

Photocopy

DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

"Biologically and temperamentally, I believe, women were made to be concerned first and foremost with child care, husband care, and home care." -- Dr. Benjamin Spock

"The constant celebration of homemaking in the media cannot conceal the fact that most housework is dirty and boring. Most people would prefer just about any job to being a domestic servant; few women would stand for a female roommate trying to stick them with all the clearing. But to do the same dirty work for a husband is supposed to be a privilege. The rationalization is usually that women are inherently altruistic, which makes about as much sense as Senator George Murphy's remark that Mexicans are better suited to stoop labor because they are built 'low to the ground.' It is equally specious to imagine that because women are uniquely equipped to give birth and nurse infants, they also have a special talent for changing diapers and wiping noses." -- Ellen Willis, Whatever Happened to Women?

Handwritten notes:
Healy + ...
Healy + ...
...
... + ...

PART I

A. Nature of the Feminist Movement Today

Few myths are on the surface so irrational, yet at the same time so widely believed, as that of the inferiority of women. Yet, for thousands of years, people all over the world have been taught to believe that women are biologically and intellectually inferior to men, with an emotional makeup that makes their acceptance of a subservient role in society natural.

Throughout history, women have rebelled against this, and fought for improvements in their status. But never before has there been a feminist movement as irreconcilable in its opposition to oppression, as radical in its critique of the social forces that breed these inequities, and as potentially powerful a force for ending that oppression, as the emerging movement of today.

The most outstanding characteristic of this new movement is its deep-going challenge of every aspect of the oppression of women, including the hitherto unquestioned "sacred" role of women in the family. The fundamental proposition being put forward by feminists today is that it is not biology but social institutions which have kept women "in their place" in the home; that the present-day psychological differences between men and women -- and even to some extent their physical differences -- have been culturally conditioned, not biologically determined.

This bold denial of biological inferiority is part of the unprecedented militancy of feminism today. For the first time in history many people are beginning to grasp the depth of women's oppression, the degree to which women have been systematically stunted, warped and dehumanized so as to fit into the appointed role as wife-mother-housekeeper.

The consciousness that society, and not the organic nature of women, is responsible for their second class status is reflected in all aspects of the feminist movement's activities. It can be seen in the consciousness-raising groups, where women discuss how their personal problems are not the result of their own individual failings, but flow from a basic oppression suffered by all women. It is expressed repeatedly in feminist literature. Most importantly, it

can be seen in the actions of masses of women -- in which demands have been raised, such as free 24-hour child care centers, which, if realized, would bring much closer the day when women can make a free choice about what they want to do with their lives.

The current feminist movement is thus on a much more advanced level than the women's rights movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries where only the most far-sighted leaders questioned the role of women in the patriarchal family system. The masses of women who took part in that movement believed that the struggle for legal rights such as the right to education, the right to participate in politics, and to speak in public, the right to divorce, and the right to own property, would automatically lead to full equality for women.

The understanding and goals of today's movement goes much deeper. Since 1920, when women won the franchise, history has shown that it was not simply a lack of legal rights that has caused the oppression of women, but something much more fundamental, something inherent in the social roles which women play.

B. The Family

Since the beginning of class society, the institution of the patriarchal family has defined women as child-raisers and house-keepers, and this categorization has been responsible for their treatment as the inferior sex in all other spheres. Women have never consciously chosen this role, but have been trained from birth to feel that their fulfillment can come only from marriage and child-rearing. Never before in the history of class society have large numbers of women even been aware there could be an alternative. Even when women have gone outside the home to take a job, they have been charged with neglecting their "first responsibility" to the family. Thus, women have been prevented from being independent human beings. They have been dependent, both for economic security and for their very psychological identity and estimate of self-worth, on their husbands, fathers or boyfriends.

The role women are assigned in society means that the decision

to have a child commits a woman to years of work and drudgery. Once she has children, she becomes still more financially dependent on her husband. The denial of adequate birth control and the right to abortion have been among the most brutal aspects of this oppression. Because women lack control over the decision to have children they have no control over their lives. The vulnerability and dependency which flows from this situation is a decisive aspect of every woman's life. It helps to reinforce the conception that women are basically powerless.

For working women, poor women, and women of oppressed national minorities, the role women are forced into is even more oppressive, both to themselves and to their children. They are forced into the worst jobs and have even less access to educational opportunities, child care, safe abortions or birth control. This means greater economic vulnerability and dependence on their husbands. The alternative is often welfare. If a woman works, she may have to leave her children completely uncared for.

The fact that poor women suffer most from their oppression as women stems from the fact that the family is one of the basic instruments through which the social and economic inequities of class differences are perpetuated. Under capitalism, the nuclear family is assigned the responsibility for providing for the welfare of its members -- food, clothing, health care, child care, education, and care of the old and sick. And each family is thrown into competition with all others to get its share of the available jobs, goods and services.

