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Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation

Draft Resolution for Fifth World Congress Since Reunification (11th World Congress)

Submitted by Mary-Alice Waters

INTRODUCTION

The following resolution was originally drafted in 1973 at the request of the United Secretariat in preparation for the February 1974 world congress of the Fourth International. It was published in the International Internal Discussion Bulletin in November 1973. (See IIDB Vol. X, No. 22.)

The women's liberation point was taken off the agenda on the eve of the 1974 congress, but the written discussion remained open and it was agreed to place it on the agenda for the next world congress, now scheduled for early 1978.

A number of changes have been made in the current editing of the resolution to take into account the development of the international women's liberation movement during the last three years.

The basic Marxist positions on women's oppression are part of the programmatic foundations of the Fourth International. However, we are discussing and adopting a full resolution on women's liberation for the first time in the international's history. With that in mind, the purpose of the following resolution is to set down our basic analysis of the character of women's oppression, and the place the struggle against that oppression occupies in our perspectives for all three sectors of the world revolution.

Conjunctural questions concerning tactics that guide our work in the women's liberation movement will be part of the pre-world congress discussion, reflecting our growing involvement in the movement in many countries. This resolution, however, focuses on the more fundamental questions of analysis and political line that differentiate revolutionary Marxism from the various bourgeois, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist currents against which we contend. Its goal is to provide a basic orientation for the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

I. THE CHARACTER OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

The New Rise of Women's Struggles

1. Since the late 1960s a growing revolt by women against their oppression as a sex has emerged. Throughout the world, millions of women, especially young women—students, working women, housewives—are beginning to challenge some of the most fundamental features of their centuries-old oppression.

The first country in which this radicalization of women appeared in a significant way was the United States. It was announced by the blossoming of thousands of women's liberation groups and in the mobilization of tens of thousands of women in the August 26, 1970, demonstrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the

victorious conclusion of the American women's suffrage struggle.

But the new wave of struggles by women in North America was not an exceptional and isolated development, as the spread of the women's liberation movement through the advanced capitalist countries soon demonstrated. In country after country, large-scale campaigns against reactionary abortion and contraception regulations as well as medieval marriage laws rapidly confirmed that the fight for women's liberation must be regarded as a fundamental component of the new rise of the world revolution.

In many countries this new rise of women's struggles preceded any widespread changes in the combativity of the organized labor movement. In every case, the movement rose outside of and independent from the existing mass organizations of the working class, which were then obliged to respond to this new phenomenon. But the women's liberation movement came upon the historical scene as part of a more general upsurge of the working class, which took many forms, from economic strikes, to struggles against national oppression, to student demonstrations, to an international movement against the imperialist war in Vietnam.

2. This radicalization of women is unprecedented in the depth of the economic, social and political ferment it expresses and in its implications for the struggle against capitalist oppression and exploitation.

Growing numbers of women are raising demands that challenge the specific forms the oppression of women takes under capitalism today. They are demanding the right to be able to participate with complete equality in all forms of economic and cultural activity—for example, equal education, equal access to jobs, equal pay for equal work.

In order to make this equality possible, women are searching for ways to end their domestic servitude. They are demanding that women's household chores be socialized. The most conscious recognize that society, as opposed to the individual family unit, should take responsibility for the young, the old, and the sick.

At the very center of the emerging women's liberation movement has been the fight to decriminalize abortion and make it available to all women. The right to control their own bodies, to *choose* whether to bear children, when, and how many, is seen by millions of women as an elementary precondition for their liberation.

Such demands go to the very heart of the specific oppression of women exercised through the family and strike at the pillars of class society.

3. The rise of women's liberation struggles on an international scale is one of the clearest symptoms of the depth of the social crisis of the bourgeois order today.

These struggles illustrate the degree to which the outmoded capitalist relations and institutions generate deepening contradictions in every sector of society and

breed new expressions of the class struggle. The death agony of capitalism brings new layers into direct conflict with the fundamental needs and prerogatives of the bourgeoisie, and brings forth new allies for the working class in its struggle to overthrow the capitalist system.

The fact that the women's liberation movement emerged as an international phenomenon even prior to the exacerbation of capitalism's worldwide economic problems in the mid-1970s only serves to underscore the deep social roots of this rebellion.

4. Women's oppression has been an essential feature of class society throughout the ages. But the practical tasks of uprooting its causes, as well as combating its effects, could not be posed on a mass scale before the era of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The fight for women's liberation is inseparable from the workers' struggle to abolish capitalism. It constitutes an integral part of the socialist revolution and the communist perspective of a classless society.

The replacement of the patriarchal family system rooted in private property by a superior organization of human relations is the prime objective of the socialist revolution. This process will accelerate and deepen as the material and ideological foundations of the new communist order are brought into being.

The development of the women's liberation movement today advances the class struggle, strengthens its forces, and enhances the prospects for socialism.

5. Women can achieve their liberation only through the victory of the world socialist revolution. This goal can be realized only by mobilizing masses of women as a powerful component of the class struggle. Therein lies the objective revolutionary dynamic of the struggle of women's liberation and the fundamental reason why the Fourth International must concern itself with, and help to provide revolutionary leadership for, women struggling to achieve their liberation.

Origin and Nature of Women's Oppression

1. The oppression of women is not determined by their biology, as many contend. Its origins are historical, economic, and social in character. Throughout the evolution of pre-class and class society, women's reproductive function has always been the same. But their social status has not always been that of a degraded domestic servant, subject to man's control and command.

2. In preclass society, where social production was organized communally and its product shared equally, there was no basis for exploitation or oppression of one social group or sex by another. Both sexes participated in assuring the sustenance and survival of all, with women playing a leadership role. The social status of both women and men reflected the roles each of the sexes performed in social production and the activities of everyday life.

3. The origin of women's oppression is intertwined with the growing productivity of human labor based on agriculture and stock raising; with the rise of new divisions of labor, craftsmanship, and commerce; with the private appropriation of an increasing social surplus; with the development of the possibility for some humans to prosper from the exploitation of the labor of others; that is, with the passage from preclass to class society.

Along with the private accumulation of wealth, the

patriarchal family developed as the institution by which responsibility for the unproductive members of society—especially the young—was transferred from society as a whole to an identifiable individual or small group of individuals. It was the primary institution for perpetuating from one generation to the next the class divisions of society—divisions between those who possessed property and lived off the wealth produced by the labor of others, and those who, owning no property, had to work for others to live. The destruction of the egalitarian and communal traditions and structures of preclass society was essential for the rise of an exploiting class and its accelerated private accumulation of wealth.

As the exploitation of human beings became profitable for a privileged few, women as a sex became valuable property. Like cattle, they were a source of wealth. They could produce new human beings whose labor could be exploited. Thus the purchase of women by men along with all rights to their future offspring arose as one of the economic and social institutions of the new social order based on private property.

All women, including the wives and daughters of the new possessing class, were progressively deprived of an independent role in social production and relegated to basically domestic chores as men took over the new social divisions of labor. This brought about the subordinate status of women on which the cohesiveness and continuity of the patriarchal family depends. If women could simply take their children and leave, without suffering any economic or social hardship, the patriarchal family would not have survived through the millennia. Thus the subjugation of women was based on the historical dialectic of economic and social factors, not biology.

Deprived of an independent productive role in society, women's social status was increasingly defined by their reproductive capacities. Like land, livestock, and slaves (both male and female), women became the private property of the men who owned them. Indeed, the word family itself, which is still used in the Latin-based languages today to designate the basic economic unit of class society, comes from the original Latin *famulus*, which means household slave and *familia*, the totality of slaves belonging to one man.

The patriarchal family, based on the subjugation of women, thus came into existence along with the other institutions of class society in order to buttress class divisions and perpetuate the private accumulation of wealth. The state, with its police and armies, laws and courts, enforced this. Ruling-class ideology, including religion, arose on this basis and played a vital role in justifying the degradation of the female sex.

