

Women and Revolution



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The Class Struggle Road to Women's Liberation

SDS needs a clear and accurate class analysis of the special oppression of women, and a Marxist program for women's liberation. The class question is the decisive issue in a class society; however other types of oppression exist as well, i.e., racial oppression, colonial oppression, and the special oppression of women.

Economic Aspects of Women's Oppression

Women make up one third of the American labor force, but the wages of the full-time working woman average only 60% of those of the average male working full time. The non-white working woman, suffering under a double load of exploitation and oppression, must indeed be the most victimized category in American capitalist society. In itself, the lower average income of women workers roughly indicates the degree of their *oppression*, not their *super-exploitation* relative to working men. (They might—and do—take home less money because they are concentrated in less productive jobs.) But women, even more than other oppressed groups such as Black male workers, frequently receive less for work *identical* to that performed by more highly paid men: this constitutes their super-exploitation. In addition to suffering oppression and discrimination, women are thus super-exploited in the literal and technical sense of the term.

The Reactionary Nature of the Family

It is not only as workers that women are oppressed: they suffer from numerous other forms of oppression as well, most of which arise out of that oppressive institution known as the family.

Marxists have long viewed the family as a basically reactionary economic unit which arose with the development of private property (See Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*). With the creation of private property in the hands of one man comes the need to insure that the children of that man and no other would inherit the wealth; thus, the need to restrict sexual access to women created the institution of marriage, for which the monogamy of the woman (but not that of the man) is required.

The social revolution will, by transferring all productive property to public ownership, undermine the economic basis of the family unit: when the means of production are transferred to common ownership the single family household ceases to be the main economic unity of society, and housekeeping becomes a social, rather than private, process. The care and education of children then becomes a social responsibility and a public affair. Society will look after all children alike whether or not they are, in bourgeois jargon, legitimate.

This is far from advocating the idiocy of the capitalist press that under communism men and women will live in separate barracks and children will be brought up in a state orphanage. We are advocating the replacement of marriage as a compulsory economic unit with voluntary forms better suited to people's physical and emotional needs. We foresee a more humane system of human relationships based on free choice rather than economic necessity. We do not expect human love to vanish...on the contrary, freed of eco-

nomic and political coercion, these relationships will be free to flourish and develop their full potential.

Since the institution of the family is an integral part of the capitalist system, the struggle for women's liberation cannot be successfully culminated under capitalism. Only in a socialist society will the free forms necessary to true female liberation be possible. This does not mean that the economic and social oppression of women will automatically end following the socialist workers' revolution. It only means that this battle can be won fully and completely in a socialist society.

The Family in Non-Capitalist States

In those societies which have abolished capitalist property relations but in which workers' control has been usurped by a bureaucracy substituting itself politically for the working class, the woman's situation vis-a-vis the family and the rest of society bears an important resemblance to that of capitalist countries. This is due not to the semi-socialist aspect of these societies (public ownership of the means of production), but rather to the political and cultural holdovers from bourgeois society, which are revived by the nationalistic bureaucratic elites to stifle further development toward the full workers' control which threatens their privileged caste position. What is most repugnant to a revolutionist is that the Stalinist elites ruling over the working class in these societies present the survival of a reactionary institution as a great achievement in building socialism. Lenin and Trotsky recognized that the dark, stultifying heritage of the family and its attendant oppression of women could not be eliminated overnight under primitive conditions, but they never glorified these backward survivals. The official glorification of family life and the retreat from Bolshevik policies on divorce and abortion were an integral part of Stalin's counterrevolution which established a political dictatorship over the working class. Even where private property no longer exists—an advance beyond capitalism which revolutionaries must defend *at all costs*—the institution of the family serves, at best, to hinder the development of a socialist society. At worst—when officially endorsed—it provides a backward base of support culturally for the parasitic bureaucrats who barter away the world revolution. SDS cannot wish away the traditionalist, authoritarian significance of the family institution by anti-Marxist words about making it a “unit for fighting the ruling class.” Reactionary institutions serve reactionary ends; they prevent revolution or help to turn it back.

SDS and Special Groups

Within SDS we must oppose sexual discrimination and male chauvinism as divisive forces, dividing and weakening SDS just as they divide and weaken the labor movement and the working class in general.

But it is not enough to fight individual aspects of women's oppression within the labor movement and in SDS. Separate women's liberation groups offer an opportunity to tie together all aspects of women's oppression in the minds of their members, and hence to suggest a single solution—which is socialism. As Marxists, we recognize

that special oppression calls for special defensive and combative organizations of the oppressed. For this reason, SDS should give critical support (determined by program) to Black groups which fight the special oppression of Black people; similarly SDS should support women's groups which fight on the basis of a Marxist program for the special needs of women.

Armed with a more developed political and economic analysis of society, SDS members should be able to win the more serious groups away from petty-bourgeois amateur therapy sessions, liberalism, female separatism and vicarious anti-male terrorism, to a working-class perspective. Women's liberation groups are a good arena for winning militant women over to SDS and to socialism.

Program for Women's Liberation

When SDS members make a political entry into a special group such as a women's liberation group, they should be armed with a program which raises consciousness by relating specific felt needs to the broader struggle for socialism. We carry through this program by raising a series of transitional demands—that is, demands which flow from the specific struggle but which lead the struggle to a higher level of militancy and political sophistication.

