

# **INTERNAL INFORMATION BULLETIN**

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## Introductory Note

The struggle for women's liberation has been placed on the agenda for the next world congress of the Fourth International, which is now set for late 1977 or early 1978. The purpose of this bulletin is to help provide some background for the discussion that will be taking place on this point.

The first article, "The Abortion Struggle: What Have We Accomplished, Where Should We Go From Here?" by Betsey Stone and Mary-Alice Waters is reprinted from the SWP Internal Discussion Bulletin Vol. 31, No. 18 of 1973.

The second article, "Concerning the Draft Resolution on Women's Liberation Work and the Fourth International, or The Illumination of Other Debates," by Tamara and Verla, is reprinted from the French edition of the Fourth International internal discussion bulletin, *Documents et Informations de Sociologie*, Nouvelle Série numéro 22, Sept. 1973. Tamara and Verla are members of the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR-Revolutionary Communist League). In the first paragraph of their article, they refer to the resolution "Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation." This document was submitted to the international discussion in 1973. It has subsequently been updated and submitted to the current discussion on women's liberation leading up to the world congress. It can be found in International Internal Discussion Bulletin Vol. XIII, No. 9, 1976.

THE ABORTION STRUGGLE:  
WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED,  
WHERE SHOULD WE GO FROM HERE?

by Betsey Stone and Mary-Alice Waters

The January 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion was a landmark victory in the struggle for women's liberation.

It was the first major advance recorded by the new wave of struggles by women in the fight against the institutionalized domestic slavery to which women have been relegated by class society.

The abortion rights victory opened the door for millions of women—especially working women, Blacks, Chicanas, Puerto Ricans—to begin to control their own reproductive functions, their own bodies. It went a significant way towards establishing a fundamental human right for all women—the right to choose whether or not to bear a child.

Freedom from enforced motherhood is a precondition to women's liberation. Only with the right to control their own bodies can women begin to reassert their full human identity as productive, not only reproductive, beings.

The 1973 abortion rights decision sets the stage for a new level of women's liberation struggles. Such struggles will be inspired by the victory won and enhanced by the heightened social expectations and confidence of women developed because of the decision and the changes it will bring.

The victory can only serve to hasten the development of a proletarian vanguard of fighting women and men capable of achieving women's liberation and leading the American socialist revolution to victory.

The Socialist Workers Party made a contribution in helping to win the abortion rights victory. The purpose of this article is to draw a balance sheet of the party's women's liberation activity since the last convention, most importantly our participation in this fight to repeal capitalism's reactionary abortion laws. The article will also assess the development of the feminist movement over the past four years, the present state of the struggle, and our tasks in the period ahead.

The Political Committee does not plan to present a draft resolution to the convention, or to propose a separate agenda point on women's liberation work. We hope this contribution will facilitate the discussion which will take place under the political report and at the panel on women's liberation work.

*Behind the Supreme Court Victory*

The Supreme Court decision was brought about by a combination of factors. Some of them are cited in the 1971 SWP resolution, "Towards a Mass Feminist Movement," as factors responsible for the emergence of the women's liberation struggle as a whole.

First, the decision was a product of the increasing disparity between the actual position of women and the possibilities provided by today's technology and wealth for freeing women from a narrow existence of domestic drudgery. As a result of psychological conditioning and econom-

ic coercion women continue to be channeled into the role of wife-mother-housekeeper. They are systematically molded for this socially prescribed role by law, by custom, by religion, by the dominant ideology of the ruling class. They are taught it is their "natural" place. While women today have more options than ever before in terms of jobs, education, and participation in productive activity, they are still restricted at every turn by the institutionalized forms of sexual discrimination and oppression which are the basic underpinnings of class society.

This disparity between what is and what could be became abundantly clear in the debate around the issue of abortion. The use of birth control devices and the pill are now widespread in the U. S., and are recognized as a legal right in most states. Under modern medical practice abortions are safer by far than childbirth. But for simply exercising the right to control their own bodies, women have been branded as criminals and condemned to risk their lives at the hands of backstreet abortionists.

This and similar contradictions gave rise to the women's liberation movement in general and the struggle against the reactionary abortion laws in particular.

The impact of women's liberation ideas and the fight carried out by large numbers of women was another major factor behind the Supreme Court decision. This was manifested in the fact that the concept put forward by large numbers of women's liberation forces—that abortion should be a woman's right to choose—was incorporated in the Supreme Court decision.

The ruling was also influenced by the general radicalization with its challenges to traditional attitudes and values. The rise of the Black movement, the antiwar movement, and other struggles for social change helped create an atmosphere that spurred changing views on abortion.

The influence of the radicalization, and the development of the feminist movement in particular, was reflected in the polls that showed a rapid change in attitudes relating to abortion between 1968 and 1971. In 1968, the polls reported that only 15 percent of the population believed women had a right to abortion. Abortion was still largely a secret ordeal that many women went through but were afraid to talk about. By 1969, the percentage supporting abortion rose dramatically to 40 percent. By 1971, it was 50 percent.

The rise of the women's liberation movement helped bring about the first partial victory in the abortion rights struggle: the legalization of abortion in New York state in 1970. The excellent safety record in New York under the new law and the demonstrated demand for legal abortion helped legitimize the procedure and also made it more difficult for the ruling class to take back this limited gain women had won.

The liberalization of abortion in New York sparked a concerted drive by the anti-abortion forces which be-

gan to assume national scope. The polarization and ferment that began to mount over this question forced the ruling class to realize they would have to settle the matter in one way or another.

#### *Orientation confirmed*

The victory for women embodied in the Supreme Court decision confirms the orientation of the SWP of throwing its energies into the fight for the right to abortion. It showed we were correct in our insistence that the question of abortion was becoming a national political issue around which a struggle would take place which would lead to either a significant victory or a major setback for the women's liberation movement and the radicalization in general. It confirms our view that it was crucial for the feminist movement to intervene in this struggle, to fight for the interests of women and to thereby demonstrate the relevance of the women's liberation movement to the masses of women.

Although the Supreme Court decision was handed down before either the feminist movement or the abortion rights movement had reached a stage of mobilizing large numbers of women, the work we carried out as builders of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) had an important impact. Over the past several years, WONAAC has been the one women's liberation organization that has carried out consistent activity oriented toward involving women in struggle, independent of the capitalist parties and politicians, around an issue of vital concern to masses of women. It had the correct political position on abortion as a woman's right. It was the only women's liberation group to continue to fight uncompromisingly for the right to abortion throughout the 1972 election period. It was the only one to answer the so-called "right-to-life" campaign in an organized manner and on a correct political basis. And it was the group that did the most to publicize, encourage and link up with the growing international struggle for the right to abortion.

WONAAC played an important role in providing a correct perspective for the women's liberation struggle at a time when the feminist movement was facing a crisis of orientation. The full significance of this role of WONAAC and the abortion rights struggle can be best understood by looking at the origins and development of the women's liberation struggle as a whole over the past four years.

#### *Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement*

What has been popularly referred to as the "women's liberation movement" is not a movement in any organized sense. There has been a general radicalization of women around feminist ideas. This has reflected itself in many and varied organizational forms, from consciousness raising groups to union caucuses, as well as in changing attitudes on a mass scale. When we talk about the women's liberation "movement," it is more accurately this general radicalization that we are referring to with its organized and unorganized reflections.

The SWP recognized the emergence of the new women's

liberation movement as extremely significant in terms of its potential for affecting the course of the American socialist revolution. The explosiveness with which the movement developed around 1969, the rapidity of the spread of women's liberation ideas, and the radical nature of the movement's critique of the family and the roots of women's oppression, were seen as a reflection of the depth of the current radicalization and the deepening contradictions of American capitalism.

In its 1971 resolution "Towards a Mass Feminist Movement," the SWP noted that while struggles by women had accompanied every previous radicalization in the U.S., this new women's liberation movement was unprecedented. It states: "Never before has there been a feminist movement as irreconcilable in its opposition to oppression, as radical in its critique of the social forces that breed these inequities, and as potentially powerful a force for helping to end that oppression, as the emerging movement of today."

This new movement represented a significant expansion of the general radicalization process affecting American society. It meant people were beginning to challenge some of the most ingrained prejudices and basic institutions upholding capitalist society.

While the emergence of the women's liberation movement was fundamentally conditioned by the growth of objective contradictions in the situation of women, it was also an outgrowth of the general radicalization developing in American society. The particular forms the movement took and the way it developed were influenced by the specific nature and stage of the general radicalization.

The feminist movement was born at the height of the ferment of the rising antiwar struggle in 1968-70. The movement was also deeply inspired by the Black liberation struggle and the fury expressed in the ghetto rebellions that swept the country in the mid-1960s.

In this context of general questioning of authority and challenges to the status quo, hundreds of women's liberation groups sprang up throughout the country in 1969, most of them beginning as consciousness-raising groups. Numerous conferences were organized to discuss and formulate demands relating to women's oppression. There was an outpouring of literature by women examining the nature of sexist oppression and how to end it.

This initial flowering of the movement culminated in the giant outpouring on August 26, 1970, the 50th anniversary of the winning of women's suffrage. In New York, where the largest demonstration took place, 30,000 were in the streets. The unexpected size of these demonstrations is partly explained by the fact that they followed on the heels of the largest student upsurge in American history—the May 1970 explosion after the invasion of Cambodia and the murder of the Kent State and Jackson State students.

As an outgrowth of the general youth radicalization of the 1960s, the women's liberation movement reflected the weaknesses and limitations of that radicalization as well as the strengths. As happened with the antiwar and Black movements, the feminist movement very quickly faced a crisis of orientation. Given the relative political quiescence of the labor movement and the absence of a mass revolutionary socialist party, there were strong tenden-

cies toward ultraleftism, sectarianism, workerism, reformism, and other attempts to find short cuts to move the struggle forward.

Many of the women who were initiators of the women's liberation groups came out of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or the antiwar movement as conscious opponents of any attempt to build a mass action movement. Many in this layer looked to the women's movement as a way out of political activity and as an escape from the kind of political struggle that characterized the antiwar movement and the student movement.

From the very beginning these ex-New-Left currents attempted to steer the women's movement in the direction of ultraleftism, elitism, and a reliance on changing "life styles" as solutions to the oppression of women.

In addition, the central leadership of the National Organization for Women (NOW) was a consciously reformist nucleus that worked to turn the energies of the developing women's liberation movement toward subordination to Democratic Party politics.

The August 26, 1970 demonstration provoked a deep-going debate over many of the same questions that had previously been fought out in the antiwar movement. This outpouring of protest showed the great potential before the women's liberation movement. It sharply posed the question of what strategy the movement should follow. How could this potential force of masses of women be organized and mobilized as a power to help bring about the liberation of women?

A discussion of this had already begun prior to the demonstration. In countless consciousness-raising groups, for example, women reached a point in their discussions when they realized that the consciousness-raising group was no longer adequate. They came to the conclusion that talking was not enough, that something had to be done about the oppression of women. However, most activists were not convinced of the effectiveness of any particular course of action. The questions raised—such as what is the cause of the oppression of women, who is responsible for maintaining it, and how can we end it—could only be answered by a Marxist analysis and perspective.

Our answer to the question of what direction women's liberation groups should take was that they had to turn outward, toward the masses of working women, Black, Chicana, and Puerto Rican women. We said feminists should organize around the basic issues facing the masses of women, with the aim of mobilizing women, independent of the capitalist politicians and parties, to fight for their needs. We said to free themselves women had to challenge the fundamental institutions of this society; that changing one's life style was no solution at all.

We said the women's liberation forces had to break out of any closed-circle existence and involve in struggle the many women who did not yet consider themselves feminists but were ready to fight for certain basic demands.