Women, it was said, were physically and mentally inferior to men and therefore were "naturally" or biologically the second sex. While the subjugation of women has always had different consequences for women of distinct classes, all women regardless of class are oppressed as part of the female sex.

4. The family system is the institution of class society that determines and maintains the specific character of the oppression of women as a sex.

5. Through the history of class society, the family system has proved its value as an institution of class rule. The form of the family has evolved and adapted itself to the changing needs of the ruling classes as the modes of production and forms of private property have gone

through different stages of development.

The family system simultaneously fulfills different requirements in relationship to classes whose historical interests are diametrically opposed. What could today be called the bourgeois "family" and the petty-bourgeois "family" serve very different social and economic functions. Together, however, they constitute the contemporary form of the family *system*—an economic and social institution of class rule whose important social functions have remained constant throughout the history of class society. While the patriarchal family system to some extent and in a distorted way allows for the fulfillment of various individual human needs, such as love and companionship, this in no way defines the basic nature of the family system.

a. The family is the basic economic unit of class society. It is the mechanism through which the ruling class abrogates social responsibility for the well-being of the direct producers—the masses of humanity. The ruling class tries, to the degree possible, to force each family to be responsible for its own.

b. The family system provides the means for passing on property ownership from one generation to the next. It is the basic social mechanism for perpetuating the division of society into classes.

c. For the ruling classes, the family system provides the most inexpensive and ideologically acceptable mechanism for reproducing human labor. It enforces a social division of labor in which women are fundamentally reduced to a reproductive role and assigned limited tasks immediately associated with this reproductive function: care of the other family members. Thus the family institution rests on and reinforces a social division of labor involving the domestic subjugation and economic dependence of women.

d. The family system is a repressive and conservatizing institution that reproduces within itself the hierarchical, authoritarian relationships necessary to the maintenance of class society as a whole. It fosters the possessive, competitive, and aggressive attitudes necessary to the perpetuation of class divisions.

It molds the behavior and character structure of children from infancy through adolescence. It trains, disciplines, and polices them, teaching submission to established authority. It then curbs rebellious, nonconformist impulses. It represses sexuality, forcing it into socially acceptable channels of male and female sexual activity for reproductive purposes and socioeconomic roles. It inculcates all the social values and behavioral norms that individuals must acquire in order to survive in class society and submit to its domination. It distorts all human relationships by imposing on them the framework of economic compulsion, social dependence, and sexual repression.

6. Under capitalism, the family system also provides the mechanism for the superexploitation of women as wage workers.

a. It provides capitalism with an exceptionally flexible reservoir of labor that can be drawn into the labor force or sent back into the home with fewer social consequences than any other component of the reserve army of labor.

Because the entire ideological superstructure reinforces the fiction that women's place is in the home, high unemployment rates for women cause relatively less social protest. After all, it is said, women work only to

supplement an already existing source of income for the family. When they are unemployed, they are occupied with their household chores, and are not so obviously "out of work." The anger and resentment they feel is often dissipated as a serious social threat by the general isolation and atomization of women in separate, individual households.

b. Because women's "natural" place is supposed to be in the home, capitalism has a widely accepted rationalization for perpetuating:

1) the employment of women in low-paying, unskilled jobs. "They aren't worth training because they'll only get pregnant or married and quit."

2) unequal pay rates and low pay. "They're only working to buy gadgets and luxuries anyway."

3) deep divisions within the working class itself along sex lines. "She's taking a job a man should have."

c. This superexploitation of women as a reserve work force plays an irreplaceable role in holding down men's wages as well.

d. Capitalism's inexorable drive to incorporate more women into the productive process, in order to increase surplus value, has a limit and built-in contradiction.

The process of drawing women into the competitive labor market brings them a degree of economic independence that begins to undermine the acceptance by women of their domestic subjugation. As a result, the family system is undermined and begins to disintegrate.

But the family system is an indispensable pillar of class society. It must be preserved if capitalism is to survive.

This contradiction leads to periodic attempts to push women out of production and back into the home whenever the process of integration into the work force has gone too far, forcing the ruling class to assume too large a portion of the social costs normally borne by the family (such as widespread child-care facilities, public cafeterias, etc.).

A cyclical process of drawing women into the labor market, then forcing them back into the home, also results from the fact that women, as a component of the reserve army of labor, are drawn into production at a rapid pace only when capitalism is in a period of accelerated expansion.

e. The subjugation of women within the family system provides the economic, social, and ideological foundations that make their superexploitation possible. Women workers are exploited not only as wage labor but also as a pariah labor pool defined by sex. Thus women workers are doubly oppressed.

7. Because the oppression of women is historically intertwined with the division of society into classes and with the role of the family as the basic economic unit of class society, this oppression can only be eradicated with the abolition of private ownership of the means of production and the transfer to society as a whole of the social and economic functions borne under capitalism by the individual family.

8. The materialist analysis of the historical origin and economic roots of women's oppression is essential to developing a program and perspective capable of winning women's liberation. To reject this scientific explanation inevitably leads to one of two errors:

a. One error, made by many who claim to follow the Marxist method, is to deny, or at least downplay, the oppression of women as a sex throughout the entire history of class society. They see the oppression of women

purely and simply as an aspect of the exploitation of the working class. This view gives weight and importance to struggles by women only in their capacity as workers, on the job. It says women will be liberated, in passing, by the socialist revolution, so there is no special need for them to organize as women fighting for their own demands.

b. A symmetrical error is made by many anti-Marxists (as well as by some revolutionists). They deny that the struggle for women's liberation is an aspect of the class struggle. They hold that the oppression of women by men is unrelated to class divisions.

The anti-Marxists who support this view reject the socialist revolution as the road to women's liberation because they deny that women's oppression is rooted in private ownership of the means of production. While they favor women organizing themselves in struggle, they see no need for the working class to take power. They see no need to build a revolutionary party of the working class, male and female, to lead such a struggle for power.

Both of these one-sided approaches deny the revolutionary dynamic of the struggle for women's liberation as a form of the class struggle. Both fail to recognize that the struggle for women's liberation, to be successful, must go beyond the bounds of capitalist property relations. Both reject the implications this fact has for the working class and its revolutionary Marxist leadership.

Roots of the New Radicalization of Women

1. The women's liberation movement of today stands on the shoulders of the earlier struggles by women at the turn of the century.

With the rise and consolidation of industrial capitalism during the 1880's, increasing numbers of women were integrated into the competitive labor market. The gap between the social and legal status of women inherited from feudalism and their new economic status as wage workers selling their labor in the market, produced glaring contradictions. For women of the ruling class, too, capitalism opened the door to economic independence. Out of these contradictions arose the first wave of women's struggles aimed at winning full legal equality with men.

Revolutionary Marxists played a significant role in these struggles by women to win for themselves many of the democratic rights popularized and institutionalized during the bourgeois-democratic revolutions. In Western Europe and North America, large numbers of working-class as well as upper-class and petty-bourgeois women were involved.

Through struggle the women of the most advanced capitalist countries won, to varying degrees, several important democratic rights: the right to higher education, the right to engage in trades and professions, the right to receive and dispose of their own wages (which had been considered the right of the husband or father), the right to own property, the right to divorce, the right to form and participate in political organizations. In several countries this first upsurge culminated in mass struggles that won the vote for women.

2. Women's suffrage, following or sometimes accompanying universal male suffrage, was an important gain for the working class. It reflected, and in turn helped advance, the changing social status of women. For the first time in class society, women were considered citizens fit to

participate in public affairs, with the right to a voice on major political questions, not just household matters.

The underlying cause of the oppression and subordinate status of women lies in the very foundations of class society itself and women's special role within the family, not in the formal denial of equality under the law. Nevertheless, the extension of democratic rights to women helped the masses of women to fight more effectively against all forms of their oppression and helped to expose the deeper roots of their problems.

