

The Struggle for Women's Liberation: Strategy for A Mass Movement

Young Socialist Alliance
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This draft resolution on the women's liberation movement was written for the Young Socialist National Convention to be held at the Manhattan Center in New York City, December 27-31, 1970. It was drafted by the National Executive Committee of the Young Socialist Alliance.

Similar resolutions and discussion articles will deal with other activities in which young socialists are involved. These initial draft resolutions, along with any others submitted to the convention, will be discussed and the general political perspectives outlined in them will be voted on.

The resolutions are being circulated prior to the convention to assure the fullest possible discussion on political perspectives and activities before the convention meets.

Young socialists from around the country are invited to participate in the written discussion and urged to attend the convention. Contributions to the discussion and inquiries can be sent to the Young Socialist Alliance, P.O. Box 471 Cooper Station, New York, New York 10003.

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THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION:

STRATEGY FOR A MASS MOVEMENT

Fifty years after the granting of suffrage, the status of American women remains essentially unchanged. In their overwhelming majority, women are still tied down to the home. They are discriminated against on the job, earn 58% of what men earn, and continue to be portrayed by this society as dumb, subservient household fixtures and sex objects. In 1970 the contradiction between the technological proficiency and wealth of our society and the fact that women cannot even obtain free, safe birth control and abortions, childcare facilities, decent jobs and equal education opportunity, is becoming more and more sharp as the feminist movement unfolds and sweeps new layers of women into its ranks.

Just two years ago the women's liberation movement consisted almost entirely of small groups which met to talk out their common problems in private. Today, in demonstrations like the August 26 Strike, we see thousands of women pouring into the streets to demand their liberation. The growth of women's liberation has proceeded at an astonishing rate, reflecting the depth of the radicalization that is sweeping this country.

In many ways, women in America have won a good deal of formal equality. They have the right to vote, to own and dispose of property, and other rights. There are labor-saving devices such as refrigerators, laundry facilities, and prepared foods to cut down on household drudgery. But rather than alleviating the oppression women feel, the legal and technical gains made by women over the past half century have only exacerbated the frustration of women with their role in society. It is partly because women spend less time than ever before in such activity as housework that they are restless with the lack of creative opportunities open to them. Partly because women can vote, but see no progress being made by the government on their demands, they have taken to the streets in independent action.

With the rise in the number of women working, the gap between the wages of men and women has widened. In 1955,

women's wages on the average were 64% of men's wages. In 1968, this percentage was 58, a drop of 6%. As more and more women enter the labor market, they are beginning to challenge the long-standing practices of discrimination, lower pay, the lack of childcare, and women's dual job inside and outside the home.

The eruption of women's liberation organizations in virtually every sphere of American society is breaking down the myth that the only feminists are middle-class or college women. Women are organizing everywhere, in grade schools, in city government offices, in hospitals, in the suburbs, in the church, on the job, and on the college and high school campuses.

The Young Socialist Alliance has been in the forefront in recognizing the revolutionary nature of this movement, supporting feminist demands, and building feminist groups and mass actions by women.

Women's Liberation in the Context of the Current Radicalization

The radicalization we are now experiencing is being produced by fundamental contradictions in the capitalist system. These contradictions in the epoch of the decay of capitalism as a world system have rendered the ruling class incapable of stemming the tide of the revolt of Blacks in the ghettos, student struggles on the campuses, a mass antiwar movement, and now the rebellion of women.

Women have learned many important lessons from the Black struggle, in particular the need to study their own history, the development of self-pride, and the need to guarantee their liberation by organizing their own independent struggle. The antiwar movement has also helped to set the stage for the upsurge of women, by legitimizing dissent and mass actions in the streets against the government. The Vietnam war itself has created a deep distrust of this government

in the minds of the American people. More and more young people are understanding that the ruling class ignores the needs of the masses of people when these needs conflict with the needs of imperialism.

One of the most powerful aspects of the current radicalization has been the alienation of youth from the social relationships imposed upon men and women by the capitalist system. Radicalizing youth today are groping for new forms of living without the intense alienation and oppressiveness of present human relationships. To many young people it is becoming clear that it will be impossible to build new, freer relationships in the context of this system.