An important aspect of the class struggle under capitalism has been the fight to force the government to shoulder more and more of the responsibility for social welfare. Concessions have been won in this struggle, including social security, medicare, free public education, welfare, limited unemployment insurance, and state-financed colleges. These concessions represent significant advances, but they don't come close to being adequate. In most of the major areas of social welfare, it is still up to the family to provide for basic needs.

The demands being raised by the feminist movement today represent the sharpest challenge yet to the concept that the individual family must take the economic responsibility for each of its members. One example is the demand for 24-hour childcare, available free to anyone who wants it. Demands like this that call for social responsibility for the rearing of the young point in the direction of a redivision of social wealth so fundamental that it begins to bring into question the whole capitalist system.

The role played by women in the household serves as the chief rationalization for the oppression of women in all other spheres. The unique "duties" of women in the family are used to justify unequal job and educational opportunity, unequal pay, the exploitation of women as sex objects, the discrimination against women in all areas including the arts, sports, scientific research, etc., and the use of women as a section of the reserve army of labor.

The family system also plays a crucial role for capitalism in inculcating the norms and values of the private property system. The 19th century utopian socialist, Robert Owen, summarized this function of the family in the following way:

"The children within these dens of selfishness and hypocrisy are taught to consider their own individual family their whole world, and that it is the duty and interest of all within that little orb to do whatever they can to promote the advantages of all the legitimate members of it. With these persons, it is my house, my wife, my estate, my children, my husband; our estate, and our children; or my brothers, my sisters; and our house and property."

Within the patriarchal family, the children receive training in submissiveness to authority, a training which is necessary to an economic system which demands unquestioning acceptance of the right of the rich to rule. The family is an authoritarian structure, with **the** man considered the head and the women and children dependent on him. Obedience to the father and to the norms of the monogamous family unit helps to prepare the child for acceptance of the

ideology of class society, including patriotism, religion, sexism and racism. The fostering of a child's loyalty to the individual family unit is paralleled by the inculcation of patriotism and chauvinism, that is, the loyalty of a person to his or her own racial or religious grouping, or nation-state. The family, which in one form or another has been a necessary feature of all class societies, plays the central role in implanting in infants and children the character structure necessary to maintain the social relations intrinsic to capitalism.

There is no institution in class society whose true role is as hidden by prejudices and mystification as that of the family. Much religious teaching is devoted to the perpetuation of the monogamous family unit, any deviation from which is labelled as "sin." The academic world has been united in rationalizing the existence of the nuclear family and the oppression of women. Bourgeois psychology has upheld the basic definition of women as dependent and submissive, and has labelled any initiative or aggressiveness on the part of women as "unnatural." Historians have hidden the true history of the struggle of women and have portrayed women activists and political leaders in a way calculated to make it difficult to identify with them. Bourgeois sociologists uphold the subordination of women in the family. Bourgeois anthropologists perpetrate the myth that the family economic unit has always existed, and that women have always been subservient to men because of their natural childbearing functions.

In this systematic obfuscation of the role of the family, the anti-Marxist anthropologists have played an especially important role. They hide the fact that the origin of the patriarchal family coincided with, and flowed from, the development of private property, class society and the state. They hide the fact that in early communal societies, the basic economic unit was the clan, not the individual family. Within each clan goods were shared equally, and people worked in a cooperative way rather than competing against one another.

The historic turning point in the transfer of these economic functions from the clan to the family came with the development of

an economic surplus and individual accumulation of this surplus as private property. Individuals began to separate themselves from the clan and set up separate households. Women became isolated from communal activity, and monogamy for the wife was strictly enforced to assure legitimate heirs.

Throughout the history of class society, the family institution has evolved and changed according to the different divisions of labor, propertied interests and needs of the systems of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. Until the bourgeois revolution, among the wealthy and powerful possessing classes, the choice of a husband or wife was made on the grounds of economic considerations, usually by the parents of the couple. It was only with the rise of capitalism, with its concept of free exchange and free labor, that the idea of freedom of choice of marriage partners evolved along with other democratic ideas. Despite this assertion that relationships between husband and wife should be based on free choice and affection, the old economic basis of the marriage tie remained, and along with it, the practices of adultery and prostitution.

Before industrialization, the primary role of the family was as a basic unit of production in capitalist society. Most goods were produced on the family farm or in the family shop or small business, and much of what each individual family consumed in the way of clothes and food were made within the home. The role of women in the family economic unit clearly defined their role in society. Until the industrial revolution, women had little identity or rights outside of their functions within the family. They could not travel, speak in public, engage in politics, go to college, drink in the taverns or mix in society at large in any significant way.

Industrialization began to lay the basis for the replacement of the family by creating the possibility for relieving women of their economic functions in the home and thus freeing personal relationships from economic compulsion.

Mass production was a turning point in the economic history of the family. For the first time, women were drawn away from the family to outside work. By bringing women out of the home, industrialization led to a more and more obvious contradiction between the restrictions

put on women in public activities and the need for them to participate in industry.