3. It is not surprising that the resurgence of the women's movement today first came about in the most advanced capitalist countries—such as the United States, Canada, and Britain—where many democratic rights have been won and where a tradition of militant struggle by women survives. The radicalization spread rapidly to other advanced capitalist countries.

It was generally the young, college-educated women, those who enjoyed a relatively greater freedom of choice, and those most affected by the youth radicalization of the 1960s, who first articulated the grievances of women in an organized and outspoken way. This led many economist-Marxists to conclude that women's liberation is basically a middle-class or bourgeois protest movement that has no serious interest for revolutionists or the masses of working-class women. They are wrong.

The early development of the women's liberation movement serves only to emphasize the depth and scope of women's oppression. Even those with many advantages in terms of education and other opportunities were and continue to be propelled into action. The most oppressed and exploited are not necessarily the first to articulate their discontent.

But feminist consciousness spread rapidly into the working class, giving impetus to struggles by women workers and spurring the formation of women's caucuses within the labor movement.

4. The roots of the new radicalization of women lie in the objective economic and social changes of the post-World War II years, which have brought deepening contradictions in the capitalist economy, in the status of women, and in the patriarchal family system.

a. Advances in medical science and technology in the field of birth control and abortion have created the means by which masses of women can control their reproductive functions with relative safety and ease. Control by women over their own bodies is a precondition for women's liberation.

While such medical techniques are more widely available, reactionary laws, reinforced by bourgeois customs, religious bigotry, and the entire ideological superstructure of class society, often stand in the way of women exercising control over their own reproductive functions. Financial, legal, psychological, and "moral" barriers are literally manufactured to try to prevent women from demanding the right to choose whether and when to bear children.

This contradiction between what is possible and what is affects the life of every woman. It has given rise to the powerful abortion struggles, which have been at the center of the women's movement on an international scale.

b. The prolonged boom conditions of the post-war expansion significantly increased the percentage of women in the labor force.

To take the example of the United States, in 1950, 33.9 percent of all women 18 to 64 years of age were in the labor force. By 1974 this had risen to 53 percent. Between 1960 and 1970, two-thirds of all new jobs created were taken by women. Working women accounted for 29.1 percent of the total labor force in 1950; 39.3 percent by 1974.

Equally important, the percentage of working women with children increased dramatically, as did the percentage of working women who were heads of households.

Similar statistics can be cited for other advanced capitalist countries. For example, in Britain between 1881 and 1951 the proportion of women in employment was fairly stable, remaining at about 25 to 27 percent. By 1965, 34 percent of all women between 16 and 64 were in full-time employment, 17.9 percent were in part-time employment, and a total of 54.3 percent came within the category of "economically active." Nearly two-thirds of the working women were married.

As this influx of women into the labor force has taken place, there has been no substantial change in the degree of wage discrimination against women. In many countries this differential between the sexes has actually widened.

This is primarily because of the fact that the increased employment of women has not been spread evenly over all job categories. On the contrary, the proportion of women holding low-paying jobs has increased. Thus the growing number of women entering the labor force has resulted in accentuating the discrimination against them relative to male workers.

In 1955 the median income of full-time, year-round women workers in the United States was 64 percent of that of men who were employed full-time and year-round. By 1975 it had fallen to 57 percent.

c. The rise in the average educational level of women has further heightened these contradictions. Capitalism's need for more highly skilled labor has resulted in the acceptance of women into institutions of higher education on a qualitatively larger scale than ever before.

Yet, as the employment statistics indicate, the percentage of women holding jobs commensurate with their educational level has not kept pace. In all areas of the job market, from industry to the professions, women with higher educational qualifications are usually bypassed by men with less education.

As they receive more education and their individual expectations are raised, the stifling and mind-deadening drudgery of household chores and the constrictions of family life become increasingly unbearable to women. Thus the heightened educational level of women has deepened the contradiction between women's demonstrated abilities and broadened aspirations, and their actual social and economic status.

d. The functions of the family unit in advanced capitalist society have contracted further. It has become less and less a unit of petty production—either agricultural or domestic (canning, weaving, sewing, baking, etc.). The urban nuclear family of today is a long way from the productive farm family of previous centuries.

As the standard of living rises, the average number of children per family declines sharply, industrially prepared foods become increasingly available, modern technology is applied to many housekeeping chores. The objective basis for confining women to the home becomes less and less compelling. Yet the needs of the ruling class dictate that the family system must be preserved. Bourgeois ideology

and social conditioning continue to reinforce the reactionary fiction that a woman's identity and fulfillment must come from her role as wife-mother-housekeeper. The contradiction between reality and myth becomes increasingly obvious and intolerable to growing numbers of women.

5. The postwar economic and social changes that have accelerated these contradictions, especially in the advanced capitalist countries, and laid the groundwork for the radicalization of women have dictated the radical thrust of the demands they are raising.

Greater democratic rights and broader social opportunities have not "satisfied" women, or inclined them to a passive acceptance of their inferior social status and economic dependence. On the contrary, they have stimulated new struggles and more far-reaching demands.

6. While the women's radicalization has a dynamic of its own, determined by the specific character of women's oppression and the objective changes that have been described, it is not isolated from the more general upsurge of the class struggle taking place today. It is not mechanically dependent on other social forces, subordinate to their leadership, or beholden to their initiative; but the women's movement has been and remains deeply interconnected with other social struggles and will share their fate.

From the beginning, the new upsurge of women's struggles has been strongly affected by the international youth radicalization. The increased questioning of all traditional bourgeois values has had a sharp impact on attitudes toward the family and sexual oppression.

The radicalization of women has also been fueled by the colonial revolution and the liberation struggles of oppressed nationalities such as the Black struggle in the United States. This has been important in bringing about a widespread awareness and rejection of racist stereotypes. The obvious similarities between racist attitudes and sexist stereotypes of women as inferior, emotional, dependent, dumb-but-happy creatures produced an increasing sensitivity to and rejection of such caricatures.

The women's liberation movement was also deeply influenced by the post-May 1968 rise of working-class militancy in many of the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. The growing combativity of important sectors of the organized labor movement, including women workers, led many to examine the relationship between class exploitation and the oppression of women, and search for perspectives that could lead to an eradication of both.

The end of the postwar boom and the deepening economic, social, and political problems of imperialism on a world scale, highlighted by the 1974-75 international recession, have not brought about a decline in women's struggles, or relegated them to the sidelines while "more important" social forces came to the fore. Far from diminishing as the struggles of the organized working class sharpened in recent years, feminist consciousness and struggles by women continued to spread. They have been a powerful motor force of social protest and political radicalization.

Advanced capitalist countries such as Spain that were little touched by the rise of the women's movement in the early 1970s experienced an explosion of feminist struggles in 1976 as the post-Franco era opened. In Italy, mass mobilizations by women for the right to divorce and abortion provoked more than one governmental crisis.

Resistance by women to being driven out of their newly acquired places in the work force, and broad female opposition to social cutbacks such as the closing of child-care centers, have created unexpectedly thorny problems for the rulers in many countries. Imbued with a growing feminist consciousness, women have been more combative and less willing than ever before to shoulder a disproportionate burden in the current economic crisis.

Women's Liberation in the Colonial and Semicolonial World

1. Women's liberation is not a matter of interest only to relatively privileged women of the advanced capitalist countries, as some have contended. On the contrary, it is of vital concern and importance to the masses of women throughout the world. In its own distorted way, even the International Women's Year proclaimed by the United Nations in 1975 brought this fact home.

2. In many colonial and semicolonial countries, women have not yet won some of the most elementary democratic rights secured by women in the advanced capitalist countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Even where formal legal equality does exist, the masses of women suffer crushing oppression. They are subject to the most reactionary, stifling prejudices, and are often considered scarcely human. In some countries women are still sold into marriage and denied the right to divorce; they can be murdered with impunity for violating the "honor" of their men. From cradle to grave they are ruled over, first by father and brother, then by husband or in-law. For many women the only alternatives are prostitution or suicide. Their life is one of hard domestic labor. They are totally dependent economically, denied access to education, unacquainted with modern contraceptive methods, and often bear child after child in the hopes of finding economic security in old age. Because of the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth, especially without adequate medical care and proper diet, women suffer a significantly higher mortality rate than men.

