by a concept of patriarchy as the underlying system of oppression, more fundamental than class relations.

Male power is at the root of women's oppression, according to radical feminism, and it is exercised against women through the state, the family and through individual relations between men and women.

The violence of men against women is the method by which men keep women subordinated and is therefore a central issue, leading to these groups concentrating on campaigns against rape and male violence.

In the 1980s this was extended from individual male violence to a concentration on military targets. Nuclear weapons were seen as the most extreme example of male power, and radical feminists set up peace camps and campaigns.

Radical feminism is essentially a petit bourgeois ideology which has profoundly reactionary positions on certain questions.

Firstly in arguing that men are the enemy it necessarily opposes any working class unity in the face of the bosses.

This has led to the exclusion of men from any WLM events, and in some groups to the exclusion of heterosexual women who were seen as collaborating with the enemy.

In some groups it even led to the refusal to allow male children into their creches!

Secondly, their concentration on male power, violence and sexuality has led many radical feminists to side with right wing pressure groups in campaigns against pornography, sex shops and cinemas.

They became part of a repressive lobby which encourages the state to ban films and books and harass people whose sexuality they disagree with.

Needless to say lesbian and gay publications proved to be one of the main targets of the state's anti-pornography legislation in Britain and the USA.

Finally, certain radical feminists argue that women should be given wages for housework, since they see the family as the place where men exploit the labour of women.

This is a backward slogan which does not lead to the economic independence of women through being drawn into social production, but to the reinforcement of the capitalist ideology which teaches that home is a distinct women's sphere. ■

Socialist feminism emerged as a specific current within the western women's movements during the 1970s, in response to radical feminism. It was a small tendency in the USA reflecting the weakness of the organised labour movement, but more influential in Britain, Italy, Holland and France. Many women in the WLM had been influenced by, and had participated in, the upsurge in working class women's activity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was especially true in Britain. Women from left groups in particular entered the WLM, either as individuals or in organised tendencies.

They found themselves facing radical feminist opposition to any orientation to the "male dominated" labour movement, and were unable to answer the radical feminist charges that Marxism could not explain women's oppression and that existing left organisations within social democracy, Stalinism and centrism had an appalling record on the woman question.

In fact it was not surprising that the left's record was so bad. The revolutionary communist position on the woman question and work amongst women had been first decisively developed in the Marxist classics of the nineteenth century and the healthy Comintern up to 1923. However, the rise of Stalinism and the domination of the working class movement by Stalinism and social democracy from the late 1920s onwards ensured that this position was buried.

The failure of centrist "Trotskyism"

After the war the groups claiming to be Trotskyist had not succeeded in reproducing the theoretical understanding of, and programme for, the woman question, let alone refining and developing either for the post war period.

The International Committee of the Fourth International tradition, and in Britain the Cliffite tradition, initially had a purely economistic response to the problems posed for revolutionaries by the rise of the WLM. They downplayed the woman question altogether, posing women's issues in exclusively trade unionist terms.

The WLM, having been characterised as petit bourgeois (a correct class appraisal but hardly the last word on the subject—after all other petit bourgeois movements, especially nationalist ones, were being cheered to the echo by these same groups), were simply dismissed.

Socialist feminism emerged in this climate. The result was that certain sections of the centrist left, especially the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) who sensed yet another new vanguard in the making, began to consciously adapt their politics to the socialist feminist movement.

The socialist feminists have developed a range of theoretical positions which attempt to link a Marxist understanding of history and class with what they see as a feminist understanding of women's oppression.

These theories have failed for a number of reasons. Firstly, they all agree that Marx's political economy is "sex-blind" and cannot explain the economic relationship of women to production and reproduction.

The fact that Marx never explored this relationship explicitly in his writings does not mean that his categories and methods are useless on the issue. Marx's historical materialism gives us the tools, as it did to Engels, to understand women's oppression in the context of the struggle of classes, explaining the social relations within which women are oppressed in terms of their relationship to the mode of production.

The errors of socialist feminism

Socialist feminist theories have tried to graft onto Marx other categories dealing with "modes of reproduction", which are relatively autonomous from the mode of production. These theories, varying greatly in their sophistication and understanding of Marx, all lead towards a conclusion whereby there is something separate about

the dynamic of women's oppression, a dynamic which goes beyond the fundamental class antagonisms which Marx outlined.

