

WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY



WVO Exposes Itself - Again - At Woman's Conference

Comrade Lenin taught us that the struggle against imperialism is a sham and a humbug if it is not linked up to the struggle against opportunism. It is crucial to always apply this teaching in the struggle for the full emancipation of women, and to fight against all forms of opportunism on the woman question. Especially against right opportunism, the main danger, and its conciliation to bourgeois feminism, its reliance on bourgeois courts and bourgeois politicians, and its failure to link the struggle for the full emancipation of women to the struggle against imperialism.

Historically, the Workers Viewpoint Organization has been one of the main proponents of this line in our movement. Their role in the women's conference which we are summing up below, shows how, despite their high-sounding phrases and self-proclamations about being the party, they are the same right opportunists they have always been. ★

On the weekend of June 24-25, the New York Working Women held a "Poor Women's Conference". The main force behind the conference and the NYWW (New York Working Women) as well as the Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO). What was their purpose in carrying out the conference, and how they carried it out, gives us a good grasp of WVO's current line and how little this line has changed since two years ago when they were advocating to build the mass movement as the central task. In fact, the conference was like a re-run of the old Budget-Cuts Coalition that WVO formed at the time as one of its fronts. The line of WVO, then and now, is to build jelly-like mass organizations, with vague principles of unity and goals, without principled ideological struggle, and where everyone can fit in. The conference was meant to be a mass recruitment effort, to build another organization along the lines of the Budget-Cuts Coalition in which they have no intention of making any kind of lines of demarcation with the bourgeois feminists, anarchists, reformists and opportunists of all sorts. This became clear from an analysis of the line of the conference, the main forces invited to participate and lead the workshops in the conference, WVO's tailism throughout the conference, and their undemocratic methods.

THE LINE OF THE CONFERENCE

We don't expect that a mass organization put out a communist view on the woman question, or on any other question. It is in fact with the help of communists that the masses go beyond their trade-unionist consciousness and views. But when incorrect views are put forward, it is the duty of communists to combat them and put forward the correct views. Did WVO do this?

The general line of the conference was one of reliance on politicians and on the parliamentary road. This reformist line was manifested in many ways. It was manifested, for example, by the main speakers chosen, most of whom clearly represented the capitalist establishment, such as Ruth Messinger, NYC councilwoman, Representative Ted Weiss, and Commissioner, Seymour Posner. The main message was "write your congressman, support your good politicians, pressure the bad ones, and everything will be all right." Even from Black activist and Welfare Rights organizer, Beulah Sanders, though speaking in a militant way, and advocating (incorrectly) for individual violence, the message remained the same: work through the politicians. WVO not only invited these reformists as main speakers of the conference thus propping them up as leaders of the masses, but they didn't even bother to combat their ideas at any moment. This is outright opportunism and misleading the masses, just for the sake of attracting more people to the conference.

WHO LED THE WORKSHOPS

Another form in which reformism was manifested was in the choice of representatives to lead the various workshops. These choices were clearly made with the intention of non-antagonizing a number of forces and playing up to them by placing them in charge of the workshops. Rather than attempting to put out correct lines and answer the burning questions in the people's minds from a class perspective, WVO catered to the most backward elements and placed in command such forces as the National Organization of Women (NOW) who led the ERA workshop, Brooklyn Legal Aid Offices, who led the Welfare workshop, and others.

As a result, the welfare workshop was oriented towards teaching people how to beat Welfare harassments as opposed to how to organize welfare recipients for revolutionary struggle, and linking the current cutbacks in welfare benefits with the crisis of capitalism worldwide. NOW, a petty bourgeois feminist organization, presented ERA from the point of view of the petty bourgeoisie, of course and emphasized on the need to support ERA as, according to them "a powerful tool to defend women's rights", neglecting the fact that ERA adversely affects working class women and creates the illusion that equality can be obtained through the courts.

WVO'S TAILISM

WVO practised the most slavish tailism at the conference. They avoided all controversy with any of the widely differing forces present. They put up no struggle in the face of all the reformist and bourgeois feminist ideas that were being put forward. This is no accident and it goes further than just a question of "conciliation." It is part of WVO's line, in fact. It is consistent with their line of social-feminism to have placed NOW forces in the leadership of the ERA workshop. WVO advocates bourgeois equality (that there is absolutely no differences between the sexes, negating women's role as mothers, and negating the conditions of life for women under capitalist society, etc.) WVO therefore logically opposes protective legislation, something that is wiped out by ERA. Having historically united with the bourgeois feminists (see Resistance, Vol. No.) WVO today still makes no lines of demarcation with these opportunists. Their practice at the conference confirmed this once again.

WVO's opportunist stand on ERA is especially revealing. They want to have it both ways on this question. They want to appeal to those who support ERA as well as those who oppose ERA, so they avoid putting out a position one way or the other. They claim it is a "tactical" question and by this they mean that whenever they are with ERA supporters, WVO tends to support it. With those who oppose it WVO will then strike the pose of opposing ERA. They allow members to have their own view in the hopes of being able to recruit in both camps. Thus the invitation to NOW leaders to defend ERA at the conference is not a conciliation with the feminists but part of WVO's line.

