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**FIGHTING:**

**TODAY'S**

**WOMAN**

**A Marxist-Leninist View**

**CLARA COLÓN**

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**TODAY'S WOMAN**

**A MARXIST-LENINIST VIEW**

By **CLARA COLÓN**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Clara Colón, the author of this booklet, completed her formal education with a B.A. degree from Boston University's College of Liberal Arts. For the past 37 years she has been active in the trade union and Communist movements. During the McCarthy years she was an activist in the South, under harassment by state witch-hunt committees and federal agents.

In the 1960s she was secretary of the Gus Hall-Benjamin J. Davis Defense Committee, which was headed by the late Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. It was this Committee's attorneys, John Abt and Joseph Forer, who, in successfully defending 44 victims of the McCarran Act, nullified most of the provisions of that repressive law.

Clara Colón is the author of a number of articles on legal defense and on women's freedom, which have appeared in *New World Review*, the *Daily World* and *Political Affairs*. She is presently teaching a course on "Women's Oppression and Women's Liberation" at the Center for Marxist Education, in New York.



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*"There can be no real mass movement without women. . . . Our Communist work among the women, our political work, embraces a great deal of educational work among men."*

—V. I. LENIN

*"The bourgeoisie is fearful of the militancy of the Negro woman, and for good reason. The capitalists know . . . that once Negro women undertake action, the militancy of the whole Negro people, and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced."*

—CLAUDIA JONES

*"By creating a classless society without exploitation and tyranny, socialism gives mankind and womankind their first real opportunity to develop as individuals. . . . Woman is truly free for the first time."*

—WILLIAM Z. FOSTER

## I. INTRODUCTION

What's new about Today's Woman in the United States?

Together with her children and menfolk she faces problems that are new to the world—problems stemming from the monopolists and militarists of her own country. They have in their hands the capability to extinguish the life of every child, man and woman and to destroy all life on this good green earth.

Today's American working woman, entering the labor market in massive numbers, has learned that modern industry and agriculture are capable, for the first time in history, of producing a plentiful life for all. But in the midst of lavish abundance for some, millions are condemned to a senseless poverty. And she, a competent worker, is denied equality in employment and pay—the root of inequality in all aspects of life.

Twenty-two million Black women, men and children, with bolder determination than ever before, are fighting and many are dying for freedom, justice and a full life. They are proving that democracy, promised at our nation's very founding, can never be realized until it is real for the Black people.

In the Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano ghettos, poverty has reached crisis proportions. The crisis is contagious. It is fast expanding to wide, new areas.

On the Indian reservations, all these problems are further sharpened by nearly five centuries of genocide.

Politicians, doing the bidding of the wealthy, show crass indifference to the needs of the people. Fifty years after women won through bitter struggle the right to vote, there is hardly a token number of women in high elective posts.

The people have been on the move against these cruel and irrational abuses throughout the sixties, with the Black Liberation forces in the lead. A mounting movement of militant labor, youth, women, students is storming the walls of the Establishment. The people in motion are seeking more radical solutions. Many are

considering the benefits of socialism now seen in living practice in over one third of the world, including an island just off our own shores.

Out of the battle experience, the suffering and the hope of this rising struggle, today's woman is emerging.

What's new about today's woman?

She demands the right to live a whole life, to use fully all the mental, spiritual and physical capacities she possesses. She rejects the half-life that all hitherto existing society based on class oppression has imposed upon her.

Nature has endowed the woman with mental ability equal to that of the man. Today's woman demands the right to develop her talents and skills, commanding full recognition of her achievements and her potential.

The woman has physical strength equal to all but a very few jobs in industrial production. Today's woman demands free and equal access to all types of work for which she is qualified by her strength, skill and dexterity.

Nature has endowed the woman with the capacity for motherhood. Today's woman demands the right to exercise that capacity, subject to her own decision and to those laws she has had an equal share in shaping. She wants to enjoy all the richness of experience that is inherent in motherhood and family life. She refuses to have motherhood thrust upon her as a duty, a socially necessary evil, a handicap, a penalty.

Today's woman rejects the "modern" concept that she may choose to be *either* mother/wife *or* worker/career-woman. She demands the right to be both, and insists that society provide her with the facilities to fulfill all her capacities and talents, to be a whole woman, a complete human being, her equal status unquestioned and unchallenged. She refuses to be the stunted half-person that the ruling class in every age has tried to make of her. She refuses to hide her light under a bushel for fear of having her femininity impugned.

For centuries, civilization tried to limit the woman's horizon to the four walls of her home, to the care of her husband and children, with the creative aspects of motherhood stifled by the myriad chores of household drudgery.

True, in every age and every country, there were those hardy

women who broke out of this mold, revealing again and again that women had talents and skills far beyond those they were permitted to develop. Many such brave women went to their martyrdom, some burned at the stake as witches as reward for their courage. Others suffered the penalty of imprisonment and exile. The very least punishment was social ostracism or public ridicule. Very few great women were heralded in their own day. It took consummate guile as well as courage for a woman to utilize her capacities in public life. Many women exercised their leadership indirectly, discreetly, secretly, often through the men in their families.

Today's woman in the United States has her own distinctive character and style. Call her "independent," call her "pampered," call her bold. She stands on the shoulders of her past. She is the product of a history that starts with her courage, coming to these shores as religious refugee or indentured servant, driven by dissenting conscience or economic need, in search of freedom and happiness.

But, limited by male supremacist prejudice from the start, neither her daring nor her sensitivity was equal to the task of counteracting the twin evils that run through our country's history: racism against the Black people and genocide against the American Indians.

The Black woman, brought here by force in chains, towered above the incredible brutalities and oppression stemming from slavery and extending later into city life. Pitting herself against especially intense exploitation, racism and male supremacy, the Black woman has played, and is playing, a unique part in shaping this country's womanhood.

What the Indian woman might have contributed, had she not been nearly exterminated, we can only surmise from the high status she held before the white man destroyed the tribal way of life. Perhaps we may learn it from the prominence of women in the leadership of the current freedom struggles of the surviving Indians.

The American woman entered early into mass production industry, due to economic need. She fought against its super-exploitation of women and children. American women, Black and white, fought against slavery, for the free universal public school system, for fair legislation for all workers, for support of just wars of liber-



ation, for genuine peace, for socialism. The American woman's fight for the right to vote is a long and, with some notable exceptions, a proud chapter in this country's book of democratic struggles, though marred by resort to racism on the part of some of its leaders after the Civil War.

Never in the history of this country did the woman constitute the backward section that retarded progress.

In spite of continuing prejudices, discrimination and repression, in spite of continued harassment under the ruling-class whip of male supremacy, the American woman always was and is today in the thick of every democratic and radical development.

In modern times women began to enter industry en masse. While prompted by economic need, this step nonetheless gives women a measure of economic independence, and a greater share in social production.

But it was the women themselves who paid dearly—and still keep paying—for this advance. In assuming the responsibilities of employment in shop, field or office, the women still carry the major, if not the sole, burden of care for home and children. Neither the employers nor the government nor the men of the families step forward to share the load.

Capitalist society has made no provision to share in the working woman's traditional task of home-making and child-rearing. The result is that the woman, pivot of home and family life, can only set one foot into the world of opportunity as industrial worker. The other foot is still stuck to the household doorstep. If she tries to combine home and work, she is restricted to performing half-way in each. The working mother finds employment outside the home is a tough and tedious chore, hardly a step toward equality.

The professional woman's work often becomes a secondary interest she may indulge only if and when home duties are fulfilled.

At best, to date, only the exceptional woman under exceptional circumstances (ample economic means, an "understanding" husband) has been able to escape the dreary toils of household cares. It is a rare woman who can devote herself to perfecting her skill at a machine or advancing in a profession to the full extent of her desire while still maintaining a full family life.

But today women in mounting numbers and rising wrath are demanding their due. Their demands coincide with the tide of re-

bellion rising on all sides—the fight for peace abroad, Black liberation at home, the struggle to end poverty, youth's revolt against a life without a future.

Today's woman adds an indispensable issue to the radical movement's "must" list: freedom and equality for women.

In the course of manifold activities, today's woman is gaining an appreciation of her own identity, worth and collective strength. She resents and resists the restrictions placed upon her by a ruling-class-dominated male supremacist society, the unreasoning pressures hemming her into outworn "feminine" modes of conduct, confining her interests into narrow spheres. She has no patience with the ruling-class Establishment that denies her the facilities to develop her many-sided capabilities. She gives no quarter to prejudiced men, be they in progressive and radical circles or anywhere else in society, who are guilty of domineering attitudes and practices.

The impetus for women's freedom in the United States today is gathering momentum from all the liberating currents in which women have been active throughout the 60's. It draws inspiration from women's past history as well. Many diverse forces feed this momentum. The militant women in trade union struggles and strikes, the courageous women in the Black Liberation, welfare rights and community control movements, the indomitable women demanding an end to the war in Vietnam, the feminists groping for new solutions, the Communist women—all are adding to a swelling stream that is fast becoming a torrent. They constitute a force that the radical movement cannot do without.

The obstacles in the struggles for women's full freedom are tremendous and tough. The fight in this heartland of world imperialism will be fierce. But the American woman is a fighter. Today's woman will win many staunch allies in the rank-and-file labor movement, in every forward-looking movement of the day. The achievements—let no one doubt it—will be historic.

In a modest effort to aid in the search for a Marxist path for today's woman's full freedom, this pamphlet will try to make a realistic appraisal of the sources of oppression and of some of the main practical and ideological obstacles, as well as some of the chief issues and avenues of struggle that lie ahead.

## II. ARE AMERICAN WOMEN REALLY OPPRESSED?

To hear some people tell it, women never had it so good in all human history as they do today in the United States.

They have had the right to vote since 1920. Young women are free of the old social restraints: who ever hears of a young woman being accompanied by a chaperone or mother? American women are free to go to work or to acquire a profession if they please. And if married, they are assured of a livelihood and a happy home life complete with hard-working husband, children and a fabulous array of labor-saving gadgets that make housekeeping a breeze.

This glamorized version of women's lot in the U.S. is current not only in slick women's magazines, and among the Jet Set. In many foreign countries the image of the American woman is that of a poised, well-groomed woman in whose home air-conditioning, the self-cleaning electric stove, the refrigerator dispensing ice cubes at the flick of a switch are standard equipment.

Another false notion of American women's "independence" and "selfishness" was created by returning GI's during World War II and the Korean War. Many of them made nostalgic comparisons between American women and the docility of foreign women who, according to the GI's, wanted nothing better than to cater to men—unlike the self-centered American women.

True it is that the women of this country have won certain gains in status by dint of stubborn, fearless struggle. Many partial gains were won—the right to education, training for professions, the franchise, protective legislation for women and children, among others—despite male chauvinism, past and present.

Some progress, yes. But equality? Far from it. There's a long way to go.

U.S. women are angry—and with good reason.

First, and basic to all other griefs, women are forced to the bottom rung of the wage ladder. This inequality is unjust and galling.

Black women most of all have cause for bitter protest. Why

are 30 per cent of their number relegated to the most monotonous and insecure jobs, domestic work? Why are those who do work in shops limited to the least skilled, lowest paid jobs?

Systematic destruction of the family is rampant. Aid in the form of child-care centers is scandalously unavailable.

Another cause for wrath is women's practical exclusion from top elective posts.

And what about the conspiracy of silence on women's activities in the history of our country? To study our school and college texts one would never know about the consistent thread of women's contributions at every decisive moment of our country's history. Marxist historians alone—William Z. Foster, Dr. Herbert Aptheker, Dr. Philip S. Foner—have consistently incorporated the role of women in their books.

From this basic all-encompassing discrimination, a million daily frustrations, insults and abuses grow, affecting every minute of the day, every aspect of a woman's life. True, women in the U.S. are not slaves according to the law, nor are they tucked away in harems. The forms and the degree of oppression have changed. But class oppression "modern style" is no more acceptable than old-fashioned male supremacy. Today's woman resents with growing fury the burden of the ancient myth of her inferiority.

### III. THE "TROUBLE WITH WOMEN"—THE MYTH

It all started with Eve, we are told. Woman just got off on the wrong foot from the very start. Beguiled by a snake, she tempted Adam with the apple from the tree of knowledge. Neither Adam nor the deity at that early time had gotten around to the point of view that "the truth shall make ye free." Instead, healthy curiosity met with thunderous disapproval and both Adam and Eve were evicted by a wrathful Jehovah from the simple, easy life in the Garden of Eden. Since then man has had to earn his keep by the "sweat of his brow" and woman has had to pay for her original sin by enslavement to man forevermore.

This fable in varying forms, sanctified by the religions of the modern world, has "justified" woman's subjection through the ages.\* In so doing, religion served the purposes of the ruling class in each succeeding civilization.

Pseudo-scientists have offered their explanations for woman's inferior position. It's strictly biological, they say. Nature dictates that woman carry the infant for nine months and suffer the pangs of child-birth. And then there's the nuisance of menstruation. With these handicaps how can you expect a woman to do anything but keep the home fires burning? How can she use her head about political, social, scientific or economic matters? Of course, it takes little short of genius for the average working mother to maintain an orderly home, attend to children, cater to a husband and keep a job. But that doesn't qualify her as her husband's mental equal. That's just "feminine intuition," no doubt.

False "scientific" enforcement of male supremacy owes much to

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\* Today the myth is beginning to crumble, even in the church, under the hammer-blows of a new reality. Witness Pope John XXIII's pronouncement in "Pacem in Terris" in which he listed as one of the "three distinctive characteristics" of our age: "Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments, but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life." (Paulist Press, New York, 1963, p. 17.)

Freudianism. Psychologists of that school have influenced more than their patients. Their "philosophy" of adjusting the woman to the status quo permeates much of modern and current literature, drama, film. The atmosphere is polluted with the notion, phrased in Freudian mumbo-jumbo, that a woman's real fulfillment can be achieved only by her submission to the man.

And then there are those who don't bother either with religion or science. "It's human nature," they tell us, for a man to dominate and a woman to please him. You can't change human nature. It has been ever thus, and must remain so forever.

But has it been ever thus?

## The Myth Exploded

Let's refer to Frederick Engels, an acknowledged authority in this field. In discussing the status of women and various forms of family life in prehistoric times, he says:

. . . Communistic housekeeping, however, means the supremacy of women in the house; just as the exclusive recognition of the female parent . . . means that women—the mothers—are held in high respect. One of the most absurd notions taken over from eighteenth-century enlightenment is that in the beginning of society woman was the slave of man. Among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle stages, and to a certain extent of the upper stage also, the position of women is not only free, but honorable. (*Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, International Publishers, New York, 1967, p. 42.)

In the matrilinear communal society, Engels explains in his chapter "Barbarism and Civilization," women were the keepers of the grain culture, the major source of the tribes' livelihood. Women had discovered grain and the methods of cultivating it. For this they were venerated, because their historic discovery and their work provided a more reliable source of food than any known until then.

Associated with women's prime responsibility for infant care and the main feeding of the tribal commune were a number of creative, socially necessary activities. In seeking out plants for food, they discovered some were poisonous but, if treated, could

be nourishing. They found ways of drawing out the poison. They discovered the healing qualities of certain herbs. In their search for clothing, they experimented with furs and skins until they learned the process of tanning leather. In their concern for shelter, they became the builders of houses.

Women's ingenuity in meeting their communes' needs, their participation in the hard work of social production, earned them a place not only of equality but of distinction in the communal society.