It is this conclusion which is false. It leads socialist feminists to theoretically justify their practice, which separates off a "woman question" into a distinct sphere.

A second, and related, weakness is that most socialist feminists share with radical feminism the notion of patriarchy—structures and ideas, autonomous from the particular class society which reproduce male domination—as something different from the relations of ruling class and its state.

Central to this is the idea that the family is the social unit within which women are oppressed directly by fathers, husbands or other male relatives, with the implication that they enjoy a class superiority over women.

This is fundamentally wrong. Like radical feminism this theory ends up targetting men, regardless of their class, as the enemy.

We argue that the family is a social relation necessary for capitalism and it is only the capitalists who really benefit from maintaining the family. It is for this reason that we reject the idea that "patriarchy" exists as a social relation within each individual family and is root cause of women's oppression. We do not totally reject the notion of patriarchy, however.

The family structure, with a male head dominating women and children within it, is patriarchal, and gives men prestige within the family and society. In previous class societies this family structure was based on an actual economic relation whereby male heads of families controlled the product of the labour of women and children.

For the mass of serf or peasant labourers this control did not give men any great advantages, since any surplus product was appropriated by the ruling lords and landowners. But within the family it gave men power to regulate the labour of their wives and children, and with this social domination.

Many socialist feminist theories fail to understand the working class family under capitalism because they have not seen the transformation of the role of that family. Their notion of patriarchy within the family is ahistorical, because they regard this as a constant structure of oppression alongside the historical development of class society and ignore the changed social function of the family and male dominance in the working class.

Thus socialist feminism does not represent a qualitative break with the errors of radical feminism, and remains tied to a utopian, and ultimately reformist, programme.

Since socialist feminism shares radical feminism's notion of a separate dynamic to the question of women's oppression, the terrain upon which they concentrate their demands and struggles is also shared. They have been most active around questions related to male violence, sexuality and fertility.

Within the labour movement they have been raising issues of sexism, action programmes for women in the unions and workplace, and campaigns for men to take more responsibility for housework and childcare.

Whilst all of these are issues which revolutionaries must take up, socialist feminists in fact avoid the fundamental problem facing women: capitalism. They also reject the idea that working class women must be in the vanguard of a struggle for women's liberation, preferring to retain their alliances with radical feminists and petit bourgeois or bourgeois allies in a cross-class women's movement.

Socialist feminists have argued that male workers are not a natural ally of working class women. Rather they are a group who, whilst oppressing women, are a major part of the only class which has the potential to create the economic prerequisites for women's liberation, i.e. socialism. They argue, therefore, that male workers are a temporary ally in some struggles but will ultimately become a force women have to organise against.

The USFI, at the forefront of the struggle to bring feminism into the socialist movement rather than revolutionary politics into the women's movement, argued in the 1970s that women were a natural ally of the working class. By this they meant all women.

This is an incorrect and misleading notion which deflects from the problem of clear conflicting class interests between bourgeois and proletarian women. It is working class men, not enemy bourgeois "sisters", who are the "natural" allies of working class women in the sense that they share an objective interest and can subjectively recognise this in the course of struggle.

Feminism in the imperialised world

Just as the bourgeois revolution and the advent of industrial capitalism propelled women in the western world into campaigning for female emancipation, so the impact of imperialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the growth of nationalist movements in these continents, propelled women in these countries into a battle against reaction, obscurantism and social oppression.

Modernisation—industrialisation and the transformation of infrastructures and of agriculture—became a central plank of the programme of various bourgeois nationalist movements and of many national bourgeoisies in the semi-colonies. The extension of education, bourgeois democratic rights and, as part of this, more rights for women, were a necessary component of the bourgeois nationalist programme for modernisation.

If the new ruling classes were to educate their own next generation they needed educated women and families based on western monogamy. It was also the case that religious and cultural traditions could hold back progress in the countryside and prevent the freeing of female labour there which the developing industries needed.

Progressive women's organisations as far apart as Egypt, Korea and South Africa grew as part of the modern nationalist movements. Some nationalist governments such as Ataturk's in Turkey and Sun Yat Sen's in China spearheaded a drive against the particularly vicious subjugation of women that had been a feature of life in the Ottoman Empire and imperial China.