We move that SDS accept the following program for struggle and agitate around the following demands:

For the abolition of family restrictions:

1. Abolition of abortion laws; each woman must be free to make her own decisions.
2. Free abortions, as part of demand for free quality medical care for everybody, so poor women will have the same freedom of choice as middle-class women.
3. Freely available birth control devices and information.
4. Free full-time child-care facilities for all children, the expenses to be borne by the employer or the state. Free prenatal, maternity and postnatal care with no loss in pay for time off.

5. Establishment of free voluntary cafeterias in the factories and other places of work.

6. Divorce at the request of either partner. Abolition of alimony. Equal right to and responsibility for children. Expenses for children to be paid by the state.

7. Lower the legal age of adulthood to 16. State stipend for schooling or training for any child who wishes to leave home. Free education for all children, with housing, food and stipend. No *loco parentis*. Student-teacher-worker control of all schools and colleges.

To fight the super-exploitation of women workers:

8. Full and equal pay for equal work.

9. Equal work: equal access to all job categories. Shorter work week with no loss in pay ("30 for 40") to eliminate unemployment at the capitalists' expense.

To fight male chauvinism:

10. An end to all forms of discrimination—legal, political, social and cultural.

SDS should seek the creation of a non-exclusionist class-conscious women's liberation organization in which SDS members can participate and struggle on the basis of the above program. Toward this end, we should direct interested SDS members to seek to initiate, along with other radical women, a nationally-oriented women's liberation publication.

- Tweet Carter, Florida State SDS, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus, Spartacist
- Nick Dicken, New School SDS, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus, Spartacist
- Stephanie Komkov, Austin SDS, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus, Spartacist
- Mary O'Neil, Memphis MDS, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus

WOMEN AND REVOLUTION



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Women's Revolutionary Manifesto

After centuries of servitude, we resolve to organize our vast power to smash women's oppression and to wage a total struggle for liberation that will not end until we have achieved control of our bodies, lives and destinies.

We are determined to put an end to the myth of femininity which constrains and distorts us so, that we become unrecognizable as complete human beings - even to ourselves. We refuse to be assigned the female roles which would render us impotent, passive and economically dependent. The content of our lives must be determined not by our sex, but by our interests and abilities.

We are not naive and we know that our task involves much more than merely challenging the myths which victimize us. We are well aware that these myths are not in themselves the cause of our oppression, but simply morbid symptoms. The success of our struggle will depend upon how well we can wage through the confusing mass of superficial symptoms that obscure the underlying cause which is rooted in the capitalist economic system and social structure. Changing "false consciousness" cannot substitute for actually changing the society from which it springs.

We have learned from each other that our problems as women are not unique and personal, but rather social and political. Only through collective social and political action, therefore, can we achieve liberation.

But liberation from whom? We see that although they serve as the agents of our oppression, men are also enslaved in our society - enslaved to their bosses, to the small but powerful capitalist class which runs the society for its own profit. We are certainly not interested in equality with men in a society in which men are also oppressed. Our goal is not equality in slavery, but an end to slavery! We don't seek liberation from men, but liberation with men!

To struggle for the liberation of women is ultimately to struggle for the liberation of all oppressed people, regardless of sex. To struggle for the liberation of women is to struggle to replace capitalism, which only serves the needs of the ruling class, with a system which serves the needs of all the people. To struggle for the liberation of women is to struggle for socialism.

There is no way that capitalism can be reformed sufficiently to accommodate our liberation. The special oppression of women, as of racial minorities under capitalism, is essential to the maintenance of power and profit for the ruling class and will not be voluntarily sacrificed. Our cheap, marginal labor in the work force makes possible tremendous profits not only directly, but indirectly, because, as lower paid workers who may be easily hired or fired, we tend to undermine the wages and conditions of the working class as a whole. Furthermore, the oppression of women, as of racial minorities, also serves the capitalists by maintaining divisions

within the working class - the only class with the power to make a successful socialist revolution. Workers divided among themselves pose little threat to

the bosses who are their common enemy.

The majority of working women, even though they are engaged in essential social labor, are not paid at all, because

they work in the home. This is criminal! It is the reactionary nuclear family which encourages this exploitation of women, which forces several workers to exist on the wages of only one, and which inevitably results in physical and psychological dependence of women. The nuclear family is the key institution through which capitalism perpetuates the oppression of women. It is based on a sexual division of labor and it clearly defines and limits woman's role in society: wife, mother, domestic servant. Until women are free from the confines of the home and able to define themselves instead of being defined by their sex, liberation will not have been achieved. Not only must economic discrimination against women be ended, but domestic labor must be socialized so that alternative institutions capable of really satisfying people's emotional needs, can arise.

A successful anti-capitalist revolution that fails to encourage alternative institutions through which people can be released from the bonds of the nuclear family can neither liberate women nor achieve socialism. As Lenin pointed out, it is futile to speak even of socialism, unless great masses of women are drawn into general social production.

Revolutions in the past, such as the Russian, Chinese, and Cuban -- have enabled women to participate more freely in social production outside the home, but have not adequately socialized domestic labor. The nuclear family in these countries is idealized as a "socialist" institution while women continue to do the housework. The revolution we are fighting for will not be so limited.

