

The importance of the Woman Question must be deeply grasped by Marxist-Leninists. It is an integral part of the overall strategy and tactics which must be developed to deal with the growing offensive of the bourgeoisie. The success of the revolution depends upon the participation of women.

The masses of women are in need of a strong and correct political line to reveal the nature of their exploitation and oppression and to guide them in their struggle.



The WOMAN QUESTION

The women's movement in the United States is presently dominated by bourgeois ideology. The main responsibility for its bourgeois character is the failure of Marxist-Leninists to give leadership to the women's movement.

In the communist movement historically, there has been vacillation as to the very importance of the woman question. This is expressed by the failure to take up the struggle, develop theoretical clarity and political line adequate to the needs of the revolution. There should be no question but that this amounts to a bourgeois and opportunist stand.

In this light, it is of special importance to take a good look at the positions that have been presented this year on International Women's Day. The positions we analyze are far from identical, but there is an underlying and decisive aspect common to them all. It is their failure to approach the Woman Question with the stand, viewpoint and method of dialectical and historical materialism.

There are two main types of errors. One is the idealist approach which fails to see the source of women's exploitation and oppression in class society. Instead, it blames other women or men, male chauvinism or other ideological sources.

The other error is philosophically based in vulgar materialism. It fails to analyze women's exploitation and oppression in its all-round and historical development, necessarily makes errors, and then must resort to idealism to justify them. This is the same error that provides the basis for the revisionist position of the CPUSA, which has dominated the communist and women's movements for over 30 years.

The current positions of the communist movement are no exception. The same error is made in the stand, viewpoint and method, and essentially the same revisionist line is the result, whether from an idealist or vulgar materialist starting point.

CPUSA ON THE WOMAN QUESTION

The CPUSA's line on the Woman Question historically has been a revisionist line. It was officially put forward by the party in *THE COMMUNIST* in 1941, and later came out in a pamphlet, *MARXISM AND THE WOMAN QUESTION*, in 1943. The author of this pamphlet was A. Landy, National Educational Director for the party, who played an important role in the building of Browder-Revisionism.

Landy's line was published in opposition to the book *WOMAN POWER*, by Mary Inman, which in fact, represented the Marxist-

Leninist presentation of the Woman Question. The struggle which ensued between Marxism-Leninism and revisionism within the party resulted in Mary Inman and others that upheld her line being accused of attacking the party, and of taking "the road to right opportunism". Landy's revisionist position held on as the official party position on the Woman Question.

There are two main aspects to this revisionist line.

1. After World War II and the subsequent growth of industry, women became "integrated" into industrial life. Industrialization was seen as the material basis for undermining women's inequality.

This was part of a larger picture, for Landy had already developed a revisionist position on the international situation, following the tradition of Kautsky during the First World War. Landy tried to theoretically justify the lie that the struggle against Hitlerism had transformed bourgeois democracy into a system equally as good as socialism.

In this context, there was no need to mobilize the masses of women, or anyone else, to struggle for socialism. Moreover, women now had no special problems outside being proletarians.

The finishing touch was the liquidation of the party's women's organizations and publications. 2. The other aspect of this line regards the role of women in the family. The family under capitalism is seen as a consumption unit only. It is the theory invented by Bukharin, who in 1937 had already been shot as a counter-revolutionary traitor to the Soviet government!

According to this, women's labor in the home is not productive labor. The women's production of the commodity, labor-power, is denied. The family is not seen as an "economic" or "industrial" unit of society, as Engels puts forward. In fact, whatever it is that goes on in the home is not connected to production at all, except in the consumption of its products.

This is the basis for the revisionist denial of domestic slavery as a form of exploitation and oppression. *Clearly, such a bankrupt analysis provides the perfect basis for liquidating the Woman Question as a question of special exploitation and oppression.*

The CPUSA today upholds the same line. Their pamphlet on the Woman Question, *WOMEN ON THE JOB*, by Judy Edelman, focuses on women's oppression in the shops and trade unions. There is no analysis of women's role in the family. In their program neither imperialism or socialist revolution are mentioned. Thirty years later, the revisionist line still holds on.