Early feminist movements in the colonies and semi-colonies thus found more support, relatively speaking, from sections of the nationalist bourgeoisie, than their sisters in the west found from the imperialist ruling classes.

But this support had definite limits. First, there have been times and places where nationalism has gone hand in hand with profound reaction on the woman question (Islamic Fundamentalism in Iran and other parts of the Middle East is a recent example, but nationalists in the 1920s were equally capable of turning on women's rights, as they were every gain made by the masses in the anti-imperialist struggle).

Second, for the new ruling classes of the semi-colonies, limited emancipation and the establishment of western style monogamy were enough for their purposes.

A free and independent womanhood would be a threat to the established order which they now presided over

Feminism and anti-imperialism

FOR THE MOST part bourgeois feminism in the colonies and semi-colonies mirrored western feminism in paying little attention to the needs of the great mass of working class, urban poor or peasant women.

Where they were paid attention, their independent interests would be subsumed within the general bourgeois reforming programme.

The Comintern in the early 1920s, made a determined effort, through the establishment of the Communist Women's International, to bring working class and communist leadership to the progressive women's organisations of the east and to rouse working class and peasant women independently of the bourgeoisie.

With the degeneration of the Comintern from the mid-1920s however, these efforts ceased and many of the gains were lost. Nevertheless the specific interests of working class and peasant women, and their understanding that imperialist domination was placing ever greater burdens on them, led to the participation of substantial numbers of these women in anti-imperialist movements that developed during and after World War Two, including in the armed struggle, for instance in China, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

At the same time, these women challenged their traditional subordinate roles or sought to preserve and extend their independence as capital uprooted the peasant family and placed ever increasing burdens on their shoulders.

The spread of socialist and Marxist ideas within such anti-imperialist movements encouraged the demands for equality and the organisation of women.

But the hegemony of Stalinism and the programme of petit bourgeois nationalism has led to these movements being tied to either the new ruling bureaucracies, or the new bourgeois governments such as in Zimbabwe.

Today women's organisations of a cultural, political or welfare-providing character exist in every country of the globe. Women play a crucial role in the life and leadership of the working class in the barrios, shanty towns and workplaces of the imperialised world. Western feminism is often viewed with suspicion. Its preoccupation with lifestyles seems light years away from the daily struggles for existence confronting the majority of the world's women.

But this does not mean that feminism does not exist or is not influential.

Working class and peasant women are taking up, not only the fight against poverty and exploitation, but also the battles against "machismo", dowry deaths, the seizure of land held by women and sexual brutality.

Where feminism, with its theory of a separate or parallel struggle against patriarchy and its strategy of a cross class women's movement can appear to provide the answer to these problems it will continue to grow until communist leadership provides an alternative to it. ■

and to the institution of the family. In these cases feminist movements either died out after the achievement of independence or maintained a tenuous existence until a new generation of women were able to take up the unsolved questions.

Feminism and the labour movement

Towards the end of the 1970s and right through the 1980s feminism moved into increasingly defensive struggles. Following the defeats of the workers' movement that occurred in western Europe and the USA they turned away from pseudo-revolutionary strategies—whether socialist or radical—towards reformist ones.

Amongst the radical feminists anti-pornography campaigns became crucial and were centred on fighting lengthy and elaborate court battles. Amongst the socialist feminists there was a major turn towards the social democratic parties and even to some extent, in the USA, the openly bourgeois Democratic Party.

Women's units became part and parcel of the various social democratic local and national government apparatuses. Cadres from the WLM became well known leading activists inside the reformist parties.

The radical demands for "liberation" were hushed up as women's movement activists put their university degrees to work in "women's studies" departments, government "equality" units or feminist publishing houses.

The growth of such political areas showed that the state had been forced to take up the issues of women's rights in a greater way than ever before. In all the major (and many minor) imperialist countries state agencies, education departments and most of the major bourgeois parties began to openly address the issues of improved opportunities for women. This development is no doubt in part due to the lobbying of women from the WLM and other organisations such as trade unions, but it would be wrong to assign all the credit to the feminist movement.

In fact these developments reflect the actual changing role of women in society, with increasing numbers of women working and better control over fertility allowing women to play a more central role at all levels of society, whilst continuing their family role. The expansion of state provision of health care, welfare and other facilities drew women into work and gave them greater opportunities to participate in education, politics and other social activities.