Another example of WVO's tailism was at the Organize the Unorganized workshop in which the J.P. Stevens boycott committee was pushing the line that the boycott was the primary tool in organizing J.P. Stevens workers in the Black Belt South. This is incorrect as it negates the vanguard role of the working class, and negates the primary tool which is the strike. WVO did not attempt to combat this incorrect idea either. Other views, sometimes put out by honest people who didn't know any better were also met by WVO's approving silence. Some of these were like "forming our own home care system", and to "nationalize housing and eliminate landlords" -- both reformist propositions impossible within capitalism. Rather than attempting to struggle with these ideas in order to help those honest but confused people advance in their positions WVO chose to remain silent and keep an unprincipled peace with all forces.

UNDEMOCRATIC METHODS

The line of the conference was also reflected in its methods of work. WVO consistently undermined the democratic process. Resolutions were prepared ahead of time, sometimes resented at the last minute without having had any discussion on the topic. This method did not give people the opportunity to air out their views on the resolutions and reach principled unity on them. At the Affirmative Action workshop, a leading cadre of WVO presented a resolution supporting the call for a "mass party." WVO tried to innocently slip in this resolution without any discussion of it during the workshop, but it was rejected since there had been no discussion or presentation on the matter before. In the same way without any discussion, there was a last minute appeal to pass a resolution supporting the NOW minority caucus. Many of us were surprised to hear at the closing session resolutions that had not been approved or discussed at our workshops. Struggle was crushed many times. At the Sterilization and Abortion workshop where an important struggle was developing around who is the enemy of women, WVO quickly ended it by announcing that "dinner is being served for those interested." ★

OUR PARTICIPATION

Although short notice of the conference did not allow for adequate participation, we urged some friends to attend with us the first day in the spirit of investigation. On this day, our participation was very limited. At the end of the day, we summed up the conference, the forces present, the line, our role, etc. Summing up with our friends led to a more active participation on the next day. This was a correct method of work which provided comrades with a clearer orientation and a way to exercise leadership more consciously and effectively. As a result, we were able to exercise leadership and combat incorrect ideas in a principled and nonsectarian manner. At the ERA workshop for example one person was won over to opposition to ERA after realizing as she said the danger ERA represents for the working class.

We also made mistakes. Most notably, we failed to struggle for a resolution of our own on opposition to ERA. We were able to stop a resolution in favor of ERA proposed by NOW. Although we struggled staunchly against ERA, this failure showed liberalism and a lack of leadership and initiative on our part. It was possible and correct to struggle for such a resolution which would have helped to advance the struggle forward. This failure also showed sectarianism reflected in the narrow view of counterposing WVO's interests in the conference with those of the struggle overall.

All of this pointed to a graver error which in summing up led us to concretize a major lesson. This was the need for a conscious plan in all the work we do and the need to combat bowing to spontaneity on all fronts. In our planning we failed to set out a clear conscious goal for our participation in the workshops and the conference in general. In a thorough discussion on this question, comrades would have gained a better grasp on the purpose of our participation in the workshops. It would have helped them not to lose their bearings on the question of the resolutions. Such a discussion would have brought out more practical problems to be tackled, as well as sectarian attitudes to be combated. Although not necessarily preventing all errors or eradicating liberalism, sectarianism, etc. more consciousness in our political work certainly leads to a better style of work and better results. This has been an important lesson once more confirmed in the concrete from our participation in this conference.

CONCLUSION

What the conference really turned out to be was a process of self-exposure by WVO. As usual, WVO "unites to expose" with the reformists, but ends up exposing only itself. For those unfamiliar with WVO's opportunist line it was a process of getting to know them better too, in practice.

In particular, the line of "build the mass movement" as the central task held by WVO came out clearly. WVO has brought together a few organizations and conjured a coalition which calls itself "Socialists for a Mass Party" (SMP). In their own words:

"This growing unrest and disenchantment among the American people with the two major political parties has stirred motions from various forces for a new mass political party. The disillusionment of the American people with the two parties and the motion for a new party give further evidence for the need for SMP." (taken from a flyer distributed at the conference)

This "mass party" line represents a growing trend in the U.S. today. How does WVO intend to build its mass party? According to them:

"The best way is to pull together individuals and organizations from various struggles around N.Y.C. into one broad political movement against monopoly capitalism." (same source)

This "mass party" trend is particularly dangerous because it negates the need for a communist party and the leading role of the working class in the revolution. It claims that the working class is not ready for such a party, and that what is needed is not a vanguard party made up of the best elements of the working class but a free-for-all coalition of loosely held mass organizations.

The "growing disenchantment of the American people" is WVO's theoretical justification for their Budget Cuts Coalitions of yesterday, and their NYWWs of today. But this mass political party is not what the disenchanting American people need. The only real alternative to the two political parties of the U.S. bourgeoisie is the new communist party that we must build.

To sum up the conference for Poor Women was, in the last analysis, an excellent example of what the emancipation of women is not all about, and what the line of WVO is all about. ★