

WORKING WOMEN  
AND  
THE STRUGGLE FOR  
WOMEN'S LIBERATION

A Revolutionary Perspective on Working Women  
in the United States

Papers for Discussion by  
the Organization for Revolutionary Unity

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to be effective, the struggle against women's oppression must be based on an understanding of the current social and economic factors which most affect women in the U.S. This pamphlet, the result of a two-year study, attempts to provide such an understanding and offers perspectives for carrying out the struggle in the years ahead.

The pamphlet is directed both to the general reader who has a particular interest in the current situation of women and to those who are actively seeking to end women's oppression.

We came to see the need for a pamphlet such as this from our own experience and observation in the women's movement and in the Left.

First, the Left has not developed, in our opinion, either the theory or the practice to come to terms with the dramatic changes affecting women in the workplace and in the household since World War II. For example, during the 1970's most Left organizations viewed the overwhelmingly male working class in basic industry as alone worthy of their organizing efforts. Even today, some Left organizations retain this outlook. Likewise, the labor movement's neglect of women's oppression is reflected in the facts that only one in eight women workers belong to a trade union, fewer than 10 percent of trade union officials are women, and a major organizing effort directed at an industry in which women predominate has yet to be mounted. Similarly, stubborn adherence to narrow electoral and legal strategies by "mainstream" women's movement organizations has left the increasingly large number of working women and women heads of households without a true voice.

The above facts alone show how much work needs to be done to further the liberation of women in this country. This pamphlet represents a first step by our organization at tackling some of the issues involved. Since we cover so much, given the lack of Left materials we encountered, we often paint with broad strokes in laying out strategic considerations. We also give our views on specific questions as these arise, such as a stand on the ERA, comparable worth, and so on.



The first three sections of the pamphlet describe the recent changes affecting women in the home and on the job. An important conclusion is that women workers in the sex-segregated service, clerical and light industrial sectors play indispensable roles in the economy. Eighty percent of U.S. clerical workers, who make possible the realization and expansion of profits so necessary for the capitalists, are women. Service workers, mostly women, are responsible for the production and reproduction of the working class itself through educational, health and social service institutions. "Women's work" is neither marginal nor peripheral: it keeps this system afloat. Another conclusion is that rapidly changing family forms are confronting women with new kinds of oppression. The "feminization of poverty" is correlated with the expanding role of women as heads of households burdened with the "double day". The changes chronicled in these sections are shown to reflect significant trends in U.S. imperialism.

What kind of response must be made to the above facts? In order to answer this question, in sections four and five we take up the labor and women's movements from an historical point of view with an attempt to draw lessons for today. For example, the organizing of the needle trades between 1909 and 1913 resulted in the first stable trade union whose membership was predominantly women, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and was also an important factor in achieving the vote for women. Similarly, a major organizing drive in today's banking or insurance industries would be important to today's labor and women's movements. Two of the highest priorities for the labor movement today should be organizing unorganized women and creating deep links with the women's movement around the issues of the special oppression of women.

In Section V, an outline of the women's movement is given. We argue that in order for the women's movement to be truly effective, it is necessary that a working class section of the movement be developed and that it (as well as the labor movement) take an internationalist stance, supporting national liberation movements both at home and abroad.

An unprecedented growth in U.S. foreign investment in the 1970's has gone hand in hand with U.S. support of Third World dictatorships to protect those investments. For the American worker the result is runaway shops, runaway dollars, and runaway jobs to countries where workers do not

have democratic or economic rights. Women workers in U.S. light industry have been especially hard hit by this flight of U.S. capital. The success of national liberation movements will severely restrict the capitalists' ability to move dollars around.

The last two sections address some theoretical and strategic issues. In Section VI we sketch the basis for the special oppression of women under capitalism, including the role of sexist ideology. In the last section we take up the relation between women's liberation and socialist revolution. We believe firmly that women's liberation cannot be achieved under the present system in the U.S. (monopoly capitalism), and that a socialist revolution is impossible without the active participation of working women, given their importance in the workforce and in the household - and thus their importance in society. In this section we present our views on the rudiments of strategy and tactics within the labor and women's movements, including the necessity to fight for reforms.

We welcome and encourage criticism, comments and proposals by organizations and individual readers.

## SECTION I

### WORKING WOMEN TODAY

#### An Overview

##### 1. More Women are Working

If we could take a picture of the entire labor force today, we would see more women in it than at any other point in U.S. history. About 43% of the work force are women, in contrast to only 33% twenty-five years ago.<sup>1</sup> See Graph 1-A for the increase in numbers of women workers from 1950-1982. Between 1970 and 1980 alone, women accounted for about 60% of the total gain in the work force. If this trend continues, we could see a 50% female work force in the next decade.

If we took a picture of all women in the U.S. today, the changes during the same period would be even more dramatic. Graph 1-B portrays the rise in the percentage of women who work.

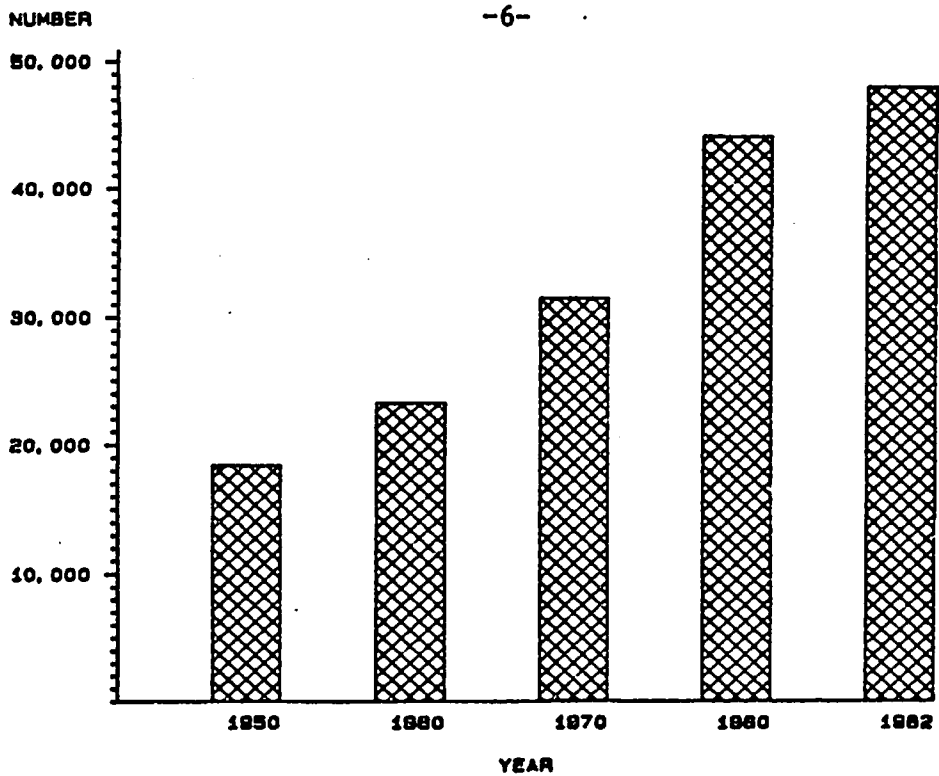
The picture of change for minority women would be different from the picture of women as a whole, however. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Historically, black women have been more likely to work than whites. However, during the 1970's the labor force participation rate for white women grew much more rapidly than for black women so that by the close of the decade there was little difference between their overall participation rates (about 51 and 54 percent, respectively for white and black women). Although the participation rate for Hispanic women was somewhat lower than for either blacks or whites, it has also advanced, reaching 47 percent in 1979.<sup>2</sup>

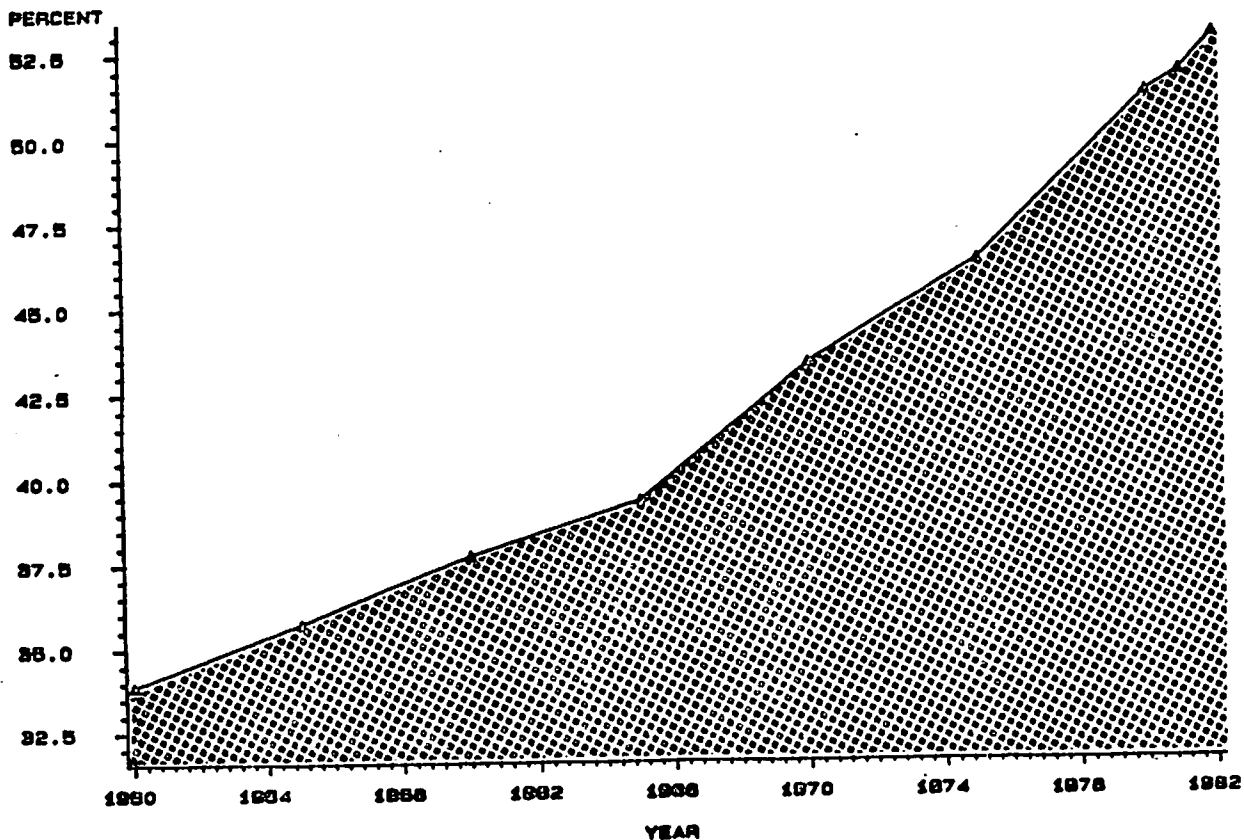
As of March 1979, nearly half of the Black work force were women, but only 39% of Latino workers were women.

The unemployment picture is as significant as the employment picture. In 1958, the unemployment rates of men and women were about the same, 5.7% (women) to 5.1% (men). The January to June average for 1980 was 6.8% (women) to 5.1% (men). Says the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

About 2.9 million women were unemployed in 1979, an increase of around a million since 1970. The unemployment rate for women, which had climbed from 5.9 percent in 1970 to a record high 9.3 percent at mid-decade, had dropped to 6.8 percent in 1979. As in past decades, unemployment rates generally remained



Graph 1-A NUMBER OF WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE 1950-1982



Graph 1-B LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF WOMEN 1950-1982

higher for women than men, with the gap widening when business was buoyant and declining during sluggish periods, such as the first half of 1980.<sup>3</sup>

In 1982-1983 unemployment figures for men were higher than for women.

National minority status, however, was a much bigger factor in determining unemployment status than was sex. For example, unemployment is much higher for Black men than for white women.

## 2. Women are Still Working for Less

For every dollar a man earns, a woman earns 59¢. In fact, '59¢' has become a catchword among women symbolizing unequal pay in the workplace. All across the board corporations save money by hiring women.

Comparison of Usual Weekly Earnings		
1979		
	Women	Men
Service worker	139	208
Operative (except transport)	159	253
Clerk	183	287
Salesperson	159	311

In 1960 women earned 60.8% of what men earned on an annual basis, in 1978 only 59.4%.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the pay discrepancy has not been substantially lessened by the affirmative action struggles of the 1960's and 1970's. There were important legal battles won - women's right to equal pay for equal work was established, in principle at least, and a number of industries were forced to reclassify jobs. But equal pay for equal work, even where it was implemented, could not ease the burden of most women's low pay and poor working conditions, because most women are not doing the same work as men.

## 3. Women Work A Double Day

Of all the factors which distinguish the quality of a working woman's life from a working man's, the most burdensome, the most costly to her health and well-being is not, perhaps, the lower pay or the segregated dead-end job, but the double day. For the great majority of working women,

the responsibilities of housework, meal preparation, shopping, childcare, and emotional nurturing have not been lightened. Rather, they have been squeezed - squeezed into the hours between waged work and sleep, with all too predictable consequences for the physical and mental health of women, and for the quality of family life in general.

Childcare poses a great difficulty for working women. Virtually no employers provide childcare for their workers; they do not pay women extra for childcare costs (and they do not allow women time off for sick children) or for children's educational and emotional needs. Yet the number of children under six with mothers in the work force has grown from 5.6 million in 1970 to 7.2 million in 1979. The number of children from six to seventeen with mothers in the work force has grown from 20 million to 22.9 million. What makes the situation even more serious is that in 1979 1.3 million of these children under six, and 4.8 million of the children from six to seventeen were in families headed by women (that is, families where the mother was divorced, widowed, never married, or was married with the husband absent). (See Section III on "The Family".)

On the whole, Black and Latina women who were maintaining families without a spouse were less likely to be in the workforce than white families. In 1979 70.7% of white women with children under 18 were working compared with 56.5% of Black women and 44.1% of Latina women. As a result, many more Black and Latina women were living below the poverty level - in 1978 about 60% of Black and Latino families maintained by women with children were living below the poverty level compared to 34% of white families.

#### 4. Job Segregation by Sex - "Women's Work"

Most women work in "women's" jobs for "women's" pay. Despite much-reported breakthroughs by women into the skilled trades and "male-only" professions, most women still work alongside other women in a highly stratified and sex-segregated job market. While the popular press in the last decade or so has run feature stories on women doctors, truck drivers, and machinists, the facts are that as of 1980 35% of working women were reporting to work in offices, another 28% in service jobs, and only 14% held blue collar jobs. See Graph 1-C.

Non-professional, non-managerial clerical work is the largest pink collar "ghetto". Not only do over a third of all working women have office jobs, but the work is increasingly sex segregated. Of all U.S. clerks, 80.3% are women compared to 67.5% in 1960.

Percentage of Workers Which are Women

	1980
Clerks	80.3
Bank tellers	92.9
Secretary-typists	98.6
Sales Representatives	
Retail	70.7
Wholesale	12.4

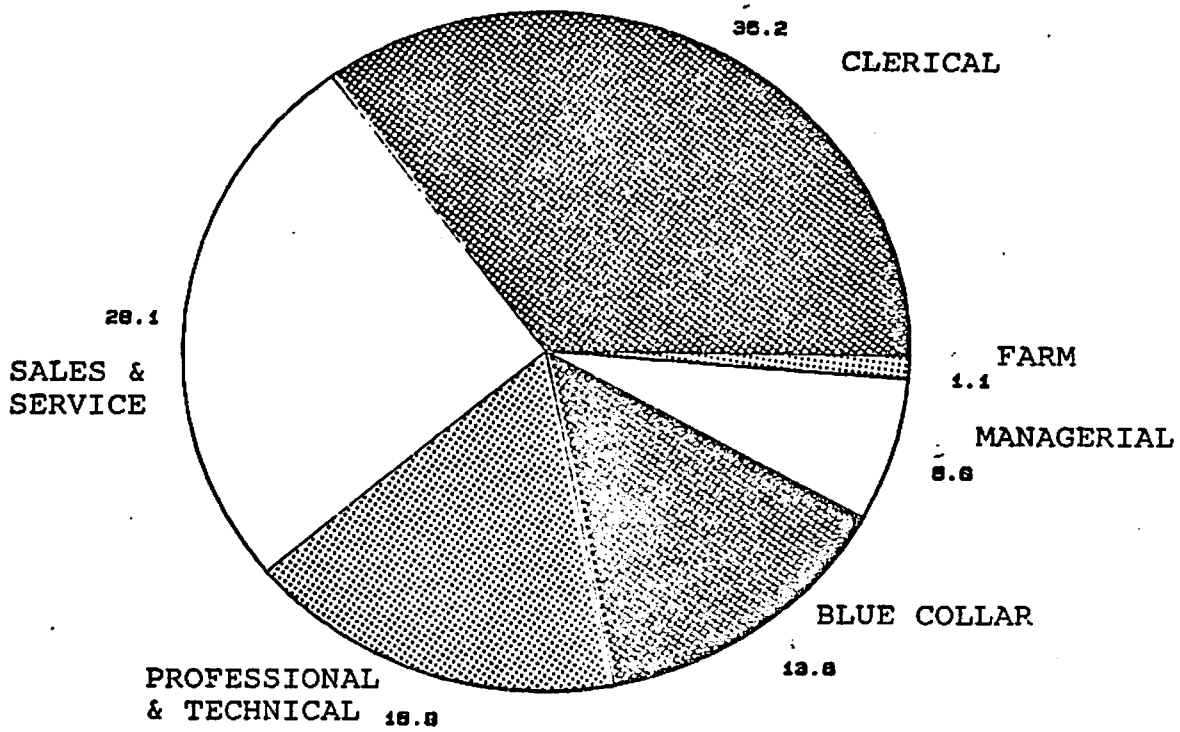
Service jobs can be divided into food, health, personal, protective, and private household services. In 1960 women were 70.0% of food service workers and in 1979 68.4%, which might suggest a more equal job distribution between the sexes. But actual on-the-job segregation is probably much more widespread than the figures suggest. For example, most restaurants hire either male or female waiters, but not both (and the fancier, better-paying restaurants usually hire men).

Health service workers are more predominantly women than thirty years ago - in 1950 they were 74.6% women and in 1979 90.4% women. The trend is similar in personal services (hairdressers, barbers, attendants, childcare workers, etc.), although not as extreme - 49.7% women in 1950 and 77.3% women in 1979.

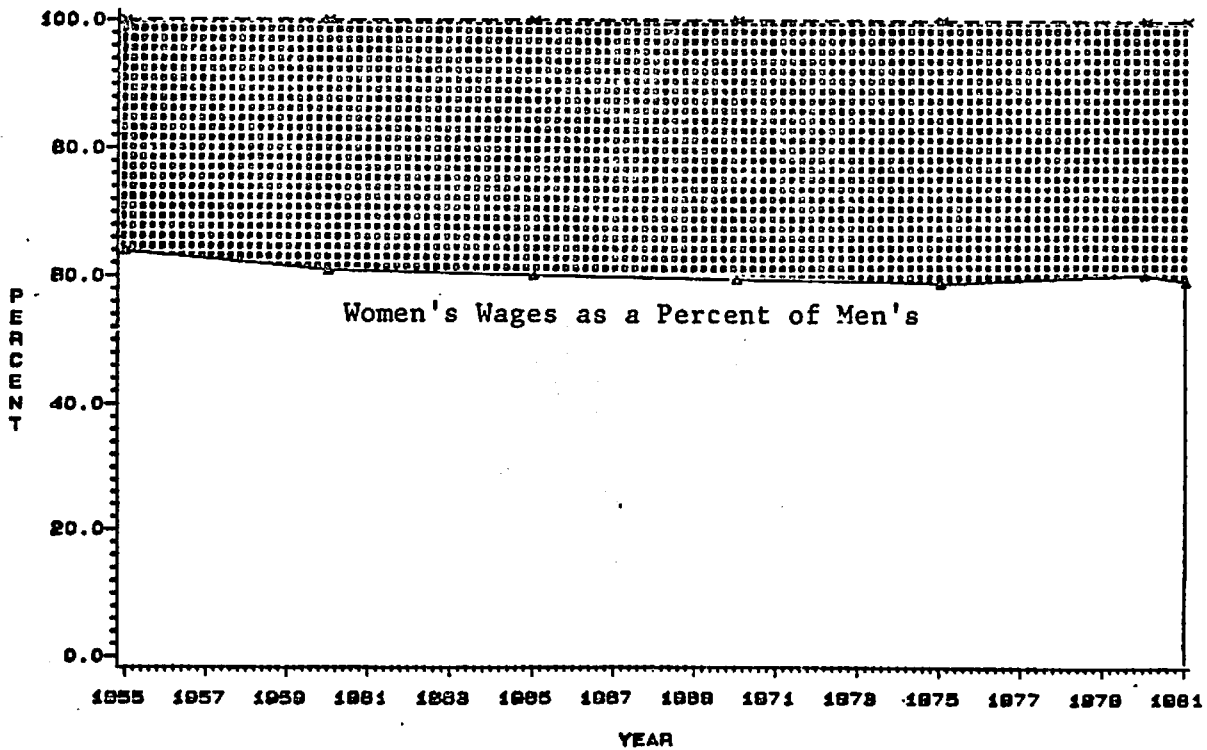
At first glance blue collar work is the least segregated of all the areas in which women work. But the more the figures are broken down, the more segregation is revealed. Craft workers are the best paid and most skilled section of blue collar work. Women have risen to a mere 5.7% of craftworkers as of 1979; from 2.9% in 1960. Operatives represent most semi-skilled and unskilled blue collar work and here women are a substantial 39.9% of the work force. The largest category is assemblers where 53.4% are women. But it is important to then look at the industries where women are employed - they are heavily concentrated in food processing plants, electronics, and the textile and garment industries. A relatively small number work in mining, steel, auto, aerospace and oil. Even within major industrial plants, women, along with minority men, will be found in the lowest paid, most dead-end jobs, which are unofficially reserved for them.

Louise Kapp Howe remarks in Pink Collar Workers:

In 1900 the most common occupation for an American woman was unpaid labor in the home. As is still true today.



Graph 1-C WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES 1980



Graph 1-D "THE WAGE GAP REMAINS" 1955-1981



In 1900, while a fraction of women was filling all those untraditional jobs, most women in the paid labor force were in occupations disproportionately filled by women. Still true today.

In 1900 there was one occupation that accounted for nearly a third of the female labor force. Domestic service. Today there is one occupation that accounts for over a third.

In 1900 most members of the female labor force could be found in agricultural, manufacturing, or domestic service jobs. Today nearly two-thirds can be found in clerical, service or sales jobs.

In fact, a number of different scholars have now determined that the rate of occupational segregation by sex is exactly as great today as it was at the turn of the century, if not a little greater. Only the jobs, not the proportions, seem to have really changed very much.<sup>6</sup>

## A Look At Women's Jobs

### 1. Clerical Occupations

The most drastic changes in the work women do have occurred in clerical jobs. The degradation of job skills, the automation and routinization of the work, and the specialization of clerical functions have completely changed the face of this work in large offices. According to "Race Against Time", a fact sheet put out by Working Women, by 1990 there will be 4.8 million new jobs for clerical workers, making clerical work the fastest growing occupation in the 1980's. However, of the estimated 3.5 million offices in the U.S., about 1.5 million are considered large enough for some form of office automation. And the occupations which are targeted for automation - file clerks, bookkeepers, secretaries, typists, bank tellers - are all at least 90% women.

Every aspect of an office employee's work is affected. Fifteen years ago, an entry-level typist in a large company might have been typing part of the day (usually complete jobs from first draft to final), filing, answering the telephone, and performing other miscellaneous tasks. She would have to acquire considerable information about the operation of the entire office to handle calls and to fill in for other workers. Today, an entry-level clerk might be put in front of a computer terminal with a video display screen amid ten to fifty other clerks doing the same thing. She might be told to type in data for most or all of the day. The data might be words or merely lists of numbers. She

will not be told what they refer to, and errors found later will be corrected by someone else. The terminal she types on keeps track of how much she types, how long her breaks are, and what her productivity is. If she does not meet production standards, she can easily be replaced - her training is maybe thirty minutes of instruction from another worker or the immediate supervisor.

Although clerical work is changing rapidly, it is by no means completely automated. The range of socialization and automation extends from a private secretary working one-to-one with her boss to rooms full of clerks entering data into a computer. The trend is toward automation - however, there will remain significant numbers of private secretaries and small offices employing a few all-around clerical workers.

Working conditions in offices are better historically in many respects than in factories and mines. However, many conditions have worsened with changes in job organization and other conditions have been better understood as old problems. The work is often repetitive, dull, unvarying and highly supervised and is done under time pressures and production quotas. It adversely affects women's health (symptoms associated with sitting, eye strain, back strain, reactions to chemicals and inadequate ventilation). This is what has become known as the clerical assembly line.

Upward mobility is slight. Many jobs offer few opportunities to learn any but the narrowest skills. It is quite possible to know nothing about the work two desks away. In large companies the worker may have the opportunity to become a clerical supervisor (a job mostly filled by women) which has low status and pay, but is in management. Middle and upper management still consists primarily of white males.

For permanent clerical workers there is considerably more job security than in manufacturing or some kinds of service work. Layoffs are relatively rare in this sector, partly because it is an expanding sector, partly because high turnover makes it possible to cut employment through attrition, and partly because of the use of temporary workers, usually hired through agencies. Temporary workers have no job security, no opportunities for promotion, low pay and minimal benefits. They provide the flexibility in the clerical work force which allows companies to hire and fire on short notice for maximum profitability without the economic and political consequences of hiring and firing permanent workers.