Men hunted and fished, providing the secondary, less reliable supply of food. The men invented and perfected the instruments and weapons, the skills required for their own work—the bows and arrows, the javelins, the boats.

Each individual's work tools were his or her only personal possession. Everything else was owned by the tribe in common.

It was the women who concerned themselves with affairs of the household. But the household, it must be borne in mind, was not the individual family home as we know it. It was the tribal place of settlement, accommodating sometimes hundreds under one roof or in group dwellings. Women's responsibility covered all matters of provision, preparation, conservation and distribution of food, clothing and shelter for the entire tribe. Therefore taking charge of affairs of the household was comparable to today's administration of a city.

The tribal council, which was responsible for all affairs of the tribe, consisted of men and women alike, all with equal rights.

With the domestication of animals, cattle, sheep and goats became a valuable and reliable source of food and clothing, and later a handy medium for exchange. The men, now responsible for animal husbandry as well as hunting, took control of this newly developed source of livelihood, and of the economic power it represented.

Domesticated animals became a much more important source of livelihood than any previously known. They supplied not only meat but milk for food as well as skins for clothing, shields and shelter (tents).

The "savage" warrior and hunter had been content to take second place in the house, after the woman; the

“gentler” shepherd, in the arrogance of his wealth, pushed himself forward into the first place and the woman down into the second . . . 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. (*Ibid.*, p. 147.)

A cattle-raising tribe could even supply more provisions than needed for the tribe’s own use. Barter and exchange came into practice.

The increase of work involved in breeding, tending and slaughtering cattle required increased sources of labor. This source was found by converting prisoners of war into slaves. Previously the victors in war adopted enemy survivors into their tribes. Now the captives became enslaved work-hands.

Concurrently, the herds which originally were the property of the tribe were entrusted more and more to the temporary care of a family within the tribe and finally became the permanent property of individual families.

Thus private property originated and with it the development of classes based on private ownership of the means of production. The communal tribal society based on complete equality of all was broken up into classes: the class which owned the herds and flocks which represented wealth, as distinct from the class which owned nothing and was forced to work for the owners.

Coupled with the drop in woman’s rank in the scale of social production, the new class structure forced women into slavery.

The transition of economic control into the hands of individual men marked the beginning of private property, the beginning of class divisions, the end of matrilinear communal society, the beginning of woman’s enslavement.

It is in the context of these developments that Engels says:

. . . The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. (*Ibid.*, p. 58.)

At the same time, men used their new-found economic position



to establish their authority as heads of families and to substitute the tracing of descent through the father instead of through the mother as had been the practice in the communal society. Now that there was private property to be disposed of, men wanted to guarantee that the property was inherited by none other than their own children. For this purpose the monogamous, male-dominated family was established. Says Engels: "The supremacy of the man in marriage is the simple consequence of his economic supremacy." (*Ibid.*, p. 73.)

It was objective developments that brought about women's enslavement. Neither the man's nor the woman's superiority or inferiority had anything to do with it. Women had built up a great record of social achievement over a period of centuries when genuine equality prevailed. But once private property replaced communal possession, once class divisions were established, male supremacy took root and women were enslaved.

### **Master or Partner in Misery?**

While the first class oppression in history coincided with the oppression of the female sex by the male, class divisions throughout history have *not* been based on sex. There never was a time when all men were masters and only women were slaves, as some feminists would have us believe. The process of enslavement of women came simultaneously with the process of turning war captives, mostly men, into slaves.

In the later society based mainly on slavery, the great body of slaves consisted of men as well as women. Under feudalism, the serfs were both men and women. Under capitalism, men as well as women are exploited in the shops, mines and fields. The ruling class in each succeeding form of society consists of both men and women.

It is true that the ruling class for its own purposes of profit and advantage has decreed a greater degree of exploitation of women workers than men workers. It is true that the ruling class, rationalizing this super-exploitation, has established a whole culture based on male supremacy. But obviously we cannot speak of all men belonging to the ruling class and all women belonging to the exploited class.

What determines an individual's class status is not the individ-

ual's sex; what determines a person's class is his or her relationship to the means of production. Whoever owns the means of production, using them for purposes of profit through others' labor, is an exploiter; whoever has to depend on his or her own laboring strength for a livelihood, and is thus forced to contribute to the profit of the owner, is exploited. And sex does not determine this relationship.

Among the common people throughout recorded history, and certainly under capitalism today, the relationship of men workers to women workers is not that of masters to slaves. It is rather that of partners in misery.

The practice and ideology of male domination among the exploited has persisted through the ages only because the ruling class has consciously fostered it by every means at its command for its own selfish class purposes.

### **Who Benefits From the Myth?**

The rulers in every class society have used their power to encourage male domination within the home and in society generally. Along with private property, male supremacy has been sanctified by religion, written into the law, "explained" by science, ingrained into the prevailing culture, and hallowed by custom from generation to generation.

The ruling class of each succeeding society—slavery, feudalism, capitalism—had good reason to maintain the fiction of male supremacy. This myth has served to divide a discontented populace, especially the workers, and provide the men with a scapegoat. In addition, the female population was to be converted into the most backward force in society, acting as a brake upon social change and progress. At the same time, working women are generally used as marginal workers, serving as a labor reserve which threatens the employment and wage levels of male workers. Besides, under capitalism, women workers are a source of extra profits because employers pay them lower wages than they pay men for the same work.

For all these reasons it is the ruling class that has a stake in the special exploitation and general oppression of women. And it is the ruling class that has to be fought as the main enemy of women's freedom.

#### IV. UNEQUAL WAGES: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Male supremacy may vary in form and degree from country to country and from one century to the next. But its basic class essence is evident in the United States today in the condemnation of the woman to a lower pay scale than a man earns.

Nationwide, all occupations included, the median wage for year-round, full-time women workers in 1966 was \$3,973 per year. This was only 58 per cent of the median wage for men workers—\$6,848 per year. (*Background Facts on Women Workers in the U.S.*, U.S. Department of Labor, Woman's Bureau, September 1968, p. 3.) The extra profit to the nation's employers, based on this 42 per cent differential, is very substantial.

The excuses for the difference in wages are many: Women work for pin money or for luxuries or to relieve their boredom. Women aren't serious about their work; they are unreliable because they only work until they marry or have babies.

All these notions are outdated and refuted by the facts. Women work because they have to—the same as men. The typical working woman is no longer a young girl out of school biding her time until she marries. An increasing number of women from 35 years of age and up are joining the labor force to stay until retirement. There are millions of mothers working who have children under six years of age. Nothing but dire need would force these women to leave their homes for work.

In 1966 there were 27.8 million women in the labor force, or 36 per cent of all workers. Thirty-nine out of every 100 women over 14 years of age go to work. Of all the women who work, 57 per cent are married, and some 60 per cent of the married women are mothers of children under 18. The largest increase in the labor force in recent years has been from among married women.

Ability to earn a livelihood for herself or to add to the family income marks an advance for women's status. Constituting more than one-third of the working class gives women a significant

power—if they could wield it. But women's potential is nipped in the bud by the constant, grinding abuse, the super-exploitation that is the wage differential.

Let's see how this exploitation is exercised in various industries, especially those employing large numbers of women.

### **The Hard Facts**

In the apparel industry, 75 per cent of the workers are women. In New York City, with 40,150 women workers employed in women's and misses' dresses—a typical section of the garment industry—the median wage for women in 1963 was \$2.24 per hour as compared to \$3.27 per hour for men. (*1965 Handbook on Women Workers*, U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Bulletin 290, p. 143.)

Yet New York state has an equal pay law. The method of evading it in this instance is the differentiation between "men's jobs" and "women's jobs." Women simply are never hired for the more highly paid categories. Cutters are men only, and that is the most skilled and highly paid craft in the garment industry. The majority of the women are in the lower-paid categories, such as examiners, sewers, pinkers, trimmers and various classifications of operators. Women with years of experience reach the better-paid position of operator in the higher-priced lines. There are many Black and Puerto Rican operators in the cheaper lines at lower wages. The majority of Black and Puerto Rican workers, who have flocked into the industry in recent years, have met outright resistance by prejudiced employers to advancement to the more skilled jobs. In one instance, even when a Puerto Rican worker completed a union training course as a skilled operator, she was turned down by the employer. Beyond giving the course, the union did not fight for her advancement.

There are many Puerto Rican and Black women in the garment industry today who earn as little as \$45 and \$50 a week, and some who work overtime for no extra pay. This is below the state minimum and employers could never get away with it in an organized shop. But there are many unorganized shops, even in New York City, where workers do not know they are entitled to a minimum wage.

Bad as the situation is in New York City, it is nevertheless the

best in the country. Compared to New York's median wage of \$2.24 per hour, the median wage for women making dresses is \$1.87 per hour in Philadelphia and \$1.47 in Dallas (*Ibid.*, p. 143.)

But what about the runaway garment shops that have fled from the metropolitan areas where unions, weak as they may be, do exist? Some of the biggest manufacturers, while maintaining their present shops, are establishing new and bigger plants out of town. (George Morris, *Poverty in the Garment Shops*, 1965, p. 4.) Recent indications are that more and more shops in garment and other industries are being set up in the South. They take full advantage of the mass unemployment and hunger among the uprooted farm families driven off their land by the rapidly developing mechanization of agriculture. The manufacturers have the further advantage that most southern states have no minimum wage laws and the trade union movement is almost non-existent.

Hospitals are another field where large numbers of women are employed. In 1965, 1,134,500 women—81 per cent of those employed as non-professional hospital workers—were in various occupations from practical nurses and nurses' aides to laundry and kitchen workers and maids. Their median wages in 1963 in New York ranged from \$72.00 a week for practical nurses to \$1.51 an hour (\$60.40 for a 40-hour week) for laundry workers and maids. New York wages were next to the highest in the country, exceeded only by those in San Francisco. The lowest scale reported was in Atlanta where the median wage was \$53.00 a week for practical nurses and 58¢ per hour (\$23.20 per week!) for maids. (*1965 Handbook*, p. 150.)

But the 1965 figure of \$60.40 per week in New York already embodies a sizeable increase due to intense union activity. In 1959, wages ran as low as \$28 and \$32 a week. It is against this background that one must measure the recent victory in winning the \$100 weekly minimum under the leadership of Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Union. The militant involvement of the members and the rise of Black and Puerto Rican women leaders are evident in the picket lines, in the organizing meetings, in the pages of the union's publications. Prominent in the new contract are provisions for equal pay for equal work for women employees. And very promising among the union's activities is its training program which aims to train women as well as men as shop

delegates.

The laundry and cleaning industry is another area of high employment—and intense exploitation—of women. Numbering 360,200, women are 66.4 per cent of all workers employed in the power laundries. A 1963 government study discloses the familiar pattern of wide differences between southern and northern wage rates as well as the gap between the pay of men and women both in the North and South.

One after another, the industries employing the largest percentages of women are the industries with the lowest average wage rates.

But grim as the pay statistics are, they give only a dim outline of the job problems a woman has to face. The average working day for a hospital laundry worker (before the union, that is) is described in "This Is The Way They Wash Our Clothes" by Carla Andrews (*Daily World Magazine*, December 1, 1969). The work day is filled with exposure to 100-degree heat in the pressing room, to the risk of fires and accidents due to management negligence, to the tension of speedup. And this is only half the story. There is the home day. That starts at 5:45 A.M. with a fast cup of coffee and preparation of the children's breakfast and clothes before school, and winds up in the wee hours of the night after all the children's cares are settled and the household chores done.

The field of office work (secretaries, bookkeepers, typists, switchboard operators) is generally considered a women's field. Seven and a half million women are employed in one or another type of office work.

An examination of prevailing wages, even among the top classifications, is filled with surprises. As of 1964, secretaries got the high weekly averages of \$108.50 in Los Angeles and \$104.50 in New York City. The scales in southern cities were lower: \$81.00 in Memphis and \$96.60 in Atlanta. Those \$150 and \$175 weekly salaries in the agency ads in the *New York Times* "Classified" are the exception, not the rule. And as for the lowly typist, the range was from \$71.00 a week in Memphis, \$71.50 in Atlanta, \$70.50 in Dallas to \$82.00 in New York City, \$83.50 in San Francisco and \$86.00 in Los Angeles (1965 *Handbook*, p. 140.) These wages are higher today, but not enough to alter the situation basically.

In the clerical field as a whole, women's wages are only 66.2 per

cent as much as those of men in the same field. In addition, as office machines are introduced, the percentage of women is declining. In the area of finance, insurance and real estate, which employs about one and a half million women, the ratio of women to men has dropped from 50.2 per cent in 1960 to 49.5 per cent in 1965. (*Ibid.*, p. 110.)

The gap between women's and men's wages has been widening in almost every field—clerical, factory and sales.

The median income of full-time year-round women workers fell from 64 per cent of that of men in 1956 to 60 per cent in 1964 (*1965 Handbook*, pp. 126-127), and as we have noted, to 58 per cent in 1966.

In one industry after another, the same pattern persists: women get a lower wage, whatever the pretext; the differential is increasing instead of shrinking; the percentage of women declines as an industry becomes automated.

### **For Black Women Life is Harder**

Racist oppression of the Black people is the reality within which the special problems of the Black women arise. Because the men are so often deprived of the opportunity to earn a livelihood, the women have to shoulder an added responsibility. According to the *1969 Economic Report of the President* (p. 153), "The incidence of poverty is far higher among nonwhites\*: about one household in three compared with about one in seven among whites." Some 50 percent of Black women, as compared to 39 percent of white women, are in the labor force.

Low as the white working woman's average pay is—\$3,744 per year in 1965—the Black woman's average wage that year came to only \$2,642. Out of these conditions grow the cruel disadvantages forced upon Black children. While 24 per cent of white mothers with children under six have to work, 40 per cent of Black mothers with children under six go out to earn a living. (*Negro Women ... in the Population and in the Labor Force*, U.S. Department of Labor, December 1967.)

Black women are to be found in practically every industry as well as in clerical and professional jobs. That is a significant ad-

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\* Over 90 per cent of this category are Black Americans.

vance. But, again, it is the classification into which Black women are forced by discrimination on the job and in previous training and education that determines their low pay scale. The discrimination indicated in the garment industry is typical. In clerical work, Black women are few and far between among private secretaries and receptionists. Most of them are tucked away in the back offices as file clerks and typists.

In those cases where unions have fought discriminatory practices, such conditions have been changed. But a great many Black women are in unorganized shops because necessity compels them to take the first job that comes along and, all too often, those are the only jobs they can get.

### **Domestic Workers Are Hardest Hit**

Today some 13 per cent of Black working women have jobs as clerical workers, nearly 16 per cent are in factory jobs, over 58 per cent are in service industries like hotel, hospital, laundry, etc., and in private household work.

The largest single group of Black working women—30 per cent—are domestic workers (as compared to 5.6 per cent of white women). Partly because their pay is so low and their work so irregular, their yearly wages are the lowest. The median in recent years comes to about \$1,200 a year.

State minimum wages, in those states that have them, apply only when one employer has four or more domestic workers at one time. The southern states, except for Kentucky and North Carolina, do not have minimum wage laws at all, and more than half the country's domestic workers are employed in the South.

As for unemployment insurance, only two states—Hawaii and New York—have mandatory coverage for domestic workers. But there is an "escape clause" here, too. Steps toward adopting workmen's compensation laws for domestic workers are being taken in eight states, but even there no penalty is provided against employers who fail to comply. Federal social security coverage of domestic workers is compulsory under the law. In order to qualify, however, a domestic worker must receive at least \$50 in wages from one employer in a calendar quarter (three-month period), and only then are wages received from all employers credited for the



purposes of computing the benefits. That means keeping records. But many domestic workers are unaware of this law, as are most housewives who employ domestic workers by the day.