#### *Debate Divides the Movement*

The debate that broke out around the meaning of August 26 divided the movement fundamentally over the question: for or against the perspective of mass action as the indispensable form of struggle. The SWP and YSA, which had played an important role in building the Au-

gust 26 demonstrations, took the lead in explaining the significance of those actions and proposing a continuation of an action perspective for the movement.

Lined up against the SWP and YSA and the independent activists who had been inspired by August 26 were three main currents:

1. One current insisted upon the overriding importance of small groups of what they considered "true feminists." Their view was that women could move toward liberation primarily by changing their own consciousness and life styles. Another aspect of this theory was a disdain for the masses of women, who were not yet "conscious feminists." One influential section of this current began to equate feminism with lesbianism and to look down upon women who were not gay as not "real" feminists.

2. The second was the liberal current. It was primarily represented by the leadership of the National Organization for Women. They tended to counterpose lobbying, "behind-the-scenes legislative action," and small "militant" acts to mass action around specific issues. Immediately after sponsoring the August 26 demonstrations, the NOW leadership rejected further actions of this kind and more openly began to orient toward involvement in Democratic and Republican party politics in preparation for the 1972 elections.

3. Finally, there were the various sectarian tendencies on the left calling themselves socialist or anti-imperialist. These women tended to oppose and denigrate the August 26 actions or any other feminist action as "not radical enough." Some groupings, such as the International Socialists, enamored of rhetoric about "orienting toward working women," opposed any campaigns that had the potential of involving large numbers of working women.

These three currents were not totally distinct from one another. Many of the groups dominated by SDS women, for example, were characterized by both sectarianism and an orientation toward counter-life-styles.

As the debate in the movement continued through the fall and winter of 1970-71, the crisis of perspective began taking its toll. Many women's liberation groups and consciousness-raising groups which had sprung up during the earlier period became more and more introverted and apolitical. With the passage of time, most such groups completely disappeared.

To help propel the movement forward and in order to provide an orientation, the SWP proposed outward-reaching activities in the women's groups in which we were involved. However, we encountered strong resistance to this action perspective, both in NOW and in the city-wide women's liberation groups, such as the New York Women's Center, Redstockings, Washington D. C. Women's Liberation, and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, which were led, in the main, by ex-SDSers who were consciously opposed to such actions. The reformists and ultralefts more and more resorted to red-baiting as a method of combatting our political ideas.

It was at this time, when much of the organized movement was becoming introverted and clique-ridden, that struggles began to sharpen in several states around the issue of abortion. Abortion law repeal coalitions and groups sprang up in numerous states, some formed with SWP and YSA participation, others arising where we had no comrades. In the spring of 1970, the New York move-

ment had initiated an important court suit and organized a demonstration through the coalition called People to Abolish Abortion Laws (PAAL).

Passage of the liberalized New York abortion law in March 1970 was a turning point in the struggle. At one and the same time it provided an impetus to the abortion rights fight and prompted the reactionary anti-abortion forces, spearheaded by the powerful Catholic Church hierarchy, to launch a campaign to reverse the trend toward legalization. Numerous capitalist politicians including Richard Nixon felt impelled to publicly support this reactionary offensive. Newspaper and magazine articles on the abortion question proliferated; debates raged in more and more state legislatures; meetings, rallies and demonstrations were organized by both sides in the abortion fight.

It became evident that a heated and deepening nationwide struggle was looming on this question, and that either the New York law would be reversed by the anti-abortion offensive, or legalization of abortion would be extended to other states. The fact that the reactionaries had decided to rally their forces for a showdown fight around this issue made imperative the need to organize and fight back.

#### *Considerations Behind the Abortion Campaign*

In countering the attacks of the reactionaries, the abortion coalitions and groups around the country were handicapped by their local outlook. An effective struggle to repulse the onslaught of the reactionaries and win a decisive victory for women required a unified, nationwide effort on the part of the feminist movement.

A national action campaign centered on the abortion issue could rebuff the reactionary right-wing offensive and become the vehicle to enable the women's liberation forces to break out of a relatively closed-circle existence and begin to organize around the real social and political issues that affected the masses of women. Such a campaign could provide the opportunity to advance beyond the stage of general propagandizing about women's oppression to organizing a fight to attain a concrete goal of vital importance to masses of American women. It could begin to demonstrate, in practice, that the ideas of women's liberation are of concern to working women, Black women, Chicanas. It could be a way of involving new layers of women in the feminist movement.

The SWP considered such a campaign to be a realistic prospect because, in addition to our own movement, there were other significant forces already involved in the abortion rights struggle who would welcome the idea of a national effort on this issue. In the spring of 1971, Women vs. Connecticut, a group which sponsored a class action suit against that state's abortion law, had already called for a national march on Washington demanding repeal of the laws restricting the right of women to obtain abortions.

From the beginning, the feminist component of the abortion rights movement had been the most uncompromising in its stand for total repeal of abortion laws and the right of a woman to choose abortion. One of the dangers of the developing controversy over abortion was that the population-control advocates who were influential at this time in many pro-abortion groups would direct the debate into a losing fight over population control vs.

"right-to-life." Leadership by the women's liberation movement was needed to shift the debate off this axis and squarely pose the question on the basis of a woman's right to control her own body. This was particularly important in order to involve Black, Puerto Rican, and Chicana women in the abortion struggle, since most population control theories and proposals are marked by racist attitudes and assumptions. Clear political leadership by the feminist movement was also needed to fight liberal proposals that women should be allowed abortions only under special conditions, such as rape, incest, or threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman.

The demands embodying a clear, principled position based on a woman's right to choose were: "Repeal all anti-abortion laws" and "No forced sterilization."

A broad women's coalition, united behind these demands was needed. We supported the idea of a *women's* coalition for two reasons.

1) We agreed that women should organize themselves to fight against their oppression as women. Those who suffer directly from a particular form of exploitation, injustice or oppression will, in their overwhelming majority, be the most uncompromising in their struggle against it. Women alone cannot make a socialist revolution and establish the material prerequisites for ending their oppression. But this does not alter the fact that women must organize and lead the fight to liberate themselves. No one else can or will do it for them. Organizing women to fight on the abortion question was a way of setting an example for how women should fight, a way to provide a perspective for the entire women's liberation movement; to demonstrate in action how to struggle. A woman's coalition could help increase the confidence of women in their ability to lead, to organize, to fight and win.

2) In the absence of a mass revolutionary party, a coalition of conscious women's liberation forces, united around the demand for abortion as a woman's right, provided the strongest possible left wing of the abortion struggle. With an organized and politically clear left wing *leading* the abortion struggle, the women's liberation movement could reach out to broader forces and involve them in the abortion rights fight. This could be done with less danger of the struggle being derailed by the non-feminist and liberal forces who were not committed to fight for abortion as a woman's right.

WONAAC, the feminist coalition we helped originate, thus had a double function. First, it was a component part of the women's liberation movement, an expression of the rising militancy and determination of significant numbers of women to fight for their liberation. It provided a focus, a perspective and an example of how to wage that struggle.

Secondly, WONAAC was a bridge to, and provided leadership for, other non-feminist forces, both women and men, who were willing to join in the fight on a specific issue of women's oppression. WONAAC reached out to unions, women's organizations, family planning centers, health organizations, church groups, the welfare rights organization, professional clubs, and many others. It was a vehicle through which feminists could provide a *class struggle* leadership to much broader social forces.

The class struggle policy that was advocated by us in the abortion fight was based on three fundamental concepts:

First is our orientation toward issues that are fundamental to the exploitation and oppression of the working class. We advance a political line and perspective that speaks to the real problems and needs of the working masses. Struggles to resolve these problems begin to challenge the interests and prerogatives of the ruling class.

Second our class struggle policy is based on political independence from the individuals and institutions of the ruling class political apparatus—parties, politicians, legislatures, etc. We defer nothing, we subordinate nothing to the needs of any alien class interest. While capitalist politicians and others of their ilk are welcome to support our demands and our actions, they do so on our terms.

Third are the methods of struggle employed, which are proletarian methods—the use of extra-parliamentary action as opposed to reliance on the capitalist legislature. We teach the struggling masses to rely on their own strength and united power as opposed to the institutions, representatives and spokespersons of the class enemy.

#### *What Did WONAAC Represent?*

Together with other forces, the SWP and YSA helped initiate the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition in July of 1971.

The initial organizing efforts, including the first national WONAAC conference, were successful in involving and inspiring hundreds of women with the perspective of united action to beat back the anti-abortion forces and participation in a struggle which could register an important victory for women. At the same time, from its very inception, a debate raged within and around WONAAC between the supporters of a mass-action approach and the sectarians and liberals who saw WONAAC as a threat to their orientations.

The alternatives to mass action were posed at the various WONAAC decision-making meetings in the form of proposals to change the focus of WONAAC's activities by: (1) adding such demands as "free abortion," "free childcare centers," and "freedom of sexual expression"; (2) eliminating demonstrations; (3) concentrating on lobbying legislators or aiding Democratic or Republican party politicians who endorsed the right to abortion.

The continuing debate within WONAAC served to educate a whole layer of feminist activists about the need for an action perspective oriented toward the masses. There were several major lessons that came out to these debates and WONAAC's experience.

1) One major debate was over the importance of the abortion issue itself. Many of the women who proposed WONAAC take up other issues did so because they believed abortion was not a matter of concern to most women.

Their arguments took many forms. Just as sectarians in the antiwar movement had objected that the demand for U. S. withdrawal from Vietnam was "not radical enough," that it "wouldn't stop the seventh war from now," so too did representatives of these currents in the women's movement try to say that the demand for legal abortion was "not radical," or that the capitalist class would easily grant it and therefore it was not worth struggling for.

Some argued that the right to abortion was not of concern to working women, either because they could not afford even a legal abortion unless it was free, or because they were more interested in getting childcare centers.

They argued that since the right to abortion is not a significant issue, the role of socialists or "anti-imperialists" or "real" feminists in the abortion movement should be to raise "more radical" demands, such as "free abortion on demand" and "free, 24-hour childcare centers," or "freedom of sexual expression."

The SWP rejected these arguments as did the majority of WONAAC activists. The right to abortion is a basic democratic right of women that must be wholeheartedly championed by any socialist. Under the laws in force prior to the Supreme Court decision statistics showed that one woman out of every four would have had an abortion at some time in her life. Almost every woman had been haunted by the fear of unwanted pregnancy, and the fear of having to resort to illegal, backstreet abortionists.

We pointed out that the right to legal abortion is *especially* relevant to working women, Black, Puerto Rican and Chicana women since these are the women who have the least access to birth control information and devices, and the hardest time getting safe, inexpensive abortions under illegal conditions. They account for the overwhelming majority of botched-abortion fatalities.

We saw the fight for the right to abortion as a struggle challenging one of the most important ideological props of women's oppression. Freedom to decide when or if to bear a child is necessary if women are to begin to have any control over the course of their lives. Along with "women's duties" in the home, vulnerability to unplanned pregnancy has been one of the basic "justifications" for discriminating against women in all areas, including jobs and education. It is one of the fundamental components of reactionary ideology defining women as inferior, dependent beings, whose proper place is in the home.

We believed that winning a victory on this question was possible, and that it would represent a giant step forward for the women's liberation movement. It would alleviate an important aspect of women's oppression and represent a defeat for the reactionary anti-abortion and anti-feminist forces. It would lay the basis for further struggles by women.

2) The second debate was over the mass action strategy and the tactic of focusing on the single issue of legalized abortion. Opposition to the class-struggle approach was the reason why some women sought to raise other issues that would cut across concentration on legalized abortion.

Neither the socialists nor the feminists in this country "created" the abortion issue. We did not arbitrarily "decide" that repealing the abortion laws was the question on which a major fight would develop. That was dictated by social forces much stronger than us. The right to abortion had achieved prominence as a major national political issue because of the objective social factors cited above. With or without us, struggles were beginning to occur around this question.

