

Some of our women members were active in various women's issues at UC-Irvine during the first year of SOC's existence. We will attempt in this section to summarize our theoretical orientation to work

around women's oppression, the history of our work on campus, a critique of that work and a final word on the relationship between the women's movement and the Marxist-Leninist left.

I. Theoretical and Historical Perspective

Sex and Class

From our experience in practice and our study, we have come to view sexual oppression as an integral part of the fabric of class oppression. Historically, women's oppression and class oppression arose from the same material basis, that is, the contradiction between developing productive forces and existing relations of production.

Before the development of social classes, the productive relations were communal, based on the equal participation of both sexes in social labor. Because of the primitive conditions of existence--little control over nature, rudimentary tools, etc.--a collective effort was absolutely necessary to the survival of the communal group. There was a non-exploitative division of labor between the sexes based on women's reproductive activity and the fact that women worked primarily (though not exclusively) at food gathering

and domestic tasks. Men were largely responsible for hunting, fishing and war. Because women's and men's labor were equally essential to survival--and there was as yet no question of a particular form of labor acquiring status and power by producing a stable surplus--women's social status was equal (and at times superior) to men's. The property relations at this time were primarily concerned with simple tools, ownership falling to those who used them or to an individual delegated responsibility for the tools used by the family. The division of ownership of the tools arose parallel to the division of labor along sex lines. Women, working mostly in the household sphere, owned the tools applicable to that labor, and passed them along to their daughters. Men owned the tools for hunting, fishing and war, and these were passed on not to their sons but to their nephews in order to keep the tools within the matrilineal family group.

The developing productive forces interacted with this pattern of ownership to change the form of the family and the status of women--both within the family and within society. The decisive development was the domestication of animals, a captured descendant of the hunt. As prizes of the hunt, their ownership fell into the hands of men, but with an important difference from the ownership of previous tools: cattle, and later the enclosed land they grazed upon, were *productive property*, that is, they produced a stable surplus. Temporary surpluses surely existed in primitive communal societies, but with the establishment of cattle raising, a stable surplus was produced, which, for the first time, was owned by individual men and/or their families. This led to economic and social inequality based on the unequal accumulation of private property and the unequal distribution of the surplus produced. Among the have-nots, the propertyless of society, were all women and children, as well as most men.

As propertied individuals or families began to exchange this surplus and then compete to increase their wealth, the labor available within the family for cattle tending became inadequate. A new



source of labor was needed. Extra workers were secured by transforming the function of war (a part of the men's sphere) from simple revenge or territorial raid to the capture of slaves (and also cattle and other property.) The slaves were put to work by their captors to produce a surplus and themselves became productive property. As propertyless workers, producing for a minority of men who owned them, their social position was parallel to the propertyless women engaged in do-

mestic work. As the subjugation of slaves became entrenched in the social system, so too did the subjugation of the propertyless women. This was rationalized by a philosophy that proclaimed both productive and domestic slavery the divine and universal order.

There had been a prior division of labor according to sex, but it was only when the men's sphere developed this social, surplus-creating character that the division gave rise to inequality and subjugation. The fact that the means of social production were controlled by a minority of men created the material base for the inequality both of propertyless men and of women who controlled only the means of domestic production, which created no stable surplus. That is, the rise of social production and of a slave-owning minority created for the first time both class and sex oppression. With the development of commodity production, the social sphere grew in economic importance and the domestic sphere (which created relatively few commodities) waned further. Women remained primarily within this waning sphere, responsible basically for the reproduction of labor power (both the daily reproduction of men's labor power and the reproduction of new laborers--children.)

While the subjugation of slaves was based on their relation to the means of social production, the subjugation of women (especially women of the exploited classes) was based on their role in the family--a legacy of the prior division of labor. As different modes of production developed, the contradiction between private, domestic labor and social, productive labor outside the home increased. For lack of space, we will skip over the intervening modes of production and go directly to the oppression of women under monopoly capitalism.



Women under Monopoly Capitalism

In the development of monopoly capitalism in the United States, through two world wars and the tremendous increase in the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, more and more women have been drawn into social production. Nevertheless, women are still held responsible for all the domestic labor necessary for the reproduction of labor power (care and sustenance of husbands and children.) This situation leads to the use of women as a surplus labor force.