This alienation from the social roles forced upon individuals in our society is most vividly reflected in the breakdown of the nuclear family. More and more young people are rejecting the notion that lifetime monogamy is the only sexual norm. The role of parental authority in preserving bourgeois ideology is clearly breaking down. The development of relatively available birth control devices has allowed women especially to redefine their sexual role, at least in terms of separating sexual relationships from the bearing of children.

But in spite of these developments, the fact remains that under capitalism there is no escape from the social oppression people face. The partial freedom women now have to control their bodies exists alongside the grossest exploitation of the female as a sex object, in advertising, the media, and in personal relationships. The attempts of a few young people to live in communes is frustrated by the fact that even with communal living, someone still has to perform alienating labor outside the commune to support the non-working members of the group, and someone, often a woman, has to take care of the house and children. Until this society is transformed into one where production is organized on the basis of human needs and not private profit, that is, until we achieve a socialist society, it is utopian to think we can win freedom through individual solutions.

August 26: The Turning Point

The large scale demonstrations on August 26 indicated for the first time that the demands of women's liberation have a mass appeal. Women protested that day in nearly every major city and in smaller towns all over the country to demand free abortions--no forced sterilization; free, 24-hour childcare, community-controlled; equal opportunity and pay on the job; and equal opportunity in education. The thrust of the actions was

militantly in favor of "liberation now," not just for token rights or equality with men.

The demands of August 26 clearly emerged as foci of the struggle for women's liberation. While there are undoubtedly many other issues around which women will mobilize, these basic demands and others related to them obviously have the power to draw masses of women into action and relate to their most basic needs.

As revolutionary socialists we support these democratic and transitional demands. They are demands which can mobilize women in independent political action against their oppression. They also lay the blame for the continued oppression of women squarely on the government, where it belongs. Finally, in the process of raising these demands women's consciousness is raised about the type of social system which is needed for their total liberation. Their realization that only a socialist society can create the possibility of an end to women's oppression will add powerful new forces to the revolutionary movement in this country.

The spectrum of women involved in August 26 was one of the most revealing aspects of that demonstration. The turnout of traditional women's organizations, women's liberation groups, both radical and moderate, and campus groups, was large. In addition, for the first time we saw significant numbers of Third World women, high school women, working women and housewives. It is the presence of these women that clearly exposes the elitism of the reformists and ultralefts within the women's liberation movement who claim that feminist demands do not relate to working women. These demands, in fact, have the most relevance for working and Third World women, since they suffer the most from inadequate childcare, exorbitantly expensive or illegal abortions, and discrimination on the job.

August 26 has set the stage for the development of women's liberation into a mass movement. Thousands of women for the first time saw that sisterhood is powerful when they united in mass action around common demands. They were able to see the impact that masses of women in motion can have on this country--on the media, on the government, and on the minds of masses of Americans who before August 26 didn't know what the women's liberation movement was all about. The majority of these women participated in their first women's liberation activity that day and now await further opportunities to act against their oppression.

The Importance of Mass Action

The central debate in the women's liberation movement today is the question of mass action. This debate is an integral part of the larger question of how the women's liberation movement is going to organize to win its demands. The YSA has consistently pointed out that mass actions against the government are the most effective means of building the movement and winning our demands.

The oppression of women is so tightly intertwined with the basic needs of the capitalist system itself that the ruling class will grant no rights to women without a real struggle. Just to gain the elementary right to vote, women had to fight for nearly a century. The struggle for our total liberation must involve massive numbers of women united in the broadest, most visible actions possible against the government. We have seen that this system will not and cannot grant total freedom to any oppressed group; some reforms may be won, but only through struggle independent of the government.

At this juncture in the women's liberation movement, the perspective of mass action is also important in order to unify the existing women's groups around clear demands directed at the government. In addition, mass actions will serve to reach out to and mobilize the thousands of women who are not yet involved in the movement.

The role that mass actions have played in the antiwar movement demonstrates the correctness of this strategy. It is clear that antiwar mobilizations and student strikes that have taken place in this country against the war in Vietnam have been a real deterrent to the ruling class in carrying out its counterrevolutionary plans in Southeast Asia.