What is sorely needed is a genuine union for domestic workers which would strive to win all the benefits of minimum wages and hours, unemployment insurance, workmen's compensation and social security. Such benefits would have to be secured through a union contract, as well as through legislation that would be enforced only if there is a union acting as watchdog and champion.

### **The Trade Union—What's In It For Women?**

Of the 27 million women in the labor force, only  $3\frac{1}{4}$  million (about one-eighth) are in unions; whereas one-fourth of working men are union members.

Since women are on the lowest rung of the wage ladder, they have the most to gain from trade union membership. Why are they so slow to be organized? The primary reason is the neglect and indifference of union leaders, their utter failure to understand the potential as well as the special difficulties of women workers. What incentive is there for a Black or Puerto Rican garment worker to stick to a job or to pay union dues when, starting at the bottom of the pay scale, there is little prospect of training or chance for advancement to a better-paying, more interesting job?

The failure to promote women to policy-making bodies in the union leadership is another practice that shows not only neglect but contempt for women. A graphic illustration of this is found in *Justice*, organ of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (June 1-15, 1968). On page 12 a full-page photograph shows the floor of the opening session of the recent convention with the delegates predominantly women; on page 17 there is a photograph of the General Executive Board—21 men and one woman! Compounding the discrimination is the fact that Blacks and Puerto Ricans are hardly represented in the leadership whereas they are a high and growing percentage in the union and in the industry.

The growth and health of a union require a conscious, consistent effort to guarantee equality for its women members. Most unions overlook this simple fact. A number of unions, however, are developing programs geared to the needs of their women members.

The United Auto Workers, 200,000 of whose members are women, has a Women's Department of long standing. It publishes periodic bulletins and has issued a constant stream of brochures (*Women—Then and Now*, *A Girl's Best Friend is Her Union*, etc.), reports, special leaflets and bulletins. It has conducted national and regional women's conferences. It has led in the fight for the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

It is energetically conducting a campaign on the controversial question of repealing state protective legislation for women which, it claims, hampers women's eligibility for "men's" jobs.

With women forming one-third of its membership, the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE) held a national women's conference in October, 1967. It included panels on enforcement of Title VII and the Equal Pay Act and on social problems of women as citizens, and a forum on women in politics. The union also issued a report in 1967, based on a two-year study of the activity and leadership participation of its women members (*Women in the IUE*). The study showed, among other advances, a leap from 272 to 496 women members on local executive boards in that one year. The union has a consistent record of fighting for equal pay for women, with emphasis on equality for Black women. They have won struggles for maternity leave without loss of seniority. They have also presented testimony at hearings on Title VII.

A similarly effective record for women's equality has been chalked up by the smaller but militant United Electrical Radio & Machine Workers Union (Independent). This union has won substantial gains in pay scales for women under Title VII and continues to do so without, however, eliminating state protective laws which are often needed to protect the rights of new, unskilled and lower paid women workers. UE also has an enviable record in fighting through for job rights and equal pay for Black and other minority group women and promoting them to local and district leadership. This union, too, has published a number of fine pamphlets on equality for women in the unions. The *UE News* occasionally runs articles on the history of women's struggles for the vote and in the labor movement.

The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America has to its

credit a significant pioneering achievement: the establishment of a nursery and child-care center for children of its members, and a plan whereby the union will establish a whole chain of such centers.

District 65, Distributive Workers' Union, conducts a class geared especially to the interests of its women members, tied in with its training program. The content and approach of this class may be of great interest to other unions with a large woman membership.

But all of the union efforts combined have hardly begun to scratch the surface of the needs and possibilities for tackling the special problems of working women. A serious, concerted attack by the labor movement is essential not only for the sake of women workers but for the health and vigor of the labor movement as a whole.

Many unions have begun to talk about revitalizing the trade union movement. They are becoming aware of labor's indispensable role in ending poverty. There are many industries in which wages barely reach above poverty level even with full-time, year-round employment. These industries are a real challenge to organized labor. And these are the very industries—laundry, restaurants and hotels, agriculture, hospital, garment, textile—in which the women workers are a high percentage or the majority. The total of unorganized working women comes to some 23 million. And their number is increasing.

### **Reservoir of Leadership and Militancy**

But more than that, consider the reservoir of leadership and fighting capacity embodied in these women. The latest, most vivid example of this is the courage and resourcefulness displayed by the Black women hospital workers of Charleston, South Carolina. Against the ingrained bigotry, abuse and violence still rampant in Strom Thurmond's bailiwick, these women have thrown their sheer determination and self-sacrifice into the fray, sweeping their families with them. They have had to counter a three-pronged attack: as workers (with wages of \$23 a week); as Blacks still bearing the brand of slavery; and as women traditionally relegated to silence and contempt. One can only marvel and say, with Lenin: "The depths have arisen."

The Charleston strike is the latest in a tide that has been mount-

ing throughout the sixties. Among the earliest, and still going strong, was the grape workers' strike and boycott in which Chicano women, defying an especially powerful tradition against women's participation in public activity, are in the thick of the fight as activists and leaders. One of the top organizers of the national and international boycott and an effective negotiator is Dolores Huerta.

Recent social service workers' struggles have aimed not only to improve their own pay but to raise the standards of the people on welfare whom they serve. Teachers, mostly women, in many parts of the country outside New York City have broken with professional custom to walk on picket lines both to increase their salaries and to improve school conditions. Colorado flower farm workers have gone on strike. State and city non-professional hospital workers in New York, mostly Black women, conducted a militant struggle for recognition of their own chosen union. Their leader, Lillian Roberts, braved a prison sentence at Christmas 1968 as "reward" for her fearless and devoted leadership. But the union, Local 37, State, County and Municipal Workers of America, united in struggle, forced suspension of the sentence and won recognition. The forerunner of the Charleston battle was the dramatic victory of Local 1199 in New York which won the \$100 weekly minimum wage. Here again some 75 per cent of the members and activists were women, predominantly Black and Puerto Rican women, with a Black woman, Doris Turner, among the top leaders.

To increase, retain and strengthen this vibrant force in the labor movement, isn't it important to develop a concerted drive for equal pay, for equal training and promotion opportunities, for pregnancy leave without loss of seniority, for child-care and nursery centers under union and/or community control? Isn't it important to set up courses for men and women members on the risks of male supremacy as well as on the history of women's achievement? And above all, isn't it vital to *promote women to trade union leadership* so that their voices will be heard and heeded in policy decisions?

## Title VII

In building the labor movement among women, in organizing the unorganized and in developing leadership among them, great care is needed to maintain the unity of the working women themselves. There are many pitfalls, some of them hard to recognize at first glance. Such a trap may be Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

This provision, for the first time in the current struggle for civil rights, specifies that there shall be no discrimination in employment because of sex. Title VII provides that an employer cannot refuse to hire or train a woman because of assumed characteristics of women in general or because of preference of the employer or other employees or customers.

This measure was hailed by certain sections of the labor and women's movements, among them the United Auto Workers (UAW), especially its Women's Department. Eager to test this new provision, women applying for jobs previously open to men only ran into the obstacle of state protective laws for women. For instance, a woman applying for a job in printing finds an employer refuses to hire her because the job requires that she be available for overtime work or night shifts. Even if the woman is willing and able to work overtime and at night, she is prevented from doing so because state labor laws forbid such overtime or night work for women. Or the barrier to a job may be a state law forbidding women to lift weights beyond 25 or 35 pounds.

In the case of some women these laws really are a barrier to promotion. This is probably true in the case of many women in the auto and electronics industries, some of whom have been working since World War II, and have acquired seniority and developed skills. They are women whose children are grown up. Instead of objecting to overtime, many of these women would welcome the opportunity to earn the extra money to help send their children to college, or to live a little more comfortably now and after retirement.

The protective laws probably also hamper women college graduates who qualify as executives in business and the professions. Many of these women claim the state protective laws are obsolete, that the modern woman doesn't need these laws any more than

the average man. It is undoubtedly the more privileged, who are still the minority among women wage and salary earners, who find the state protective laws burdensome. But their problem calls for a genuine solution.

### **State Protective Laws—Are they Outdated?**

With the above complaints in mind, Philip Schlossberg, General Counsel of the UAW, drew up an extensive brief, analyzing the experiences of many women whose progress on the job was stymied. The brief was presented at hearings before the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) on May 2, 1967. This is the agency charged with application of Title VII. Women from various industries testified, backing the brief.

This brief became the center of discussion at a number of conferences like the Women's Legislative Assembly held at Rutgers University Labor Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey in May 1968. Although a number of issues were placed on the agenda, Title VII captured major attention. This conference, in spite of opposition expressed by the state labor leadership, wound up as a rally to abolish all existing state protective legislation for women.

The effort to eliminate state protective laws for women has continued and gained momentum. In a number of states pressure has been exerted, especially on women legislators, to introduce bills wiping out all previous protective laws. In practically every instance either the state federation of labor or spokesmen for a substantial number of unions have come forward to oppose such bills.

The chief argument against these bills, which are aimed to clear the way for Title VII, is well expressed in an editorial article in *Advance* (May 15, 1968), the national organ of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America:

While protective laws for women may slow down the promotion chances of some female workers in professional and business occupations, most women in manufacturing and service occupations do need the law's protection. Most unions—and the AFL-CIO itself—seek to strengthen existing state protective laws and extend them to all workers—men as well as women—where possible. ACWA General President Jacob S. Potofsky has testified that until this is

accomplished, any attempt to destroy state protection for women would be a serious retrogression.

The reference to extending state protective laws for women to apply to *all* workers is not just idle talk. The very first minimum wage laws in this country were state laws adopted before World War I to protect women workers. (*Minimum Wage and the Woman Worker*, Leaflet 24, U. S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1955.) In the 1930's when employers, taking advantage of mass unemployment, tried to revert to sweatshop conditions, they were confronted with the rising labor movement's demand for minimum wages for all workers. Now it is a basic demand of the entire labor movement and is required by federal legislation.

Furthermore, the conditions facing the majority of women factory and clerical workers, especially in unorganized shops and offices, make protective legislation indispensable. Such protective laws will be especially necessary as the Nixon Administration attempts to foist its "workfare" program upon the poor. Already the experience of Black mothers in Detroit, taken off welfare and put to work in auto shops, is a tip-off as to the situation that may well face all welfare mothers under the Nixon plan.

In addition, with more industries fleeing to the South to escape from the unions to states with anti-union "right to work" laws on their books, the employers are likely to resort once more to the same extreme degree of exploitation that prevailed in the early sweatshop days in the North before unions and labor laws were established. Certainly, the most exploited of all women, the domestic workers, need more—not less—protective laws.

Men as well as women need this protection, it may be argued. True. But isn't it wiser to let protective laws for women be the lever for improved conditions for all, as in the case of minimum wages? Or should the employers' standard practice of setting lower wages for women be allowed to become a threat to the wage level of all workers?

Some women have argued that the reason the labor movement persists in defending the protective legislation is that they thus save the better-paying jobs and overtime opportunities for men. (With labor's dismal record on the struggle for women's equality, who can blame women for harboring that suspicion? To this day there has never been a woman on the AFL-CIO's Executive Board,

and not one International Union's Executive Board has more than a token one or two women as members.)

But even if that is so, the practical realities of the majority of working women have to be faced. The man working at a dirty job, even if he works overtime, knows that at the end of the day he goes home, washes up and finds supper on the table. The welfare-mother-turned-shopworker, or any working mother, when she leaves the shop begrimed with dirt and grease, has to start another day's work—cooking, serving, tending the children. Every minute's overtime is agony. Protection for her is an urgent matter, both as to hours and kind of work. When we reach the stage where the working mother has no extra home tasks, then it will be time enough to dispense with protective laws.

The UAW women and others who are campaigning for Title VII, while they have been very competent in protecting the interests of a limited group of women, have shown no concern for the majority of their sisters. The effect of this campaign is to pit one group of working women against another, those who are better off against those who are disadvantaged. Any such division among women workers will be harmful to all in the long run. Any gain for a section of the workers at the sacrifice of the majority winds up being a loss for all. This breach must not be allowed to widen.

Actually there are other ways of applying Title VII. The EEOC can call upon an employer to claim exception to the state law when women workers find that such laws hamper their progress. Or, if the EEOC decides that an employer's conduct in invoking the state laws is actually discriminatory rather than protective, it can take him to court. So can the union. Long process? Yes. But going through the legislative mill to eliminate protective laws isn't just a hop and a skip either. Besides it piles up trouble and division for the future.

Some feminists have objected that the very idea of having to resort to appeals to the EEOC and the courts for their rights is denigrating to women. But is placing the majority of working women in a more vulnerable position not denigrating? What is needed is combined struggle for all women by all women together with the labor movement.

The advantages and disadvantages of Title VII have yet to be fully explored by both the labor movement and by the women's



organizations. There has been quite a body of experience with Title VII, and it should be evaluated.

Back in February 1967, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union won a wage increase for its women members in two packing plants in Dubuque, Iowa under Title VII.

During the same year the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers (UE) won substantial increases for its women members by invoking Title VII at the Allen Bradley plant in Milwaukee. The increases totaled some \$250,000 per year.

At present the UE is calling for enforcement of Title VII in its current struggle to compel the General Electric Company nationally to pay equal wages to women in its employ. The same union fought against Title VII when a Milwaukee employer tried to use it to get rid of seats which had been provided for women workers under a state protective law. The UE argued for retention of the seats, stating that in order to eliminate the inequity, the employer should supply seats for men as well as women. The UE also testified at hearings before the Wisconsin state legislature against a bill that would wipe out protective legislation for women.

A truly representative conference of labor and women's groups on a national scale, would doubtless prove fruitful as an initial step toward pooling experiences and assessing the value of Title VII, the state protective laws for women, and their relationship to each other. Such an exploration, to be worthwhile, should have the participation of the organizations and groups affected. That means women shopworkers, organized and unorganized; professional and executive workers; Black and white, Puerto Rican, Asian-American, Chicano, Indian and other national groups; domestic workers as well as office workers; young and middle-aged, married and single.

Such a conference to start the ball rolling, and appropriate follow-up committees, could initiate an exchange of opinion and joint exploration leading to genuine solutions that would satisfy the needs and strengthen the unity of all women workers, and establish more firmly than ever their status in the labor movement.

## V. PREJUDICE PURSUES THE PROFESSIONAL WOMAN

The pattern of exploitation and discrimination originating in industry follows women into the professions as well.

It is every woman's *right* to train herself for any profession she may choose. Besides, there is great need, according to the Federal Manpower Commission, to develop more women in the professions due to the severe shortage of personnel in such fields as medicine, health, education, science. Yet the percentage of women entering the professions is declining.

### Again, the Stubborn Facts

In 1965, 37.4 per cent of all professional and technical workers were women. This was a decline from the 1940 figure of 45 per cent for women in this category. In the first flush of victory after obtaining the vote in 1920, women flocked to colleges and into the professions. By 1940 the glow of the promise of equality apparently began to fade into the reality of surviving discrimination.

The largest single group of professional women in 1965 — 1,382,000—were teachers, other than college. Women teachers constituted 42 per cent of all professional women and 69 per cent of all non-college teachers. Seven out of ten women teachers were in elementary schools, two out of ten in secondary schools. Women were only eighteen per cent of the college and university teachers.