Thus, industrialization and urbanization were key factors which led to the rise of the early women's rights movement. The women's rights movement was part of and a sequel to a general worldwide upsurge in the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions against the traditional, inherited privileges of the upper strata under feudalism. In the United States, it grew out of the radicalization preceding the Civil War and got much of its impetus from the abolition movement.

At the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, a Declaration of Sentiments was passed, which called for women to have "immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." Specifically this included the right to vote, property rights, freedom from the domination of the husband, the right to have a profession, to go to college, to better wages, and an end to the moral double standard between men and women.

The demands of the present movement go beyond those of the earlier women's rights movement, while at the same time building upon the aims and achievements of this earlier struggle. The feminist movement today is still demanding equality -- in pay, in opportunity, in the types of options women have in life -- but there is a much more radical realization that real equality cannot be won without the full right of women to control over their bodies, and without social alternatives to private responsibility for the raising of children within the individual family.

Whereas the early women's rights movement spoke in terms of gaining equal rights within American capitalist society, the feminist movement of today started out by questioning the basic structure and institutions of this society. This new level is reflected in the demands raised at the Congress to Unite Women, held in November 1969 in New York City, one of the first major conferences of the women's liberation movement. It outlined some of the basic goals that are being raised by the entire feminist movement: 24-hour child care centers open to all children from infancy to early

adolescence regardless of their parents' income or marital status, with child care practices being decided by those using the centers; the right of women to control their own bodies; equal job opportunities; an end to the tracking system in education; women's studies programs; enforcement of Title VII which calls for equality on the job; an end to the derogatory image of women presented by the media; and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Since 1920, the continuing economic and social development of the U.S. has laid the basis for raising these more radical demands. The giant leap in technology and industrialization, which has accelerated since World War II, has removed productive activities from the family to an unprecedented degree. The old family farm has virtually disappeared. Modern appliances, frozen and packaged foods, and ready-made clothes are all examples of the degree to which work activities are being transferred out of the individual, isolated family unit, to be carried out on a mass production basis.

What began as a challenge to a few specific aspects of women's oppression during the period of the women's rights movement and the rise of industrialization has now developed to the point where the entire family institution is under question.

The role of women is directly affected by these changes in the nature of the family which have narrowed the tasks of the housewife to such functions as care of the very young and very old, and janitorial and cooking tasks around the house. Along with the fact that the average American family is having fewer children, this has meant that for a greater period of each woman's life, her role consists only of caring for her own and her husband's personal needs.

At the same time, more women than ever before are working outside the home, and those who do continue to be discriminated against on the job. In addition they continue to have a double burden -- their jobs and their "duties" at home. For working women with children, facing a situation where there are few child care facilities available, this double burden is especially oppressive.

The technological revolution has created two other contradictions faced by women today: 1) the contradiction between increased

female education and the continuing discrimination against women entering the job market; 2) the contradiction between the scientific and technological potential women see for controlling their own bodies and the denial of this control because of reactionary abortion laws and lack of adequate birth control education and safe methods.

Thus while women see the increased potential for participation in the activities of the world, they are at the same time told that their identity and worth still come from the degree of their "success" in finding a man, settling down in a home, and having children. Just at the point when women have more material possibility than ever to develop, more options than ever before about what they can do with their lives, they are still held back by the basic wife-mother-housekeeper definition of females, which is inherent in the continuing existence of the patriarchal family institution. The thoroughgoing radicalism of the new feminist movement is partly a product of the growing consciousness of these contradictions.

Another factor which has promoted the radical critique of the family made by feminists today has been the fact that the family has come under attack from another quarter -- the youth revolt. The worldwide youth radicalization that is occurring today is a unique phenomenon in world history, not only in its size and power, but in the political issues that it is raising. Previously, most working class and middle class youth have been so preoccupied with the struggle for economic security that even when they rebelled, it was over questions of immediate economic survival. The youth radicalization of today is much broader in its condemnation of the system of capitalism, and many of its most prominent features strike right at the heart of the competitive family system itself.

This new generation is alienated from the decadent social relationships inherent in the death agony of a society completely oriented toward competition and accumulation of private property. Young people are beginning to see the hypocrisy of capitalism's reverence for the "sacred" family system. They see that while popular magazines and other media praise the ideals of family "togetherness," the relationships between human beings are distorted by the crassest

market-place ideas. Husbands and wives are chosen on the competitive sex market; the husband according to his status, the wife according to her value as a sex object. The children are seen as "products" produced by the family, with each family making "investments" in its children in the form of music lessons, summer camps, college, etc., to prepare them for "success" according to bourgeois standards in the competitive world. This get ahead mentality is reflected not only within the family, but also in friendships since social relationships are calculated according to what would be most beneficial in the careerist struggle to advance.

The opponents of the women's liberation movement maintain that the feminist opposition to the family system is a challenge to the existence of affectionate relationships between people. In reality, the family system and the class system are the real destroyers of genuine human relationships. The fact that people are free to choose their own partners in marriage does not bring freedom and happiness within marriage any more than "freedom" to sell one's labor power means that a worker is truly free. So long as women and children are dependent on the male for their economic existence, they will tend to be subordinate to him in their personal relationships. This means that millions of people who do not want to live with each other, who often do not even like each other, will continue to live together, because they feel they have no other choice. When feminists oppose the patriarchal family system, they are talking about eliminating this economic compulsion, so that personal relationships will be freed from these economic fetters.