Our path lies clearly before us. Our liberation and the liberation of the working class go hand in hand. We shall not separate ourselves from the mainstream of the revolutionary movement, but shall make our struggle an integral part of it. As we fight the oppression of women, we shall also fight racism and every other backward tendency which impedes our progress. We consider this our revolutionary obligation. The movement needs the consciousness that comes with understanding and overcoming male chauvinism. It also needs the talent, commitment and leadership which we have to offer.

We must bring masses of women to understand their oppression and to fight it. We must point out not only the nature of the problem, but the direction of its solution. Along with the consciousness of their oppression as women, we must raise class consciousness and revolutionary consciousness.

The stakes in the struggle are very high; we must organize as women around a clear program of revolutionary socialism if we are to be effective in achieving our goals. We must also unite as workers in revolutionary organizations determined to crush the capitalist regimes.

Join us in building toward the revolution. All power to the workers! Victory to women's struggle for liberation! Solidarity against the common enemy!

PROGRAM

I. Family II. Education III. Production

I. THE FAMILY

The institution of the family is inherently reactionary and helps maintain the capitalist system. The family, as a socio-economic unit, is oppressive to its members. Women are especially oppressed by the family, for their confinement in the home limits vital human development and diminishes their useful participation in society. Each nuclear family exists in isolation from the rest of society and, thus, weakens the class consciousness of the workers. Our program provides demands around which we can wage a struggle to give people the opportunity to free themselves from the bondage of family restrictions.

1. FREE QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR ALL: Most people, especially working-class and poor people, seldom receive adequate medical care because of the high cost of health services and supplies in this society. We demand free quality health care for all women, men and children including consultations, treatment, hospitalization, medicines and corrective devices.

2. FREE ABORTION AND BIRTH CONTROL ON DEMAND: Each woman must be free to decide whether she wants to have a child or not; this is a private matter and the government has no right to impose restrictions on eligibility. We demand that free, legal abortions be readily available on demand to all women. We also demand that abortion or sterilization shall occur only at the consent of the individual; no forced abortion or sterilization. Free safe birth control devices and information must be available to all men and women regardless of age or marital status.

3. MATERNITY AND PATERNITY BENEFITS: Women and men should be compensated, not penalized, for having children. We demand pre-natal, maternity and post-natal care for the mother and child. Maternity and paternity leaves should be granted with no loss in pay for time off; men and women must be assured of retaining their jobs with no loss of seniority while they are away.

4. CHILD CARE: The care of children is a social, and not a personal, responsibility. We demand free, 24 hour quality child care facilities, under the control of the parents and staff, for all children, with all expenses borne by the employer or state.

5. THE SOCIALIZATION OF HOUSEHOLD DUTIES: In order to fully participate in society, women and men must be freed from burdensome and repetitive household duties. We demand that free voluntary dining rooms be established at work places and in communities; we demand that free laundry service be established. As many domestic duties as possible should be socialized; others must be shared between members of the family.

6. ADEQUATE HOUSING: Housing is a basic human requirement which should be based on need and not on income. We demand low-rent, adequate housing for all working people; maintenance costs should be the state's responsibility and housing should be controlled by the residents.

7. AN END TO MARRIAGE RESTRICTIONS: Marriage should not be a legal contract; it should be a voluntary emotional bond. Partners should have no economic or legal responsibility for each other; women and men, married and unmarried, should have the same rights. People should have the freedom to establish any kind or number of relationships, based on consent of each partner.

8. FREE, IMMEDIATE DIVORCE-NO ALIMONY: Relationships between couples should be voluntary; incompatible relationships should not be maintained because of economic dependence of one partner upon the other. Free and immediate divorce, at the request of either partner, must be available with child support costs paid by the state and not through alimony.

9. FREEDOM FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH: Children and minors suffer from many of the same forms of oppression as women and have even fewer rights. In fact, they have no rights at all: they are confined to the home; they must submit to authority from parents and from others outside the home; they have no freedom, independence or privacy; they are accepted by society on the basis of their "legitimacy."

a. We demand that the legal age of adulthood be lowered to 16, with free housing, food and a stipend provided by the state during school years for those young people who do not wish to remain at home.

b. Jobs should be freely available to all, with no discrimination on the basis of age.

c. Young people should have an equal opportunity to gain economic independence.

c. Whether born in or out of marriage, all children must be equally recognized by the state and have the same legal rights.

10. SEXUAL FREEDOM: End legal and social discrimination against homosexuals.

Sex relations among consenting individuals should not be a concern of the state.

We recognize that prostitution is an extension of women's degraded status under capitalism, but this oppression is not lessened by legal persecution of prostitutes.

PROGRAM cont'd

II. EDUCATION

1. **FREE AND EQUAL VOLUNTARY EDUCATION:** All people should have access to any type of training at any time of their lives. Women especially have been crippled by existing ideas of what kind and amount of education is "proper" for them. We demand free and equal voluntary education for all, with free housing, food and a state stipend to eliminate the need to work while studying.
2. **AN END TO TRACKING BY SEX, RACE AND CLASS:** All people should have equal access to academic and vocational training. Both women and men must have the opportunity to learn skills according to their interest and ability. We demand an end to tracking by sex, race and class.
3. **WORKER-STUDENT-TEACHER CONTROL OF SCHOOLS:** School officials should not have the power to practice loco parentis, the imposing of parental authority over students while they are in school. Schools should be operated by the students, teachers and workers, in their own interests.
4. **AN EXPANDED CURRICULUM:** The roles of women, minority groups and the labor movement have been diminished, if not totally ignored, in courses and textbooks. We demand that the struggles of women, minority groups and labor be written back into history and that this information be accessible to all regardless of sex, race or class.