According to a report of the National Education Association "salary differentials based on sex have largely been eliminated" (1965 *Handbook*, p. 157). But obviously there is still marked discrimination in opening the doors for women to the more prestigious college posts.

Once a woman does break through as a member of a university faculty, she is faced with a salary differential at each level: as an instructor she gets \$407 per year less than a man, and when she

becomes a full professor she gets \$1,453 a year less than a man holding the same post (1965 Handbook, p. 153. Based on 1963-64 figures.)

The next largest group of professional women, 25 per cent, are in the medical and health field, primarily in nursing. Of the 933,000 women in this field in 1965, well over half—567,884—were registered nurses. Only 15,513 women were physicians—about 1.5 per cent of all women in the health and medical field. Seven per cent of the doctors in the U. S. are women. In the Soviet Union 75 per cent of the doctors are women.

In this country three per cent of our attorneys are women. There is less than one woman in a hundred engineers. In the Soviet Union one out of every three engineers is a woman. (Statistics on Soviet women taken from *New Times*, March 8, 1967.)

In the U. S. scientific community women constitute 27 per cent of the biological scientists, 26 per cent of the mathematicians, four per cent of those in physics, nine per cent of the natural scientists. (*Science*, May 28, 1965, article by Alice S. Rossi, citing 1960 census.)

The same pattern prevails in the business world. The following example is typical:

. . . An executive recruiter reports that the managers of a manufacturer in Northern New Jersey saved money by hiring a woman to serve as their chief financial officer at \$9,000 a year. When she left, they had to pay \$20,000 to get a man to do her job. When *he* left, they went back to a woman at \$9,000 and they then replaced *her* with a man at \$18,000. According to the recruiter, all four employees were good at the job. (Caroline Bird, *Born Female*, David McKay, New York, 1968, p. 78.)

## How Free the Choice?

The average working woman cannot afford the "luxury" of choosing whether she should go to work or not. But the professional woman usually comes from a middle-class background (although the ratio of students from working-class families is increasing now). As a rule she can choose whether to follow a profession or become a homebody. Of course, in our society, she cannot readily do both.

But even so, there is no *free* choice. The choice is loaded. First of all, she must bear in mind that within the profession she may pursue, progress will be limited not by her ability but by her sex. Then, her status as a person will be measured not by her standing in her profession, but by her husband's wealth or lack of it. Besides, many in her social circle will regard her as "selfish" if she gives preference to her professional work rather than to being a homemaker and hostess or companion to her husband at social engagements with his business associates or superiors. In addition, many of her best friends will look at her askance if she gives her profession the time and attention it requires and lets someone else take care of her children. The final blow is directed against that most sensitive point—her femininity. Can a woman give her major attention to her work and still be truly "feminine" according to the best middle-class Freudian standards?

Since a woman in modern capitalist society cannot expect to live a full life, since she must choose one or the other half of life, who can wonder that she doesn't select but settles for what seems the better deal—the comforts (and frustrations) of home, the approval of family and friends, the compensation of living through husband and children. She may wind up a neurotic on a psychiatrist's couch, but that is more acceptable in suburbia than taking chances on a career of your own if you're a woman.

A keen exposure of these conditions among middle-class housewives and potential professional women was made in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Norton, New York, 1963). This book promptly became a best seller, in itself an indication of the ferment of discontent among women. As a result the National Organization for Women (NOW) was formed. NOW was instrumental in establishing the unisex classified ads in some newspapers including the *New York Times* and in beginning to change the image of airline hostesses from sirens to sober servitors of flight customers. Unlike the old-line professional women's organizations, NOW members do not hesitate to carry a placard on a picket line, whether to repeal abortion laws or open exclusive's men's restaurants to women diners. NOW is a thriving, growing organization. Its approach is frankly feminist, giving priority to women's rights over every other issue including the class struggle.

## The Black Woman in the Professions

Despite the barriers of double discrimination, Black women are represented in most of the professions today—as doctors, lawyers, judges, artists, research scientists, writers, performers in show business. But again, more than half are teachers, largely in the elementary grades in Jim Crow schools. The next largest group are nurses.

Among Black women professionals, however, there is one important difference from the pattern prevailing among white professional women: There is a higher percentage of Black women than Black men in the professions. In 1966 the respective percentages were 8.4 and 4.4. (*Negro Women*, U. S. Department of Labor, December 1967, p. 36.) As of October 1969, 10.8 per cent of the Black working women were in professional and technical work, compared to 7.3 per cent of Black employed men. (*Employment and Earnings*, U. S. Department of Labor, November 1969.)

## VI. YOUNG WOMEN

It is the young women on the threshold of adulthood who are most cruelly affected by the unreason of discrimination and male supremacy. The very first step of earning a livelihood—a problem faced by the average youth on finishing or dropping out of school—presents greater difficulties for girls than for boys. The wage differential confronts the young woman from her very first day of job-hunting. So does discrimination as to opportunity for trade or career.

In the 14-19 year age group, 42.1 per cent of white girls and 38.9 per cent of nonwhite were in the labor force in 1964. (*1965 Handbook*, p. 18.) Of the 2.3 million in that age group who were employed, 32 per cent were doing clerical work, 27 per cent were in private household work (domestic or baby-sitting) and 15 per cent were in service industries outside the home (waitresses, hotel, etc.). (*Ibid.*, p. 102.)

But the employed, even in these low-paying categories, are the "lucky" ones. The rate of unemployment among youth, especially among young women, is staggering. Among white teen-age girls looking for work in 1966, the unemployment rate was 11 per cent, and among nonwhite 31 per cent. Among the boys in the same age group the unemployment rate was 10 per cent for white and 21 per cent for nonwhite. (*Underutilization of Women Workers*, U. S. Dept. of Labor, Women's Bureau, August 1967, p. 17.)

### Careers for Girls?

When it comes to education for a professional career, the young woman student is diverted from a serious course. Data on women college students show this picture:

Until recently, up to the college level, more young women than young men have stayed in school: in 1962, the median number of years of school completed was 12 for women as against 11.6 for men. . . .

But once the college level is reached, the girls begin to fall behind. The 437,000 women who enrolled in college in 1962 constituted only about 42 per cent of the entering class. Women are earning only 1 in 3 of the B.A.s and M.A.s awarded by American institutions of higher learning, and only 1 in 10 of the Ph.D.s. Today's ratios, moreover, represent a loss of ground as compared with the 1930s, when 2 out of 5 B.A.s and M.A.s and one out of 7 Ph.D.s were earned by women. (*American Women, Report and Other Publications of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1965, p. 27.)

It is not for lack of ability or talent that women drop out of preparation for careers. On the contrary, among all undergraduates in the country, 68 per cent of the women as compared to 54 per cent of the men averaged a grade of B or better. (*Report on Progress in 1966 on Status of Women*, Third Annual Report of Interdepartmental Committee, U. S. Office of Education, December 31, 1966, p. 11.)

What is it then that keeps these bright and promising young women from developing their talents? We are told in *American Women* (p. 30) that "From infancy, roles held up to girls deflect talents into narrow channels. . . ." Or, as Marya Mannes puts it, "those women capable of assuming positions of power in our society are still denied it, or conditioned not to accept it." ("Feminine Progress?," *This Week*, May 4, 1969.)

In other words, the unequal opportunities and prevalent social prejudices combine to warn a girl that a complete life is not for her, that she has a choice only as to which half of life she wants to live: either marriage or a career. And, of course, the weight of social opinion—family, friends, school counsellors, church—leans toward marriage. No young man has to choose between marriage and a career. This stupefying "choice" is reserved for women only. And the young woman, untried and inexperienced, has to contend with it from the word "go."

## Radical Solutions in the Offing

But the ferment among the young women in the sixties promises that before this quarter-century is over, today's woman

among the youth will come up with some radical solutions to the oppressive "half-life" choice. The challenges by young women in the sixties have not only revived the best traditions of the women in the labor and suffrage movements but have added a few new angles. The youth have been conspicuous in numbers and in militancy in the most important union struggles of women. Young women were among the leaders in the earliest of the student struggles that have become a profound sign of the times. They have been in the thick of the movement to end the war in Vietnam. Young women, Black and white, were active participants in the civil rights movement from the start, experiencing terror and arrest, taking part in the early lunch counter sit-ins, the southern freedom projects, the voter registration drives. They were widely engaged in the election campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and the late Robert Kennedy. They were among the candidates as well as campaigners in the Freedom and Peace Party in 1968.

Many active young women soon discovered, however, that even in the Movement, men consider that "women's place" is where they can best serve the men. The one question on which there is no generation gap is male supremacy. Below 30 or above, men in our class society consider women their inferiors.

Young women in the course of the general struggle have begun to fight for recognition of their equal status at every level, in policy making as well as picketing.

Very vocal and bold in their probing, a group consisting largely of former students and former Movement activists, disillusioned and frustrated with the male supremacy they encountered among New Left males, has set out to initiate a separatist women's movement. Their aim is to do battle not only against male supremacy as an ideology but against all men.

Their sharp-edged attacks against male supremacist expressions and practices are thought-provoking and effective. But their view of the relationship between men and women skirts the Marxist concept that class is based on an individual's or group's relationship to the means of production. They regard *all* men as exploiters and *all* women as exploited. Men, they claim, possess power and enjoy many advantages and comforts based on the servitude of women. Therefore, they reason, men as a ruling class have a stake



in keeping women down and will never voluntarily yield their power. There's no point in trying to educate them. The only thing to do is to build unity of women as a power base for effective attack against men. Since these enterprising young women have not at this writing issued a program of action other than "raising consciousness" and developing sisterhood among women, it is hard to know what the form and content of that attack will be.

It is evident, however, that their "analysis" is based on superficial and opportunistic reasoning. Probing beneath the surface of men's "power" and advantages, it is soon revealed that men—especially working-class men—are not in the long run enriched nor benefited by the enslavement of women any more than the racist white worker, man or woman, is benefited by the brutal repression and enslavement of Black people. Marx, with characteristic insight and despite surface appearances, had said that "Labor in the white skin cannot be free while labor in the black skin is branded." We can say with equal truth that men will never be really free, will never know the fullness of life until women acquire their full stature in equality and freedom.

The advantages men enjoy today, based on the countless and usually reluctant daily services extended by women, are demeaning and stultifying to the men themselves. Who can measure the frictions, tensions and breakdowns that result *for men* who have the advantage of the endless services of a wife who performs dutifully—and resentfully? How can you compare such "advantages" to the genuine, long-term unity and balance that is built upon mutual respect and reciprocal appreciation that can grow only in the soil of equality and freedom? An entirely new and richer life awaits all working people once the rotting prop of male supremacy is knocked out from under men's thinking and practice.

In practical terms, the separatist line of these eager young women, despite their honest intentions, is helping create conditions for splitting the working class along sex lines. Never a healthy tactic, it is a great menace today—or would be if working women were to heed their advice. This divisive approach plays right into the hands of the ruling class. Solidarity among the women is necessary. It can spur constructive activity towards freedom.

"Sisterhood is power" as these young women aptly say—if simultaneously it helps build the unity of the working class and the alliance of labor with the Black people.

Some of the more forward-looking unions, with many young women now joining their ranks, are building a solid base for equality without fanfare or publicity. First and fundamental is the fact that equal pay, equal job and training opportunities are written into the union contract. In addition, some of the leaders, both women and men, recognize that union membership and activity do not automatically eliminate male supremacist attitudes and practices. One union is making a special effort to train its young women members for leadership posts from shop delegate on up. Another union is conducting a series of classes on women's status, tied in with a full-scale training course for higher skills. The special classes are geared to develop the young women's sense of identity, to sharpen their awareness of male supremacy and teach them to cope with it, to instill pride in their womanhood rather than to regard it as a handicap. The students are Black, white and Puerto Rican women, and so are the instructors, who are members of the union staff.

These initial steps, together with one union's initiative in establishing child-care centers, are the first straws in a wind that will soon blow up a storm for women's freedom.

The recent notable advance of women in the leadership of the Black liberation movement, especially among the Black Panthers, is very significant. The intensity of the struggle, coupled with a realistic policy, has demolished the false image of the castrating female and is developing the concept of the fighting woman with equal rights and responsibilities.

On the campuses, too, young women are learning to introduce issues pertaining to women's rights as part of the all-round movement of youth for peace, for Black liberation, for relevant curricula. At one university a group of young women fought for the reinstatement of a radical and liberation-minded woman professor. In several universities, young women are fighting for the inclusion in the curriculum of regular courses on the history of women's struggles and contributions. At one university such a course has been initiated. A number of universities, previously the private

preserve of men, noting well that "the times they are a-changing," are opening their doors to women. This will probably encourage more openings for women on college faculties. Here, too, "sisterhood is power" and the menfolk are learning to appreciate it in the process of cooperation.

## VII. THE FAMILY—OBSOLETE OR REVOLUTIONARY?

The special exploitation of the working woman in the shop, field or office under capitalism is matched by the oppression that is her lot at home.

The monogamous family, brought into being in the transition from communal to private property for the express purpose of perpetuating private property along the male line of descent, has maintained pretty much the same form through the various societies based on class exploitation. Although in all these social formations—slavery, feudalism, capitalism—both men and women were exploited as slaves, serfs or workers, the women in each society had an even lower status than the men of their class, usually suffering oppression even at the hands of the men of their own class and their own families. The women bore the brand, as it were, of having been among the first to be exploited. That lower status of women persists in the typical family under capitalism today.

Created as an instrument to maintain private property, the family is used by the ruling class as a prop of the capitalist system. There is hardly a politician, minister, sociologist or any "pillar of society" who will not orate at the drop of a hat about the need to maintain a sound family life as a foundation for society based on "free enterprise," meaning private profit. What makes family life "sound" according to their lights is that the wife and children are dependent on the husband's pay envelope; that the dutiful wife makes do with what little the worker makes; and if he shows signs of complaining to the boss—or worse yet joins with others to make a collective demand through a union—the good wife cautions him not to do anything that will endanger his job. The wife and mother, kept dependent and helpless, can be counted on to maintain the status quo.

In the same spirit, she can be relied upon to raise "well-behaved" (meaning obedient) children who in their turn will knuckle

under, having no choice but to serve the bosses.

Now that's how the bosses have it figured.

But they themselves have taken a hand in breaking up this smooth-running family system. More and more, they have been hiring and exploiting women, including wives and mothers. But quite undaunted by the realities, the capitalists overlook the difficulties this creates for the working-class family. They still preach about "woman's place" in maintaining the "sound" family institution.

Any day in the week you can find some spokesman of the Establishment declaring that juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and all social ills are due to careless mothers who don't keep an eye on their children. Even though a woman puts in eight hours a day at a shop or office, she is still expected to be a full-time mother and home-maker. Industry is ready enough to put mothers to work, and to squeeze extra profits out of their work. But neither industry nor government provides household help or child care.

Unfortunately, men of the working class have fallen in with the prevailing idea of the "woman's place" in the home, even when she works too. Little realizing what he is losing by woman's enslavement, the worker deludes himself into thinking he is being catered to as a superior when his wife serves him his meals, darns his socks, launders his shirts, etc.

When his day's work is done, he expects to find supper on the table. After the evening meal, he either retires to watch TV or read his paper or spend a social hour with the guys down the street. Or if he is active in the union or some other organization, he has a ready-made "reason" to go tearing out of the house, leaving all the chores to his wife.