Women have already begun to win significant victories through mass action. For example, the reform of the abortion laws in many states has only come about as women began to demand en masse the right to control their own bodies. Teach-ins and demonstrations played a key role in forcing reactionary state legislatures to pass bills aimed at the liberalization of the existing abortion laws.

The Alternatives to Mass Action

Some women in the movement see a contradiction between the building of mass actions and the work of small women's

liberation groups. They fear that mass actions, where all the sections of the movement unite around common aims, will somehow destroy the work of smaller feminist organizations. Consciousness-raising and other women's liberation groups do indeed play an important role in providing a way for women to become more conscious of their oppression and carry out on-going education and small scale actions; often the first introduction of new women to the movement is through such groups. But mass actions organized by coalitions have the power and visibility to the broader masses of people which the individual feminist groups do not provide by themselves. Mass actions in no way cut across the ability of small groups to function and continue to grow. In fact, the building of mass united demonstrations can help these groups to reach new women and grow stronger.

Another variation of this argument is that mass actions compete with the "counter-institutions" women have developed to cope with the everyday problems they face. Such counter-institutions include abortion-referral projects and communal childcare projects. These projects can be useful in drawing new women into the movement and in providing a limited means of survival for small numbers of women who have no other recourse. But it is utopian to believe that women in the movement can organize enough abortion clinics and childcare centers to meet the needs of the millions of women in this country when they do not control the resources necessary to do so.

Counter-institutions cannot and should not be a substitute for mass action which places the responsibility for providing these resources on the state. The main thrust of the women's liberation movement has been the recognition that it is the duty of society as a whole to meet the needs of women who want abortions or a decent childcare center for their children while they work. Women cannot assume that entire burden for themselves and must demonstrate that it is the government's obligation.

"Women Are Too Divided To Unite"

A more basic argument against mass action is the line adopted by the Communist Party, Young Workers Liberation League, Progressive Labor Party, and others that women have too many disagreements to unite around action. They claim that the class and racial divisions between women prohibit the possibility of any real union around the common oppression all women face.

The essence of this line is that it clearly opposes any kind of independent women's movement at all. The underlying reason for this opposition is a fear of a mass women's movement, most often manifested by opposition to women participating in broad actions to make demands on the government. The CP opposes the mass character of the women's liberation movement for two reasons. First, the anti-capitalist thrust of an independent women's movement runs counter to their reformist political perspective, and second, the demands of the movement conflict with their defense of the family system. For PL, the demands of women's liberation are not legitimate "working class" demands. They deny the fact that the super-exploitation and oppression of women workers is only possible because of the family system. Both the CP and PL are opponents of an independent women's movement.

We must make it clear that all women, regardless of class or racial background, face some degree of oppression. No woman, even in the ruling class itself, can be arbitrarily ruled out as a potential feminist. While it is obvious that most women in the ruling class have more loyalty to the privileges of their class than to other women, there can be and are exceptions.

It is also fallacious to say that Third World women do not share an interest with all women in fighting for feminist demands. For Third World women, the issues of women's rights to control their own bodies, to equal pay, and to childcare are of crucial importance. The fact that growing numbers of Third World women are organizing around their oppression as women is testimony to this fact.

The Two-Party System

Another major alternative to the perspective of mass action is to place faith in the capitalist two-party system as a solution to women's oppression. The main argument is that if only more women were elected through the Democratic and Republican parties to Congress, they could convince the more reactionary elements in the government to grant women's just demands.

This reformist line has many parallels to the support for "peace" candidates as a means of ending the war in Vietnam. The experience of the antiwar movement has shown that it has been the mass pressure of thousands demonstrating in the streets, not the "doves" in Congress, that has limited Nixon's ability to escalate the war against the Vietnamese people. The campaigns of the so-called peace candi-

dates have sought only to sap the strength of the antiwar movement by taking it out of the streets and into the capitalist electoral machines.

Just as in the antiwar movement, we must counterpose independent mass actions around the demands of women to reliance on the ruling class parties to grant women's liberation. We must point out that no woman, no matter how well-intentioned she may appear, can change the centuries-old oppression of women by seeking to reform either of the two parties responsible for the perpetuation of capitalist society.