We rejected the notion that this struggle could be made "more radical" if WONAAC raised other demands which changed the focus of the fight. The social question that had come to the fore—because of forces beyond our control—was legalized abortion, not socialized medicine as implied by those who wanted to focus on "free abortion," or gay oppression of free childcare.

The effect of adding such demands would not be "more radical" actions, but rather to let the capitalists off the hook

in the real struggle developing over legalization of abortion by not bringing to bear the potential power and anger of the many women concerned about this issue.

The most radical thing WONAAC could do, we said, was to begin to affect the consciousness of the masses of working people and to mobilize significant numbers in struggle. It is only through the experience acquired through such struggle that large numbers of people will begin to understand what we already know: that much more than legalized abortion is needed to end the oppression of women. It is only when masses are in motion, engaged in struggle, that their consciousness begins to undergo a qualitative change. Until such motion develops and unfolds according to the dynamics of mass struggles, it is nothing but ultraleftism and sectarianism to proclaim the need for struggle around "more radical" demands.

Actually the proposals to add other demands to WONAAC's program were presented not out of concern for winning those demands, but rather as a ploy to mask opposition to an effective mass-oriented campaign to win the right to abortion. They were put forward by sectarians and counterculture-oriented forces who were either opposed to building mass actions or lacked any conception of how to do so. None of these forces tried to build fights around the demands they raised.

Those who fought hardest for the demand "freedom of sexual expression," for example, were women who viewed changing their own consciousness and lifestyle as the way to win liberation. Their insistence that the abortion campaign also deal with gay oppression reflected their desire to keep the movement small and "pure" and demonstrated their lack of interest in reaching out to nonfeminist women and involve them in struggle.

The bankruptcy of the sectarians and "living room feminists" was clearly manifested during the 1972 election period. Immediately after WONAAC was formed, most of the women in the feminist movement began to look toward the 1972 elections with illusions that "lesser-evil" politics was the way to win gains.

When McGovern repudiated the abortion rights demand and the reformists were telling women to "put the abortion issue on the back burner," and to switch to "quiet, behind-the-scenes lobbying action," the sectarians and "living room feminists" offered no struggle alternative, and generally ended up supporting "lesser evil" capitalist politicians.

The record of WONAAC, on the other hand, stands up well during this period. WONAAC was the only group to continue the fight, independent of capitalist politicians and parties, for the right of women to abortion. WONAAC's Abortion Action Week in May 1972 and the local tribunals in the fall of 1972 were the only counter to the "right-to-life" campaign and to Nixon's and McGovern's anti-abortion statements.

#### "Left Critics"

Among the main proponents of the addition of "free abortion," "free childcare," "freedom of sexual expression" and other demands were the International Socialists (IS). Their conception of the role of Marxists in the abortion struggle was not to take responsibility for helping to lead and organize an effective struggle to win legalized abortion, but to act as congenial "left" oppositionists, concerned only with proving themselves "more radical" than the rest of the women involved in the struggle.

IS also advanced the most sophisticated version of the "raise other demands" position. This was their argument that WONAAC should demand free abortion because that would be the basis for continuing the struggle after abortion law repeal was won. The argument went: "Perhaps the masses of women wouldn't understand or agree, but at least a vanguard layer would have been educated about the need for free abortions and they would keep fighting." They asserted that WONAAC didn't do this out of fear of "scaring off bourgeois women" or "dividing the movement along class lines."

In reality, however, WONAAC did divide the women's liberation movement. Not according to the sociological origins of the women involved, of course, which is what the sectarians usually mean by "dividing the movement on class lines." The divisions were over the political perspective that WONAAC adopted. It was a *class struggle* perspective, even though that term was never used, and most women did not consciously see it that way. It was precisely because WONAAC advanced a perspective of uncompromising struggle to mobilize the masses of women to fight for social changes in their interests, and against the interests of the ruling class, that the resistance to this orientation was so bitter.

Secondly, our concern in opposing the addition of "free abortion" or some other demand was not whether it would "scare off" potential supporters. The question was what would advance the fundamental strategic goals of WONAAC. For example, we supported making the demand for "No Forced Sterilization" part of WONAAC's programmatic aims although this was unacceptable to many supporters of abortion law repeal.

In determining what demands to raise, the question that must always be answered is: at this time, and in this political situation, what are the demands which meet the objective needs of the masses and advance the struggle, even if they are not yet fully understood. Answering that question correctly is the art of politics.

The correct answer to that question in 1971, in the women's liberation movement, was the demand to legalize abortion, and that correctly became the axis of the struggle.

Thirdly, it is sheer idealism to believe that all that is necessary to keep a campaign or mobilization going after the issue that brought it into being has been settled is to raise a "more advanced" demand. We don't arbitrarily pick the issues around which people will mobilize. In 1971 there was no reason to single out free abortion or free medical care, as opposed to childcare or some other demand, as the issue around which women would be mobilized in struggle following a victory for legalized abortion. Such questions are not predictable.

As for the question of how best to relate to the women who were the most open to radical ideas, we thought it was necessary to educate them on much more than just free abortion. We put forward our entire program of revolutionary Marxism, and our strategy for mobilizing and leading the masses of working people in struggle. We did that partially in action through WONAAC, and we did it in propaganda through *The Militant*, *ISR*, the *Young Socialist*, our forums, classes, election campaigns, etc. The result was that we won to the YSA and SWP hundreds of women—a much more



important factor in continuing the struggle for women's liberation than if we had simply educated them about free abortion on demand.

3) A third dispute in WONAAC was over the policy of non-exclusion. From its very inception, all opponents of WONAAC's action program joined in a vicious red-baiting campaign reminiscent of those we experienced in the Black movement and the early period of the antiwar movement. The red-baiting was directed against WONAAC, the SWP and the YSA. Its aim was to camouflage differences with WONAAC's mass action perspective, and with the policies of the SWP and YSA in the women's liberation movement, by scare tactics designed to frighten women away from even considering these views. The smears against WONAAC and the SWP ranged from a public red-baiting press conference held by opponents of WONAAC immediately following the founding conference of the coalition, to unrestrained red-baiting at the WONAAC conferences themselves, to attacks on WONAAC and the SWP on the floor of the 1971 NOW convention. Numerous slanderous articles and dossiers against the SWP were circulated throughout the movement. Some of the red-baiting was obviously the work of ultra-right, anti-feminist forces seeking to divide and discredit the entire movement. These included an attack on WONAAC in Phillip Abbott Luce's "Pink Sheet on the New Left," and the anonymous red-baiting letter sent to reporters and speakers who had agreed to address the November 20 WONAAC demonstration in Washington, D. C.

WONAAC set an example for the movement by rebutting the attempts to weaken and divide the movement in this manner. The majority of independent activists at WONAAC's decision-making meetings reacted by insisting instead on free and fair debate of the political questions involved, and complete democracy in the movement. WONAAC refused to buckle under the red-baiting pressure, and refused to take any measures to exclude socialists or to make socialists second-class members of the coalition. If WONAAC had succumbed to these red-scare tactics, it would have provided the opponents of abortion law repeal with a weapon to destroy the left wing of the movement.

#### *Balance Sheet of the Abortion Campaign*

In supporting the idea of building a national abortion law repeal campaign, the SWP envisioned the potential for a movement of significant proportions around this question. In drawing the balance sheet of this campaign, we must examine WONAAC's accomplishments, as well as discuss why no massive mobilizations on the abortion question developed.

The most dramatic proof of WONAAC's correctness was the Supreme Court decision itself. The ruling reflected the social impact of the burgeoning women's liberation movement as a whole. It was also affected by WONAAC's arguments and activities. The political concept that WONAAC fought for as the axis of the abortion struggle was incorporated into the decision itself with the recognition of abortion as a woman's right.

WONAAC's direct achievements are impressive. It carried out the November 20, 1971 Washington demonstration, the first national action for the right to abortion. It carried out manifold activities in local areas in May 1972. The New York WONAAC demonstration held

during that Abortion Action Week was the only visible protest action by the abortion rights movement to offset the nearly successful attempts by the anti-abortion forces to have the New York abortion law repealed.

WONAAC's three national conferences served to unite large sections of the movement for valuable discussions of political questions, priorities, and exchanges of experiences in the abortion rights struggle. The largest conference in Boston attracted 1300 women. The WONAAC newsletter played an important role in giving national direction and inspiration to the abortion fight as well as providing a forum for discussion.

The coalition organized the successful defense of Shirley Wheeler, the first woman tried and convicted in the U.S. for having an abortion. It spurred the rest of the movement to join in this defense effort.

WONAAC encouraged and helped to draft the Abortion Rights Act introduced into Congress by Bella Abzug. It helped initiate class action suits in several states, including California, Massachusetts, and Michigan. It educated around the questions of availability of birth control, and of the practice of forced sterilization and polemicized against those who viewed abortion as a "population control" issue. WONAAC supporters throughout the country were the major force engaging the "right-to-life" forces in head on confrontation, rebutting their reactionary campaign in debates and literature.

Despite its limited resources, WONAAC was able to contribute to and encourage the struggle for the right to abortion in other countries. Its call for an international day of protest November 20, 1971, was answered by actions in France, England, Canada, Italy, Germany, New Zealand, and other countries. In addition, WONAAC sponsored international tours for two of its leaders, and built the International Abortion Rights Rally in March 1973 in an attempt to utilize the victory of the Supreme Court decision in this country to aid women still struggling for the right to abortion in other countries.

In addition to its contributions to the abortion rights movement, WONAAC made an important contribution in advancing the feminist struggle as a whole. It provided a medium for women's liberation activists to put their ideas into practice. It provided an example of how to struggle effectively for the needs of women and an alternative to the sterile perspectives of counter-culturalism, sectarianism, reformism, and liberalism rampant in the rest of the movement.

WONAAC became a subject for discussion and debate within existing women's liberation groups including NOW, the citywide women's liberation groups and the campus groups. Although the vicious red-baiting limited WONAAC's ability to involve in action members of NOW and the citywide groups, an important layer was won over, and many campus groups wholeheartedly joined the WONAAC campaign.

WONAAC, however, was never able to involve in its activities significant numbers of women in addition to the activists of the women's liberation movement. It did not become a mass movement before the Supreme Court handed down its favorable decision. The size of WONAAC's actions were smaller than we had anticipated they would become. The reason is that we underestimated the combined impact of various obstacles to the pace of WONAAC's development. These obstacles included:

1) The intense opposition to the national abortion campaign within sections of the women's liberation movement, expressed, among other ways, in the virulent red-baiting of WONAAC. The initial strength of the ultralefts and liberals was greater than we had foreseen. We had felt that a national abortion campaign would be able to involve NOW, for example, but NOW as a national organization refused to lend its support in any effective way to the struggle for abortion. Most of the ferocity of the opposition to WONAAC came from the substantial layer of conscious opponents of a mass-action strategy — both ultralefts and liberals—who had long experience in fighting against class-struggle politics in the antiwar movement and other fields. This early period of WONAAC was similar to the early years of the antiwar movement. But unlike the antiwar movement the abortion rights victory came before WONAAC was able to harvest the fruits of the initial intense struggles over political orientation and perspective. It was only towards the end of the campaign that WONAAC began to really cut through the obstacles created by the opponents of the campaign in a significant way.

2) We underestimated the strength and effectiveness of the reactionary anti-abortion forces. The struggle for the right to abortion was a new battle, and it was up against deep-seated and widespread prejudices. The well-financed and energetic anti-abortion campaign succeeded in confusing many people over the issue, as was demonstrated in the defeat of the abortion referendums in Michigan and North Dakota.