III. SUPER-EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN WORKERS:

Women workers--like racial and national minorities or youth--are a specially oppressed section of the working class. They are channeled into low-paying "women's occupations," often not unionized. They have little job security and suffer a high rate of unemployment. In addition, women are often literally "super-exploited"--i.e., paid a lower wage for doing the same work. Pay differentials and lack of unionization facilitate the division of the working class along sex (as well as race) lines. Unity of the class is vital to the protection of all workers against low wages and unemployment, but particularly the most oppressed workers who are the most vulnerable.

1. **EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK:** Women are most often discriminated against by receiving less pay for the same work as men, frequently by being given different job titles. This serves to keep the wages of all workers down. We demand that women (and other oppressed groups) receive equal pay for equal work.
2. **EQUAL ACCESS TO ALL JOB CATEGORIES:** Job availability should be based only on ability, not on race or sex. The bosses use race and sex to keep the working class divided; they would rather have us fight each other instead of them. We demand an end to all forms of job discrimination or segregation on the basis of race or sex. Jobs should be filled on a "first come first served" basis and not on race or sex quotas.
3. **THE ORGANIZATION OF WORKERS IN UNIONS:** Only through strong unions with militant programs can women and men workers protect themselves against their exploiters. All unorganized workers must be organized.
4. **THE BUILDING OF MILITANT CAUCUSES:** Sellout union bureaucrats must be ousted in favor of leadership based on a class-struggle political program. Caucuses should be based on such militant programs and not on sex (or race).
5. **TRAINING AT FULL PAY:** Women especially have low or out-dated skills which make them eligible for only the most menial and low-paying jobs. Everyone should be able to receive training at full pay to refresh skills or acquire new ones.
6. **A SHORTER WORK WEEK WITH NO LOSS IN PAY--"30 for 40":** We must eliminate the huge pool of unemployed workers, especially women and minority-group workers, who lower the bargaining power of the employed workers and are forced to live on unemployment "benefits," welfare or their own ingenuity. Available work should be distributed to all workers at a living wage; we demand that for thirty hours of work we receive forty hours of pay. It should not be necessary for a worker to work overtime in order to make a decent wage; we demand higher wages with no compulsory overtime.
7. **A SLIDING SCALE OF WAGES AND HOURS/NO WAGE CONTROLS:** Inflation always hurts the working class first. Wages must rise with the cost of living. No wage cuts; no lay-offs. Women are always the first to be eliminated from the labor force. Freeze prices, not wages.
8. **A MORE EQUALIZED WAGE SYSTEM:** Although some jobs require higher-than-average pay to get enough people to fill them, we demand a narrowing of the wage differences between skilled and unskilled labor. No job should be treated as necessarily badly paying. End favoritism in unions; equal membership and job rights for all workers; raise basic job rates to lessen wage differences.
9. **EQUAL BENEFITS FOR TEMPORARY AND PART-TIME WORKERS:** People who work on a temporary or part-time basis must receive the same benefits and salary rates as those people who do the same work on a full-time basis. Women especially are forced to take these jobs because of heavy family responsibilities or because they cannot find full-time employment. No division of the working class based on availability for work. Temporary and part-time workers must be unionized so they cannot be used as scab labor.
10. **THE EXTENSION OF PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION:** It is not true that only women workers require protective legislation regulating the number of hours worked per day, the guarantee of safe and healthy working conditions, a required number of rest and dining breaks, a limit on the weight which may be lifted. All workers must have this protection from exploitation. We demand that protective legislation be extended to cover all workers--not just women.
11. **THE FORMATION OF A WORKERS' PARTY:** The Democratic and Republican parties are run by and for the bosses. They will never fight in the interest of the workers because they profit from workers' oppression. Workers need their own party based on the rank and file, with militant programs.
12. **WORKERS CONTROL OF INDUSTRY:** The liberation of women as of all oppressed groups will be possible only when the workers control the industries in their own interests. Workers and their allies - revolutionary women, students, minority members - must fight for the establishment of a workers' government.
13. **LABOR STRIKES AGAINST THE INDOCHINESE WAR:** U.S. imperialism crushes the struggles of our sisters and brothers around the world. We are in solidarity with other revolutionaries. Billions spent for arms, which come from the taxes of working people, should be used for our benefit. We have the strength to force immediate withdrawal from Indochina by calling labor political strikes against the war.

THE FURIES

Revolutionary Women came together nearly two years ago as a small rap group in the San Francisco Women's Liberation movement and we called ourselves -- half whimsically, half seriously -- The Furies. We met once a week to talk about our oppression, share our feelings, and provide a measure of mutual support. Our new-found sisterhood was exciting -- even exhilarating -- to us.