And then he wonders why his wife is so backward, why she doesn't sympathize with whatever cause he is sacrificing for. He doesn't realize she is sacrificing more than he is. And there's nothing more frustrating than sacrificing for a cause one knows nothing about.

The woman complains and grows bitter. In every-day language she becomes a "nag." Home life becomes a nightmare for the whole family, including the "superior" master of the household with all

the services rendered by his obedient but resentful wife.

In view of all this, the modern feminists and radical separatists have come to the conclusion that the family is the source and spawning ground of the oppression of all women by all men. Their answer is to do away with the family altogether.

Besides, they argue, didn't Engels say that the family as we know it originated as an instrument of man's supremacy?

But while citing Engels' analysis of one transitory period, our radical friends lose sight of Engels' view of history as a whole, including that period. According to Marx and Engels, humanity has progressed through a series of changes resulting from the clash of social forces. "The history of all hitherto existing society," says the *Communist Manifesto*, "is the history of class struggles." Through these struggles, humanity develops, grows and matures. Nothing remains static. Everything—institutions, ideas, purposes, social relations, the very human being—is subject to change.

### **Changes in Family Relationships**

The family is no exception.

Originally the family concept contained not the slightest concern for personal feeling, emotional or sexual, between the two partners to a marriage. The strictly economic character of marriage prevailed through the Middle Ages as a means of uniting the wealth of dynasties, strengthening the power of large landowners, without regard for the personal sentiments of the man and woman involved.

But a drastic change began to develop with the introduction of individual sex-love into the relationship between man and wife during the Middle Ages. Although the property relationship remained the main basis of marriage and the family among the propertied classes, the concept of individual love was gradually smuggled in as a secondary factor.

Among the common people love developed as the chief basis for marriage. More than that, the sanctity of marriage became a revolutionary force among the propertyless classes.

When the peasants rose against their feudal rulers, they rebelled not only against the economic robbery to which they were subjected, but also against the abuse of their families, the viola-

tion of their wives and daughters by the feudal lords. The crassest of these abuses was the right of the first night, the feudal lord's privilege to occupy the marriage bed of the bride of any of his serfs on the wedding night. Small wonder, then, that: "In the revolutionary movements that undermined the medieval social structure, the woman's right to protection from physical violation was one of the most powerful motivating factors." (*The Hidden Heritage*, John Howard Lawson, Citadel Press, New York, 1950, p. 60.)

The family concept continued evolving as the source of the individual's identity, the place where elders and children alike had roots, where the children received their earliest training as social, ethical human beings, where they first learned the meaning of love and respect for fellow-humans. The classes who had little or no property, the peasants, sharecroppers and workers, most appreciated the need for—and did most to develop—the family as a center of ethical and cultural life, a haven where the stresses of every-day life could be discussed and resolved, a source of personal warmth, affection, security.

In most instances, despite male supremacy, the woman emerged as soul and organizer of the home. But she continued carrying the mark and the burden of slavery. She inherited from all past generations the wearing, endless chores of household work and the physical care of the children's daily and hourly needs. Tradition and religion in the service of the ruling class combined over the centuries to keep woman "in her place."

So deeply ingrained is male supremacist thinking that even the removal of the economic basis for it, even the provision of major facilities to enhance women's freedom, does not automatically eliminate male supremacist customs. Only recently the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* (February 27, 1969) carried an article in which a working professional woman chided the menfolk for leaving the few remaining household tasks to the women of the family even in cases where the women worked outside the home. Evidently the battle for the minds of men—and women, too—must continue stubbornly and skillfully even after socialism has been established.

Certainly in capitalist countries the struggle against the economic conditions that nurture male supremacist practices must be ac-

determination to defend it.

A stronghold in the midst of a crisis-torn, poverty-ridden existence, a solid start in life for the children, a good start each day of their lives—that's what keeping a family together means.

### **The Black Family: Special Object of Attack**

Family life can't be taken for granted, especially in the ghetto. The Black family is under attack, and has been for a long time. It has been the target of the most sustained, brutal and insidious assault from the day the first Africans were brought in chains to these shores. In this country more than in any other, the slave traders and masters had no scruples about separating families on the auction block or in sales from one plantation owner to another. Marriage between slaves was not recognized by the owners. Plantation owners and their riding bosses did not hesitate to use Black women, married or not, for their sexual gratification, and took no responsibility for children born of rape.

But Black women and men fought throughout to save their families. Little has come down to us in written form, but we cannot regard as an isolated instance the experience in the 1850's of the Still family, torn apart by slave-catchers and reunited after a 40-year search by the two brothers. (Kate R. Pickard, *The Kidnapped and the Ransomed*, Negro Publication Society of America, New York, 1941.)

After the short-lived Reconstruction Era, once again the Black family was under attack. Deprived by Jim Crow of the opportunity to earn an adequate livelihood, the Black husband and father was prevented from being the breadwinner of the family. More and more the wife and mother shared in this responsibility. Often the woman had to be the main or sole breadwinner, creating a pattern incompatible with the prevailing white family pattern.

Today the family living in poverty—and especially the ghetto family—is subjected to an additional destructive onslaught. Welfare regulations provide that a family cannot receive Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) funds if the father is present. Enforcement of these regulations persists even though the Supreme Court ruling of June 17, 1968 in the case of Mrs. Sylvester Smith (represented by the American Civil Liberties Union) sets a precedent



the Black man of earning power. The woman has risen to the challenge with fierce determination to save the family in the face of heavy odds. Is she to be penalized for that? Would the Black man's pride or ego be improved if the woman collapsed under the responsibility the Establishment has unfairly and brutally thrust upon her?

Furthermore, Moynihan's standard for a stable family is the typical middle-class white family in which the father is dominant. But that standard may be quite irrelevant to the woman of today, Black or white. With more and more women going into industry and the professions, with women demanding equality in every phase of modern life, it is very likely male dominance of the family is on its way out. We may be evolving new standards in family life. The sacrifice and travail of the Black mother may well be blazing the trail to a new life-style, to a more balanced form of family life in which the woman stands as a proud and equal partner, along with the man, at the head of the family.

Poverty based on discrimination and racism is at the root of the problems of Chicano and Puerto Rican families as well, whether in the big city slums or on the farms where they follow the crops, living in hovels and chicken coops, with little or no provision for schooling for the children.

Indian families have been subjected to special forms of attack. Not only have their ancient tribal ways and morality, including a lofty status for women, been subverted. Not only have their lands been seized by the white man. During the past year, the protests of Sioux Indian mothers revealed that the authorities are placing their children with alien foster parents, presumably to provide advantages not available on the reservations. The *New York Times* of July 17, 1968 reports: "A delegation of Devil's Island Sioux Indian mothers from North Dakota said at a news conference in the Overseas Press Club that children on their reservation had been taken away from them by welfare workers after 'coercion and starvation threats.'"

Did it ever occur to the authorities that improving conditions on the reservations, granting the Indians themselves control over their own affairs, and leaving the children with their parents might make more sense than destroying the family?

## The War in Vietnam and the Family

The most pervasive over-all attack on family life stems from the brutal war in Vietnam. What standards of human relationship are set for our army youth and our whole population when we see our G.I.s setting fire with their cigarette lighters to the humble family homes of the Vietnamese people? What standards are set by the bestial atrocities against women and children at Songmy?

The civilian side of the coin is characterized by crisis and hunger and disease. What else can be expected of a system where war and aggression come first and human beings, especially the workers and the poor, are at the bottom of the priority list? What else can be expected where billions are available for military expenditures, where a moon-landing cannot be delayed, but welfare food allowances are cut from a magnanimous 83 cents to 66 cents a day per person? What can we expect where the first timid beginnings of medical aid are cut; where schools and housing are deteriorating and there is hardly a penny for child care centers; where universities are geared to war purposes. What is the family worth in *this* system of priorities?

These are the things that have sent today's American women pounding at the doors of the Pentagon, picketing in union struggles, storming the welfare offices, demonstrating for housing and for community control of the schools. And this is only the beginning. For today's woman aims to go far—and fast—in her fight for equality, for freedom, for the family, for a full life in a better world.

## VIII. CHILD CARE CENTERS: TOP PRIORITY

All busy American *mothers*—be they workers, professionals, job-seekers in training, full-time home-makers with large families—need child care centers for children of pre-school age and for all pupils after school hours. But it is especially the working mother and the ghetto mother for whom reliable, competent, free child care means the difference between living like a creative human being and existing like a beast of burden.

American society is duty-bound to establish a system of child care for its own self-preservation. Freedom for women is also essential for society's survival. In addition, existing shortages of woman and manpower make child care an urgent, immediate "must." Hospital and health programs are clamoring for personnel. There is a critical shortage of teachers, trained nurses and doctors. But thousands of registered nurses and qualified teachers are tending their babies at home and considerable numbers of women hesitate to enter the medical profession. Many American women would readily defy the middle-class prohibitions, but when it comes to the question of who is to take care of the children, there is no answer.

For the working mother the period of child-rearing is an ordeal which she often survives only with health impaired and nervous balance threatened. The ghetto mother, if she only had the chance, if her children were guaranteed adequate care, would much prefer to work rather than suffer the indignities that go with welfare benefits today. Contrary to the stereotype of welfare mothers as people benumbed with helpless despair, the fact is that 41 per cent of the Black mothers and 26 per cent of the white on ADC were working whenever they got the chance. (*1968 Manpower Report of the President*, p. 98.) Side by side with the demand for adequate welfare and wage standards must go the demand for adequate child care centers.

### Where Do We Stand on Child Care?

Today there are at least 4.5 million children under 6, and 6.4 million children from 6 to 11 inclusive, whose mothers are working. Forty-four per cent of the nonwhite mothers and 27 per cent of the white mothers of children under six were in the labor force

in 1967. (Leaflet 37, 1968, Women's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor.)

*Of all the pre-school children of working mothers in need of child care, there are adequate group care accommodations for only 2.9 per cent.*

The one period in U. S. history when there were the beginnings of a serious approach by the government to the problem of child care was during World War II when added labor power was badly needed and women willingly enlisted for work in defense industry. Under the Lanham Act a system of nurseries and child care centers was initiated. Just as soon as the war ended, employers discharged women *en masse* and the whole child care system was dismantled.

Today there are some six million more women in industry than there were at the peak of World War II production. The percentage of mothers among them is rising considerably. The lack of provisions for children of U. S. working mothers has become not only a national scandal but an international disgrace.

There have been increasing efforts by scattered community groups to set up child care centers to meet local needs. The pressure of these needs and actions has led so far only to much talk at top levels of government and social service agencies, a little legislation, and some reluctant steps toward nation-wide action by government agencies. It has led to one very hopeful union breakthrough.

During the past decade there has been a national conference on child care almost every year, sponsored by one or another government agency (Women's Bureau, Children's Bureau, Labor Department). These have had representation from the national offices of various established women's, civic, religious and national groups, and from a few trade union organizations.

The late President John F. Kennedy set up a Commission on the Status of Women which in 1963 presented a significant report, later published under the title of *American Women*. A continuations committee of the Commission publishes annual reports on progress, indicating slight, sporadic advances in various fields. A number of laws were adopted and programs launched dealing with child care, including measures like Headstart. These amounted to no more than a drop in the ocean, but the Nixon Administration,

through its recent curtailment of the Headstart program, seems bent on wiping out even that drop.

### **The Scope of the Problem**

The individual mother and father want to make sure that their pre-school children get real care, proper food, adequate attention, training and love in the mother's absence during this sensitive, formative period. They want to guarantee that the school youngster isn't running into danger on the streets after school is out; that TV cartoons, commercials, scenes of violence, prejudice and ugliness don't become the standard "cultural" fare of the children. The parents worry that the friend, neighbor or relative who undertakes to look after the child may be burdened with her own chores and that the child may become a secondary responsibility. Sometimes a younger child is left with an older child who is not up to the responsibility. Accidents happen.

There are no two ways about it. In these circumstances, what is needed is a group of qualified people—teachers, nurses, dietitians—equipped with proper facilities for tots and school children. Needed are school rooms, specially selected games and toys, cots and sleeping space, food and kitchens, athletic equipment, material for arts and crafts, scientific experiments, training in art.

Now multiply the individual child's needs by 4.5 million under 6 and 6.4 million from 6 through 11, and you begin to see the size of the problem nationally.

Put it in terms of dollars and cents. The cost of group day care (all day) is \$1500 to \$1900 per child per year. For care after school and during vacation for children of school age, the cost is \$500 to \$600 per child per year. (*Facts for Filing*, October 1968, Women's Unit, Albany, N. Y.) It comes to a minimum of some \$10 billion a year. A more realistic figure in view of the increasing number of women in the labor force would be \$20 billion a year.

How much of this necessary sum do the children actually get in this wealthy society of ours? It's not easy to get the answer to that question. The figures are dispersed among half a dozen agencies operating under as many laws. It almost seems as though an evil genie were trying to hide the truth. Funds are appropriated under various sections of the Social Security Act, the Equal Opportunity Act and others. Every so often there are amendments that change

the allotments or even phase them out. Federal funds are dispensed usually on the basis of partially matching funds from the states and counties. Besides, appropriation of funds doesn't mean that the money is actually spent.

The funds actually spent by the U. S. federal and state governments for child care in the year 1968, as best they could be pieced together from the figures of various agencies, totaled *only a little more than \$10 million*—less than 1/1000 of what is necessary!

In the understatement of the decade, Mr. Joseph H. Reid, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of America, said: "It is an illusion to think we are a child-centered country." (*Report of a Consultation on Working Women and Day Care Needs, Women's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, p. 32.*)

The illusion that federal funds are available for child care on the basis of need has been broken for many groups which have tried to secure the funds appropriated by the law. Why? Because there is no single agency to which application can be made; because there is a confusing jumble of laws dealing with child care; because the required procedures for application are complex; because even after complying with all the requirements, the agency may allow only part of the sum the budget calls for. In any event, the bulk of the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the applicants, the community. In sum, the federal laws for child care today, instead of providing a solution to the problem, constitute an obstacle course effectively barring the way to a solution.

### **The Labyrinth of the Law**

There are two sections of the Social Security Act that provide for child care under "Aid to Families with Dependent Children" and "Child Welfare Service." Four sections of the Economic Opportunity Act allot funds for child care, including the famous Headstart Program and assistance to migrant farm children. A section of the Manpower Development and Training Act and a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act allot funds for child care under certain specific circumstances. One program provides care for children whose unemployed parents "are in the work experience and training program," but this provision is now being phased out.

Some of the provisions apply to establishment of child care

centers, others to training personnel, still others to research. Most measures specify that priority be given to "low income or other special groups, such as the mentally retarded, the physically handicapped or migrant children . . .".

With such a variety of laws and seemingly such a supply of available funds, what's the complaint?

First, most of the programs are geared to serve only the disadvantaged. Certainly that is where the need is sharpest, and it is tragic that this need is not being met. This failure, especially in the ghettos, is one more evidence of the undermining of the family life of the poor. But what about the working mother who is not on welfare? Isn't she entitled to the freedom from anxiety that child care can provide? The government's approach is that of meeting an emergency, hushing the outcry of those in direst need, rather than establishing a service that every child and its parents are entitled to, recognizing the right of every woman to be equal in her right to work.

Second, when a community group applies for a child care center, it is not sufficient simply to show the need and indicate the funds required. You must first determine which of the many laws applies to your particular situation, and to which of the numerous agencies you must address your application. That in itself is enough to discourage the average individual or group, especially a group of harassed, overworked parents. So you have to retain a lawyer. That means spending money. If there is an anti-poverty set-up operating in your neighborhood, it may be equipped and willing to lend a hand with this part of the process.