3. Centuries-old traditions and conditions remain relatively unchanged for the masses of peasant women who comprise the bulk of the female population in most of the semicolonial world. In this they are not unlike the Russian women in 1917. But the pressure of the world capitalist market is bringing changes that are affecting the situation of more privileged layers of women. The demand for more skilled labor has meant an increase in the number of young women who gain access to education and jobs. The student radicalization, as well as the women's liberation movement in other parts of the world, has encouraged those women to begin to challenge their oppression as women. The spread of birth control methods, even where prompted by reactionary goals, has brought a measure of relief from unwanted pregnancy to a section of women able to take advantage of the advanced medical technology.

These changes in the status of some layers of women, and the ever greater penetration of the capitalist market, mean that movement by women against their oppression and superexploitation will be an increasingly important part of the fight for national liberation and social revolution in the semicolonial and colonial world.

4. The importance of the struggle for women's liberation

in the colonial world has long been a distinguishing feature of the program of revolutionary Marxism in those countries. This was stressed in the resolutions of the third and fourth congresses of the Comintern, which drew special attention to the exemplary work of the Chinese Communists in organizing and leading the mobilizations of women that were part of the second Chinese revolution.

5. The role and importance we ascribe to the fight for women's liberation and the program we put forward for achieving it separate us from nonproletarian forces contending for leadership of the colonial revolution.

The struggle for women's liberation has always been intertwined with national liberation struggles. Large numbers of women invariably come forward to participate. Their active role is crucially necessary, and in the process of the developing struggle, women begin to break down the old barriers excluding them from political activity and greater social freedom. The deep contradictions they live with can only stimulate the revolt by women against their oppression as a sex, and trigger demands for greater equality within the revolutionary movement as well.

In Vietnam, Algeria, Cuba, Palestine, and elsewhere, struggles by women to end the most brutal forms of the oppression they suffer have been closely intertwined with unfolding revolutions. But attitudes and policies concerning the demands and needs of women are inevitably one of the acid tests of the revolutionary caliber, perspective, and program of any leadership.

Revolutionary Marxists pay special attention to women and aim to play a leading role in mobilizing them to fight for their needs because our goal is to overturn private property relations and reconstruct society on a socialist basis. We know this cannot be done without women playing a conscious and leading role.

6. The crushing weight of women's oppression in the colonial and semicolonial countries gives struggles by women a particularly explosive character. Struggles beginning around elementary democratic rights can rapidly evolve to encompass additional demands relating to the broad range of urgent social needs of the masses of proletarian and peasant women. This process was clearly evident in China, for example, where the struggle for liberation of women from both feudal traditions and the effects of imperialist domination became an important component of the revolution. Even the demand for freedom to cut their hair provided a starting point for the radicalization of women, leading to struggles of increasing social weight and political impact.

7. The direct involvement of sections of the Fourth International in women's struggles in the semicolonial countries has been limited. The initiatives taken by the Indian Communist League, the literature published by the Argentine PST, the analytical work done by the Iranian Sattar League, together with the early experiences of the Chinese Trotskyists, provide a starting point and useful guide for developing our women's liberation work in the colonial and semicolonial countries.

In 1972 the Communist League Central Committee adopted a resolution concerning the struggle for women's liberation on the Indian subcontinent. It emphasized the importance of this question in the construction of a revolutionary Marxist party in India today.

The resolution pointed to a number of factors that have brought changes in prevailing attitudes toward women on the Indian subcontinent and a rise in the self-confidence of

educated and employed women in particular. These factors included the expansion of women's education since 1947; the expansion of opportunities for the employment of women; the rising cost of living, which forces wives to take employment; the possibility of family planning; and the existence of a political framework that permits women to hold elected public offices.

The resolution noted:

"The struggle against the social oppression of women will develop around the demands of free education for women, free hostels for women students, hostel facilities for employed women, child-care centers and cheap hotels for married women, reservation of jobs and the end of discrimination in employment and promotion, a lighter workload, fewer working hours, liberal conditions of work, including transfer only on demand. As the struggle develops, more basic and fundamental questions will be taken up, including the abrogation of Hindu and Muslim personal laws on marriage, inheritance, and divorce; the right to free marriage and divorce, especially in cases of physical and mental torture and restrictions on personal freedom; the right to free legal abortions and women's control over their own bodies."

To help lead women's struggles to their logical anticapitalist conclusion, the resolution called for the formation of independent, mass-based, and democratically controlled women's groups, organized as united fronts on a concrete action program.

Women in the Workers States: Liberation Betrayed

1. The October 1917 revolution in Russia and each subsequent socialist victory brought significant gains for women, including democratic rights and integration into the productive labor force. The measures enacted by the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky demonstratively showed that the proletarian revolution meant immediate steps forward for women.

Between 1917 and 1927 the Soviet government passed a series of laws giving women legal equality with men for the first time. Marriage became a simple registration process that had to be based on mutual consent. The concept of illegitimacy was abolished. Free, legal abortion was made every woman's right. By 1927, marriages did not have to be registered, and divorce was granted on the request of either partner. Antihomosexual laws were eliminated.

Free, compulsory education to the age of 16 was established for all children of both sexes. Legislation gave women workers special maternity benefits.

The 1919 program of the Communist Party stated: "The party's task at the present moment is primarily work in the realm of ideas and education so as to destroy utterly all traces of the former inequality or prejudices, particularly among backward strata of the proletariat and peasantry. Not confining itself to formal equality of women, the party strives to liberate them from the material burdens of obsolete household work by replacing it by communal houses, public eating places, central laundries, nurseries, etc." This program was implemented to the extent possible given the economic backwardness and poverty of the new Soviet Republic, and the devastation caused by almost a decade of war and civil war.

A conscious attempt was made to begin combating the reactionary social norms and attitudes toward women

which reflected the reality of a country whose population was still overwhelmingly peasant and in which the dead weight of feudal tradition still hung over all social relations.

2. The decimation and exhaustion of the working class vanguard, and the crushing of the postwar revolutionary upsurges in Western Europe, laid the basis for the triumph of the counterrevolutionary bureaucratic caste, headed by Stalin, in the 1920s. While the economic foundations of the new workers state were not destroyed, a privileged social layer that appropriated for itself many of the benefits of the new economic order grew rapidly in the fertile soil of Russia's poverty. To protect and extend its new privileges, the bureaucracy reversed the policies of Lenin and Trotsky in virtually every sphere, from government based on soviet democracy, to control by the workers over economic planning, to the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination, to a proletarian internationalist foreign policy.

By the late 1930s the counterrevolution had physically annihilated the entire surviving Bolshevik leadership and established a dictatorship that to this day keeps hundreds of thousands in prison camps, psychiatric hospitals and exile, and ruthlessly crushes every murmur of opposition.

For women, the Stalinist counterrevolution led to a policy of reviving and fortifying the family system.

Trotsky described this process as follows: "Genuine emancipation of women is inconceivable without a general rise of economy and culture, without the destruction of the petty-bourgeois economic family unit, without the introduction of socialized food preparation and education. Meanwhile, guided by its conservative instinct, the bureaucracy has taken alarm at the 'disintegration' of the family. It began singing panegyrics to the family supper and the family laundry, that is, the household slavery of woman. To cap it all, the bureaucracy has restored criminal punishment for abortions, officially returning women to the status of pack animals. In complete contradiction with the ABC of communism the ruling caste has thus restored the most reactionary and benighted nucleus of the class regime, i.e., the petty-bourgeois family" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38*, 2nd ed., 1976, p. 129).

3. The most important factor facilitating this retrogression was the cultural and material backwardness of Russian society, which did not have the resources necessary to construct adequate child-care centers, sufficient housing, public laundries, and housekeeping and dining facilities to eliminate the material basis for women's oppression.

