

Intl. Women's Day: FIGHT FOR REAL- NOT FORMAL-EQUALITY

Capitalism has inherited different forms of oppression from past societies which it then has used to divide and further exploit the modern working class. Thus, they become capitalist forms of oppression. The oppression of women is one such form which has existed since the beginnings of class society and which continues to rage with increasing brutality, especially against working class women. In this year's celebration of International Women's Day special attention must be given to the tasks which face us in regards to building a real Marxist-Leninist Communist Party and to the role which women must play in such an undertaking.

On March 8, 1908, in New York City thousands of women workers went out on strike. This day was later proclaimed by the Second International Conference of Women Socialists as International Women's Day; "International Women's Day is a token of invincibility and an augury of the great future which lies before the liberation movement of the working class." (1)

In viewing the woman question we must see two aspects; the oppression of women as well as the exploitation of women. The oppression of women is a phenomenon which crosses class lines; male supremacy is the ideological justification used to oppress not only working class women, but petit bourgeois and

bourgeois women as well. However, the insults and indignations that petit bourgeois and bourgeois women suffer are incomparable to the torment that working class women must bear while they watch their children starve to death. The exploitation of women under capitalism has a particularly brutal nature. Women comprise a large section of the Anglo-American work force. The oppression of women is a weapon which the capitalists use to further exploit the whole working class. As such then, we must treat the woman question as a special question of the class struggle.

Because of the dual aspects of the woman question, the bourgeoisie and the revisionists try to confuse the working class

Women

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about this question. For example, the Equal Rights Amendment which if ratified by 38 states will supposedly give women full "equality" with men is nothing but a bare-faced fascist attack on working class women and on the whole working class. The ERA will with one stroke legally wipe away the protective laws which it took the Anglo-American working class one hundred years of hard and militant struggle to attain. This is what the petit bourgeois leadership of "Men for ERA" has to say about these protective laws; "As for so-called labor protective laws such as one still on the books in some states that forbids working women to lift more than 25 pounds - tell that to any mother who picks up her kids." (2)

It should be noted that the Women's movement represents a genuine spontaneous rebellion of women against male supremacy and class oppression in its various forms. However, its leadership has been maintained in the hands of the petit bourgeoisie and as such it has served the bourgeoisie. The ERA proclaims women to be the same as men - not their equals which is the very recognition of differences. This attack on working class women forces them to do the same work as men regardless of the danger to their health and ability to reproduce. They too are forced to serve as cannon fodder for the imperialist wars of aggression. Thus, the "equality" law further enslaves working class women under the guise of equality. The struggle for the equality of women can only be achieved through the recognition of difference. What does Comrade Lenin say on this question? Let us quote from his essay "Women & Society"; "As long as women are engaged in housework their position is still a restricted one. In order to achieve the complete emancipation of women and to make them really equal with men, we must have social economy, and the participation of women in productive labor. Then women will occupy the same position as men.

"This, of course, does not mean that women must be exactly equal with men in productivity of labor, amount of labor, its duration, conditions of labor, etc. But it does mean that women shall not be in an oppressed economic position compared with men." (3)

The mounting fascist offensive of the bourgeoisie against the working class has particularly been felt by working class women. Forced sterilization of women on welfare, welfare cutbacks, forced work programs, rising unemployment and the ERA have been attacks aimed specifically at the working class women.

As we approach the formation of a real Communist Party, what are we as communists going to do to win over working class women to the side of com-



munist and to stop the fascist drive against working class women and the working class as a whole? Again let us turn to Comrade Lenin, "...the struggles for our demands for women must be bound up with the object of seizing power, of establishing the proletarian dictatorship... But the women of the working class will not feel irresistibly driven into sharing our struggles for the state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. No, no! The women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own suffering, needs and wishes. They must realize what the proletarian dictatorship means for them; complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; and end to the power of the bourgeoisie." (4) For us this means that always and everywhere we must strive to involve women in our factory nuclei and fractions. Women must be allowed to move forward politically. It is our duty to arm women with a Marxist Leninist education, for the woman worker "can help the common cause if she is politically conscious and politically educated. But she can ruin the common cause if she is down-trodden and backward, not of course, as a result of her ill-will, but because of her backwardness." (5) In the USNA today fully 42% of the work force is made up of women. Although there are large numbers of women in service work and in small shops, there is also a sizeable number of women working in large-scale industry, particularly in the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. In 1970 the average wages for men in manufacturing were \$6,654 per year, whereas for women they were \$3,430 per year. 80% of women workers in the USNA are unorganized. It is clear that most women workers are in the section of the working class which is most actively engaged in battle against the enemy. The Farah Pant strike is a good example of women workers who determinedly and unswervingly battled the capitalists for the last two years.

But there are large numbers of women who do not work. In the USNA 58.7% of women work. This means that a large percentage of women in this country are either on welfare or dependent on their husbands for economic support. What does that mean to us communists? We must involve ourselves in the women's mass movement. We must

join organizations such as Welfare Rights, Headstart, PTA, etc., in order that through these organizations we may fight against the special oppression of women as part of the fascist attacks on the working class. Everywhere that the working class is to be found there too is where communists must be.

Finally, we know that women are the greatest reserves of the working class. "This reserve constitutes a good half of the population. The fate of the proletarian movement, of the proletarian revolution, the victory or defeat of proletarian power depends on whether or not the reserve of women will be for or against the working class. (6) Historically this reserve has been used to divide the working class; to force wages down, break strikes, etc. Women have been shuttled in and out of production according to the needs of the capitalists. As communists we must change this historical pattern.

The fight for women's rights must be waged within the League itself. If this is not done, then as we ground ourselves deeper into the class we too will contribute to the spreading of this male supremacist venom. This struggle must not be waged abstractly through "ideological cleansing", but rather concretely by respecting the political leadership of female comrades and by making sure that they have the proper tools with which to fight - Marxist-Leninist education. This struggle must be waged through action, not words. A militant struggle must be waged by the male comrades to give-up the poisonous privilege. There is a definite difference between shooting a man because he has raped one's wife - one's "private property" - and shooting a man because he has degraded an equal - a woman.

This struggle against male supremacy within the CL must not be separated from the struggle within the working class; the League is part of the working class. Comrades in the League must walk on two legs in regards to the woman question; on the one hand we must recognize the special oppression of women and on the other, we must see women as part of the Anglo-American working class.

The struggle against male supremacy will not be won until the conditions are right - until we have communism. However, this is not at all to say that we should give-up the struggle. We must begin now to lay the groundwork for creating the right conditions.

- 1) J.V. Stalin, from a collection of essays in The Woman Question, International Publishers, New York, 1970, p. 44.
- 2) Chicago Daily News, 2/22/74.
- 3) Ibid., p. 52.
- 4) Ibid., p. 91.
- 5) Ibid., p. 64.
- 6) Ibid., p. 44.