Historically, considerable illusions among workers have accompanied clerical and some kinds of service work. The work was traditionally structured to allow close identification with management, even long after clerical work ceased

to be a training ground or apprenticeship for management. Loyalty to particular bosses was encouraged and bosses, in turn, protected favored employees. The work was clean and required certain "mental" skills, e.g., being organized, knowledge of grammar and spelling. This has changed - many aspects of the work are manual now such as keying data into a computer, typing from tapes exactly "as is", operating copying machines, and printing out reports via computer terminals.

These changes have affected the class consciousness of clerical workers in two ways. On one hand, it is very difficult to maintain the illusion of being a valued, skilled employee in the face of these new conditions. In addition to changes in the kind of work, clerks in large companies are now subject to layers of impersonal supervision, standardized rules and production procedures. General knowledge of the firm's operation and decision-making are now reserved for managers. The technical expertise in computers which business now requires has been assigned to a new category of technical "professionals" or specialists like computer programmers and computer data base administrators.

On the other hand, the labor pool from which these businesses draw has also changed from thirty years ago. Clerical work in the past was considered by many women to be preferable to factory work because it was less physically demanding, clean, required some education, and enjoyed a certain association with the boss. It was common for women with some education, especially white women, who faced overwhelming discrimination in the "male" professions, to turn to office work. At the same time there has been almost universal discrimination against minority women, particularly Black women, in private secretarial jobs or jobs where one interacts with the public. Both these phenomena still exist. But with the general degradation of job skills and the capitalists' need for large numbers of women to do routine work cheaply, we have seen a dramatic increase in minority and working class white women doing clerical work since the 1960's and 70's. This was also the period of the most successful struggles for affirmative action in hiring.

In the nine years between 1970 and 1979, the percentage of all Black women workers who were clerical workers rose from 18.9% to 28.8%, the percentage of Latina women from 28.5% to 31.7%. This is still considerably lower than for white women, which has remained stable at 36.1% and 36.3%, but we can see a most dramatic shift upwards. Data from Pink Collar by Howe indicates that minority women under thirty-five years old are much more likely to be office workers than those over thirty-five who are still found heavily concentrated in service work, especially private household. There are now more national minority women under the age of thirty-five in clerical work than in any other

single occupation.<sup>7</sup> From another angle, the ratio of minority women to white women in office work has risen from 1 to 24 in 1960 to 1 to 9 in 1980.

## 2. Service Occupations

Service work includes a wide variety of work, public and private, union and non-union, productive (directly creating profit for the owner of the enterprise) and non-productive. How does the nature of service work compare with clerical and light industrial occupations?\*

Service work under monopoly capitalism is often more similar to jobs in a large plant than is commonly realized. Harry Braverman, in Labor and Monopoly Capital, points out that many services act upon and change a product in the same sense factory workers do.

Does the fact that porters, charwomen, janitors, or dishwashers perform their cleaning operations not on new goods that are being readied at the factory and construction sites for their first use, but on constantly reused buildings and utensils render their labor different in principle, and any less tangible in form, from that of manufacturing workers who do the factories' final cleaning, polishing, packaging, and so forth?<sup>8</sup>

He also points out that part of the shift from manufacturing to service work stems from changes in census practices earlier in the century - deciding to call some work service which was formerly called manufacturing.

A significant difference between most service work and factory work, however, is that the former is done directly for, and often in the presence of, a consumer. Whereas a worker at Del Monte or Lockheed will never know personally the users of that plant's commodities, a waitress or hospital aide has direct contact with the consumer, as do sales clerks and bank tellers, for example. If the worker is in the public sector and the consumer is a taxpayer, this

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\*Here service work refers to service occupations (e.g. waitresses, teacher's aides, hairdressers, nurse's aides), not necessarily to employment in service industries such as the health, restaurant or banking industries. These industries employ clerical workers, craftspeople and others who do not have service occupations (as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics) but who may be counted as part of the "service" or non-goods-producing sector of the national economy.

also significantly affects their interaction. There is pressure to please the customer or client or patient, particularly in a private, competitive enterprise, and the supervisor has an ally in evaluating the employee's work and pressuring the worker to produce. Along with this, the personal appearance and demeanor of the worker assumes an importance that other kinds of workers do not have to worry about. In jobs where there is the closest contact with the consumer - food service, patient care, teaching young children, and so on - there has been a marked preference for women, tying in neatly with society's ideological oppression of women, which encourages women to be submissive and eager to please.

The pressure to please may be generated, for instance, in jobs that depend heavily on tips to supplement the low hourly pay. Or it may be generated by an elaborate professional code of commitment to service, as in hospitals, education or welfare work. These professional codes are more and more coming into direct conflict with the realities of tedious, routinized work, speed-up and layoffs, conditions which have become more and more apparent in large hotels, the kitchens and laundries of large institutions, fast-food restaurants and hospitals. Many service jobs are located in the public sector. Cutbacks in public funds and the effects of the recent recession have added substantially to lay-offs and speed-up of paraprofessionals and other workers in health care, schools and social services.

At one end of the spectrum, service work is performed by some of the lowest paid, most highly exploited workers in the work force (including large concentrations of women and minorities) and at the other end by a number of semi-professional occupations which require some schooling - dental assistants, licensed practical nurses and hairdressers, for example. Most jobs are still at the lower end. Of women with less than four years of high school, 31.4% were service workers in 1979 as opposed to 17.2% who were clerical workers and 24.3% who were operatives. The median annual 1978 earnings of year-round full-time workers were \$6832 for women in service compared to \$7995 for women operatives and \$9158 for women in clerical work. (For men the earnings were \$11,057, \$13,470 and \$15,289, respectively.) Many Black and Latina women have service jobs, although the percentage is dropping for younger minority women. In 1979 18.8% of white women had service jobs, 34.8% of Black women, and 21.8% of Latina women.

Although many service workers have split loyalties between the consumers they service and their fellow employees, there is also tremendous potential, as some community/union struggles have shown, to unite the demands of consumers and workers for more effective action.

### 3. Light Industry

There can be no doubt that industrial work for women remains some of the most oppressive and hazardous work offered by U.S. capitalists to women. Although the percentage of working women employed in industry as operatives (unskilled and semi-skilled production labor) has dropped from 19.6% in 1950 to 11.5% in 1979, while clerical, sales and service gained larger percentages of women workers in the same period, the absolute number of women in industry grew substantially from 2,995,000 in 1950 (33.5% of all operatives) to 4.4 million in 1979 (39.9% of all operatives). The biggest increase was assemblers - from 267,000 in 1960 to 688,000 in 1979.

Like service workers, women in manufacturing work at a variety of jobs under a wide variety of conditions. On the West Coast of the U.S. two of the biggest industries employing women are food processing and electronics. A first-hand report on one food processing plant illustrates conditions typical of such labor-intensive light industries:

In the 1970's, this particular plant was a medium-sized food processing plant which had been purchased recently by a multi-national corporation. About 80% of the 300 workers were women; many were minorities, including Southeast Asian immigrants. Conditions of work included:

- 12-14 hour work days for weeks at a time, followed by layoffs.
- More layoffs of women workers, most of whom were hired into lower-paying jobs, than male workers, who were concentrated in a higher pay level, since the former jobs were more affected by the "boom and bust" cycle.
- Most men earned about \$2.00 per hour more than the women workers.
- Permanent status took one year to make; until then, workers were on call, and could be called in at any time of day or night, any day of the week. This led to a high rate of turnover.
- There was limited upward mobility for women.
- Men could be hired off the street into higher-paying jobs while women had to bid with no guarantee of getting them.
- Outside the workplace, finding childcare was especially difficult due to irregular hours at work.
- Relations with families were aggravated by the erratic hours.

And believe it or not this was a unionized workplace! This plant was a sad example of the kind of nominal organization that exists in much of light industry. Although these workers are considered part of the organized sector of the work force, their relationship to "their" union is considerably different from, say, auto workers to their union.

- The workers were represented by a Teamsters local, one of the largest locals in the U.S., with up to 60-70,000 members at peak season.
- Business agents are appointed, often given huge areas to represent (e.g. 10,000 workers), so that even if they wanted to, they could hardly do an adequate job representing workers.
- In the mid-1970's the frozen food plant had three stewards, two of whom were supervisors.
- There were often no union meetings during the peak processing months, July through November.

There were some attempts at rank and file organizing. The Revolutionary Union was active in the late 1960's in the plant, especially among younger male workers. In fact, a number of attempts at rank and file organizing over the years concentrated on younger males, resulting in some antagonism developing between male and female workers, with the younger, more militant men resentful of older women not taking up their spontaneous struggles, and the women seeing them as rash.

A number of significant developments took place at the end of the 1970's. A bakery was automated and about one-third of the workers were permanently laid off. A consulting firm redesigned jobs, further reducing the work force. In 1977, the first strike in the plant's thirty-year history took place. In 1979, when the contract expired, the company laid off a large number of workers, including members of the rank and file chosen bargaining team. The struggle continues today.

Food processing plants, while facing automation, are necessarily tied to the United States because of the nature of their product. Electronics and other industries, however, are coming more and more to represent the growing international division of labor. A look at the "Silicon Valley" reveals what is happening to thousands of women workers in California.

Santa Clara Valley, with its cheap labor and vast landholdings in the hands of banks following the ruination of many farmers in the 1930's, was a "natural" for the growth of the communication industry. Spurred on by the military aerospace industry, which was centered in Los Angeles and

Seattle after World War II, 150,000 people worked in the Valley by 1982, with 40,000 employed in the fifteen largest semiconductor firms.

But relatively high employment is only part of the story. To hold down wages of production workers, the industry has sponsored union-busting seminars and resorted to increasing use of speed-ups and lay-offs of lower-paid workers. Although 27% of the U.S. work force is unionized, there are few unions in Silicon Valley electronics plants. High profits and guaranteed military contracts, plus heavy competition, have induced companies to give relatively good benefits (even though wages are low) in an attempt to build loyalty and keep down pro-union sentiment. Most of the production workers are women and without any organization, these workers face an insecure future. Furthermore, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has the electronics industry on their list of "high health-risk industries using the greatest number of toxic substances". Workers are faced with numerous health hazards - including headaches, nausea, fatigue, weakness; kidney, liver and heart damage; silica/lung disease, skin and eye reactions, exposure to numerous carcinogens, eye and back strain, and tension without union protection and with little support from OSHA.

The ascent of the electronics industry in Silicon Valley has meant not only an increase in pollution, but also the skyrocketing of housing prices, and more recently, unemployment. Many companies have not yet gotten back up to pre-1974 employment levels. And though the electronics industry will undoubtedly survive over the long term because of its close ties with military and weapons manufacturing, the immediate outlook for production workers is increasingly layoffs, speed-ups, runaway shops. Already more firms are moving assembly plants to Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Washington and Oregon (all but the last two are "right-to-work" states). In fact, the electronics semiconductor industry has become a vanguard of the globalization of capital. Research is done primarily in the U.S., along with the initial production of chips, etc., and the more labor-intensive, less-skilled assembly tasks are done in the "Third World". The product is then returned to the U.S. for final assembly. What we're seeing now is a "new international division of labor", with control over the overall production process and technology remaining in the advanced capitalist country's company headquarters and low-skilled jobs sent to the "Third World". The internationalization of production makes international cooperation among workers essential.

Conservative estimates put the number of women in the underdeveloped countries employed as industrial workers at two million and market analysts Frost and Sullivan predict that even though automated assembly will bring 39% of



production back to the U.S. by 1989, plants building these automated assemblers are likely to remain "offshore".

Eighty to ninety percent of these low-skilled jobs now go to women, unlike the earlier pattern where mostly men were hired. Why the change? Women are paid less than men. Most of the women are very young (16-24 years old) and in great need of money. (Older women are often tied to home by the family.) Young women are believed by corporations to be more docile, and in fact there are strong religious and cultural pressures on the women not to struggle for better conditions. Most have little experience in organizations. These factors help ensure that the women work long, hard shifts for little pay until they are worn out - then they are replaced.

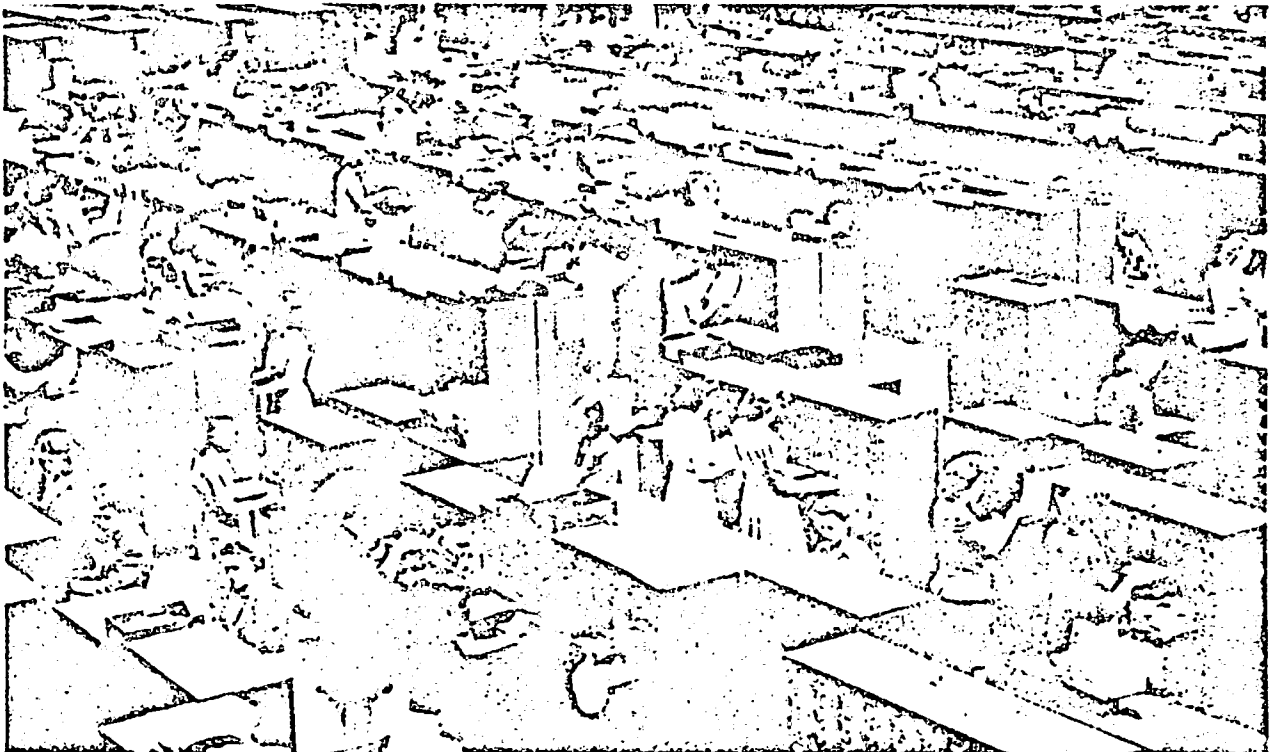
The majority of these women live at or near subsistence level, in crowded quarters often shared by several shifts. At work, conditions are likely to be not only tedious, but dangerous, given the general lack of health regulations (one of the big "pluses" for the multinationals). The alleged "mass hysteria" in the electronics industry, attributed to the "volatile" nature of women, is in fact based on reactions to toxic substances - and is sometimes used by the women to protest oppressive working conditions.

Eye problems are common in electronics from looking through microscopes for hours at a time. Stress is also a common complaint in all of these "women's industries", stemming from both direct health hazards and from the lack of sufficient breaks and bathroom "privileges" and from rotating shifts. Management encourages high turnover to avoid paying higher wages to "older" workers (23 or 24 years old is considered old). It's estimated that six million women have already been cast off by their multinational employers.

Attempts to organize are likely to be met with heavy repression by the "host" government, aided by the multinationals. The relationship between many Third World governments and the companies is similar to that between pimp and customer. The governments advertise and sell their women, and keep them in line. Others joining this international traffic include: the U.N. Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), which promotes "free trade zones" (free from taxes and regulation); the World Bank, which has loaned billions to finance the infrastructure in underdeveloped countries; and the U.S. government, notorious for financing repressive industry, anti-communist unions, and brutal regimes. Nevertheless, these women workers are organizing. For example, in South Korea in 1979, a young woman died at the hands of the riot police during a peaceful vigil and fast protesting a plant shutdown. This led to widespread rioting that contributed to the overthrow of President Park Chung Hee.

NOTES

1. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Perspectives on Working Women: A Databook, October 1980. All other statistics in this section are from this source unless otherwise noted.
2. Same as above, p. 61
3. Same as above, p. 1
4. Same as above, p. 21
5. Howe, Louise Kapp. Pink Collar Workers, Avon, 1977, p. 6
6. Howe, "Chart K", no page number
7. Braverman, Harry. Labor and Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press, 1974, p. 361



Over 5 million women joined the labor force from 1940-49, many in the expanding offices of the banks, corporations, and U.S. government.

## SECTION II

### HOW DID WOMEN'S JOBS ARISE?

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN THE STRUCTURE OF MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

We have seen that the majority of women are employed in the clerical and service sections, with a significant percentage (roughly 12%) in industry, mostly light industry. These changes contrast dramatically with a hundred years ago, when a woman entering the labor market would most likely work in manufacturing or domestic service. These changes are due not to the preferences of women workers for certain types of work. Rather, they reflect important developments in the structure of the economy, in the structure of monopoly capitalism in the U.S. (as well as throughout the other industrialized countries). This section examines these changes in some depth.

#### Expansion in Capitalist Investment and Distribution

A great deal of literature on the Left focuses on speed-ups in the workplace, because as the production phase of the cycle\*, this is where the worker daily feels the intensifying exploitation of capitalism. But in this century remarkable related developments have also occurred in the other two phases of the cycle, capitalist investment and distribution. As competitive capitalism grew over into

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\*As Marx and Engels showed in a lifetime of work, capitalism is driven to expand. The cycle of capitalist investment, production, and distribution (the last being the sales end of the business, or realization of profit) is the lifeblood of capital as it sucks dry previous economic systems and expands. Yet this cycle, which allows capital to grow, is at the same time its own limitation. If a bottleneck develops in distribution and goods pile up, the system gets out of whack. Recessions or a depression eventually result. As capitalism develops, each capitalist (whether owner of a small firm or conglomerate, or a state capitalist) must try to speed up its own cycle or turnover in order to compete and survive. Thus, "speed-up" takes place on the line, where workers experience it directly in production. Introduction of ever quicker and more sophisticated machinery represents another way in which capital tries to speed up the cycle. Similar developments occur within investment and distribution as more efficient and faster banking and sales systems are devised.

imperialism, new forms and structures developed which Marx, Engels, and Lenin did not live to see and analyze. Inevitably, these changes have affected the structure of the job market.

### **Growth of the Clerical Sector**

The change in the job market which has perhaps most affected women has been the vast expansion of jobs in the clerical sector. Such jobs used to be few and "privileged". Now, during the 20th century they have multiplied and become socialized, unskilled and semi-skilled. These jobs have multiplied in each area of the capitalist cycle, but mostly in finance (investment) and sales (distribution), and less so in production itself, relatively speaking.

The duplications and reduplication of records affects both investment and sales. Because of the adversary, cut-throat nature of capitalism, no enterprise trusts any books but its own. Every commercial transaction is recorded by all participants. Not only do business firms keep their own records of transactions with other businesses, but so do banks, insurance companies, government agencies, and other interested parties. Then there is the internal duplication by different departments or branches of the same firm or agency, as well as the "independent audit". Such multiple, and basically wasteful, record-keeping has an obvious effect on the need for clerks of all kinds. With the invention of typewriters, calculators and computers, more and more aspects of a business can be collected and analyzed - and the records pile up.

### **Growth of the Financial and Advertising Industries**

In the investment part of the cycle, the financial sector has tremendously expanded its structural role under monopoly capitalism during this century. Growing corporations required institutions to centralize and manage their capital; banks and other financial enterprises (insurance companies, brokerage firms, etc.) developed as an integral part of monopoly capitalism to make a profit from this need. Banks were particularly essential to the internationalization of capital and have become the "headquarters" of Western imperialism. Banks can finance development and expansion of industry on a scale well beyond the capabilities of most industrial companies. They provide short-term operating credit, employ reserves of money that capitalists are not immediately using, such as wage funds, pension funds, depreciation funds, and so on. They have affected the working class directly by making available consumer credit. The U.S. government and finance capital have a close relationship nationally through financing of the national debt, and internationally through agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

There have also been striking developments in the moving of goods (distribution). Credit, advertising, and sophisticated sales systems have been developed in order to acquire a larger and larger share of the market and to expand the market. This is an urgent need of capitalism, even in the advanced stage of monopolization.

The development of consumer credit has reached enormous proportions since its beginning just after World War I, as the capitalists have attempted to deal with the chronic problem of over-production and under-sales. Consumer credit represents a temporary transfer of a little money to the worker in return for the later transfer of a lot of capital to the capitalist. At the same time, it is a device to speed up distribution of goods. Naturally, loan companies multiply and bank departments expand to handle the enormous monies involved. This borrowing in the present against the future is an act of faith by the capitalist system in its own future. But it contains the seeds of its own destruction: when faith or belief is shattered, as in 1929, billions in capital are lost.

The development of advertising on a grand scale to move goods and services is another major development. It, too, is highly wasteful. The sales and clerical people involved in this activity produce no useful goods or services. However, through this mechanism capitalism has found another way to survive, and even to experience considerable growth. Massive advertising has in turn stimulated the growth and monopolization of the commercial media, including all the major TV networks. In terms of dollars, 50% of gross national income in the U.S. today goes to sales, distribution and administration.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the finance sector, many women work for financial institutions, which are non-unionized and pay very low wages. At the other "end" of the cycle, distribution of goods, we find a similar situation - very large numbers of women in sales and related jobs which do not pay well. As these are sectors which developed after the production sector, in terms of the numbers and strength of the workers, it is not surprising that wages are low, unions not well established, and the workers more subject to the unchecked strength of the ruling class. In the future, these same sectors are likely to be major battle areas between the mainly women workers and the U.S. owning class.

### **Production Jobs vs. Non-Production Jobs**

More and more of the goods necessary to maintain U.S. society are being produced in other countries. The U.S. as a whole has increasingly developed into an administrative and financial center of Western imperialism (as England was

at the turn of the century). The fact that production increasingly takes place outside of its borders in shops staffed by poorly paid, female labor is a major factor in the absolute growth of certain kinds of administrative and accounting functions in corporate headquarters in the U.S. It also results in the relative growth of non-production jobs within the U.S. - i.e., compared to production jobs.

### New Goods and Services

The increase in service and light industrial work can be attributed in part to the expansion of capitalism into areas new to commodification. Many goods and services which were once produced privately or mostly privately by the family have been taken over by large-scale capitalist production in this century, particularly the last 30 years. A wide variety of service work has been generated by capitalism's compulsion to make a profit from every possible human need. The result has been millions of women employed in:

- public and private hospitals, convalescent homes, sanitariums
- hotels, restaurants, bars, casinos, nightclubs
- sports, travel agencies, tourist industries
- beauty parlors, health clubs
- theaters, moviehouses, television, radio and other entertainment
- communications as telephone operators for AT&T, answering services, switchboards, etc.

The large-scale entry of women into the work force more recently has added to the demand for new products which were once provided at home. This demand in turn has caused the expansion (internationally) both of production and non-production work, particularly in non-durable goods (light) industries such as food-processing, food preparation and clothing.

### The Maturation of Manufacturing

Manufacturing in the U.S. has become capital-intensive in the last thirty years, particularly the manufacture of durable goods. The production process is increasingly mechanized and automated and the ratio of labor (variable capital) to machinery (constant capital) has dropped. Now large investments in equipment are necessary to begin operations of such industries as steel, auto, aerospace and oil. The scale of finances rises accordingly and a few firms have a strong grip on most industries.

The workers remaining (and far fewer are needed to produce much, much more) have become relatively highly organized with better wages and benefits than other sectors.

The weight of large productive\* investment in the U.S. has switched to light industry, to areas new to commodification - health, pharmaceuticals, financial services, recreation, etc. or to new technology industries. Investment in labor-intensive industries has increased also outside the U.S. in runaway shops, and in some regions of the U.S. where labor is cheaper.

These developments of U.S. imperialism have affected where women work. Workers in heavy industry are predominantly men, workers in labor-intensive, non-durable goods industries are predominantly women, many of them national minority women. (The male workers in these industries are also often from national minorities.) These industries pay low wages and minimal benefits - unions are either non-existent or very weak. The net result is that jobs have increased much more rapidly outside of mining and heavy industry than they have within it.

### **The Decline in Agricultural Employment**

Agricultural workers, too, make up a smaller portion of today's workforce. Productivity in agriculture rose tremendously in the U.S. between World War II and the 1970's, largely as a result of mechanization and improvements in horticulture, fertilizer and pesticides. Since agricultural labor was once a significant part of U.S. production work, its decline partly accounts for the rise in clerical and service occupations relative to goods producing occupations.