Thus while sentiment for the right to abortion had developed rapidly, it still remained a very controversial issue. This contradictory situation was reflected in the treatment of the abortion issue by the McGovern campaign and at the Democratic Party convention. On the one hand there was for the first time a floor discussion on the abortion issue—showing the great interest that had been engendered in the issue. On the other hand, however, McGovern refused to support the right to abortion because he didn't want to antagonize the Catholic Church hierarchy, and even many pro-abortion delegates at the convention were persuaded to vote against the pro-abortion platform plank on the grounds that such a position would hurt McGovern's chances.

3) The abortion campaign was launched at the beginning of the 1972 election period, which extended over the first year and a half of WONAAC's existence. WONAAC was constantly under the pressure of the strong liberal forces who wanted to subordinate the abortion fight to lesser-evil support for capitalist party candidates. The elections were an especially important factor in determining the limited amount of support WONAAC was able to gain from NOW and the Women's Political Caucus.

4) The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and then Nixon's deal with Moscow and Peking against the Vietnamese, along with other factors enumerated in the political resolution, led to a general downturn in the antiwar movement, and radical activities on the campuses. Just as the upsurge of the general radicalization in 1968-70 had its effect in spurring on the struggle of women, the downturn affected the movement too. In retrospect we can now see that the women's liberation movement was born at the very height of the radical upsurge

of the last decade. In its struggles it was swimming upstream from the start.

During this downturn, the student movement was more susceptible to tendencies toward counter-culturalism—that is, the concept that it is not necessary to change society because it is sufficient to change one's own life-style to be "liberated." These developments in the student movement reinforced similar currents in the women's movement.

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All of these elements combined to slow down the pace of development of the abortion movement. There began to be a reversal of this, however, in the summer and fall of 1972 when WONAAC's campaign picked up steam. The turning point came with a number of startling successes registered by the anti-abortion forces including a "right-to-life" demonstration of 10,000 in New York, the defeat of pro-abortion referendums in Michigan and North Dakota and the near defeat of the New York law in the state legislature. These setbacks in the spring and summer of 1972, and the clear danger that the New York law would be lost during the upcoming session of the New York legislature helped convince large numbers of women of the urgent need to unite and take action to defend the gains already won and to extend them further.

As a result, WONAAC meetings and activities began to win new and broader support. The local tribunals, held in the fall of 1972, were successful in involving sectors of the women's movement and the traditional abortion rights organizations which had refused to work with WONAAC in the past.

WONAAC began to regroup broader forces that had the potential for organizing sizable actions. Three hundred people including prominent supporters of abortion in the New York Assembly and representatives from various abortion groups participated in a WONAAC-sponsored meeting in early December which mapped out plans to defend the New York law. Groups such as Planned Parenthood, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Women's Political Caucus and the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws began to join with WONAAC to build specific actions. An extremely broad list of endorsements was obtained for the planned Abortion Tribunal.

WONAAC also began to work with some significant union forces, including individual union leaders of the hospital workers (Local 1199), the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Furrier, Leather and Machine Workers Union, the Cleaners and Dyers Joint Board, the Social Services Employees Union and others.

Although we initially misestimated the pace of WONAAC's growth and this was sometimes reflected in what we wrote in our press, WONAAC's overall impact and accomplishments confirm the general analysis and projections that led us to support and build the campaign for legalized abortion.

The dramatic upsurge of the abortion rights struggle internationally—involving demonstrations of up to 10,000 in both France and Belgium—indicates that the abortion issue does indeed have the potential, as we consistently and correctly emphasized, to provoke significant struggle

for this basic need of women. It was precisely this potential that the ruling class was attempting to defuse through the concession it made with the high court ruling.

### *Present Status of the Abortion Rights Movement*

The Supreme Court decision represented a turning point in the struggle for legalized abortion. Given the character of the decision, it will not be easy for anti-abortion forces to get it reversed. But this eventuality is by no means precluded. As we have seen in Britain, for example, reactionary forces will not and cannot give up easily on this question. In 1972, some five years after the liberalized laws went into effect there, a demonstration of 50,000 was organized by the "right-to-lifers."

The reactionary "right-to-life" forces in the U.S. have already organized considerable activity aimed at reversing the Supreme Court decision. The Catholic Church, in particular, can be counted on to continue to use its vast resources and influence in this effort. Already, eleven state legislatures have voted to support an amendment to the Constitution which would outlaw abortion. An anti-abortion conference of nearly 1,000 was held recently in Detroit. This means that supporters of the right to abortion, including WONAAC, must remain ready to respond to attempts to roll back the abortion victory.

An important element in the long-run struggle to maintain the right to abortion will be the outcome of struggles over abortion now taking place in many parts of the world. The U.S. Supreme Court decision is already having an important influence on these struggles. Similarly, we can expect that the size and outcome of the struggles abroad will have an effect on our ability to maintain legal abortion in this country.

Like other concessions won in struggle, the right to abortion will not be complete or secure until after the socialist revolution. The abortion issue rouses some of the most ingrained prejudices about women perpetrated by class society. Opposition to abortion will continue to be raised by right-wing or developing fascist movements as one of their rallying points until they are decisively defeated through a socialist revolution.

### *The Objective Situation Facing the Women's Liberation Movement*

The objective contradictions to which we pointed at our last convention as underlying factors in the rise of the women's liberation movement continue to exist and in some ways have intensified. According to the 1970 census, 43.8 percent of all working-age women are now employed, and 40 percent of working women are the sole or major wage earners in their families. Working women accounted for two-thirds of the increase in total employment in the 1960s.

At the same time, the gap in pay between male and female workers has not narrowed. Women still suffer a higher unemployment rate than men, women are still kept out of the higher-paying job categories, and millions of women still receive substantially less than equal pay for equal work.

The trend toward more and more education for women continues. They received 42 percent of the bachelor degrees awarded at the end of the 1960s, and 37 percent of the masters degrees. At the same time, women face discrimination in admission standards, scholarships, and in em-

ployment and promotion in the educational system. They received only 13 percent of the doctorates, and are grossly underrepresented in all professional schools.

Moreover, while there has been a constant rise in the employment and education of women during the past decade, even these gains are not secure. As their economic situation requires, the ruling class will take whatever measures they deem necessary to try to push numbers of women out of the labor force and undermine any gains made in feminist struggles which legitimize women's participation in production on an equal basis with men.

Even in the midst of today's profits boom, the capitalists are anticipating the long run difficulties of absorbing into the workforce the large number of women who presently hold jobs. Bourgeois economists frequently point out that the present unemployment rate of five percent is not the "true" rate of unemployment since so many women are working or looking for jobs. The "real" unemployment rate they claim—for male heads of households—is much lower. There are even proposals being made to "redefine" unemployment so millions of women will not be counted.

Class society must maintain the family system as the fundamental mechanism by which class divisions are perpetuated from one generation to the next. The family system also serves as an indispensable ideological prop for an economic system based on dog-eat-dog competition and institutionalized inequality. Capitalism cannot take on the collective responsibility and social burden of childcare and integrate women into the labor force on an equal basis.

The capitalist system also gains innumerable advantages from the fact that women are an extremely flexible and malleable component of the reserve army of labor. Because of the socially accepted belief that women's "natural" place is in the home, women can be much more easily drawn into and pushed out of the labor market, according to the needs of the bosses.

The role of women as wife-mother-housekeeper—and the continued acceptance of this role by millions of men and women—is so indispensable to the capitalist rulers that they can be expected to use every possible means to try to undercut the radicalization of women. While they can be forced to give concessions like the Supreme Court ruling, they will try to chip away at whatever gains women make. This can take many forms all the way from putting economic pressure on women by limiting available childcare, to direct ideological assaults on the movement, to attacks on the legalization of abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment.

### *Where Does the Movement Stand Today?*

In the three years since the August 26, 1970 actions, there have been no demonstrations or actions around women's liberation issues which have equaled the size or impact of August 26.

The process of disintegration of most of the women's liberation groups that began after the first spurt of the movement has also continued. Of the groups which still exist, many are concentrating on issues such as rape, prostitution and "self-help" clinics that are not central political issues to the masses of women and which do not lend themselves to effective struggle against the institutions that perpetuate women's oppression.

On the other hand, feminist sentiment and ferment continue to spread throughout the country and new layers of women have become involved in struggle. One important reflection of this is the increasingly serious coverage of women's liberation developments in the mass media and the seriousness with which Democratic and Republican party politicians are forced to treat women's issues.

Another expression of the influence of women's liberation was the number of conferences called to discuss the problems of women during the past year. Last October there was the conference of 600 predominantly Black household workers. This March the first national conference of Stewardesses for Women's Rights took place. In April some 700 Black women met in Detroit to discuss concerns of Black women. In May the California state AFL-CIO sponsored its first statewide conference of union women. This conference of about 300 adopted important resolutions, including support to low-cost childcare and support to the farmworkers organizing struggle.

Interest in women's liberation is also reflected in the success of *Ms.* magazine, which sells nearly a half a million copies per month.

The campus groups, in general, do not have the dynamism or militancy which was characteristic of these groups several years ago, but campus women's liberation groups continue to exist on a relatively widespread basis and struggles around women's liberation issues keep breaking out in the high schools and colleges. There is still much potential for feminist activity on campus. Campus women's liberation groups were, in the main, responsible for organizing the impressive series of meetings and conferences in observance of this year's International Women's Day. More women's groups have been set up which are officially connected with student governments and there has been a marked growth in the numbers of women's studies departments and classes on women's history. According to an article in the March 3 *New York Times* more than 100 campuses now offer over 900 different women's studies courses.

The National Organization for Women and the Women's Political Caucus have grown. Their conferences in February were each over 2,000. NOW continues to oppose the organization of any visible mass actions but at the same time NOW's activities have not been characterized by the introverted sectarian approach of many other feminist groups and they have been able to reach out and attract new women. NOW, which claims 30,000 members, remains the largest group in the women's movement in the country.

#### *Greater Participation of Black and Working Women*

Of special importance has been the greater involvement over the past year of Black women and working women in struggle around feminist issues. Significant protests by Black, Puerto Rican and other working women have taken place in New York, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, California and Illinois over Nixon's cutbacks in childcare services. Another important area of women's struggle has been the involvement of women in strikes or as supporters of strikes. The majority of strikers at Farah pants company are Chicanas, and women in Houston played an important role in building support for the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers strike.

Another indication of resistance to job discrimination

has been the thousands of individual working women who have taken advantage of legal openings to fight for their rights. There has continued to be a sharp rise in complaints of sex discrimination on the job, for example. Charges brought before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission increased from 33,000 in the year ending June 30, 1972, to some 52,000 in the current fiscal year. In addition, since 1970, class action suits on sex discrimination in education have been filed against some 10 percent of the 2,556 colleges and universities in the country.

The most dramatic result in antidiscrimination suits was the settlement made in January, 1973 with Bell Telephone in which the company was forced to pay \$38-million in back pay and raises to women employees as well as Black and Spanish-speaking employees.

In the electrical industry and the communications industry the issue of maternity rights has been raised. It is also significant that the Equal Rights Amendment has begun to gain more support in the unions. In Ohio, a group of women unionists organized into the Cleveland Council of Union Women have been very aggressive in publicizing the fact that there is significant union support for the ERA and in fighting to increase that support.

#### *A Contradiction Facing the Feminist Movement*

While the questions and demands raised by the feminist movement pose fundamental challenges to the basic institutions of class society and cannot be resolved without a revolutionary struggle of the working class to destroy capitalism, the labor movement itself is not yet taking the road of independent political struggle.

This contradiction has marked the rise and evolution of the women's liberation movement, just as it has affected the radicalization as a whole. It is reflected in the fact that after the first flowering of the feminist movement in 1969-1970, the movement immediately faced a crisis of perspective. Tendencies toward counter-culturalism, workerism, ultraleftism, sectarianism and reformism which developed as women tried to find some short-term solution to this contradiction were exacerbated.