After several months of such discussion, however, we began to feel a little stifled, so we initiated a study program, worked on the abortion issue and protested against job discrimination. Now we felt we were doing something -- putting our ideas into practice -- yet we couldn't help noticing that our efforts were sporadic and disjointed. We realized that what we lacked was the organization and clear analysis that could give our action direction and power, so we began putting our energy into developing principles and a program. We were no longer a small rap group, but an action group with a basic political program for struggle. Our politics were enunciated in our first publication -- "Women's Liberation--Revolution--The Class Struggle." We changed our name and became The Socialist Workshop.

THE SOCIALIST WORKSHOP

We remained active in San Francisco Women's Liberation. We attended intergroup council meetings, mass conferences and workshops and we participated in struggles around women's rights. We wanted to see San Francisco Women's Liberation transform itself from a loose conglomeration of small groups into a strong militant organization. Together with a few other groups, we called for a political conference of all individuals and groups in the area who wanted to discuss what our principles and program should be. Many women responded to this call and attended the two-day conference, but some of them came to argue against having any political program at all. We had come pre-

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ORGANIZE NATIONWIDE

The women's movement in the United States has suffered both from a lack of clearly defined politics and from a lack of effective political organization. Attempts to surmount these obstacles have often become bogged down in discussions of whether politics and organization are even necessary to the women's movement. We maintain that they are critical for our development as a real revolutionary force! Today's women's movement needs a national (and eventually an international) organization in which revolutionary women can work together to fight capitalism.

It is time to transcend the usual "small group" formations. Small groups may open our eyes and even help us become better revolutionaries but they will not make the revolution and they often foster the illusion that our oppression stems from personal problems which can be worked out. We know better. We know that many causes of our neuroses and inadequacies are built into the capitalist system and help it function. With this realization comes the recognition that liberation can come only with the overthrow of capitalism, and for this we need a solid organization geared for struggle, not merely a scattering of small groups. Local actions are not enough! We must begin to organize on regional and national

levels! Revolutionaries cannot rely on groups like NOW, which support this system and merely want to reform it. We cannot rely on sporadic gatherings of radical women. We must have an organization of our own which has socialist politics and which recognizes the working class as the motive force in the revolution.

Given the enormity of our objective and the power of the enemy (which controls the economy, the media, the police and the military), we must begin to gather our forces and delineate our aims, our strategy, and our tactics. We need to share our experiences and develop our political program through discussion and debate.

Through our political agitation, we will point out revolutionary paths when events begin to force people to move against the system. If we hide our politics until "people are ready for it," they may never get ready and we will have been fatally remiss in our obligation as revolutionaries.

If you feel as we do and if you think you can generally accept our program, or if you want more information, let us hear from you now! Together we can begin to build an effective organization of revolutionary women and men to struggle effectively for women's liberation.

MEET WITH REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN IN YOUR AREA

For information about meetings, activities, literature, contact:

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Who we are

pared to discuss our ideas on principles, program, tactics, and structure, but found ourselves bogged down in endless and hopeless discussions with feminists whose thinking could not go beyond a mindless affirmation of solidarity with all women and a rejection of politics as some sort of masculine perversion which could only divide us from our sisters. Needless to say, little came out of the conference. We voted to meet again, but political discussion at later meetings was also effectively blocked and eventually the meetings became so meaningless that even the anti-political factions stopped attending. One or two attempts have been made since that time to have political meetings, but these, too, have rapidly degenerated and dissolved.

In the face of this failure of San Francisco Women's Liberation to organize itself, the Workshop turned much of its energy toward a class series - "Women's Liberation and Revolution" which we are currently offering through the Free University of Berkeley. Our aim is to further our own education and to discuss with all interested people the revolutionary struggles of women in the past and the roles that we can play in the struggles to come.

REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN OF THE BAY AREA

Realizing that we were no longer merely a workshop, we changed our name again recently to Revolutionary Women of the Bay Area. Our emphasis at this time is on the construction of a strong, nation-wide, revolutionary organization to fight the oppression of women with a socialist program. There are groups in Austin, New York City and Boston who are in general agreement with our principles and program and it is with the hope of uniting with more such groups and individuals across the country that we have begun to publish WOMEN AND REVOLUTION.

We invite you to exchange information with us, debate with us, criticize us, and join with us in building the kind of revolutionary women's liberation organization we all need.

DOES YOUR FAMILY

Laing, R.D. The Politics of Experience New York: Ballantine Books, c. 1967.

The Politics of Experience by R.D. Laing, a young British psychiatrist, has been one of the most widely read books on American campuses during the past few years. Although principally directed at a radical reappraisal of schizophrenia in our society, it also contains a perceptive analysis of the family as an oppressive institution which may be of special interest to us in women's liberation.

Laing makes it clear that it is not merely a question of individual personalities within this or that particular family -- an overprotective mother or a domineering husband -- but that the family is by its very nature an instrument of violence!

Family violence often goes by the name of love, but it is the opposite of genuine love. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern, whereas violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with essential indifference to the other's own existence or destiny.

From the moment of birth, when the Stone Age baby confronts the twentieth century mother, the baby is subjected to these forces of violence, called love, as its mother and father, and their parents before them, have been.