Whilst the WLM undoubtedly influenced the way in which women were drawn into state administration and political life, the tendency occurred even where there was little or no organised feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

For example, in Sweden there was a tiny WLM, although reformist women's groups had remained in existence since "first wave" feminism.

Yet it is in Sweden where women have had the highest involvement in public life—28% of members of parliament in 1984, compared with 3.5% in Britain, 5.9% in France and 7.9% in Italy (1983), all of which had much larger WLMs.

The expansion of women's involvement in the state and other arenas has drawn many feminists (particularly from the socialist feminist camp) into mainstream politics, away from their consciousness-raising, alternative lifestyle building of the 1970s. This has included a significant increase in bureaucratic women's posts in the trade unions which have attracted many socialist feminists.

Likewise women have been drawn into local state administration. In these latter posts the chronic limitations of the feminists and their utopian strategies are most sharply revealed: no end of women's units, equal opportunities programmes or women's studies courses have significantly altered the position of working class women.

Welfare agencies such as women's refuges and rape crisis centres have provided temporary respite for some women from the extremes of brutality, but resources pumped into these areas will never solve the underlying problem.

As feminists get drawn into state administration they can, at best, help patch up the worst examples of women's oppression, but as capitalism's crises intensify even these small gains are threatened. At worst, and most commonly, feminists in government positions become advocates for bourgeois politics, albeit with a "pro-woman" facade.

"Feminist" incomes policies (take from the male workers to pay the women better), "men out first" solutions to unemployment—are demonstrations of the ultimate problem with all variations of feminism: a programme which, since it fails to address the question of capitalism, fails to put forward a strategy for working class unity in the face of the bosses' offensive, ends up being a liberal camouflage for bourgeois politics.

The current period of capitalist crises makes the tasks of building a revolutionary party capable of leading the working class, men and women, to power an urgent necessity. Winning women away from the false ideas of feminism is an essential part of the building of that party. ■

Revolutionary politics and women

THERE IS A TRADITION of organising women that does not belong to the feminist movement. Women workers have organised themselves in the course of many struggles over the last one hundred years, and the socialist movement played a central role in the most important examples of such organisation which occurred independently, and generally in opposition to, bourgeois womens' movements.

The tradition of the Second International

Before World War One, the Second International, and its unofficial leading party the SPD, organised working class women into an explicitly socialist women's movement. This was led by left wing members of the SPD including Clara Zetkin who played a central role in both the German women's movement and the International Socialist Women's organisation.

Initially women were not allowed to be members of the SPD because of the repressive laws in Germany at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This led to Zetkin organising a network of women through a semi-legal parallel structure to that of the SPD.

Whilst forced separation like this made it difficult for women to play a full and active role in the main party, it did allow them to struggle for their own demands, and organise themselves in ways which made it easier for new women to be drawn into politics.

Once the laws in Germany were relaxed and women allowed to be members of political parties there was no longer a reason for a women's organisation simply as a surrogate for party membership for socialist women.

Yet Zetkin fought successfully to retain and expand the women's movement for by that time she and other party leaders, both men and women, had realised the importance of special forms of organisation and propaganda aimed at women. This did not mean that Zetkin founded a socialist women's organisation politically and organisationally divorced from the party. Rather what she fought for was a special organisation led by party members to draw women out of the backwardness, passivity and low level of culture imposed on them by their age-long oppression and maintained by capitalist exploitation.

Zetkin also learned in struggle that it was not only women who were "backward". Because the women's movement and its principal leaders stood on the revolutionary left of the SPD, as the party came to be dominated by party and trade union bureaucrats in the years before the First World War, the increasingly reformist leadership sought to subordinate it to their control and at the same time to dilute its radicalism by turning it into a mass social organisation for the wives of male party members, undermining its political character and orientation to women workers' struggles.

Zetkin and the other women around the paper Die Gleicheit ("Equality") continued their revolutionary struggle against the right wing in the workers' movement and its indifference to the full emancipation of women.

This did not mean that Zetkin was in favour of separate socialist women's organisations. She always argued for women to be full members of the Socialist, and later the Communist Parties.