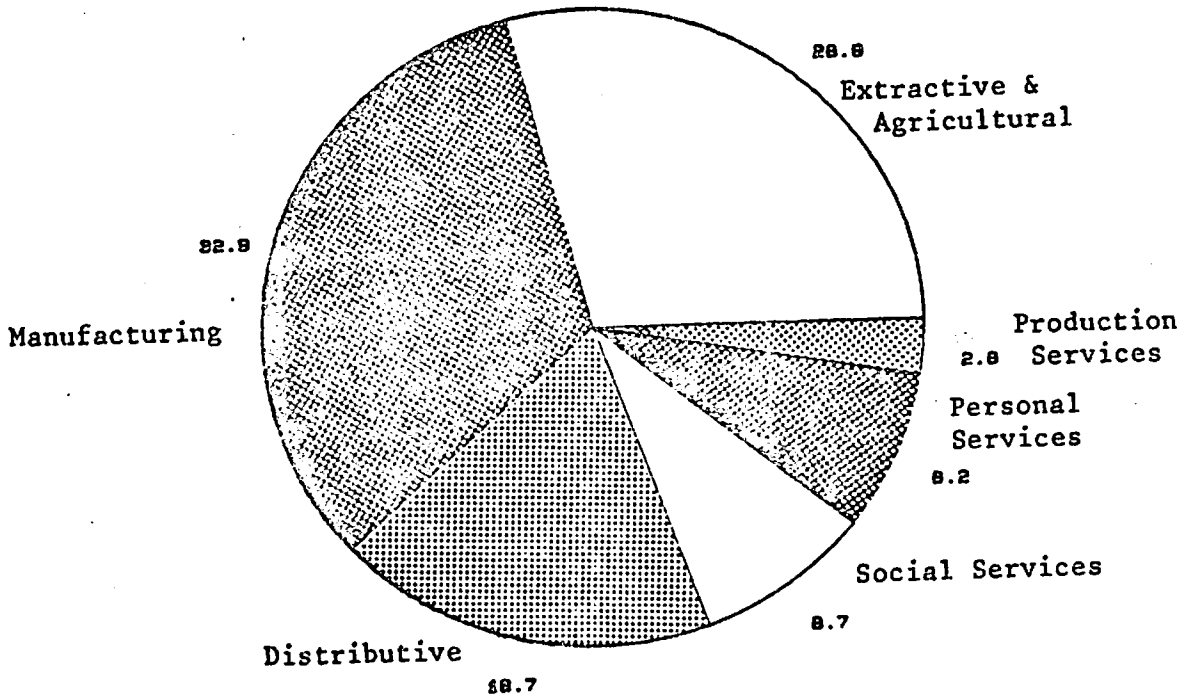
### **The Growth of the Public Sector**

The growth of jobs in the public sector is an equally major development in the U.S. economy, particularly since World War II. The growth of population (particularly in urban areas), the intensified conflict between capitalist competitors, and the need to regulate, control and maintain the working class as well as other functions - have stimulated the growth of government. An enlarged, more sophisticated infrastructure (highways, airports, etc.) was developed. Private transportation such as the auto industry, aerospace and shipping has been subsidized. The military, instead of cutting back after World War II to previous peacetime levels, remained large and well-equipped to conquer, defend and control U.S. international interests. The police, the jails and courts have also grown to control and repress at home. Schools and media have developed to educate/indoctrinate and control the work force, to prepare a small number of future managers and technicians, and to

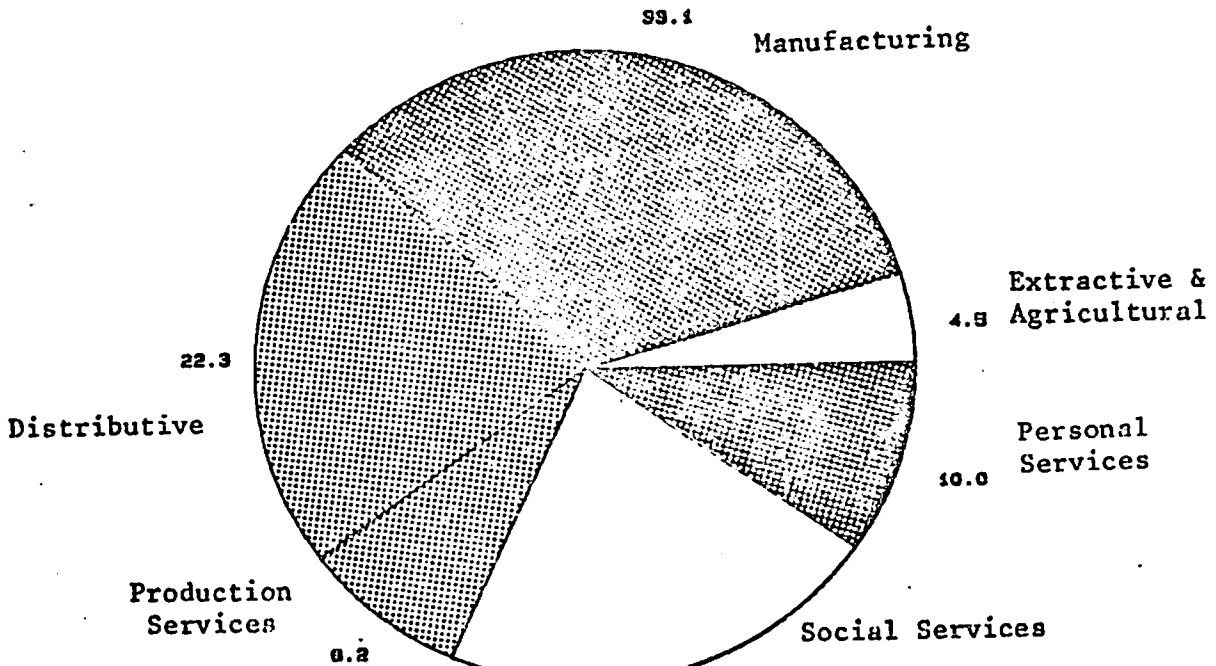
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\*U.S. corporations have increasingly shifted investment out of production altogether and concentrated on corporate takeovers and speculation on the money markets and real estate.

### WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRIAL SECTOR 1920 & 1970



Graph 2-A 1920



Graph 2-B 1970



enforce the class system. The regulation and mediation of potentially damaging conflicts via the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and similar agencies began in the 1930's under Roosevelt's administration when U.S. capitalism faced its most serious economic crisis. The administrative and accounting work of government has also expanded.

In spite of the talk about the "swollen Federal bureaucracy" federal employment has remained fairly stable in the last thirty years. Most of the increase has come in state and local government. The percentage of women workers has risen substantially in federal, state and local government in the 1970's, primarily in education at state and local levels.

## A New Perspective on "Women's" Work

### Socialized Labor

A principal reason the industrial proletariat has always been considered by Marxists to be the most revolutionary part of the working class is the large-scale, socialized nature of the work. Said V. I. Lenin:

The socialization of labor by capitalist production does not at all consist in people working under one roof (that is only a small part of the process), but in the concentration of capital being accompanied by the specialization of social labor, by a decrease in the number of capitalists in each given branch of industry - in many separate production processes being merged into one social production process.<sup>2</sup>

In manufacturing hundreds of workers may be required to turn out a product, working interdependently as a unit. Despite various tactics by management to split these workers politically, their shared position in relation to their bosses is impossible to conceal, constantly underscoring the absolute necessity for unity and organization.

Today many jobs in the investment and distribution part of the capitalist investment-production-distribution cycle have acquired that socialized character. For instance, in major insurance companies the work has been broken down into specialized units so that forms are processed along an assembly where each worker has her specialized part to play. The organization of fast food service in McDonalds and Burger King reflect the same trend, as does the organization of patient care in large hospitals. Inevitably, there's also been a rise in automation, computerization and displacement of workers, as in industry. Women in light indus-

trial work have always been involved in socialized labor, although many of the companies are smaller and employ fewer workers than in heavy industry.

### Productive and Unproductive Labor

In the 1970's, many Left groups justified their focus at the "point of production" by stressing the productive nature of that work and implying that other, "unproductive" work was not deserving as much attention.\* Since a number of us in O.R.U. shared that history, we asked ourselves whether this distinction remained valid today, and how that related to work among women.

In the 1800's, when Marx and Engels described the main features of the proletariat, the working class looked much different than it does today. The service, clerical and retail sales sectors were small and had different characteristics. (Harry Braverman has a helpful description of these changes in Part IV of Labor and Monopoly Capital.) The main distinctions within the working class between the urban factory workers and the rural proletariat or the artisans and craftspeople. The term proletariat was often used interchangeably with the term urban industrial working class, which was the most advanced, revolutionary sector of the working class. Unproductive work for the capitalists was minor and the state sector very small.

Even today, much service work (and some clerical) is considered productive in the same Marxist sense as the labor of the urban industrial proletariat. Services provided by

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\*Marx analyzed labor as to whether it was productive or non-productive for the capitalist. Briefly, productive labor is labor exchanged against capital, which in turn increases that capital. A productive worker, therefore, not only produces a product or service (collectively with other workers) with sufficient value to pay for her or his own subsistence, he or she then continues to labor and produces additional value which the capitalist keeps - surplus value. This is the essence of the capitalist mode of production - where the capitalists make their profits. Unproductive labor is exchanged against revenue; that is, it is paid for out of profits already made from productive labor, and it does not add to the employer's capital. It is mainly labor involved in investment and distribution of goods; i.e., the appropriation of capital and its realization. As unproductive labor within the capitalist mode of production, it has expanded tremendously since Marx's day, and become more critical to the continued existence of monopoly capitalism.

workers in private, profit-making companies produce surplus value as surely as does the production of autoworkers and coal miners. In addition, especially with the development of computer technology, some part of the manufacturing process in many plants is clerical in nature. These clerks add to the value of the final product and are productive workers.

However, many service workers are public employees working for the government or "non-profit" institutions substantially funded by the government. Most clerks are involved in the administrative, accounting and distributive aspects of both private and public enterprises, or they work in institutions which provide "producer" services like banks. This kind of unproductive labor has expanded dramatically as part and parcel of the capitalist mode of production - it enables the capitalists to realize the profits they have made from productive workers and for other capitalists to appropriate parts of the profits to themselves.

The distinctions between productive and unproductive workers are increasingly blurred. In the health industry, for instance, there are no clear distinctions between the working conditions of public and private hospital employees, or between health employees in general and many private industrial employees. Cutbacks in government spending produce deteriorating conditions for public employees as downturns in the economy produce them for production workers. They are all facing poor working conditions, speed-up, lay-offs, automation and occupational health problems. It is common for production workers to be in the same family with clerks or service workers.

The fact is that most workers in the unproductive sectors experience their jobs in much the same ways as productive workers do. They are largely faced with the same attacks from the capitalists but are, in general, less organized to defend themselves. As the nature of the work has changed, inevitably the consciousness of the workers has changed as well. The militant struggles in the public sector as well as some of the less successful struggles in the clerical sector point to a growing sense of solidarity among themselves and with other workers. There is simply no sound basis for revolutionaries failing to give full theoretical and practical attention to these mainly women workers on the basis of their being unproductive workers.

### **The Relationship of "Women's Work" to Class Struggle**

To put forward more specifics on the role of each sector of the working class and its relative importance in a strategy to overthrow capitalism would require a comprehensive class analysis, which we do not attempt here. It would require an analysis of many factors besides the role of

women - the national question and the role of national minority workers, the labor aristocracy and the "technocrats", the public sector. It could answer more definitively which sectors of the working class are strategically placed to contribute most to the defeat of U.S. capitalism, and which sectors are most in movement, most open to taking up the struggle - in other words, where the contradictions between labor and capital are sharpest.

Even without a fully developed analysis of classes in the U.S., several points are clear. Production work, particularly heavy industry, remains of strategic importance. The notion often held in liberal or social-democratic circles (including many sociologists) that we have become a "service" society, where production work is not significant because of automation, is incorrect. It is true that the ratio of production to non-production work has declined. This is partly due to increased productivity of production workers through mechanization as well as the tremendous growth of non-production jobs for reasons we have mentioned. but it is also partly due to U.S. imperialism and the removal of production to other countries, along with the super-exploitation of their workers. Whether it occurs within or without U.S. borders, that production work maintains U.S. society (including the capacity to employ millions of non-productive workers in both the public and private sectors), and the surplus value it creates is fundamental to capitalism and the wealth of the U.S. ruling class. Only by ignoring the U.S. as major imperialist power could we characterize it as a "service" society. Furthermore, in postulating a work force of middle-class "technocrats", this theory wilfully ignores that many of these new service workers face the same low wages and alienating working conditions that their earlier counterparts in manufacturing did.

Not only are other sectors dependent on heavy industry, but the early socialization of industrial labor has left its mark on the work force. There is a long tradition of struggle, solidarity and resistance to management among industrial workers, though the unions themselves are headed by bureaucratic leadership and the workers better paid than any other sector except craftworkers.

By contrast, unions are newer in clerical and service occupations, for the most part. The last ten to fifteen years have seen tremendous advances in the organization of public employees, encompassing many occupations, but office workers in the private sector are not unionized to any significant extent and have had minimal contact with unions. This in itself seriously affects their ability to act with unity or effectiveness on any issue.

But heavy industry is less important than it was fifty years ago relative to other sectors, because other sectors have increased in size and importance for reasons we have shown. Our strategic perspective on creating a better society cannot be as simplistic as it so often has been - see the programs of almost any of the U.S. revolutionary parties and pre-parties in the 1960's and 1970's. We cannot rely heavily on quotations from Marx and Engels observations of the work force in the 1800's or on Lenin's in the early 1900's to learn what our conditions are and what our program out to be. A program to defeat U.S. imperialism today must speak to the changes in our objective conditions. The newer sectors play an ever-increasing role in the economic life of the U.S. and are ever more necessary to the survival of monopoly capitalism. However, economic and political clout cannot be our only consideration, in any case. Wherever women are concentrated in low-paying, segregated jobs, wherever national minority workers are located in such jobs, there is tremendous value in organizing and struggling. There are many aspects to developing and leading revolutionary activity, and creating a multi-national party where women are involved at every level, in every area of work is one of our foremost goals.

In particular, some old myths must be debunked, myths that Marxists and labor activists have not been immune to - the myth that clerical, sales and service workers are not "real" workers, because their work is not productive in the sense of producing profit for the capitalist, that these workers are either middle class or paralyzed by middle class illusions, that they have soft jobs which are not hazardous to their health and well-being, that they are incapable of class consciousness and class solidarity. We consider these lines to be a distortion of the objective situation and usually based on a distortion of Marxism as well. At best, they are a one-sided perspective on real differences that exist between these sectors and the older manufacturing sectors. At worst, they reflect the pervasive sexism that still must be combatted in the progressive movements, for the work done in these newer service and clerical jobs, as well as much of light industry, is still considered less significant, less "organizable", less revolutionary because it is "women's" work.

-52-  
NOTES

1. Baran and Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, 1966 as quoted in Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, Monthly Review Press, 1974.
2. Lenin, V., Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 1, pp. 175-6 ("What the Friends of the People Are"), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972.



Some of the 3,000 women coal miners in the U.S. today.

## SECTION III

### WOMEN AND THE DECLINE OF THE "TRADITIONAL FAMILY"

#### Introduction

The development of U.S. monopoly capitalism has affected women not only in the workplace, as discussed in the previous section, but also through changes in the family.

For the first time in history, over half of all married women in the U.S. work. There are more single and divorced women, and women heads of household, than ever before.

As more women work, more face the "double day" of responsibilities at both work and home. Working women suffer very long hours, many of them unpaid. Their families suffer, too, from the strain.

Women and their families have become direct victims of what has been called the "feminization of poverty". Over half of all poor families in the U.S. are now headed by women, and the number is increasing.

Black and other minority families in particular have paid a very high price for the crisis of monopoly capitalism in the 1980's, and working minority women suffer the triple oppression of the "double day" plus the oppression they experience as minorities in the U.S.

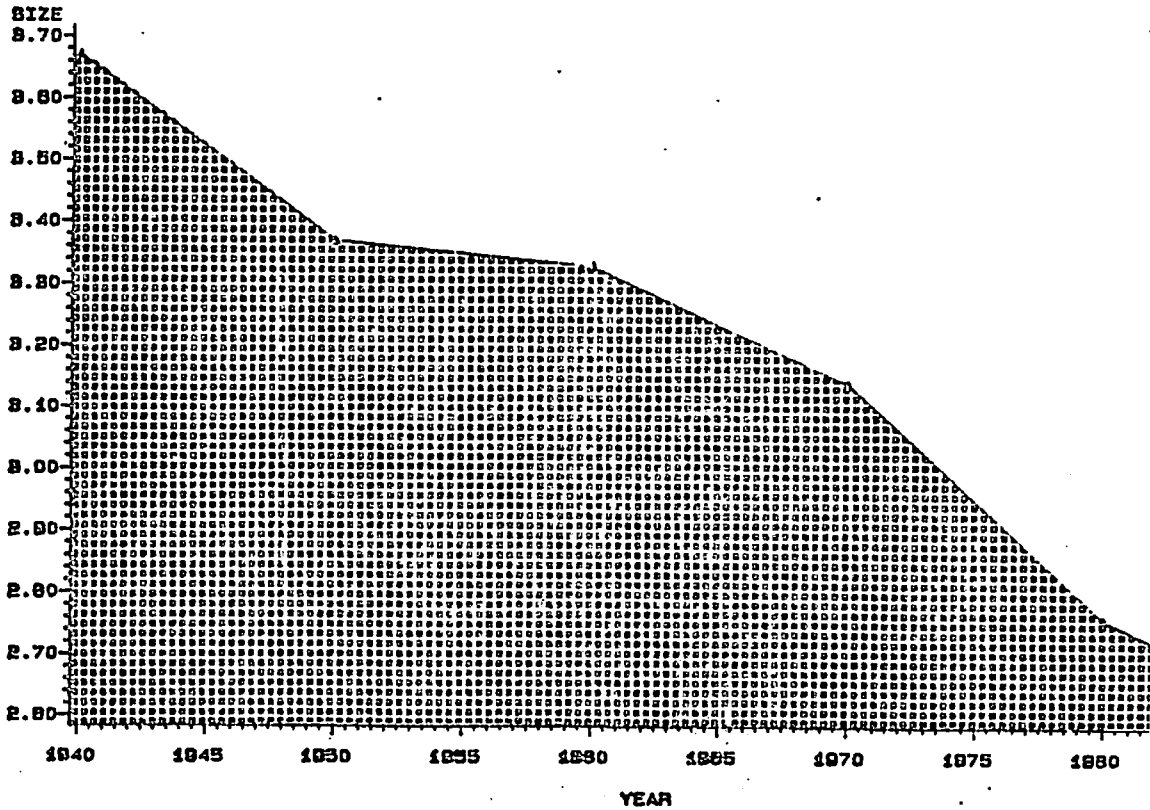
What is happening to the family? What impact is it having on women? How are changes in the family linked to the crisis of U.S. imperialism? What can be done? We will try to give some beginning answers to these questions. We begin with some possibly dry but useful statistics.

#### The Modern Household is Smaller and Changed

The stereotypical family - a married couple, husband who works, wife who is a "homemaker", kids under eighteen at home - has declined to being only one of nine of all U.S. households, only one of six husband-wife families.<sup>1</sup> Fewer households include children under eighteen.

	1960	1975	(projected) 1990
Married, no children	32%	33%	27%
Married, one child	15%	11%	12%
Married, 2+ children	28%	20%	16%
Female head of household	17%	25%	29%
Male head of household	8%	11%	16%

Types of Households, 1960-1990<sup>2</sup>



Graph 3-A AVERAGE U.S. HOUSEHOLD SIZE  
1940-1982



Note that the percent of households other than married couple households has increased steadily, from 25% in 1960, to 36% in 1975, to a projected 45% in 1990.

At the same time women are having a smaller total number of children, continuing a long-term trend briefly reversed during the post-World War II "baby boom" in the 1950's and 60's:

1920	117.9
1930	89.2
1940	72.9
1950	106.2
1960	118.0
1970	87.9
1979	66.4

Fertility Rate of Women Aged 15-44  
in the U.S. (births per 1,000 women)<sup>3</sup>

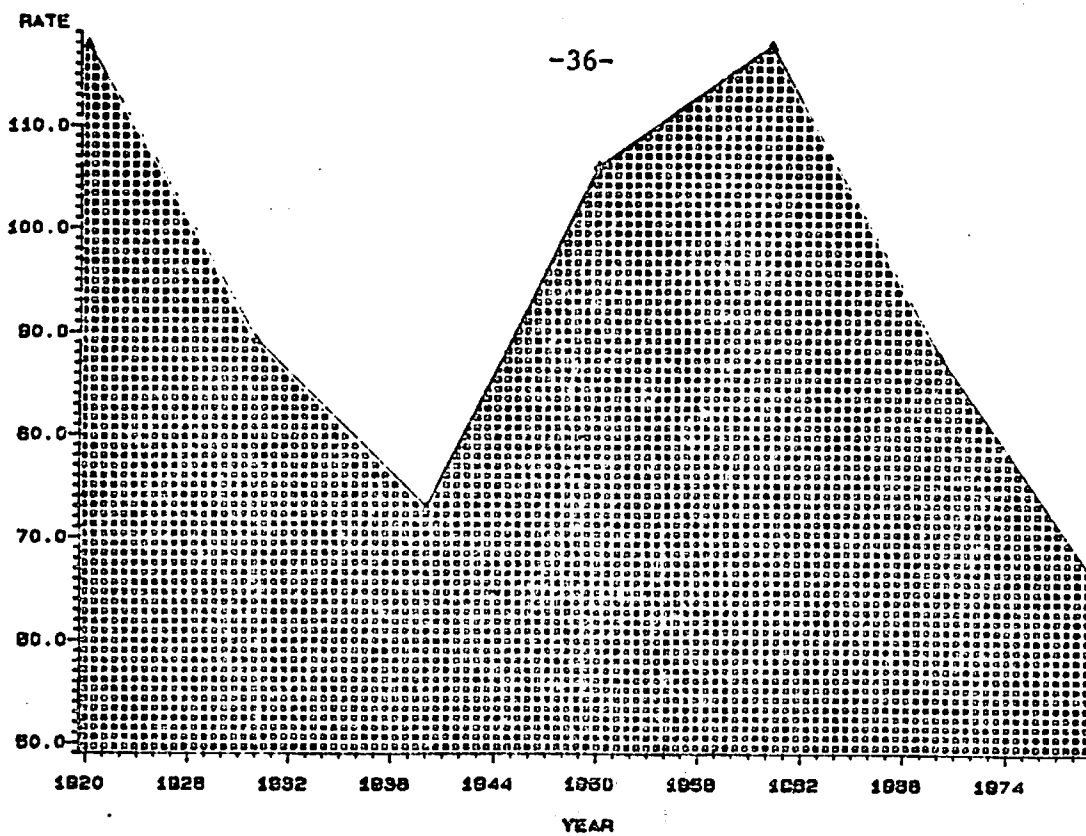
As a result of these and other factors, the average household size in the U.S. has dropped steadily. This also is a long-term trend:

1790	5.79 persons
1900	4.76
1940	3.67
1950	3.37
1960	3.33
1970	3.14
1980	2.76
1982	2.72

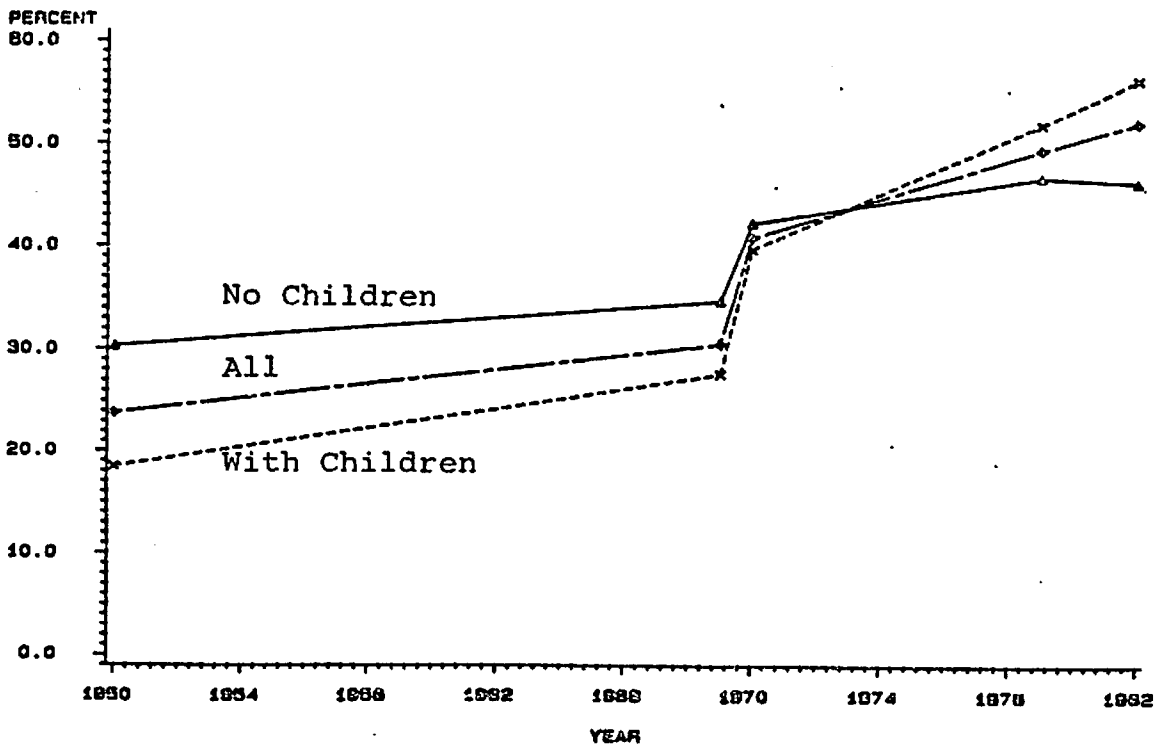
Average Household Size in the US<sup>4</sup>

### Mothers and Wives are Becoming Part of the Paid Work Force

Ten times as many mothers of children under 18 are working today in the U.S. compared with thirty years ago! (In that same period the total number of women working increased one and one-half times.)<sup>5</sup> During the same period (1950-1980), the participation of married women in the labor force also increased dramatically. Over half of all married women are working for wages for the first time in U.S. history:



Graph 3-B BIRTHS/1,000 WOMEN AGED 15-44 ("FERTILITY RATE")



Graph 3-C LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF MARRIED WOMEN, HUSBAND PRESENT

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1982</u>
Married Women w/ No children under 18	30.3%	34.7%	42.2%	46.7%	46.2%
Married Women w/ Children under 18	18.4%	27.6%	39.7%	51.9%	56.3%
All Married Women	23.8%	30.5%	40.8%	49.4%	52.1%

Labor Force Participation of Married Women  
with and without Children under 18 years.<sup>6</sup>

### The Divorce Rate is Rising

By the time they are 30 years old, 90% of the population has married at least once.<sup>7</sup> The percentage of women who are divorced at any one time has increased considerably over the last two decades:

1950	2.5%
1960	2.8%
1970	3.7%
1979	6.3%

Percentage of Adult Women Currently Divorced<sup>8</sup>

In 1979, 5.4 million women heads of household were divorced. They work as frequently as do men - 79%. Over half maintained families. In 1979 one-third of all families headed by women were headed by divorced women.