The capitalist system itself has been laying the basis for the disintegration of this basic economic, competitive family unit. The rising divorce rate, statistics on the number of children running away from home, the growth of communes and collectives, the "sexual revolution," and the increased number of people living together without legal marriage certificates are all signs of this. More and more, the ideological covering that has hidden the true role of this institution is being removed.

The disintegration of the family has also been affected by other

Products of the technological revolution including the increased mobility of the population, the breaking down of traditional community ties, and the decline in religion. The sexual revolution is a result, not primarily of the pill, but of these broader changes in people's outlook toward contemporary life.

The radicalization of women today stems from the contradiction between the potential which exists for meeting the needs of women because of the tremendous wealth of American society, and the reality that these needs are not being met by the capitalist social order. For the masses of working class women and women of oppressed nationalities, this contradiction is the deepest. The fact that the majority of the population in this country still has to fight for the necessities of life creates the potential for the radicalization of great masses of women around feminist demands. And whereas middle class women are rebelling against the emptiness of their lives, the emptiness and oppression experienced by working class women are all the more profound. The fight for the demands of the feminist movement -- such as childcare, equal pay, and free abortion on demand -- are part of the class struggle and they are of greatest relevance to working class women.

In this sense, we are seeing a turning point in world history similar to the turning point thousands of years ago when the private property system replaced the communal clan system. Just as the beginning of class society and private property were associated with the separation of women into individual households, so the freeing of women will see the emergence of women from their dependence on individual men within the home into full participation in public life and social production.

C. The fight for female liberation, part of the anti-capitalist struggle

Whereas the early women's rights movement, which was able to go part of the way in the struggle for liberation, was an aspect and extension of the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the current female liberation struggle -- including the demands for the deferred democratic rights of equality -- is part of the process of the developing

anti-capitalist revolution. The question of how to end the oppression of women flows from, and is tied into, the question of how to end the class system of capitalism. The strategy of this movement must flow from a basic analysis of how that system perpetuates itself, and what forces must be mobilized in struggle to eliminate it.

This struggle is against the most powerful state in history and the social system which it defends. Not only is the dignity and humanity of women at stake, but the future of the human race itself. The opponent, U.S. capitalism, has shown the extreme lengths to which it is willing to go to preserve itself. It is a system which, despite its rhetoric about the sanctity of womanhood, is ready to kill hundreds of thousands of women -- in Vietnam, on the abortion tables, and as a result of the miseries and hardships of domestic slavery and poverty. Our struggle must be aimed directly at taking away the power of the class which rules this country according to the private property-profit system, those who have control over our lives, who make the basic decisions to use the wealth of this country to destroy and oppress human beings instead of putting it towards development of better schools, hospitals, birth control, child care, housing, and other human needs.

The essence of being "feminine" has always meant the opposite of asserting control over one's life. Women have been trained to be passive, weak, submissive, self-sacrificing, gentle, emotional -- in short, to think of themselves as being powerless as individuals and as a group. In carrying out the struggle for liberation, women must do something they have been systematically educated to believe themselves incapable of: women must become fighters, leaders, organizers, and clear political thinkers, so that the power of masses of women can be mobilized to take on the capitalist system.

Part II

A. The strategy for women's liberation

In determining the strategy for women's liberation, there are two basic questions which must be answered:

1) Given the fact that women are divided by class, race, and other factors, what are the possibilities for uniting women in the struggle for liberation?

2) What is the relationship between the feminist movement and other movements directed against the capitalist class, such as the radical student movement, the antiwar movement, the movements of oppressed nationalities including Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans, and the struggles of labor.

Two main incorrect points of view have been put forward within the women's liberation movement in regard to the first question. There are some women who say that the class and racial divisions among women are unimportant. This tendency is often reflected in the attempt to designate women as "an oppressed class" or even an "oppressed nation," or "colony." Those who hold this view say that all that is needed for the liberation of humankind is a mass independent women's movement because all other struggles are based on and flow out of the feminist struggle.

At the other extreme are some women who say there is no basis, except a strict class basis, for uniting women; that the divisions among women are insurmountable. Those who hold this viewpoint tend to deny the significance of the oppression of women as women and hold that the feminist struggle should be subordinated to and wait for other struggles.

The truth is that women are at the same time both united by sexist oppression and divided by capitalist society. There is an objective basis for a unified struggle of women of different nationalities and classes, because all women are oppressed as women. Sisterhood is powerful because of this universal female oppression, and this is the basis for the existence of an independent, non-exclusive mass feminist movement.