We have already begun to see "women's liberation" candidates appear on the scene as it becomes clear that the women's liberation movement is reaching masses of women. The best example of such candidates is Bella Abzug from New York, who was elected to Congress this year under the slogan "this woman's place is in the House." Her campaign was a skillful attempt to convince women that their needs can best be granted by electing spokeswomen for their demands on the Democratic Party ticket. Among her best supporters was the Communist Party, which calls for 51% representation of women on all governing bodies by doubling the number of women elected to public office with each election.

One of the ways we counter this strategy of dependence on Democratic or Republican party politicians is by supporting the Socialist Workers Party election campaigns. These campaigns stress a break with the two-party system, counterposing the building of a mass, independent women's liberation movement to support for the ruling class parties.

Large numbers of women's liberation activists supported and participated in the 1970 SWP campaigns. These campaigns educated thousands of new women about the ideas of feminism, as well. Many of the SWP candidates were activists in the women's liberation movement and played significant roles in building women's liberation actions in their areas.

An "Anti-Imperialist" Women's Movement?

Progressive Labor Party and other ultraleft women have counterposed the building of a "socialist" or "anti-imperialist" women's movement to building mass actions around feminist demands. These women say that the women's liberation movement as it now stands is reformist because it does not take up the struggles against racism and imperialism.

Again, in essence, this position opposes any mass, independent women's movement at all. The struggle of women is a revolutionary struggle in its own right. Its demands are those which have the potential of drawing the largest numbers of women possible into struggle against the government. And the granting of these demands in their entirety presupposes the establishment of a socialist system.

To specify that women must be "anti-imperialist" to join the movement only serves to narrow it, and weaken it by excluding masses of women who don't yet understand imperialism, but are ready to fight against the oppression they feel as women.

We must also point out on the question of racism that the women's movement cannot map out a program or define a strategy for the Third World liberation movement. That is the task of Third World people--both men and women. It is by struggling as women around demands that meet the needs of all women that the most can be done to advance the independent liberation of Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and other oppressed nationalities.

The main way we will be able to cut across all these attempts to divert the struggle of women from becoming a mass movement is by building the mass actions themselves. Through the success of these actions thousands of women will begin to see the strength they have when they unite around common issues. The victories women have already won against the abortion laws have greatly increased their self-confidence and combativity. These and future victories will be seen by women as concrete proof of their power to wrest concessions from the government.

Other Debates Within the Movement: The Role of the Family

The role of the family becomes more and more of a central theoretical debate as the feminist movement grows. The key demands of women's liberation today strike objectively at the foundations of the family as an economic institution and as a pillar of class society.

The family provides the capitalist system with a way of escaping the costs of public services such as free childcare, care for the aged, etc. The family system forces each unit to compete with every other to feed, clothe, and provide adequate housing for its members.

The family is the agent for inculcating bourgeois ideology and morality into its members. Children are taught to

respect the authority of their parents and of the state, the sanctity of capitalist private property, etc. Through the family they learn all the traditions of morality, competitiveness, and religion. Women are trained to accept their role as the bearers and rearers of children, while men are trained to think of themselves as the creative doers in every sphere, and trained to think of women as inferior.

It is through the family that woman's oppression is justified. Her job is in the home, therefore she should be denied equal access to jobs and equal pay outside the home. Her role is to care for her children, therefore she is a "risk" for acceptance into institutions of higher learning (this is particularly blatant on the graduate school level). She is supposed to bear children and consider it a "joy," therefore her demands for abortion are immoral.

Our main and most consistent opponent on this question has been the Communist Party. The CP considers the family a potentially revolutionary force. In order to get around the traditional Marxist condemnation of the family, they put forth the idea that the family has evolved into a vital unit of love between man and wife and an important tool for raising "socially conscious" children.

The CP takes a dim view of those women who insist that the family is a reactionary institution, pointing out that no other substitute exists. While it is absolutely true that no other means exists in capitalist society for the care of children and for companionship in this alienating environment, women cannot defer until the socialist revolution their struggle against their role as defined by the family. Demands such as free 24-hour childcare, government financed and community-controlled, and free abortion on demand can be fought for as steps toward creating a society where the family can be replaced.