Why does an institution which subjects us all to violence from the day we are born continue to exist? We in Revolutionary Women of the Bay Area have already dealt with this question

to some extent. We know that the family continues to exist because it is functional for capitalism -- by keeping women out of the labor market, by forcing several people to exist on the wages of one worker, by encouraging the sale of more and more consumer goods, and so on. What Laing seems to suggest is that the family, brutal as it is, has also been functional for our very survival under this system -- although at a terrible price:

Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction.

This becomes clear in his analysis of two major functions of the family -- the adaptation of its members to society and the protection of its members from society.

The family seeks to insure the survival of its members through the adaptation of each of them to the larger society, but what this means at present is an adaptation to capitalism, to the irrational, to "a world gone mad."

In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex we have to destroy our capacity to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses. Long before a thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste our own sanity. We begin with the children. It is imperative to catch them in time. Without the most thorough and rapid brainwashing their dirty minds would see through our dirty

tricks. Children are not yet fools, but we shall turn them into imbeciles like ourselves, with high I.Q.'s if possible.

To fulfill this function of helping its members adapt to an insane world, the family must concern itself largely with destroying most of each individual's potential and with instilling respect, conformity, obedience, fear of failure, respect for work, and respect for "respectability." In this enterprise, says Laing, the family is highly successful:

By the time the new human being is fifteen or so, we are left with a being like ourselves, a half-crazed creature more or less adjusted to a mad world. This is normality in our present age.

Since the unity of the family rests on no common objective, it can continue to exist only so long as each member incarnates it within himself and acts in terms of its existence. Each person who seeks to maintain the family, then, may act on other members to coerce them (by sympathy, blackmail, indebtedness, guilt, gratitude or naked violence) into maintaining their interiorization of the group unchanged.

At the same time, each member is offered protection. The family, says Laing, is a "protection racket." Its justification for existence is that it protects us from external danger and if there is no external danger or if there is insufficient external danger, then danger and terror have to be invented and maintained! The invention and maintenance of terror are major functions of the family!

The "protection" that such a family offers its members seems to be based on several

preconditions: 1) a fantasy of the external world as extraordinarily dangerous; 2) the generation of terror inside the nexus at this external danger. The "work" of the nexus is the generation of this terror. This work is violence.

Violence is the basis of the stability of the family -- a reciprocal terrorism behind which stands the ultimate threat of exile or excommunication -- group death.

In conclusion, Laing makes clear the painful truth that oppressive institutions are often necessary for survival in an oppressive society. To ask why many women continue to function as family members is somewhat like asking why they continue to work at dehumanizing jobs. They do it to survive. And while we may call for the abolition of the family, as we may call for the abolition of the eight-hour day, we must do so with the consciousness that these things will be abolished only in a society which no longer makes them necessary for our survival.

As Trotsky pointed out, it is impossible to simply "abolish" the family -- it must be replaced. The alternatives in a post-revolutionary society will be numerous and may include relationships never yet envisioned. It is to be hoped that in a more rational and humane world we shall no longer feel the desperate need to clutch at the "protection racket" that is the family; that we shall learn to love one another simply and genuinely rather than destroy one another in the name of this travesty we call love.

Dale Ross

DRIVE YOU CRAZY ?

N.Y. WOMEN ORGANIZE



A new women's liberation group is in the process of organizing in New York City. At our last meeting we voted to endorse the general political thrust of the Socialist Workshop pamphlet, "Women's Liberation--Revolution--The Class Struggle." We are having on-going discussions about program and perspectives for the women's liberation struggle.

At this point we are mainly a study and discussion group. Some of our members are involved in women's liberation for the first time through this group. We need to educate and inform ourselves further about women's liberation and the history of women's struggles, as well as revolutionary politics in general. Binding us together is our belief that the liberation of women, along with all other specially oppressed sections of society can be achieved only with a socialist revolution by the working class and that the struggle for women's liberation must be waged accordingly.

We are very enthusiastic about the prospect of uniting with other groups sharing a socialist perspective to form a national women's liberation organization with working class politics.

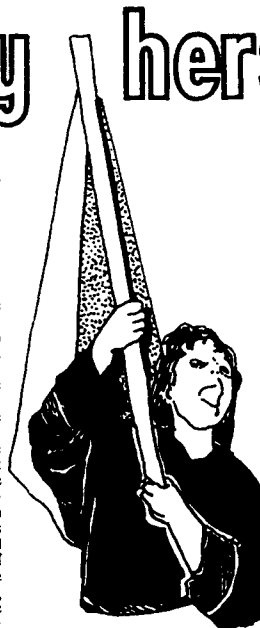
Besides reading and discussion, our group plans to be active in the movement as a whole--participating in demonstrations, actions, projects along with other groups. We are an open, non-exclusionist organization; it will be our politics which will define our membership. We welcome the participation of those men who have demonstrated their seriousness toward women's liberation struggles and commitment to ending women's oppression. Our activities will be publicized through WOMEN AND REVOLUTION. We plan to contribute articles to future issues and to distribute the paper in the New York area.

Contact us in New York through Toni at 942-6468, or Karen at 669-1180. Revolutionary Women of New York

history herstory

When discussing the relationship between women and history, female liberationists often borrow Betty Friedan's observation that history is, indeed, HIS story. In fact, this remark was repeated at last fall's statewide WL conference here in Austin by Evelyn Sell, who gave a short talk on women and history. It is true that, as she put it, history is "the story of kings and inventors," but this statement contains an implication which is not valid. This implication, one which is widely accepted in the WL movement and which so-called Marxists (like Evelyn) should be ashamed of strengthening, is that the only problem with history books is that most kings and inventors (i.e., most historical figures studied today) are shown as men.