Women of different social classes suffer to very different degrees from a lack of child care, abortion, equal pay, and lack of an independent identity -- but their oppression as women is very real. They can and do have a stake in struggling around these issues. But the broadest unity in struggle, closed to no woman, is possible and progressive if this unity is based on demands which combat the oppression foisted by capitalism on women. In fact, women of the working class have the most to gain by united struggle which wrest victories around such demands.

While all women -- including women of all social classes, Black women, Chicanas, students and gay women -- suffer oppression as women, the differences in degree and nature of the oppression they face are significant. Because women suffer different forms and degrees of oppression, different groupings will organize separately, as well as together. Black women will organize as Black women because they suffer a unique oppression. Working women will organize together to further their struggle on the job. High school students, college students, women belonging to religious organizations, gay women, and other groups of women are all already showing a need to organize separately around the particular oppression they face. In fact this independent organization is necessary to most effectively unify and mobilize the broadest actions around democratic and transitional demands.

Any attempt to disregard either those factors which divide women or those which unite them will lead to misunderstandings and roadblocks in the attempt to mobilize the full power of women.

It is just as wrong to underestimate the importance of the independent feminist movement as it is to underestimate the importance of the independent national liberation struggles. The fight for the liberation of women is an integral part of the overall struggle against capitalism, whether or not all of the participants are conscious of this. It is a fight which is challenging an institution without which capitalism could not survive -- the family. The feminist movement is also a struggle which is different and independent from all other movements, because it is based on a unique oppression which

women experience, and therefore has a dynamic all of its own. It is only women, organized independently on the basis of struggle against their common oppression and with correct program of struggle, who can win full female liberation. No other movement can do this for them.

Similarly, other struggles for fundamental change have their own independent basis and dynamic. Each of the struggles of students, of workers, of Black people, of Chicanos, and the struggle to end the Southeast Asia war has a unique, independent dynamic and course of development. But while these struggles are independent from each other, they are also interrelated, because they all are reactions to evils of the same capitalist system. The struggles for Black liberation, for Chicano liberation, the antiwar movement and the student movement were important in sparking and inspiring the women's liberation movement.

In turn, the feminist movement is having a profound affect on those struggles. The rise of the women's liberation movement has brought about greater understanding and support by women of the oppression of Black people. Similarly, the feminist movement has already had a profound effect on the Black liberation movement. It has raised the concept that the fight for community controlled child care centers and abortion clinics are also part of the struggle for Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano liberation.

Black feminism leads Black women to a discovery of their identity as human beings, and therefore builds a new confidence and spirit of struggle against all forms of oppression that Black women face. Groups such as the Phoenix Organization of Women, which is a predominately Black and Puerto Rican group of ex-drug addicts in New York, have played a vanguard role in building the women's liberation movement. A large amount of literature has been published describing the triple oppression of Black women -- as women, as workers, and as African-Americans. Within all the various Black organizations, discussions and debates are taking place over the question of the relationship of the Black movement to the women's liberation movement. More and more women of the oppressed nationalities are coming to the conclusion that feminist ideas are deeply relevant to their lives,

and are organizing to fight their oppression as women as well as their oppression as Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanas, or Native Americans. These women are more oppressed as women than other women, and they will be the staunchest fighters for the liberation of women.

In La Raza Unida Party of Northern California, Chicanas succeeded in having women's liberation demands included as a part of the party's platform. The same questions will be raised in connection with a Black political party. Similarly, the unions must adopt many of the demands of the female liberation movement as their own, if they are to be transformed into real instruments of struggle, for the benefit not only of the large number of women workers, but for the class as a whole.

Three major trade unions -- the UAW, the AFT and the American Newspaper Guild -- have adopted convention resolutions incorporating demands of the women's liberation movement for maternity leave, child care centers and an end to discrimination against women workers. At the AFT convention, women delegates formed a caucus to fight for their demands.

A national organization of women government workers was formed in 1968 -- Federally Employed Women. It now has 1,000 members in 30 chapters across the country. One-half of the membership is Black women. In New York City, women workers for the city government have formed Women in City Government United, which participated in the August 26, 1970 demonstration. It is fighting against discrimination against women in city jobs, for abortion coverage in women workers health insurance, and for free, 24-hour child care centers.

The combined power of the different social struggles is needed to constitute a force strong enough to overthrow capitalism and overwhelm its defenders. In this process there will always be some layers of the population that will temporarily move out ahead of others. In the feminist movement, the students and young women have been in the vanguard. In the overall fight for liberation, struggles on the campuses are sparking other struggles. The struggle to win control of university facilities to benefit women -- such as medical facilities for abortion and classroom and library facilities for women's studies -- provides an example for the general fight to win control of the

resources of society. Student women's groups are playing an important role in organizing actions and coalitions which go beyond the campus.

One of the tasks of revolutionary socialists is to deal with the basic reality of a society divided into different classes and oppressed layers, layers which radicalize and move at different rates. The job of the revolutionary socialist party is not only to help build independent movements of struggle by these different layers, but also to understand how one struggle can spark others. Moreover, there must be a perspective for coordinating these movements, so that over time their striking power can be unified. Feminist consciousness, the nationalist consciousness of oppressed minorities, and class consciousness must be welded together and elevated into socialist consciousness. The revolutionary socialist party is the only kind of organization which can develop this overall perspective, because it includes members of all oppressed groups, and has a program for the mobilization of the working class and its allies in struggle against the capitalist system.