But beyond these objective limitations the reactionary Stalinist bureaucracy consciously gave up the perspective of moving in a systematic way to socialize the burdens carried by women, and instead began to glorify the family system, attempting to bind families together through legal restrictions and economic compulsion.

As Trotsky pointed out in the *Revolution Betrayed*, "The retreat not only assumes forms of disgusting hypocrisy, but also is going infinitely farther than the iron economic necessity demands."

The bureaucracy reinforced the family system for one of the same reasons it is maintained by capitalist society—as a means of inculcating attitudes of submission to authority and for perpetuating the privileges of a minority. Trotsky explained that "the most compelling motive of the

present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of forty million points of support for authority and power.”

As part of this counterrevolution, the old tsarist laws against homosexuality were dusted off and reintroduced.

The conditions created by the proletarian revolution and Stalinist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union have not been mechanically reproduced in every workers state formed since 1917. Important differences exist, reflecting historical, cultural, economic, and social variations from one country to another, even one region to another. But maintenance of the economic and social inferiority of women and bolstering of the family institution as the norm of social relationships is official policy in all the deformed workers states from China to East Germany.

4. The promotion and glorification of the family system have resulted in perpetuating the traditional burden of women, the double day's work, inside and outside the home. According to the official 1970 Soviet Union census, 90 percent of all urban women between the ages of 16 and 54 hold jobs outside the home. Yet the average Soviet woman spends four to seven hours a day on housework in addition to eight hours on an outside job.

The perpetuation of the responsibility of women for the domestic chores associated with child-raising, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for the personal needs of other members of the family unit is the economic and social basis for the disadvantages and prejudices faced by women and the resulting discrimination in jobs and wages. This deeply affects the way women view themselves, their role in society, and the goals they seek to attain.

While 50 percent of the wage earners in the Soviet Union are women, they are concentrated disproportionately in lower-paying, less responsible jobs, and in traditional female sectors of production and services. For example, 43.6 percent of all women still work in agriculture, while another quarter are employed in the textile industry. Eighty percent of all primary and secondary-school teachers, and 100 percent of all preschool teachers, are women. In 1970 only 6.6 percent of all industrial enterprises were headed by women. According to 1966 statistics, average women's wages were 69.3 percent of men's—up from 64.4 percent in 1924!

More than 40 percent of all scientists are women, but only 3 out of 243 full members of the Soviet Academy of Science are women. In the national political arena, only 8 of the 287 full members of the Communist Party Central Committee are women. There are no women in the Politburo.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as in the advanced capitalist countries, sufficient material wealth and technology today exist to significantly alleviate the double burden of women. Yet the distortions introduced in economic planning and the productive process because of the absence of democratic control over production by the workers and the domination of the privileged bureaucratic caste are a source of resentments. Women feel the dead weight of the bureaucracy in this respect even more than men because they are forced to compensate for the distortions in the economy through the double day's labor they perform.

In the last decade, these potentially explosive resentments have forced the bureaucracy to plan expanded

production in consumer goods and increased social services. But the supply of consumer goods continues to lag behind the needs and growing expectations of the masses of Soviet women. Social services also remain sorely inadequate. For example, while child-care facilities are more widespread than in advanced capitalist countries, crèches in Leningrad are able to accommodate only 13 percent of the children of preschool age. According to the official 1970 statistics, this figure rises to two-thirds by the level of kindergarten.

The Stalinist bureaucracies have also repudiated the view of Lenin and other leaders of the Russian revolution that unrestricted access to abortion is a woman's elementary democratic right. While legal abortion is generally available in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the ruling castes have repeatedly curtailed this right, frequently placing humiliating conditions as well as economic penalties on women seeking abortions (such as denial of paid sick-leave time to obtain an abortion or refusal to cover abortions as a free medical procedure). The more reliable birth control methods are generally unavailable. Women's right to abortion is subordinated to the twists and turns of bureaucratically conceived economic plans and social politics.

5. Women in the deformed and degenerated workers states will not win their full liberation short of a political revolution that removes the bureaucratic caste from power and restores workers democracy. Although there are as yet few signs of any rising consciousness concerning the oppression of women, there is no iron curtain between the advanced capitalist countries and the workers states, especially between Eastern and Western Europe. Women in the workers states will inevitably be affected by the radicalization of women elsewhere and the demands they are raising.

The struggle of women for their liberation will be a significant component of the process of challenging and overturning the privileged bureaucratic regimes and establishing socialist democracy. Demands for the socialization of domestic labor in particular are an important aspect of the transitional program for the coming political revolution.

In some respects, in comparison with the capitalist countries, the economic independence and status of women in the workers states provide a positive example. But Soviet history also strikingly confirms the fact that the family institution is the cornerstone of the oppression of women. As long as it is sustained and nurtured as official policy, as long as its functions are not fully taken over by superior social institutions, the truly equal integration of women in productive life and all social affairs is impossible.

The Stalinist counterrevolution on women and the family, and the continued inequality of women in the workers states, today comprise one of the obstacles to winning radicalized women elsewhere to revolutionary Marxism. As with all other questions, the policies of Stalinism are often equated with Leninism rather than recognized for what they are—the negation of Leninism. Women fighting for their liberation elsewhere often look to the workers states and say, “If this is what socialism does for women, we don't need it.” Many anti-Marxists pointed to the situation of women in the workers states as “proof” that the road to women's liberation is not through class struggle. Thus the fight to win the leadership of feminists

in other parts of the world is interrelated with the development of the political revolution in the deformed and degenerated workers states.

II. THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Our Perspective

1. The Fourth International welcomes and champions the emergence of a new wave of struggles by women to end their centuries-old oppression. By fighting in the front lines of these battles, we demonstrate that the world party of socialist revolution can provide a leadership capable of carrying the struggle for women's liberation through to its conclusion. Our goal is to win the confidence and leadership of the masses of women by showing that our program and our class-struggle policies will lead to the elimination of women's oppression along the path of successful proletarian revolution and the socialist reconstruction of society.

2. This perspective of the Fourth International stands in the long tradition of revolutionary Marxism. It is based on the following considerations:

a. We recognize that the oppression of women is indispensable to the maintenance of class society in general and capitalism in particular. The struggle by masses of women against their oppression therefore has an anticapitalist thrust.

b. We recognize that women fighting for their liberation are a powerful ally of the working class as a whole in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Without the socialist revolution women cannot achieve their liberation. Without the mobilization of masses of women in struggle for their own liberation the working class cannot accomplish its historic tasks.

c. We recognize that the struggle for women's liberation touches some of the most basic needs of women, especially the most exploited and oppressed layers. It is an avenue to reach and mobilize them.

d. We recognize that educating the masses of workers through propaganda, agitation, and action around the needs of women is an essential part of the struggle to break the stranglehold of reactionary bourgeois ideology within the working class. It is an indispensable part of the politicalization and revolutionary education of the workers vanguard and the construction of a mass revolutionary party of the working class.

e. We recognize that it is only by consistently championing the demands and needs of the most oppressed and exploited layers of the class—the women, the oppressed nationalities, the immigrant workers, the youth, the unorganized—that the full power and united strength of the workers can be brought to bear. Part of the fight to transform the trade unions into instruments of revolutionary struggle in the interests of the entire working class is educating the organized labor movement to fight for the demands of women.

In other words, our goal is not only to lead the women's liberation movement in a revolutionary direction but also to convince the working class as a whole and its organizations to recognize and champion struggles by women as their own.

f. The struggle against the oppression of women is not a secondary or peripheral issue. It is a life and death matter

for the workers movement, especially in a period of sharpening class polarization.

Because of women's place in class society and the hold of the ideology that buttresses their inferior status, women as a whole are a special target for all clerical, reactionary, and fascist organizations. Whether it is the Christian Democrats, the Falange, or the opponents of abortion rights, reaction makes a special appeal to women for support, claiming to address women's particular needs, playing upon their economic dependence under capitalism, and promising to relieve the inordinate burden women bear during any period of social crisis.