Comrades, the CPUSA has proven itself a traitor to the working class many times over. While we have made a beginning break with modern revisionism on the ideological front, we have only begun to purge its influence from our midst. Revisionism on the Woman Question clearly has not been defeated. And it will continue to reappear as long as dialectical and historical materialism is not consistently applied to develop this position.

We present the following analysis of the basic approaches in the Marxist-Leninist movement in the interest of moving toward a revolutionary position on the Woman Question and consolidating the break with modern revisionism.

THE IDEALIST APPROACH

A non-dialectical and materialist approach permeates the communist movement in the various positions taken on the exploitation and oppression of women. Beginning from an idealist approach, many of these positions present the superstructure and social relations as the basis of oppression and exploitation of women, rather than seeing these aspects as manifestations of the underlying material, economic base, that is, the fundamental roots of the Woman Question in class society. Instead ideological aspects are placed as the decisive factor in creating these conditions.

In one of their articles, the Workers' Congress presents a relatively correct position on the Woman Question. Their *RESOLUTION ON THE WOMAN QUESTION* correctly points out that the source of women's exploitation and oppression is in private property society. It correctly states that only with the abolition of the private household as an economic unit of society can we accomplish the abolition of class society. We unite with their position on the limited nature of bourgeois democracy for the masses, as put forward in the resolution.

However, there is a major weakness. This is the Workers' Congress' failure to base their analysis of the special exploitation and oppression of women as domestic slaves on the two forms of social production. This is the theoretical explanation for the differential in wages and working conditions of men and women, of the inability of women to take part in socialized production, and the role of women in the revolutionary movement. Workers' Congress correctly states that "The bondage of women is historically connected with the appearance of private property." (*THE COMMUNIST Supplement on Women*, 3/8/76, p. 2)

Private property is also the material basis of the exploitation and oppression of the working class as a whole. *The question, then, is how private property determines the special exploitation and oppression of*

women, which is different from that of the class as a whole.

Workers' Congress explains it this way:

"Within the monogamous family the social status of women was degraded and her role in production reduced to that of being an instrument to produce a man's legitimate heirs and a domestic slave restricted to the petty tasks of a private household economy. Based on private property the monogamous family arose as the subjection of one sex by the other, establishing a family system entirely dominated by the private property system." (*THE COMMUNIST Supplement on Women*, 3/8/76, p. 2)

While this is a basically correct analysis of the difference in the position of men and women in the rise of slavery, it does not explain the nature of women's special exploitation and oppression under the capitalist mode of production. Workers' Congress lays out that

"In bourgeois society sex oppression in the monogamous family based on private property is the source of the social inequality of women and the second class status of working women in the labor force." (*ibid*, p. 2)

However, because the role of women in the production of the commodity labor-power in the service of the bourgeoisie is not grasped, the Workers' Congress is reduced to trying to explain it through a mis-analogy of national oppression.

In the *STUDY GUIDE FOR RESOLUTION*, the Workers' Congress states that the role of the family places women's labor outside the realm of social production.

"The first paragraph of the Resolution shows how private property determined a family system based on the exclusion of women from social production, their restriction to the petty domestic slavery of the private household economy as the basic economic unit of society and the subjection of women to men." (*ibid.*, p. 3)

By this logic, Workers' Congress places private household economy outside social production and, therefore, relegates the family to being a consumption unit only. They have reached Landy's position on the family by a different path, because they have failed to analyze the role of women in the family as domestic slaves in the service of capital. That is, they have failed to see women's labor as a necessary part of the capitalist mode of production.

Women in the working class are responsible for the production and maintenance of the commodity labor-power.

"The labor of the woman in the home to maintain and reproduce the laborer and future laborers is a service to the

capitalist, unless we say that this particular form of labor is exempt from the laws of Marxist political economy." (Communist Line #6, DRAFT THESES ON THE WOMAN QUESTION, p. 2).