The special oppression and exploitation to which women were subjected, the backwardness and illiteracy of many working women and the discrimination and underestimation which they experienced even in the SPD in respect of their demands, made it necessary for them to have special methods of work, pioneered by Zetkin (their own press, special meetings and special forms of organisation).

On important questions, such as voting rights in Germany and Austria, the right wing of the Social Democratic leadership was prepared to sacrifice women's demands for the good of a compromise with the rulers.

This expressed both the growing bureaucratic reformism and, equally, the historically determined lack of analysis of women's oppression and absence of a revolutionary women's programme. Although even Clara Zetkin was not free of these weaknesses it was she who fought against the giving up of the demand for women's voting rights. The tradition of the German Socialist Women's movement, always in sharp opposition to the bourgeois feminists, is a valuable lesson for us. Attempts to build such movements in other countries were less successful but still important, for example the united attempts of Bolshevik and Menshevik women, such as Alexandra Kollontai, to build a movement of women workers in Russia in the period 1905-7.

These attempts were encouraged by the International Women's Bureau. This, being led by left Social Democrats like Zetkin, played an important role at the outbreak of World War One in trying to rally an international opposition to the chauvinist betrayal of the leaders of the Second International.

From the Third to the Fourth International

After the betrayal of the working class by the Second International in 1914 the struggle for the foundation of what was to become the Communist International, began. The defence of a revolutionary position on women was no less important than the many other issues taken up by the Bolsheviks and left wing of Social Democracy.

The 1917 Revolution in Russia involved large mobilisations of. The February Revolution actually began with strikes and demonstrations of working class women in Petrograd on International Women's Day.

The Bolsheviks had been doing work amongst women in this period, but it was between February and October that they really tried to build a mass movement of working class women. After, to some extent stormy, internal discussions they set up a Bolshevik women's bureau to lead this work.

After the revolution this was transformed into the Zhenotdel (women's departments). The movement of women that the Bolsheviks built was communist-led, but directed its efforts towards drawing non-Party women into joint activity with them. This included special conferences for working women, special representatives of factory and peasant women on local committees and state organisations. This movement was not "separate" in the sense of being autonomous (it was led by Bolshevik women), although it did allow women workers to participate in conferences, adopting resolutions etc, which were sent to the Soviet government. Neither was it an attempt to lead women into a distinct area of struggle.

It had two main aims which Alexandra Kollontai, Lenin and other leading Bolsheviks were clear about. It was

to draw women into the Party and the tasks of building socialism through their own direct participation in work, soviets and the state.

Special forms of work, organisation and propaganda were necessary to achieve this because the women were backward, isolated in the family, and often had to unite with other women to overcome the sexist reaction of the men around them who would rather their wives and daughters had left the politics up to them.

The women's movement was also necessary to express the interests of women, to ensure that they were taken up by the Soviet leadership. Neither of these reasons led to the need for a separate organisation, since at all times it was thoroughly integrated into the Party, the unions and the Soviets. As Lenin argued, "This is not bourgeois 'feminism'; it is a practical revolutionary expediency."

The transition to NEP in 1921 which Lenin recognised as a necessary retreat for the young workers' state led to a heavy defeat for women. They were the first to lose their jobs and the socialisation of housework was postponed. On the one hand this was the result of the objective economic backwardness of Russia, on the other its was made easier by a serious gap in the programme and, above all the mass agitation, of the Bolsheviks in pursuit of women's emancipation (e.g. the underestimation of gender-specific division of labour, lack of criticism of sexual oppression).

The Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 adopted theses on "Methods and forms of work among Communist Party women". They outlined the key positions on how national sections should organise and build departments for work among women. This included all the key tactics used by the Bolsheviks and the German socialist women's movement.

The International urged sections to do special work among women in the unions, workplaces, communities etc. This, had it been carried out by the sections, would have led to the kind of mass communist women's movement which developed in the Soviet union.

The theses offer a correct perspective for work in a period when there were mass communist parties in a position to win the vanguard of the working class, men and women, to their banner through mass work.

Trotsky kept alive, just, this revolutionary perspective on work amongst women. He noted and opposed the process of Thermidor in the family in the USSR and argued for the defence of those rights to abortion, easy divorce and soon, that were won by the revolution and betrayed by Stalin.

However, the struggle of the Left Opposition, and of Trotsky, against the bureaucratic counter-revolution, which advanced even in the areas of family life, sexual morality and women's rights, did not sufficiently integrate these issues into their overall programme.