This fact in no way implies that women should wait until the labor movement goes into action, or postpone struggles for demands which concern them. On the contrary, by taking the lead in fighting for their needs the women's liberation movement can help accelerate the radicalization and politicization of the labor movement. But the seemingly overwhelming task of winning liberation and the fact that there is no manifestation at present of the type of social power it will take to challenge the institutions responsible for women's oppression, encourages ultraleftism and sectarianism and the tendency of women to seek personal solutions which, they hope, will at least make life in a sexist society a little more bearable.

The fact that there is no labor party, Black party or mass revolutionary socialist party means that the capitalists have a virtual political monopoly in this country. This, of course, also strengthens reformist tendencies who want to orient the movement toward lobbying and toward support for the capitalist party politicians. It means that during election periods, feminist sentiment is expressed in the political arena mainly through attempts to fight for reforms in the Democratic and Republican parties.

A significant number of women in the feminist move-

ment correctly see the need for action by the labor movement in support of women's needs. But they often do not understand that the objective situation places limits on the pace at which working-class struggles will develop. They look for shortcuts around this obstacle and try to "spark" working women into action. Under these conditions a certain number of radicals are inevitably drawn toward our various opponents because of the "workerist" positions they all hold to one degree or another.

The most extreme workerist tendencies such as the Workers League or Progressive Labor deny the validity of any struggles by women against their oppression as women. The only activities by women that are worthy of support, in their opinion, are struggles of women as workers, on the job. They reject the possibility that struggles by women might play an important role in the radicalization and politicization of the working class.

Others, uncomfortable about the fact that large numbers of working class women are not marching in the streets, immediately jump to the conclusion that the problem is a subjective one—that the correct demands are not being raised. All that is necessary is a new gimmick. If we would just stop fighting around a single demand and add free abortion, free 24-hour childcare, and equal pay, working women will flock to our banner. The *Guardian* tends to advocate this approach.

Such gimmicks were similar to some of the schemes suggested by the *Guardian* to overcome problems faced by the antiwar movement. Many radicals were concerned, for example, that large numbers of Blacks did not participate in the antiwar actions. The *Guardian* said the problem was that the antiwar movement wasn't making racism one of its central issues. But as the massive Chicano antiwar actions subsequently proved, the problem did not lie in the character of the antiwar movement, but in the crisis of leadership in the Black community. The *Guardian's* error was in underestimating the national question and thinking that the Black masses would begin to move without their own leadership.

Simply throwing out more and more demands won't move a struggle forward or bring the working class or the labor movement into motion. If that were the case, the Trotskyist movement has a better list of demands than anyone else. Our opponents could simply throw in the towel now.

The Communist Party is another group that hides behind workerist formulations. They do so to cover their reformist abstention from the women's liberation movement.

All these groups and currents end up by actually opposing those struggles taking place which can begin to have a real effect on the working masses.

### *The Interrelationship Between Feminist and Class Struggles*

The significance of the feminist struggles taking place today, and the role of socialists in building these struggles, can be best understood by looking at both the potential impact and logic of the feminist movement as well as its present contradictions. Although it is impossible to jump over the objective situation and artificially spark masses of working people into motion, the spread of feminist ideas and struggles is today having an impact on the consciousness of the working masses and will have an important effect on working-class struggles as

they develop.

One current example of this is the fight by Cleveland Typographical Union local 53 to organize the unorganized workers, many of them women, in the printing and publishing industry in Northwest Ohio. The militancy of the women workers involved, who are helping set an example of how to strengthen the union by organizing along industrial lines, is a reflection of the new confidence many women workers have gained as a result of the rise of feminism.

Another indication of how the feminist movement will affect the struggles of working people was the participation of women, many of them housewives who had never been involved in a struggle of this type before, in the meat boycott. The more prominent role of Chicanas and Black women in the fight for Black and Chicano liberation is another indication of how feminism will be reflected in the class and national struggles which arise. Feminism will help to deepen the militancy of these struggles, to sharpen their political thrust, and to strengthen the side of the working class.

The struggles waged by working women and women of the oppressed nationalities over such feminist issues as childcare, abortion, equal rights on the job, equal education and paid maternity leave will be a powerful impetus to the involvement of working women—and men—in revolutionary struggle to bring down the capitalist system.

Women's liberation issues will be important in the development of a class struggle left wing in the unions and will play a role in the fight to transform the unions into revolutionary instruments of class struggle.

We cannot predict the forms or pace of development of future struggles by masses of women. But we can say that such struggles will be related to and interconnected with general upsurges of the working class, the Black movement, the Chicano movement, and youth radicalization. At the same time they will have their own unique dynamic, their own demands, their own organizational forms. They will often leap ahead of other struggles, showing the way, and drawing other forces behind them.

### *Our Tasks in the Period Ahead*

At the present time there is no single women's liberation issue which is a national focus for united activity of women's liberation forces. Instead, there are a number of issues around which struggles have taken place, with the issues often varying from city to city. While the nature of our participation in women's liberation struggles will be determined by political developments on a national and local scale, political decisions about how to intervene, and around what issues, will take a greater degree of branch leadership than when we had a central national campaign.

There are several issues that will continue to be of particular importance in the coming period. These are abortion, childcare, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

### *Abortion*

As shown by the anti-abortion counter-offensive since the Supreme Court decision, the battle for the right to abortion is not over in this country. The women's liberation

movement has to remain ready to take action in response to those who are fighting to chip away at, and ultimately reverse, the Supreme Court ruling. WONAAC will have a key role to play in this regard. We will want to continue supporting the actions organized by WONAAC against efforts to overturn and undermine the court decisions or to limit the right to abortion in various ways—such as stipulations that hospitals are not required to perform abortions, or various restrictive regulations like requirements for parental or husband's consent.

### *Childcare*

A significant number of militant struggles have already taken place across the country protesting the government cutbacks of funds for childcare. Some of them succeeded in preventing childcare centers from being closed down for a while. They involved many new women in struggle, especially young working mothers. We must participate in these fights wherever they arise, attempting to extend and broaden them to whatever extent possible. The San Francisco childcare referendum is an example of one way this can be done.

Along with developing debates and struggles over childcare, we can expect a campaign of opposition by right-wing forces—just as in the struggles for the right to abortion and for the ERA. An important task will be to help educate—through our press, our election campaigns, and our participation in childcare struggles—about the importance of quality childcare to both women and children.

### *Equal Rights Amendment*

The Equal Rights Amendment has become a national issue. It will become a test of strength between the women's liberation forces and our most reactionary opponents. Because of the broad implications of the ERA as a statement of the principle of women's equality, the outcome of this battle will have an impact on all struggles by women—for childcare, equal pay, and equal opportunities in all areas.

One of the main obstacles to building support for the ERA has been the opposition of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy to the amendment. We must continue to explain our view of the necessity to fight *both* for the extension to men of those protective labor laws that are beneficial and for passage of the ERA. In unions where we have members or supporters, we should attempt to initiate discussion around motions to endorse the ERA and to pass resolutions of support like those already adopted by the UAW, the Teamsters and AFSCME. The endorsement of the amendment by the May conference of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists is a sign of the possibilities for support in the union movement for the ERA. The fight to defeat the union bureaucracies on this question will help set the stage for further struggles for equal pay and other demands of women workers.

In addition to these three questions, others have arisen in local areas. The issues around which women are challenging their oppression have proliferated. Antidiscrimination fights, struggles by working women for maternity leaves, conferences of women, support for strikes by women workers—these and others are the kinds of struggles we should become involved in. We have to keep our eyes

open for possibilities to participate in struggles that have the potential to involve new layers of women in action.

### *Campus Women's Groups and NOW*

The campus continues to be a place where it is possible to carry out consistent women's liberation activity and where there is the greatest interest in feminist and socialist ideas. We will want to continue to support the YSA's efforts to build general women's liberation groups on the campuses where possible. One important aspect of the activities of campus women's groups should be to build support for off-campus struggles, such as for childcare, defending the right to abortion, and the ERA. In addition, we want to participate in education and action campaigns for the needs of campus women, such as demands for health care, women's studies programs, or fights against discrimination on the campus.

We should continue our participation in NOW, as well as keeping in touch with the activities being carried on by the Women's Political Caucus. One of the important issues around which NOW has been active is the Equal Rights Amendment. In addition NOW has participated in actions around abortion, childcare, and other struggles.

### *In the Unions*

We should be alert to any opportunities to raise women's liberation issues—especially childcare, the ERA, and defense of the right to abortion—inside the trade unions and involve union women and men in supporting these struggles. In addition, we want to show our support for—and participate in, wherever possible—struggles around women's issues that arise within the unions. Examples are struggles for maternity leave rights, for preservation of beneficial protective laws and their extension to male workers, equal pay fights, and strikes and organizing campaigns by women workers.

### *Black, Chicana and Puerto Rican Women*

All of the basic demands of the women's movement have particular relevance to women of the oppressed nationalities and special efforts should be made to involve Black, Chicana and Puerto Rican women in struggles which arise around these demands. We want to pay particular attention to the issues that have involved large numbers of Black, Puerto Rican and Chicana women in struggle. These include the fight for childcare, welfare rights issues, and the fight for decent pay and working conditions for household workers.

We should attempt to involve Black organizations in supporting women's liberation issues. Also, we want to be champions of the rights of Black women, Chicanas, and Puerto Rican women to full and equal participation inside the various Black, Raza and Puerto Rican organizations. The demands of women for full rights within the organizations of the oppressed nationalities has come up within La Raza Unida Party and also more recently in regard to African Liberation Day activities.

### *Socialist Propaganda and Education*

One of the characteristics of the women's liberation movement has always been the widespread desire for knowledge

about the basic causes of the oppression of women and how to end it. Marxists are the only ones who have answers to the very fundamental questions posed by the feminist movement concerning the basic institutions of class society and there is a tremendous openness within the movement to Marxist ideas. The continuing high level of interest in these questions, especially on the campuses, is demonstrated by the consistently good response to the lectures of Evelyn Reed and other party spokeswomen and the sales of our women's liberation literature.

Our socialist election campaigns will be an especially important vehicle for fighting for women's liberation and

presenting our ideas concerning women's oppression. SWP candidates can set an example for women's liberation fighters by showing how to effectively answer the capitalist politicians and the reactionary opponents of abortion, childcare, and the ERA. Through our campaigns we will also be giving publicity and support to women's struggles.

Through our election campaign, selling our press and literature, through public forums and classes, we can continue to reach women activists with Marxist answers to the cause of women's oppression and how to fight it.

July 5, 1973

### Concerning the Draft Resolution "Women's Liberation Work and the Fourth International," or, The Illumination of Other Debates

By Tamara and Verla

Comrade Mary-Alice Waters criticizes the resolution on building parties in Europe for being . . . European; in other words, for attempting to encompass too diverse a reality. Yet the same comrade does not shrink from proposing a "world" orientation for women's work. ["Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation," draft resolution submitted by United Secretariat members Abel, Adair, Hans, Juan, Pedro, Stateman and Thérèse, IIDB, Vol. X, No. 22, Nov. 1973, pp. 11-22] Moreover, whatever we may think of the consistency of such a position, this resolution countenances the view of women's oppression as something that abstractly surmounts important differences among the social positions of women in different parts of the world; not only class differences, but also different social and political systems. Her approach is a caricatured "sectoral" one which certainly does not help combat feminist approaches, nor inversely "male chauvinist" ones which treat women as a separate "sector."