One-half of first marriages end in divorce. The divorce rate is highest among the working class and poor.<sup>9</sup> In 1976, of the 6 million women whose first marriage ended in divorce, 71% of these women had remarried by the fifth year following divorce.<sup>10</sup> Divorce leaves its scars: it ranks second in life stress factors, behind death of a spouse and ahead of death of a parent.<sup>11</sup>

Of the 65 million children under 18 in the U.S., two-thirds live with both biological parents. Of the remaining third, slightly over half live with their mothers only, slightly under half live with one biological parent and another adult, and only one of a hundred live with their fathers only.

More Families Are Maintained by Women. Almost one of six families in the U.S. is maintained by a woman. This has increased significantly since 1950:

1950	9.4%
1960	10.0%
1970	10.9%
1979	14.6%
1982	15.8%

Percentage of All Families Maintained by Women<sup>12</sup>

For Blacks in the U.S., the position of women heads of families is even more important - two of five Black families are maintained by women. In 1979 over half of all families below the U.S. government's official poverty index were headed by women. In 1969, ten years earlier, the same figures were one-third and one-half respectively. This is a major part of what has been called the "feminization of poverty." The number of poor families headed by women is increasing rapidly. The "feminization of poverty" is discussed further below.

**The Black Family.** The families of Blacks in the U.S., torn apart under hundreds of years of slavery, continue to receive brutal treatment under advanced capitalism. Muhammed Kenyatta poignantly describes this in a recent issue of Monthly Review:

But let us not think that this assault is only a memory from the distant, benighted past. Racism still takes its toll. The black infant mortality rate in the United States today is more than 75 percent higher than that of whites. Black youth unemployment is at least three times as high as that for white youth. . . In the 1970s one of every four black males born in the United States died before his eighteenth birthday, the highest black mortality rate since the Ku Klux Klan pogroms. . . in the 1870s and 1880s. In the Philadelphia metropolis, black male adult unemployment is conservatively estimated . . . at nearly 20 percent. The physical and social conditions of inner city ghettos, where the majority of black families live, range from indecent to obscene. . . All of this and other commonly recognized indices are quantifiable evidence of the continuing ravages of institutional racism.<sup>13</sup>

In the same article, Kenyatta explores the amazing resiliency and strength of the Black extended family - an intimate network of parents, relatives, and close friends. He gives as an example the "doubling up" of families in dwellings in response to the acute housing shortages and economic depression in Black communities. For Blacks, Kenyatta goes on to say,

Extended families serve as grapevines for information of economic as well as affectionate significance. . . also as a reserve of affection, affirmation, encouragement, empathy, love and sanity. It is "how we got over" and how we get over, one of various survival mechanisms to insure the continuity of black life.<sup>14</sup>

### The 'Feminization of Poverty' - The Working Class Under Attack

Changes in the family have a heavy social cost, particularly for women. When a male-female adult couple breaks up, the usual result is that the man becomes single and the woman becomes a single mother - a female "head of household".

The Bureau of Census reported in 1979 that the standard of living for women in the first year after divorce fell 73%; for men it rose 42%. In three years, between 1979 and 1981, the number of female heads of household below the poverty line rose from 32 to over 35 percent. The income gap between families headed by women and all families also has widened.

The forces pushing single mothers toward poverty substantiate our view that advanced capitalism in the U.S. is opposed to the fundamental interests of women:

- Upon divorcing, women who worked without pay or formal benefits in the home often are unable to obtain jobs that pay enough to keep their family out of poverty. The 58.5% of women who head families who are fortunate enough to find work, most frequently are forced into sex-segregated "women's work" at "women's wages".
- Only 25% of eligible divorced or separated mothers actually received child support. In 1975, the average payment for those who did was less than \$1,500 per year.
- Fathers who did pay child support contributed an average of only 10% of their income. While women's increasing participation in the workforce is held up by the Right as a major cause of the break-up of the family, it belies the fact that it is actually men who benefit economically from divorce!
- Government support for social services, many of which are used and depended on by single mothers, has declined sharply at both state and federal levels. For example, federal spending on programs for low-income people such as Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, and Headstart, dropped more than 25% from 1981 to 1983. The

structure of social support services under U.S. capitalism encourages the break-up of the family. To be eligible to receive AFDC, for example, a woman must be a single head of household.

- Many of the people living alone today are elderly widows. One third of the elderly live in poverty. This, too, is part of the "feminization of poverty". One of twenty elderly is home-bound due to illness. (Since 1940, the average life expectancy has risen ten years.)

Married working class women, too, bear an inordinate burden in the U.S. A recent study showed that among working couples, women spent an average of 29 hours a week on family care in addition to their waged work; men spent an average of 9 hours.<sup>18</sup>

Only in certain respects has the decline of the traditional family in the U.S. corresponded to increased freedom for working class women. It has led also to new burdens and to new forms of dependency. For under capitalism, women are denied the power and the resources necessary to be truly equal and self-determining. We return to this topic later.

#### Why Are These Changes Happening?

Today more a stereotype than a reality, the "traditional" family is a remnant of feudalism and early capitalism. For the propertied classes of these earlier societies, monogamy for women was important to clarify birth-rights for the inheritance of property. The religious doctrines of the church provided ideological support for these ends.

When the population of the U.S. lived primarily on the farm, large numbers of children were desirable for supplying the labor necessary for operating the farm. Among early urban working classes, children provided an important source of income for the family as child laborers in factories, mines and fields.

More recently, in the 20th century, the nuclear family was preserved and promoted as a "natural" unit of consumption by the rising monopoly capitalists like Ford and Rockefeller. A car in every garage, a TV set in every living room, a dishwasher in every kitchen - the more self-contained living units there were, the more products could be sold.

The relative prosperity of the U.S. in the 1950's and 60's was a direct result of the rapid expansion of U.S. imperialism throughout the world after the victory of the Allies in World War II. In return for tacit - and open - support for expansionism and intervention abroad, the capitalist class was able to buy two decades of stability and

"labor peace". Large portions of the working class received a "family wage" - enough for one wage earner to support an entire family. (Though many sections of the working class, especially those with predominantly minority workers, have never received a large enough wage to support a family adequately.)

In the 1980's, U.S. imperialism is in crisis, economically and politically, at home and abroad. Since the early 70's, through a combination of inflation, unemployment, outright wage cuts, the reduction of social services, and the raising of taxes, the U.S. capitalist class has significantly lowered the workers' standard of living. Today more than half of all families have more than one wage earner, and must, in order to survive. Through shifting the effects of its own crisis onto the shoulders of the working class, the ruling class in the U.S. has further eroded the economic basis of the "traditional" family and brought increased suffering, especially to women and children. The "feminization of poverty" is just one aspect of this attack on the working class.

Other important dynamics have also affected the family:

- As described in the first section of this pamphlet, women and minorities have been major sources of "new" labor for the expansion of U.S. capitalism into new sectors or the development of old ones. Struggles of the women's liberation movement, too, have led to gains in job opportunities for women, particularly in "non-traditional" work, the public and semi-public sectors, and in the professions. More women today are also pursuing advanced education and training than twenty years ago.

- Women's greater control over how many children they have and when has allowed both young and older women to remain confidently and indefinitely in the work force. Today, partially due to the efforts of the women's movement, it is much more accepted for women to remain single, to not have children, to have relationships primarily with women rather than men, or to leave a relationship if they are not happy.

### Perspectives on the Family

Under capitalism, women are oppressed under both the traditional families and in new living structures. As documented above, women fare worse economically in the new structures. But Phyllis Schlafly and other demagogues of the Right would have us return to the traditional family of the past. As author Caroline Bird analyzes it:

In the 1970s hard-core conservatives literally believed that the stability of society depended on preserving the traditional family. They proposed government programs to "save the family" in the same spirit that government programs have been enacted to "save the family farm" even though fewer than 5 percent of the population were family farmers . . .

The Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, affirmative action for women, government funding of day-care centers - all were opposed in the name of "The Family". (It was always "the" family to emphasize that there could only be one kind.) The crusade enlisted the support of very party opposed to social change. The Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and right-wing fundamentalist churches joined the fight.<sup>15</sup>

If women were to retreat into the home, as the Right advocates today, economic and emotional stress on households would be increased, not relieved. In the context of high unemployment, ever-rising costs, etc., this call denies the economic rights of women and their families, and is an attack on the entire working class.

Neither is the Right's effort to make divorce more difficult any kind of a solution. No one should be forced to maintain a relationship based on inequality, oppression, or, for that matter, incompatibility.

A return to the particular form of bondage which is the "traditional" family is no solution!

At the same time we oppose these efforts of the Right, we also oppose the perspective of those ultra-"Leftists", both "communist" and "radical feminist", who one-sidedly attack the family and ignore the real needs, feelings and desires of its members.

Some Left organizations have belittled the family's importance as a source of strength and support for its members. The Revolutionary Communist Party is an example - their perception of family responsibilities and ties as only annoying diversions from class struggle forced many members ultimately to choose between family and political activity.

In the 60's and 70's, some radical feminists, too, attacked the family, particularly the nuclear family. In an overreaction to the oppressive aspects of the nuclear family, they asserted that any relationship with men would be oppressive to women. Men of all classes were identified as women's enemy. Heterosexual women within the women's movement were attacked for being "male-identified" and unreliable in the struggle for women's liberation. It is positive for women to eliminate dependence on men and to build sup-

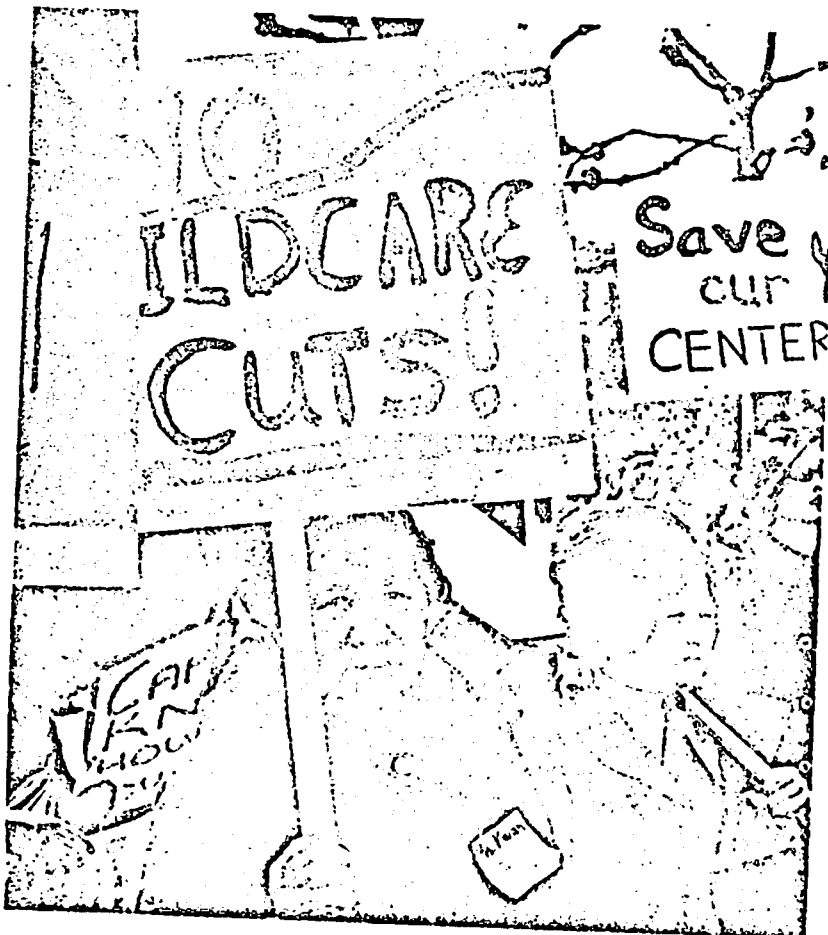


portive relationships with each other. However, the radical feminists' solutions in no way dealt with the reality or desires of the great majority of women in the U.S.

Stable, caring human relationships and positive environments for raising children are not necessarily dependent on any one particular family form, but rather on economic stability, social support, and equality.

Women need and should be provided support regardless of what type of household they are a part of - a traditional family, a single-parent family, living alone, or in a hetero- or homosexual relationship. Women and their families in all types of households will benefit from equal wages and job opportunities for women, social provision of child-care, and other social services.

What is obtained in the U.S. today will be won against the interests of the capitalist class by mass efforts. It will take continued mass effort to keep concessions from being taken away later. Only when the working class rules the U.S. will people, and families, and women come first, before the interests of the owning class.



When the government tried to cut off funds for childcare centers in 1973, working mothers took to the streets in a nationwide storm of protest. Without childcare, many of these women would be forced to quit their jobs and go on welfare. Deadset against this, working parents, childcare center workers, and many others kept the heat on until the 1973 cuts were largely defeated.

[Photo and caption from What Have Women Done? by the San Francisco Women's History Group.]

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## SECTION IV

### WOMEN AND ORGANIZED LABOR

Until recently very little attention has been paid, even by the women's movement, to the relation between women and the U.S. trade union movement.<sup>1</sup> Understanding this relationship will yield important lessons for organizing among working women and anchoring the women's movement in the working class. In this section, we examine this relationship by looking historically at the major national labor organizations. The facts show that women have often played a leading role in class struggle.

#### Women and U.S. National Labor Organizations

##### A) First Battles, 1800-1865

Women played an important part in the development of early competitive capitalism in the U.S. In the early 1800's the percentage of women industrial workers in the New England states varied from thirty to sixty-five. For the most part these women workers were either between farming seasons or were recent immigrants, concentrated mainly in textiles and the needle trades.

The conditions of the work included company towns, "blacklists", 14-hour days and no trade unions. The leading factors which brought about these conditions were (1) chauvinism derived from feudalism (in struggles against the bosses these women in the early 1800's often emphasized that they were the daughters of free men), (2) a small inexperienced working class, and (3) the fact that the oppression of women did not directly affect men in the workplace, since there was a shortage of men workers in this period. Women and children in the early 19th century in the U.S. (and in Western Europe) played a similar role to that which Third World women and children are playing today - providing the bodies for the most rapidly expanding part of the industry.

The Civil War created 100,000 new jobs for women in sewing rooms and arsenals - almost a 40% increase. The government began hiring women clerks at half the rate of pay for men, and many capitalists followed suit. This was the beginning of the major shift from male to female clerical workers. At the war's end, women were thrown out of their newly acquired jobs, again with the government showing the way by firing women clerks.

##### (B) The National Labor Union, 1865-1877

The National Labor Union (NLU) was the first national organization of any substance encompassing different trade unions. Under the leadership of Henry Sylvis, the NLU organized aggressively, took up very progressive policies,

especially with relation to women, and carried on intensive electoral campaigns. Though the NLU was never a member of the First International,<sup>2</sup> it had cordial relations with it and many of the leading members of the NLU were Marxists.

At its peak, the NLU claimed 600,000 members, the result of aggressive organizing, a minimal bureaucratic structure, and token dues. Although several constituent unions within the NLU barred women and Blacks from membership, they were organized, if necessary into separate locals. Women and Blacks played key roles at each of the NLU's national conventions. The NLU also campaigned for the 8-hour day, defended the unemployed, advocated industrial organizing, and attempted to set up a workers' party.

On several occasions, Karl Marx remarked that the NLU's endorsement of "equal pay for equal work" was a milestone. Although this was a great step forward, the Cigarmakers International Union (CMIU) was the only union to implement the policy and this was principally due to the self-interest of men. Because women cigarmakers were being hired in large numbers at lower wages, "equal pay for equal work" was the only way men could maintain "their" standards. The CMIU was also the first union to admit both women and Blacks mainly because both groups had been successfully organizing independently of the CMIU.

Of equal importance was the relationship of the NLU to the women's suffrage movement, and in particular to suffragists Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. When it became clear that women were not, like Black men, going to be given the right to vote after the Civil War, Stanton and Anthony broke with Abolitionists and launched an independent movement with some working-class support. Stanton and Anthony were seated as delegates to the 1868 national convention of the NLU and had a progressive influence on their platform on women's issues. However, in 1869 Anthony was not seated due to her role encouraging women to scab in a New York City printers' strike. Shortly thereafter, Anthony dismissed the "laboring masses of men" as the worst enemies of women's suffrage. Thus the first chapter of the interaction of the labor movement and the women's movement was brought to a close. Stanton and Anthony had made it clear that their involvement with the NLU was based on the need to recruit troops for the suffrage movement.

The untimely death of Sylvis in 1868, an increasingly middle-class membership, and a central focus on electoral politics combined to put the NLU out of business in 1873.

### (C) Knights of Labor, 1869-1895

The Knights of Labor (K of L) flourished after the depression of 1873. It often fought vigorously for "equal

pay for equal work", hired women organizers and created a women's department. The K of L membership peaked in 1889 at 800,000, roughly 60,000 of whom were women. Organizing among women was facilitated by low dues and the fact that much organizing was done on an industrial basis. Another important factor was that despite the dissolution of the First International in 1876, socialists were prominent in the leadership of the K of L - its program called for the wage system to be superseded by what they termed "cooperative institutions".

When the K of L held sway there were many instances of women's militancy in class struggle. During the Great Railway Strike of 1877, women and men united in a full-scale insurrection and formed the Pittsburgh Commune, modeled after the communist-led Paris Commune of 1870. They held the city for two weeks while battling the militia and setting fire to thousands of railroad cars. The railroad strike triggered general strikes in Chicago, St. Louis and elsewhere. The following is a Chicago newspaper account of women's role in that strike. We quote at length from this remarkable document, though it reeks of male supremacy:

Women with babes in arms joined the enraged female rioters. The streets were fluttering with calico of all shades and shapes. Hundreds were bareheaded, their disheveled locks streaming in the wind. Many were shoeless. Some were young, scarcely women in age, and not at all in appearances. Dresses were tucked up around the waist, revealing large underthings. Open busts were as common as a barber's chair. Brawny, sunburnt arms brandished clubs. Knotty hands held rocks and sticks and wooden blocks. Female yells, shrill as a curlew's cry, filled the air. The swarthy features of the Bohemian women were more horrible to look at in that scene than their men in the Halsted Street riots. The unsexed mob of female incendiaries rushed to the fence and yards of Goss & Phillips' Manufacturing Company. The consternation which this attack created extended to Twenty-Second Street, at that hour very quiet. A crowd of men gathered on Fish Street to witness this curious repetition of the scenes of the Paris Commune. The fence surrounding the yard gave way, and was carried off by the petticoated plunderers in their unbridled rage. There was fear for a while that the Amazonian army would continue their depredations. Word was dispatched to the Himmon Street Station, and a force of officers under Lieutenant Vesey pushed down to the corner of the contest. The women hissed as they saw the blue coats march along. Some of the less valorous took to their heels. . . Others stood their ground.

A shower of missiles greeted the boys as they came smiling along left front into line. One woman pitched a couple of blocks at the heads of the officers, and then moved on to attend to her family duties. The men were weak in the strength and forcefulness of their language compared to these female wretches. Profanity the most foul rolled easily off their tongues with horrid glibness. Expressions were made use of that brought the blood mantling to the cheek of the worst-hardened men in the crowds of spectators. It was awful.<sup>3</sup>

Nine years later, in 1886, the movement for the 8-hour day culminated with a general strike centered in Chicago involving some 350,000 workers. Karl Marx called it the "first fruit of the Civil War". The K of L leadership, however, refused to support it and in fact attempted to sabotage it. This proved to be a fatal tactical mistake and within a few years the K of L was no longer a viable labor organization. During its decline the K of L was racist and sexist - for example money was raised to deport Blacks to Africa and women's suffrage was not supported.

#### (D) The American Federation of Labor, 1886-1953

With a militant front and highly structured bureaucracy the AFL assumed control of the labor movement in 1890. It soon became clear that the AFL leaders were indeed "the labor lieutenants of the capitalists".<sup>4</sup> The AFL attacked socialists of all stripes and put forward the notion of "trade unionism pure and simple". In truth this meant trade unionism only for the white male and skilled craftspeople. These policies had disastrous consequences for women, the foreign-born and national minorities.

As Karl Marx noted, one of the chief reasons for the existence of a trade union is to secure an increase in the price of labor power. In the 19th and early 20th centuries the AFL or craft approach to increasing the price of labor power was to attempt to restrict the supply of labor (i.e., limit the number of people who could do a job of a particular kind). This was done through restricting access to apprenticeships, membership bars (especially against women and national minorities), high dues, boycotts of non-union tradespeople, dividing workers in one plant into different unions (e.g. plumbers, electricians, laborers), and permitting the workers to do only one kind of work. In times of relative scarcity of skilled labor these methods can be effective.<sup>5</sup>

These policies also meant that the AFL could not and would not deal with the burgeoning industries of 20th century U.S. monopoly capitalism. For large plants to be effectively organized, the "industrial" approach, where all the workers in a given plant were organized into one union, was needed. The key to industrial organizing is to confront the boss with the unity of the workers. The AFL viewed such an approach with open hostility and often gave the capitalists a helping hand in their fight against unions which organized on an industrial basis. The two most notable examples involved women workers at Lawrence, Massachusetts (1912) and Patterson, New Jersey (1913). In these cases the AFL signed sweetheart contracts with employers while thousands, led by the Industrial Workers of the World, were on strike. The AFL also failed in its attempt to sabotage the San Francisco and Minneapolis general strikes but succeeded in the general strike in textiles - all of which occurred in 1934.

The AFL did give support to women's suffrage, but at no time did it attempt to play a leading role. On the other hand it refused to support minimum wage legislation for women.

Overall the AFL's policies were a step backward for women workers. In fact, the advances made by women workers at the turn of the century came in spite of the AFL, and were due to organizations of working women, two of which will be described later in this section.

#### (E) Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1930

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was formed by Eugene Debs, Bill Hayward and others in direct response to the need to organize workers on an industrial basis. The IWW was a revolutionary labor organization that wanted to take state power, replacing capitalism with socialism, through mass strikes, demonstrations, and trade union control (i.e., syndicalism). Its policies and practices were diametrically opposed to those of the AFL.

During World War I, the IWW, in contrast to the AFL, took a forceful anti-war stand ("Don't be a soldier, be a man - stay home and fight the ruling class"). It fought for free speech and organized the unorganized - especially unskilled workers, the unemployed and women workers.

Women organizers/revolutionaries were prominent in the IWW. There were no more effective or courageous leaders in the IWW than Mother Jones (for a short period - she spent most of her time working for the United Mine Workers), Lucy Parsons, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Flynn, who later

became a leader in the Communist Party, led the IWW's most bitter struggle, the 1912 strike at the Lawrence, Massachusetts textile mills where most workers were women and children.

The IWW only grudgingly supported the suffragists' fight to obtain the vote, and criticized the Women's Trade Union League's notion that obtaining the right to vote was the foundation for future gains for women workers. On the other hand, the IWW did play a leading role in advocating birth control - the working class should not "provide more slaves for the boss".

While the Wobblies were not free of male supremacy (Flynn on several occasions raised sharp criticism in this regard), their militant organizing of women workers was a step forward. But by 1914 IWW membership had dropped sharply to 100,000 members. The subsequent anti-red campaigns both during and after World War I insured that the IWW would not be a major labor organization.

#### (F) The Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1935-1953

Like the IWW, the CIO developed in response to the need to unionize on an industrial basis. It combined the militant tactics of the IWW with tighter and less sectarian methods to establish strongholds in coal, auto, steel, electronics, oil and rubber. By 1940 the CIO had more members than the AFL and was more influential in every aspect of American life.

In contrast, the only major organizing drives conducted by the CIO in industries employing large numbers of women were a somewhat ineffective one among southern textile workers (37% women) and one among New York office workers. There were other problems as well. Few women could be found at any level of trade union leadership. Only small gains were made in contracts to provide women the opportunity of being trade union leaders, prevalent sexist attitudes went unchallenged (e.g. 'cheesecake' pictures often appeared in the CIO news), and most importantly, the CIO did very little to prevent women workers from being thrown out of their jobs at the end of World War II, so that their role as a reserve army of labor was reaffirmed.

In spite of the above, the CIO was a progressive alternative to the AFL for women. Most notable was the fact that women played an important role in the sit-down strikes which sparked the CIO's initial organizing drives. Women workers "sat down" in Woolworths, hosiery mills, drug companies, hotels, restaurants, cigar manufacturing plants and elsewhere. As members of ladies' auxiliaries, women



enthusiastically supported the UAW sit-down at Flint (and elsewhere). The auxiliaries organized the Emergency Brigade and, wearing red caps, did everything that was necessary to win the strike, from preparing food for the sit-downers to taking on goons with crowbars and pipes. Women's auxiliaries made important contributions to most CIO unions and during World War II many auxiliary members became strong union members themselves.

(G) AFL-CIO (1953 - )

Today, after 150 years of struggle, only 15% of women workers are organized. While there has been a recent increase, the percentage of union members who are women is still only 25%. Until recently at least, there has not been a woman on the AFL-CIO Executive Board. No major organizing of women clerical (outside the public sector) or industrial employees has gone on. In short, the AFL-CIO represents another chapter in the continuing story of the neglect of the needs of women workers. And this has been happening at a time when women workers have become increasingly important in the workplace. It is projected that over the next twenty years two-thirds of all new workers will be women.