As primarily domestic workers in the home, women function as an ideal surplus, returning not to the street when laid off as unemployed men do, but to the home. As a reserve army of labor, women who do work (millions of women in the U.S. are "just housewives") are in the traditional "female" occupations, such as clerical, nursing, teaching, service, textile and food industries. These are "female" occupations because most of them are extensions of women's tasks in the home, and they are lower paid than "men's" work.

The contradictory role of women as both housewives and workers leads to a double oppression as workers and women. First of all, as workers, because--as both workers *and* women--they are super-exploited in many ways (lower pay, part-time work, discrimination in hiring and advancement.) Secondly--as both housewives and workers--they face a double shift: eight hours or more at work and many hours of work at home. This double shift exists for many petty bourgeois and professional women also.

Monopoly capitalism needs this reserve army of labor in the home, and the monopoly capitalist state perpetuates this situation by consistently denying women even minimal help with domestic labor--for example, denying government-financed child care. The "labor saving" devices that the monopolies promote may make some housework easier, but they do not cut down the time necessary since the work remains unsocialized. In fact, they increase the work by creating new expectations and new tasks.

Many women are forced to remain in the reserve army of labor at home, and this perpetuates the super-exploitation

of women at the workplace. The state also denies women basic democratic freedoms such as control over their bodies through free abortion on demand, as shown by the recent Supreme Court decision against the use of Medicaid funds for abortion. The judicial and police systems also contribute to the humiliation and degradation that battered and raped women face.

This entire complex of discrimination and special oppression that women face is reinforced by an ideology that says women are *by nature* inferior both physically and mentally to men, but that they are also, by happy circumstance, specially suited to the tedious and often unrewarding tasks of housework and family nurturance. Women are seen as "naturally" incapable of individual ambition; their souls were forged only to be of service (to men.) Therefore, the lot of the oppressed service worker (clerk, secretary, LVN, etc.) going from a low-paying job at work to an unpaid job at home is explained as a result of her "natural" capacity for service and her lack of personal ambition.

This view of women was not conspiratorially concocted by men; it is the ideology of the ruling class, based on its own conditions, history and needs, and as such it is propagated daily through schools, the media, the social, legal and political organizations of society, as well as through our individual perceptions and interactions as men and women. It is the dominant ideology of our society, serving the dominant class.

In a society which is not based on exploitation, oppression and subjugation, this ideology will lose its class base. Given the conscious application of working class interests and ideology, it will eventually be replaced through struggle by a materialist view of men and women as equals in social production.



The Women's Movement and the Socialist Movement

Situating the oppression of women within the totality of class oppression is by no means to liquidate the question. Women are not just like other workers in general--the specificity of women's issues is very real and must be understood and dealt with as such. It is crucial to the development of a strong, viable revolutionary movement and party, actually capable of contesting for power, that the fight for women's liberation be made a vital part of its practice. Working and third-world women's special needs, such as adequate free child care, equal pay, and abortion on demand can be developed by a revolutionary movement to show the integral relationship between women's oppression and the structure of monopoly capitalism. The social inequality of women, based fundamentally on their exclusion from social production, cannot be overcome until women participate fully and equally in social production. Our demands for women arise from the necessity to remove all barriers to this participation. Capitalism cannot allow these barriers to be fully removed because it needs a reserve army of women workers; the demands are therefore revolutionary demands.

Marxist-Leninists (both men and women, or women alone, depending on the circumstances) must take the lead in these struggles and make them a part of the socialist movement, in order 1) to demonstrate within these struggles the links between women's exploitation and class exploitation, and 2) to broaden the base of the socialist movement to include masses of women. To this end, a revolutionary party would not only have to provide for the special needs of its women members (child care, for example) but would also have to struggle against any manifestations of sexist ideology within its own cadres. The previous tendency of the left to reject women's struggles as either a distraction from "workers' issues," petty bourgeois, or divisive, has contributed greatly to the current segregation of the women's movement from the left. This has harmed not only the left, but the women's movement as well, leaving

it vulnerable to co-optation and the dominance of bourgeois feminists.