Thus even though Trotsky was one of the first to warn of the reactionary effects of the Soviet bureaucracy, the Fourth International was too weak and too isolated to be able to undertake an actual further development of the programme, though its founding document, The Transitional Programme, in stark contrast to the programmes of the Stalinists and social democrats, raised the slogan "open the door to the woman worker".

With the post war degeneration of the FI into centrism it was inevitable that the revolutionary position on the woman question held to by Trotsky, should be dumped along with his revolutionary programme in relation to Stalinism and social democracy. While the occasional document was penned on the woman question little or nothing of note was added to the arsenal of Marxism on this question by the FI.

The errors of Wilhelm Reich

A further contribution, which should not be underestimated, was made by the Sex-Pol movement under Willhelm Reich in the early 1930s in Germany and Austria.

Reich attempted to build a sexual-revolutionary movement, based primarily on women and youth, within the context of the revolutionary workers' movement, using the methods of psychoanalysis.

At first it had some success but was soon discontinued by the Stalinist leadership of the KPD. Whilst Reich was right to see sexual misery/deprivation as an important area for communist mass propaganda and showed some interesting inter-connections between the social oppression of sexuality and susceptibility to reactionary ideologies, his initiative was, nonetheless, limited.

Reich overestimated the contribution of sexual repression to the development of false consciousness within the working class and underestimated the extent to which false consciousness is based on the very nature of the wage labour form.

He overlooked the decisive significance of the united front as a tactic against reformism and over-emphasised sexual enlightenment. In addition he stood for a normative heterosexual genitality which characterised departures from this norm as deviant forms of orgasm and pathological forms of sexuality. ■

For a working class women's movement!

IT IS TO THE TRADITION of the German and Russian revolutionary working class women's movements and of Trotsky and the early FI's defence of the revolutionary position on the woman question that we look, and which we seek to develop.

Not because we slavishly copy their positions and actions, but because they represent an invaluable experience of working class women's leadership in the struggle for the emancipation of women. It is also necessary to re-assert the Marxist positions developed in those periods, against the capitulation of social democracy and Stalinism to bourgeois positions on women.

We fight today for the building of a mass movement of working class women, based in the workplaces, the unions and the working class communities.

Like the movements in Germany and Russia, such a movement would not be separated off, but rooted in the mass organisations of the working class. Its fighting strategy must not be restricted to economic issues alone, or to the sectional interests of "working women" alone.

Its programme must be one of struggle against all aspects of the oppression of women under capitalism—against all attacks on abortion and contraception rights, against the physical violence suffered by women, against all the effects of capitalism in crisis such as low wages, job insecurity, rising rents and prices, health service cuts etc. A working class women's movement would give a lead in these struggles.

Within such a movement revolutionary communists would fight for their programme and for leadership against the reformists, feminists and centrists. Revolutionaries would fight to win women to membership of the Party in order that they are fused in struggle with the overall struggles of the working class.

To those who say that a movement of working class women would divide the working class and lead to separatism and bourgeois feminism rather than revolutionary struggle, we reply: firstly, the class is already divided along sex lines by the fact of the oppression of women which leads to the privileges many male workers actively defend (by such methods as excluding women from certain craft unions), and the sexism which pervades the class.

In these conditions for women to participate fully and equally in the labour movement, they will have to fight for their voices to be heard, for their participation to

be taken seriously and for the class as a whole to take up the demands of women.

Secondly, a working class women's movement is necessary to reach women who are trapped in the family and outside social production and thus are prey to backward ideas and form a potential pool of support for reaction. Thirdly, whatever we may argue as revolutionary communists, working class women's movements will emerge spontaneously in the course of struggles.

Working women organise

In country after country, working class women find themselves thrust into political activity and leadership in the townships, democratic movements and trade unions with a tendency to form their own organisations. They have formed sections and caucuses in the unions and create equal pay and pro-abortion campaigns.

They have formed women's organisations to support male workers in struggle such as in support of the miners in Bolivia and Britain, organisations which promoted class unity and solidarity. At the same time the creation of these women's support groups reflected the recognition that the women had something distinct to offer, and strengthened their own ability to participate in the struggle even when met with sexist hostility.