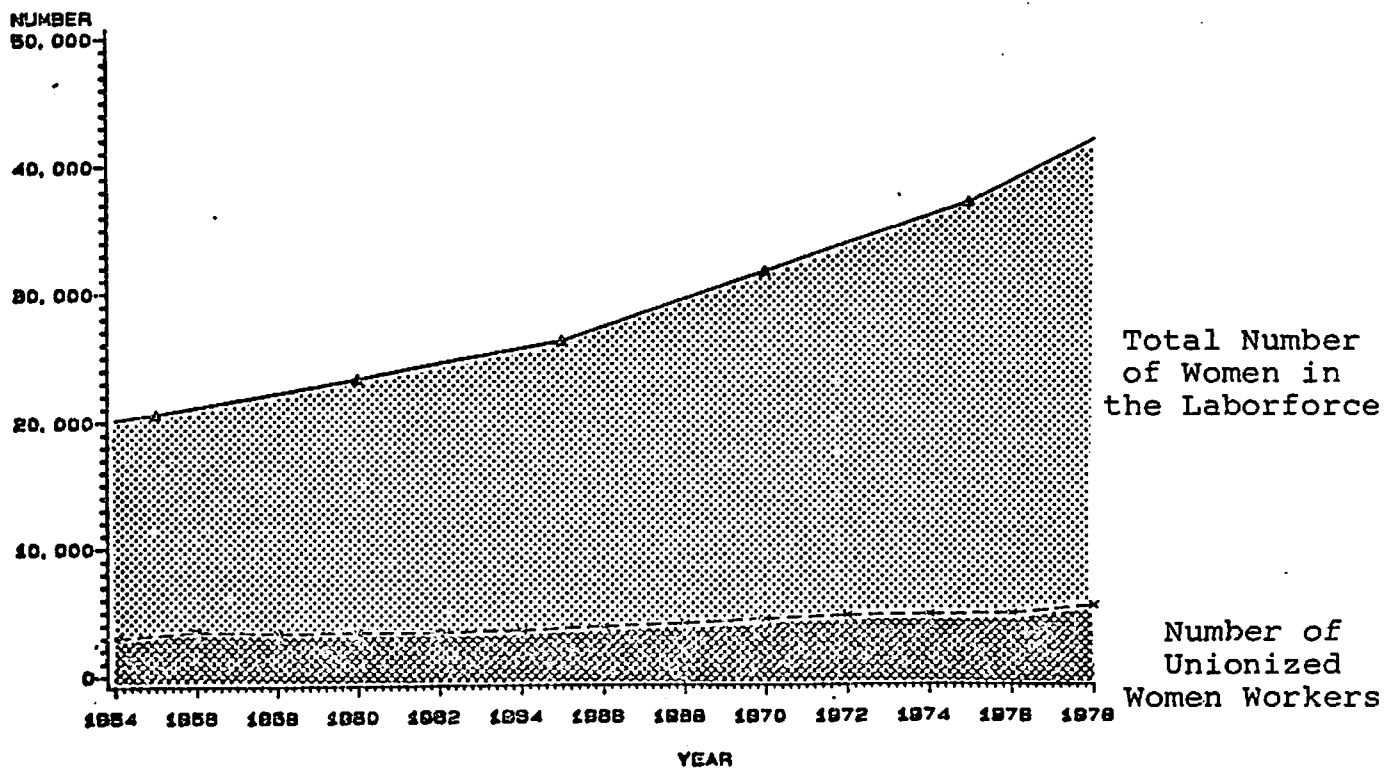
**Women's Trade Union Organizations**

Women's trade union organizations provide many important lessons for the work that will be needed to make fundamental changes in this country. Below, we first discuss two "popular front" or cross-class organizations which were able to forge links between the labor movement and the women's movement and, second, some current organizations.

(A) The Illinois Women's Alliance, 1888-1894

Chicago in the late 1880's was the center of militant trade unionism in the United States. One product of this ferment was the IWA. It was initiated in response to a series of articles in the Chicago Times in the late summer of 1888 entitled "City Slave Girls", which depicted the misery of women and children in factories and workshops. The principal organizer of the IWA was Elizabeth Morgan, a socialist with a very strong record of trade union organizing - she was secretary of the Ladies Federal Labor Union (an affiliate of the AFL), and delegate to the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly.

The IWA was a coalition of the Ladies Federal Labor Union and women's groups with suffrage, literacy and temperance interests. Its purpose was to "prevent the moral, mental and physical degradation of women and children as wage workers". The basic strategy of the Alliance was to remove children as competitors with women for factory jobs,



Graph 4-A UNIONIZATION OF WOMEN WORKERS  
1954-1978

and to eliminate sweatshops. To accomplish the former the IWA focused on exposures of child labor and enforcement of compulsory education laws. They soon discovered that they could not force children out of the factories if there were not enough schools, and thus proceeded to lead a mass campaign to construct new schools. To close sweatshops the IWA had to reform factory inspection procedures and obtain the appointment of Alliance women as factory inspectors. In related efforts, the Alliance pressed for enforcement of truancy laws, equal pay for women teachers and appointment of women school board members.

The Alliance was an example of a "popular front" - an organization composed of groups from different classes. It was at all times under working class leadership, with socialist women prominent, so that IWA aims were in direct support of the working class movement.

In 1894, the Alliance, in combination with other socialists, almost succeeded in having the AFL endorse a socialist program. Many socialists reacted to this defeat by leaving the AFL and setting up "revolutionary" dual unions. The impact in Chicago was the dissolution of the Alliance and the general weakening of the working class movement.

#### (B) Women's Trade Union League, 1903-1950

Though trade union membership in the U.S. as a whole rose from 447,000 in 1897 to 2,072,270 in 1904, organizing activity among women workers was virtually non-existent outside of Chicago. This was mainly due to the decline of the K of L and the sexist policies of the AFL and its constituent international unions. The formation of the Women's Trade Union League at the AFL convention in 1903 was thus a response to an objective need. The WTUL's first order of business was the organizing of women workers; offices were opened in Chicago, New York and Boston for this purpose.

The WTUL held its first national convention in 1907 and put forward a program that called for equal pay for equal work, full citizenship for women (suffrage), a minimum wage scale, the 8-hour day and the organization of women into trade unions. In order to be a member of the WTUL, one either had to be a trade union member or an "ally". Among the "allies" was Margaret Drier Robins, who served as WTUL president from 1917 to 1922 and who by virtue of her wealth provided the main financial support for the national office. Robin's sister, Mary Drier, in a similar fashion controlled the WTUL's New York office.

Without doubt, the formative event in the history of the League was the "Rising of the 20,000" or the "Waist-makers Revolt" in November of 1909 in Manhattan and Brooklyn. In the spring of 1909, strike activity grew in response to the oppressive conditions of the dress and waistmakers shops in New York. These strikes were met with police violence (muted by the presence of the wealthy League allies) and jailings. Finally, on November 22, a meeting was called to discuss an industry-wide walkout. AFL President Samuel Gompers, Mary Drier and Ernest Bohn, Secretary of the New York City Central Federated Union all gave rousing speeches but failed to call for a general strike. It took a young woman, not more than twenty years old, who had just returned from the hospital after receiving a beating by police on the picket line, to do so. This was Clara Lemlich (later to be a founder of the Communist Party), who rose to call for a general strike in Yiddish, the native tongue of the majority of the shirtwaist workers. With her speech the dam was burst and within several days more than 20,000 shirt waistmakers were on strike.

The "Rising of the 20,000" triggered a series of strikes in the New York garment industry that lasted four years. Trade union membership of women in the needle trades in New York City rose from 3,000 in 1909 to 63,872 in 1913. The ILGWU (International Ladies Garment Workers Union) became the third largest AFL affiliate, but more importantly it was the first stable trade union for women workers.

The WTUL played an important role in this period. The League raised badly needed strike support funds and through its middle-class "allies" was often able to obtain favorable publicity for strikes. On the other hand, while the League supported strikes, it rarely planned or led them. Indeed on several occasions the WTUL in conjunction with the AFL played a role in muting the struggle of the rank and file. In this connection, it should be remembered that the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the major suffrage organization in the U.S., took a neutral stand on the "Uprising of the 20,000".

The WTUL did not confine its activities during the period of 1909-1913 to New York. It supported major strikes in Chicago, Kalamazoo, Cleveland, and Milwaukee. It is important to note that Milwaukee was the only city in which there was not police violence and/or police protection for company thugs. Milwaukee had a socialist mayor who was able to restrain the police.

After 1913 the WTUL concentrated most of its resources on legislative activity. It was successful in fourteen

states between 1913 and 1923 in obtaining minimum wage measures. The League also agitated for the 8-hour day for women. The centerpiece, however, was obtaining the vote. The WTUL viewed women's suffrage as the key to solving the economic problems of working women.

The League generally limited its political perspective to that of the AFL. For example, despite considerable sentiment in the League's leadership for peace prior to World War I, when AFL President Gompers told the League to support the U.S. going to war, it did. It was no coincidence that thirty-eight WTUL leaders - including League President Robins - received appointments to government boards during World War I. In spite of the League's cooperation, the AFL did not reciprocate. It gave money (\$150 a month) in only one year, and refused to let the League hire women organizers to work in areas where women workers predominated. The AFL also steadfastly fought against minimum wage legislation for women as "unAmerican" and "socialistic".

The League, like the IWA, was an example of a "popular front", but the petty-bourgeois ("middle class") forces were much more influential in the League than they were in the Alliance. The League supported the organizing of the needle trades because it had no choice. The "Rising of the 20,000" happened in spite of the League and the AFL, not because of them. When the momentum of organizing died down, the League made legislative efforts their highest priority. The lack of AFL funding together with the Drier sisters' financial control of both the national office in Chicago and the chapter office in New York rendered the League dependent on petty-bourgeois elements.

After World War I, the League was not an effective organization. During its heyday it helped focus the power of the working class in a productive manner. However, over the long haul dominance by petty-bourgeois elements severely limited and muted the League as a weapon of the working class. The dominance of the petty-bourgeoisie also insured that in the deep split between the AFL and the IWW at that time, the League would cast its lot with the AFL - the most reactionary national labor organization in the history of the U.S.

### (C) Coalition of Labor Union Women and Current Working Women's Organizations

In the early 1970's working women's organizations held a great deal of promise. But, while the situation is almost certain to change, these organizations have yet to become a factor in the women's movement. In 1982 two of the main

organizations relating to working women in the San Francisco Bay Area folded. Women Organized for Employment (WOE), an affiliate of Working Women, was never really able to decide whether its main task was finding employment for women or helping them to organize. It folded from lack of resources.

The demise of the Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality (Union WAGE) was a real loss both to the women's movement and to working women across the U.S. Formed out of women's struggles for trade union democracy in the San Francisco Bay Area, Union Wage grew quickly and at one time had chapters in several cities across the U.S. Its members were involved in union organizing, the publication of pamphlets and a monthly newspaper. In its last year, Union WAGE had a plant closure committee and a runaway shop committee, which led them to a more internationalist stance. Union WAGE also folded due to lack of resources - too few women had done too much of the work for too long - and also due to some differences within their group over where they should be heading.

The largest and most well-known women's labor organization in the U.S. today is CLUW. It was formed in 1974 amid much fanfare, and now boasts 12,000 members, including men, and "associates", who are not union members. CLUW is all but an official body of the AFL-CIO. It has both formal and informal ties with the labor federation, and much of its leadership has been AFL-CIO officials.

The program of CLUW is akin to that of the AFL-CIO, with special emphasis on the needs of women workers. While organizing the unorganized is a basic principle of CLUW (as with the AFL-CIO), it has done no organizing of its own and only recently requested assistance in this regard from the AFL-CIO. During the recessions of 1973-75 and the present, layoffs rolled back many affirmative action gains, because women and minorities were usually the most recently hired and layoffs were by seniority. This led to a serious discussion within CLUW about whether layoff by seniority should be modified so as to spread the burden of layoffs among all workers.<sup>6</sup>

Currently CLUW is giving attention to the issue of "comparable pay for comparable worth". Because the effort by women to obtain equal pay by taking jobs traditionally men's has, for a number of reasons, met with little success, another avenue to obtain equal (or comparable) pay is to develop standards which show that traditional women's jobs are comparable in worth to traditional men's jobs. This issue promises to be prominent in the 1980's. So far, though, it has been applied mostly to semi-professional and professional jobs (e.g., nurses and librarians) - working class women have not, in the main, been the focus of the issue.

Although the formation of CLUW was due in large part to the inspiration of the women's movement, the relations between the two have not developed and are at best formal. CLUW pales in comparison to its predecessors, the IWA and WTUL, in this regard.

CLUW has potential if only because of its size and the fact that the objective needs of women workers are not being met. At present, however, it does no organizing, has little relation to the women's movement and takes its leadership from the AFL-CIO.

One promising working women's organization is District 925 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). District 925 is a "joint effort" of SEIU and Working Women; it was founded in 1981 primarily to organize women workers. It has won seven representation elections, and claims a membership of 4,000 with branches across the U.S. While relatively undeveloped, it is an organization in motion, and has taken the first steps in organizing women workers as few others have.

Other bright spots in recent years include the UFW and Local 1199, which have successfully organized low-paid national minority women workers.<sup>7</sup> Local 1199 has had to conduct long, bitter strikes along with campaigning for state legislation enabling collective bargaining. In 1982 in San Jose, mostly women office workers, members of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), successfully conducted a strike using comparable worth as the key issue (see Appendix A for a discussion of the comparable worth issue). Elsewhere, AFSCME has been one of the leading unions in organizing women workers, and in a few decades has grown from a small union to one of the largest in the U.S.

### Lessons for Today and the Future

There are many lessons that can be gleaned from this history. As outlined above, gains made by working women have, as a rule, come about from sharp class struggle. The organizing of the needle trades between 1909 and 1913, the California Farmworkers in 1970's, textile workers (Lawrence, Gastonia, Farah), hospital workers by Local 1199, the sit-downs of the 1930's, and the San Jose city workers strike are all milestones for women workers made possible through bitter, prolonged and sometimes violent struggle. A common outcome of such struggles are trade unions which are tough, democratic and progressive. At times, gains have come about for women because men thought that they were in their own interest. An example is the demand for equal pay for equal work by the NLU. Another is the call by AFL president Gompers at the beginning of World War I for equal pay,

since it would discourage war industries from hiring women and thus would not undercut "men's" jobs.

A basic lesson of U.S. labor history is that, because of the necessity for prolonged and unified struggle, the craft model of union organization has outlived its usefulness. Looking from another angle, given that women earn only 59% of what men do, and are segregated into jobs that are generally less skilled and dead-end, for which there is no labor shortage, the unity of women workers is absolutely essential. To foster this, women should be organized along company or industrial lines. For example, whenever possible, one union should organize one employer.

Organizing unorganized women workers is important for several reasons. First, it will help raise the floor of protections and benefits for all women workers. Second, it will provide a mechanism for building the working class component of the women's movement. In addition, there are whole industries within the economy virtually untouched by union organization - banking, insurance and the electronics industry of Silicon Valley.

What organizational factors are necessary for trade union work among women workers? On the one hand, the AFL-CIO, with very few exceptions (UFW, Local 1199, AFSCME), has not responded to the dramatic changes affecting women in the workplace. On the other, it is very unlikely that a significant organizing drive can succeed without the involvement of the AFL-CIO in some form. Recall that the IWA worked through the Chicago Central Labor Council and that WTUL was involved with the AFL and that militant socialist rank and file women provided leadership therein on a sustained basis. The lesson for the future is that, at some point, socialists and progressives must come forward to do trade union organizing among women in the context of the AFL-CIO. The creation of a working women's organization would greatly facilitate this work, as would increased unity on the left.

Most trade union work among women will be enhanced if it is done while forging links with working class men, the women's movement, and the community. As noted, in the 1930's women in trade union auxiliaries were an important factor in organizing male workers. To organize women workers, men must be recruited to support women union members by doing everything from household work to picket duty. It is in both the long- and short-range interests of men to participate in these activities. Clearly it will also help unify the working class.

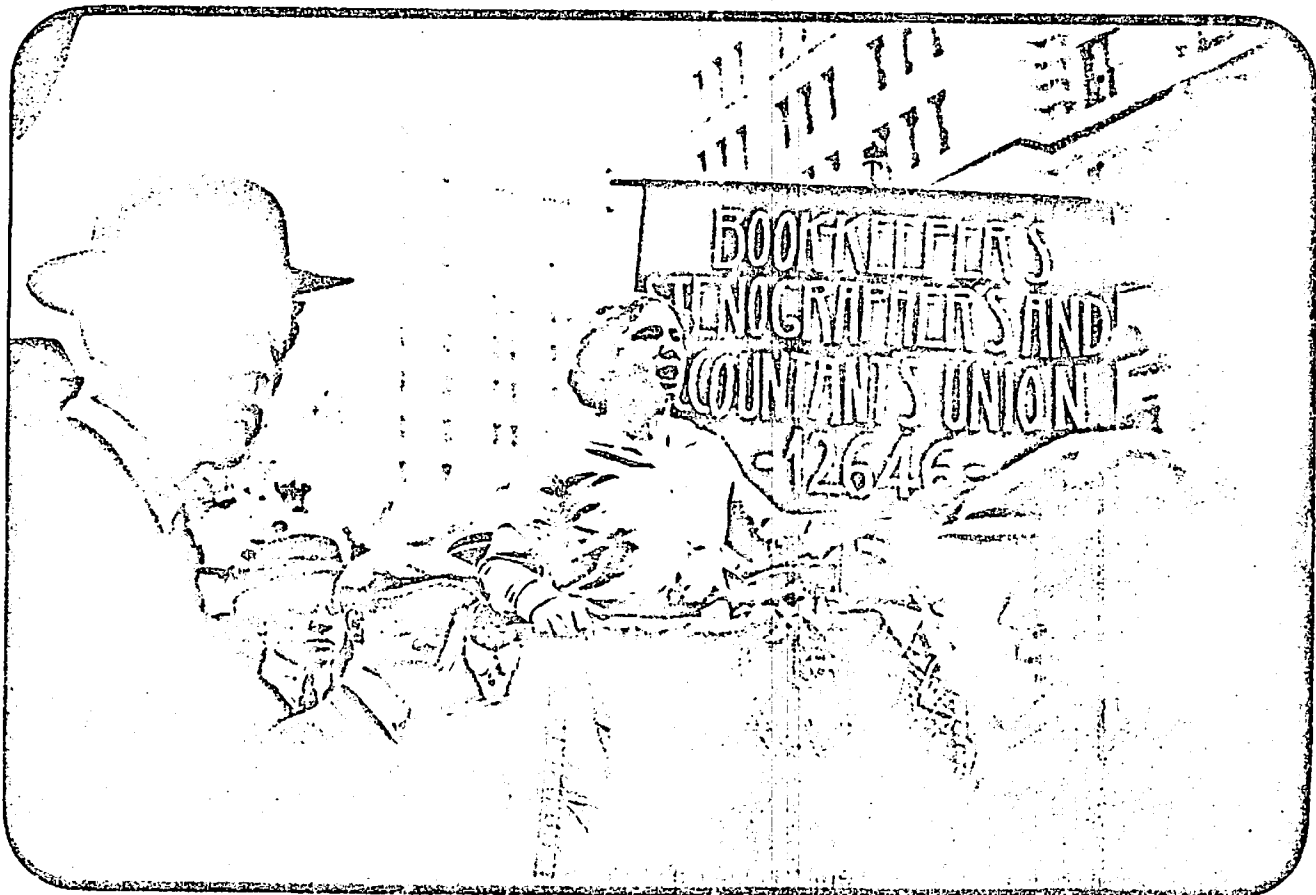
Women workers are often in a good position to link workplace struggles directly to community concerns. It is a community issue if health or education workers are overburdened or laid off since the social services of the



community are thereby diminished. It is a community issue if an insurance company or an electronics firm threatens to "run away" in search of cheaper labor.

In spite of the serious flaws of the WTUL, it, like the IWA, does provide a good example for today on the effectiveness of linking the labor movement and the women's movement. Working class women, through the WTUL, enlisted the support of middle class women in building the first effective and stable trade union (ILGWU) which was predominantly female. On the other hand, it was through the WTUL that middle class women developed support by working class women for women's suffrage. Thus, because of its multi-class nature, the WTUL became an effective instrument in the working class movement and in the women's movement.

A working women's organization today would enhance trade union work, since it is especially well-suited for creating the necessary links with working class men, the women's movement and the community. Just as important, it would provide for the training and development of women in class struggle.



*Rose Schneiderman Organizing for the WTUL*

NOTES

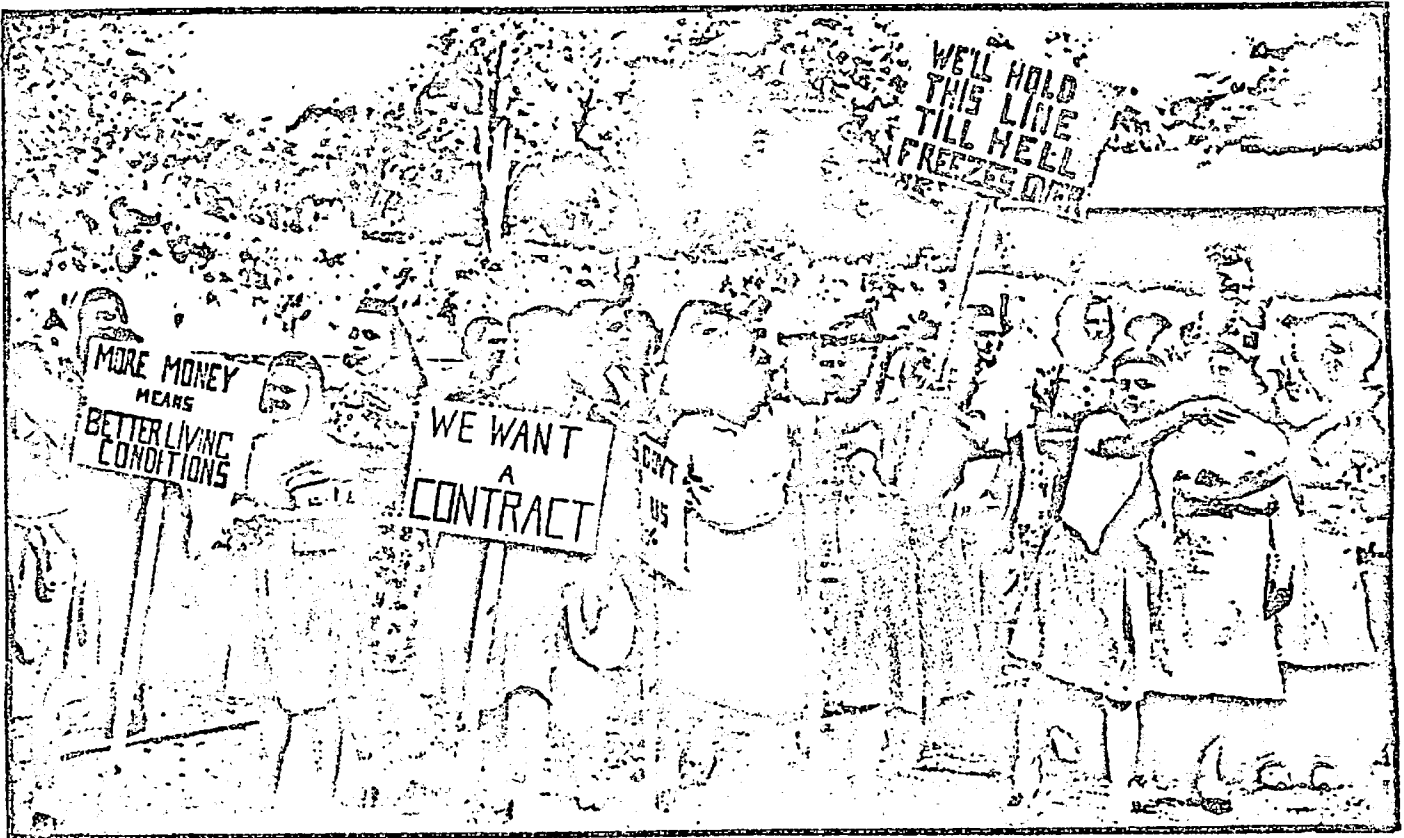
The basic reference for this section is Philip Foner's two volume Women and the American Labor Movement. It is by far the most detailed study of its kind. Foner's extensive background as a labor historian is put to good use. If there is any flaw in this work it is that analysis is overwhelmed by detail. Foner's five volume study entitled History of the Labor Movement in the United States is also recommended as a general reference.

For the early history we also used John B. Andrews' History of Women in Trade Unions, 1835 through the Knights of Labor, Anthony Bima's History of the American Working Class, W. Z. Foster's History of the Communist Party of the United States and Eleanor Flexner's Century of Struggle.

Meredith Tax's Rising of the Women provides a solid analysis of the Women's Trade Union League, the Illinois Women's Alliance and "the rising of the 20,000".

Other works of value are Mari Jo Buhle's Woman and American Socialism 1870 - 1920 and "Bargaining for Equality" by the Women's Labor Project.

photo from American Labor: A Pictorial Social History, by M. B. Schnappes



1934 Strike at Greensboro, Ga.

## SECTION V

### THE MATERIAL BASIS FOR THE SPECIAL OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Sexism and male supremacy are pervasive throughout modern capitalist societies. Women experience daily the effects of sexist ideas and attitudes in all our major institutions - ideas which relegate women to certain jobs, which belittle her capabilities intellectually and physically, which minimize her role in history and society, which impose a double burden of wage and domestic labor, which in fact deny her democratic rights. What is more, organizations which ought to be in the forefront of the struggle against these attitudes - trade unions, progressive community groups and revolutionary organizations - have been far from free of these attitudes themselves. Historically, there has been, even on the Left, a marked tendency to belittle women's oppression and women's capacity to fight and organize for an end to it. Thus, it is understandable that for many women and men sexist ideas and attitudes in individuals and institutions are at the root of women's oppression and are women's principal enemy. This has led many feminists to devote their struggles to eliminating sexism through education and legislative reforms in hopes of finally freeing women to pursue their lives at work and at home on an equal footing with men.