A Marxist-Leninist party and movement must also recognize the need for a specific and vigorous strategy toward combatting women's oppression, as a specific form of oppression which will not disappear with the overthrow of capitalism. The fight against the oppression of women in all its forms is part of the ideological struggle against the capitalist superstructure--a superstructure which, although rooted in the mode of production, maintains a momentum of its own in tradition and attitude long after the mode of production has entered a transitional phase. The economic conditions will be different--the potential for change will be great--but we have to engage in direct struggle in order to motivate the forces for change in the correct direction, instead of waiting for some historical mechanism to do it for us "automatically."

As a part of this strategy, we must recognize that, although women and especially third-world women are *the* most exploited sector of the working class in the United States, most women are subject to some degree to the oppressive roles assigned them, and therefore have the potential for politicization (excluding of course ruling class women, whose class interests overwhelm any consciousness of sexual oppression.) In this context, alliances with petty bourgeois feminists can be important to our work. From our own experience, which we'll outline further, Marxist-Leninists can rally liberal feminists as an articulate and resourceful source of support for third world and working women's struggles, and their consciousness of their own personal oppression can be expanded to embrace a working class perspective. In times lacking a mass movement, women won to Marxism-Leninism can serve as the ideological lead in organizing around women's issues even though masses of working class women are not in motion.

In sum, the fight for women's demands should be viewed and treated as a distinct, but integral, part of the socialist movement.

The Recent Women's Movement

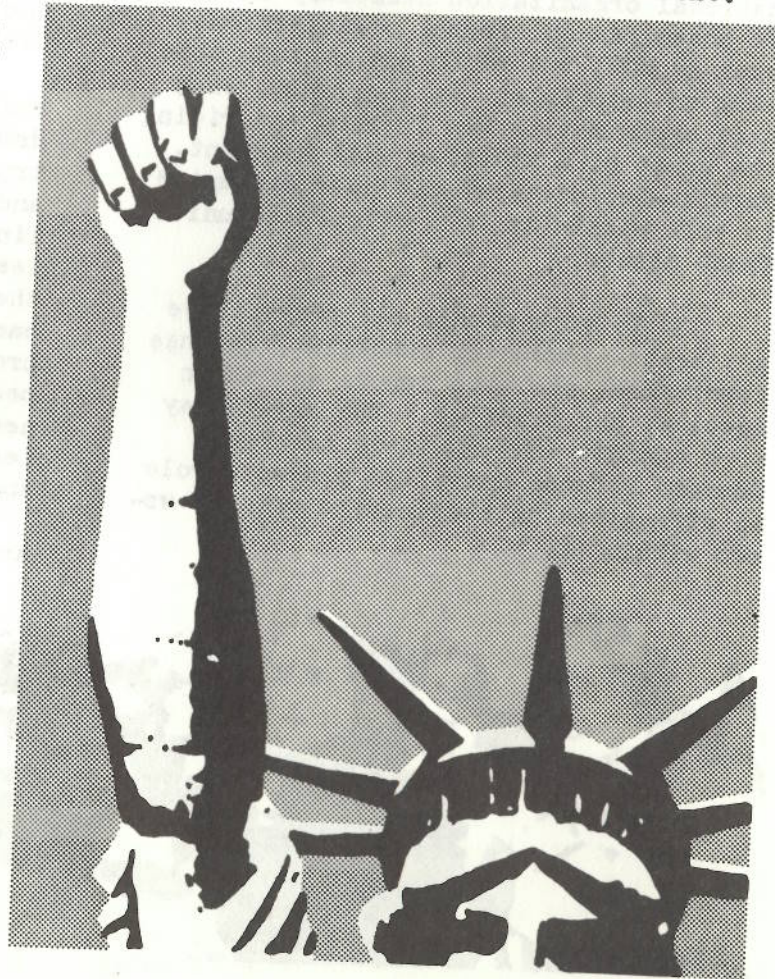
During World War II, millions of women were mobilized into the workforce by a massive propaganda campaign, prompted by the wartime labor shortage, as well as by their own need for income. Once the war ended, it was necessary to the stability of capitalism that these women, many of them in heavy industry jobs, be replaced by the returning veterans. Another campaign was launched, this time glorifying the role of women as mothers and housewives, extolling their "natural" proclivities towards nurturance and support. Women were moved out of heavy industry, but returned to the workforce in the growing sectors of clerical, service and light industry. The nagging economic crises of the last 25 to 30 years eventually eroded the war prosperity, and more and more women entered the workforce simply in order to survive. At the same time, enrollment of women in colleges and universities was on the rise. Increasing numbers of women were becoming financially independent and responsible for themselves, looking for better jobs and better use of their skills and intelligence. These conditions came into growing conflict with the generally accepted view of women and the absurd and denigrating economic, legal and social prejudice we are all familiar with.