"The cost of production of simple labour-power must include the cost of propagation, by means of which the race of workers is enabled to multiply itself, and to replace worn-out workers with new ones... Thus, the cost of production of simple labour-power amounts to the cost of existence and propagation of the worker. The price of this cost of existence and propagation constitutes wages. The wages thus determined are called the *minimum of wages*. This minimum wage, like the determination of the price of commodities in general by cost of production, does not hold good for the *single individual*, but only for the *race*. Individual workers, indeed, millions of workers, do not receive enough to be able to exist and to propagate themselves; but the wages of the whole working class adjust themselves, within the limits of their fluctuations, to this minimum." (Marx, Karl, WAGE-LABOUR AND CAPITAL, Intl. Publ. 1933, pp. 26-7)

What must be understood is that this is a relationship which takes place within the proletariat on a social scale. It is differentiated from socialized production by the fact that it is carried out in the individual family household.

By failing to analyze the role of domestic slavery under capitalism, the Workers' Congress is unable to explain why domestic servitude and male supremacy become "untenable" under socialism, or why the petty individual household economy must be transformed into socialized production.

Further, comrades from the Workers' Congress present a compilation of statistics and data on women in the U.S. work force, but fail to make a political point because they supply no analysis of it. In addition, they point out that "discrimination against women by banks, loan and credit companies, etc. is being attacked, as is the exclusion of women from professions and the skilled trades." (Women Workers and Fight for Equality, THE COMMUNIST, 3/8/76, p. 1)

Marxist-Leninists take up the struggle for the partial demands of the working class or any sector of it, which objectively contain within them the essence of a genuine struggle for democratic rights, that is, demands which are undoubtedly favorable to the interests of the revolutionary struggle by increasing the fighting capacity of the proletarian movement and which will be linked up with the demands carried out after the seizure of state power. Mass support for demands which are objectively against the interests of the masses cannot change their counterrevolutionary nature. The contradiction in Workers' Congress' position is that abstractly in their Resolutions they present a relatively correct line on democratic rights, and yet fail to apply this position in their presentation of the demands which flow from the objective conditions of women.

Comrades, communists do not

encourage the masses of women to simply struggle for a bigger bite of the capitalist pie. The motion of the petty bourgeois women's movement has been directed precisely toward these sort of struggles. And logically so. The class interest of the feminist movement is petty bourgeois, not proletarian.

Such struggles are a sham, and a smokescreen over the real injustices that working class women suffer.

THE WOMAN QUESTION AS A CLASS QUESTION

The basis of women's exploitation and oppression is class society. The material exploitation and oppression of women began with the emergence of private property and arose simultaneously with the development of class society. With each surpassing of previous modes of production, the position of women was not overturned, but rather had the additional needs of each new society, slave, feudal and now capitalist, placed upon the existing burden of domestic slavery, which had arisen with the supremacy of the man over the woman. Thus, today women's position of double exploitation and oppression is precisely because each new mode of production only added to women's enslavement and did not fundamentally alter their position. (See Communist Line, #6, p. 3).

Not grasping this fundamental distinction will lead to the inability to carry out the defeat of the bourgeoisie under socialism. The class struggle which is carried out under socialism is between the proletariat who is in power and the bourgeoisie who is defeated yet many times more persistent in its struggle to regain the domination of society.

Lenin pointed out:

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the end of class struggle but its continuation in new forms. The dictatorship of the proletariat is class struggle waged by a proletariat that is victorious and has taken political power into its hands against a bourgeoisie that has been defeated but not destroyed, a bourgeoisie that has not vanished, not ceased to offer resistance, but that has intensified its resistance." (Forward to the published speech "Deception of the People with Slogans of Freedom and Equality," ICW, vol. 29, pp. 380-81).

One basis for the re-emergence of capitalism under socialism, as Lenin pointed out "lies not only in the strength of international capital, in the strength and durability of the international connections of the bourgeoisie, but also in the force of habit, in the strength of small production. For, unfortunately, small production is still very, very widespread in the world, and small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly spontaneously and on a mass scale." "LEFT-WING" COMMUNISM AN INFANTILE DISORDER, FLP, 1970, p.5. It is precisely the small production in the home which under socialism will be one breeding ground of capitalism and is itself in glaring contradiction with socialist relations of pro-

duction. It cannot be eliminated under capitalism, but it must be eliminated under socialism. It is in this sense that the Woman Question is most profoundly a class question for socialist revolution, and the building of communism.

The nature of women's exploitation and oppression is not limited to their exploitation and oppression as part of the working class.