Third, the application or "proposal" must specify the location—the building, apartment, store—which is to house the child care center. The structure must meet the health and safety standards set by the state. In the average crowded working-class or ghetto community an appropriate location is rare as hen's teeth. None of the laws allows funds for new construction. When a good location is found, the landlord may not want to rent for this purpose. Many a community group gets hung up on this requirement alone, and no government agency takes responsibility for finding a location. Likewise it is up to the group to secure staff and equipment, and to arrange for all the relevant details of setting up the child care center.

There have been instances where a community group, usually consisting of mothers, has run the whole obstacle course up to the final step only to find that they had just missed the deadline for that year's appropriations. They then had to wait another year before their proposal could be considered. In the meantime, not only did their children go without care, but the location which had taken blood, sweat and tears to secure was lost.

In no case can a group of mothers or a community depend on getting a child care center, paid for by their tax dollars, on the simple basis of need. On the contrary, they have to go through a long-drawn-out process of combined red tape, pleading, demanding, proving, waiting. Some groups have succeeded. These account for most of the 2.9 per cent that has been achieved. But many community groups have given up in disgust and are resorting to "do-it-yourself" cooperative community efforts. Most of these have been of short duration simply because the main burden and cost of the venture falls on the shoulders of those already overburdened. Thus we see on TV the report and appeal for help for a child-care center in a Black church in Long Island that is about to close for lack of funds after having maintained itself for two years. An even more poignant appeal is expressed in letters in *The Southern Patriot* (June 1969) pleading for help to keep alive a cooperative nursery in Hinds County, Miss.

It is the dauntless efforts of community groups, mostly mothers, that are carrying the ball for child care. For the moment there may be no alternative. But the time is long past due for a massive coordinated national effort to compel Congress to establish a system similar to the public school system, *under one law, appropriating some \$20 billion a year, to be implemented by one agency which is obligated to operate nursery and child care centers accommodating children from six months to six years full time and school age children after class hours. These centers are to be professionally staffed, scientifically equipped, and conducted under community and/or trade union control.*

That places the responsibility where it belongs—on the federal government—so that every family will receive child care as a public service to which it is entitled, just as the people now receive social security and unemployment insurance and other rights won by labor and the people's struggles over the years.



## A Union Shows the Way

One significant breakthrough has been made by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Largely through the persistence of the leadership of its Baltimore Region, the first of a planned series of 15 child care centers has been established. These centers are to be financed mainly through special contributions from the employers to the union's welfare fund, with a small part of the funds coming from the federal government. The centers are to accommodate the pre-school children of mothers who are union members.

It took years of study and planning. The union leadership took into account the fact that the men's clothing industry employees today are 80 per cent women. In examining the employer's complaints of absenteeism and tardiness, the union came face to face with the dozens of problems a working mother is called upon to solve day in and day out, primarily the lack of a reliable system of child care.

The development of the plan was described as follows by Mr. Samuel Nocella, International Vice President and Baltimore Regional Joint Board Manager:

. . . Finally, we made up our minds to place these problems [of child care centers] where they actually belong—on the doorstep of industry. So we decided . . . to negotiate, for the first time, with a segment of the men's clothing industry in the city of Baltimore and its environs, a contract code for a contribution to the welfare fund for the express purpose of setting up day care centers for the children of the mothers who work in these factories. . . .

While industry has developed rapidly in this country and has done much to encourage women to enter its ranks, it has done very little to take care of the problems of working women. Day care as a possible solution for the problem of absenteeism of working mothers came out of our collective bargaining discussions. (*Consultation on Working Women and Day Care Needs*, Women's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, 1968, p. 54.)

The Baltimore Region opened its first center for children aged two to six in Verona, Va. in September 1968. It accommodates 240

children and has a full professional staff and up-to-date equipment, including a clinic. It is located in open country conveniently near the plant, which employs 1200 workers, most of them women. The parents pay \$5 per week for the child's care which includes lunch and an afternoon snack. The rest is paid by the union welfare fund.

Since that time another child-care center has been completed in Baltimore and ground has been broken for a third in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (*Advance*, June 15, 1969).

The ACWA's initiative and its plans for the immediate future might well serve as a pilot project to other labor organizations, especially in those industries which employ many women. In all cases a union child care plan would be a powerful inducement for a working mother to join the union. It would enable her to put her mind on her work, to develop her skill and earn a higher wage. It would give her a chance to be a more active union member in her shop and local.

As recognized representatives of the workers, the unions have both the responsibility and the know-how, in dealing with employers, to establish child care as a union demand on a par with health and retirement plans and all other fringe benefits that have become part of union contracts.

Organized labor's leadership on this issue, in cooperation with community efforts, might well be the entering wedge for early adoption of federal legislation establishing a national system of child care centers for all.

### **Union and Community—A Winning Combination**

Trade union concern with community issues holds many advantages both for the unions and for neighborhood organizations of the people. Not every union endeavor to establish child care centers lends itself to the same solution as the one used in the pioneering effort by the Baltimore Region of the ACWA. The shop in this case was located in the Shenandoah Valley and the union was lucky in finding a favorable and convenient location. But the situation is different with the dozens of small garment, retail and distributive shops, laundries and hospitals in large cities. The shops are located in congested areas and the workers live in scattered, crowded neighborhoods. It certainly wouldn't be practical for any one union to set up a child care center for only its members

in each community where a handful of them happened to live. A cooperative venture, utilizing the Baltimore experience and meeting the combined needs of one or more unions together with the community, could doubtless be worked out. Such a combination could call on the resources both of industry and the federal government, and would require joint union and community control.

The trade unions are becoming increasingly aware that in addition to their basic responsibility for improving pay and work standards, the well-being of their members also involves improving conditions in the neighborhoods where their members live.

Unions are in a peculiarly favorable position to initiate a nationwide drive for child care centers. They are in a position to place the problem on the doorstep of industry through the union contract as well as in the halls of Congress through united, co-ordinated union and community pressure for a \$20 billion-a-year child care law.

Starting with even a small union-backed group of parents, broad support can be developed. The Black liberation movement has already displayed its concern for children through the fast-developing breakfast program of the Black Panthers. The Young Lords of Chicago took over a church basement and converted it into a child care center. The churches could not in good conscience stand aloof from such a latter-day Children's Crusade. The women's peace movement would no doubt find it relevant to join an effort that would remove a sum on the order of \$20 billion annually from the clutches of the Pentagon and invest it in care for young children. Radical women's groups might be convinced that greater liberation for women can be achieved through child care centers than through general condemnation of all men.

Local efforts alone, however, even the successful beginnings already made, will not solve the over-all problem. While continuing union and community activities, the greatest need is to unite all forces throughout the country now engaged or who can possibly be involved in a nationwide coordinated effort to compel the federal government to allocate the necessary sums for child-care centers. Short of such a united push, all the present efforts will remain scattered starts.

Worse still, some profiteering conglomerate will cash in on the

people's need for child care centers. In fact, such a venture is already under way. We read in a popular weekly that:

In contrast to the locally run community and school centers, some programs initiated by business are planned on a national scale. Nashville's American Performance Systems, Inc., which owns the Minnie Pearl chicken empire and other businesses, has recently established a new company to grant franchises to would-be operators of day-care centers across the country. (*Newsweek*, August 4, 1969.)

At the reported fee of \$21 per week per child, this plan will in no way touch the problems of the ghettos or of the average workers' family. But it may attract families of professionals and highly paid skilled workers who would otherwise support a drive for federal legislation.

The fight for a nation-wide system of child care centers will require not only the most competent organizational planning and astute legislative work but also a stubborn ideological fight. The idea that "woman's place is in the home" will die hard, especially where children are involved.

A boss employing 1,000 women in an electronics plant is reported to have stated that he prefers women workers because of their greater manual dexterity. But he saw no reason why private or public funds should be contributed for care of children of working mothers because he was certain that women work only because they want luxuries and should really be home minding the children. (*Report of A Consultation on Working Women and Day Care Needs*, p. 35.)

Encouraging this attitude are educators, sociologists and psychologists, especially of the Freudian school, who preach that a woman's fulfillment depends on catering to her man's desires and devoting herself completely to rearing her children. These authorities have maintained that children are so much in need of their mothers' constant care that those mothers who go to work do great harm to their children. This "theory" is so deeply rooted that even when a mother has no choice but to go to work, she still feels guilty. Nor is the working woman's husband free of this male supremacist notion of "woman's place."

Even McCarthyism has been harnessed to fasten this outworn "theory" upon people's minds. In a *New York Times* article (December 31, 1967) we read: "The orthodox view used to be that the pre-school approach long practiced in other countries, particularly in the Soviet Union, Israel and Scandinavia, had a collectivist connotation—slightly un-American."

### **Socialism Makes A Difference**

While authorities in the U. S. have labeled group child care immoral, unhealthy and un-American, the socialist countries have been uninhibited by any such false notions. They have not only passed laws declaring women's equality, but have adopted policies by which society assumed its share of responsibility for the rearing of the young. They have developed a remarkable system of creches for infants, nurseries and kindergartens for pre-school children, and "Pioneer Palaces" for after-school attention to older children. Of course, their whole system of priorities is different. People come first, not property or profits.

Even the youngest socialist country, Cuba, digging out from under years of poverty imposed by U. S. imperialism's rule, has succeeded in ten short years in beginning a network of child care centers, some of which take infants starting at the age of 45 days.

The Soviet Union, handicapped by the ravages of two world wars, became the acknowledged world leader in this field. It has some nine million pre-school children in creches, nurseries and kindergartens. The parents pay 15 to 20 per cent of the cost. The rest is paid by the state. There is no red-tape of drawing up applications, pleading for funds, madly hunting for quarters. That is handled either by the local government council (Soviet) or the trade union welfare committee. (*Soviet Life*, June 1969.) The working mothers take this service for granted as their right. There is hardly a residential block or two-block area in Moscow without its kindergarten. The national plan calls for adequate accommodations to take care of *all* the children in the cities of the Soviet Union by 1970. Faster progress is planned in the countryside, too. (*Soviet Woman*, May 1969.)

As for summer vacations, the streets of the big cities seem deserted during the summer. The youngsters, tots and teens alike, are away in the country either at summer nurseries or camps. This, too, is

## IX. THE MASS MEDIA AND FEMININITY

As if injury were not enough the Establishment adds insult as well. And it uses all the channels of the mass media to perpetrate this indignity.

One of the most disgusting examples of vulgarity in the treatment of women is the advertisement of a steak restaurant, appearing in newspapers and magazines. It shows a woman poised on her knees, back turned to the viewer, wearing nothing but a cowboy hat. All that is visible of her body is divided into sections, each labeled according to the meat cut from the corresponding section of a cow—e. g., rump, shoulder steak, etc.

There is hardly an item on the market that isn't made more "enticing" by the addition of the female form. She may be seductive, brash, stupid or cuddly, and the product advertised may be automobiles, cigarettes, air travel, detergents, cosmetics or dogfood. But the female presence is required to make the product a "mind-sticker."

Black women have traditionally been consigned to especially undignified treatment. In TV films (before "Julia" and "Soul" came upon the scene), in movies and plays to this day, Black women have been generally limited to roles as subservient maids or prostitutes. Peter Bailey, Associate Editor of *Ebony*, writes:

. . . I am tired of seeing Black women portrayed as whores and/or exotic creatures in American plays and films. . . . The Black woman is seldom shown as a whole woman who loves her man and sticks by him. Even Black playwrights have failed to do this. Though they don't show her as a whore, they usually depict her as a nagging shrew out to castrate her men. There is no group in this country more in need of better stage and film treatment than Black women. (*New York Times*, March 16, 1969).

The female body has become a source of profit in another way, too. Pick up any women's magazine. The content is limited in

scope usually to home-making, fashion, beauty and such. Which is bad enough. But the bulk of the magazine space is taken up by advertising. And most of the advertising is what makes "beauty" a \$7-billion-a-year business. No longer is it a matter only of how attractive a woman *looks* to the man (and, of course, it's the man's alleged taste that determines what is attractive and "feminine"). But a woman has to make sure she is pleasing to his sense of touch and smell, too. (Don't forget, "a woman's most serious deodorant problem isn't under her pretty little arms.") Such advertising is not confined to the magazines with their circulations in the hundreds of thousands. The intimacies of a woman's daily life are spread before the general public over TV as well. How else can a well-informed public be posted on the latest 18-hour girdles and "cross your heart" bras? By now everybody knows what only you and your hairdresser are supposed to know.

There isn't a feature, there isn't an inch of the woman's face and figure, inside and out, that isn't fair game for the Madison Avenue hucksters. The word "privacy" has been wiped out of the dictionary. The beauty that is a woman's body has been commercialized, step by step, into obscenity.

No doubt, enslavement of women was obscured behind the Middle Ages and Renaissance glorification of madonnas, princesses, and nudes. Yet the paintings of those eras at least displayed a respect and love for the beautiful.

Prevailing standards of "beauty" in the all-pervading mass media show respect and love only for the almighty dollar. The eternal feminine has become the universal harlot.

But today's woman won't take it!

Some women's groups protested to the airlines when in their advertising they showed glamorous hostesses in exotic costumes more appropriate to a brothel atmosphere than to typical working conditions. At the same time the unions protested against the airlines' practice of firing hostesses at the age of 32 or if they got married, whichever came first. Now airlines advertise through demure, just-waiting-to-serve-you types, and occasionally even show a woman passenger. (Previously only men rode the planes in ads.) That's progress! The unions won, too. The hostesses over 32 or married are not fired. They're grounded to office jobs.

Real mass protests against the giant communications media and

their monopolist sponsors—not just occasional lobbying—are needed to make continuous scorching exposures of the constant attack of the mass media against the dignity of American women.

### Now, About Femininity . . .

But much more fundamentally, women young and old, Black and white, are getting fed up with the traditional standards of femininity and beauty geared to the dual aim of pleasing the man and minting the dollar.

False notions of femininity and dire warnings against the loss of it are used by the ruling class to frighten women and herd them into those fields considered suitable for women. This is aimed to prevent women—and in a large measure this aim has been achieved—from venturing into “men’s work.” As soon as a woman dares to enter politics and run for high office, or train for carpentry, or prepare to be an engineer, architect or surgeon, she is threatened with loss of her attractiveness to men and loss of the opportunity for family life. The concept of femininity has been grotesquely distorted and developed into a male supremacist bludgeon. The ruling class uses this distortion just as effectively as (if more subtly than) it uses the wage differential to “keep women in their place.”

Many young feminists, rebelling against this male supremacist distortion, regard the very concept of femininity as an evil creation of the oppressing male. Many Marxists simply ignore the question. William Z. Foster, however, indicated his sensitivity to the matter in his article “On Improving the Party’s Work Among Women.” He speaks of the “advocates of male superiority” who argue that woman’s participation in the social struggle “would also destroy her femininity and her charm. All such contentions place high barriers in the way of women in many walks of life.” (*Political Affairs*, November 1948.)

What is femininity? It is a distinctive quality of womanhood which is hard to define under capitalism because its full flowering requires freedom for the woman to be her full human self. Women who have lived for some years under socialism should help us define it, but they are apparently too busy living it to take the time to write about it.