But the fact that history books are dominated by male figures doesn't really tell us why these books exclude the history of women as a whole. Actually, the female sex doesn't figure in your history books because history, as we learn it, is the history of the world oppressor classes, with the oppressed peoples almost entirely forgotten. The history of the "Old South", for instance, is the story of the ideology and culture of the slave-owning class (a small minority of the population). And most owners were men. Is the answer to this unjust historical presentation, then, to feature the few female slave-owners? No, of course not. It is far more important that the story of the slaves--male and female--be told.



By
REVOLUTIONARY
WOMEN OF
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Evelyn remarked that women need "to have female historical figures to identify with." Any female figure? Does she want us to identify with Queen Victoria, who presided over the imperialist rape of India? Far better that we should study the history of, and identify with, oppressed women--like Sojourner Truth and Mother Jones--and with women who devoted themselves to the struggles of the oppressed--women like Rosa Luxemburg--along with their male counterparts, who are also excluded from "his story."

Of course, the women in Revolutionary Women of Austin believe that inventive and creative contributions made by women, whether or not they are members of the ruling classes, should be given their just notice in the chronicles of human progress. But when one calls for "writing women back into history" without calling for writing in the oppressed, one is in effect asking that history, just as it is, be amended to include more female oppressors. We believe this is no answer. We believe women should demand that our history be taught for what it is--a significant part of the long-ignored history of the oppressed victims of class society. And if we have to "identify" with someone, we feel that we should identify with other oppressed groups, not simply with any female figure we find in history. For women's liberationists actually have more in common with Joe Hill, a male champion of oppressed workers, than with Catherine the Great of Russia, an autocratic despot.

* pamphlet

A three article pamphlet including "The Only Road to Women's Liberation: The Class Struggle"; "How the Russian Revolution Failed Women"; "Women's Liberation and Socialism: Towards a Working Class Perspective."

Price: 50¢ each to include mailing costs, bundle rates available.

Address: P.O. Box 40063 San Francisco, Calif. 94140

RAISING HELL WITH MA BELL

I didn't know what it really meant to be called a girl until I started work at the phone company. As an operator, you are seen as a child, you are subject to constant supervision - both visually and audibly. You are expected to stay healthy for Ma Bell. For most of us, there is, in reality, no sick leave. Anyone who accumulates too many absences may lose her job. But since operators are harassed for being absent for sickness and get no pay when they are absent, many come to work and expose their fellow workers. I remember my T.O.M. (a supervisor of supervisors) telling me that "there are ways" to keep from getting sick. Unfortunately she neglected to tell me what they were. She must know something that medical science has been working on for years.

As an operator, you may secretly be listened to at anytime. And, boy do I hate to get caught making mistakes; those people really try to make you feel like you have committed some grave sin. Most of the things they trap you in are really petty -- like not hearing exactly what the customer said.

I always knew people hated the phone company, but having to deal with these people's hostilities every day is something that really can drive a person mad, especially when you have no recourse. You have to sit and take their shit and you aren't supposed to hang up. Operators caught disconnecting obnoxious customers can be fired. (Can you imagine someone calling you at home and calling you a fucking bitch and not be able to hang up or give him hell?) In training, we are given all sorts of "propaganda" about being courteous to customers and how the phone company feels that the customers should get the best service possible. I think everyone

where I work realizes, however, what happens when customers can't pay their bills.

The harassments and rules are hooked very closely to Ma Bell's greed for profit. They want us to be able to do as many calls as possible in a short period. The more calls, the more they handle, the fewer operators they need to hire. We can't get paid for our work (operators) since that would mean we are requiring the company to hire more operators). Supervisors and supervisors (supervisors) know if they let up, we would get out of here when they call might chat with them and disrupt Ma Bell's fine tuning traffic machine.

Most phone company workers, if they belong to a union, belong to the Communications Workers of America. The union "leaders" for the most part does nothing to improve the situation of the workers. They are very little to in- into positions of power and afraid of rocking the boat. Thus, the way of bucking the company too much. The union officials see a strong union as one with lots of silent members who never come to meetings. As it has hap-

pened in most other unions, the leadership sells out the membership in contracts and on local levels in grievance settlements. Each different department has a different contract. Thus, traffic operators and related jobs) and accountants, the departments which contain the most women are separated from the men. This is just one of the ways used at Bell to divide and conquer workers. Men are barred from jobs in the elevators and in

A group of women workers have started a caucus within the union to fight against phone company policies and to replace the union's leadership. We realize the need to have control of the union in order to have contact with many people. The union is rotten and you have to find another organization. We realize the union leadership is rotten and trying to build another counter-union is impractical and divisive. At this time, we are trying to build a more radical union and only pull away the most skilled operators. We are trying to build a caucus within the union to expose the union's leadership to the membership. We are involved in forming a militant caucus in the union. Our caucus is formed around our program. People join our caucus on the basis of agreement with the program. The program

tells what we stand for and formulates the direction that our action will take. We raise our demands to raise the consciousness of our fellow workers about their situation in the Bell System, in particular, and in capitalism, in general and to provide a strategy for our fight. For instance, in our program we call for fighting racism and male chauvinism. In fighting for these demands, we point out to the people we work with that Ma Bell uses both racial and sexual discrimination to divide workers against each other and weaken their struggle. Part of what we work for in connection with that is a shorter work week at higher pay to end unemployment (which would also make the white male workers feel less threatened by women and blacks entering their job categories.) We also call for a labor party, based on the rank and file, to link up and struggle for all oppressed groups. We have run candidates for union office on the basis of our program, and we will do so again in the future.