The revolutionary socialist party incorporates in its program the various demands and ideas which come out of the mass movements of the day. Because revolutionary socialists participate in all these various movements, they gain a clearer understanding not only of the interrelationship between them, but also of the lessons that one movement can learn from the other. In this sense, the Socialist Workers Party has learned a great deal from the feminist movement as well as from other movements such as the Black, Chicano, student, antiwar, gay, and anti-pollution movements. The job of the revolutionary socialist is not only to learn from existing movements but to study capitalism and the history of revolutionary struggle against it, and to use this understanding to construct a mass revolutionary socialist party that can successfully challenge that system.

The fundamental Marxist strategy which has developed out of the experiences of twentieth century revolutions is that of the transitional program. This program puts forward the concept that the best way to build a mass movement with the power to challenge the capitalist system is by mobilizing masses of people on the basis of demands which meet their present needs, and which also lead in the

direction of overturning the capitalist system itself. A program of transitional and democratic demands must be the basis of a successful strategy of the feminist movement, just as they are the basis of strategy for other movements which challenge capitalism. These demands flow from the understanding that the basic goals of the feminist movement -- child care, equal pay, equal job opportunity, and the right of women to control their own bodies -- are revolutionary, and that mass struggles around such demands lead inexorably in a revolutionary direction.

Masses of people do not come into motion against this system by being won over by argument alone to the abstract idea of socialism. As all revolutions in history have shown, an understanding of the need to change society comes in the process of struggle, when it becomes clear through experience to masses of people that they must take over and control society for themselves if their demands are to be fully met.

At this time, it is impossible to predict all the demands and issues which will be important in mobilizing the power of women, and which will become part of a transitional program for women. Many key demands have already been raised, but it is certain that as the movement develops and grows, as new layers of women come into struggle, new demands will be added.

Demands which already are clearly of central importance to women are the three demands raised on August 26, 1970 -- child care, abortion, and equal educational and job opportunity -- as well as demands for maternity leaves with pay, an end to sexist advertising and women's studies. The demands for child care, equal job and educational opportunity, and the right of women to control their own bodies, all flow from the simple desire of women to have control over their lives. At the same time, these demands are very revolutionary, because to win them completely requires going beyond the boundaries of the capitalist system. The inability of the capitalists to meet the demand of Blacks for equal job and educational opportunity is an indication of the difficulty this system will have in meeting the demands of the feminist movement.

The issue of abortion has revolutionary implications because a victory in this struggle will undermine one of the chief rationalizations for the oppression of women: their vulnerability to unplanned pregnancy. It will also throw into sharper relief the real causes of female oppression, which are economic and social, not biological. The fight for free abortion on demand is one which affects masses of women in the most immediate way, and the struggle to make abortions free raises the fundamental question of whether the resources and medical facilities of this society should be put to the service of the people as opposed to regulation by the profit-makers.

The importance of building a movement which fights for the needs of masses of women was shown clearly by the August 26, 1970 demonstrations. Up to that point, the organized women's liberation movement was quite small, with the main forces involved coming out of the radicalized student milieu. The turnout of more than 50,000 women in cities and towns all over the country, in the first nationwide action ever to be organized by this movement, was a striking example of the widespread support that the women's liberation movement can mobilize. August 26 helped to cut through the myth that only middle class women could relate to their oppression as women. Secretaries, high school women, Black women, women from all walks of life turned out on that day.

By putting forward its demands clearly, and by demonstrating for them, the feminist movement showed on August 26 that it was fighting for goals which are wanted and needed by masses of women. August 26 demonstrated the impact of the feminist movement and it began to show masses of women the serious nature and potential power of this movement, by cutting through the ruling class lie that only a handful of women support it.

August 26 was an example of the real meaning of "sisterhood" -- that is, the concept that women can unite together as sisters on the basis of common struggle. It provided a feeling of solidarity, of power, and inspired women to see that their problems were shared by masses of others. It was also important because it put the onus for the lack of abortion, child care and equality of job opportunity squarely where it belongs -- on the capitalist government. Women

on August 26 were doing exactly what they have been trained not to do. They were out fighting for their own needs, putting these needs first, demanding these needs be met.

August 26 was only one of the first steps in the struggle to build a mass women's liberation movement. Building this movement is a prolonged process with many twists and turns, successes and setbacks. Only through the experience of struggling for the demands of the movement -- by seeing concretely how the power of women can win concessions, and by seeing how the government will try to hedge on granting these concessions -- will large numbers of women gain the political understanding that is necessary to accomplish this.

B. Anti-mass action tendencies

The concept of building a movement through mass struggle around democratic and transitional demands avoids a number of errors which are common in the feminist movement today. These include the errors of reformism, of ultraleftism and sectarianism.