"The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male." (Engels, ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE, p. 66).

This means that the struggle against the exploitation and oppression of women is a struggle against the ownership of private property; a struggle against class society. Private property is the foundation of women's exploitation and oppression, not the other way around.

These various examples are not isolated or unique, but the logical expression of taking up the question from a non-proletarian stand.

IDEALISM IN THE WING AND THE WOMAN QUESTION

In taking up the various idealist approaches to the Woman Question, the "Revolutionary Wing" presents a remarkably shallow presentation of this question for a group which publicly consider themselves the "Leninist core" and the "quintessence of Marxism" in the communist movement. We will take up the idealist line of Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization (PRRW) individually and then their joint statement from March 8, 1976. August Twenty-Ninth Movement's (ATM) position is treated in the following section on vulgar materialism.

RWL has basically put forward two presentations of their views on the Woman Question, one in their Principles of Unity (POU), and the other in the first issue of the Bolshevik. In the POU, RWL's position on the domestic slavery of women under capitalism is that:

"This labor, of educating children, building and caring for the home are essential to capitalism. It provides the capitalist with stable family units to depend on to supply future generations of workers and maintain a stable work force." (p. 44).

So far, so good. However, by missing the implications of their own presentation of the question, RWL at the same time holds that: "Women are often tied to and oppressed in the household, but this is not the source of the oppression of women-- but a reflection of capitalist society." (p. 44)

If this is not the source of the special oppression and exploitation of women, then what is? RWL's answer is the classic petty-bourgeois feminist line that

"The dependency and subordination of women and their dependency on men is the basis for the oppression of women." (p. 44)

They then go on to elaborate the source of this condition as women's socialization into feminine roles and further state that the nature of the women's struggle is that

"Today, women are breaking through old stereotypes and combatting their oppression in the U.S." (p. 44)

Because of their failure to correctly apply dialectical and historical materialism to the conditions of women, RWL stands squarely in the midst of a bourgeois position on the Woman Question, and in keeping consistent with this stand RWL then advances the classic petty-bourgeois view that "women have performed millions of hours of unpaid labor at home." (p. 43--

In their second presentation of the Woman Question, in the Bolshevik, RWL basically presents a re-hash of PRRWO's 1975/1976 position. RWL even goes so far as to recopy word for word, entire passages from PRRWO's position (see PALANTE, vol. 6, #2, pp. 3-5 and Bolshevik, pp. 74-83).

PRRW's position is objectively a step backwards from RWL's petty-bourgeois statement in their POU's, as it is merely a set of moralistic phrases, offering no real analysis of the Woman Question, and is clearly the weakest "position" in the "Revolutionary Wing".

The joint position of the "Wing" is merely a compilation or merging of the positions of RWL and PRRWO, with much of the correct views of RWL's earlier position neglected. In order to take up the third member of the "wing" we must take up a second deviation on the Woman Question, the deviation of vulgar materialism.

VULGAR MATERIALISM

The other error in the stand, viewpoint and method on the Woman Question is one of vulgar materialism; of viewing the development of a thing devoid of its full historical context. The limitations of vulgar materialism inevitably lead its exponents to make the leap to idealism in order to explain social relations.

Presently, the third member of the "Wing" is the ATM. Stating that "Women's oppression stems from the division of society into classes." (Revolutionary Cause, vol. 1, #4, p. 2), ATM gives two bases for women's exploitation and oppression which they feel to be different from that of the working class as a whole, both of which are inconsistent with Marxism-Leninism.

The first basis is laid out in the following quote:

"In their never ending drive for profit the capitalist superexploit women on the job, or force them into the reserve army of the unemployed as a cheap labor source." (ibid., p. 2).

This is starkly incorrect on at least one major point. The permanent army of unemployed is a manifestation and component part of the exploitation of the

proletariat as a whole, contributing to the absolute impoverishment of the working class. As such, it is not and cannot be the basis for the special exploitation and oppression of women, as this fact is a *manifestation* of women's existence which does not demarcate it from the exploitation of the working class. In other words, the fact that women and national minorities make up the bulk of the permanent army of unemployed is not, therefore, the *basis* of either women's or national oppression, but is, rather, a product of a more basic aspect of class society.