However, ideas are a reflection of material class (and other) forces in struggle with each other. Backward ideas, such as around the inferiority of women, are extremely powerful and must be struggled against in themselves, but they will not be eliminated until the material basis for them is also eliminated. The ideology of women's inferiority is directly related to the economic and political structure of class society, which is partly based on the unequal position of women and national minorities. To put it more crudely, real profits are made directly and indirectly from oppressing women. That is why we ask how is women's special oppression rooted in and related to class society in monopoly capitalism? If we call the systematic subordination of women to men throughout society patriarchy, then how are capitalism and patriarchy related? Our views affect our understanding of a successful program for ending women's oppression, of women's role in socialist revolution, and of the need for a continuing struggle for the emancipation of women under socialism.

Having said that, we also note that women's position in the economic and political structure is closely related to and partly dependent on the ideology of female inferiority. For instance, if "woman's place is in the home", then not only does that help keep women out of the work force when not wanted, but places them in a bad bargaining position when they are. That is, secure full-time employment at union wages is reserved for men, who do "belong" there.

There are many other ways that sexist ideas and attitudes make it easier for capitalists to make more profits, directly or indirectly, from the labor of women.

### How Did Male Supremacy Originate?

Were women oppressed before class society developed? Some anthropologists say yes, because women were confined to a less active role in early communal life due to pregnancy, childbirth, and child-rearing. Others say no, women were actually the most powerful, respected members of "primitive" communal society because of their capacity to reproduce life. Some believe there used to be matriarchal societies, societies where women played the primary role in the organization and leadership of the tribe or household. In fact, not a great deal is known about the origins of male supremacy although the rise of the women's movement in the last two decades has stimulated considerable discussion and not a little outright speculation.

Frederick Engels, in the 1880's, made the first comprehensive analysis of the development of society in stages which tied family, marriage and the position of women generally to the development of the means of production. Although we have considerably more information now about early societies, his book, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, is still a guide to those who stress a materialist analysis of how society developed. Most Marxist groups hold that "primitive" communism was a period of equality between the sexes, with a benign "technical" division of labor, primarily because women bore and nursed children. This division of labor by sex was a result of the low level of productive forces - in the purely food gathering stages (called savagery by Engels) men probably hunted and women gathered plants for food and healing. When men were able to tame and herd some animals a new stage of development, food production, was heralded. With the herding of animals and simple agriculture a surplus of food was possible for the first time. Eventually the herds were transferred from communal to private ownership and the surplus they produced could be exchanged for commodities, including slaves. Says Engels:

The domestic labor of the woman no longer counted beside the acquisition of the necessities of life by the man; the latter was everything, the former an unimportant extra.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of being the general concern of the whole group, domestic labor became private service for individual men. Though the work remained essential to the maintenance and reproduction of society, it lost its valued status because it was not a source of expanding wealth. To slightly over-



simplify, the advent of private property laid the basis for the subjugation of women and the devaluation of women's labor.

### Biological Differences Between Men and Women

The idea that women's biological nature is one material basis for their oppression is a pervasive one. It is still a common view that women have always been oppressed because they are weaker physically, especially when pregnant or tied down with young children, making them dependent on men to care for them. There is a partial truth to this in that in exploitative, production-oriented society, whether it be slave, feudal or capitalist, women are seen as having less economic value because their capacity to work is periodically interrupted by childbirth and childcare. But these limitations are tied to particular social systems and how they choose to treat women's reproductive capacities. In a non-exploitative society, they will be valued. In this regard it is important to understand that technological advances in themselves are not the key to women's liberation. Although bourgeois sociologists and organizations like Planned Parenthood promote this illusion, advances such as contraception, sterilization and abortion can also be used against women. It is capitalism's social treatment of women's reproductive capacity, not women's reproductive capacity itself which oppresses women.

Other biological differences between men and women are of even less significance in a society where the level of development of productive forces is so high. Modern technology has the capacity to automate and redesign jobs which require mainly physical strength. (In any case, such jobs should not exclude all women any more than they could include all men.) There is now very little biological basis for differential treatment in the workplace, although the strength of old prejudices on this question should not be underestimated.

### How Capitalism Forms the Material Basis for Women's Oppression

Capitalism did not create the secondary position of women, but was able to exploit and develop it for profit as it came out of feudalism (as it exploited other differences in the emerging working class). In the process, capital strengthened and added new wrinkles to the ideology of female inferiority. The owning class's intense all-pervasive subjugation of working class and national minority women facilitated the expansion and consolidation of capitalism in two closely connected ways:

1) Historically, women provided an under-class or secondary class of workers who would work for less and could be moved in and out of the labor force with flexibility, in other words a "reserve army of labor".

2) At home, in a private capacity, women contributed untold hours of unwaged domestic labor maintaining and reproducing the working class.

### **Women as a Reserve Army of Labor**

If women did not exist, early capitalists would have had to invent them. For their purposes nothing could have been more profitable than half of the working class already constrained politically, economically and ideologically in a subservient role within the class. Early manufacturing, particularly in textiles, was able to employ women and children first within their own homes and then in large plants at subsistence wages even lower than men were making in other industries. This use of women continues to this day in the electronics plants, in office "factories", canneries, and so on. When no longer needed, women, especially national minority women, were and are summarily dropped from the work force. Many other groups have functioned similarly as a reserve army of labor - new immigrants, Blacks and other national minorities. Within these groups women are consistently paid less and have more difficulty in getting full-time, permanent work. The ideology of female inferiority and the reality of her position in the home are crucial contributing factors which have facilitated the movement of women in and out of the work force.

In some respects women's position in the work force has changed in the last twenty years. Women are still forced into lower paid, seasonal and part-time work, the majority are still able to find jobs in mainly new or expanding industries which are unorganized and in many cases unprotected by labor laws. But whereas once women could be shunted off to home again "where they really belong" when no longer needed, now women expect to work and society expects them to work. If they are laid off they are "unemployed" not "housewives" and can be counted on to look for another job. In short, women are becoming a permanent part of the work force, although still in a disadvantaged position.

It is very unlikely that a significant portion of working women could now be turned out of their jobs as the result of a propaganda campaign such as occurred after World War II.

Since the last century it has been a common view that sexist attitudes have forced women into jobs which are extensions of their role at home (nursing, waiting tables, teaching, secretarial). Certainly the parallel has aided

the process of funneling women into these jobs by defining them as "women's" work. But the reason women are doing these jobs is much more fundamental to capitalism than stereotypes, potent though they are. These are the areas where capitalism is currently expanding and where the demand for labor is greatest, particularly the demand for unskilled, cheap labor. Hospitals, fast food chains, hotels, banks, insurance companies have made untold profits from not having to pay union wages and benefits or provide job security.

But capitalism will hire women with the same enthusiasm for all kinds of jobs which are not extensions of traditional female work. The most obvious current example is electronic assembly, but other industrial jobs in canning, frozen food plants, textiles and so on also actually have little relation to the canning, freezing and sewing women do at home as individual housewives. During wartime, capitalists hire women to replace men without any concern for their feminine natures, and in its first century manufacturing relied heavily on women and children workers. National minority women in particular have throughout U.S. history done arduous, grueling work without it upsetting capitalist sensibilities.

#### Women and Domestic Labor

The bulk of unwaged domestic labor is done by women, including women who work outside the home in waged jobs. In the working class and lower strata of the middle classes the work is done primarily by the adult women and older daughters of the household. This occurs not only in the traditional nuclear family with husband as breadwinner, but in families where both parents work full time for wages, in single-mother homes, and in extended family homes where there may also be grandmothers, aunts, and other women to help with the household chores. In millions of households in the U.S. it is understood that shopping, cooking, sewing, cleaning, nursing, childcare, and in general making the household run smoothly are women's responsibilities, whatever their other obligations. A loyal, comforting, patient, even submissive attitude toward their families as they labor is another major part of their responsibility.

In the last two decades two important changes must be noted: 1) the effect of the women's movement on the division of labor within households; and 2) the flow of large numbers of women into the paid labor force which has removed some aspects of domestic labor to outside the home (mainly childcare during working hours).

But these changes, despite all the media publicity, must be viewed cautiously. The current depression has slowed the influx of women into the paid labor force. In

particular, many minority women have been laid off or are unable to find jobs. The depression may also be keeping young adults home with their parents longer. While the women's movement has probably influenced the division of labor in many homes to some degree, it is still rare for men to share fully responsibility for housework and childcare.

Domestic work is not only disproportionately the responsibility of women, it remains the most inefficient, un-socialized type of labor existing under modern capitalism. For instance, each night millions of dinners are cooked and served in separate household units. For the working class one way to avoid this drudgery is fast-food restaurants but their high cost and low quality of food must be constantly measured against their efficiency in feeding large numbers of people quickly. Other kinds of housework are equally inefficient and isolated, including the purchase of "labor-saving" devices which could be used much more efficiently by larger groups of people.

What then does domestic labor accomplish? What is its function under capitalism? And how is it related to wage labor for the capitalists?

This labor which most of us take for granted as part of our daily lives has generated controversy among feminists and other progressives who have analyzed its role in capitalism. Although Karl Marx and Frederick Engels commented on household work in a number of different contexts over a hundred years ago, neither of them developed anything approaching a complete analysis of it.

Domestic labor accomplishes two vital tasks for the capitalist system: 1) it reproduces and prepares for adulthood a new generation of workers; and 2) it restores daily the worker or workers of a household to a condition where he or she can return to work and labor again for the capitalist. Women, in their labor, provide food, rest, recreation and a place to live for the only period of time the worker is not directly supervised by the capitalist. From the capitalists' point of view these hours are merely the necessary time during which the laborer's ability to labor is restored. From the workers' point of view this part of the day is the reason for which he or she works. Workers everywhere struggle to extend and improve the quality of this period as much as possible.

The controversy arises over where women's domestic labor is located in the capitalist mode of production. In the 1960's and 70's women demanded that attention finally be paid to the special oppression of women, an oppression far larger, far more complex than the mere exclusion of women from the industrial workplace, an oppression located in the home as well as the office or factory. Whereas volumes have



been written since Marx on the capitalist exploitation of workers in waged production, the hard work of women at home went largely unnoted until the 1960's. Domestic work was apparently unworthy of serious analysis and was not often granted the status of being real work.

When more and more women began to work for wages, they continued to labor at home, struggling to survive under the equivalent of two jobs. This coincided with the development of a strong, independent women's movement. It became clear to the more class-conscious, revolutionary-minded women that an analysis of women's labor at home that related it to the capitalist mode of production in general was essential to an all-around understanding of women's oppression, and to the development of effective strategies for fighting it. But that analysis was not easy to develop. For Marxists and Marxist-feminists it required a comprehensive understanding of the capitalist mode of production as described by Marx and a full recognition of the social value and extent of domestic labor and the special oppression for women it represents.

Two fundamentally opposed views emerged, one characterizing domestic labor as domestic servitude for the husband, the other characterizing it as productive labor for the capitalist class, its specific product being the commodity labor-power. In Appendix B we discuss these two views and our preliminary view of the matter. In the long run, progressive and revolutionary organizations will need a correct and comprehensive analysis of this question - if only because it profoundly affects how we speak to and how we attempt to organize and win over women outside the workplace, women who by necessity are as intimately concerned with welfare rights, educational reforms, reproductive and health care issues and childcare as they are issues of wages, overtime and lay-offs. It is vital to understand that few working class women escape the burden of housework and childcare - these are responsibilities that belong almost entirely to women, and no woman will be liberated until it becomes a responsibility shared by all of society.

### Ideological Oppression

When we look at the material facts - at women's income relative to men's, her use as a reserve army of labor with the attendant unemployment, underemployment and lack of job security, her arduous labor at home, her exploitation as a sex object, it seems inconceivable that over fifty percent of the population could be so subjugated. But when we look at our educational system, the mass media, the churches, the family, the law and the government we see how every major institution instills an ideology of women's inferiority which is so pervasive, so profound, that even revolutionary, conscious women are deeply affected by it. It permeates our

culture, shaping our sexual and social identities, consciously and unconsciously, from birth.

Many of the particulars of sexism and how it shapes us have been well documented by the women's movement of the last twenty years. One by one, the myths and stereotypes, the countless little rules proscribing women's behavior were challenged and thrown out with all the analysis, polemic and ridicule women could muster. Lawsuits were filed and picket lines went up. The 1960's and 70's saw a full-scale counter-attack against the ages-long suffocation of women. New heroines arose and old ones were resurrected. Woman as weak, woman as evil, woman as bitch, woman as domestic, the "good" woman, the "bad" woman, the emotional woman, the illogical woman, the castrating woman, the woman who competed only with other women (and only for men) were denounced by thousands of women in the U.S. and millions more in other countries. Women began developing their own media, writing their own histories, creating their own art and literature, building their own organizations to an unprecedented degree. They did not eliminate sexism and male supremacy in the U.S., but they made inroads and carried the battle forward substantially and unforgettably.

Our particular task here is to link the struggle against this oppressive ideology with the struggle against capitalism. As the relationship between women's distorted image in the ideas and culture of society and the material benefit this image renders capitalism becomes clearer, both struggles become sharper and strengthened. It should be noted that ideology has a material force of its own. A woman who has been denied an available job because the boss does not think a woman can do it, or a woman who has been beaten and raped by her husband suffers very material damage indeed, a direct result of men's distorted views of women. The widespread and vicious subjugation of women resulting from "bad ideas" is not a psychological or intellectual phenomenon, though psychological and intellectual oppression are two real components of it. Every means at the capitalists' disposal is employed to ensure that women accept their "place".

Not surprisingly, much of the ideology of sexism is an accepted part of working class life. This is partly because male supremacy was carried forward from feudalism by the developing working class. Principally, it is because ideas of women's inferiority are constantly cemented through our schools, churches, media, families and so on. For the working class it is a serious problem - to the extent that it persists working class unity will not be forged, and nothing less than unity on a large scale will defeat the rule of capitalism and the forces of patriarchy which are inextricably intertwined. Male supremacy within the working class does not have the material basis it has in the capitalist

class - the working class, men and women, has so much to gain from ending it - increased unity in waging class struggle and the energy and leadership of millions of women who have been long suppressed. There are, however, often material disadvantages to men in eliminating sexism - this has to be faced. Increased competition for jobs in a shrinking labor market is one. On a personal level, there is the loss of marriages which are based on women's financial dependence, and the "loss" of a sexual and social identity which is dependent on male "superiority". But there is no doubt these "losses" are far secondary to the tremendous power of a working class not divided by sexual oppression.

Organizations of the working class, and progressive and revolutionary organizations of all kinds, need to take the lead in vanquishing male supremacy in practice as well as program. There has been much struggle already in these groups and there will be much more. It is important to recognize that these struggles aim for greater unity in the long run. Within the working class and its allies, men are not the enemy of women, and the interests of both lie in establishing a non-exploitative society. Nevertheless, the struggles against sexism for class-conscious revolutionaries must be serious and even fierce. One lesson that we have learned is that the efforts to overcome male supremacy within organizations must be active, conscious, and specific. Where there is passivity and lack of attention to sexism, old habits quickly reassert themselves. Sexist patterns must be identified and remedied by specific plans. Our goal is women's participation in every aspect of our work, including theoretical and political leadership.

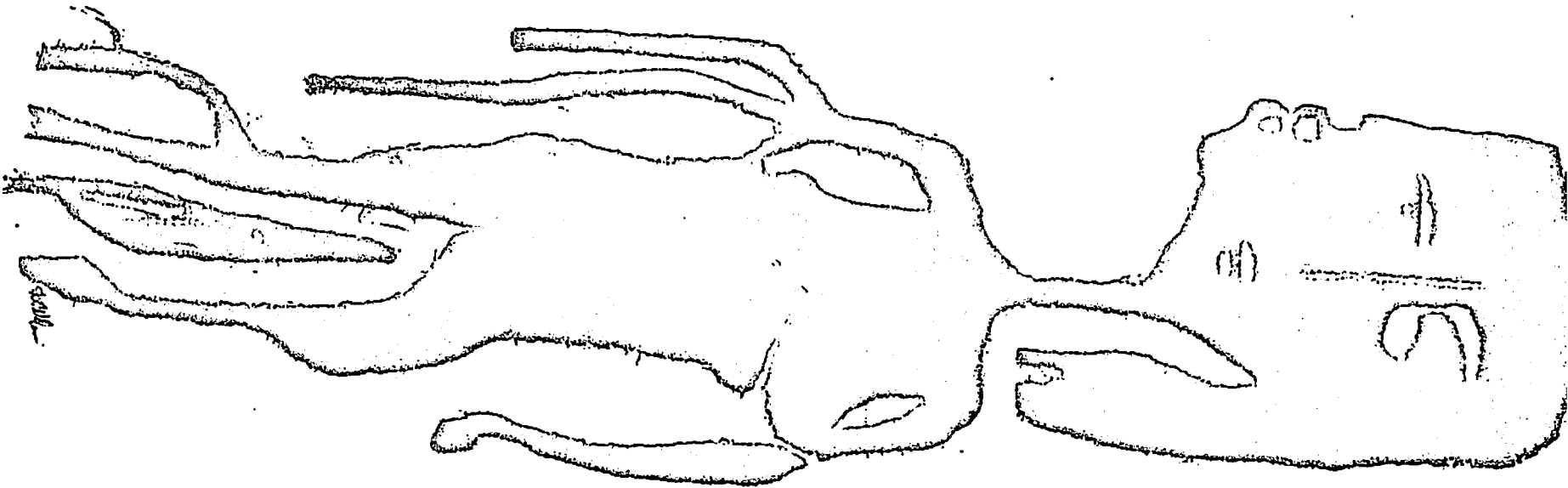
#### NOTES

1. Engels, Frederick. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. International Publishers, New York, 1972, p. 221

#### BREAD AND ROSES

As we come marching, marching, in the beauty of  
the day,  
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill  
lofts gray,  
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden  
sun discloses,  
For the people hear us singing,  
"Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses."

As we come marching, marching, we bring the  
Greater Days,  
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where  
one reposes,  
But a sharing of life's glories,  
Bread and Roses, Bread and Roses.



Graphic by Sandra, Kate Williams



## SECTION VI

### THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The women's movement for equality and liberation mushroomed into a vigorous widespread popular movement in the 1960's.<sup>1</sup> Stimulated by the civil rights, anti-war and New Left movements of the 60's, women began to apply the rhetoric of freedom, equality, and independence to their own condition, bringing out into the open the systematic subjugation of women.

It was not easy. When women stepped forward and demanded equality, they were dismissed by many men (and many women too) as "aggressive", "man-hating", "ball-busters", "in need of a good fuck" and worse. But women persisted. For women on the left there was a serious contradiction between the rhetoric of liberation for minorities, for workers, and for revolutionaries and the denial of even simple respect for women's physical and sexual integrity. The women's movement exploded, many women displaying the radical militancy which characterized the Black Power and New Left movements. As with the national minority movements, there appeared in the middle and late 60's a jumble of political and cultural statements reflecting a wide diversity of views on what women's liberation meant and how it could be achieved. Thousands and thousands of women joined "the movement" in hundreds of different organizations built around dozens of issues. According to one history of the movement, a study showed between 80,000 and 100,000 women belonged to some kind of women's group by 1973.<sup>2</sup> For some women the movement was a small "consciousness-raising" group, for others it was the battle for abortion rights, for others it was living openly as lesbians. Some women pushed women's issues in mixed political organizations, others worked exclusively with other women in all-female organizations. Out of the ferment a number of demands emerged which remain today as critical in defining women's equality, their denial representing most aspects of women's special oppression:

1. An end to abuse of and violence against women, including an end to pornography, because it actively encourages violence against women as well as the exploitation of women as sex objects.
2. An end to sexist, male supremacist ideology in all its forms.
3. Reproductive rights, including the right to free abortions on demand, an end to sterilization abuse, free dissemination of contraception information to women of all ages, quality medical care and education for mothers during pregnancy and after childbirth.

4. Basic job rights, including affirmative action in hiring and promotions, equal pay for equal work, comparable pay for comparable work, paid maternity and childcare leaves, an end to sexual harassment on the job, childcare for working mothers.
5. Economic rights - the right to have credit, full pensions, etc.
6. Full participation of women in political life; passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.
7. Democratic rights for lesbians.

The women's movement of the 1960's was similar to the rest of the New Left in its diversity, its multiplicity of organizations and political lines. It also shared a fundamental weakness - it was based mainly in the middle class, particularly among students, and there was no significant working class or national minority leadership. Many younger working class women, and to a much lesser extent national minority women, were attracted to and influenced by the women's movement, but the question of different class interests within the movement was seldom seriously addressed. Many working class and minority women were alienated by the middle class biases, conscious and unconscious, of women's organizations and their failure to integrate women's issues with class and national oppression. For instance, Betty Friedan's Feminine Mystique, which more than any other single book ignited the 60's debate on women's oppression, is addressed exclusively to educated, middle-class women. Although many radical feminists recognized this and tried to address issues which were of concern to working class and minority women, they were not notably successful. Partly because women's issues had previously been dismissed on the left in the name of taking up "more important" issues like racism and national chauvinism, women were suspicious of attempts to raise these as problems in the women's movement. National minority women were, and remain, organized largely autonomously and relate to national minority and community, as well as women's issues.

Today, twenty years after the women's movement took off, it is much subdued; the rhetoric of radical feminism has largely died out. But the consciousness of the country has been changed, and thousands of women still focus their struggles around women's issues or prefer to work mainly in all-women's organizations. We must ask what are the strengths and weaknesses of the women's movement today and what are the prospects for the development of a strong movement that will play an important role in the class struggle of the U.S.?

It is always a bit arbitrary to divide participants in

a social movement into categories, and in many ways the women's movement has been especially fluid and open-ended. But in gauging the potential of the women's movement to take up revolutionary struggle, it is useful to look at the following groupings:

### The Reformists

The most obvious distinction that arose among women was between reformists and revolutionaries, between those who aimed to make capitalism work for women, and those who understood that capitalism as a system must be defeated in order to attain complete liberation for women. That distinction is still relevant today. Today's mainstream reformist women's groups include the National Women's Political Caucus, the League of Women Voters, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and the National Organization of Women (NOW).

NOW is the largest: it claims two million members and says that it receives one million dollars per month in contributions and dues! NOW is largely a middle class organization and has been an avenue for the advancement of middle class women. The weaknesses of NOW are typical of middle class dominated reform movements, which have a great deal invested in maintaining capitalism. For over ten years NOW has focused principally on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Its strategy has been mostly legislative, i.e. working with the Democratic Party and liberal Republicans to get the ERA ratified in state legislatures. It lobbies much like any other special interest group, giving financial and organizational support to those politicians who support its demands. Because of its size, it can now command serious attention from lawmakers. Nevertheless, NOW and other forces failed to get the ERA passed even though the polls showed it had the support of the majority of women in the U.S. NOW made little attempt to actively mobilize that support, preferring its more bureaucratic, legislative strategy. Following the failure to pass the ERA in the spring of 1982, NOW indicated that its chief objective would be to elect legislators at the state and national levels who are supportive of women's rights. Its financial and organizational resources will be used in alliance with the Democratic Party.

The reform organizations have been the most durable in the women's movement, and each has its accomplishments. But even at their best they frustrate women members who have learned that more fundamental changes in society are needed to ensure equality, and that the real strength of the women's movement is not to be found in the halls of Congress and state governments, or in the Democratic Party.

## Radical Feminists and Cultural Separatists

From the late 1960's to the mid-1970's, radical feminists, mainly white and middle class, made up a significant tendency in the women's movement. They certainly did not view themselves as reformists - many of them called for the overthrow of society, which they identified primarily as a patriarchy. As Celestine Ware wrote on the goals of radical feminism in 1970:

Radical feminism is working for the eradication of domination and elitism in all human relationships. This would make self-determination the ultimate good and require the downfall of society as we know it today.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the radical feminists found all ideologies, including Marxism, suspect as products of male supremacist culture. They preferred to rely mainly on the personal experiences of women; "the personal is political" was their watchword. They did not develop a systematic analysis of how society could be changed or how its economic life should be organized. Nor did they develop organizational forms which could implement revolutionary change because of their deep distrust of the "bureaucratic, hierarchical" forms of organization developed by men. In this sense they also remained essentially reformist groups.

The Redstockings were a radical women's group in New York who helped articulate many of the views common to radical feminists.

We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented ... All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women. (Original emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

Later in Part VII of the same manifesto:

In fighting for our liberation we will always take the side of women against their oppressors. We will not ask what is "revolutionary" or "reformist", only what is good for women.<sup>5</sup>

The New York Radical Feminists wrote:



We believe that the purpose of male chauvinism is primarily to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, and that only secondarily does this manifest itself in economic relationships. For this reason we do not believe that capitalism or any other economic system, is the cause of female oppression, nor do we believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of a purely economic revolution. The political oppression of women has its own class dynamic. And that dynamic must be understood in terms previously called "non-political" - namely the politics of the ego. (We're using the traditional rather than the Freudian, that is, the sense of individual self as distinct from others.)<sup>6</sup>

There were many different organizations and many variations on this theme, but this represented the general tenor of radical feminism in the late 60's and early 70's.

Their successors can best be described as cultural separatists based partly in alternative women's small businesses and cultural institutions. There is in most big cities a stable community of feminist bookstores, restaurants, music, cultural centers, etc. National publications such as Off Our Backs represent this part of the women's movement which, though holding its own, does not appear to be growing significantly, and remains primarily white and middle class.