Reformism in the women's movement is based on the belief that it is possible to win liberation under capitalism, and logically leads to dependence on those responsible for perpetuating this system to grant liberation. It leads away from the concept of organizing women as a mass independent power, fighting uncompromisingly for the needs of women, which inevitably leads them into struggle with the capitalist class. The orientation of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party toward working within the Democratic party is a clear expression of their reformism.

Instead of supporting capitalist party candidates, the feminist movement must expose these parties, which are among the main institutions upholding this sexist, capitalist society. Women have nothing to gain by working through the Democratic or Republican parties, or by supporting "lesser evil" or women candidates within those parties. The Democratic and Republican parties are completely controlled by the capitalist class of this country, and are structured to perpetuate this control. Any attempt to work within these parties will contribute to the illusions that masses of women have about the system. The job of revolutionary women is not to reinforce

the illusions that masses of people have in the capitalist ruling parties, but to expose the fact that these parties and the economic system they represent cannot provide liberation.

The other basic error which the transitional approach avoids is that of ultraleftism and sectarianism. The ultraleftists reject struggles around the basic demands of the feminist movement on the grounds that these struggles do not challenge the capitalist system as a whole. Ultraleftists often understand, in words, why a revolution is needed, but they think that the way to bring one about is to organize women on the basis of raising demands for such general concepts as "socialism," "anti-capitalism," "anti-imperialism," or "abolition of the family."

Because they do not see the revolutionary dynamic of struggles around concrete issues such as child care, abortion, maternity leaves, equal pay, etc., they have no program which can mobilize masses of women who do not yet know that their enemy is the capitalist system itself.

Both ultraleftism and reformism make the fundamental error of ignoring the most important task of women's liberation: that is, the creation of a powerful mass, independent women's movement. The reformists think mainly in terms of convincing the politicians of the two major capitalist parties. The ultralefts organize in a way which has no ability to mobilize masses of women in struggle. Neither of them sees the dynamic relationship between struggles for immediate gains around issues like abortion that directly affect women and the attainment of full liberation.

Ultraleft groups counterpose building a socialist or anti-imperialist women's movement to building broader organizations fighting for demands leading toward women's liberation. They insist that coalitions, campus groups, Black women's groups and broader feminist groups be turned into organizations which require a consciously anti-imperialist or anticapitalist perspective on the part of their members.

Not only do they fail to understand the revolutionary implications of struggles around concrete feminist demands, but they fail to understand that different kinds of organizations are needed within

the movement to serve different purposes. Broad coalitions uniting as many individuals and groups as possible around specific demands are needed to unite the power of women, concentrate it against the government, make manifest the growing numbers of women who support the basic demands of the movement. Other kinds of feminist groups are also needed: student groups, caucuses within unions, Black groups, Chicana groups, gay liberation groups, church groups, high school groups, and feminist organizations which can encourage and meet all the various needs of women within the movement, including education, action and consciousness-raising activities.

Although there are many radical currents and tendencies within the U.S. today which tend toward ultraleftism and reformism, the Communist Party is the strongest nationwide organization, and our most important opponent, which rejects the transitional approach and has a reformist perspective.

C. The Communist Party

The Communist Party attempts to channel the energies of the feminist movement into support for female reform candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties, such as Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug. Because they put their basic faith in the liberal wing of the capitalist class, the CP fears the feminist movement because the dynamic of feminist demands is just as threatening to this wing of the capitalist class as it is to the conservatives. This fear is reflected in the CP's assertion that the feminist struggle should not be given equal importance to other movements for social change, and in its reactionary romanticism and falsification of the institution of the family. The Communist Party also defends the reactionary attitude of the Soviet bureaucracy toward Soviet women.

Because of the Communist Party's fear of the development of a mass independent, feminist movement -- which would challenge both capitalism in this country and the privileged bureaucracy in the Soviet Union -- the CP will often support ultraleft activities and actions which sound radical, but which divert the movement from the task of building a real mass movement.

D. Counter-institutions

Counter-institutions represent attempts by women to use

their own resources to set up child care centers, abortion counseling, private women's liberation health clinics, clothing exchanges, food co-ops, and loan societies. There have been some benefits to a few women from these activities -- they can help a few women to survive on a day-to-day basis. But the building of such counter-institutions is no alternative to building the mass women's movement to win their liberation.

The women's liberation movement by itself does not have the basic economic resources to meet the needs of masses of women. For example, it is possible through abortion-counseling and small-scale abortion clinics to provide for some needs of a limited number of women. But, the goal of the feminist movement must be to struggle for the right of every woman to have control over her body. And it is only possible to do this by fighting to see that hospitals and medical facilities are used to this end. Similarly, it is necessary to fight for control of the educational complexes and facilities, as well as the industries and businesses, which discriminate against women.

The attempt to change society through the creation of counter-institutions reflects a middle class and utopian outlook. It is only the relatively privileged women who have the resources and time to create their own child care centers and other institutions. Moreover, if the counter-institutions are built with a "serve the people" perspective of providing for working women and poor women and children, this can very easily divert the movement in the direction of philanthropic social work.

