

Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission, of the Spartacist League

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Feminists Resurrect Anarchist Fraud:

**The Legend of
"Red Emma"..... 4**



Emma Goldman

**Bolshevik Work Among
Women: Part 1..... 7**

**The Private Life of
Islam: A Review..... 19**

**Bureaucrats' Front Group Collapses:
CLUW's Had It! 24**

Exchange with Radical Women of Seattle... 2

Letter from Radical Women

September 10, 1975

Workers Vanguard

Editor:

An article headlined "Socialist-Feminist Conference: Nothing Learned, Going Nowhere" in "Workers Vanguard", July 18, 1975, reflects the sectarian politics of the Spartacist League. Your view of the first national socialist-feminist conference is limited to griping about the exclusion of non-socialist-feminists from the conference. You totally ignore the historical significance of the first national socialist-feminist conference and the crucial political struggles against the Stalinists and social democrats by Radical Women that took place there.

Spartacist League states that although "the cast of characters changes somewhat from time to time, the petty-bourgeois subjectivity, anti-political prejudice and liberal rhetoric remain essentially identical." This is a cynical and false characterization of the conference and the feminist movement in general. The fact that there were many serious independent socialist and feminist women at the conference who were looking for political ideas does not enter your collective mind. You provided absolutely no alternative for the women at the conference, and insisted on attending the conference apparently to proclaim that "there is no such thing as a socialist-feminist." And you wonder that you were not welcome there? We can only ask the crucial question—*Why were you there?*—and urge you to explain this in another article!

The conference was publicized extensively, months in advance, as a *socialist-feminist* conference. Groups, individuals and parties who disagreed with the principles of unity that were set up as a framework to begin discussion of the socialist-feminist movement, including SL, should not have been there. Obviously, you do not agree that socialist-feminists have a right to hold their own conferences, without interference from organizations that are not feminist.

We were appalled to see that you spent more time attacking Radical Women than exposing the treacherous politics of the Stalinists and Maoists in attendance. Your main criticism of the Stalinists is that they did not support letting SL into the conference. What about the *politics* that the Stalinists put forth at the conference, and their undemocratic takeover of the third world women's caucus and much of the conference? What about the Stalinists' history of repeated, bloody sell-outs of revolutions and women the world over?

Instead of addressing these questions, you attack Radical Women because our politics pose a serious threat to you. We support the independent socialist-feminist movement. We worked on the planning committee for the conference, upholding a minority opinion, most often alone, for a democratic, political conference. We were expelled from the planning committee twice, and fought for our right, as socialist-

feminists and Trotskyists to remain on the committee, and debate the anti-Trotskyist politics of most of the other planning committee members.

Radical Women's priority is providing a revolutionary, Trotskyist, socialist-feminist program to the working class, and especially the most oppressed of that class—women. SL doesn't concede the leadership role of the most oppressed, women workers and minority women. You deny the importance of the independent minority and women's movements to the class struggle in the United States.

Rather than state the programmatic differences you have with Radical Women, your "analysis" of our politics is limited to your statement that "though they (Radical Women) claim to be Trotskyists, their groveling tailism and embracing of feminist anti-communism is more indicative." We call this type of "analysis" exactly what it is—baiting, untrue and slanderous!

Radical Women supported SL's right to free speech in the planning committee, as we told you we would. But you state that Radical Women should have supported your right to attend the conference sessions as a matter of left solidarity. You say, "Radical Women had warned of just this kind of capitulation by leftists to bureaucratic witchhunting in CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women)." SL's comparison of self-serving women union bureaucrats in CLUW, and the socialist-feminist movement, which is part of the radical movement, whether you support it or not, is a scurrilous attack on the whole movement. Left solidarity against bureaucratic witchhunts is crucial in CLUW and unions, and certainly within the socialist-feminist movement there is no place for anti-feminists.

Your final stab at Radical Women in the article is based on out-right fabrication. SL falsely reports that Radical Women passively accepted the removal of our speaker on the Third World women's panel by the Stalinist-controlled Third World women's caucus. We did not! The fact is that we fought, virtually alone, to get our position heard in the caucus and the conference. When the Stalinists and social democrats from the planning committee refused to let Yolanda Alaniz speak, over 100 interested women went to a separate section of the lawn, where she presented her talk. In your rush to attack us for "capitulating on the exclusion question," you forgot to get the facts straight—or the facts are much less important to you than your gleeful, self-righteous attack on us.

Seattle Radical Women is the oldest socialist-feminist organization in the United States, founded in 1967. In keeping with the history and theory of Trotskyism, we believe that the leadership and unifying potential of women in the class struggle is *central* to the American revolution. In a speech delivered to the Second World Conference of Communist Women, Leon Trotsky addressed the issue of women and the class struggle. He said, "...in the world labor movement the woman worker stands closest precisely to the section of the

proletariat... which is the most backward, the most oppressed, the lowliest of the lowly. *And just because of this, in the years of the colossal world revolution this section of the proletariat can and must become the most active, the most revolutionary and the most initiative section of the working class.*"

The sexist, non-revolutionary politics of the Spartacist League were demonstrated clearly to Radical Women and many other women at the socialist-feminist conference. Your failure to support socialist-feminism is a betrayal of Trotsky's teachings. Your high-handed, superficial analysis, based on the false hypothesis that feminism is counter-revolutionary, is further indication that it is not Radical Women and socialist-feminism, but the politics of the Spartacist League that are "Going Nowhere."

Constance Scott for
Radical Women

cc: "Women and Revolution"

Women and Revolution replies:

Far from having the historical significance you claim, the first national "socialist"-feminist conference reflected in microcosm the failures of the radical feminist movement during the near-decade of its existence. Despite the large turnout, the bureaucratically stage-managed conference accomplished nothing; none of the essential political questions facing women were even on the agenda.

The conference organizers were very interested, however, in protecting the Scotch-tape unity of the conference by demanding adherence in advance to three "principles" which were cynically designed to exclude communists. The fact that these so-called "principles" were never even discussed by the

participants, much less voted upon, is an abomination which serves to underscore the fact that any discussion—even a motion to approve these "principles" or the proposed agenda—would have exposed the sham "unity" of the conference and revealed a broad spectrum of political ideology from NOWism to Maoism to your own pretend-Trotskyism cowering beneath a thin blanket of "sisterhood."

Having endorsed the conference and served on its planning committee, you share in the responsibility for its rotten politics and organizational abuses. It is clear from your letter that you accept this responsibility with pride.

You ask us why the Spartacist League attended the conference at all, since we clearly disagreed with its phony "principles." The answer is that we were there to fight for our politics—to win some of the "many serious independent socialist and feminist women" of which you speak away from the dead-end tactics of feminism and convince them of the need to struggle for the full emancipation of women through international proletarian revolution. Class struggle—that is the alternative we offered. There is no other.

We were there also to insist on our right to attend any public conference and engage in open, democratic political debate. Your failure to defend this right betrays not only your unbridled opportunism but a deadly naiveté. By "protecting" the Stalinists, social-democrats and feminists at the conference from communist criticism, you have contributed to the right-wing leadership's ability to consolidate women around an anti-working-class, anti-communist program. What is more, future conferences based on such a program will not scruple to draw fine distinctions between the pseudo-Trotskyist Seattle Radical Women and the Trotskyist Spartacist League. *Both* will be excluded, all your oaths of allegiance to eternal sisterhood notwithstanding!

You say that you are appalled that we spent so much time attacking your politics: Well, had you identified yourselves in a straightforward way as the social-democrats that you are, we might have limited ourselves to a simple polemic demonstrating that you are fundamentally incapable of developing a winning strategy for women and for the working class as a whole; but when you put forward these same social-democratic politics in the name of Trotskyism, then you are not only incorrect but also dishonest, and your masquerade must be exposed. Yes, we criticize your politics! Your program is nothing more than a mishmash of reformist and utopian demands directed at various times toward the state, trade unions, men, radicals, minority groups and society at large. You are consistent only in that you conscientiously avoid demands—such as the expropriation of industry without compensation, or an independent party of labor to fight for a workers government—which go beyond the bounds of reformism. You sow illusions about the capitalist state by calling on women elected by the bourgeois parties to "act responsibly in the interest of their own sex." You call on the bourgeois

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continued on page 14

Feminists Resurrect Anarchist Fraud:

The Legend of "Red Emma"

The recent opening of several "Emma Goldman clinics" and the appearance of T-shirts bearing the inscription "Emma Lives!" herald the rediscovery of a new heroine by a section of the disparate feminist movement—"communist-anarchist" Emma Goldman.

Goldman is looked to as a model particularly by a newly revived current which dubs itself "anarcho-feminist" and which proves by its impressionistic, classless political approach to be a mere remnant of the defunct New Left. Though this tendency deserves a thorough political critique (soon to appear in the pages of *Women and Revolution*) it is useful, as a beginning, to unmask the "revolutionary" Emma Goldman for what she was—an anti-communist social worker.

Goldman was a Russian immigrant working as a seamstress in Rochester, New York at the time of the Haymarket Massacre in 1886. The hanging of four anarchists whose connection with the incident was never proven had a profound effect on her, as on many others. In her autobiography, *Living My Life*, she wrote that on the day of the hangings "I was in a stupor; a feeling of numbness came over me, something too horrible even for tears." On the very next day she resolved to dedicate herself to the cause of the martyred men and to the ideals (as yet dimly understood) for which they had died. Three years later she broke relations with her new husband and her parents and moved to New York City where she soon entered into a circle of "communist-anarchists."

"Communist-anarchism" had made its first appearance in the United States in the late 1870's following a wave of strikes and riots. The core of the movement was a group of radicals, mainly German immigrants, who had become disillusioned with the politics of the Socialist Labor Party and broke away from it in order to establish their own organization. Having no concrete political program, they floundered until 1882, when John Most arrived in New York and quickly established his leadership over the amorphous formation.

Born in Germany in 1846, Most had joined the Social Democratic Party while still in his teens and had been elected to the Reichstag in the 1870's. His experiences there convinced him that political action was futile.

Most, who was the author of *Science of Revolutionary Warfare—A Manual of Instruction in the*



Emma Goldman in 1886

Use and Preparation of Nitroglycerine, Dynamite, Gun-Cotton, Fulminating Mercury, Bombs, Fuses, Poisons, Etc., was a proponent of the "propaganda of the deed," i.e., terrorism, as a revolutionary strategy. This audacious anarchist leader became Goldman's lover as well as her first teacher and was greatly influential in shaping her political philosophy. "Most became my idol," she wrote. "I adored him."

The "Propaganda of the Deed"

While Goldman never participated directly in a terrorist action, she said that she understood the "psychology" behind such actions and supported this psychology, if not the actions themselves. Writing about Leon Czolgosz, the assassin of President McKinley, she said:

"I feel certain now that behind every political deed of that nature was an impressionable, highly sensitized personality and a gentle spirit. Such beings cannot go on living complacently in the sight of great human misery and wrong. Their reactions to the cruelty and injustice of the world must inevitably express themselves in some violent act in supreme rendering of their tortured soul."

—Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

She did participate indirectly in the attempted assassination of Henry Frick, manager of the Homestead Steel Mills, by her comrade and lifelong companion, Alexander Berkman. During the Homestead Steel strike of 1892 Frick had brought in Pinkerton guards who murdered strikers and their families. Incensed by the massacre and impressed by the activities of the Russian nihilists, who were countering

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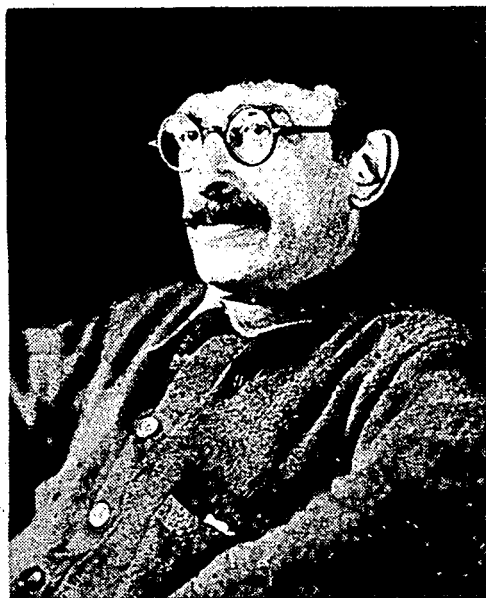
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Left: Alexander Berkman in Moscow (1920). Right: Anarchist leader John Most in the 1890's.

government hangings, with political assassinations, Berkman and Goldman resolved that Frick should be killed in order to attract attention to the Homestead struggle, and "also strike terror in the enemies' ranks and make them realize that the proletariat of America had its avengers."

Unable to perfect a bomb, Berkman made his way into Frick's office (Goldman had wanted to accompany her comrade but didn't have the train fare), shot him three times and stabbed him repeatedly before being overpowered. Frick recovered from his wounds and was back at his desk within two weeks; Berkman was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment.

Goldman defended him ardently, throwing herself into one campaign after another to obtain his release. Failing this, she resolved to double her effort toward the realization of their common ideal: "Committee sessions, public meetings, collection of foodstuffs, supervising the feeding of the homeless and their numerous children, and, finally, the organization of a mass-meeting on Union Square entirely filled my time."

In the Ranks of the Counterrevolution

Although always at odds with Marxism, which she considered too scientific, authoritarian and rigid for her "free spirit," she nonetheless counted among her friends several socialists who she felt were not too "sectarian" (i.e., did not put forward a consistently Marxist line), including Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, John Reed, Bill Heywood and Robert Minor.

When socialist revolution triumphed in Russia in 1917, Goldman and Berkman supported the proletariat in its stunning victory. Although they were critical of the Bolshevik Party for advocating a strong, centralized government, they believed that Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders were devoted to the principles of freedom and equality and therefore deserved the support of all workers and libertarians.

In 1919, Goldman and Berkman got an opportunity to view the young Soviet republic at close range. After a

two-year prison term for "conspiring against the draft" (they had organized the No-Conscription League for the purpose of encouraging conscientious objectors to resist induction into the army), they were deported to Russia along with hundreds of others suspected by Attorney-General Mitchell Palmer of being sympathetic to the Russian Revolution.

And indeed they had been sympathetic—from afar. But after 30 years of immersion in the naïve anarchist ideal of revolution, they were completely unprepared to deal with the reality, particularly in a backward, impoverished and isolated country in the throes of a vicious civil war. They were distressed by the suffering of the people and by what appeared to be needless hunger, arrests and executions resulting from what they considered to be the inefficiency and stupidity of the government. Discussions with Lenin, Trotsky, Kollontai and other Bolshevik leaders—who explained to them that in the cataclysm of revolution and civil war some miscarriages of justice were inevitable—did nothing to reassure them. After eight months in Russia, Goldman wrote of the Revolution: "Its manifestations were so completely at variance with what I had conceived and propagated as revolution that I did not know any more which was right. My old values had been shipwrecked..."

The climax of Goldman's opposition to the Bolsheviks came a year later when the government put down an uprising of the mutinous sailors of Kronstadt. After that she and Berkman left the country and embarked on a crusade to "expose" the Bolsheviks.

Goldman's disillusionment with the Revolution was absolute, and her attacks on it were even more fanatical than those of extreme reactionaries. Describing Bolshevism as "only left-wing fascism," she asserted that Lenin and his comrades must be destroyed at all costs.

Her campaign against the Soviet Union continued until the end of her life in 1940. The degeneration of the Revolution after the death of Lenin, the failure of

continued on next page

"Red Emma"...

proletarian revolution in Western Europe and the consequent consolidation of power by the Stalinist bureaucracy provided ample fuel for her anti-communist hysteria. She was incapable of discriminating between the early revolutionary workers state, operating under the tremendous stresses of "war communism," and the later degenerated workers state which, under the slogan of "socialism in one country," betrayed the international working class in favor of Russian national self-interest and the privileges of the bureaucratic ruling elite. Like most anarchists, she viewed Stalinism not as the perversion of Leninism which it is, but as its inevitable continuation:

"They are now blaming everything on Stalin, as if he had come to the fore out of nothing, as if he were not merely the dispenser of the legacy left him by Lenin, Trotsky and the unfortunate groups that had been savagely murdered in the last two years. . . . In other words, it is the communist ideology which has spread the poisonous ideas in the world, first, that the Communist Party has been called upon by history to guide 'the social revolution,' and second, that the end justifies the means. These notions have created all the evils including Stalin, that have followed Lenin's death."

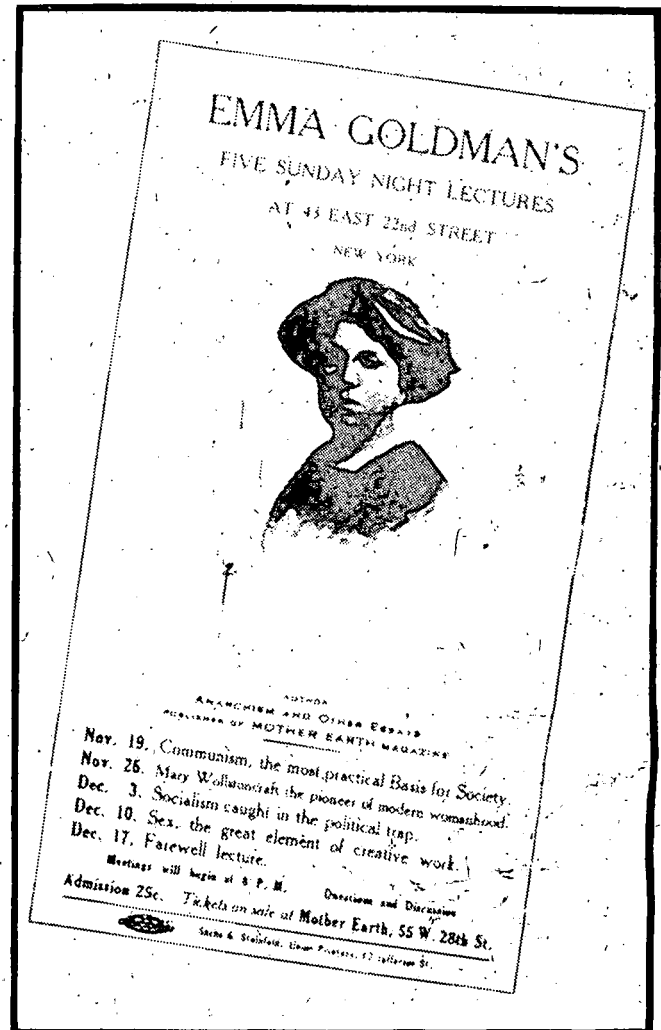
—Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

Goldman made her last stand for anarchism in the Spanish Civil War. Here her antagonism to a revolutionary vanguard party contributed to the bloody defeat of the Spanish working class. Rejecting Trotsky's call for a united front of the workers' organizations to mobilize completely independently of the bourgeois government to fight against Franco and in their own revolutionary class interests, the Spanish anarchists, despite the militancy and courage of the anarchist worker ranks, pursued the suicidal policy of capitulating before the bourgeoisie. The litmus test of social revolution in Spain forced anarchism to reveal its true colors: these dedicated foes of all state power—including proletarian state power—functioned as a prop for the bourgeoisie and in 1936 actually entered the capitalist government!

Living Her Life

Goldman died at the age of 70. Her life was typical of that of many anarchists in that it was held together by impressionistic reactions to events. Traveling from place to place—deeply moved by a workers' struggle here, a wildcat strike there, a massacre, an assassination, a free speech campaign—she was guided less by any consistent political philosophy than by an endless series of crises. She free-lanced from New York to Seattle, lecturing, nursing, raising money, defending, counseling—according to no particular design. Shunning disciplined, systematic work within a democratic-centralist organization, her "contribution" to the revolution that she professed to be working for has been little more than a romantic idealization of her own life:

"My life—I had lived in its heights and its depths, in bitter sorrow and ecstatic joy, in black despair and fervent



Times Change Press

hope. I had drunk the cup to the last drop. Would that I had the gift to paint the life I had lived."

—Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

Very poetic—but from a revolutionary viewpoint the life of this "communist-anarchist" was worse than useless. True, she had been a pioneer in the struggle for women's rights, including the right to birth control and sexual freedom. She had campaigned for a number of democratic and progressive causes, but her hostility to all forms of political organization and her failure to recognize the primacy of class struggle led her to block with the forces of vicious White terror against the only proletarian revolution in history. ■

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Early Communist Work Among Women: The Bolsheviks

The Soviet Union provides the classic illustration of Fourier's observation that the progress of any society can be gauged by the social position of the women within it. To the extent that the Bolshevik Revolution was victorious, Soviet women were liberated from their traditional, subservient social positions; to the extent that the Revolution degenerated, the position of the women degenerated. The fact that this degeneration

has been incomplete—that Soviet women continue to enjoy advantages and opportunities unknown in the West—is precisely because the degeneration of the Soviet workers

Part 1

state has also been incomplete, i.e., capitalism has not been restored.

The Old Order: "I Thought I Saw Two People Coming, But It was Only a Man and His Wife."

Russian folklore testifies to the fact that women in pre-revolutionary Russian society were commonly considered generically defective to the point of being subhuman. But such attitudes had not prevailed in Russia from time immemorial. In ancient times, women had had the right to rule their own estates, choose their own husbands, speak in the community councils and compete for athletic and military honors. Epic songs are still sung in some provinces about mighty female warriors called *polnitsy*—a word derived from the Russian *pole*, meaning "field" and, in a secondary sense, "battlefield." These women warriors, according to folk tradition, wandered alone throughout the country, fought with men whom they encountered on their way and chose their own lovers as they pleased: "Is thy heart inclined to amuse itself with me?" the so-called Beautiful Princess asks the Russian folk hero Iliia Muromets.

But the centuries which witnessed the growth of the patriarchal family, the rise of Byzantine Christianity with its doctrine of the debased nature of women, the brutal Tatar invasion and the consolidation of dynastic power, also witnessed the obliteration of these ancient privileges.