Both the radical feminists and cultural separatists formed tight-knit communities which offered tremendous solidarity and support for women. But the strength of this part of the movement has also been its weakness, for it has remained isolated from more broadly based movements. The women's cultural movement, while having many positive aspects, has served to reinforce this isolation and, in some ways, to hold back the development of a truly broadly based women's movement which has significant participation of working class and national minority women.

To some degree, the economic crisis of U.S. imperialism, its aggression abroad and the rise of the New Right at home have encouraged formerly politically separatist women to seek out and work with other sections of the women's and progressive movements in the last few years. The transition has not always been easy and many women still prefer to be active on other issues through women's organizations. This is partly because homophobia and a failure to take women and women's demands seriously are still problems on the Left. The Marxist-Leninist Left was especially dogmatic on women's issues in the 60's and 70's, and change has been painfully slow.

## Anti-Imperialists and Socialist-Feminists

This part of the women's movement has been a very positive force in the struggle against capitalism. From the beginning of the women's liberation movement, some women worked to relate women's struggles to the class struggle in positive ways. They consciously opposed U.S. imperialism and put forward a strong internationalist perspective. Many of these women seriously attempted to involve national minority women and to address their concerns. Most supported aspects of both a feminist and a Marxist analysis, and many had a long history of progressive political activism. This was reflected in a greater ability to carry out mass political work than other sections of the women's movement had shown. Like the rest of the Left, however, they were not strongly based in the working class and were small in numbers.

Today this grouping includes feminist theoreticians who have been writing prolifically in the last decade on the relationship between Marxism and feminism.<sup>7</sup> Although most of these writings are very academic and have no organizational strength behind them, they do at least reflect an understanding of the need for a scientific analysis of society and a systematic explanation of how sexual and class oppression are related to each other, i.e. the relationship between the U.S. as a patriarchy and the U.S. as a capitalist society.

Anti-imperialist women (some of whom identify themselves as socialist-feminist) have focused heavily on reproductive rights issues and support of national liberation struggles in other countries. Union WAGE, until its demise, was an excellent example of women connecting the struggles of working women with an anti-imperialist perspective. The Reproductive Rights National Network (R2N2) is an explicitly anti-imperialist, anti-racist network of many groups. Other anti-imperialist women's organizations are active in the Central America solidarity movement.

### Which Way for the Women's Movement?

The women's movement has made some significant gains for women. It stimulated a national debate on the condition of women in the U.S. and throughout the world. It caused many women who had never been active to become involved in political struggle and made enough noise and exerted enough pressure to win a number of legal reforms. It set the stage for women to break into "men only" domains, deeply influenced internal family relations in many cases, and generated an outpouring of art, music and literature which expressed women's feelings and rebellion. To be a woman in the 1980's, especially in the urban U.S., is very different

from being a woman in the 1950's. Everywhere women and men feel the effects of the women's liberation movement.

But when we look at the demands that came out of the struggle in the 60's and 70's and how far we still have to go, we must ask just what would it take to achieve them? Is it possible under capitalism?

For instance, the law now requires equal pay for equal work, and some corporations were forced to make substantial changes to conform with this. The concept of comparable pay for comparable work (i.e. comparable in skills and level of responsibility) has been raised more recently, and it is likely some gains will be made in this area. But the fact remains that the average full-time salaries of women are only 59% of men, a decline from 1957 when women earned 63% of what men did.<sup>8</sup> Pornography still flourishes, as does violence against women and their exploitation as sex objects by advertising and the mass media. There were gains in reproductive rights and then some major setbacks. We are a long way from free abortions on demand and the elimination of sterilization abuse of minority and poor white women. Lesbians can live and work more openly now, at least in most major cities, but still find it necessary to conceal their sexual preferences in many arenas. Affirmative action in hiring and promotion made some gains, but the economic recession and a conservative administration in the White House have undercut most of them. Most women are still underpaid in sex-segregated workplaces. Health and welfare systems have been radically cut back, the main victims being the poor, national minorities and elderly women. Universal quality childcare is rarely even discussed anymore.

The women's movement as presently constituted may not make many significant gains in the next few years. The New Right and the depression have combined to put it on the defensive and it is not, in the current political climate, able to spark the massive support it did in the 70's. But the cause of women is still there, the special oppression of women continues. What kind of women's movement do we need? What kind would actually move the struggle forward?

Women who are truly committed to full liberation must take up the struggles of working class and minority women and truly represent the interests of the majority of women in the U.S. They must join other forces in the struggle against capitalism, not by ignoring reform struggles, but by taking on reform issues which will first and foremost benefit working and national minority women, reforms which deal with the "feminization" of poverty; with the unorganized, vulnerable position of working women; with reproductive services which, even when they are legal, are not affordable or available to poor and working women, and so on. They must constantly expose the connection between the oppression of

working class women and imperialism. They must link with other struggles against capitalism - the condition of women is intimately related to the condition of working people and national minorities.

Historically, an excellent example of how strong links can be forged between the women's movement and working class women can be seen in the Chicago Illinois Women's Alliance of the 1890's, which enlisted the women's movement in the fight to end child labor and sweatshop working conditions. (See Section 4 for a more detailed look at the IWA.) In another example, through the Women's Trade Union League, middle class women supported the organizing of the unorganized needle trades between 1909 and 1913. Both the IWA and the WTUL served as popular fronts in which socialist women often provided leadership and working women had the opportunity to learn of the broader movements for socialism and women's rights. They also played a role in the Socialist Party and the final push to attain the vote.

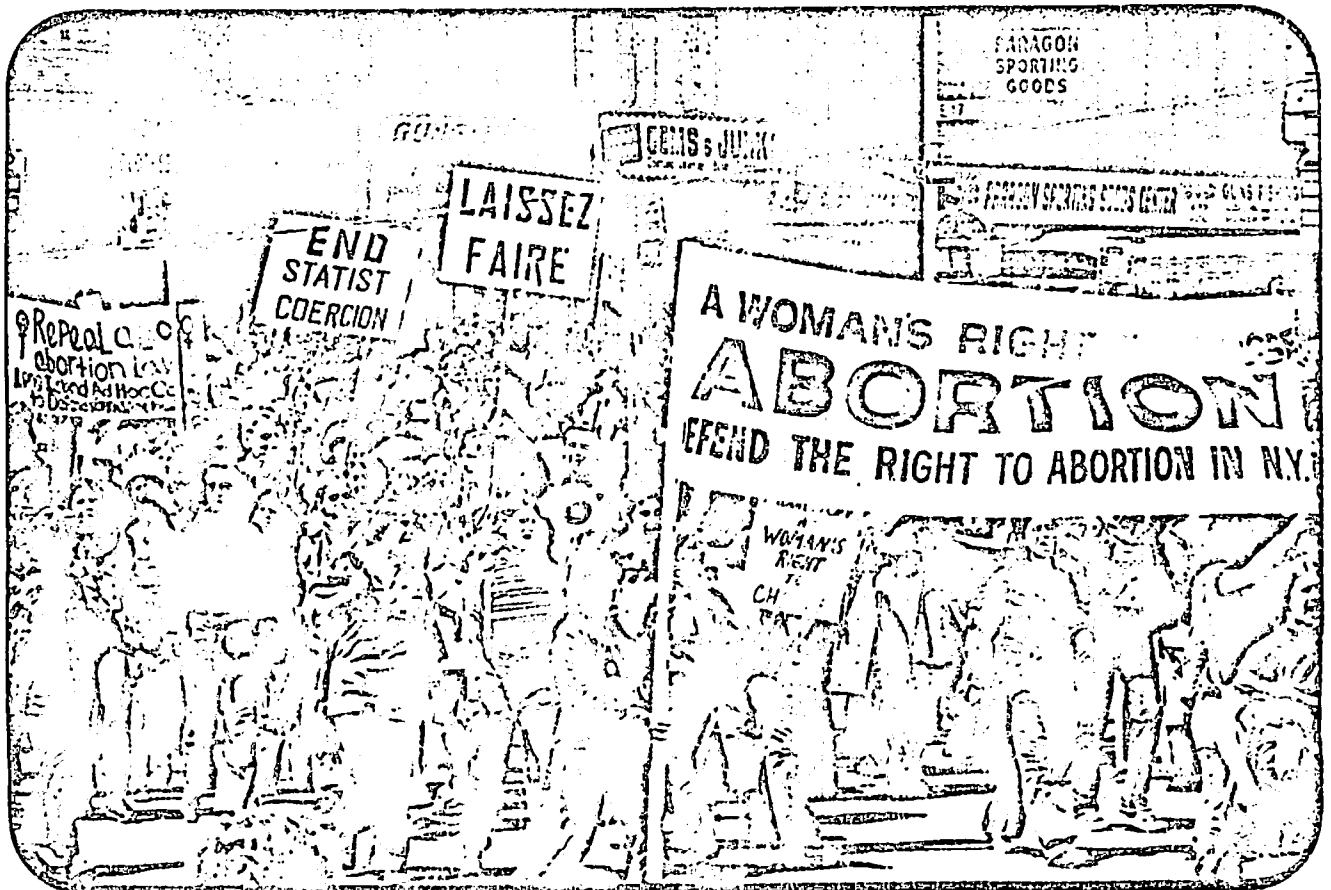
Today an issue which needs to be taken up much more vigorously by the women's movement is the interdependence between the oppression of U.S. women and the oppression of "Third World" workers at home and abroad by U.S. imperialism. U.S. corporations can often invest more profitably in the underdeveloped countries than they can at home. The last twenty years has seen big increases in foreign investment, much of it in light industry where eighty percent of the workers are women. At the same time the U.S. government props up dictatorships in these countries via "defense"-related spending or foreign "aid", so the economic climate remains stable for runaway shops and runaway dollars to turn superprofits. South Korea, Thailand, Guatemala, the Philippines are prime examples. This state of affairs affects women in two ways: (1) governmental spending on "defense" and "aid" means cutbacks in social programs which affect women disproportionately (for instance, seventy percent of all families receiving public assistance or welfare are headed by women); and (2) the runaway light industry directly affects U.S. women workers in electronics, textiles, and other industries through "job blackmail". Wage levels, safety practices and environmental regulations are difficult to improve because of the industries' perpetual threats to run away. The success of liberation movements in the Third World countries would put an end to the unrestricted exploitation of women there - and strengthen the hand of women here when they organize for better wages and conditions.

In summary, the women's liberation movement has never been a single, unified phenomenon, nor will it be. It is a result of and reaction to the special oppression of women, oppression which cuts across class lines and affects all women, though class and national status deeply affect the severity of the oppression and the concrete forms it takes.

The largest and best-known organizations are purely reformist. However, there has always been a significant grouping of women understanding and exposing the connection between monopoly capitalism and patriarchy, between imperialism abroad and sexism at home. Along with these women ORU sees that it is essential that the now small working-class and national minority segments of the women's movement grow and begin to assume political leadership of the movement. Only the participation and leadership of these forces will ensure a program that serves the interests of the majority of women in the U.S., and the linking of the struggle for women's liberation to the liberation of national minorities and the working class.

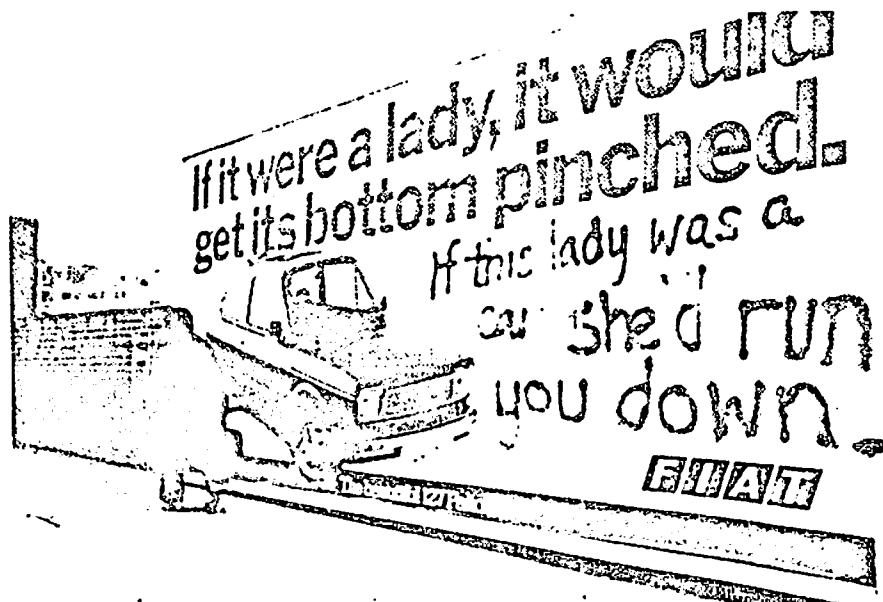
Two developments must take place: trade unions, community/national/cultural organizations must take up the struggle for women's equality far more seriously, even in the face of other important struggles; and the organized women's movement must be struggled with by class-conscious women to take up the issues of racism, national oppression, job rights for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, free and low-cost childcare, and so on. Until these and similar issues are seriously addressed as "women's issues", working class women, Black women, Latina women and other national minority women will avoid the organized women's movement, leaving it unable to develop or implement a revolutionary program of liberation for all women.

Abortion Demonstration, New York, 1972



NOTES

1. Although this section discusses the most current upsurge in the struggle for women's equality - the women's movement of the 60's and 70's - the women's movement in the U.S. has a long history. We touch on some of its other high points in Section IV.
2. Hymowitz, Carl and Michaela Weissman. A History of Women in America. Bantam Books, 1978, p. 368
3. Ware, Cellestine. Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation. Tower Publications, Inc., 1970, p. 60
4. Morgan, Robin, ed. Sisterhood is Powerful. Vintage Books, 1970, p. 534
5. Morgan, same as above, p. 535
6. Ware, same work, pp. 58-59
7. Heidi Hartmann, Lise Vogel, Sheila Rowbotham are three of the most widely published such writers. See Women and Revolution (ed. by Lydia Sargent, South End Press, 1981) for a sampling of the controversies facing women who view themselves as feminists and Marxists.
8. Recent data from the Census Bureau indicates that women working full time now earn 62% of what men make. San Francisco Chronicle, October 3, 1983.



## SECTION VII.

### WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

In previous sections we have surveyed the dramatic changes faced by women in the U.S. both in the home and on the job. How do these changes affect the relation between the struggle against women's oppression and the revolutionary process in the United States? Let us look at the following related questions: How much can women achieve under U.S. imperialism? Is complete liberation for women a revolutionary question? How is the fight for reforms for women related to socialist revolution?

#### Is Complete Liberation for Women a Revolutionary Question?

To be more precise, we are asking: can the special oppression of working-class women be ended under U.S. imperialism? Can women and men of the working class be equally exploited under capitalism? We know that the exploitation of women and men as workers can only be ended through socialist revolution and therefore is what we call a revolutionary question. Is the special oppression of women in the U.S. also a revolutionary question?

The exploitation of women is integral to understanding the development and current features of U.S. imperialism. Women contributed mightily to early capitalism in the industry of the northeastern states, e.g. in 1831, 58% of all industrial employees in twelve New England states were women, 7% were children under twelve. In Southern states women slaves helped produce the chief U.S. export crop, cotton, which in turn prepared the way for capitalist expansion. The ideology of women's inequality provided the underpinning for women becoming a reserve army of labor. As a reserve army, women have been injected into the work force in large numbers during every war and have served as low-paid workers in expanding industries like textiles, canning, food service, electronics, etc. Currently, women predominate in the clerical sector (35% of women who work), which is important to monopoly capitalism for the realization and expansion of profits (banking, insurance).

The exploitation of women has thus been an integral part of the development of U.S. imperialism. Will it necessarily continue?

The fight for women's liberation in the U.S. has been going on for over 150 years and continues today. If the complete liberation of women means . . .

- (1) Women participating fully in social and political life
- (2) The achievement of wage parity
- (3) The abolition of sexist ideology
- (4) The end of physical violence towards women and sexual harassment
- (5) Universal quality childcare
- (6) Full participation of women in the work force on a permanent basis instead of as a reserve army of labor; this includes the ending of job segregation and access to promotions
- (7) The guarantee of the full range of reproductive rights
- (8) Women and men taking full responsibility for maintaining the living unit

. . . then where do we stand today?

Women in the United States have won portions of all the above items. They fought for and won the right to vote, have birth control devices, have birth control information, enter higher education, enter into contracts, enter a wide variety of jobs and borrow money. The right to an abortion was won in 1973; however, closely related issues like governmental funding for abortion have not been won on a national basis.

Some progress on other issues has been made by women. For example, equal pay for equal work, participation in social and political life, ending sexual harassment. The ERA has been passed in many states. Many of these gains have been achieved through a slow back and forth process, exemplifying the transitory nature of reforms under capitalism. For example, many women who obtained non-traditional jobs in the 1970's lost them during the recent recession (almost all women miners have been laid off). An earlier example is government-sponsored childcare which was won during World War II, and lost soon afterwards.

One of the gains we can easily see which cannot be achieved under capitalism is wage parity between men and women. Wage differentials are of importance because they are a rough but reliable indicator of the distribution of



wealth in a society and thus indirectly a measure of the relative status of men and women. In order to achieve parity, 42% of the work force would require a 67% increase in wages. Although wage parity can be achieved under socialism it cannot be given in the U.S. for many reasons.

The forces working against a more equitable distribution of wealth arise in different forms. The ideology of sexism is an integral part of the economic inequality faced by women. For example, the notions that a woman's first concern should be to stay in the home to provide family care or that the jobs that women hold are not as important as those done by men bolster the idea that woman's role in the workforce is temporary and trivial. This is not lost on the capitalist who uses these ideas in order to weaken the ability of women to sell their labor power.

The flight of capital and jobs from the U.S. to less developed countries (which has undergone unprecedented growth in the last fifteen years) and increasing defense expenditures are additional pressures which make pay equity for women "less affordable". The flight of capital is based on the fact that profit rates are higher in the developing nations than in the U.S. Contrast the 10% return on investments in the U.S. with 45% in Asia, 39% in Africa and 19% in Latin America. These higher profit rates have resulted in an increase from 11% in 1966, to 24% in 1980, of U.S. profits which come from direct foreign investment. A good portion of this investment is in light industry where at least 80% of the workers are women. In short, U.S. capital increasingly exploits workers all over the world!

In order to retain the "right" to exploit labor in the developing countries it is necessary that billions be spent on "defense". For example, the U.S. finances and arms dictatorships in South Korea, the Philippines, Guatemala and El Salvador where trade union activity has been greatly curtailed and where "free enterprise zones" have been established. In these zones generous tax breaks are given to businesses, and workers are prohibited from striking. Thus, while on the one hand, defense spending itself makes wage equity for women in the U.S. harder to obtain, on the other it weakens the ability of U.S. women to wage economic struggles by helping to prepare a safe environment for U.S. capital to exploit (mostly women) labor in the developing nations.

The flight of capital out of the U.S. and the wastefulness of defense spending are not policies or choices of a particular administration. This situation cannot be changed by electing "pro-woman" or "pro-labor" leadership. The search for higher profit rates and the necessity to defend access to these profits by the use of armed force when threats and diplomacy fail are at the heart of the logic of imperialism.

From another perspective it must be remembered that the gains made by women have come about by intense struggle. For example, it took nearly 60 years for women to win the vote, a mostly formal reform, in a context where the women's movement had achieved an unprecedented strength by linking up with the labor movement and where the Bolshevik revolution in the Soviet Union had shaken the whole world. The winning of wage parity on the other hand would require deep structural changes in U.S. imperialism - a redirection of the resources of this society, a severe restriction on the capitalist's ability to make profits, and a highly unified working class. It is unlikely that these conditions could be met in the U.S., except in a revolutionary situation.

The fact that differences in wealth and privilege will continue to exist under U.S. capitalism also has serious implications for the other aspects of women's oppression. The differences will serve to reproduce chauvinist ideology (especially the ideology of economic inequality), reinforce the reserve army of labor role for women and tend to limit participation by women in political life. This in turn means that along with wage differentials the other aspects of women's oppression will continue to exist under capitalism.

It has been suggested that one possible way to eliminate wage differentials is simply to lower the wages of men. Against this it should be noted that the lowering of only men's wages by 40% could only happen in the context of monumental class struggle and that it is fantasy to assume that the lowering of men's wages would occur without also lowering of women's wages. The real wages of men dropped in the 1970's, but the real wages of women fell correspondingly, so the wage differential remained roughly the same.

Another important factor why the complete liberation of women is a revolutionary question is the relation between the liberation of national minorities and women's liberation. Women's liberation does not mean the liberation of white women. Eighteen percent of women are national minorities. In order that national minority women be liberated, it is clear that national minority men must also be. That is, for true women's liberation to occur, national liberation must also occur - a feature of women's liberation specific to the United States.

Many of the factors in the U.S. that operate against national liberation are the same as or analagous to those operating against women's liberation: wage differentials, racist ideology, national discrimination, defense spending, flight of capital, etc. Just as overcoming differences in wealth for women is impossible under capitalism so is it for national minorities - almost 20% of the working class. Eliminating wage differentials would be only part of the

"cost" of eliminating national oppression since national liberation within the borders of the U.S. would mean comparable housing, education and social services for national minorities. National liberation within U.S. borders can only be realized in the context of revolution.

Let us sum up. We have highlighted only two aspects - there are others - of women's oppression which make it a revolutionary question. First we referred to the fact that giving parity to women in the distribution of wealth in this society runs headlong into the imperialist drive for profits and the requirement to defend its access to a highly exploited labor pool. Secondly, in the U.S., women's oppression is tied directly to national oppression, which itself is a revolutionary question. As mentioned above there are other aspects of women's oppression which will persist under capitalism. Since capitalism is a breeding ground of inequality, sexist ideology, for example, will remain even into the first stages of socialism.

#### Why Should Women Fight for Socialism?

Are the prospects for women's liberation any better under socialism? Socialism means more than nationalized industry and universal childcare. Socialism is a society in transition which is ruled by the working class. The transition is comprised of the struggle to eliminate classes, divisions between town and country, mental and physical labor, etc. While production for profit may continue to exist under socialism to a certain extent, production for human need must have the upper hand. In order for socialism to develop, the involvement of all sectors of working people must be maximized. The end result of this transition is communism, a classless society operating according to the principle "to each according to his or her need".

The overthrow of capitalism is not an automatic guarantee of an end to women's oppression. The Soviet Union for many years was a leader in the struggle to liberate women. Women were brought into the work force in large numbers on a permanent basis, childcare was greatly extended, women had full reproductive rights and were allowed full participation in social and political life. More recently, additional aspects of women's full equality have been addressed by the development of family codes in Cuba and Nicaragua requiring equal responsibility for housework and an end to male chauvinism.

However, the decline of socialism itself in the Soviet Union has coincided with lack of progress in the attainment of full equality for women. The pro-Soviet writer William Mandel's "Soviet Women" contains the following relevant information. According to surveys, two-thirds of those families in the USSR where both a husband and wife are



present are "headed" or dominated by men. In more than one-half, home burdens are not shared equitably - especially in those homes where small children are present. Childcare facilities are considered inadequate by many. No women's movement exists in the USSR which is in any way comparable to that of the United States. In the workplace, women earn only about 68% of what men do. Even women industrial workers earn only 75% of what men do. Sex-segregated workplaces are also a problem - only 10% of skilled workers are women. Yet the Bolshevik Revolution occurred over sixty years ago. This is why a strong women's movement is necessary before, during socialism. Just as class struggles will continue during socialist transition, so must the struggle for women's liberation.

### Two Necessary Long Range Tasks

Since women's oppression cannot be ended under capitalism and can be ended under socialism, it is in the interest of working women to bring about and deepen socialist revolution. It is also true that socialist revolution cannot happen without the active participation of the broad masses of working class women. This is a recognition of the dramatic changes affecting women in the workplace and in the family. For example, 42% of workers are women, some of whom are in strategic sectors like electronics, some of whom play an important role in the clerical sector in the capitalist class' realization and expansion of profits. Also women currently head over one-quarter of the households in the U.S. In short, women can no longer be neglected in attempting to develop the long-range strategy for socialist revolution.

It is because women's liberation is a revolutionary question and women will play a significant role in socialist revolution that the strategy for women's liberation and socialist revolution will overlap in important ways. Two long range tasks are the building of a revolutionary communist party and a revolutionary women's movement (please see section on women's movement).

A revolutionary communist party must be committed to winning over women workers, creating a theory of women's oppression, insuring that leadership and theoretical skills are developed among women, and creating within the party itself the necessary organization to guarantee that the above tasks are carried out. The differences between men and women in society are often mirrored in revolutionary organizations. This fact has often been belittled and deserves special attention from revolutionaries.

## Why Fight for Reforms?

If women's liberation is indeed a revolutionary question, why fight now for reforms aimed at ending women's oppression? First, it must be clear that all forms of inequality in the working class are roadblocks to unity. Fighting against sexist ideology and combatting sex-segregated workplaces, for example, are examples of struggles that are now helping to bring more unity to the working-class. Secondly we have seen that in many areas of women's oppression substantial progress has been made. Thirdly, it is often through the struggle for reforms that people come to see the need for socialist revolution. Lastly, a revolutionary women's movement fighting for reforms will build unity and clarify lines of thought necessary for the struggle against women's oppression both before, during and after socialist revolution.

## Important Tasks in the Fight for Reforms

(1) **Trade Union Work.** Organizing unorganized working women is an important task as it would provide a floor of protections and organization for working women, lay the basis for the working class component of the women's movement and provide an avenue for winning women workers to socialism. Successful organizing drives in banking, insurance or electronics would be major breakthroughs. While this work should be attempted within the structure of the AFL-CIO, it will not be effective until a largely autonomous working women's organization is created.