Certainly, beauty, charm, femininity do not consist in plunging headlong into a pile of cosmetics which change and often distort



a woman's appearance as well as bury her identity. Nor is it slavishness to images created by a decadent, profit-mad society and disseminated by men whose tastes are formed by a false ruling-class "culture."

Femininity is a distinctive characteristic of women that can truly develop only in an atmosphere of equality in man-woman relationships.

Perhaps it can best be illustrated by what we hear of the women of Vietnam, in the liberated zones of the South and in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Every visitor returned from Vietnam, man or woman, has unfailingly remarked on the femininity of the Vietnamese women. As different as their circumstances of life are from our own, there is something of universal interest in their personal experience.

Vietnamese women in the liberation struggle—whether guiding a plough behind a water buffalo under enemy fire, fighting in guerrilla units, operating a machine, or firing anti-aircraft guns at American planes—still seem to retain their femininity. It's true of Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, diplomat, head of the delegation at the peace conference at Paris and of Nguyen Thi Dinh, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam; it's true of the young women guerrillas in their severe uniforms.

If women can retain their femininity under conditions where war has been the way of life for 20 years, why should it be so hard for women in the U. S. while working at a lathe, being an executive in an office, a leader in a union or a public official?

The answer lies not in any essential difference between American and Vietnamese women, but in the difference between the two kinds of society in which they live, the difference in their status in their respective societies, the difference in the societies themselves.

American women, despite many advantages enjoyed, especially by middle-class women, have not achieved equality. We are reminded on all sides—by the mass media, psychologists, educators, sociologists, etc.—that there are limits to a woman's sphere and penalties for stepping beyond these limits. And if a woman does move into a "man's world" she is reminded that we live in a competitive, capitalist, dog-eat-dog society. It is the ruling class that

sets the pattern of conduct. A premium is placed on grasping aggressiveness. A leader in any field must display his or her strength to prove authority. Subtly or openly, a leader must be something of a bully.

Women who wish to be leaders have very little but the examples that men have set. Almost all known leaders have been men, trained in the ruling class manner. (The modesty of a Lenin or a Foster is the exception, the harbinger of a new society.) Women have scant choice of examples to follow. Or they learn by harsh experience that to advance in a man's world, they have to claw their way as men do.

But in liberated South Vietnam and socialist North Vietnam women are not called upon to prove their equality at every step. They have it, the real thing, in law and in fact. They don't have to imitate men, certainly not men of an exploiting ruling class. When one reads that North Vietnam's leaders' faces "take on an ecstatic look, their eyes go moist, their voices husky" when they speak of the role of their women (Wilfred Burchett, *Vietnam North*, International Publishers, 1966, p. 89), then one knows that the new status of women is something the American woman has only dreamed about and never yet seen in life. This new status of women has become part of the basic fabric of liberated Vietnamese society. It's there for keeps, both because of the government's unshakable position on the question of women's status and because of the women's wisdom in seeing their own freedom battle as part of the national liberation struggle and the struggle for a socialist society. Since women are unquestionably equal, they feel perfectly free to be themselves.

The Vietnamese women have no reason to be ashamed of showing their solicitude for people around them, their tenderness toward their families or neighbors. They have no fear of being considered "soft," emotional, indecisive, weak and inferior because they express their feelings. Their men, and all men, know they are as adroit at wielding a gun, as skillful in handling a machine, as decisive in policy making, as eloquent on the platform as they are gentle in nursing their babies.

In this country, until woman's equality is fully established and accepted, as long as she has to keep meeting the challenge of being "tough" and unemotional and "objective" as a man is supposed to

be, often denying her own better judgment, we shall never know what the American woman's femininity really is.

But one thing is certain: it's not the ridiculous, artificial caricature—the kitten, the siren, the dumb blonde, the possessive mother, the slavish wife, the castrating female, the all-round sex object—that the mass media and other “authorities” say it is.

Today's woman won't accept the hucksters' image of her. She will fight through for equality and freedom, and she will establish her own image and identity and standard of beauty. And the man may find some qualities in her that he himself might want to develop to enrich his life.

## X. THE LAW AND THE WOMAN

When the U.N. Declaration on Women's Rights was adopted on November 8, 1967 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, most British and American women paid very little attention to it. Their point of view was probably expressed by Lady Gaitskell, member of the British delegation to the U.N., who "said that the declaration in most instances does not promise new rights to women of established Western countries but should be a clarion call to women in countries where equality is not accorded." (*New York Times*, November 8, 1967.) Quite so. Still, the women of the socialist countries, whose conditions far outstrip those of women in developed industrial capitalist lands, hailed the event with a feeling of solidarity for their sisters in the developing countries.

The truth is, however, that there is no room for complacency on the part of U.S. women with regard to the advances made even on the legal front. True, many of the state discriminatory laws against women have been removed. But there are still some laws that are a throw-back to the middle ages and the chastity belt in their physical enslavement of women.

### Laws Against Family Planning

One set of laws that needs to be wiped off the books quickly and thoroughly is the whole collection of state laws against abortion. The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) have been very actively lobbying, picketing, petitioning and pressuring legislators on this issue. In February 1969 a national conference for drastic revision of abortion laws was held in Chicago where the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws was founded. Women state legislators have taken an active hand in introducing bills calling for repeal of abortion laws, so far to no avail. Honest and concerned doctors who have on principle resisted the anti-abortion laws have been penalized with jail sentences, loss of practice, ostracism from the medical community.

The fight against the abortion laws is extremely important to the woman and to society both in principle and in practice. While

the need for abortions may be decreasing with the use of medically tested and inexpensive contraceptives like the pill and the IUD, none of these methods is foolproof. The following statistics are significant in this connection:

Even the pill, the most efficient contraceptive known to date, has a one percent failure rate. There are 25 million women in the United States between the ages of 15 and 44; only about 3 million of these women want to conceive in any given year, leaving 22 million women exposed to the risk of an unwanted pregnancy. Even if all these women could use the pill the failure rate of one per cent could still yield as many as 220,000 pregnancies that were not wanted by the women." (*American Women 1968: Report of the Task Force on Family Law and Policy, Citizens' Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Women's Bureau, Washington, D. C., p. 27.*)

Recent congressional hearings on the contraceptive pill have revealed the actual and potential dangers resulting from its use. In the light of these disclosures the need for abortion law repeal is more urgent than ever.

Freedom of abortion at reasonable cost, under sanitary conditions, free of the tension of illegality, with assurance of competent medical care is especially important to the poor. Exorbitant rates are charged by qualified doctors as well as by quacks. "In the 1950s researchers found that botched abortions were the largest single cause of maternal deaths in the United States—as high as 50 percent among New York Negroes and Puerto Ricans. . . ." (Keith Monroe, "How California's Abortion Law Isn't Working," *New York Times Magazine*, December 29, 1968.)

The abortion laws are degrading and frustrating. They take the choice as to motherhood completely out of the woman's hands. But motherhood among human beings is not simply an instinctive biological function. It is an important social function as well as the expression of an individual woman's desire and aspiration. It must therefore be a voluntary act.

Only to the extent that motherhood is voluntary can it fulfill its social function of continuing the human race in terms of a healthy

family atmosphere, with the child knowing he or she is wanted and cherished.

As a highly personal and intimate matter, motherhood involves the woman's civil right as to the control of her body.

Chattel slavery was ended legally over a century ago, but in actual life in the capitalist United States in 1970 the woman's body is at the mercy of male supremacist legislation, discussed at hearings where the opinion of women is not heard or considered. In a society that calls itself "free" and "democratic" a woman should have the freedom to decide what happens to her person. If she wants to end her pregnancy—whether it is caused by accident or by the unrestrained lust or obstinacy of a man—she should have the right to do so.

Involuntary or enforced motherhood is among the most brutish aspects of male supremacy. The extremes of this practice were the slave-breeding farms of the South and the promiscuous mating imposed by the Hitler regime among the German youth. Our abortion laws are a form of enforced motherhood.

Even the "liberalized" abortion laws adopted in Colorado, North Carolina and California were strictly male supremacist laws although some women pressured and voted for them. These new laws are little if any improvement over the old laws. They all involve time-consuming procedures for pregnant women, the indignity and frustration of questioning by hospital boards composed mainly of disapproving men, or appearances at court to prove the existence of the grounds for abortion specified in the law: rape, incest, danger of impairment to mental and physical health. Under these new laws, the cost of abortion remains out of reach for poor people.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that women continue resorting to the dangerous practice of illegal abortion, and the very people who fought for the "liberalized" abortion laws are now seeking to have them rescinded.

Complete repeal of all state abortion laws is the only way out of this hideous subjugation of women. Abortion, like any other medical question, is a matter to be settled by a woman in consultation with her physician. All women on their own request, should be entitled to professional medical care in terminating unwanted pregnancies. Such medical care should be included in group health and hospital insurance plans on the same basis as surgery or obstetrical

services.

Equally damaging are laws and regulations by various agencies forbidding or limiting freedom of information regarding contraceptives.

Incredible as it may seem, federal law still makes birth-control information taboo.

Section 1461 of Title 18, U. S. Code, makes the mailing of obscene or crime-inciting matter a Federal crime. Included in the prohibition are the mailing of articles and advertisements of articles for preventing conception or producing abortion. Section 1462 of Title 18 prohibits the importation or transportation in interstate or foreign commerce of such articles . . . (*American Women 1968: Report of the Task Force on Family Law and Policy*, Citizens Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Washington, D.C. 20210, p. 32.)

A number of Supreme Court decisions have broken through this tight prohibition against free access to contraceptive information. Still, we learn that:

Even now though it has become national policy to give women the right and the opportunity to plan intelligently for children, a national program reaching every State and locality is far from implemented and should have careful examination in every State. Hesitancy by administrative agencies, timidity, or inertia should not hinder the basic right of women to be knowledgeable about the use of the newer contraceptive methods . . . (*American Women 1968: Report of the Task Force on Health and Welfare*, Citizens Advisory Council on the Status of Women, p. 38.)

Now one sees at clinics and hospitals in some states like New York discreet little signs indicating that contraceptive information is available on request. Some hospitals have begun community projects, training women "externs" to visit community homes and advise on family planning. These steps are far from adequate.

In the meantime, one of the marks of the crisis of the cities is the increase in pregnancies among high school girls, which often scar their lives.

### **Legislative Errors to be Avoided**

While some existing laws need to be rescinded, there are other

measures that should not be allowed to become law. In the latter category is the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). In women's understandable eagerness to achieve their full status today, it is easy to be carried away by a seemingly militant measure which, if thoroughly examined, will be found to mislead women into disunity and defeat. Unfortunately, there is a trend today to channel women's legislative and other activities into narrow feminist lines. NOW's current campaign for adoption of the ERA is part of this trend.

The ERA was first introduced in Congress in 1923 on the initiative of the National Women's Party, one of the groups that emanated from the National American Woman Suffrage Association which had led the struggle for women's franchise to victory in 1920. The ERA has come up and been defeated in Congress almost every year since then. It has consistently been opposed by labor and liberal forces and by a goodly section of the women's organizations.

The wording of the ERA has a simple and idealistic sound: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

The effect of this Amendment would be to make every law now applicable to men equally applicable to women; simultaneously it would render unconstitutional any law that is now applicable to women only.

Thus the few state laws that still are on the books which discriminate against women with regard to ownership of property, inheritance, right to jury service, etc. would become null and void. At the same time the military draft laws would become applicable to women the same as to men. Simultaneously, all the laws that were adopted at the height of the sweatshop period to protect women's rights would be nullified or at least be subject to lengthy court tests as to their constitutionality.

Now, most of the discriminatory laws against women regarding property, etc., (which in any event affect a minority of women) have gradually been whittled away under the pressure of women's and liberal groups. There is no great organized support for keeping such laws on the books.

On the other hand, there are powerful organized groups eager to eliminate all labor protective laws including protective legislation for women workers. These laws limit working hours and the



amount of weight a woman is allowed to lift. They specify that women may not work in certain industries—mining, quarries, high-risk chemical plants—where the hazards may have a harmful effect on women's child-bearing capacities. Elimination of such laws would give the exploiters more of a free hand in practising special exploitation of women, and thereby of all workers. That is why, for instance, the National Association of Manufacturers has been a constant supporter of the ERA right from the start. Among its supporters are also such illustrious benefactors of the people as Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut, Perle Mesta of "hostess" fame, and the late reactionary Senator William L. Langer of North Dakota. The conservative National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs has also been a staunch supporter of the ERA.

The labor movement has consistently opposed the ERA as a threat both to the legislative gains made by working women and the labor movement as a whole. In addition, the measure has been opposed over the years by the National Consumers League (representing housewives in the main), the American Association of University Women, and the League of Women Voters.

In an effort to retain the existing protective legislation as well as to gain the possible benefits of the ERA, the following amendment was proposed by Carl Hayden, former Senator from Arizona: "The provisions of the [Constitutional] article shall not be construed to impair any rights, benefits or exemptions now or hereafter conferred by law upon persons of the female sex." This amendment was defeated by the feminists.

The group that initiated the ERA and remained its most ardent supporter was not representative of the majority of women, surely not of working women. The measure itself, in spite of its attractive wording, contains nothing concrete for the great majority of women. It is at best an abstract slogan.

But in the light of current realities, the ERA is fraught with danger. It would make women subject, equally with men, to being drafted for military service in the criminal war in Vietnam.

Now, there has never been a just war in which our country was engaged without women rising to the occasion with magnificent courage and sacrifice. In the Revolutionary War which gave birth to our nation, women displayed great ingenuity in making life

impossible for the British tax collectors and military quartered in their midst. In addition, one Black woman, Deborah Gannett, and a white woman, Molly Pitcher, served in the armed forces.

In the Civil War, women—especially of the suffrage movement—showed their commitment to the anti-slavery cause by suspending their suffrage activities for the duration. They also established an effective, organized, front-line hospital system for the Union armies. And they conducted a powerful petition campaign for the Emancipation Proclamation.

The entry of women into unaccustomed industrial work as well as into certain branches of the armed services during the war against fascism is well known.

It took neither an ERA nor a draft law to move women into action in a just war. On the other hand, American women have always been among the first to take action against an unjust war. This was evident in women's activities for peace before and during World War I and in the present U.S. aggression against Vietnam.

It would certainly be a sharp departure from the principled stand historically taken by U.S. women with regard to war and peace if at this critical juncture they were to tie the noose of conscription around their own necks. Are American women fighting to achieve equality with the worst products of the exploiting system, the war hawks? Or do they want full freedom to help create a better world, a world of peace? What is the gain for women or for anybody in adding forces to the armed might of U.S. imperialism in its savage war against a freedom-loving people? Are American women to rise in defense of Mme. Nhu's rubber plantations in Vietnam, or will they fight in solidarity with the Vietnamese people's heroines, to bring their own men home alive and put an end to the blood-letting?

Promotion of the ERA or any measure for women's status cannot be considered apart from other questions. Separatism leads up a blind alley.

## XI. THE AMERICAN WOMAN IN POLITICAL LIFE

Everything points to the need for full representation of women in government. This is necessary not only to assure passage of legislation required to advance women's freedom. But just as the participation of women is essential in all activities in the trade unions and communities, in the streets and meeting halls, to help resolve problems of peace, of welfare, of community control of schools, so also women's voices need to be heard in full measure in the governing bodies of the country.

The male supremacy that condemns women to a half-life is nowhere more prevalent than in politics. The legislative bodies are the decisive policy-making bodies in the nation and in each of its areas. That is the field above all others in which the man in a class society tries to assert his "superiority," and in which "female fickleness" and "weakness" can least be tolerated.