During these centuries Russian women were progressively excluded from politics, education and social life in general. Those of the lower classes became beasts of burden who might be driven with a stick if it pleased their husbands. Those of the upper classes were physically removed from society and imprisoned in the *terem* or "tower room"—an upper chamber of the house built expressly for the lifelong seclusion of women. Peter the Great (1672-1725), in his determination to transform Russia into a modern commercial and industrial state, holds the distinction of releasing

women from the *terem* and compelling them to mingle with men at public social functions, as they did in the West.

The Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine the Great (1729-1796) continued to encourage more progressive attitudes toward women, and they constructed academies for their education. On the eve of the Russian Revolution, women constituted 30,000, or almost one quarter, of the 125,000 students enrolled in Russian universities.

Despite these reform measures, however, women continued to be severely oppressed in pre-revolutionary Russia. Not only was the number of educated women only a tiny fraction of the total population (the illiteracy rate for women was 92 percent in 1897), but the lack of educational opportunities had a much more stultifying effect on women than on their male counterparts, because they were far more isolated.

Peasant women grew old early from overwork and maltreatment. Even when elementary education was available to girls, it remained customary for them to stay at home to care for the younger children until they were old enough to work in the fields. Husbands were generally chosen by the fathers, who sold their daughters to the highest bidder. Tradition decreed that the father of the bride present the bridegroom with a whip, the symbol of the groom's authority over his new wife.

Those peasant women who sought to escape to the cities found that they were paid lower wages than their male co-workers and that all skilled trades were closed to them. Outside of domestic service and the textile industry, marriage constituted grounds for immediate discharge.

Life was somewhat more comfortable, of course, for women of the middle and upper classes, but not much more fulfilling. While educational opportunities were more accessible to them, the kind of education deemed appropriate for women was limited. Husbands, as among the lower classes, were chosen by the fathers, and the law bound women to obey their husbands in all things.

Equal Rights for Women

The radical notion of equal rights for women was originally introduced into Russia by army officers who had been stationed in France after the defeat of Napoleon and who brought back to Russia many of the new liberal, republican and democratic ideas to which they had been exposed.

Male intellectuals continued to participate in this
continued on next page

Bolshevik Work ...

movement for the next hundred years. They championed higher education for women and entered into fictitious marriages with them in order to provide them with the passports they needed to study abroad. Well-known authors such as Belinsky, Herzen, Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky encouraged women in their struggle for equal rights.

The active participation of men in the struggle for women's liberation and the fact that prior to 1906 the masses of Russian men and women *did* possess equal political rights—that is, no rights at all—meant that at a time when women's suffrage organizations were on the rise in the West, Russian women and men continued to engage in united political struggle.

Equality of political oppression broke down only after the Revolution of 1905. On 17 October of that year Tsar Nicholas II issued a manifesto which provided for the summoning of a state duma based on male suffrage only. A group of the newly-enfranchised men immediately appealed to the author of the manifesto, Count Witte, for female suffrage, but this was refused. Out of this defeat arose the first feminist organizations in Russia—the League of Equal Rights for Women and the Russian Union of Defenders of Women's Rights.

Like all feminist organizations, these groups sought to achieve their goals through reforming the social system. At the first meeting of the League of Equal Rights for Women, which was held in St. Petersburg (later renamed Petrograd and presently Leningrad) in 1905, a number of working women put forward a resolution demanding measures to meet their needs

and the needs of peasant women, such as equal pay for equal work and welfare for mothers and children, but the bourgeois women who constituted the majority of the membership rejected this proposal in favor of one which called only for the unity of all women in the struggle for a republican form of government and for universal suffrage.

One of the League's first actions was the presentation to the First State Duma of a petition for female suffrage signed by 5,000 women. This petition was presented three times between 1906 and 1912 but was never accepted. Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov commented:

"Careful observation of reality shows that there is a danger of women being attracted by the ideals of the revolutionaries, and this circumstance, in my opinion, obliges us to regard with extreme care the question of encouraging women to take up political activity."

—Vera Bilshai, *The Status of Women in the Soviet Union*

Feminism or Bolshevism?

Side by side with the burgeoning feminist movement, the pre-revolutionary years witnessed the development of work among women by the Bolsheviks and other avowed socialists—work which was greatly accelerated by the entrance of masses of women into industrial production.

The programs and strategies of feminism and Bolshevism were counterposed from the outset. The feminists declared that women's most pressing need was political equality with men, including participation at every level of government. Only when women were in a position to influence all governmental policies, they said, would cultural and economic equality be



Bettman Archives, Inc.

Russian women demonstrate (1917). The banner says: "City guardians increase pay to soldiers' families!"

possible. To achieve their political goal, the feminists created multi-class organizations of women united around the struggle for equal rights.

Socialist organizations also struggled for equal rights for all women. "We hate and want to obliterate," said V.I. Lenin, "everything that oppresses and harasses the working woman, the wife of the working man, the peasant woman, the wife of the little man, and even in many respects the women from the wealthy classes." But socialist organizations from the beginning rejected the feminist reform strategy and insisted that full sexual equality could not be achieved short of a socialist society. Far from leading them to abandon special work among women under capitalism, however, this position encouraged them to pursue it more ardently in the knowledge that "the success of the revolution depends upon how many women take part in it" (Lenin).

As early as 1899 Lenin insisted that Clause 9 of the first draft program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) contain the words: "establishment of complete equality of rights between men and women." The program adopted by the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903 included this demand as well as the following special provisions:

"With a view to safeguarding the working class from physical and moral degeneration, and also with the view to promoting its capacity for waging a struggle for liberation, women should not be employed in industries harmful to the female organism, they should receive four weeks' paid pre-natal and six weeks' post-natal leave; all enterprises employing women should have nurseries for babies and small children, nursing mothers should be allowed to leave their work for at least half an hour at intervals of not longer than three hours, and male factory inspectors should be replaced by women in industries with a female labor force."

—VKP(b) v rezoliutsiiakh, quoted in William M. Mandel, "Soviet Women and Their Self-Image"

Throughout the entire pre-revolutionary period the Bolsheviks pressed their demands for complete sexual equality as they carried out educational and organizational work among women through every possible vehicle—cultural and educational organizations, evening schools, trade unions. Centers of Bolshevik agitation and propaganda also took the form of women's clubs. In 1907, such a club was opened in St. Petersburg under the name "The Working Women's Mutual Aid Society," while in Moscow a similar club was called "The Third Women's Club."

Through this special work the Bolsheviks were able to recruit many working women to communist politics. One of these recruits, Alexandra Artiukhina, later recalled:

"When we began to attend the Sunday and evening schools, we began to make use of books from the library and we learned of the great Russian democrat, Chernyshevsky. Secretly, we read his book, *What Is to Be Done?* and we found the image of the woman of the future, Vera Pavlovna, very attractive.

"The foremost democratic intelligentsia of our time played a considerable role in our enlightenment, in the growth of revolutionary attitudes and in women's realization of their human dignity and their role in public. They acquainted us with the names of Russian revolutionary women, like Sofia Perovskaya and Vera Figner.

"Later, in underground political circles, we read the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. We understood that the enslavement of women occurred together with the establishment of private ownership of the means of production and the beginning of exploitation of man by man and that real equality and real freedom for women would be found only in socialism, where there would be no exploitation of man by man. Therefore, the most reliable path for the liberation of women was the path of political struggle against capitalism in the ranks of the proletariat."

—A. Artiukhina, "Proidennyi put," in A. Artiukhina et al. (eds.), *Zhenshchina v revoliutsii*

Women and the War

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 precipitated a dramatic transformation in the lives of Russian women, ripping them away from their private family roles and throwing them into entirely new social roles in factories, hospitals, at the front and in the streets.

During the very first months of the war, military mobilizations took approximately 40 percent of Russian working men out of industrial jobs, many of which had to be filled by women. Between 1913 and 1917 the percentage of women working in the metal trades in Petrograd rose from 3.2 percent to 20.3 percent. In the woodworking industries, the number of women increased sevenfold. In papermaking, printing and the preparation of animal products and foodstuffs their number doubled.

This entrance of large numbers of Russian women into industrial production was a profoundly progressive step because it laid the basis for their economic and political organization. By the time of the October Revolution, women constituted about ten percent of the membership of the Bolshevik Party and were represented at every level of the party organization.

While many female comrades took a special interest in party work among women, it was always clear that this important arena of work was the responsibility of the party as a whole and not solely of the women within it. This Bolshevik refusal to differentiate political functioning on the basis of sex is also illustrated by the fact that neither in the party nor in its youth section did women ever constitute a male exclusionist faction or caucus. There were, at times, women's commissions and departments to oversee special work among women, but these always remained under the control of higher party bodies composed of comrades of both sexes.

The absence of women's caucuses was not, of course, an indication that the party was entirely free of sexist attitudes; only that the struggle against such attitudes was carried out by the party as a whole on the basis of communist consciousness, which was expected to transcend sexual distinctions.

One of the foremost Bolshevik leaders in the struggle against reactionary attitudes toward women within the party was V.I. Lenin. In an interview with Clara Zetkin of the German Social Democratic Party, he said:

"... Unfortunately it is still true to say of many of our comrades 'scratch a Communist and find a Philistine.' Of

continued on next page

Bolshevik Work...

course you must scratch the sensitive spot, their mentality as regards women. Could there be a more damning proof of this than the calm acquiescence of men who see how women grow worn out in petty, monotonous household work, their strength and time dissipated and wasted, their minds growing narrow and stale, their hearts beating slowly, their will weakened? Of course, I am not speaking of the ladies of the bourgeoisie who shove onto servants the responsibilities for all household work, including the care of children. What I am saying applies to the overwhelming majority of women, to the wives of workers and to those who stand all day in a factory.

"So few men—even among the proletariat—realize how much effort and trouble they could save women, even quite do away with, if they were to lend a hand in 'women's work.' But no, that is contrary to the 'right and dignity of a man.' They want their peace and comfort. The home life of the woman is a daily sacrifice to a thousand unimportant trivialities. The old master-right of the man still lives in secret. His slave takes her revenge, also secretly. The backwardness of women, their lack of understanding for the revolutionary ideals of the man, decrease his joy and determination in fighting. They are like little worms which, unseen, slowly but surely rot and corrode. I know the life of the worker and not only from books. Our Communist work among the women, our political work, embraces a great deal of educational work among men. We must root out the old 'master' idea to its last and smallest trace. In the Party and among the masses. That is one of our political tasks, just as it is the urgently necessary task of forming a staff of men and women well trained in theory and practice, to carry on Party activity among working women."

—Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*

International Women's Day

A great deal of radical agitation and propaganda among working women centered around the observance of International Women's Day, a proletarian women's holiday which had originated in 1908 among the female needle trades workers in Manhattan's Lower East Side and which was later officially adopted by the Second International.

The holiday was first celebrated in Russia on February 23, 1913, and the Bolshevik newspaper, *Pravda*, devoted a great deal of space to publicizing it. Beginning in January, *Pravda* initiated a special column entitled "Labor and the Life of the Working Woman," which provided information about the various meetings and rallies held in preparation for the holiday and about the resolutions which were passed at them.