The civil rights movement provided the impetus for women to begin vocalizing their anger. The educated petty bourgeois women were the first to organize themselves, not because they were the most oppressed, but because they were the best able, through education, leisure time and the experience of certain freedoms (relative to the working class) to articulate their protest and demands. These demands remained within the boundaries of equality under capitalism.

The anti-war movement generated a radical wing to the women's movement, as women radicals found themselves treated like prostitutes, maids or children within a movement which they took very seriously. They faced both the fight against monopoly

capitalism and the struggle for their own right as women to fight. Demands they made as women within the movement were belittled or ignored. Many left the movement in disgust and formed separate organizations, some socialist and some "radical" feminist.

Meanwhile, the mechanism of co-optation had been mobilized by the ruling class and its agents, who recognized the necessity of absorbing a movement too strong to reject, assimilating and transforming those aspects it found palatable, and discarding those it could not digest. This gave legitimacy, publicity, and thus strength, to the "safe" liberal bourgeois women's movement. The socialist women's movement, cut off from the mainstream of the socialist movement, was overwhelmed and further weakened by the growing dominance of liberal feminism. The radical women's movement, like their socialist counterparts, remains a rejected, unacceptable and ignored part of the movement.



Provisional Strategy on Women's Oppression

In order to work in a principled fashion against sexist oppression, the SOC has adopted the following four strategic focuses.

1. To organize in industries where there are large numbers of women workers, primarily light manufacturing and assembly, clerical and health care. This includes all the tasks outlined in the Trade Union section, fighting discrimination and sexist ideology in existing trade unions, and struggling to address women's needs and draw women into leadership in organizing the unorganized.

2. To work, wherever possible, within existing mass women's movements and raise a strategic Marxist perspective in a non-sectarian fashion. (At present we do not believe the left has the forces or the national organization necessary to work in consolidated liberal organizations such as NOW, but we do not exclude this work on principle. In the 1960s, when this organization was forming and riding the crest of a volatile mass movement, Marxist-Leninists should have attempted to work within it in a principled united front manner.)

3. To work within all progressive movements--community struggles, defense committees, etc.--to oppose sexism in ideology and practice. The day-to-day work against sexism within the Frank Shuford Defense Committee played a role in strengthening the leading role of women within it.

4. To struggle in the communist movement and our own organization against all manifestations of sexism. We feel one aspect of this struggle has particular importance for communists.

Sexism and Leadership

The women's movement arose within the anti-war movement in the late 1960s. The anti-war movement itself developed in a period without a genuine communist party, on a largely petty bourgeois base at the universities and colleges and lacking a real upsurge in the working class. The arrogant, elitist and commandist forms of "leadership" promoted within this movement played a large role in forcing women to develop their own organizations. Insensitive commandism has traditionally been associated with "the macho ideal" and many of the token women who gained notice in the anti-war movement did so by "leading" in this same way.

We do not oppose the idea of leadership--as many radical feminists and social democrats tend to--but we believe that true leadership is a dialectical process and involves developing a genuine mass line. Leadership can only take place by learning from the people, deciphering their real needs and taking these needs back to them in a concentrated form. The processes of listening, learning from the people and being sensitive to their real needs are at least as important a part of leadership as giving charismatic speeches and issuing directives.

In concrete terms, the open struggle around sexism within the SOC made many of us aware of the elitist forms of leadership that had tended to oppress women more than men and that many of us had absorbed from the anti-war movement or from bourgeois society. We believe that the struggle against sexism within the communist movement can become an important avenue of struggle against elitist, bourgeois forms of "leadership."



ERRATA

Because of last minute problems with the section on our practice in the women's movement, pages 77-83 had to be withdrawn. We will publish a separate document on this subject later.