The heart of the struggle for the liberation of women is a struggle for control of the vast resources of the richest society in the world, so that these can be used for the greatest welfare of human beings. Anything less than this means co-existence with an exploitative system which continues to make its basic decisions on the basis of what is profitable to the ruling class.

A parallel error is that of attempting to find personal liberation through the formation of collectives or communes. One of the most powerful aspects of the current radicalization of women has been the rejection of alienated relationships imposed upon men and

women by the capitalist system. The experimentation with collectives and communes is an example of this rejection and an effort to substitute better relationships for the traditional ones. But these attempts can have only a very limited effect as an alternative because, even in instances of communal living, someone still has to perform alienating labor outside the commune to support non-working members, and someone -- often the women -- has to prepare food, wash clothes, clean, and take care of children. Until this entire society is transformed into one where production is organized on the basis of human needs, where there is socially organized child care, care for old people, medical care, public free laundries, and communal kitchens, it is utopian to orient the struggle towards individual solutions.

One of the ways the oppression of women has been maintained is through the separation of women from each other in isolated households. To overcome this, the feminist movement must organize vehicles for bringing women out of the home and for giving women the courage to lead independent lives and gain independent identity and strength. Consciousness-raising groups, and the general consciousness raising that comes from being part of a broad movement, can help give women this confidence which can lay the basis for breaking out of isolation and getting involved in the social and political struggle to reorganize society. In this sense, consciousness-raising is the opposite of an individual solution. It lays the basis for participating with other women in political and social revolution.

The growth of the feminist movement is challenging all the oppressive aspects of women's personal lives, for example, the way women are forced to dress -- not for comfort, but as sexual objects -- and the powerlessness represented by the fact that men feel free to shout hate-filled obscenities as women pass by on the sidewalk. This challenge provides a basis for the pride and confidence needed to fight for liberation.

Because much of oppression women experience -- on the street, in the family, on the job -- is perpetrated by individual men, consciousness-raising must of necessity include attacks on the

antiwoman behavior of men. The women's movement, however, cannot be aimed at simply reforming individual men, any more than the Black liberation movement can succeed if it is aimed at "reforming" whites. All forms of male chauvinism must be condemned and fought against, and the existence of a powerful feminist movement will have an impact on men and help force them to change. But any central orientation of the women's liberation movement towards attempting to create unalienated, completely fulfilling human relationships through individual reform under capitalism is doomed to failure and will only end in frustration because it is impossible for either men or women to completely remake themselves as free individuals until this sexist, racist exploitative society is replaced by one founded on human needs and solidarity.

The existing feminist movement, while still quite limited in its forces, has a crucial role to play in inspiring masses of women to move against their oppression. It can do this if it acts around demands which relate to the needs of masses, avoids sectarianism, avoids the idea that all women will radicalize in exactly the same way, and avoids centering the movement around non-visible, limited activities that can affect only a few women at best, such as counter-institutions.

So long as capitalism exists it is impossible to gain full dignity and humanity as women and as human beings, other than by fighting against oppression. The key task is one of organizing and inspiring masses of women to fight to change society.

While a socialist revolution is a pre-condition for the complete liberation of women, a socialist revolution cannot be complete until women are totally free. The development of a powerful women's movement now, before the socialist revolution, means that this movement will not only strengthen the struggle against capitalism, but will also be a powerful stimulus to revolutionary changes in the family system and in human attitudes about sex roles following the revolution, in the period of the construction of the new society.

The women's liberation movement is developing not only in the United States, but around the world. This international feminist movement is a highly significant part of a worldwide upsurge of the

oppressed. Women's liberation groups have appeared not only in industrialized countries in Europe and the Far East, but also in the workers states and in the colonial and semi-colonial world.

The forms of oppression suffered by women in these different parts of the world are different. In the colonial and semi-colonial countries the struggle of women is interrelated with the struggle for national liberation against imperialism, combined with the socialist revolution. In the advanced capitalist countries, the women's movement is part of the struggle to establish a socialist society.

In the post-capitalist countries, such as the USSR, the struggle of women for their liberation has already become part of the struggle to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracies of these countries in order to be able to continue the process of the socialist revolution. The struggle of women in the worker's states will be toward building socialism, not back toward capitalism. The incompleteness of the revolutions in the existing workers states -- the fact that the women are still oppressed, and the fact that youth, workers and national minorities are also oppressed -- is at root a result of the pressure from the encircling capitalist world. Every new struggle against oppression within the U.S., such as the struggle of women, has the effect of weakening imperialism and strengthening revolutionary tendencies all over the world.

The successful August 26 demonstrations and the struggle American women are waging to control their own lives has already helped to inspire the women's movement in other countries. The women's liberation movement in this country, which is fighting for the rights of more than half the population, strengthened by the developing international feminist ferment, will be an extremely important and powerful ingredient in the struggle to end the worldwide capitalist system.