The CP goes so far as to claim that part of the women's struggle today should be a struggle to maintain the family! Clara Colon, in her pamphlet Enter Fighting: Today's Woman, wrote the following:

"A stronghold in the midst of a crisis-torn, poverty-ridden existence, a solid start in life for the children, a good start each day of their lives--that's what keeping the family together means." (page 48)

According to Colon, the ruling class is on a major offensive to destroy the family, and those feminists who consider the family an obstacle are playing into their hands.

The CP's position flows from their defense of the official Soviet position on the family and women's place in it. While many more women in the Soviet Union are doctors, scientists, and technicians than in the United States, and while there are considerably more publically available childcare centers, the traditional role of women in the home remains. If a Soviet woman holds a job, as most do, then she must juggle her time accordingly to both care for her children and husband and go to work. The concept of motherhood as a woman's fulfillment is strongly encouraged by the Soviet bureaucracy.

Some women point to the reactionary attitude of the Soviet Union toward women as proof that what they identify as socialism is not the answer to the oppression of women. One of our important tasks will be to explain what happened in the Soviet Union. After the Russian Revolution, the Soviet state instituted measures to legalize abortions, liberalize marriage and divorce laws so that women would have equal rights with men. The material backwardness of the Soviet Union and the isolation of the revolution enabled a privileged bureaucracy to arise and consolidate power over the Soviet state. This Stalinist bureaucracy reversed the gains made by women in the early days of the revolution as part of its strategy for staying in power. The state did not have the resources to immediately free women from the oppression of the family, but rather than admit this and proceed to develop these resources as fast as possible, Stalin restored the family as a sacred social unit and a "progressive" force, using the authoritarian family as a prop of the authoritarian rule necessary to uphold the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Progressive Labor Party puts forth the same concept of the "revolutionary family" in its attacks on the women's liberation movement. As with the CP, the Maoists defend the policies of Stalin and the practices of the Chinese bureaucracy in preserving the family system.

Are Women Oppressed Only As Workers?

The Communist Party, Progressive Labor, and at least a wing of the International Socialists have sought to limit the struggle to the demands of women as workers. Their argument is that the main struggle in capitalist society is between the ruling class and the working class and that any "other" struggle is a diversion.

The only issue around which women should fight, they say, is discrimination on the job--any other aspects of women's oppression are "petty-bourgeois" issues. But, in fact, the reason that women can be

super-exploited on the job is because of the oppression of women as women, which is rooted in the family system. The family is used as the rationale for giving women less pay and for pushing them into the most menial labor categories, since their real job is supposedly in the home.

A further argument by these groups is that the fight for women's liberation will separate men and women in the fight against the ruling class. They have a similar position on Black nationalism, saying that the Afro-American struggle for self-determination "divides" the working class. The fact is that the working class is already divided on the basis of sex and race lines. Unity among male and female workers can only be based on a program that supports the rights of oppressed women, not on the basis of capitulating to the prejudices of backward male workers.

Another argument in this vein is that the demands of the women's liberation movement do not relate to working women. Such an assertion could not be further from the truth, as the growth of women's liberation groups among working women has shown. This argument is basically an elitist one, saying that working women can only understand and react against their economic oppression.

Both the reformists and ultralefts have formed a bloc against support for the Equal Rights Amendment. This position is just another indication of their pessimism about working women's ability to fight for and win equal rights. The government counterposes the ERA to the Protective Laws, saying that women must choose between the two. We do not accept this ruse and urge the passage of the ERA as a step forward in the struggle of women for our rights, and at the same time demand the extension of those protective laws that benefit women to all men as well. While the ERA will be defeated this year, we can expect renewed debate and struggle around this issue next year when it comes up again in Congress. YSAers must be prepared to explain our position on the ERA and to organize support for its passage in the future.

The Present Stage of the Movement

It is clear that the depth of the women's movement as illustrated on August 26 opens up the way to establish on-going coalitions of women around concrete actions. The action focus of these coalitions will be crucial to the maintenance of unity among all the forces within the women's movement. While there

are wide differences in approach and emphasis among the numerous women's groups, it has been shown that the majority of these women can join together to carry out actions for common goals. It is through such actions that coalitions will be able to hold together.