This inability to clarify the real basis for women's position under capitalism is also carried through in ATM's presentation of the danger of wars' effect on the position of women. ATM says

"How does this growing danger of war effect women? It concerns women and all workers who must fight, suffer and die in a new imperialist war. It means even greater exploitation on the job through speedups--covered over with patriotic slogans about wartime production. It means further cutbacks in social services like day care, hot lunch programs for school children, special skill training for women, aid for the elderly, etc." (ibid., p. 2).

This view that women are just part of the working class who are somehow uniquely exploited but in a way which is essentially no different than the working class as a whole, *except there is more of it*, is consistently applied throughout ATM's position, as the above two examples reflect. However, this is in essence the revisionist position of Landy and the CPUSA all over again.

By not grasping the essential difference of the special exploitation and oppression of women, which is different than that of the working class as a whole, ATM is led to an idealist explanation of this position, which is the *second basis* they present when they say that

"By confining them to the narrowness and drudgery of housework and childraising the bourgeoisie hopes to keep women divided from the struggle of the working class for revolution." (ibid., p. 2)

This is essentially stating that the oppression and exploitation of women is produced by a policy of the bourgeoisie, as a method of dividing the working class. Thus the basis of women's condition for ATM comes down to a question of ideas; ATM must resort to idealism to cover for their vulgar materialist presentation of their first error. They conclude, in essence, that the bourgeoisie uses male supremacy to divide the class and, from this, arise exploitation and oppression. It is not surprising, then, that the tasks of the revolutionary movement, according to ATM, are to

"break down the ideological and political barriers which keep women out of the factories." (ibid., p. 2)

The October League begins from vulgar materialism also in their pamphlet, *WOMEN'S LIBERATION: A COMMUNIST VIEW*. They present women's oppression as a product of the first accumulation of wealth and private property during slavery. They discuss the defeat of mother-right,

attributing it to the need for protection and inheritance-rights of private property "according to male descent". However, they do not connect it with the division of labor in society or the material basis of male supremacy.

The OL first fails to define the division of labor in the rise of class society, i.e. slavery - of women as domestic slaves, relegated to house hold and child-bearing, and men as the owners of the means of production. This then leads them to being unable to

trace the role of women in the family through the different modes of production. They do not see women as having been subjected to material exploitation prior to capitalism. Instead,

"It is important to recognize that the source of women's oppression lies in the material exploitation of women under capitalism." (October League, *WOMEN'S LIBERATION: A COMMUNIST VIEW*, p. 7)

Again, this is the same position put forward by Landy in 1941. It means that women's position as a domestic slave throughout all phases of class society is not considered exploitation. The sum total of women's exploitation and oppression is seen only in their position as part of the proletariat.

It denies the role of women in the family as producers of the commodity labor-power which workers sell to the capitalists and producers of children destined to become proletarians, thereby supplying more labor-power to the capitalists. The theory of unpaid labor in the home flows from this by its failure to see the working class family as a unit, each member with a task defined by the needs of the ruling class. The essence of it is to deny that women's labor in the home is productive, that it is an integral part of the mode of production, and that it is subject to exploitation by the ruling class.

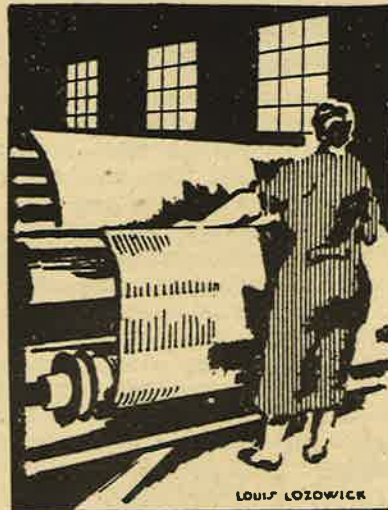
"Much of the wealth of the Rockefellers, Morgans, and other ruling class families in the U.S. has been derived from the exploitation of women's labor in the factories and mills. It is this imperialist class which has benefited from women's unpaid labor in the home and the imperialists have filled the textbooks, literature and media full of their propaganda preaching the 'inferiority' of women." (ibid., p. 3).