The first International Women's Day in Russia drew tremendous attention in St. Petersburg and Moscow. *Pravda* published a special holiday edition, greeting the working women and congratulating them upon entering the ranks of the fighting proletariat. In opposition to the Mensheviks, who wanted the celebration of International Women's Day confined to women, the Bolsheviks insisted that it was a holiday of the entire working class. Bolshevik speakers around the country took the opportunity to put forward the Marxist analysis of the oppression of women and to

explain the Party's strategy for women's liberation through socialist revolution.

Bolshevik work among women was so successful in fact that by the winter of 1913 *Pravda* was receiving more correspondence than it could handle on the special problems facing working women. The solution, Lenin urged, was another journal aimed specifically at proletarian women. It was entitled *Rabotnitsa* (The Working Woman). *Rabotnitsa* played a crucial role in organizing women and rallying them to the Bolshevik Party. (For a detailed account of its development, see "How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women: History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*," *Women and Revolution* No. 4, Fall 1973.)

The Bolsheviks' major political competitors, the Mensheviks, attempted to counter the influence of *Rabotnitsa* with a women's journal of their own called *Golos Rabotnitsi* (Voice of the Working Woman), but it appeared only twice and failed to win much support.

Menshevik attempts to organize women through mass meetings seem to have fared badly also. Klavdia Nikolaevna, who later became an editor of *Rabotnitsa*, described one such meeting as follows:

"At the meeting there were many women and front-line soldiers. Suddenly, a group of Bolshevik working women burst into the hall and pushed their way to the speakers' platform. The first and second to reach the platform collided with it, but the third was able to gain a foothold on it, and she made such a fiery speech about the aims of the revolution, that all the women and soldiers left the meeting singing the 'International' and only one Menshevik was left in the auditorium."

—K. Nikolaevna, "Slovo k molodim rabotnitsam," A. Artiukhina et al. (eds.), *Zhenshchina v revoliutsii*

"The First Day of the Revolution—That Is the Women's Day"

As the war dragged on, the daily life of the Russian working class grew steadily worse. By 1916, bread lines in Petrograd were often over a mile long with the women, who constituted the great majority of them, standing four abreast. In this situation of massive social unrest, the intervention of the Bolsheviks, who placed the blame for the war and the high cost of living squarely on the shoulders of the autocracy, evoked a deep response from the war-weary masses. The Bolshevik slogan, "Bring back our men!" was frequently found scrawled across factory walls, and Bolshevik proclamations, such as the following, appeared in underground newspapers and were posted on walls:

"The black scourge of war has destroyed... our workers' organizations... The government has dealt treacherously with our deputies—class-conscious working women and working men—and our sons, husbands and brothers are bleeding profusely on foreign fields, paying with their lives to procure new markets, new lands for triumphant capital..."

"Thus is it possible not to raise our voices in protest, the voices of hundreds of thousands of unfortunate mothers, wives and sisters, is it possible that we will shed only inaudible tears, sigh only secret sighs for the pain of the men? This cannot be, comrade working women. In all countries workers are rising up against their oppression by capital; we rise up and our voices demonstrate that we



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Children receive free meals in early Petrograd commune.

are also able to defend our children, husbands and brothers....

"Enough bloodshed! Down with the war! A people's court for the criminal autocratic government."

—Bolshevik International Women's Day proclamation (23 February 1915), quoted in A.P. Konstantinov and E.P. Serebrovskaia (eds.), *Zhenshchiny Goroda Lenina*

Pitirim Sorokin, who was an eyewitness to the February Revolution, has written:

"If future historians look for the group that began the Russian Revolution, let him [sic] not create any involved theory. The Russian Revolution was begun by hungry women and children demanding bread and herrings."

—Pitirim Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary*

Sorokin is correct in pointing out the importance of the women in the streets in the series of events which led to the downfall of the autocracy; but this is only half the story.

Street demonstrations by women had been occurring in the major cities for several months, but they had generally been no more than local disturbances leading at most to the looting of one or two shops. The demonstrations of 23 February—International Women's Day—1917 were of another order. These were massive city-wide actions involving thousands of people who struck their factories, raised political banners, turned over railroad cars and attacked the police who attempted to restrain them.

All radical parties had intended to celebrate International Women's Day in the customary manner—that is, with rallies, speeches and the distribution of leaflets. Not a single organization had called for labor strikes. When on the eve of the holiday a group of working women met with a representative of the Bolshevik

Party, V. Kayurov, to discuss the next day's activities, he specifically cautioned them to refrain from isolated actions and to follow the instructions of the party.

Despite his advice, however, a few hundred women textile workers assembled in their factories early on the morning of the 23rd and resolved to call a one-day political strike. They elected delegates and sent them around to neighboring factories with appeals for support. Kayurov happened to be engaged in an emergency conference with four workers in the corridor of the Erikson Works when the women delegates came through that plant. It was only by this chance encounter that the Bolshevik representative learned of the forthcoming strike action. He was furious:

"I was extremely indignant about the behavior of the strikers, both because they had blatantly ignored the decision of the District Committee of the Party, and also because they had gone on strike after I had appealed to them only the night before to keep cool and disciplined. There appeared to be no reason for their action, if one discounted the ever-increasing bread queues, which had indeed touched off the strike."

—V. Kayurov, *Proletarskaia Revoliutsia* No. 1, 1923, quoted in George Katkov, *Russia 1917: The February Revolution*

The strike was thus unauthorized by any political group. It was, as Trotsky said, "a revolution begun from below, overcoming the resistance of its own revolutionary organizations, the initiative being taken of their own accord by the most oppressed and downtrodden part of the proletariat—the women textile workers, among them no doubt, many soldiers' wives."

By noon of the 23rd an estimated 90,000 workers had

continued on next page



Bread lines before the Revolution often extended for miles.

Novosti Press Agency

Bolshevik Work...

followed the working women out on strike. "With reluctance," writes Kayurov, "the Bolsheviks agreed to this."

As the striking workers, who came mostly from the Viborg District on the north side of the city, began their march into the center, they were joined by thousands of women who had been standing all morning in the bread lines, only to be informed that there was to be no bread in the shops on that day. Together they made their way to the Municipal Duma to demand bread.

For the remainder of the day the streets swarmed with people. Spontaneous meetings were held everywhere, and here and there hastily improvised red banners rose above the crowd; demanding bread, peace and higher wages. Other demands were scrawled on the sides of streetcars: "Give us bread!" and "No bread, no work!" One woman streetcar conductor later recalled:

"...when we conductors turned in our money for the night, we saw soldiers with rifles standing to one side of the gate, and on the following day they were still in the conductors' room and walking about the yard. Leonov [a Bolshevik who had been one of the leaders of a successful streetcar conductors' strike the previous year] quietly said to us: 'This is all for us; you see today in Petrograd 200,000 workers are on strike!'

"We began to leave the yard to embark in the municipal streetcars when suddenly we saw a crowd of workers coming at us, shouting: 'Open the gate to the yard!' There were 700 people. They stood on the rails and on the steps of the Gornyi Museum opposite the yard. The workers were from a pipe plant, a tannery and a paper factory. They told us that today all the plants in our city were on strike and the streetcars were not running. The

strikers were taking the streetcar drivers out of the hands of management. From all sides we heard: 'Down with the war!' 'Bread!' and a woman shouted: 'Return our husbands from the front!'

"The strikers swept over the city. A demonstration of workers from the Putilov Factory marched to the center of the city and into it, like a flood, merged again and again the crowds of workers...."

—K. Jakovlevoi in *Vsegda s Vami: Sbornik posviashchennyi 50-letiiu zhurnala "Rabotnitsa"*

All in all, the day passed with relatively little violence. A few troops were called out to assist the police, but it was determined that they were unnecessary, and they were returned to their barracks. In the evening the audience at the long-awaited premiere of Meyerhold's production of "Lermontov's Masquerade" heard some gunshots through the red and gold drapes of the Alexandrinskii Theatre, but there were no casualties and no one suspected that anything especially out of the ordinary was taking place.

They were mistaken. During the days which followed, the general agitation not only continued but assumed an ever more violent character until the hollow shell of the once-powerful Romanov dynasty crumbled.

One week after the strike which had set off this chain of events *Pravda* editorialized:

"The first day of the revolution—that is the women's day, the day of the Women Workers' International. All honour to the International! The women were the first to tread the streets of Petrograd on their day."

—Fanina W. Halle, *Women in Soviet Russia*

Toward October

"The Tasks of the Proletariat In Our Revolution: Draft Program for the Proletarian Party," written immediately

upon Lenin's return to Russia in April 1917, stated:

"Unless women are brought to take an independent part not only in political life generally, but also in daily and universal public service, it is no use talking about full and stable democracy, let alone socialism. And such 'police' functions as care of the sick and of homeless children, food inspection, etc., will never be satisfactorily discharged until women are on an equal footing with men, not merely nominally but in reality."

—V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 24

Throughout the spring and summer of 1917 the Bolsheviks intensified their work among women. The first working women's conference, which took place at Lenin's suggestion and which was attended by Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and feminists as well as Bolsheviks, demonstrated the influence which the Bolsheviks had gained among working women.

In her address to the conference, Konkordia Samoilova, a leading member of the Bolshevik Party, proposed that all political work among women in industry be carried out henceforth under the guidance of Bolshevik organizations. Naturally, this proposal met with the fierce resistance of the representatives of other radical organizations. A Menshevik, Bakasheva, argued that the women's movement was independent and must not be subordinated to the influence of any political party. But although three or four women expressed solidarity with the Menshevik resolution affirming the non-partisan character of the women's movement, it was defeated, while Samoilova's proposal for Bolshevik leadership was accepted.

Under the mounting pressure of events in the months preceding October, animosities on the left became more intense than ever. In July an abortive

uprising took place. Although the Bolsheviks had counseled against such a move at this time, when the class lines were drawn they took their places in the front ranks of the proletariat. A Russian working woman recalls:

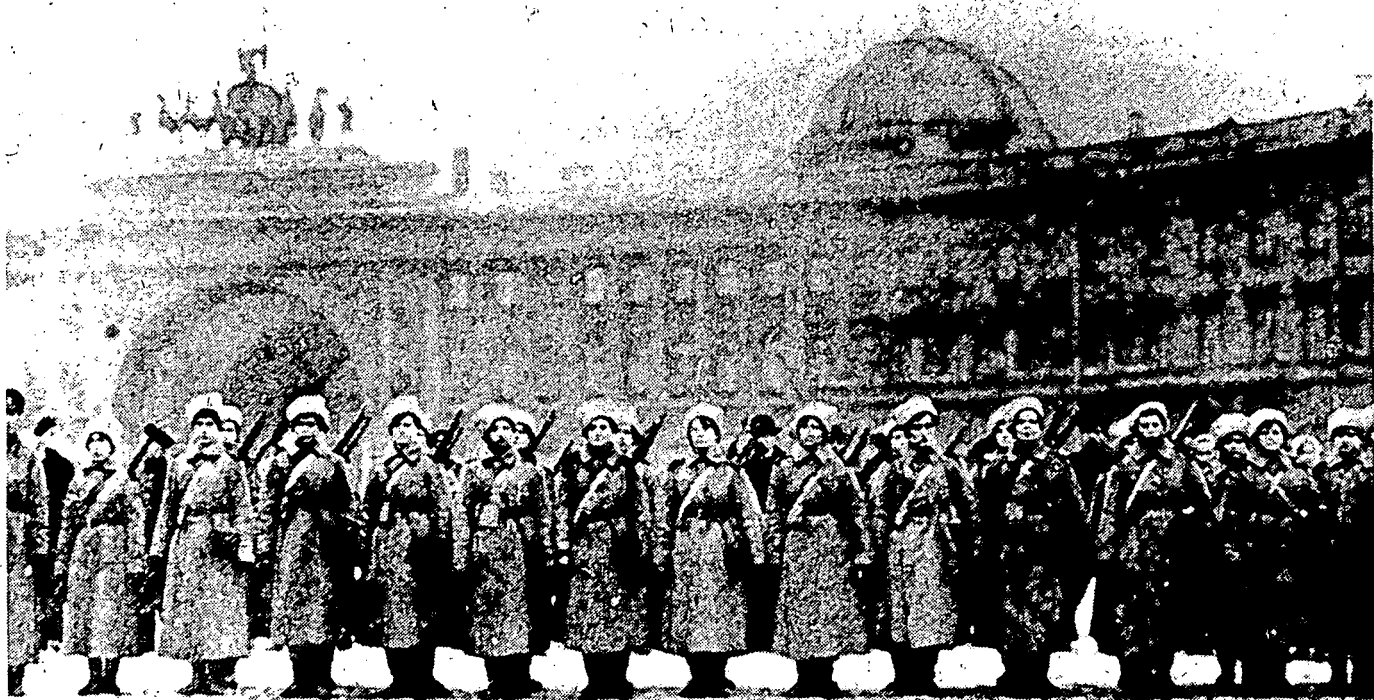
"I remember how we went to the July demonstration. Our organized working men and working women arose under the Bolshevik signs. Loudly and mightily our voices resounded: 'We who were nothing and have become everything shall construct a new and better world.'

"As the demonstration approached the corner of Nevsky and Sadova, machine-gun fire was heard. People ran to the sidewalks, but, since the doormen all along the Nevsky had closed the gates, there was nowhere to escape, and the shooting continued. The Nevsky was strewn with the bodies of the demonstrators. At a corner of the Nevsky, a store was located on the basement level. When the machine-gun fire began, we descended a short flight of stairs to the door of the shop, which was closed. Working women disassembled the window pane and, helping each other, got into the shop and ran out through a dark passage into a yard and from there through an alley back again to the Nevsky.

"The streets of Petrograd were running with the blood of workers and soldiers.... we buried them in a communal grave.

"When on the morning of July 5, 1917 we returned to our plant, 'Novi Promet,' it was as if we did not know our co-workers. During the course of our two-day absence, the Mensheviks and SRs had spread the foul slander that the Bolsheviks were fully responsible for the shooting down of the workers. The atmosphere was tense. When we entered the shop, many working women jumped up and began to throw aluminum nuts with very sharp edges at us. I was taken by surprise and covered my face with my hands, and my attackers kept repeating:

continued on next page



Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

The Women's Battalion of Death guards the Winter Palace in Petrograd (1917). These soldiers were the last defenders of the Provisional Government against the Bolsheviks.

Bolshevik Work...

"Take that, Bolshevik spy!"

"What are you doing? The Bolsheviks gave their lives for the working class and you listen to the Mensheviks and SRs, the murderers of the working class..."

"The working women, seeing my face running with blood, became frightened. Someone brought water, iodine, a towel. The girls from my brigade were in a flood of tears. They told me how the Menshevik Bakasheva and others had set them against the Bolsheviks.

"The wavering of working women became apparent not only in our plant but also in other Petrograd enterprises during the July Days, when counterrevolutionary scum together with the Mensheviks and SRs carried on their filthy persecution of the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks and SRs had started down the path of open counter-revolution."

—E. Tarasova, "Pod znamenem Bolshevikov," in A. Artiukhina et al. (eds.), *Zhenshchiny v revoliutsii*

In the final weeks before October, the Bolshevik party made an all-out effort to consolidate the support of the working women and enlist them in the imminent struggle. Party committees held working women's conferences at which they explained the problems of the party, dispelled the wild rumors which abounded, attacked counterrevolutionary positions and generally tried to raise class-consciousness among the women and draw them into revolutionary activity.

Coinciding with the October Revolution itself was the First All-City Conference of Petrograd Working Women, which was organized by *Rabotnitsa* and attended by 500 delegates elected by 80,000 working women. A major goal of the conference was to prepare non-party women for the coming uprising and to acquaint them with the program which the new Soviet government would pursue after victory. The women discussed various questions of government and worked out plans for the welfare of mothers.

The conference was temporarily interrupted by the outbreak of the armed uprising which had been under discussion. The delegates recessed in order to participate in the revolutionary struggle along with many other women who bore arms, dug entrenchments, stood guard and nursed the wounded. Afterward Lenin was to say of them:

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

—V.I. Lenin, quoted in Fanina W. Halle, *Women in Soviet Russia*

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Letter...

(continued from page 3)

police to protect prostitutes. You counterpose a polyvanguardist conception which defines the most oppressed as necessarily the most revolutionary to the Marxist insistence that only the united, organized and class-conscious proletariat has the self-interest and power to smash capitalism and substitute its own democratic rule. What has any of this in common with Trotskyism?

The Bolshevik Party spent years combatting feminism, male exclusionism and the Menshevik idea that the women's movement should be "autonomous" (see "Early Communist Work Among Women: The Bolsheviks" in this issue). And now you claim that these very things constitute the core of Trotskyism, which is the continuation of Bolshevism in our time! *Incredible!*

We support wholeheartedly Trotsky's words to the Second World Conference of Communist Women which you quote. Yes, women will play a critical—perhaps decisive—role in the coming revolution. That is why we, like our Bolshevik predecessors, devote a significant amount of our resources to special work among women—we publish a separate journal dealing

with the woman question, maintain a commission of the Central Committee to oversee all party work among women, conduct numerous forums and classes on issues relating to women's liberation and project a women's section of the party and of the reformed Fourth International.

But was Trotsky addressing his words to some "autonomous" movement of feminists—"socialist" or otherwise? No, he was not! He was addressing a conference of professional revolutionists—a working body of the anti-feminist vanguard party! He was speaking to them about the leading role of working women in the context of a struggle of the whole class under the leadership of the Communist International! It is a fine speech. And you have not understood a word of it.

Read "How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women: History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*," in *Women and Revolution* No. 4 (Fall, 1973); read the article on Bolshevik work among women in this issue; and especially read the original Comintern "Theses on Work Among Women." If a careful study of these documents does not break you from the reformist course to which you are so passionately committed, perhaps it will at least improve the historical accuracy of your leaflets.

Soviet Women: A Stalinist Apology

Mandel, William M.
Soviet Women.

Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1975.

A careful look at the status of Soviet women sheds much light on the evolution of the Soviet state. The revolutionary Soviet government under Lenin took immediate steps to alleviate the oppression of women. Divorce was made free and easily accessible; discrimination against children born out of wedlock was eliminated; free communal daycare centers were established; equal pay for equal work was decreed; abortion was made legal; free and available on demand; and thousands of schools were opened to women for the first time on the basis of preferential admissions.

One of the fundamental aims of the Bolsheviks was to increasingly supplant and transcend the nuclear family as an economic institution through the socialization of the housework traditionally done on a private basis by women. They understood that the family was a prison for women, condemning them to ignorance through isolation from society and limiting their horizons to endless years of housework drudgery. After the civil war, one of the very first major campaigns waged by the government was for the construction of adequate child care facilities.

After the consolidation of power by a bureaucratic caste headed by Stalin, women lost a great many of the advances which they had achieved through the Revolution. Stalin's policies, aimed at extinguishing all traces of genuinely revolutionary sentiment which might pose a threat to the regime, decreed the restoration of a more traditional relationship between the sexes (i.e., women playing a subservient role), particularly within the family, which was then proclaimed to be the basic unit of Soviet society.

Soviet Women, a new book by William M. Mandel, is essentially an apology for these policies. While the existing sexual inequality in the USSR is admitted, it is ascribed to the legacy of tsarism or the inevitable errors of a peasant people. Mandel also subscribes to the official Stalinist line that the goal of communists is not to replace the oppressive nuclear family, as advocated by Marx and Lenin, but only to mitigate its worst abuses.

It is undeniable that Soviet women enjoy a great many opportunities and advantages unknown to women in other parts of the world. The USSR provides free child care facilities for 10,000,000 pre-school children and free medical care. Women are guaranteed 112 days pre- and post-natal maternity leave at full pay and a year in which to return to their jobs without loss

of seniority. Men and women are allowed sick leave to care for sick children. Women's wages in the Soviet Union average 87 percent of men's (as opposed to 59 percent in the United States), and rent is set at five percent of a worker's income. Nor are these advances limited to urban areas; among peasant women, where illiteracy was virtually universal until well after the Revolution, there are more college- and high school-educated women than men!

Moreover, Mandel demonstrates conclusively that Soviet women have been drawn out of the home and into productive work. They constitute 51 percent of the workforce, and, unlike their American counterparts, who are barred from a great many skilled and semi-skilled trades, Soviet women drive trains, fly planes, run massive hydroelectric power plants, plan the development of natural resources, unload ships, do theoretical work in mathematics and science and generally participate in every branch of industry and government. ("My pride in being an American was deeply hurt," reports Mandel, "when I found that the share of U.S. women in the leading professions is just about the lowest in the entire world.")

Those like the Maoists and "third-camp socialists," who argue that the Soviet Union is a "social imperialist" or capitalist state would do well to reflect on these figures, for, while they certainly do not demonstrate full equality in the workforce, they do indicate advances which could only have been achieved in a society which has eliminated private ownership of the means of production and instituted a planned economy. Full employment, the plowing back of social profits into the massive construction of day care and school facilities and the actual enforcement of equal pay for equal work cannot be achieved in a capitalist economy. Under capitalism surplus value is reinvested only where it returns a profit; a reserve army of the unemployed (historically composed largely of women) is required to drive down wages; and the cost of labor is minimized by shifting the entire burden of child rearing onto the worker's family, specifically onto the mother.

Latter-day Stalin devotees maintain that capitalism was restored in the Soviet Union after 1956 and that the gains of Soviet women pre-date this period. But it should be noted that there is a distinct upward curve in educational and occupational equality for Soviet women under 30 and that the greatest advances by women in the countryside have been made in the past 10 years. (Mandel provides valuable comparative statistics on Chinese development which debunk the Maoist myth that China has outstripped the Soviet Union in alleviating the oppression of women. While

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Soviet Women...

Chinese women are in a far better position than the women of capitalist countries of the region, such as India. China, lacking full employment, cannot begin to integrate women into the workforce on a level comparable to that of the USSR. Furthermore, maternity leaves are only half as long as in the Soviet Union when they are available at all, and abortions are not easily accessible.)

Stalin's Legacy

Mandel admits to the relative absence of Soviet women in high decision-making positions in government, management and the Communist Party. His explanation for this is that the progress of Soviet women has been obstructed by the cultural heritage of tsarism. In a shorter essay, "Soviet Women in the Work Force," which contains the fundamental theses set forth in *Soviet Women*, he put it most succinctly; "... women have advanced in the Soviet labor force and professions in approximately direct proportion to the elimination of handicaps inherited by the Soviet regime and... a principal basis for residual differences in the status of men and women is the time lag in this regard."