In union meetings, we push for our demands and fight against the undemocratic and bureaucratic tactics of the union leadership. On the job, we talk to people about the job and the union situation, and distribute leaflets, point out what we must do to fight against oppression and gain control of our union. At most times this is a slow step by step process. Almost all phone workers hate the phone company and realize its oppressive nature, but most have no hope yet that there is any other alternative.

Copies of our full program are available from Revolutionary Women of the Bay Area and if you are interested in working with us, let us know.

--Militant Action Caucus of the CWA*

SUBVERSION?

The question of the political subversion of the women's movement has been raised recently in an article by Martha Shelley which has appeared in several women's liberation newspapers. Entitled "Subversion in the Woman's Movement: What is to be Done?" it argues that large numbers of women will turn leftward as they realize that they cannot achieve liberation under the present social structure. They will eventually conclude that their liberation requires such things as free abortions on demand, free medical care and free child care -- in other words, "a considerable degree of socialism."

So far, so good. We are in complete agreement. But, says Shelley, when women begin to turn leftward, they "take a turn down a path strewn with booby-traps laid by male dominated leftist groups and the male-oriented women who front for these groups." And, thus, the woman's movement becomes subverted.

All women who belong to organizations which include men are characterized as "male-oriented women who front for these groups" - a characterization which betrays an attitude of utter contempt toward women. It clearly implies that women are incapable of thinking and acting independently of any men with whom they are associated and can say and do only what they are told.

This is outrageous! We have grown accustomed to such insults from male chauvinists, but to read the very same nonsense in the women's liberation press is beyond belief! Furthermore, we believe that it is only with the realization that we can and must struggle along side our brothers, as well as our sisters, to smash the capitalist system which oppresses us both, that the women's liberation movement will begin to be a significant force in achieving that socialist society which Shelley agrees we need.

The line between oppressor and oppressed is fundamentally one of class, not sex, and when women understand this and participate in revolutionary organizations dedicated to overthrowing the oppressing class, then we maintain that the women's liberation movement undergoes not subversion, but a qualitative advance in consciousness. ●

FROM BOSTON --

International Women's Day has traditionally commemorated the revolutionary struggles of working class women. In 1917 in Russia, a strike by women textile workers in St. Petersburg to mark International Women's Day sparked the upheaval that overthrew the Tsar and eventually culminated in the October Revolution, a revolution that did lay the basis for the liberation and equality of women, men, and children. So too, we can use this famous day to make our struggles felt and our power known. All working class women and their allies should begin to plan to use this day for a general strike to win our demands for a better life and to demonstrate our solidarity with the revolutionary struggles both here and around the world.

To do this requires a national organization with a fighting program that will mobilize the masses of working class women to political struggle against their social and economic oppression and exploitation; a struggle against the capitalist employers, their social order, and their state. It is with this goal in mind that we are organizing a Socialist Workshop in the Boston area, joining with our co-thinkers in New York City and in the San Francisco Bay Area, where the Socialist Workshop originated.

Our basis for existence separate from any of the other organizations now claiming to know the road to women's liberation is a political one. We reject the reformist, pro-capitalist politics of the National Organization of Women (NOW), as we see our oppression as

women linked indissolubly to the capitalist system. For the same reason we reject the popular front politics of Female Liberation and Boston Women United which seek to unite all women, regardless of their differing class interests. History has shown that such popular fronts (elements with differing class interests working through the same organization or ongoing alliance) betray the working class to the capitalists, that they are an obstacle to the smashing of the capitalist order, and hence an obstacle in the path of women's liberation.

We also abhor as suicidal the man-hating political conceptions of such groups as Cell 16 who see capitalism as male conspiracy, and refuse to see that class interests are the primary divisions in capitalist society and that they cross sexual lines. Capitalism is not part of a plan conjured up by men to exploit women. To believe such a thought is to avoid seeing a harsh and cruel reality which includes the exploitation and oppression of men.

Finally, we have a major difference with the remaining elements that would still like to pretend that Bread and Roses can somehow return to its former "glorious" days of being large but amorphous and that that would be desirable. As members of Bread and Roses, we struggled with our sisters in an effort to win Bread and Roses to a socialist program. It is now necessary to provide what Bread and Roses is not capable of providing - a socialist, working-class alternative to the purely reformist organizations now in the women's liberation movement.

We believe that the question of equality, the possibility of truly human relationships among men, women and children can only begin to be realized under socialism. The Socialist Workshop seeks to help build a militant, nation-wide organization that sees socialism as the answer to women's oppression and the working class as the only class capable of overthrowing capitalism and reorganizing production along socialist lines. Thus, in our struggle against sexual oppression and exploitation we seek to aid the movement towards socialist revolution. ●

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