Our goal is clear: without attempting to draw up a full balance sheet for all the sections of the international, we nevertheless intend to contribute to putting Comrade Mary-Alice Waters' draft resolution in perspective so that a real discussion on this question can begin. The "worldwide" resolution which we've been offered reflects and is implicitly based on the American experience, which is schematically extended to an international scale. This implicit framework needs to be exposed for those comrades who have not followed in detail the intervention of the American comrades. First we will have to draw up a balance sheet of their work in order to explain the *strategic difference* we have with the proposed orientation and to

show how this difference is expressed in the draft resolution.

We feel that at the present stage of the debate and of our development of a line in this field of work, it is premature for the next world congress to adopt a resolution on it. But the Fourth International must nevertheless take up this task, and we think it useful that both Mary-Alice Waters' document and ours express the willingness to open such a discussion in our ranks leading to intervening in these issues. We think it is essential that comrades from other sections enrich the discussion by contributions based on the concrete experience of their own interventions. We will only outline a foundation on which to base the presentation of an orientation opposed to that of the minority comrades' draft.

The emergence of women's movements in the advanced capitalist countries as part of the new youth radicalization, and the growth of their impact since 1968, affecting every layer of these societies in varying degrees, has forced several sections of the international to respond, organizationally and politically. Such a radicalization expresses and at the same time reinforces the present crisis of bourgeois values and institutions; it puts in sharp relief the huge shortcomings and betrayals of the Stalinists; the pressing need for socialism is posed more and more clearly by the workers' vanguard in qualitative terms (the quality of life, new social relations) before an ever-wider mass audience. For all these reasons, the whole international must delve back into the origins of Marxism and into the October Revolution so as to deepen and extend its analyses of the superstructure, and attain a full understanding of bourgeois values and institutions—their evolution and

why they must wither away or be abolished. We must irrigate the desert of the Stalinist movement so as to drown the last Thermidoreans in the home. The international as a whole must assume its vanguard role, not only in the domain of theory but also in practice by fitting into its revolutionary strategy the struggle against the ideological and economic oppression of women, reestablishing the comprehensiveness and coherence of its program.

## A World Resolution?

The multiclass and international nature of women's oppression could easily lead to a "sectoral," "world" approach to the question, which would obscure the links between the struggle against women's oppression and the class struggle. This is the result of the long shot that Comrade Mary-Alice Waters has tried to pull off. It is achieved, moreover, at the price of considerably dulling and narrowing the analysis, producing a descriptive and deadly digest of the lowest common denominator of women's oppression in the U.S. and worldwide. Cutting it into slices (capitalist countries, workers states, and underdeveloped countries) does not make it any more consistent. It is not that we think it is in principle incorrect to make an analysis of women's oppression in different societies; it is the method used by Comrade Waters which is incorrect, because of its sectoral approach, combined with too little collective preparation in the international.

Such a broad survey, far from having an international view of the question, in fact becomes totally unworkable as the basis for any tactic of intervention whatever. The revolutionary potential of the women's movement, and the possibilities for revolutionaries to intervene in it as part of a comprehensive strategy, can only be judged on the basis of the particular *combination* of women's oppression with a given social and political situation.

In none of its chapters does the draft which has been submitted live up to the claim implied in its title.

After rehashing *The Revolution Betrayed*, the document superimposes a journalistic description of the USSR onto the Eastern European states taken all together, independently of the conditions under which these states came into existence. Even from the point of view of the document's objectives, there are important questions which are not even considered, such as: What effect does the widespread proletarianization of women in the workers states, combined with the preservation of their role in the home, have on their consciousness? Given their initial social composition, heavily peasant in most of these countries, given the cultural level, the old religious traditions and feudal relations which have often affected women's oppression in many areas, can we expect, as does Comrade Waters, the appearance of movements of women analogous to those that emerged in the more developed capitalist countries? Or, on the other hand, should we not anticipate that women's struggles will be integrated into proletarian struggles that will raise issues that come to the fore more easily in such societies such as workers' self-management of the planned distribution of investments, with a major part devoted to developing the social base as a whole. Granted that the problems posed by the current limitations on abortion and contraception are truly important; we think it is unlike that women's struggles on these issues in other countries will be able to exert an influence in societies as repressive as these in face of the tightly

supervised censorship of news in addition to the tendency of proletarian and peasant layers not to mobilize on these issues and the iron hand of constant repression against any opposition movement.

It is much more likely that the general problems of new social relationships and the family will begin to be considered in one way or another among the youth, together with seeking a communal lifestyle. In this regard, we should see how the present crisis of the family unfolds, particularly its role for the bureaucracy in power in relation to other constrictive structures.

And what about the experience of the other workers states—China, Cuba, and Vietnam?

The section on the "underdeveloped countries" is even more vague and, in addition, disturbing in that the only task emerging from this mixture of generalities is the building—in these countries as elsewhere of course—of autonomous women's groups, without class content, without any definition of their relative position in a strategy for intervention in such societies. This merits more than casual concern, considering some amazing recent incidents. Didn't Linda Jenness, for example, a leader of the SWP, conduct a speaking tour of Argentina while it was under a dictatorship and manage to speak on nothing but women's oppression, with no relation to the social and political conditions there, or the special repression which was directed against our own comrades.

The section of the document which discussed the advanced capitalist countries could have made some assessment of the intervention of the comrades in Northern Europe, France, and Great Britain, but does not do so, even for the intervention in the United States. We believe there is a reason for this. Here we are not confronted with mere "tactical" details but with basic problems which face us in the discussion of other questions. Some of these problems are the dynamics and importance of bourgeois-democratic demands in the advanced capitalist countries; the development of class consciousness among the masses and the intervention of a revolutionary vanguard in this process; and our understanding of the Transitional Program and its method.

The practical or theoretical differences which have appeared in different sections over work in the women's movement do not only or even primarily reflect the very real differences in the way this work is organized according to the different political and social conditions in Europe and North America. Rather the main differences concern the basic issues raised above. They have led to a deviation from the Marxist class-struggle approach to work in the women's movement. In our opinion, this is the same sort of deviation as the one which has appeared on the national question.

## From a Peculiar Conception of the Permanent Revolution and the Transitional Program. . .

The resolutions of the 1971 SWP convention (published as "Program for Revolution" in the *International Socialist Review*, November 1971) indicate the extent to which the SWP's orientation to work in the women's movement is typical of the general orientation of the American comrades. To quote Jack Barnes ("Report to the SWP National Committee," p. 15): "In the *Transitional Program* Trotsky pointed out that in the death agony of capitalism



it was not only the far-reaching demands of the workers, but even the serious demands of the petty bourgeoisie and other oppressed sectors that cannot be met by the ruling class within the bounds of capitalist property relations and the bourgeois state. We can see this in the kind of demands and issues that movements like women's liberation have raised. . . ." On page 16: ". . . our job is to champion the movements of all sectors of the oppressed that rise in struggle against the oppression of capitalism. And, over time, we add to our transitional program—our program for the socialist revolution—those demands flowing from these struggles which fit into the strategy of the *Transitional Program*. . . . An example of this process was the development of our *Transitional Program for Black Liberation*. Another example, in relation to the student movement, was the development of the red university resolution. We also are beginning to grapple with the question of demands and strategy in the women's liberation movement and Chicano liberation movement. We will repeat this process in relation to other movements."

In the same issue of the magazine, p. 23, the resolution "Toward A Mass Feminist Movement" says: "The women's liberation movement represents the emergence of new forces which have the potential for organizing tens of millions of women in independent struggle. It is a struggle with its own unique roots, dynamic, and demands. But at the same time, the fundamental questions of strategy which the movement poses are not new. They are basically the same strategic questions posed by every developing mass movement."

How, and with what dynamics, do mass movements develop?

The predominant central idea is that the bourgeoisie as a class, including and even especially the bourgeoisie of the advanced capitalist countries, is not capable of fully meeting democratic demands such as the women's movement raises. Hence this movement gravitates, by itself, toward the side of the proletariat and the revolution. The one condition is that this movement be headed by a revolutionary leadership.

Two assertions follow from this:

1. The bourgeois revolution has been and still is unable to complete the bourgeois democratic tasks, including the equality of the sexes. The fundamental strategic conclusion drawn from this theory, when applied to the advanced capitalist countries, is that the bourgeoisie is unable to satisfy the bourgeois democratic demands of a women's movement.

Hence, logically, a process of permanent revolution develops and plainly the role of revolutionaries is to be the best defenders of bourgeois democratic demands, demonstrating clearly to the masses that the bourgeoisie is unable to meet these demands and that private property must be abolished!

This same reasoning is applied elsewhere to the national question.

The logic of such an analysis, however, leads to no longer considering the class content of the movement to be of decisive importance. If all women are oppressed, and capitalism is unable to satisfy their needs, then there is an objective strategic place for a multi-class women's movement whose dynamic is inevitably anticapitalist.

"The building of any mass movement requires the

understanding that the ruling class in this country maintains its dominance through illusion as well as violence. A key illusion among the oppressed masses that helps perpetuate class rule is the belief that the system is capable of reforming itself and satisfying the needs of the vast majority." ("Towards A Mass Feminist Movement," *ibid.*, p. 57.)

This assertion is just as much an "illusion," opening the way to all sorts of opportunist errors. It is one thing to say that the bourgeoisie is *historically* incapable of establishing complete social equality between men and women because maintaining patriarchal family values is too profitable to be completely abandoned. But it is quite another thing to slip into the position of denying that the bourgeoisie in the advanced capitalist countries may have its own reason to adapt existing mores and institutions to correspond better to its own economic evolution, to question and even break with its own legal system under the pressure of social conditions which it has itself transformed. These changes inevitably outrage the more backward sections of the bourgeoisie, according to the particular history and ideological and religious traditions of the country in question. Obviously, these changes are always limited by the demands of the profit system and adapted to them.

This is the obvious point that we must call attention to, rather than *a priori* labelling every struggle, even the bourgeois democratic ones, as "cataclysmic." As revolutionaries, we must advance a series of demands whose content implies that a socialist revolution will be necessary to attain them. On the specific area of women's oppression, through our intervention in current struggles, we must develop and explain demands which tend to strengthen the anticapitalist consciousness of women and men. But it is incorrect to say that democratic demands which are able to satisfy some layers of the bourgeoisie have in themselves a clear anticapitalist dynamic when they are raised by the mass movement. It is even more untrue to say that a *single* democratic demand cannot be met! Such demands at best simply reveal the contradictions among various currents of the bourgeoisie at the moment; but they do not have an anticapitalist dynamic, because the bourgeoisie can embrace them. The right to abortion, for example, not only does not pose any vital threat to the ruling class's interests, but can in fact defuse the radicalization of women, as well as opening prospects of a new industry (abortion clinics). In itself, it changes nothing about the exploitation and alienation of women.

The real "illusion" is the idea of fighting only for the right to abortion. Our own comrades contribute to this mystification, in regard to working-class women, by failing to point out the emptiness of the right to abortion without the necessary social, cultural and medical conditions; by failing to politically unmask bourgeois freedoms from a class perspective; and by failing to tie the struggle for legalized abortions to the struggle for subsidized medicine and socialized medical facilities.

The American comrades have perhaps been alone in thinking that the bourgeoisie would not give way on the single issue of the legalization of abortion. Their faulty reasoning has had unfortunate consequences for their intervention in the mass movement.

The masses, following NOW [the National Organization for Women], have been shown by experience that in

advanced capitalist countries bourgeois-democratic reforms can indeed be carried out by the ruling class itself, by the bourgeoisie's own methods and in its interests.

2. By deduction, since the bourgeoisie as a class is unable to meet even bourgeois-democratic demands, it becomes objectively possible for the women's movement to go over to the side of the proletariat, and since it is certain that the movement will go in this anticapitalist direction, therefore it must be made as broad as possible. We should stress the solidarity of all women against their oppression.