The building of a really revolutionary women's movement led by communist women cadre will challenge both the sexism and hostility encountered in sections of the organised labour movement and the sexism, prejudice and obstacles women workers face in the home.

The party and particularly its women members will have to consciously struggle around these issues inside the working class and within its own ranks insofar as manifestations of sexism occur in the Party.

If communists do not intervene with a clear programme for building working class women's movements, then the leadership of these organisations will be left to the reformists and feminists and to domination by alien class forces.

We are here posing the question of the united front. To both workers' organisations and feminists alike we argue that working class women are suffering oppression, facing intensified attack in periods of capitalist crises and need to fight back. They should put no faith in the existing reformist leaders in the unions, nor in the Stalinist or social democratic parties, nor in the petit bourgeois nationalist movements and parties.

But we recognise that in the current period where revolutionaries are a very small section of the class, it would be sectarian and infantile to restrict our call to the building of a Party women's department or a "communist women's movement".

The vast majority of working class women look to reformist leaders and parties to take up their struggles. We argue for putting demands on these leaders, for calling them to account, and for working class women's self organisation to prevent the leadership's betrayals.

But the united front is never an end in itself. It exists not only to unite for struggle but to put competing leaderships, reformist, centrist and revoltuionary, to the test—i.e. it is a tactic whereby revolutionaries can win the leadership of the masses from all other leaderships.

Nor can it be turned into an evolutionary process. As with other united fronts the reformists and centrists will try, and often succeed, in splitting the working class women's movements. Communists are not afraid of taking responsibility for leading an explicitly communist women's movement fighting against the reformist as well as the bourgeois women's movements.

After a successful revolution it is clear that it is the task of communists to expand or build a truly mass women's movement on the basis of a communist action programme. In the event of other parties of the workers and peasants rallying to the proletarian dictatorship, a mass communist women's movement may retain its united front character.

But in any case it is necessary to build a movement led by communist women to organise special forms of agitation and work amongst women with the aim of drawing party and non-party women into the active struggle for their own emancipation.

This would include organisational measures such as democratic self governing conferences and local committees, which will be complementary to, rather than counterposed to, participation in the organisations of the working class (the party, unions and soviets).

We do not apologise for seeking to win and to hold the mass working class leadership for communism. Our strategic goal therefore remains throughout a mass commmunist women's movement. Throughout the struggle for this and in all united fronts which may be tactically necessary the communist organisation has the duty to organise its women members as a communist fraction under full party discipline.

The importance of intervening in the workplace

The core of the working class and communist women's movement must lie with women organised in the workplace. This involves organising to ensure that the trade unions take up women's issues, building caucuses in the unions to allow women to discuss their special oppression and build fighting confidence, drawing more women into the unions and developing class consciousness.

In organising against the bureaucracy which refuses to take women's demands seriously, it will be part of the struggle to build a rank and file opposition and alternative leadership. But a working class women's movement will also draw in women organised on the estates, in the barrios and townships, and it will reach into the countryside to the mass of peasant women suffering grinding poverty and oppression.

Building such a movement is not an optional extra for revolutionaries, but an essential part of the struggle to unite the working class and its allies in the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism.

In the imperialised countries it may be necessary to apply the anti-imperialist united front with bourgeois and

petit bourgeois forces for the winning of progressive measures

Revolutionary tactics

Whilst recognising that the fight for women's liberation is inseparable from the fight for socialism, we do not ignore the question of democratic rights and the struggles of feminists on these issues.

We support the fight for democratic reforms which would grant women equal recognition under the law, over property, in politics etc. The experience of feminism has been that such "rights" are difficult to achieve and retain even under so-called liberal democratic regimes.

As with all democratic demands only the working class in power can guarantee such rights. In supporting the struggle for equal suffrage, for example, we fight for suffrage for all, not equal propertied suffrage or equal suffrage based on race or religious group. We would call on workers to organise and take industrial action in support of such demands, linking their attainment to the question of working class power.

We seek to draw petit bourgeois feminists into united action with the working class in the fight for democratic or other demands. We do reject the creation of a popular front of bourgeois and workers' parties in the name of achieving such democratic reforms. Such cross-class alliances in effect tie the workers to a bourgeois programme and deny the working class parties independence.