As we stated in Communist Line #6 (p. 2),

"We must reject the backward and petty-bourgeois notion that women's work in the home is unpaid labor. Again, this is to say that this work is divorced from production and that women are, therefore, not exploited by capitalism."

These presentations of women's position in capitalist society, being without analytical content, confusing the different forms of exploitation and oppression, or outright misrepresenting concrete reality, cannot provide a strong base of support for revolutionary women's struggle. The result of this is to cut

the Woman Question away from its historical context, and as a result, from its full character under imperialism. It does not provide the basis for understanding the role of women in struggling for the party, for socialist revolution, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Where is the basis for linking the women's movement to the struggle of the working class as a whole? What is it about the exploitation and oppression of working women that make them enemies of imperialism and objectively revolutionary? How is the emancipation of women from the private house hold linked to the final destruction of class society?



These questions cannot be answered on the basis of a non-dialectical and historical materialist method and viewpoint.

The basic error of the various positions was the failure to take up the Woman Question with a proletarian stand, viewpoint and method. This means looking at the actual political, economic and social conditions of women and their basis in the developing mode of production. It means investigating the Woman Question in its full historical context, and in its relationship to other questions.

Clearly, for the demands of women to be revolutionary, they must be tied to the question of state power, to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The reconstitution of a genuine Marxist-Leninist party to guide the masses in proletarian revolution demands the mobilization of women through the development of a correct political line on the Woman Question.

CONCLUSION

Comrades and friends, we have presented our analysis of various lines on the Woman Question in the spirit of developing a position capable of serving the needs of the women's and communist movements. A scientific and revolutionary position on the Woman Question will be developed through discussion, criticism-self-criticism, thorough investigation of the historical and present conditions of women, and participation in the day to day struggles of the women's movement. Through such discussion and struggle a granite theoretical foundation for a correct political line will be laid, and a step taken toward the development of a party program. This process is a fundamental part of the tasks of building Marxist-Leninist unity, and of uniting Marxism-Leninism with the advanced, toward the reconstitution of the vanguard communist party.

We have tried to carefully point out an error which is of

fundamental importance to the development of a scientific and revolutionary position on the Woman Question, and which is widespread in the U.S. communist movement. That is, the failure to take up the Woman Question with the viewpoint and method of dialectical and historical materialism. We would encourage criticism and further discussion on the points in the article, with the focus on moving ahead on this very important question.

The position of the MLOC on the Woman Question, although analyzing the current conditions of women from a dialectical and historical materialist viewpoint and method, is just a beginning in answering the needs of the women's and communist movements. There are areas of our Draft Theses (Communist Line #6) which are in need of strengthening and developing, such as the exploitation and oppression of women in the particular context of imperialism and the second stage of the general crisis of capitalism. Our Draft Theses, too, sometimes failed to differentiate classes of women carefully enough, and especially belittled the oppression of poor white women. A major weakness was the failure to take up the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). We recognize that this is a point of great confusion in the workers' and communist movements, which is in need of theoretical and political clarification. We are in the process of studying the lines of other Marxist-Leninist organizations, and of women's organizations. We are investigating the history of the amendment and are trying to understand what it means under the current economic and political conditions.

We plan to make a more thorough self-criticism of the Draft Theses, and to publish an article on the ERA in the near future in UNITE! We ask comrades and friends to put forward criticism and comments, in the spirit of developing a correct Marxist-Leninist line on the Woman Question.

The Woman Question cannot be seen as a question in itself, but rather, in the context of the entire revolutionary struggle. Political line seeks to summarize the present conditions and historical development of a given question, and to link it theoretically and practically with other questions of the communist and workers' movements. A deep analysis of the Woman Question will necessarily move forward work in trade unions, national liberation movements, and other areas of class struggle.

The struggle for true emancipation of women is an integral part of the struggle of the working class for revolution and for the building of socialism. Complete emancipation of women is a question of the destruction of class society. At the same time the success of the revolutionary struggle depends upon full participation of women.

"No freedom of the people and of each individual, no progress of the country and achievement of our aims can be thought of without the complete emancipation of women." (April 29 Statement of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania, from, ON LIBERATION OF WOMEN IN ALBANIA; Gamma Publ., N.Y., p. 12).