While Marxists recognize that a fledgling workers state is built on foundations heavily marked by the traditions of the bourgeois society from which it has just emerged, they also recognize that human consciousness can intervene to lessen the effect of those traditions. Mandel's objectivist formulation serves to obscure the fact that sexual inequalities in the Soviet Union are as much a legacy of Stalin as of Nicholas. It was Stalin's policies which for 20 years decreed that woman's primary role was that of childbearer.

Mandel is too knowledgeable to simply omit all reference to Stalinist policy, and his personal repugnance for some of the worst atrocities of the regime leads him to voice occasional criticisms of it. Nonetheless, an ex-Stalinist himself, he has never broken from Stalinism's fundamental premises. He believes that the bureaucracy's policies were, in fact, justified:

"Because of the frank hostility of every other government to the USSR in the 1930's, and Hitler's publicly announced intention long before the war, to seize great parts of the Soviet Union and make it a colony, the Soviet Union became like a city under siege. Every individual's life was subject to control in what was believed to be the interests of the survival of the whole."

Mandel's real political sympathies come through most clearly in an earlier passage where he observes:

"... there is a peculiar myth, political rather than scholarly in origin, that holds that Lenin's brief lifetime after 1917 was a period of progress, followed by reaction under Stalin. The fact is that Lenin died in 1924, and Trotsky, who had been second in prominence, was thereafter in a powerless minority. It was the first decade of Stalin's leadership (1924-34) that witnessed both the flourishing of films and literature, and the kinds of legislation and experiments in living that many young Western radicals and cultural figures look upon with nostalgia."

While Communist Party leader Gus Hall or the Maoists of the October League may look upon this

period with nostalgia, 1929-36 was the period of the most brutal repression. Virtually every sector of Soviet society was devastated by purges in which some 500,000 people were killed (including virtually the entire original leadership of the Bolshevik party) and 5,000,000 were put into forced labor camps. Most of those who had participated in the brief flowering of Soviet art were put to death. Forced collectivization was so brutal and destructive that its effects are still felt in Soviet agriculture, contributing to the continually low levels of production. Mandel's book, which is so chock-full of statistics, conveniently omits mention of any of these atrocities!

This period of Stalinist reaction marked a decisive step *backward* for women. As the revolutionary tide ebbed in Europe, the Soviet Union was left isolated and poverty-stricken. This was fertile ground for the growth of a bureaucracy bolstered by its authority as the defender of Soviet borders and by its control of the scarce commodities available to the Soviet people. Anxious to protect its privileged position, this bureaucracy set out to destroy all vestiges of Soviet power which could challenge its authority. It appealed for support to the most conservative prejudices of the urban and peasant masses. The family, that purveyor of the traditional ideas of subservience and respect for authority, was one of its central instruments.

An all-out offensive was undertaken to reconstitute the family structure based on female subordination. In 1934 the Women's Section of the party was abolished and all mass women's organizations were dissolved. Mandel claims that these organizations disappeared because "at that time, women had gained the confidence to stand up for themselves in mixed organizations and to function in them, and had in practice attained essential equality in employment and education, that is, outside the home." In his haste to justify Stalinist policy, he forgets the resolution passed in 1930 by the Central Committee of the CP which he had quoted earlier, noting "extreme indecisiveness by local party bodies regarding the promotion of women to leading posts involving independent authority, and in some cases absolutely open bigotry on the part of certain party organizations and members."

Hard on the heels of the dissolution of the Women's Section and mass organizations came the illegalization of abortion and the virtual impossibility of obtaining a divorce, combined with a propaganda offensive which Mandel admits "resulted in a sanctification of 'till death do us part' that any church would envy." In 1941 a law was passed relieving men of any responsibility for children born out of wedlock. In 1944, co-education was abolished, ensuring that women would get second best in terms of available schools, teachers and facilities. This decree was similar to the "separate but equal" decisions of the U.S. courts which followed the period of reaction in the South after abandonment of Reconstruction. Mandel's response to these defeats is: "... to me, the marvel of that period is that despite the steps backward the mass-scale advance of women was not fundamentally affected, as the subsequent years have shown."



Young coal miners of the Gorlovka region of the Ukraine (1930).

Robert B. Luce, Inc.

Nothing could be further from the truth! The inequality existing today can be traced directly to the policies of this period. Twenty years of illegalized abortion, the sanctification of marriage and motherhood and the abolition of co-education could not but reinforce the traditional attitude that women are indeed inferior. More important, while women were never driven from the workforce, the emphasis on child rearing and the limitations placed on women's education robbed them of the skills which would facilitate genuine equality of opportunity. Rather than advancing as old handicaps were overcome, women were forced to retreat as old prejudices were deliberately rehabilitated.

Soviet Women in the Post-Stalin Period

The question must be posed of why barriers to abortion, divorce and co-education were lowered in 1955. While Mandel never deals with the question directly, his answer can be found in another of his essays, "Soviet Marxism and Social Science": "The USSR can today claim to be the first major socialist state to have emerged from the stage of internal terror (dictatorship of the proletariat plus the unneeded massacres in its name)." Essentially he believes that the bureaucracy is self-reforming and that socialism has been attained through simple economic growth. (He ignores Lenin's dictum that even in the lower stage of communism the state will begin to wither away as the masses assume more and more of the simple administrative duties of government.)

The real explanation for the restitution of women's civil rights in 1955 is bureaucratic self-preservation. By

1955 the Soviet bureaucracy was faced with a serious problem. Its economy was still staggering from the impact of the war. Attempts to rebuild the economy by simply abusing Eastern European allies had already led to the German uprising in 1953, to be followed by uprisings in Hungary and Poland in 1956. To head off the rising tide of internal dissent which began to boil with Stalin's death, the domestic economy had to be rationalized.

Women were the major untapped source of skilled labor power. Ever since the war mobilization they had constituted a near majority of the workforce. The most productive generations of men had been severely decimated during and immediately after the war. To provide women with the skills necessary for them to hold responsible positions in industry, they had to be admitted to institutes with high standards; i.e., co-education had to be restored. To encourage them to leave the household and devote the time and energy necessary to acquire these new skills, childbearing had to be de-emphasized. Since Soviet contraceptives at that time were still notoriously poor, abortion was a necessary back-up for birth control. The assertion of women's right to control their bodies led naturally to the belief that it was also their right to contract and dissolve marriages at will, and since a higher divorce rate led to greater mobility in the labor force, divorce became more acceptable. So when faced with the need to rationalize economic production, the bureaucracy was compelled to draw heavily upon women to provide the skilled labor necessary to advance national interests.

continued on next page

Soviet Women...

But the very limited reforms undertaken in the post-Stalin era were not accompanied by a return to the Marxist position on the necessity of replacing the nuclear family. Mandel readily admits that while over 85 percent of Soviet women are engaged in productive work outside the home, they are still basically bound by



Robert B. Luce, Inc.

The builders of the Moscow subway (1936). The banner reads: "We shall give 185 meters of finished tunnel for the first of May."

the family and continue to be responsible for housework and child care. The bureaucracy meanwhile continues to glorify motherhood by awarding medals to women bearing large numbers of children.

Current Soviet policy aims explicitly at reforming, not replacing, the family. The emphasis is on developing part-time jobs for women so that they will have time to do housework. Secondly, there is some effort to prevail upon men to help out in the home and some effort to expand the distribution of consumer products and services.

Prospects for laying the economic basis for the socialization of housework—assuming that the bureaucracy would permit its implementation—are crippled by bureaucratic mismanagement of the economy. Despite the benefits of centralized planning, Soviet economic growth has for years been under 7.5 percent annually. This slow growth combined with the devastation of Soviet productive capacity by World War II has meant, for instance, that it was only five years ago that every rural Soviet cottage finally received electricity. Mandel estimates that it will be another 10 years before refrigerators, washing machines and vacuums will be standard items in worker and peasant homes.

Meanwhile, even Soviet sources admit that among the peasantry "conditions of household culture similar

to those of the past and the economic need to preserve the personal garden farm are the basis for preservation in the family of elements of the old social inequality of the sexes and the traditional division of everyday kinds of work into male and female" (Mandel's emphasis).

In a country where 43 percent of the population is still rural and many workers are only one generation removed from the land, the impact of this should not be underestimated. Mandel himself notes that the level of abortion is very high among peasant women because most of them are still ignorant of modern birth control techniques. The vast social pressure from the old peasant families against any form of birth control contributes directly to this ignorance.

The Soviet bureaucracy continues to be the major obstacle to the emancipation of the Soviet woman, as it is for the emancipation of the Soviet working masses as a whole. Soviet foreign policy, by guaranteeing capitalist rule in the West through a strategy of class collaboration (recently exemplified by the treacherous popular fronts advanced in Chile and Portugal), sabotages the international proletarian revolution and consequently defers the day when the workers of the advanced countries can provide the products needed by the Soviet Union and more backward countries for the mechanization and socialization of housework.

Politically disfranchised as is the entire Soviet working class; Soviet women are particularly vulnerable to reversals in government policy, which may lead again to the abolition of legal abortion, co-education or easily accessible divorce. While the use of terror in the Soviet Union has become less blatant, it should be remembered that many of the reforms of the Khrushchev era disappeared entirely for several years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. In fact, the Czech events demonstrate clearly the bureaucracy's continued willingness to use armed force if necessary to preserve itself.

For Soviet women, the Trotskyist road of political revolution in the degenerated Soviet workers state is the only guarantor of their real liberation. Only through the direct democratic control of government by the working class can women be fully assured of their rights, particularly control over their own bodies. Through the liberation of the productive forces which would occur with the destruction of the bureaucracy, together with advances in the world revolution aided by a policy of genuine internationalism, major steps could be taken toward the socialization of housework which would free women once and for all from the grip of the nuclear family. Only when the nuclear family has been replaced will the basis be laid for socialist relations between the sexes. Then:

"In place of the indissoluble marriage based on the servitude of women, we shall see the rise of the free union, fortified by the love and the mutual respect of the two members of the Workers' State, equal in their rights and in their obligations. In place of the individual and egotistic family there will arise a great universal family of workers. ... Such will be the relation between men and women in the communist society of tomorrow."

—Alexandra Kollontay, "Communism and the Family"

The Private Life of Islam: A Review

Young, Ian.

*The Private Life of Islam: A Young Doctor's
Harrowing Account of a Season in an Algerian
Maternity Hospital.*
New York: Liveright, 1974.

The Algerian masses' successful war of national liberation against French colonialism was for the early New Left a living symbol of the revolutionary potential of the "Third World." Along with the overturn of capitalism in Cuba, the self-proclaimed construction of "socialism" in Ben-Bella's Algeria focused the vicarious "anti-imperialist" energies of the radicals of the 1960's, as the Spanish Civil War had embodied the "anti-fascist" sentiments of an earlier generation.

Unlike the social revolutions which established deformed workers states in Cuba and later in Indochina, the Algerian war for national independence stopped short of any fundamental transformation of the class nature of Algeria. At a tremendous human cost, the mainly peasant Algerian liberation fighters drove the French from their country but did not destroy capitalism, instead replacing the colonial rule of French capital by the domination of a native bourgeoisie which remains tied to imperialism through the world market.