As the resolution states, "There is an objective basis for a united struggle by women of different nationalities and classes because all women are oppressed as women under capitalism. Solidarity between women is a potent factor because of this universal oppression of women, and this is the basis for the existence of an independent, non-exclusive mass feminist movement, with an anticapitalist logic." (pp. 59-60.)

The Canadian pamphlet *Socialism and Women's Liberation* is unequivocal: "The women's liberation movement possesses the potential for reaching *all* women and involving them in anticapitalist struggle in the process of the socialist revolution."

We can read and reread the forty-four typewritten pages of Comrade Mary-Alice's draft resolution without finding so much as a hint of the class differences among women.

"We recognize that the struggle for women's liberation is a form of the class struggle. Yet it extends beyond the working class, touching women of all classes. . . . the bourgeoisie as a class must oppose the struggle for women's liberation because it challenges a basic institution of class rule. *But even bourgeois women are oppressed as a sex.*" (draft resolution, p. 18, emphasis added)

We do not intend to deny the obvious: the multi-class character of women's oppression and of the questioning of that oppression; and the possibility of winning bourgeois women to the anticapitalist struggle, against their own class interests.

But neither do we intend to stop with these simple statements. We must especially avoid another "illusion," namely that winning bourgeois women to the struggle against capitalism is in the "logic" of things, that solidarity among women is a powerful factor for the liberation of women ("sisterhood is powerful").

On the contrary, our role is:

1. To show that women's oppression affects women of different social layers in different ways, to show how in some cases it accompanies class privileges and in other cases, class exploitation.

2. To explain that since only a socialist revolution can effectively "liberate" *all* women, it requires the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class (including women) and the total independence and class unity of the workers.

3. To combat the idea of women's solidarity and to wage a struggle against "feminists" whose priority will always be the fight to maintain their class privileges rather than revolutionary struggle.

We must always attack feminism, especially because there is an objective basis for a bourgeois-democratic women's movement which presents a formidable obstacle to the unity of men and women workers in their struggle for emancipation.

We must resolutely fight any tendency which views women's oppression as something above classes. This

cannot be done by putting off the struggle against women's oppression until after the socialist revolution. But neither can it be resolved miraculously by isolating women's oppression from its class context and from the political situation in which it appears. Just the opposite.

For us there is no such thing as an "objectively anticapitalist" women's liberation movement that the bourgeoisie can derail only through the movement's lack of revolutionary leadership.

Concerning the suffrage movement, which took many anti-labor positions (in its struggle against protective legislation for women in factories, its support for Tory candidates, and its struggle for the suppression of the right to strike), Comrade Sally Richard of Britain can try to convince us that "it would be wrong simply to blame (sic) the suffragettes for this hostility which led them to support the imperialist war when it broke out. To a great extent the labor movement—particularly the miners—was hostile to the women's cause, and though it fought for universal suffrage it tended not to wage this struggle in a thoroughgoing way. . . . Of course, if the movement had won the active support of the labor movement and if the narrow limits imposed on the labor movement by its right wing had been thrown off, then it could have been a serious threat to capitalism."

Mary-Alice correctly asserts that "if the masses of women are not led in a revolutionary direction, the ruling class may succeed in winning them to the side of reaction. From the 'kinder-kirche-kueche' (children, church, kitchen) propaganda of the Nazi movement to the march of the empty pots in Chile, this lesson has been spelled out many times. Over and over, the history of the workers movement has proven that the reactionary mystique of motherhood and family is one of the most powerful conservatizing weapons wielded by the ruling class. Even in the immediate, day-to-day battles of the class, the attitude of the wives of striking male workers can be a decisive element in the outcome of confrontations with the bosses. As on all other questions, the reformist and Stalinist misleaders of the workers movement are incapable of showing the masses of women how to escape the reactionary trap and mobilize them on the side of revolution." (draft resolution, p. 18)

There is an untenable amalgam here.

It is correct to speak of the bourgeoisie "derailing" the movement and ideologically dominating working-class women against these women's class interests, as well as the responsibility of the leadership of the labor movement for women's non-participation in the struggle of their class and in support of strikes.

But we reject the idea that there is a continuity among all women's struggles or that it is objectively possible for the working-class movement to take the lead in all struggles no matter what shape they take.

There is not the slightest possibility of solidarity with the "empty pots" movement, which is only the (feminine) expression of the interests of the Chilean bourgeoisie, only the forerunner and sower of confusion for the counter-revolution. It is clear where the power behind these women lies: not with the masses of oppressed women, but with the armed violence of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Should we have attempted to take the leadership of this movement, comrades?

Every movement and every women's organization must

be precisely analyzed at each step from a class point of view, taking into account its potential, its level of consciousness and the way it reflects the social and political conditions, considering our intervention and the particular tactics and methods we use to intervene in it.

### . . . TO THE AGONY OF WONAAC

Let us briefly summarize the history of the intervention of the comrades of the SWP-YSA.

This practical orientation of the American comrades has been scrupulously followed at every step and even surpassed by the Canadian comrades taking the underlying logic of this orientation to its very end. The same orientation is advocated by the minority of the British section, which supports the positions of the international minority, and by the Australian and New Zealand sympathizing groups, which agree with this same tendency.

First, a "mass independent, non-exclusive women's movement" is dreamed up and developed on the basis of a set of themes and demands. The comrades do their best, inside many groups which have sprung up to discuss all the themes of the movement, stressing the necessity for the movement to wage a fight and to go into the streets. The demonstration organized by NOW (National Organization for Women—a bourgeois feminist organization tied to the Democratic Party) in August 1970 around the demands for abortion, contraception, child care and equal pay for equal work, was a success. It was the largest mass demonstration that ever took place—forty thousand persons.

Once the issue had gotten some wind in its sails, and women's liberation and the abortion question were at the center of American political life, the movement became the Noah's Ark of every possible political and apolitical trend: "living-room" feminists, "revolutionary" feminists, with petty-bourgeois perspectives, currents becoming political and having a proletarian and anticapitalist orientation, consciousness-raising, putting pressure on Democratic candidates. . . Everything goes; especially—in the face of the inevitable radicalization process, which emerges from the simultaneous exposure of many aspects of women's oppression, including its class roots—an anticommunist trend. The witch-hunt against our comrades began, and their expulsion from the broad movement was on the order of the day.

But since our comrades were under the influence of the irresistible attraction of this broad movement and since it was unthinkable to suppose that this mass movement "with an anticapitalist logic" might break up and dissolve, the only possible course for them was to base themselves on the least common denominator likely to unite all these women, i.e., the struggle for legalized abortion; that is, not a struggle for free abortion on demand or for abortion as part of a series of demands, but a nearly exclusive concentration on the fight for repeal of the repressive laws that were then in force against abortion. For this purpose the comrades built WONAAC, the "independent, mass, non-exclusive" Women's National Abortion Action Coalition. The differences with NOW revolved around the willingness to demonstrate in the streets as opposed to pressuring Democratic Party politicians, rather than around the question of slogans, since the slogans were the same as those of the bourgeois liberals. In practice,

WONAAC has remained peripheral to the nationwide forces of the SWP-YSA, geographically as well as politically. The non-Trotskyist members of its leadership quickly split from it and the November 1972 demonstration, which was to have been the self-assertion of a mass movement, was a failure. The Supreme Court decision repealing all repressive legislation on abortion dealt WONAAC its death blow and it is today reduced to a telephone network.

### What is the balance sheet?

The balance sheet must be drawn up keeping in mind the aims which the comrades had set for themselves: "Our tactics are dictated by our strategic aim which is to educate and lead in action forces much broader than ourselves and recruit the best cadre to the revolutionary party." (draft resolution, p. 20) Or further: "No matter what organizational form we adopt, the fundamental question to be decided is the same: what specific issues and demands should be raised under the given circumstances in order to most effectively mobilize women and their allies in struggle?" (*Ibid.*, p. 21)

But the "broad masses" in the U.S. who only wanted the repeal of the repressive abortion laws did not go further than this demand. There is currently *no* continuation of this movement with a higher level demand. WONAAC, seeking to win over the *same* "broad masses" with the *same* slogans as NOW, found itself reduced practically to the bare forces of the Trotskyist vanguard, because in a struggle waged on a *bourgeois-democratic basis* for such limited objectives, bourgeois forms of struggle correspond better to the level of consciousness of the "masses" and to that extent were better suited for winning a victory.

In order for the revolutionary vanguard to lead much broader forces, under the present political conditions in the United States, it would probably have been necessary to *combine* the struggle for the bourgeois-democratic demand with slogans of a more advanced social content (for free medical care, for example) which would attack the system in its present state. The "masses" likely to join such campaigns are certainly limited in size in the U.S. today, but the fact that various minorities (particularly the national minorities) have tried to put forward in the women's movement slogans with an anticapitalist content shows that a current broader than our own forces existed for this task.

Far from trying to organize street demonstrations around these advanced slogans that could have appealed to working women, our comrades treated these currents as "ultraleft" (which they might have been) without replying to them on the level of their demands, and polarized the debate around the demand for legal abortion. What educating have we done, what masses have we won over in an anticapitalist direction? Have we in any way helped to fight against the bourgeois-liberal currents? Did they (as well as parliamentary reformist "illusions") not emerge from this episode reinforced?

Our comrades entered the movement on the same level as the masses and stayed there. Their method of intervening in the movement in order to politicize it also bore evidence of the same "sectoral" deviation, at least from what we have been able to read about it. For example, in the pamphlet by the Canadian comrades, already quoted (p. 15), we read: "For instance, we try to convince the members of the women's liberation movement to oppose

the war in Vietnam by pointing out how the inflation caused by the Vietnam war, *by attacking the family budget, makes the movement relevant to women.*" (Our emphasis.) "Towards A Mass Feminist Movement," a resolution of the SWP published in the *ISR*, Nov. 1971 (p. 58), says: "Because *women*, along with every other oppressed or exploited sector of the population, pay the price of the ruling class's imperialist aggression around the world. . . ." etc. Which women pay this price? The concept is always of women as a sector whose oppression prevails in practice over other divisions among them!

Hence our first conclusion is that the vanguard does not educate (or learn from) the mass movement by adapting to the level of demands as the "masses" raise them, independently of the class content of these demands.

In formulating and putting forward its slogans, the vanguard should of course begin from the level of consciousness of the masses, and demands which reflect it, but in such a way as to *emphasize* those immediate demands which show the way forward in order to satisfy *deeper* needs. This way forward is often indicated by slogans which at first are understood only by a vanguard minority of the movement. But aided by the experiences of the struggle, revolutionaries can increase their influence among oppressed and exploited layers if they are able to point out the correct road from the beginning and to best indicate the obstacles to be faced.

Our second conclusion concerns the "organizational form with which we carry out our work." What shape this may take "does not matter," we are told. But Comrade Waters elsewhere specifies: "Given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist and class-collaborationist opponents, our perspective of trying to mobilize masses of women in action can often best be done in the present period through united-front-type action campaigns around concrete demands. The united-front-type abortion campaigns in France and the United States provide an example of this type of action." (draft resolution, p. 20) And in the October 1972 *ISR*, Comrade Mary-Alice replies in advance to our objections: "What is meant by not collaborating with bourgeois women is well explained by Bebel in his introduction to *Woman and Socialism* . . . marching separately, striking jointly, the classic definition of the united front tactic, was proposed more than forty years before it became the byword of the Third International under Lenin and Trotsky." (p. 21) Our understanding of the "byword" of the Third International is, to say the least, different from hers.

1. The aim of the united front tactic advocated by the Third International was to expose the reformist leaders, *inside the labor movement*, in the eyes of the workers.

2. Comrade Mary-Alice, however, gives the united front a multi-class meaning as serving to somehow expose both bourgeois liberals and reformists in the labor movement! When Bebel advocated "striking together," it seems, he meant with a non-exclusive coalition organized around solely bourgeois liberal slogans, if we are to follow the practical orientation of these comrades.