The WLM of the 1960s and 1970s was based on mainly petit bourgeois forces and professional and white collar workers. In its politics it espoused the desirability of an alliance with bourgeois women, but these women in general shunned the approach and continued in their own organisations.

Revolutionaries need to be in constant argument with women in the working class, plus students and intellectuals, who joined and were active in the WLM. Joint activity around issues like abortion can provide the arena for winning such women away from feminism to revolutionary politics.

The building of a revolutionary tendency inside any mass petit bourgeois feminist movement could be an important tactic for a revolutionary party, but in no way implies a concession to political autonomy or separatism, since the communist women would oppose such practices and use all opportunities to build links with organised workers, male or female. But we defend the right of a proletarian women's movement to independent organisational structures (for instance women's fractions in trade unions) and cultural forms of expression (for instance women only social events).

The question of the party

For Marxists a coherent strategy for the seizure of power by the working class—a programme—is inseparable from organised militants fighting for that programme and applying it tactically—a party. The question of women's liberation is itself an integral part of that programme and women communists an integral part of that party—both in its leadership and rank and file cadre.

Such a party must fight sexism in its own ranks, amongst militant workers and in the working class at large. To do this it must take special measures to strengthen and support women within the party and the class.

To this end the right of women to caucus and the provision of creche facilities, in order to facilitate the participation of mothers in political meetings, are vital.

Communists propagate the principle that as long as housework and child rearing is not fully socialised, men are politically and morally obliged to participate accordingly.

Whilst these rights must be guaranteed, we reject absolutely the view that the democratic centralist party is inimical to the full participation of women, that women must organise, separately and exclusively, "their struggle" because they alone have subjective experience of their oppression.

Whilst the latter is a vital component of working out strategy and tactics, women's oppression and its relationship to class society was not discovered by subjective experience alone (any more than was working class exploitation). It was, is and will be analysed by scientific work for which the party as a whole is the necessary vehicle. Women workers will be vital to the building of a revolutionary party as they will be for the building of socialism after the creation of a workers' state. Without the leadership of a revolutionary party the spontaneous struggles of women will be unable to draw together the lessons of past struggles, and mount an effective challenge to the reformist leaders of the labour movement, or the feminist leaders of the women's movement.

Any victories such spontaneous struggles achieve would risk being partial and temporary, and would fail to address the fundamental issues of women's oppression and class exploitation unless, that is, they were won in the course of struggle to the revolutionary party with its programme for women's liberation and socialism.

It is to the task of building such a party, and a mass communist-led working class women's movement, that the League for a Revolutionary Communist International commits itself. ■

Where we stand

The Leauge for a Revolutionary Communist International has sections in Britain (Workers Power), Ireland (Irish Workers Group), France (Pouvoir Ouvrier), Bolivia (Poder Obrero), Austria (ArbeiterStandpunkt), Germany (Gruppe Arbeitermacht), Peru (Poder Obrero) and New Zealand/ Aotearoa (Workers Power).

The LRCI bases its programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the documents of the first four congresses of the Third (Communist) International and on the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International.

Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need.

Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The mass Labour and Socialist parties are not truly socialist parties. They are bourgeois workers' parties—bourgeois in their politics and practice, but based on the working class and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are favour of breaking workers within those organisations away from reformism and winning them to the revolutionary party.

In the trade unions we fight for a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production.

We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class—factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

The first victorious working class revolution, the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, established a workers' state. But Stalin and the bureaucracy destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country".

In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The corrupt, parasitic bureaucratic caste has led these states to crisis and destruction. We are for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through proletarian political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We oppose the restoration of capitalism and recognise that only workers' revolution can defend the post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism.

Internationally, Stalinist Communist Parties have consistently betrayed the working class. Their strategy of alliances with the bourgeoisie (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist and their influence in the workers' movement must be defeated.

We fight against the oppression that capitalist society inflicts on people because of their race, age, sex, or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. We politically oppose the nationalists (bourgeois and petit bourgeois) who lead the struggles of the oppressed nations. To their strategy we counterpose the strategy of permanent revolution, that is the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle by the working class with a programme of socialist revolution and internationalism.

In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of "our own" army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LRCI is pledged to fight the centrism of the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International and to refound a Leninist Trotskyist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. We combine the struggle for a re-elaborated transitional programme with active involvement in the struggles of the working class—fighting for revolutionary leadership.

If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist—join us!

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