Almost as important as organizing the unorganized, is strengthening existing trade union locals where women predominate. Many of these locals lack women in leadership and/or do not take up issues of women's oppression on the job. Other locals were only organized because of their close relation to men's locals, (e.g. Teamsters) and are simply holding operations, nominally organized, to prevent other unions from organizing on "their" turf.

Many sections of the left have in practice and in theory put forward the view that political organizing among worker should be almost exclusively in heavy industry. This strategy is too narrow if working women are to be organized in a serious fashion. Over 70% of women workers are in the clerical and service sector. Only 19% are blue collar, the majority of the latter in light industry. The clerical and service sectors must be recognized as important areas for communists to work in, in addition to heavy industry.

(2) **Other Areas of Special Oppression.** There are four main areas of struggle against women's oppression that need to be addressed both in the community and on the job. The first is reproductive rights, which includes protecting and

extending abortion rights, fighting sterilization abuse and infant mortality. The second is violence against women which embraces rape, wife-beating, pornography, and sexual harassment. A third area is the so-called "feminization of poverty". In the war on the working class, women and particularly national minority women are subject to the most intensive attacks. Arising from this are issues around social security, aid to families with dependent children, health care, universal childcare and the treatment of the elderly. The fourth area is sexist ideology. Sexist prejudices and false ideas, such as "women are weaker" or that unwaged work in the home is of little value, serve to hold back women in all spheres of life.

All of the above reform struggles should be linked to strengthening the ties between the working class and the women's movement. The Women's Trade Union League serves as a good example. While the WTUL had weaknesses (e.g. being closely controlled by a reactionary AFL), it obtained the support of the middle class in the women's movement to build lasting trade union forms. At the same time it played a strong role in supporting the efforts of the women's movement to obtain the vote.

The fact that the fight for reforms can link and strengthen different movements is critical for what we found above: namely, that the struggles for women's liberation and capitalist revolution cannot proceed on independent paths.



[Photo and caption from What Have Women Done? by the San Francisco Women's History Group.]

*Puerto Rican Day Parade, New York City—June 1970.* Nearly 2 million Puerto Ricans have been forced to leave their homeland for the city slums and migrant labor camps of the U.S. Along with forced migration, the U.S. government has set up hundreds of sterilization centers in Puerto Rico to depopulate the island, and to open it up further for U.S.-owned industries and military bases. But Puerto Rican women and men have met U.S. imperialism with resistance and renewed consciousness of their national history and oppression.



## A P P E N D I X A

### WHERE WE STAND: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, SUPER-SENIORITY, COMPARABLE WORTH, THE ERA

#### Introduction

In the last two decades, women have raised a wide variety of demands in their quest for equality in U.S. society. These demands generally have been in five areas:

The right of women to control their own bodies - "reproductive rights", improved health care, opposition to violence against women (rape, battering of wives).

Equal job rights - no discrimination in hiring and promotion; entry into "non-traditional" occupations; equal pay for equal work; equal pay for comparable work; improved maternity-related rights and benefits; an end to sexual harassment on the job.

Increased social responsibility for children - social provision of childcare, improved education and health care for children.

Equal rights under the law - the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution, non-discrimination in credit, survivorship, property rights, etc.

Social, political, cultural equality - organization into and power within labor unions; entry into "non-traditional" social, educational, and political activities; increased positions of leadership and responsibility; promulgation of positive images and role models of women through education and culture; opposition to stereotyped and derogatory images.

Through their struggles, women have won important gains in all these areas. In the 1980's, however, in the throes of a serious economic crisis, and in the midst of an ideological and political campaign from the Right, some gains of the 60's and 70's have been taken away; others are threatened. This is indicative of the temporary nature of reforms under capitalism. In spite of setbacks, though, the gains against male dominance and for the equality of women have been so many and have gone so deep that there will be no return to the past. This is especially true in the areas of consciousness and outlook, and in the structure of the work force.

#### Affirmative Action And Super-seniority

Affirmative Action - Points Generally Agreed Upon. The widespread job discrimination against women of all nationalities in the U.S., and particularly against women of color, has been well-documented. So pervasive has been this discrimination that its redress involves struggles on several

fronts: not only hiring, but also promotion and layoffs; not only "immediate" workplace issues, but also related concerns such as childcare and pre-employment training.

On the Left, there is general agreement on the following provisions:

Hiring - Where minorities and women historically have been discriminated against in hiring, an "affirmative" hiring program should be instituted with the goal of bringing their participation in the workplace at least to the level of their participation in the local or regional work force.

Training - Employers should contribute to union/community training programs to develop the skills of women and minorities in occupations from which they have historically been excluded.

Childcare - Employer provision of (or reimbursement for) childcare is important in providing equal opportunity for women workers, many of whom are the primary providers for their families. Worker and community groups also can play an important role in organizing and running childcare centers.

Seniority - A strong seniority system is very important for the protection of all workers; older workers, militants, women in their child-bearing and raising years, etc. The starting point for an equitable system of promotion, transfer and on-the-job training should be cumulative seniority on a company or union-wide basis. There should be no penalty for breaks in service, for example, due to pregnancy or care of infants. We also oppose seniority organized on a departmental basis - it is discriminatory because it is built upon and reinforces job segregation within workplaces.

Seniority, Affirmative Action and Layoffs - The Controversy. Provisions calling for separate seniority lists for women, minorities, and white men are very controversial. There has been support on the Left for separate seniority lists for training - this was one of the issues at the Kaiser Aluminum plant in Gramercy, Louisiana in the Weber case. The question of separate seniority lists for layoffs, however, has been hotly debated. It is a question which has "divided" not only the Left, but also sections of the working class.

How should we respond to the threat of layoffs? Our foremost response should be to vigorously oppose all layoffs. Layoffs shift the burden of the economic ups and downs of the capitalist system onto the backs of the working class. Even while the laid-off are wondering how they are going to pay their bills and feed themselves or their families, the capitalists continue to make profits.



What is a tremendous dislocation for workers and their families is a "normal" part of the functioning of the capitalist system.

If all efforts to oppose any layoffs are unsuccessful, we are confronted with the problem of who gets laid off. At workplaces where women or minorities have been hired only recently as part of an affirmative action program, the traditional formula of "last hired, first fired" results in women and minorities being laid off first. This formula results in wiping out the gains of affirmative action very quickly. At the General Motors automobile plant in Fremont, California, for instance, between 1968 and 1974 about 500 women were hired, constituting about 10% of the work force. In 1974, GM shut down the second shift, laying off 2,500 workers. All 500 women were laid off.

The majority view in ORU is that where women and minorities have been discriminated against historically in employment, separate seniority lists should be utilized if layoffs are unavoidable. At a minimum, women and minorities should be laid off at a rate no greater than their participation in the workplace (thus at GM, in the example above, only 10% of the workers laid off should have been women - 250 instead of 500). Where discrimination has been extensive and long-standing, an argument could be made for using layoffs as a tool to achieve even greater integration of the workplace (for example, less than 250 women could have been laid off at GM).

It is argued by many, including a significant minority in ORU, that laying off by separate seniority lists divides men from women, whites from minorities, and places the burden of layoffs inordinantly on the shoulders of white men who have not had any part personally in the discrimination. Further, it is argued that the issue of separate seniority lists for layoffs should not be raised at all because it signifies an acceptance of layoffs. Instead, it is argued, our only response to layoffs should be to oppose them.

Several things are at issue here. First, what is "divisive"? It is historical fact that there has been discrimination against women and minorities within the capitalist system as a whole, including the workplace. With an unemployment rate nearly twice that of whites, minorities shoulder a great amount of the burden. In those sectors of the economy where they have only recently been hired, women, too, have shouldered more than their "share" of the burden.

Second, layoffs are an oppressive permanent feature of capitalism. They are especially prevalent in times of economic crisis, such as the early 70's and again now in the 80's. We can and should oppose all layoffs as forcefully as possible, as mentioned above. But when they do happen,

should we stand by and watch the results of years of struggle for equal job rights for women and minorities reversed, while we say simply, "No layoffs!"?

Third, hiring, promotion, and layoffs are not the concern only of workers in the immediately affected workplace. They are concerns of the whole working class, and of the communities surrounding the workplace. It is in the interests of the working class that layoffs should not occur. It is also in the interests of the working class that divisions based on gender and nationality are not perpetuated or heightened by layoffs.

Lastly, it must be kept in mind that seniority was fought for to help bring about equality on the job. Seniority was used to protect older workers and workers who were political or trade union activists. Separate seniority lists do not expose political activists. They do reduce unequal treatment of women and national minority workers. Seniority systems that do not take into account sexism and racism perpetuate basic divisions in the working class.

The particular tactics of any given situation must remain flexible and take into account particularities. For example, the least divisive time to attempt to put an affirmative action program in place is when a company is in a hiring situation as opposed to a layoff one. Also, an affirmative action struggle must be taken up by the affected classes in order to be effective. In another direction, legal action should not be ruled out as a tactic, but it should be used even then with reservation. Falling back on legal tactics is often a sign of weakness. Over a period of years, equal job rights will be won and maintained only through a broad, mass-based educational and political campaign involving workers at the concerned workplace and in the community. Often taking five to ten years, legal action can easily draw out and diffuse the struggle, with no guarantee of success.

### Comparable Worth

Recent efforts of women workers and unions, particularly in the public sector, have brought the demand of "equal pay for comparable work" to the attention of the country. This demand goes a big step beyond the demand for "equal pay for equal work", which itself has yet to be won. The demand for equal pay for comparable work addresses the entire structure of the capitalist work force: the deep "labor market segmentation" of separate jobs for men and women.

Louise Kapp Howe, in Pink Collar Workers, illustrates dramatically the undervaluation of "women's" work, referring to a University of Wisconsin study of the U.S. government's



Dictionary of Occupational Titles [DOT]. The DOT rates various occupations according to its assessment of a job's complexity. One of the top scores in the DOT is for surgeon, which receives a rating of 101 (three zeros being the highest possible rating). One of the lowest ratings on the scale of zero to eight is 878, for example:

FOSTER MOTHER (dom. ser.) . . . 878. Rears children in own home as members of family. Oversees activities, regulating diet, recreation, rest periods, and sleeping time. Instructs children in good personal and health habits. Bathes, dresses and undresses young children. Washes and irons clothing. Accompanies children on outings and walks. Takes disciplinary action when children misbehave. . . . May work under supervision of welfare agency. May prepare periodic reports concerning progress and behavior of children for welfare agency.

Rating almost as low, but not quite, as foster mother was:

HORSE PUSHER (agric.) . . . 874. Feeds, waters and otherwise tends horses en route by train.

Some other examples:

NURSE, PRACTICAL, 878-' . . . cares for patients and children in private homes, hospitals. . . '

only slightly less complex than

OFFAL MAN, POULTRY, 877-' . . . shovels ice into chicken offal container.'

CHILD CARE ATTENDANT, 878-' . . . House parent, special school counselor, cares for group of children housed in . . . government institutions.'

rated the same as

PARKING LOT ATTENDANT, 878-' . . . parks automobiles for customers in parking lot. . . '

The devaluation of "women's" work goes to the heart of the U.S. capitalist system - as has been mentioned previously in this pamphlet, it is one of the major pillars of the sexist ideology utilized by the ruling class to keep the working class divided and it is also a source of great profit to the owning class. The demand of equal pay for "comparable work" thus is a just and important demand.

Especially following the successful San Jose city workers' strike, union officials, especially in public employee and nurses' unions, have been quick to seize the issue of

comparable worth. It has been widely hailed as an important new bargaining table tactic to improve the wages and benefits of women workers.

The demand for comparable worth has great educational value since it calls into question a fundamental tenet of capitalism. However, for the same reason, those advocating equal pay for comparable work for all women must be aware that it is really a revolutionary demand - the capitalist system could not exist with women and minorities in this country (and internationally) paid equitable wages!

There are several difficulties, real and potential, that have to be guarded against in connection with comparable worth. First, there is the possibility that one group of workers in a workplace will "go it alone" in their comparable worth demands and in so doing generate divisions in the workplace. For example, nurses in a San Jose hospital claimed to be "comparable with" pharmacists and struck without the support of other workers in the hospital. The main difference between the hospital and the San Jose city strike was that, in the latter, all the women workers joined together in demanding an across-the-board increase for all undervalued jobs.

Other difficulties arise with the procedures or schemes that are used to determine comparable worth. Most of these schemes give a job higher value if it requires more responsibility and/or education. This means that such schemes are of little value to those who, for example, work on a cannery production line or enter data into a computer. This leads to related questions about the schemes themselves. For example, why should not a woman who peers through a microscope all day in an electronics factory, risking injury to her eyes, be rewarded more highly than a person with a safe yet "responsible" job?

The above problems can be avoided if it is kept in mind that the reason for trying to put comparable worth schemes in place is to raise the wages of women workers and that no such device is a substitute for the required united class struggle. The San Jose city workers' strike is again a positive example in that the comparable worth issue was intelligently used over a three-year period to generate broad community support and unity among the workers.

## The ERA

The Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was first introduced into Congress in 1923, 3 years after women won the right to vote in this country. Not until nearly 50 years later did Congress finally approve the ERA - in 1972. By 1977, 35 of the 38 states required to ratify the ERA had



done so. By 1982, despite the lengthening of the ratification period from 7 to 10 years, no other states had yet ratified the amendment, and it failed to become part of the Constitution. Legislators and activists say they will introduce the ERA again.

The ERA says simply: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Few issues have reflected the separation of major sections of the organized Left from the masses of people in the U.S. as has the ERA.

While a sizeable majority of the U.S. population supported the ERA, organizations of otherwise diverse viewpoints on the Left joined in opposition to the ERA.

The Communist Party, a relatively conservative force on the Left, having broken with its revolutionary heritage several decades ago, opposed the ERA from 1972 to 1978 (later changing its position to one of lukewarm support). Other organizations on the Left opposed the ERA from an "ultra-'Left'" point of view. The Communist Workers' Party called the ERA a "liberal reform program. . . meant to deflect the demands of the most militant sector of the womens' movement . . . like any law isn't worth the paper it's written on."

We support the views put forward by the Workers Congress (Marxist-Leninist), now defunct, which played a leading role among Marxist-Leninists in support of the ERA. Their views and ours may be summarized briefly as follows:

The Workers Congress stated that the ERA was "a statement of the principle of legal equality . . . for the first principle of our support is that we stand for the abolition of all restrictions on the democratic rights of women and for the absolute equality of men and women before the law . . ." ORU agrees with this. Democratic rights may never be fully achieved under capitalism, but they should be fought for and won to the greatest extent possible. The struggles for reforms educate and train the working class as to the real nature of their problems. As WC say, "We support this reform because through it we can more sharply draw out what the real source of inequality is - that it lies in an economic system based on the private ownership of the means of production."

It is true that the bourgeoisie may attempt to use the ERA to eliminate protective legislation for women. But the same struggle by women and the working class as a whole that gets the ERA passed will continue - in order to get it enforced and interpreted in favor of the best long-range

interests of women. The bourgeoisie always tries to turn reforms against the working class and oppressed groups; they in turn must resist those attempts and use the reforms to broaden and intensify the struggle.

This was never more true than around the issue of protective legislation, which has always had a dual character. On the one hand, protective laws were won by the working class to improve its own conditions; on the other, they have been used to keep women out of more skilled and better paying jobs. We need to strike down artificial restrictions which hurt women in the labor market and demand real protective legislation which protects men and women in the workplace.

The growth of formal equality to women through the passage of the ERA would be a concession from the ruling class to the strength of the women's movement in this country. It would record in law that there is discrimination against women. As a constitutional amendment it would undoubtedly be the basis of many legal suits and court rulings. However, the achievement of real (as opposed to formal) equality for women will depend on the strength of the women's and workers' movements - not on the passage of one law or on legal strategies in general.

# ¡Huelga! Strike! 罷工!

After striking for almost two years, more than 3000 Chicano workers, 85% of them women, forced Willie Farah to eat his words that there would never be a union in his plants. After the walkout in July 1972, the Chicanas organized most of the picketing of El Paso's downtown stores (right).

At first many women were hesitant to step forward and encountered resistance from the men. But as both the men and women changed their attitudes, they saw how sharing leadership and responsibility strengthened the strike and brought victory closer. This unity was demonstrated during negotiations when the strikers gave up some of their demands to insure maternity leave without loss of seniority for the women.

[Photo and caption from What Have Women Done? by the San Francisco Women's History Group.]





## A P P E N D I X B

### TWO VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF DOMESTIC LABOR

Does domestic labor produce the commodity labor-power? In other words, are housewives\* similar to workers in a factory in that they produce a commodity or service for exchange? And if so, are they working for the capitalist in the same relations of production that characterize the directly waged worker?

In 1939 Mary Inman wrote a series of articles in the Daily People's World (the U.S. Communist Party's west coast newspaper) describing women's work at home as a part of social production. Two years later Avrom Landy, the Party's National Education Secretary, wrote an article in The Communist which viewed the role of housework quite differently. The polemic continued with Inman's book Woman-Power which attacked what she considered to be Landy's anti-Marxist position, and in 1934 Landy responded again in Part I of the pamphlet "Marxism and the Woman Question". In 1949 Inman wrote a pamphlet called "13 Years of CPUSA Misleadership on the Woman Question" which repeated some of her criticisms of Landy in a larger polemic against the Party's whole treatment of the woman question. An edited version was republished recently by Theoretical Review.<sup>1</sup> In 1964 she published the pamphlet "The Two Forms of Production Under Capitalism".

The 1960's and 70's brought forward new advocates of Inman's position that domestic work produces value rather than being a private unpaid service to individual men. Two examples are Mariarosa Dalla Costa who, jointly with Selma James, wrote The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community, and Marlene Dixon, Chair of the Democratic Workers Party, who wrote Women in Class Struggle.

#### Inman's Analysis

In "13 Years of CPUSA Misleadership on the Woman Question" and "The Two Forms of Production Under Capitalism", Inman wrote that women do take part in social production when they labor in the home. Women participate in two ways - by producing children for the capitalist class, and by producing the commodity labor-power for their husbands'

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\* Not only the wife but the whole family may be involved in domestic labor, including members who work outside the home. But the adult women, by far, bear the largest responsibility.

employers. Inman quotes what she calls a "fundamental Marxist law" from the preface of The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State by Frederick Engels. This same quotation is referred to frequently by feminists today who are concerned with trying to integrate feminism and Marxism.

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefore; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labor, on the one hand, and of the family on the other.<sup>2</sup>

According to Inman, the "production of human beings themselves" is the production of the commodity labor-power and women are involved in it in two ways. They bear children and they reproduce each day their husbands' capacity to labor for the capitalists. In other words the housewife expends her own labor-power in producing a commodity for exchange just as the factory worker does. Her consumption is productive consumption because she produced an independent product outside of herself which has exchange value and can be sold. The housewife is paid by a "family" wage which is actually paid to the husband, but which represents the value of her labor (and others in the family). Marx explained in Wage-Labour and Capital:

The fluctuations of wages correspond to the fluctuations in the price of commodities in general. But within the limits of these fluctuations the price of labour-power will be determined by the cost of production, by the labour-time necessary for production of this commodity: labour-power.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly in Value, Price and Profit, Marx says:

What, then is the Value of Labouring Power? Like that of every other commodity, its value is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to produce it.<sup>4</sup>

Dixon apparently takes a similar position when she writes:



The wage, then is not properly paid for the hours which a worker spends working for the capitalist as an individual. The real value of labor power derives from the labor of the family as a unit, and is paid in compensation for the aggregate socially necessary labor time expended by the entire family in the production and reproduction of the commodity labor power. The wages of the worker, the exchange value of labor power, are paid to the unit which produced the labor-power: the family. That is the labor theory of value.<sup>5</sup>

However, she also supports Engels' view that, as she puts it,

The subjugation of the female sex was based on the transformation of their socially necessary labor into a private service for the husband.<sup>6</sup>

She later states that it is not actually a private service but only appears that way because of the mystifications of commodity production under capitalism. It would appear then that she does not see household labor as a private service, but, like Inman, as part of social production.

#### Landy's Analysis

Landy strongly opposed Inman's stand. Housewives do not produce value, they are not the producers of the commodity labor-power, and they are not paid wages as they do not work directly for the capitalists. He makes the following points about Inman's views:

(1) Not all production is social production. The production of children is not social production, for instance. It takes place in every society regardless of the mode of production which is primary in that society. Historically, the more the labor process develops (the more highly organized and socialized it becomes), the more the family assumes a subordinate private role outside of social production.

(2) In "primitive" societies household work was the main business of society--it was not private but public, socially necessary labor. With the development of private property and the patriarchal family, especially the nuclear, monogamous family, it became private work outside the social sphere. Engels explained this in the The Origin... and Lenin also referred to this when he characterized the housewife as

a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and to the nursery, and wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-

wracking, stultifying and crushing drudgery. The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only when a mass struggle (led by the proletariat which is in power) is started against this petty domestic economy.<sup>7</sup>

(3) For Landy, though women contribute by their domestic service to the renewal of men's labor-power, the laborer himself (or herself) must consume the necessities which will renew his or her ability to work on the following day. This consumption is individual consumption, not productive consumption. Marx carefully distinguishes the two types of consumption.

Labor uses up its material factors, its subject and its instruments, consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption. Such productive consumption is distinguished from individual consumption by this, that the latter uses up products, as means of subsistence for the living individual; the former, as means whereby alone, labour, the labour-power of the living individual, is enabled to act. The product, therefore, of individual consumption, is the consumer himself, the result of productive consumptions, is a product distinct from the consumer.<sup>8</sup>

(4) If housewives are producing surplus value for the capitalists (the definition of productive labor), they are paid for only part of the time they work. That is, their product labor-power must incorporate both paid and unpaid labor time as other products do. Yet according to Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production, labor is bought and sold at its full value.

(5) When workers labor for the capitalists, they create enough value (which they are paid) to be able to purchase the commodities required to produce themselves daily and their replacements (that is to raise a new generation of workers). They labor for the rest of the day to create value for the capitalist (which they are not paid) - surplus value. When the workers go home, they have already reproduced themselves - they have earned the wages needed to buy their necessities. Says Landy:

To regard the consumption of wages as also part of the production process would be tantamount to saying that the reproduction of variable capital takes place twice, once in the factory and a second time in the home - obviously an economic impossibility.<sup>9</sup>

Consumption at home reproduces a necessary condition for capitalist production - labor power.



## Some Observations on Domestic Labor

Though this debate was useful in generating much-needed discussion within the CPUSA on the role of women's domestic labor, both analyses had serious flaws. A more correct analysis of domestic work rejects Landy's narrow, production-oriented approach. Landy, in effect, denied the special oppression of women and equates their liberation with entering social production. Fortunately, this line, once dominant on the Left, has been mainly discredited by the modern women's movement and the actual influx of masses of women into the work force. Although participation in production does lay a basis for women's equality, by itself it is far from bringing equality to women, even equality of exploitation as workers. Participation in the work force has intensified women's oppression in many ways with its "double day" and segregated, underpaid "women's" jobs. Landy's interpretation of Marxism is extremely narrow - because Marx and Lenin place such importance on production work in explaining the mainsprings of capital, Landy apparently concluded Marxist analysis need go no further, need not examine or explain the long hours of labor in the home.

Inman and some of today's feminists have begun to theorize a more important, more central role for domestic labor because it is obviously crucial in maintaining and reproducing the working class. This has been very positive. However, to rigidly apply the description of the capitalist social labor process to domestic work produces distortions.

We feel Landy read Engels, Marx and Lenin correctly - they did emphasize the private, isolated nature of housework and childcare. Domestic labor is an important part of the capitalist system and its existence greatly benefits capitalists as well as workers. Furthermore, subsistence wages must be sufficient to pay for non-waged members of workers' families. In that sense, we may speak of a "family" wage - though more and more it takes at least two workers in a family to earn one.

But to say women and others who work at home produce the commodity labor-power in the same sense workers in a factory produce commodities raises serious questions. According to Marx, workers own their own labor-power which they must sell. That labor-power is derived from individual and non-productive consumption of the necessities of life, necessities which are paid for by the sale of the labor-power of the worker. In that sense, at least, individual workers reproduce themselves, i.e. when they are paid for their work they are able to buy the commodities needed to maintain themselves and also their children.

Labor-power is not like other commodities; it is, according to Marx, a result of individual consumption, not

productive labor. Productive labor, under capitalism, is labor which produces surplus value. (Inman does not claim that surplus value is created at home, only that it makes possible the creation of surplus value at the workplace.)

It is also not easy to see how wages paid directly to workers can be said to "actually" belong to their families as well. The capitalists pay workers for the hours they worked productively for the capitalists, not for the hours families have worked to restore the workers' labor-power. On this matter, Inman and other rely heavily on Marx's statement that the value of labor is determined by the quantity of labor necessary to produce it. But if Marx saw the worker as restoring and reproducing him or herself through individual consumption, the necessary labor time would refer to the amount of labor incorporated in all those commodities the worker must consume to live, not to the labor of the family in preparing products for consumption.

What Marx and later the CPUSA did not address was the tremendous amount of labor involved in consumption, that the conversion of a paper paycheck each week to ready-to-eat food, a made-up bed, a repaired car, etc. involves many hours of unpaid labor, not limited to the eight-hour day. This labor represents women's servitude - a servitude she must often endure jointly with her exploitation as a waged worker. It is a legacy of patriarchy as well as an integral part of capitalism and it is enforced and reinforced by the domination of women in other spheres of society. It adds substantially to the standard of living of male workers who do not have to engage in this labor themselves in their "free" time. It is an issue that must be tackled head-on - even under socialism this kind of domestic slavery will not end of itself. Women must be freed from it, in the short run by sharing it with male members of the family and social services, in the long run by making it the responsibility of society as a whole. This entails a fight on many fronts, within the home against male supremacy, against the government for increased social services, against the employers for equal wages and improved social benefits that speak specifically to the needs of women and their families.



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