American New Leftists uncritically solidarized with the struggle to build "socialism" in post-revolutionary Algeria. They viewed the Ben Bella regime as unequivocally progressive and considered it axiomatic that the defeat of imperialism would open the road to social emancipation. Rejecting the Leninist view that only a socialist revolution under the leadership of a proletarian revolutionary party can accomplish the liberation of all the oppressed, the New Leftists envisaged many "vanguard" layers—the colonial masses, American blacks, women, youth—each of whose struggles would automatically advance the aims of the other oppressed strata.

The reality of the grinding oppression of women in post-revolutionary Algeria explodes this myth. Neither the Ben Bella regime nor the less leftist Boumediene government which succeeded it significantly altered the subservient position of women in Algerian society. "Socialist" Algeria has shown itself completely incapable of completing even elementary democratic tasks, instead finding itself compelled to buttress the Muslim religion and the authoritarian family structure as essential props of bourgeois rule.

The Private Life of Islam demonstrates the reactionary role of religion and the family in perpetuating the degraded condition of Algerian women. The

book is a young British doctor's account of his training in an Algerian maternity hospital, a place where women are mutilated and killed as often as helped. The hospital is run "like an obstetrics book turned upside down, every do a don't, every never an always." The incompetence of the hospital staff is matched only by its sadism.

The staff has no time for the fear, pain or even hygiene of its patients. Beds, sheets and patients are covered with food, blood, excrement. Those infants



Pierre Ferrenbach

Algerian women voting (1967).

who survive delivery are wrapped in rags and left unchanged and unwashed until they leave. No medical histories are charted, and examinations are cursory or skipped entirely. Curettage is routinely performed without anesthetic, although bottles of it sit unused on shelves. If a slip of the hand punctures the womb, it is removed—with curses for the extra work.

The foreign doctors excuse their criminal neglect of medical standards and ordinary human decency by reference to the attitude of Algerian men themselves toward the patients. In incident after incident, terrified and suffering women are mocked, insulted, struck and most often simply ignored by male relatives and the hospital staff. Ian Young sums up one young husband's attitude toward his wife's confinement as "a trip to the vet." Still filled with moralistic ideals, Young guiltily waits for one of the patients to reproach him with a look or a word for his complicity, but the women submis-

continued on next page

Private Life of Islam...

sively accept the pain and brutalization as their lot.

The deprecatory attitude toward women emerges clearly in one bit of dialogue between members of the hospital staff:

"'It'll be born dead at this rate.' Fatma says to the girl: 'If you don't push harder next time, it'll be a little girl.' And to me, Djamilia says: 'A dead baby, or a little girl—it's kif-kif, it's the same thing.'"

In another incident, a young girl who has become pregnant after being raped, faces a choice between returning to her village, where she will be killed by her father to avenge the family's dishonor, or going to prison for the "crime" of bearing an illegitimate child. Occasionally a woman informed of her pregnancy timorously asks for an abortion, but most respond with despairing resignation.

Ian Young is indignant and ashamed. Blaming the foreign doctors, he seeks government aid to institute hospital reforms. He goes to see a bureaucrat described as a real "revolutionary." He initially flatters and conciliates the English doctor but he reveals his true attitude by boasting of how he put a doctor's wife, who is a nurse, back in "her place" by telling her: "Medicine comes before women, Madame. Show some respect for your husband." Young gradually comes to understand that the hospital is the product of the society which supports it: "These men were the unhappy executors, working in blood, excrement and death, of the most respected attitudes in Algeria."

"Muslim Socialism"

"We prefer the woman who gives birth to a pilot, to the woman who becomes a pilot herself."

—Mouloud Kassim

Member of the Revolutionary Council

Algerian rhetoric concerning women's liberation and socialism notwithstanding, the government upholds Islam. Some Muslim reformists, citing the Koran's injunctions against burying female infants in the sand and noting the vagueness of the passages used to justify the enforced seclusion of women and the wearing of the veil, claim that *true* Islam provides for equality between the sexes. But the Koran makes itself abundantly clear on its attitude toward women:

"Men are superior to women on account of the qualities which God hath fitted the one above the other and on account of the outlay they make from their substance for them. Virtuous women are obedient, careful during the husband's absence, because God hath of them been careful. But chide those for whose refractoriness ye have cause to fear; remove them into beds apart, and scourge them: but if they are obedient to you, then seek not occasion against them: verily, God is high, Great!"

The "equality" of Islam is the equality of apartheid. That is how Algerian women lived before and during the French occupation and that is how they continue to live today—covered up, locked up, uneducated and sold in marriage to strangers, often as children. Seclusion may be vague in the letter of Koranic law, but it is wholly in keeping with its spirit. The religious teachings of Islam, like the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, depict women as excessively sensual and morally inferior, needing the guidance of men to protect them from their own weaknesses.

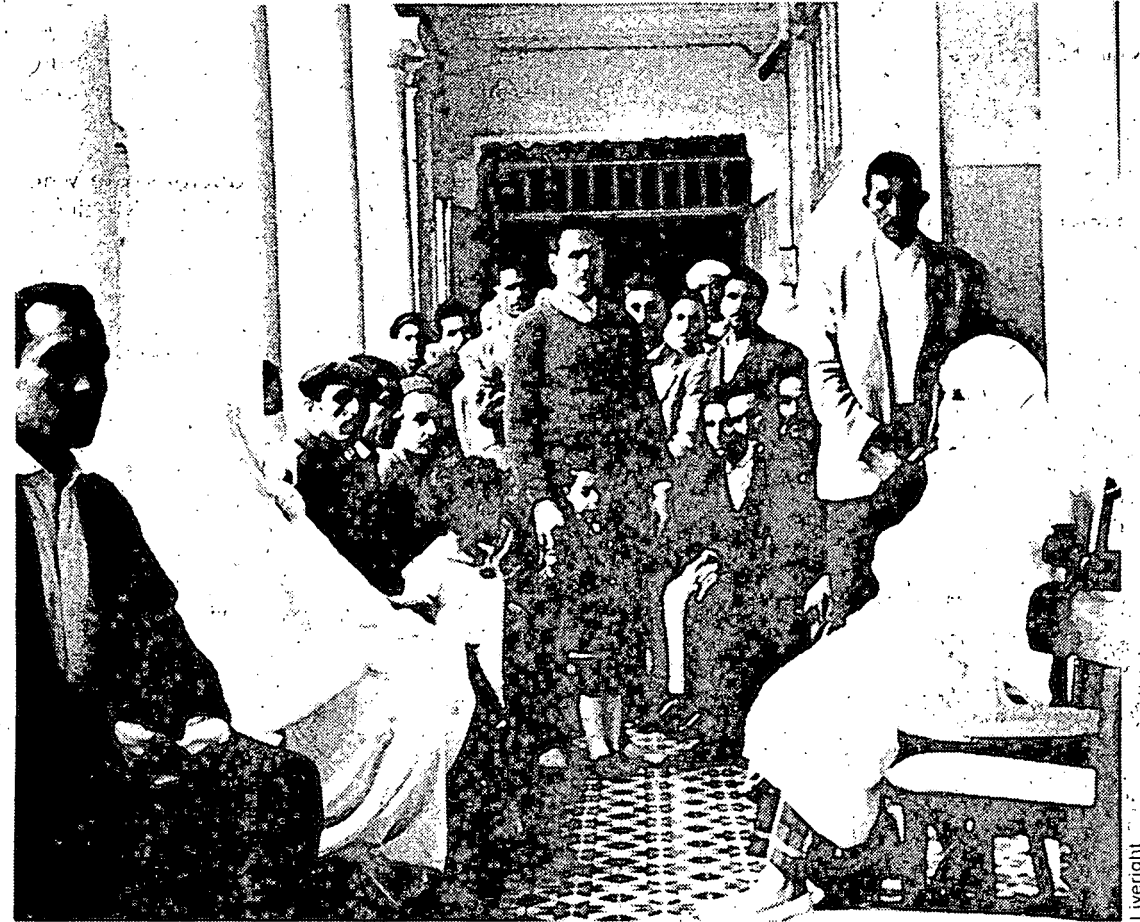
The French made use of the Islamic degradation of women to justify denying democratic rights, particularly suffrage, to Muslims. The Algerians reacted with increased Muslim orthodoxy, praising their women as the perpetrators of their true culture against French influence. Due to their seclusion, Algerian women were indeed less affected by French influence than were Algerian men, although the French made a special effort to reach them. During the struggle for national liberation, the French initiated public, pro-French unveilings of Muslim women and organized a Feminine Solidarity Movement which offered them medical care, legal aid, gifts and education in an attempt to draw them out of their isolation and into the service of French imperialism.

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"Muslim socialism" did nothing to emancipate Algerian women.

Liveright

The FLN (National Liberation Front) responded with the slogan, "For a free Algeria, not a free French woman!" Rather than raising a genuinely socialist program for women, thus releasing them from the bondage of Islam as well as from French imperialism, the Algerian nationalists took the veil as their symbol! They placed the oppression of women on the pedestal of revolution.

The popular film "Battle of Algiers" dramatizes the heroic role of women in the struggle; but it was expediency not ideology which integrated the FLN, and this equality of the barricades was short-lived.

On the eve of independence the Algerian masses had before them the possibility of sweeping away their own feudal elite along with French domination and of advancing their struggle past the attainment of bourgeois democracy and on to the construction of a socialist society. The petty-bourgeois leadership of the FLN, however, did everything in its power to avert such an outcome and ensure the future of Algerian capitalism. At Evian the FLN pledged economic cooperation with French imperialism in exchange for technical and financial aid, a pledge which made the completion of even democratic tasks impossible. Respect for French landholdings meant that only deserted land could be distributed. The promised agrarian revolution necessary to feed the cities' war-swollen population was put off year after year while

French industrialists continued to suck oil out of the Sahara.

For women the mass unemployment and food shortage which followed the war meant starvation and mass prostitution. Even child prostitution was common.

The constitution proclaimed Islam the national religion and the family the basic unit of Algerian society. Men, since they were automatically considered the heads of households, were given preference in employment. Polygamy was only moderately restricted. Forced marriage was forbidden by law, but for most women, with no possibility of employment, the only practical alternative to marriage was suicide.

The Algerian revolution did achieve national liberation from the yoke of French imperialism, but it did not free the urban and peasant masses from poverty and exploitation, nor from the savage social oppression which is rooted in the fabric of capitalist class rule. In the era of imperialist decay, there is no room for independent capitalist development of the underdeveloped countries; the weak "national bourgeoisie" cannot break from even the most reactionary and feudal elements of its class and is consequently propelled into the arms of foreign imperialism. Far from building "socialism," countries such as Algeria cannot even address the democratic tasks formerly associated with bourgeois revolutions. It remains for the revolutionary proletarian party, which must also be a "tribune of the people," to lift the veil of women's oppression in Algeria. ■

CLUW's Had It...