Demands

The demands of such a coalition must be those that can draw into action the largest number of women possible. At the present time, the demands of August 26 have widespread support and speak to the most acute needs of the most women. But as the movement grows, new demands will also emerge as important issues to great numbers of women. There must be flexibility in relation to the question of demands for the women's liberation movement; unlike the antiwar movement, the movement for women's liberation is not limited to a single central demand. Women feel oppression on many different levels and any mass movement that purports to speak to that oppression must be conscious of the broad range of issues around which the masses of women can be mobilized in struggle. The main criterion for these demands is that they must be able to bring new layers of women into direct political confrontation with their main oppressor--the U.S. government.

Non-Exclusion

We must defend the right of all women to be part of any women's liberation coalition. The oppression of women affects every woman, and to cut off any group of women from full participation in the movement means that the movement cannot grow into the kind of mass movement necessary to win its demands. The strength of any coalition will be based on its ability to represent the authority of radical women's groups, conservative women's groups, campus women, high school women, lesbians, women from political parties, from trade unions, and independent women.

The main axis of our fight against exclusion must be around the question of the need to build a powerful women's liberation movement. The majority of independent women will be in favor or drawing into action every woman possible and will oppose the rejection of women on the basis of political differences on other questions. We must point out that to concentrate on differences between us rather than on how we can unite is to place these differences on other issues

above the need to create a broad, powerful women's liberation movement.

So far, the YSA and Socialist Workers Party have been a main target of attempts to exclude women from the movement. Women who oppose mass action have tried to introduce exclusionary policies into the women's movement to prevent the development of mass action coalitions. Their attacks are launched directly at us because of our perspective for building the women's liberation movement through united mass action. One form that exclusion has taken within the women's movement is the charge of belonging to a "male-dominated" organization. The test of whether or not an organization is politically dominated by men and oriented toward preserving male-domination in society is in its program. There is no organization in this country--not even feminist organizations--whose program for the liberation of women is better than that of the YSA. Actually, the charge of "male-domination" is a tactic used by women who disagree with the YSA but substitute red-baiting for trying to convince other women in the movement that the YSA's ideas on women's liberation are wrong.

If the policy of excluding women from all "male-dominated" groups were carried out in practice, then the movement would have to exclude from its ranks all women in trade unions and all women who vote for the Democratic or Republican parties, in other words, the majority of women in this country.

Women who disagree with us have attempted to promote red-baiting attacks on the YSA, claiming that we want to "take over" the movement for our own purposes. As revolutionary socialists we see the creation of a mass women's liberation movement as a vital part of the struggle of all the oppressed which will eventually lead to the transformation of this capitalist system into a socialist system. That is the reason we participate so fully in this movement, because of the potential it has to bring about a change in the society we now live in. Our interests are in no way different from those of the thousands of women who also want to see an end to their oppression and are organizing themselves to bring about that change.

Many women new to politics may be initially confused by the red-baiting tactics. We must realize that for some of these women, the only experience they have had with socialists and communists has been in the attacks made on radicals by the government and the press. We have to explain that red-baiting is a reactionary policy that only plays into the hands of our enemy. Such attacks are a diversion from our real struggle and can only serve

to divide our forces.

High School Groups

Building Women's Liberation Groups

Both the coalitions and women's liberation groups must maintain the structure of all-women's organizations. The decisions and strategy of the women's liberation movement can only be formulated by women, since we alone experience the form of oppression we are trying to end.

Campus Groups

It is from the campuses and high schools that the bulk of activists have come to build the antiwar movement, and the same is becoming true in the women's liberation movement. Feminist organizations now exist on nearly every campus. Often these groups have a complex range of activities, including consciousness-raising, education, campus actions, and participation in citywide actions. During the May upsurge these groups played important roles, bringing the demands of women into the antiwar university struggles on a number of campuses. The deep radicalization on the campuses means that support for women's liberation activities can be far more easily mobilized there than in any other sector of the population at this time. The campus women's liberation struggles can play a vanguard role and set an example for the movement as a whole. During the Cambodia events, for example, one common feature of the gains made by students was the provision of childcare centers by the university administrations. A number of schools have also been forced to concede to the demands of women for courses in women's history.