From the "kinder-kirche-kueche" propaganda of the Nazi movement to the Christian Democrats' mobilization of middle-class women in Chile for the march of the empty pots, history has demonstrated time and again that the reactionary mystique of motherhood-and-family is one of the most powerful conservatizing weapons wielded by the ruling class.

With a correct program and a resolute struggle to help win the demands being raised by the women's movement, the revolutionary party can mobilize broad fighting layers of women on the side of the revolution. The new radicalization of women and the changes in consciousness and attitudes make it more difficult for reaction to prevail. But the Social Democrats, the Stalinists, and the centrists are incapable of showing the masses of women how to escape the reactionary trap, to give them a perspective of struggle in alliance with the working class. The lessons of the rise of fascism in Germany and the bankruptcy of the Stalinists and others must be absorbed by the new generations of the workers movement.

g. We recognize that the struggle for women's liberation is a form of the class struggle. Yet it extends beyond the working class, touching women of all classes to one degree or another, because all women are oppressed as a sex. Struggles around specific aspects of women's oppression necessarily cut across class lines in the sense of potentially involving women from different classes and social layers.

Whatever concessions the rulers may be forced to grant, the bourgeoisie as a class must oppose the struggle for women's liberation because it challenges basic institutions of class rule. But even bourgeois women are oppressed on the basis of their sex. Some, revolting against their oppression as women, will break with their class and be won to the side of the workers.

As Lenin pointed out in his discussions with Clara Zetkin, action around aspects of women's oppression has the potential to reach into the heart of the enemy class, to "foment and increase unrest, uncertainty and contradictions and conflicts in the camp of the bourgeoisie and its reformist friends. . . . Every weakening of the enemy is tantamount to a strengthening of our forces."

Even more important from the point of view of the revolutionary Marxist party, however, is the fact that resentment against their oppression as women can often be the starting point in the radicalization of decisive layers of petty-bourgeois women, whose support the working class must win.

By definition, a mass women's liberation movement is one that is basically working-class in composition and leadership.

3. Our class-struggle strategy for the fight against women's oppression, our answer to the question of *how* to mobilize the masses of women on the side of the working

class, has three facets: our program, our methods of struggle, and our class independence.

Our Program

Through the totality of the system of demands we put forward—which deal with every issue from freedom of political association, to unemployment and inflation, to abortion and child care, to workers control and the arming of the proletariat—we seek to build a bridge from the current needs and struggles of the working masses and their level of consciousness to the culminating point of socialist revolution. As part of this transitional program we put forward demands that speak to the specific oppression of women.

Our program points to the issues around which women can begin to struggle to loosen the bonds of their oppression and challenge the prerogatives of the ruling class. It recognizes and provides answers for all aspects of women's oppression—legal, economic, social, sexual.

Our interlocking system of demands includes immediate, democratic, and transitional demands. Some can and will be wrested from the ruling class in the course of the struggle leading toward the socialist revolution. Such victories bring inspiration, increasing confidence, and self-reliance. Other demands will be partially met. The most fundamental will be resisted to the end by those who control the property and wealth. They can be won only in the course of the socialist reconstruction of society.

In fighting for these demands—both those providing solutions to the specific oppression of women and those answering other needs of the oppressed nationalities and working class as a whole—masses of women will come to understand the interrelationship of their oppression as a sex and class rule.

Our demands directed toward eliminating the specific oppression of women are centered on the following points:

1. *Full legal, political, and social equality for women.*

No discrimination on the basis of sex. Equal rights for women to vote, engage in public activity, form or join political associations, live and travel where they want, engage in any occupations they choose. An end to all laws and regulations with special penalties for women. The extension to women of all democratic rights won by men.

2. *The right of women to control their own reproductive functions.*

A woman has the sole right to choose whether or not to prevent or terminate pregnancy. This includes the rejection of those population-control schemes which are tools of racism or class prejudice and attempt to blame the evils of class society on the masses of working people and peasants.

a. An end to all government restrictions on abortion and contraception.

b. Free abortion on demand; no forced sterilization or any other government interference with the right of women to choose whether or when to bear children.

c. Free, widely disseminated birth-control information and devices. Education on sex and birth control in the schools and clinics.

3. *An end to the hypocrisy, debasement, and coercion of bourgeois and feudal family laws.*

a. Separation of church and state. Marriage to be a voluntary process of civil registration. An end to all forced marriages and the buying and selling of wives. Abrogation

of all laws against adultery. An end to all laws sanctioning legal penalties, physical abuse, or even murder of wives and daughters for so-called crimes against male "honor."

b. The right to automatic divorce on request of either partner. State provision for economic welfare and job training for the divorced woman.

c. Abolition of the concept of "illegitimacy." An end to all discrimination against unwed mothers and their children.

d. The rearing, social welfare, and education of children to be the responsibility of society, rather than the individual parents. Abolition of all laws granting parents property rights and total control over children. Enactment and strict enforcement of laws against child abuse and wife-beating.

e. An end to all laws victimizing prostitutes. An end to all laws reinforcing the double standard for men and women in sexual matters. Elimination of laws reflecting the assumption that female victims of rape are the guilty party. An end to all legislation victimizing homosexuals. An end to all laws and regulations victimizing youth for sexual activities.

4. *Full economic independence for women.*

a. Right to receive and dispose of their own wages and property.

b. Equal pay for equal work.

c. No discrimination against women in any trade, profession, job category, apprenticeship, or training program.

d. Guaranteed jobs at union wages for all women who want to work, coupled with a sliding scale of hours and wages to combat inflation and unemployment among men and women.

e. Preferential hiring, training, and job upgrading of women and other superexploited layers of the labor force in order to overcome the effects of decades of systematic discrimination against them.

f. Paid maternity leaves with no loss of job or seniority.

g. Paid work leaves to care for sick children to be given to men and women alike.

h. The extension of beneficial protective legislation (providing special working conditions to women) to cover men, in order to provide better working conditions for both men and women and prevent the use of protective legislation to discriminate against women.

i. Compensation at union rates throughout periods of unemployment for all women and men, including youth who cannot find a place in the work force, regardless of marital status. Unemployment compensation to be protected against inflation by automatic increases.

5. *Equal educational opportunities.*

An end to education and conditioning that reduces women to an inferior status.

a. Free, open admissions for all women to all institutions of education and all programs of study. Special programs to encourage women to enter traditionally male-dominated fields.

b. An end to all forms of pressuring women to prepare themselves for "women's work," such as homemaking, secretarial work, nursing and teaching.

c. An end to portrayal in textbooks and mass media of women as sex objects and stupid, weak, emotionally dependent creatures. Courses designed to teach the true history of women's struggles against their oppression.

Physical education courses to teach women to develop their strength and be proud of their athletic abilities.

d. No expulsion of pregnant students or unwed mothers, or segregation into special facilities.

6. *Reorganization of society to eliminate domestic slavery of women.*

a. Free, government-financed twenty-four-hour child-care centers and schools, open to all children from infancy to early adolescence regardless of parents' income or marital status; child-care policies to be decided by those who use the centers.

b. Free medical care for all and special child-care facilities for children who are ill.

c. Systematic development of low-cost, high-quality social services such as cafeteria and take-out food services available to all; collective laundry facilities; house-cleaning services organized on an industrial basis.

d. A crash, government-financed development program to provide healthful, uncrowded housing for all; no rent to exceed 10 percent of income; no discrimination against single women or women with children.

We counterpose such demands to propaganda and agitation for the "abolition" of the family. The family as an economic unit cannot be "abolished" by fiat. It can only be replaced over time. The goal of the socialist revolution is to create economic and social alternatives that are superior to the present family institution and better able to provide for the needs currently met, however poorly, by the family, so that personal relationships will be a matter of free choice and not of economic compulsion.