(continued from page 24)

While the Spartacist League warned that: "CLUW is not a temporary stage on the road to socialist consciousness, but rather a roadblock which will be transformed or smashed as an obstacle as the proletariat develops revolutionary consciousness" ("CLUW: Dead End for Working Women," *Women and Revolution* No. 6, Summer 1974), these groups hailed CLUW uncritically in their press as a milestone in the struggle for women's liberation.

Fostering illusions that CLUW would provide an open arena for the work of leftists and that it could eventually be "taken over from below," these groups tried to outdo each other in their efforts to be CLUW's "best builders."

Predictably, this strategy has failed completely. As skilled maneuverers, the bureaucrats who compose the CLUW leadership have used every available opportunity to ensure that the radicals will remain in their service rather than vice versa. Time after time, the bureaucracy has demonstrated that it would rather lose a chapter or abandon a struggle than have even mild dissidents play any sort of leading role in CLUW.

Red-baiting has been a favorite tactic of the CLUW leadership from the founding conference at which Madar waved a copy of the *Workers Vanguard* article entitled "Bureaucrats Rig CLUW Conference" and told her audience: "If you hear anybody talking like this, shut them up." She devoted 30 minutes of the January Steering Committee meeting to reading a list of "subversive" organizations and individuals who, she claimed, were out to "destroy" CLUW. Unfortunately, most of these "subversives" have been all too willing to work out a modus vivendi with the CLUW leadership.

The bureaucrats' anti-red campaign does not stop at the door of CLUW meetings, but extends to direct collaboration with the right wing of the labor movement. The June NCC voted to establish a committee to "investigate" charges against the Seattle chapter, alleging that the chapter had been taken over by leftists. This came as a result of a letter from a group of right-wing bureaucrats which was widely distributed in the Seattle labor movement, including to the Central Labor Council, which fingered a number of trade unionists as alleged members in the IS and other radical organizations and which demanded that the chapter's charter be lifted on the grounds that the political affiliation of these trade unionists was incompatible with membership in CLUW.

The proper response to this sort of back-stabbing was demonstrated by the class-struggle Militant Caucus of Los Angeles AFSCME Local 2070, which introduced a motion in the local chapter meeting denouncing the Seattle "investigation" as an outright witchhunt and demanding that it be dropped. Unfortunately, an amendment deleting the operational part of this motion was passed, with the support of some CLUW members who professed political solidarity with those being purged!

Similar spinelessness was displayed in Cleveland when the CLUW chapter erected an informational picket line in front of a General Electric plant in defense of a fired CLUW member, Hester Butterfield. The leadership of International Union of Electrical Workers Local 707 had previously shown little interest in Butterfield's case but was quick to mobilize CLUW heavies, including Madar, against the picketing. The local steering committee, strongly influenced by the politics of both the IS and SWP, acceded to Madar's verbal order to drop the action. It was reported to an astonished membership at the following CLUW meeting that their one local activity had been scrapped.

Affirmative Action

The Spartacist League fights for the unions to take a stand against those aspects of union contracts which foster discriminatory seniority, while defending the seniority system itself. This principled position sets off the politics of the Spartacist League from those of both the bureaucrats and the "radicals" within CLUW.

Despite the fact that mounting unemployment threatens to wipe out the token gains of those hired under affirmative action quotas, the CLUW leadership has lined up hard behind the position of the AFL-CIO/UAW tops: defend seniority regardless of the consequences for women and minorities. On the other side, the SWP, OL and IS back preferential layoff schemes which undercut hard-won seniority rights and open the door to government interference in the unions. While both sides pursue their own sectional interests, neither has the slightest intention of mobilizing a unified labor movement to fight the companies to stop all layoffs and win jobs for all.

The struggle over seniority came to a head over the Fremont, California "Women's Law Suit" which, on behalf of some of the women workers laid off by General Motors, takes the seniority system—and thus the UAW contract itself—into the capitalist courts. Though the OL and others who back the suit have tried to argue that it seeks neither to punish men nor to attack the union, the facts contradict this. The suit asks for preferential immunity from layoffs (superseniority) for women recently hired under affirmative action quotas at the GMAD plant. It also asks for "population parity (for women) without regard to workforce size at any time" (to be achieved within four years from date of filing). This can only be accomplished by the firing of men, total discrimination in hiring and the ignoring of the seniority clauses in the contract at layoff time. In fact, the federal judge named the UAW as co-defendant with GM because the suit attacks sections of the negotiated contract.

While Madar denounced the suit from her business-unionist point of view, an oppositional, class-struggle caucus within Fremont Local 1364, Committee for a Militant UAW (CMUAW), wrote and circulated a petition demanding that the suit be dropped. Seven hundred unionists, many of them women and minority members, have signed this petition. The CMUAW has correctly argued that the hard-won seniority system, which protects the particularly vulnerable women and

minority workers from employer-discrimination, *must not be sacrificed* to pay for the company's race- and sex-discrimination practices. Instead the union movement must lead campaigns, strikes and plant occupations against all layoffs and for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay.

Local 1364 had passed a CMUAW resolution the previous year calling for the establishment of an official union committee to build for a national industry-wide strike to win a shorter workweek with no pay cut. Union members who later backed the "Women's Law Suit" had *opposed* this motion, thus demonstrating that they had for a long time rejected the strategy of class struggle.

Laid-Off Lackeys

The IS, OL and SWP now find themselves in stark opposition to an intransigent union bureaucracy on the preferential hiring issue. Supporters of the three opposition groups voted in the June NCC meeting for the following anti-seniority motion:

"That wherever a seniority system is used to perpetuate the discriminatory hiring, firing and employment practices of an employer by allowing a reduction in the percentage of women and minority workers gained through affirmative action struggles, CLUW stands for altering or amending that seniority system so as to protect these gains."

This motion, opposed by the bureaucrats, failed.

For the SWP, which has worked ever-so-hard to serve the bureaucracy, the bind is especially agonizing. Regardless of the outcome of the CLUW fiasco, the SWP will inevitably be faced with the difficult choice of abandoning its mass-line feminism or losing the

possibility of a coveted entrance into the trade-union bureaucracy.

Class-Struggle Opposition

Of all the political tendencies represented within CLUW, only the Spartacist League and its supporters have been notable for speaking out against the bureaucrats' criminal and impotent reliance on the Democratic Party. Only Spartacist supporters have posed factory occupations against layoffs, the nationalization of basic industry without compensation and the formation of a workers party to fight for a workers government—as class-struggle alternatives to the leadership's strategy of lobbying congressmen. Spartacist League supporters have distinguished themselves by campaigning within CLUW in defense of the United Farm Workers (UFW) against the Teamster/grower alliance which threatens to crush it, and against the exclusion from CLUW of working women who are struggling to organize their workplaces. In fact, the Spartacist League and its supporters have been the only working-class pole in CLUW arguing for an action program which links the struggle for the emancipation of women in the workplace with the struggle for the emancipation of women from the confines of the family and with the struggle of the working class as a whole against capitalism.

At the same time, the Spartacist League has refused to acknowledge CLUW as something that it is not or to bow before the present reformist leadership of the working class. Initiated by the bureaucrats as a cynical attempt to rope in working women, CLUW is an *obstacle* to the development of socialist consciousness among working women, an obstacle which will be swept aside—probably quite soon. ■

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Bureaucrats' Front Group Collapses

CLUW's Had It

The Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) started life two years ago as an effort by female union bureaucrats to build themselves a mass base. Hoping to use CLUW as a lever to exert pressure on their male counterparts and propel their own advancement within the union hierarchy, the CLUW tops sought to palm off their purely careerist vehicle as a force for combatting the labor bureaucracy's gross insensitivity to sexual oppression. From its inception, CLUW was a fraud. The oppression of women perpetrated by the employers and callously ignored by the existing union leaders cannot be confronted without a resolute struggle against these "leaders" themselves; it is they who time and time again sell out the interests of the union ranks, including women workers, to preserve their own "peaceful coexistence" with capital.

Although CLUW's national membership peaked at around 4,000 last year, probably less than half of these bothered to renew their membership this October. Local chapter meetings have grown smaller and smaller (in New York City, meetings which used to draw several hundred members now pull under 20), and recently, whether by accident or design, several National Coordinating Committee (NCC) and Steering Committee meetings have been unable to conduct business for lack of a quorum.

Torn by factionalism, terrified of "communist" dissenters and withering from total (and justifiable) lack of interest on the part of rank-and-file working women, CLUW has become more trouble to its bureaucratic sponsors than it is worth.

Bureaucrats vs. "Militants"

CLUW's initiators have stopped at nothing in their efforts to bolster their own privileged positions as agents of capitalism within the working class. Even the most rudimentary expressions of class solidarity are beyond the consciousness of these betrayers who last year extended "honorary membership" to Bella Abzug while refusing membership to the miners' wives actively supporting the Harlan County strike.

CLUW president (and United Auto Workers ex-vice-president) Olga Madar, who gained notoriety by helping to organize the 1000-member goon squad of UAW officials which broke the Mack Avenue sitdown strike in August 1973, exemplifies the mentality of these bureaucrats. Strike-breaking and reliance on the capitalist government and its political parties go hand in hand; in order to convince the working class to rely on the parties of its oppressors, it is first necessary to convince the workers of their own impotence.

The time-worn bureaucratic "program of action," recently reiterated by CLUW leader and UAW

International Representative Edith Van Horn at a Detroit CLUW speak-out, consists of nothing more than a proposal to oust the Republican administration and support Democratic "friends of labor." Like other labor bureaucrats, the CLUW leadership has remained criminally passive in the face of massive layoffs and unemployment and has refused to consider any action to combat this attack on the working class which goes beyond the bounds of bourgeois politicking. Despite the fact that the so-called "veto-proof congress" has failed to overrule even once Ford's veto of token "job creating" programs, the bureaucrats continue to insist that labor's only recourse is to pressure its "Democratic allies" and to hold "our" legislators accountable for their actions by means of the bourgeois political process.

To the alarm of its founders, CLUW soon began to attract the supporters of several radical organizations—predominantly the International Socialists (IS), Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and October League (OL)—whose motives for participation were very different from those of the bureaucrats. These self-styled militants were drawn to CLUW on the basis of their feminist-derived notion that an organization of women workers was *inherently* radical and by their desire to gain easy access to the working class.

For a period of time, it seemed as if an uneasy alliance of conciliation and back-stabbing between bureaucrats and "leftists" (in which the bureaucrats always managed somehow to come out on top) would simply continue until CLUW disintegrated. But the issue of preferential layoffs vs. seniority rights revealed the underlying divergence of appetites between the feminist conciliationism of the fake lefts and the intransigent, parochial trade unionism of the bureaucrats and made their continued collaboration impossible. At present, the bureaucrats' heavy-handedness, anti-communist expulsions and disfranchisements of entire CLUW chapters threaten to rip CLUW apart at the upcoming national conference.

The "Best Builders"

It is the role of revolutionaries to expose the treachery of the bureaucrats and break the workers movement from class collaboration. But from the beginning, most of the left oppositionists in CLUW have ignored the fact that CLUW's very existence rests on the money, policies and political backing of the present trade-union bureaucracy.

At CLUW's founding conference in March 1974, the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party, October League and International Socialists virtually sat on their hands, allowing Madar and friends to run the show.

continued on page 22