We want to see the feminist groups on campus orient toward the concept of the "women's liberation university"--with university-financed free childcare centers for students, staff, and the community; with free birth control devices and adequate medical services for women; with a curriculum of women's studies; and with an end to the discrimination against women by college admissions offices. We must remember the critical role that universities can play in this period in linking up student demands with the demands of the population as a whole. For example, many universities own and run hospitals in the community that deny free abortion services to women. The campus women's liberation groups can take the lead in struggles of the whole community to force the school administration to provide such services to all women free of charge.

The spontaneous growth of feminist organization has reached into the high schools as well. As on the college campuses, there are a number of ways in which high school women are specifically discriminated against. They are expelled from school when they become pregnant, they cannot receive birth control information, they are tracked into a cycle of home economics classes, and upon graduation have greater difficulty than men gaining admission to many universities. High school women radicalizing around the demands of women's liberation reflect the growing acceptance of these demands in the working class population as a whole.

Third World Women's Groups

The development of Third World women organizing around their oppression as women has been one of the most significant aspects of the development of the women's liberation movement as a whole. Third World women suffer from the triple oppression of being women, belonging to an oppressed nationality, and being workers. They receive the lowest wages and worst jobs in the labor market, they have the least opportunity to obtain a decent education, and they suffer most from the high cost of abortions and unavailability of childcare.

Third World feminist groups have sprung up in many different forms. Some began as caucuses in all-Black organizations, such as the Third World Women's Alliance in New York, which grew out of a women's caucus in SNCC. Others have emerged on the campus, and still others have come directly out of the Black community, such as the Phoenix Organization of Women, made up of predominately high school age women in drug rehabilitation centers in New York City. These groups have organized independently of the other women in the movement, due to the particular and different form of oppression they experience. The women's liberation movement must defend the right of Third World women to organize separately and at the same time join with them in the action coalitions.

The motion of Third World women around the demands of the women's liberation movement demonstrates the depth that this movement has already attained and also indicates the new layers that the current radicalization is reaching as a whole. The entrance of Third World women into the struggle will make a tremendous difference not only in the power of the women's movement to reach out to broader layers, but will also add

leadership forces to the struggle for national self-determination.

Among working women as a whole struggles have erupted around the issues of childcare at the jobsite and around the discriminatory job categories open to women. One example is the FEW (Federally Employed Women), an organization of government workers with 30 chapters nationally and a membership of over 1000 women, half of whom are Black.

Another area of radicalization has been among professional women, who have organized themselves to protest unequal pay, lack of advancement, and the relatively narrow spectrum of jobs open to women, including those with college and graduate school degrees. Even women tennis players have begun to rebel, demanding tournament prizes equal to those received by men.

The Tasks of the YSA

Through our experience in the antiwar movement, the YSA has gained a strong background in the building of mass movements. We have learned through this experience that in order for a movement to become a force in American society, it must engage in independent mass action. We must fight for such a perspective in the women's liberation movement and our success will be a determining factor in the future of women's liberation as a movement. We can expect that as the feminist movement grows, all the forces opposed to the growth of such a mass movement will do their best to divert that struggle, either by counterposing community-organizing to mass action or by trying to channel the movement into support for the Democratic and Republican parties.

The new stage of the women's liberation movement we are now entering will be the testing ground for whether or not broad on-going coalitions around actions can be built. Just as in the antiwar movement we will have to be among the best fighters for democracy and non-exclusion, for mass actions in the streets, and for independence from the ruling class parties. We must help build coalitions capable of drawing in not only the campus, high school, professional, radical women's groups that now exist, but also the burgeoning Third World organizations, trade unions, welfare rights groups, etc. While we can be flexible in terms of the demands, we must be firm on the question of choosing those demands which can mobilize the greatest number of women against the capitalist government and the system of sexism it perpetuates.

In addition to building coalitions, a major part of our work in this movement will be in building women's liberation groups, especially those based on campuses and high schools. On the campuses, we should help initiate such groups where they do not exist, just as we would initiate campus SMC chapters. We will also want to participate in and initiate Third World women's liberation groups.

The best women's liberation groups have been those that have successfully combined consciousness-raising and education with action projects. Many campus groups, for example, have consciousness-raising meetings, committees for citywide and campus actions, plus an educational and literature program for the entire membership. In addition, the best of these groups are those which concentrate on reaching out to other women by holding periodic well-publicized mass meetings.