These demands indicate the issues around which women will fight for their liberation, and show how this fight is interrelated with the demands raised by other oppressed sectors of society and the needs of the working class as a whole.

The women's liberation movement raises many issues. The development of the movement has already demonstrated that not all will come to the fore with equal force at the same time. Which demands to raise at any particular time in any particular struggle, the best way to formulate specific demands so that they are understandable to the masses and able to mobilize them in action, when to advance new demands to move the struggle forward—the answer to those tactical problems is the function of the revolutionary party, the art of politics itself.

Our Methods of Struggle

1. We utilize proletarian methods of mobilization and action in order to achieve these demands. Everything we do is geared to bring the masses themselves into motion, into struggle, whatever their current level of consciousness. The masses do not learn simply by being exposed to ideas or by the exemplary action of others. Only through their own direct involvement will the political consciousness of the masses develop, grow, and be transformed. Only through their own experience will millions of women be won as allies in the revolutionary struggle and come to understand the need to get rid of an economic system based on exploitation.

Our goal is to teach the masses to rely on their own united power. We counterpose extraparliamentary mass action—demonstrations, meetings, strikes—to reliance on elections, parliaments, legislatures, and the bourgeois and

petty-bourgeois politicians who haunt them.

Our class-struggle methods are geared to awakening the initiatives of the great majority of women; to bring them together; to destroy their domestic isolation and their lack of confidence in their own abilities, intelligence, independence, and strength. Struggling together with them, we aim to show that class exploitation is the root of women's oppression and its elimination the only road to emancipation.

2. Given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist, class-collaborationist opponents, our perspective of trying to mobilize masses of women in action can often best be achieved in the present period through united-front-type action campaigns, mobilizing the broadest possible support around concrete demands. The united-front-type abortion campaigns in France, the United States and Britain provide an example of this type of action.

Through such united-front-type actions we can bring the greatest power to bear against the capitalist government and educate the workers concerning their own strength. In the process, not only the liberal "friends" of women, but the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and trade-union bureaucrats who refuse to fight for women's needs will isolate themselves by their own inaction, opposition, or willingness to subordinate women's needs to their search for an alliance with the supposedly "progressive" sectors of the ruling class.

3. Struggles by women against their oppression as a sex are interrelated with, but not totally dependent on or identical with, struggles by workers as a class. Women cannot win their liberation except in alliance with the organized power of the working class. But this historical necessity in no way means that women should postpone any of their struggles until the current labor officialdom is replaced by a revolutionary leadership that picks up the banner of women's liberation. Nor should women wait until the socialist revolution has created the material basis for ending their oppression. On the contrary, women fighting for their liberation must wait for no one to show them the way. They should take the lead in opening the fight and carrying it forward. Their struggles advance the process of politicalization and radicalization. They help educate the male (and female) workers and convince them that it is in their class interests to champion the demands of women as their own.

4. The oppression of women as a sex constitutes the objective basis for the mobilization of women in struggle through their own organizations. The trend of radicalizing women to form all-female organizations—women's liberation groups, women's action coalitions, women's caucuses in the trade unions—is eminently progressive. It reflects the desire of women to take the leadership of their own struggles. They want to have their own organizations in which they can learn and develop and lead without fear of being put down or dictated to by men or having to compete with them from the start.

The Fourth International supports and helps build such all-female groups and organizations, which are an indispensable component of the mass feminist movement we strive for. We defend the right of women's liberation groups to exclude men from their gatherings. Unlike those "Marxists" who claim such all-female organizations and meetings divide the working class along sex lines, we say

it is not those fighting against their oppression who are responsible for creating divisions. Capitalism divides the working class—by race, by sex, by age, by nationality, by skill levels, and by every other means possible. Our job is to organize and support the battles of the most oppressed and exploited layers who will lead the struggle for socialism. Those who suffer most from the old will fight the most energetically for the new.

Before women can lead others they must throw off their feelings of inferiority and self-deprecation. They must learn to lead themselves. Feminist groups that consciously and deliberately exclude men help many women to take the first steps toward discarding their own slave mentality, gaining confidence, pride, and courage to act as political beings.

The small “consciousness raising” groups that have emerged everywhere as one of the most prevalent forms of the new radicalization help many women to realize that their problems do not arise from personal shortcomings, but are socially created and common to other women. They often lay the groundwork for women to break out of their isolation, to gain confidence and move into action.

Such groups can become an obstacle if they remain inward-turned and limit themselves to discussion circles as a substitute for joining with others to act.

The desire of women to organize themselves in all-female groups is the opposite of the practice followed by many mass Stalinist parties that organize separate male and female youth organizations for the purpose of repressing sexual activity and reinforcing sex-stereotyped behavior—i.e., the inferiority of women. The independent all-female forms thrown up by the new women’s liberation struggles express the distrust many radicalizing women feel for the mass reformist organizations of the working class, which have failed so miserably to fight for their needs.

5. There is no contradiction between supporting and building all-female organizations to fight for women’s liberation, or for specific demands relating to women’s oppression, and simultaneously building mass action coalitions involving both men and women to fight for the same demands. Campaigns around the right to abortion have provided a good example of this. Women will be the backbone of such campaigns, but the fight is in the interests of the working masses as a whole and our perspective is to win support for the movement from all organizations of the working class and the oppressed.

6. Likewise, there is no contradiction between supporting and building all-female organizations and at the same time building a revolutionary Marxist party of women and men.

The struggle for socialism requires both a mass feminist movement and a mass revolutionary Marxist party. The two serve different functions. The former mobilizes women in struggle through their own organizations. The latter provides leadership, through program and action, for the working class and its allies, including women, and uncompromisingly orients all facets of the class struggle toward a combined drive to abolish capitalism.

The goal of the Fourth International is to win the best fighters for women’s liberation to the revolutionary party. There is no objective basis for a separate revolutionary Marxist women’s organization.

Likewise, we maintain that there are no exclusively “women’s issues.” Every question of concern to the female

half of humanity is also a broader social question of vital interest to the working class as a whole. While we raise demands that deal with the specific oppression of women, we have no separate program for women’s liberation. Our demands are an integral part of our transitional program for the socialist revolution.

Sexist attitudes and practices within the party can only be eradicated if the party has a correct program. Women take the lead in politically educating the entire membership, male and female, on the character of women’s oppression, in developing a correct understanding of the role of the fight for women’s liberation in the socialist revolution, and in orienting the party toward active participation in the feminist movement.

7. The forms through which we work can vary greatly depending on the concrete circumstances in which our organizations find themselves. Factors that must be taken into account include the strength of our own forces; the size, character, and political level of the women’s liberation forces; the strength of the liberal, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist forces against whom we must contend; and the general political context in which we are working. Whether we should form women’s liberation groups on a broad socialist program, work through existing organizations of the women’s liberation movement, build broad action coalitions around specific issues, work through trade-union caucuses, combine several of these forms, or work through some other forms are tactical questions. Our tactics are dictated by our strategic aim, which is to educate and lead in action forces much broader than ourselves and recruit the best cadre to the revolutionary party.

No matter what organizational form we adopt, the fundamental question to be decided is the same: What specific issues and demands should be raised under the given circumstances in order to most effectively mobilize women and their allies in struggle?

While the party needs special internal fractions or commissions through which to organize our participation in the women’s liberation movement, we are opposed to caucuses within the revolutionary Marxist party that function as pressure groups. All internal fractions, commissions, or other formations must be open to any member democratically selected—regardless of sex, race, language, class origin, or whatever. To permit other kinds of undemocratic internal formations is to foster a federation of conflicting special-interest groups. The party has one program and only one class of membership with equal rights and responsibilities for every comrade. The party’s political line and direction must be democratically discussed and decided with all members participating and taking responsibility for carrying it out.