3. Moreover, the organizational form suggested by Comrade Mary-Alice and applied by the American comrades is a united front of *women* around one fighting slogan. In this respect, as in others, there is nothing in common between the American and French experiences. MLAC (Mouvement pour la Liberté de l'Avortement et de

la Contraception—Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception), in addition to being based on a platform with an explicit class content, is a combined movement which aims to organize not only women's groups but also where possible components of the labor movement as such. We will return to this point.

The idea of a multi-class united front is really only the logical conclusion of the "fundamental" error already discussed. However, the American comrades' very interpretation of the history of the labor movement and of the struggle for the right to vote deserves to be noted as well.

First, on the criterion of "massiveness": the Oct. 1972 *ISR* article "Feminism and the Marxist Movement" says that the reason the workers' parties could lead a struggle for the right to vote in their own name was because they were "mass parties, with tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of members, leading the entire trade-union movement in country after country." (p. 21)

Secondly, this struggle is supposed to be an example showing that the revolutionary workers' movement has always taken up the struggle for democratic demands.

The first "idea" is unfortunately also to be found in its "positive" expression: because the SWP is weak today, because it alone cannot bring the "masses" into the streets, the class united front is justified by the aim of "exposing" the bourgeois leaders and others in action in the eyes of the masses. We, on the contrary, say that we are forced even more by our *weakness* to follow the *principle* of the explicit class basis of the movements in which we take part. (cf. *ISR*, op. cit., Lenin.) In the case of the struggle for universal suffrage, it should be pointed out that this very demand was opposed to the demand of the bourgeois suffragettes, who wanted to extend the right to vote only while preserving class privileges. Moreover, the struggle for a bourgeois-democratic right should have opened the way for all the more clearly and strenuously denouncing social inequality and thus the class content of this formal right (without, however, underestimating its importance as such). The labor movement was not under any illusions about these "rights," nor did it focus all its activities around this struggle. But it *combined* the struggle for this bourgeois-democratic demand with its propaganda and agitation on a class basis.

Lenin is fallen back upon once more, to establish the legitimacy of "coalitions"; Comrade Mary-Alice refers (in the *ISR* article quote above) to a discussion between Lenin and Clara Zetkin about an international women's conference which was held with the aim of bringing together all tendencies, including bourgeois ones. She especially stresses Lenin's argument that all means must be used to aggravate the contradictions within the bourgeoisie. Once again, everything is there except what is essential—the conditions which allowed Lenin, reluctantly, to conceive of going along with this initiative in the context of the *relationship of forces* that would have resulted from the success of the young October Revolution. This initiative, which had nothing to do with a "coalition" but was seen rather as a *single* meeting combined with a furious struggle by the communist faction against the bourgeois tendencies, was finally rejected by the International (because of the "sectarianism" of some, according to Comrade Mary-Alice). This example, far from justifying the "coalition" orientation which upholds the illusion-creating idea of solidarity among women, firmly puts the

question of the balance of forces with the bourgeois tendencies before us in every initiative and rules out any coalition with them on a feminist basis.

## FIGHT ALL OPPORTUNISM ON A CLASS BASIS

We do not mechanistically advocate an orientation in agreement with all points of the Third International's resolution; the latter does not appear sufficient today for grappling with the nature of the current radicalization in the advanced capitalist countries. Comrade Mary-Alice, on the other hand, does claim to take the Third International's orientation. It seems to us that the draft resolution and the orientation which has been used in North America call into question the fundamental principles drawn up at the first four congresses of the Communist International, which in our opinion represent the essential basis on which to correctly deal with the new problems posed today.

### A. The Heritage of the Third International

1. The Marxist analysis of the economic, social, cultural and political position of women in capitalist countries shows that a special oppression of women exists, inherited from patriarchal society, which combines with existing class divisions and on the whole tends to maintain and even reinforce them.

2. The most obvious effect of this oppression is to make it difficult for women to enter and participate fully in the social, economic, cultural and political life of these countries.

3. This oppression in particular constitutes an objective and subjective obstacle to the participation of women workers in the class struggle, to their political and trade union involvement, and to their taking on responsibility in the organizations of the labor movement. It also represents a divisive factor inside the working class, given the dominance of bourgeois ideology and of "male chauvinism" among male workers and the immediate advantages they enjoy in the home from the oppression of women inside the family structure.

4. Consequently, the struggle to win over this militant potential to the revolution must be carried on by "special methods of work among women" linked to the perspective of uniting the working class against any "male chauvinism" inside it.

This struggle requires the "formation (in all sections) of special organs responsible for this work" (Resolution of the Third Congress of the Communist International).

5. Our activity, however, must always be designed to show the particular combination of women's oppression with class exploitation and hence the need to combat this oppression from a class point of view. This excludes any conception of classless "special women's issues" which separate the struggle of women for their liberation from the struggle of the proletariat as a whole for its liberation and for socialism: "Any link between women workers and bourgeois feminism, like any support by them for the half-measure tactics and open betrayals of the social-coalitionists and opportunists, can only weaken the forces of the proletariat." (Resolution of the Third Congress of the Third International.)

6. We must pay attention "not to winning reforms under the capitalist system, but to attempting to transform all the demands of toiling women into slogans designed to

awaken the masses to activity and designed to lead these demands onto the path of revolutionary struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat." (ibid.)

### B. The Further Elaboration of these Lessons under the Pressure of the New Radicalization of Women in the Advanced Capitalist Countries

The exacerbation of the contradictions of the capitalist system, the crisis of bourgeois values and institutions, and the whole context of the rising number of struggles, more and more demanding qualitative changes, are all elements which converge and result in a questioning of the present status of women. This questioning generally finds a confused mode of expression, is not to be found *a priori* in any of the traditional working-class organizations, and generally takes the form of all-female movements in which, internationally, the following political currents have participated (in varying degrees): a. the bourgeois liberal feminist current; b. labor reformism, often at first in the form of a workerist economism originating in petty-bourgeois and intellectual social layers, but with the tendency characteristic of the traditional working-class movement to try to get a foothold in this movement; c. petty-bourgeois radicalized or centrist political currents, advancing "sexist" positions that make the divisions between the sexes into a reality above classes, with tendencies toward individualistic solutions ("consciousness-raising" groups, women's communes, etc.); this current often represents the first steps in an unclear development of consciousness which, in the context of radicalizing workers' struggles such as we see in Europe, can oscillate or move toward conscious anticapitalist class positions; d. revolutionary Marxist currents.

Such movements, representing a *process* of developing consciousness and radicalization which today affects not only the student youth but also working-class youth and the whole mass vanguard, and tending to occupy a specific place in the political arena through mass struggles and through a diffuse "oppositionism," can neither be ignored nor approached in an opportunistic and tailending way or without a coherent plan reflecting our strategic goals. That is, they cannot be approached without analyzing their nature, their roots in the economic, social, cultural and political conditions in various countries, and their potential for damaging the system. Such an approach also implies analyzing the possibilities for a revolutionary vanguard to intervene with the aim of exposing the class divisions inside these movements, winning political hegemony over the currents that are becoming radicalized in an anticapitalist direction, and winning them over to the struggle for socialism as we conceive it strategically (in the framework of our strategic concepts).

These movements will tend to develop (in large part by renewing themselves) in the context of a period of general radicalization, at the same time as they are being rapidly confronted with a series of their own problems over perspectives for struggle, problems which are necessary for their existence; they will tend, in the absence of such struggles, to be reduced to splinter groups, occasionally having fruitful discussion but with the risk of turning inward or becoming discouraged. The majority of the women who join these groups see them as a necessity for asserting themselves, for becoming conscious of their secondary status, and for becoming involved in militant

action, often for the first time.

For us, building permanent women's movements is not a principled necessity. It is a "special method of working among women," a transitional form which can facilitate the development of consciousness and their launching of struggles against their oppression, in a period of radicalization around these issues; it is a form of organization produced by the very oppression of women but unable to abolish this oppression by itself. The petty-bourgeois centrism and empiricism which often dominate such movements represent an aspect of a radicalization that is corrosive to the system and rich in anti-capitalist potential, but we cannot subordinate ourselves to it or elevate it to the level of a principle. We understand the women's movement above all as a *process* of politicization in a situation where revolutionary Marxists are not generally able to directly influence or immediately win hegemony over such a broad radicalization. Under such conditions, the divisions that we introduce into the movement must take account of this relatively confused and centrist level from the start, and of the central themes about which the women in these groups feel most strongly. This generally implies the following:

- 1) That revolutionary Marxists explain all the phenomena of super-exploitation and oppression of women in order to show the class roots and concrete manifestations;
- 2) That a tendency be launched, on a class basis, fighting against feminism and other reformist deviations, but at a level of discussion that does not automatically require adhering to the revolutionary Marxist program or party;
- 3) That these women be organized into the vanguard which includes both men and women, and that they participate in all the forms of organization of both sexes, for anticapitalist struggles, as soon as their political understanding permits it.

In all cases, the conditions for effective work by the revolutionary Marxist vanguard are: a) effective integration of the themes of struggle against women's oppression into its various sectors of intervention; its central campaigns and its press; b) in particular, intervening around these issues as part of work in the working class, in the trade unions; c) during struggles, putting forward tactical structures, necessary transitional forms corresponding to the level of consciousness toward which we are trying to orient in a given situation, keeping in mind the current conditions for building the revolutionary party.

In this plan for reinforcing and educating the vanguard, for politicizing the women's movement in an explicitly anticapitalist direction, and for intervening with the aim of uniting the working class, we must be able to give an impetus to campaigns, including ones having a central theme, but linking this theme to the specific social situation and accompanying it with socialist propaganda

indicating the relative place of such campaigns within a body of demands and also with respect to what the bourgeoisie will be able to grant. Our objective in such struggles is not to emphasize solidarity among women, but to increase women's capacity to organize and their conscious combativity against the capitalist system through a partial struggle, while at the same time attempting to win the broad vanguard and the male proletariat to this struggle. The situation is often favorable for exposing the contradictions within the trade union and Stalinist bureaucracies and for outflanking them through extra-parliamentary struggles where revolutionaries can win a wider audience. This was the perspective which the French section had in intervening in MLAC.

We are far from viewing MLAC as the best possible form of intervention for such campaigns, and we could not in any way dominate every aspect of it. Nevertheless, its main characteristics are consistent with our criteria for intervention: it is an organization with a conjunctural purpose, linked to a campaign; it includes both men and women and is based on an explicitly anticapitalist platform, hence able to unite different components of the working-class movement and of the French far left, breaking with the various bourgeois liberal currents. In this intervention, the demand for the right to abortion has never been separated from the means for obtaining one, providing abortions free of charge, developing social facilities, improving the standard of living, free contraception for all, sex education. Without being "revolutionary," such a campaign made it possible to reach the labor movement and its broad vanguard, forced the traditional organizations of this movement to take positions and to change, and accentuated the contradictions within the bourgeoisie, showing all the ideological, economic and political obstacles to the realization of such objectives—"reformist" though they may be.

To conclude, let us repeat that revolutionaries as such, and the labor movement as a whole, must champion the struggle against any manifestations of women's oppression. This is a principle which we must fight for in our trade-union and political work. Only in this way can we effectively fight both the dominant "male chauvinism" and the feminist reaction to it, showing in practice that the struggle for women's liberation is not the business of women only, that there are no "female" demands without class content, and in so doing, showing what the role of women's groups should be and what kind of conscious dynamic we want to stimulate in them.

The women workers of Lip in France have just shown the way to radically and consciously lead the fight against their conditions as women workers. It is now up to the vanguard to draw the lessons for a determined "class-struggle" intervention.