It is also important for women's liberation groups to link up with other struggles which relate to the oppression of women. These groups should be encouraged, for example, to build women's liberation contingents in antiwar demonstrations.

The YSA has learned a great deal from the women's liberation movement. At the same time, we have played a key role since the beginning of the feminist movement in our contributions to the theoretical debates. We have a revolutionary socialist analysis of women's oppression, which provides the only cogent explanation of the roots and reasons for the demotion of women to second-class citizenship in this society. Our analysis also provides a clear strategy for the liberation of women. We must use every opportunity open to us to present to the movement our perspectives for feminist liberation: through forums and debates, through classes open to all women, through our press, and through election campaigns. In particular, both the SWP campaigns and campus election campaigns offer us important opportunities to get out our ideas to the widest audiences possible, especially through use of the bourgeois media--newspapers, radio and TV. In addition, YSAers must keep up with the women's liberation press, both to learn from it and to contribute articles on our perspective for the movement.

The women's liberation movement has drawn into activity many women who never before participated in politics. Many of these women will first start to question other aspects of the capitalist system as they begin to struggle around their demands as women. The fact that most of these demands cannot be wholly or consistently granted by the ruling class will raise the consciousness of these women about the

bankruptcy of capitalism. At the same time they will realize the deep inter-connection between the feminist struggle and the struggles against war, racial oppression, and poverty--that all these struggles are against the same enemy. These women will be looking for a revolutionary socialist alternative to this system.

A movement of women willing to fight all the way to achieve their liberation will find itself in confrontation with the present system of class society, capitalism, and with the family, an institution that supports class society. To achieve its goals the feminist movement will help to change this system.

In order to win such demands as free abortion on demand, control of hospitals to prevent forced sterilization of women, free, 24-hour childcare centers under

community control, and free restaurants, laundries and house-cleaning services, it will be necessary to completely reorganize society on a socialist basis.

We have already seen that many women's liberation activists are joining the YSA. This process will continue at an accelerated rate as the feminist movement grows, as our program for women's liberation reaches more women, and as YSA women all over the country help to build and lead mass actions for an end to women's oppression. The best activists in this movement will see that the best feminists are also those who are revolutionary socialists, part of an organization that unites the struggles of all the oppressed to overthrow capitalism. They will join the YSA, as the only revolutionary socialist youth organization which has the perspective of building a society where women can regain their destiny.

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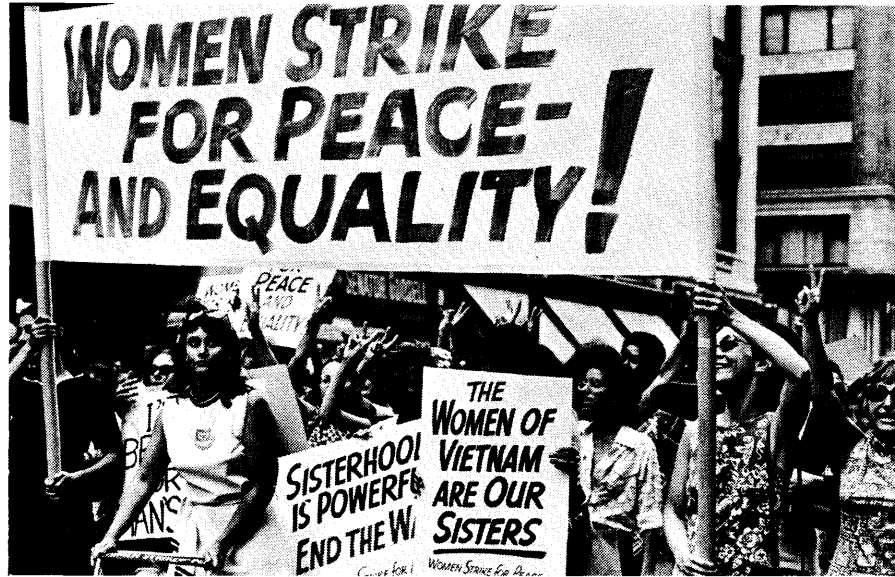


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