8. Struggles by women in the unions and on the job have a special importance. Here as elsewhere in capitalist society women are subject to male domination, to discrimination as an inferior sex that is out of its “natural place.” Struggles by women to unionize; organize; win equal rights in the unions; fight for better conditions on the job, equal pay, preferential hiring and job upgrading, child-care facilities—these are all important aspects of the struggle for women’s liberation as well as of the class struggle as a whole.

Moreover, unlike housewives, many working women are already semi-organized by the labor market itself. In

addition, many are fighting from a vantage point within the unions and within the factories, where they are well-placed to speed the process of revitalizing and transforming the labor movement, educating layers and sectors of the working class with whom they are in contact. Sometimes they are able to draw the power of the organized workers movement in support of their struggles. Their demands will be an important component of the program of class-struggle left wings that emerge within the labor movement.

There are also special difficulties in organizing women workers. Precisely because of their oppression as women they are less likely to be unionized or to have a strong class consciousness. Their participation in the labor force is frequently more sporadic. Their double burden of responsibilities and chores at home is fatiguing and time consuming, leaving them less energy for political and trade-union activity. The prevalent prejudice that "women's place is in the home" is an additional obstacle and pressure.

Changes brought about by the spread of the women's liberation movement have already begun to alter the attitudes of working women, strengthening their inclination to organize, unionize, and fight for their rights.

Conversely, working women who become involved in struggles on the job often have to confront many of the questions that the women's liberation movement has taken up. As they begin to play an active role, to take on leadership responsibilities, to prove their capacities to themselves, to gain confidence and play an independent role, they develop a greater understanding of what the women's liberation movement is fighting for. Thus, struggles by women as workers and by women challenging their oppression as a sex reinforce each other.

9. Our class-struggle methods of mass action are the antithesis of the orientation of many petty-bourgeois radicals who counterpose individual acts of moral witness or the promotion of new "life-styles" as the road to solution of their problems as women. They often concentrate on reforming men as individuals, trying to make them less "chauvinistic," rather than organizing to replace the bourgeois government which defends and sustains the institutions of class society responsible for male supremacy and women's oppression. They attempt to build "counterinstitutions" in the midst of class society.

As revolutionists we recognize that the problems many women seek to resolve in this way are real and preoccupying. Our criticism is not directed against individuals who try to find a way out from under the intolerable pressures capitalist society places on them. But we point out that for the masses of workers there is no "individual" solution. They must fight collectively to change society before their "life-style" will be significantly altered. Ultimately there are no personal solutions for any of us. Individual escapism is a form of utopianism that can only end in disillusionment and the dispersal of revolutionary forces.

Our Class Independence

1. Political independence is the third facet of our class-struggle strategy for the fight against women's oppression. We do not defer or subordinate any demand, action, or struggle of women to the political needs and concerns of either the bourgeois or reformist political forces with their

parliamentary shadowboxing and electoral maneuvers.

2. We fight to keep women's liberation organizations and struggles independent of all bourgeois forces and parties. We oppose attempts to divert women's struggles toward the construction of women's caucuses inside of or oriented to capitalist parties or bourgeois politics, as has occurred in the United States, Canada, and Australia. We oppose the formation of a women's political party, such as has arisen in Belgium and has been advocated by some feminist groups in Spain and elsewhere. The election of more women to public office on a liberal-bourgeois or radical petty-bourgeois program, while a reflection of changing attitudes, can do nothing to further the interests of women.

Women's liberation is part of the historic struggle of the working class against capitalism. We strive to make that link a conscious one on the part of women and of the working class. But we do not reject support from bourgeois figures or politicians who voice their agreement with our demands or goals. It strengthens our side not theirs. It is their contradiction not ours.

3. We reject the reformist perspectives of the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties. The policies and conduct of both these petty-bourgeois currents within the working-class movement are based on defending privileges and preserving the capitalist system, regardless of any lip service they may pay to the struggles of women against their oppression. Both are ready to subordinate the needs of women to whatever class-collaborationist deal they are trying to negotiate at the moment. The Stalinists, for example, never tire of telling women that the road to happiness through "advanced democracy" or the "antimonopoly coalition." They advise women not to demand more than "democracy" (i.e., capitalism) can give.

The Stalinists have a special stake in defending the family institution and reinforcing the reactionary grip of bourgeois ideology on the working class: They must defend the fact that the family unit is extolled in the "socialist" countries as the ideal framework of human relationships.

The reactionary positions adopted by the Communist parties in countries like Italy and France on such issues as divorce and abortion, and the American CP's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, are such blatant betrayals of the needs of women that their stance opens up possibilities for us to make headway amongst their members and the layers they influence.

Both the Stalinists and Social Democrats initially abstained from or were hostile to the new rise of women's struggles. But we can expect them to attempt to capture leadership as the women's movement develops, in order to divert these struggles into reformist channels.

4. It is only through an uncompromising programmatic and organizational break from the bourgeoisie and all forms of class collaborationism that the working class and its allies, including women struggling for their liberation, can be mobilized as a powerful and self-confident force capable of carrying the socialist revolution through to the end. The task of the revolutionary Marxist party is to provide the leadership to educate the working masses through action and propaganda in this class-struggle perspective.

Tasks of the Fourth International Today

1. The ideas of women's liberation have had varying degrees of impact throughout the world. The speed with which revolutionary ideas and lessons of struggle are transmitted from one country to another, and from one sector of the world revolution to another, ensures the further spread of women's liberation struggles. Widespread questioning of the traditional role of women creates an atmosphere conducive to Marxist education, propaganda, and action in support of the liberation of women. Through our press and propaganda activities we can explain the source and nature of women's oppression and the revolutionary dynamic of women's struggle for liberation.

2. In addition to participating in organizations and groups of radicalized women where they exist, we should integrate women's liberation propaganda and activity into all our areas of work, from the trade unions to the student milieu. It is especially among the youth—student, young workers, young housewives—that we will find the greatest receptivity to our ideas and program.

3. Our experience thus far has shown that considerable potential exists for helping to organize and lead action campaigns around issues raised in the struggle against women's oppression. The Fourth International encourages international solidarity in the women's movement, and where possible, international coordination of action campaigns around common issues.

4. To organize and carry out systematic women's liberation work, sections of the Fourth International should establish commissions or fractions of those responsible for this work, which might include male comrades as well as female.

5. Systematic education about the history of women's oppression and struggles, and the theoretical and political questions involved, should be organized within the sections of the Fourth International.

We have no illusions that sections can be islands of the future socialist society floating in a capitalist morass, or that individual comrades can fully escape the education and conditioning absorbed from the very struggle to survive in class society. But it is a condition of member-

ship in the Fourth International that the conduct of comrades and sections reflect the principles on which we stand. We fight to educate the members of the Fourth International to a full understanding of the character of women's oppression and the pernicious ways in which it is expressed. We strive to create an organization in which language, jokes, and other acts expressing chauvinist bigotry towards women are not tolerated, any more than acts and expressions of racist bigotry would be allowed to pass unchallenged. We strive to build a party in which the full and rounded political development of women comrades is promoted and maximized.

The process of internal education will take place along with and be facilitated by the growing involvement of our sections in the struggle for women's liberation. The impact of this struggle on the consciousness and attitudes of comrades has been profound. The transformation of the women cadre of the international, reflecting our involvement in the struggle for women's liberation, is a development of historic significance. The new self-confidence, political maturity, and leadership capacities of the women comrades of the Fourth International constitute a significant expansion of the effective forces of revolutionary leadership on a world scale.

The new rise of women's struggles internationally and the emergence of a strong women's liberation movement prior to revolutionary struggles for power is a development of prime importance to the world party of socialist revolution. It increases the political power of the working class and the likelihood that the revolution will be successful in carrying through to the end its task of socialist reconstruction. The rise of the women's liberation movement is an additional guarantee against the bureaucratic degeneration of future revolutions.

The struggle to liberate women from the bondage in which class society has placed them is a struggle to free all human relationships from the shackles of economic compulsion and to propel humanity along the road to a higher social order.

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