One of the most widely known achievements of American women is the stubborn struggle that resulted in electing a woman, Jeannette Rankin, to Congress for the first time in 1917 and in securing the right for all women to vote in 1920.

The women's suffrage movement figured prominently in our nation's headlines on and off for some 75 years and received wide publicity, even notoriety, abroad. Undoubtedly the modern European notion that American women are headstrong and "spoiled" stems from the accounts of the activities of the suffrage leaders. The impact of the movement's experience contributed to American women in public office now. Today (1970) there is one woman in

### Women in Political Life Today

Yet these advances are not reflected in the representation of women in public office now. Today (1970) there is one woman in the Senate of the United States and only ten women in the House of Representatives. Among these ten is the first Black woman ever to be elected to Congress. Of some 7700 seats in state legislatures in 1967, only 318 were occupied by women (*American Women 1963-1968*, p. 26). During that same year there were only 17 Black women in state legislative posts (*Ebony*, September 1967).

As for appointive federal government posts, only two women have ever held cabinet rank and no more than seven have served as

ambassadors or ministers.

Nor have women seemed too eager to use their hard-earned right to vote: "Although a survey taken after the 1964 election showed that more women than men had actually voted, only 67 per cent of eligible women voted as compared with about 72 per cent of eligible men." (*American Women 1963-68*, p. 26.) There is no definite indication that women's vote has been used as a unified instrument to achieve one or another social or political purpose.

During the 1960s women have become increasingly active in political campaigns, through trade union Women's Activity Departments and conspicuously in such campaigns as that of Mrs. Shirley Chisholm, Senator Eugene McCarthy and the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Usually women have been active as doorbell-ringers, office workers, fund-raisers. All of this is essential work requiring organizational ability and talent. It is work without which a campaign cannot get off the ground. But it never seems to occur to the campaign managers, usually men, whether they work in political or trade union organizations, that women are equally competent as candidates for public office. And even men might learn to handle mailings and work mimeograph machines effectively.

Women often "choose" to do precinct work because they can more readily fit it in with home responsibilities and care of the children. Again, it's a question of how free the choice is for women, and of men's blindness to women's problems.

A brochure entitled "An Open Letter to Union Men," issued by the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education (COPE) urges the brothers to coax the women of their families into the COPE Women's Activities Department because "without womanpower, elections are lost." Then it recounts how womanpower swung an important election: by telephoning, canvassing, distributing unbelievable quantities of campaign literature, baby-sitting on election day, running car pools for voters—and, of course, voting right themselves. Oh, yes, they do mention by way of incentive that "more than a dozen women are members of the U.S. Congress" (out of some 450 members of the House) as though that were a figure to brag about. (Incidentally, even that low figure dropped to ten in the 1968 elections.) In similar vein we occasionally see a flattering feature story in the press about women as election campaign fund-

raisers.

In 1968, the Freedom and Peace Party in New York and the Peace and Freedom Party in California ran a number of women candidates. The Communist Party ran a Black woman candidate, Charlene Mitchell, for President. But that is still the rare exception.

### **What Makes It So Tough for a Woman in Politics?**

Perhaps the experience of Mrs. Shirley Chisholm, first Black woman to be elected to Congress, might illustrate the special difficulties of a woman in political life. She had to overcome the compounded prejudice directed against her as a woman and as a Black person.

Even before the new Bedford-Stuyvesant district was set up, there had been much activity toward assuring the election of the first Black representative from Brooklyn. When Mrs. Chisholm's name was first suggested, there was immediate resistance among sections of the men in the area on the basis that Black men have to rescue their manhood from emasculation by their women, and electing a woman to public office would be the last straw. (Dr. Moynihan had done his stuff.) In addition, some people who evidently didn't have their ears to the ground argued that anybody proposing a woman candidate couldn't be serious about electing a Black representative. A woman would never make it, they felt.

As soon as the new predominantly Black congressional district was set up and Mrs. Chisholm declared her candidacy against the machine in the Democratic primaries, the people began rallying behind her because she of all the candidates showed the greatest sensitivity to the needs of the people of her district. Even so, it was not unusual for people in the audience to remark as she entered a meeting hall or mounted a street platform: "Here comes the matriarch."

Mrs. Chisholm's most serious opponent in the final elections was James Farmer who campaigned on the issue that Bedford-Stuyvesant needs a "man's voice" in Washington.

Resorting neither to apologies, evasion or guile, Mrs. Chisholm met the issue head-on. She asked for no special privileges as a woman. And gave no quarter when assailed as a woman. She came back sometimes with a pithy quotation from Susan B. Anthony, and at other times in her own straightforward words:

Of course we have to help black men. But not at the expense of our own personalities as women. The black man must step forward, but that does not mean we have to step back. Where have we ever been? For the last 15 years, black men have held political office, not women. (Quoted by Susan Brownmiller in "This Is Fighting Shirley Chisholm," *New York Times Magazine*, March 16, 1969.)

Mrs. Chisholm's campaign proved the truth of women's solidarity for any who still believe in the outworn cliches that "all women are cats." As a practical campaigner, Mrs. Chisholm analyzed her district and found there were some 12,000 more women voters than men. She not only set out to win the women's vote but organized a corps of some 200 women who were among her most loyal and capable assistants in every area of the campaign. (Some radical women seek to develop sisterhood through women's communes away from the hurly-burly of a man's world. Here sisterhood was achieved in the principled fight for a common cause on one of the toughest battlegrounds in the man's world.)

In Washington since her victory in November, Mrs. Chisholm is proving that she is equal to the great task she has undertaken. In so doing, she is proving that she is much more than an equal in ability and sheer guts.

Even in the first few months of her term in Congress, Mrs. Chisholm has exploded a number of common stereotypes about women. The myth of women's "softness" (meaning indecisiveness) was dealt a hammer blow when Mrs. Chisholm, in bucking her appointment to the Forestry Commission of the House Agricultural Committee, showed a determination and pluck that no male freshman in Congress had ever dared to exercise.

The notion of feminine fickleness is utterly belied by Mrs. Chisholm's consistent and principled position on every issue of concern to her constituents: peace in Vietnam; drastic attack on poverty (the Conyers Bill); the rights, culture and dignity of the Black people; termination of the House Un-American Activities Committee; better housing. Both in her votes on legislation and in her penetrating speeches on the House floor and among the people, her stand has been resolute.

In social life, Mrs. Chisholm has to keep disproving the half-life syndrome that is fixed in the male supremacist mind. It is assumed,

of course, that since Mrs. Chisholm has shown herself a skillful political leader, she cannot be truly "feminine." On a television program (Dick Cavett Show, August 18, 1969) Mrs. Chisholm told with great good humor how at a social affair one of her male colleagues invited her to "take a step or two" on the dance floor, and how surprised he was to find her an excellent dancer. It was hard for his male supremacist mind to grasp that a woman with a brain could possess the social graces of femininity. After all, how can a mere woman be a whole human being?

Mrs. Chisholm does not have any children of her own to worry about. She has a great advantage in that her husband is completely sympathetic and cooperative with her in her aspirations. Yet her experiences as campaigner and elected representative give some idea of the special difficulties a woman is up against in fighting for her rightful place in political life and leadership.

Is it any wonder that many a woman aspiring to public office—capable, courageous and skilled though she may be—will hesitate and perhaps turn back before the political and psychological obstacles that are placed in her way by male supremacy?

## **The Outlook**

In this period of political and social ferment, however, women and their determined leaders will come into their own in many fields, including political life.

The demagogues are well aware of the stir among women. In recognition of it, President Nixon appointed a woman ambassador to Barbados and referred to the possibility of a woman being president of the U.S. within the next 50 years. His public relations men worked out a special tour—well-publicized, of course—for Mrs. Nixon during the President's recent globe-circling junket. The reactionaries have also been trying their hand at running women candidates for high office. Thus, Shirley Temple Black ran for Congress in California in 1968 and there were women candidates for mayor in Boston, Massachusetts and Buffalo, New York in the same year. All were unsuccessful.

For American women this decade will be both practically and symbolically an important political period. The decade begins with 1970 which marks the 50th anniversary of their victory in the hard-fought struggle for the right to vote. It is also the 60th anniversary

of the establishment of International Women's Day, based on the demonstrations of American women for peace, woman suffrage and their right to organize into trade unions.

This decade will be a very active one politically. Important Congressional and state elections will be on the agenda. Issues now maturing—peace in Vietnam, Black liberation, women's equality, the crisis in the cities—will be coming to a head.

Women are waking up to the fact that the ballot can be an effective weapon of revolutionary struggle. Women will be increasingly insistent on taking leadership in policy-making and as candidates, not simply in keeping with their numbers in the population but commensurate with their growing activity in the communities and unions.

The beginnings made in nominating women candidates of minority parties must not be limited to independent parties but should spread to the reform and dissident sections of the major political parties.

In short, the 1970s can mark the breakthrough in women's political activity, at least doubling the number of women representatives in Congress in each succeeding election.

Today's woman will organize to take the initiative in this breakthrough. The power of the ballot must be wrested from the monopolist clutches of the two-party system misleaders. Today's woman, in using the ballot in the 1970s and thenceforward as an instrument of militant struggle, will exercise the same zeal, determination and know-how that the suffragists displayed in securing the right to the ballot in the first place. The ballot will be used along with the demonstration, the picketline, the mass petition as a revolutionary weapon.



## **XII. DEFENSE OF WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS**

One of the most sacred traditions of the working-class and people's movements is to cherish and defend the political prisoners. Every one realizes they are making a sacrifice beyond that of other active fighters.

The Establishment tries to put these fighters behind bars in an effort to frighten others away and to deprive the movement of its leaders. The ruling class has never learned that ideas cannot be jailed, that imprisoning the spokesmen of an idea whose time has come is as futile as commanding the tide to recede.

In the cold war following World War II the U.S. government tried to put the Communist Party out of business by jailing its leaders. The Communist Party suffered a temporary set-back. So did all progressive thought. But the main result was that the U.S. government disgraced itself and the American democratic tradition in the eyes of the world and ultimately in the eyes of the American youth. That's where today's infamous credibility gap began. And today socialism, the Communist Party's goal, is on the lips of millions in the U.S.

With the current wave of assassinations, arrests and jailings by police, directed especially against the Black liberation vanguard, the Black Panthers, the Establishment is on the way to getting its nose rubbed in this historic lesson once again. The current government campaign of forceful repression will only serve to anger and strengthen the will of the people in struggle. The people will meet their responsibility, including the defense of political prisoners.

Among them, the women will take special responsibility for women political prisoners. The "law" is more desperate and more ruthless than ever. It doesn't hesitate to imprison mothers of little children. Erika Huggins, Connecticut Black Panther leader, mother of a baby and widow of a Black Panther recently murdered, was framed on a murder charge with six others. Rose Smith, also of the Connecticut Black Panthers, was jailed while expecting a baby. Gail Madden, a Black woman with no political affiliations, mother of two infants, is one of twelve Black people in Plainfield, New Jersey accused of killing a white cop who was attacked by a crowd after shooting a Black man. She is now serving a life sentence. Two women, Joan Bird, a student nurse, and Afeni Shakur, a young

housewife, are among the 13 Black Panthers now going on trial in New York, charged with conspiracy to bomb department stores and other public places (a total of 21 have been charged). A number of white women who destroyed draft files are under indictment for their peace action but are out on bail.

## **Exile**

Another method used by the Establishment to separate the people's leaders from their colleagues and supporters is enforced exile. The absence of Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver from the U.S. has angered not only the Black Panthers but all who are determined to smash the rule of brutality that forced Eldridge Cleaver to leave the country. The Cleaver family—including the infant Antonio Maceo—represent what is revolutionary and inspiring in the family concept. Seeing beyond the perils and tribulations of the present moment, Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver have proven their fighting confidence in the people and in the future by creating "one more problem for the pigs."

It is not enough to greet the Cleavers on the birth of their baby. Women, Black and white, might well initiate a campaign to guarantee safe-conduct and security of home and person to the three so that they may return to their homeland and live as a united family.

### **XIII. FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS**

When the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 closed with the call "Workingmen of all countries, unite!" it launched a slogan that has become more deeply ingrained with each passing year in the thinking and outlook of workers' and people's organizations. Taking mutual counsel and supporting one another in time of need on an international scale has become the practice not only of Communist parties but of many organizations of labor, of youth, of scientists and artists, of women and others.

It was in this spirit that, on the initiative of the Women's International Democratic Federation, a world congress of women was held in Helsinki in June 1969, with an attendance of some 500 women from 96 countries, including the U.S.A. Representatives came from all five continents and from many islands of the world. Their deliberations on women's status in the family, at work and in public life, their resolutions on peace, on solidarity with the women of Vietnam, on women's rights, deserve thoughtful examination and study. But the very magnitude of the participation of women representing all walks of life, all political philosophies, many points of view, is in itself impressive.

Another expression of international unity of women was the introduction in the United Nations of the Human Rights Convention on the Political Rights of Women. Sixty-three nations have signed the Convention including some countries which had to change their constitutions in order to comply with the U.N. document's conditions.

It may be argued by some that ratifying the Convention would be meaningless to American women since our laws already provide for all the rights called for in the Convention. But U.S. ratification would be an act of support and friendship for the women of those countries whose laws have yet to meet Convention standards. Besides, it would help keep the issue of women's rights current at all levels here as well.

On August 6, 1969, Senator William Proxmire appealed to the Senate to ratify the Convention, but so far to no avail. Pressure on other senators to follow Proxmire's lead would be very much in order.

By far the greatest act of international friendship—and for enhancement of our own chances of survival—would be the all-out effort needed to end the U.S. aggression in Vietnam. As each hour goes by, as more lives are sacrificed on both sides, as new revelations expose the self-righteous lies of the government and the atrocities committed by U.S. armed forces, the people's movement mounts to end this monstrous crime being committed in our name.

The women of this country could make their own distinctive contribution within the general peace movement by throwing their full influence in each family into stopping their sons and brothers from going to Vietnam, and by persuading all workers they can reach, men and women, to fight to end the production of war material. Women are in the best position to understand and to spread the word about the destruction of family life in the U.S., caused both by the deaths of loved ones and by the impoverishment of families to feed the war machine.

Conferences, large and small, might be arranged providing contact and exchange of experiences between U.S. and Vietnamese women wherever a meeting ground is available—in Vietnam, in Mexico, in Canada. Such conferences, like the one held in Canada in the summer of 1969, should continue to be held, as close to U.S. territory as possible, until the living example of friendship between American and Vietnamese women breaks through the U.S. mass media.

A way should be found to honor publicly—perhaps on Mother's Day—the mothers of the GIs who returned to the President and to the Pentagon the posthumous medals bestowed on their dead sons.

Women above all others should leave no stone unturned in an effort to involve all peace- and freedom-loving people in the U.S. in active resistance to the war.

#### XIV. THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S FREEDOM

The world Marxist movement has initiated giant advances both in theory and practice in the emancipation of women and in the struggle to defend the rights of women workers.

As far back as the Congress of the First International in Geneva in 1866, Karl Marx declared that the struggle of the working class against capitalism would be unsuccessful unless women were freed from economic bondage. He called for all workers' parties to include in their programs specific demands to protect working women and child laborers.

In 1884, Frederick Engels completed *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the scientific study which blasted the myth of male superiority by showing it had its roots in economic circumstances, in class exploitation, and not in women's innate inferiority.

This was followed in 1893 by *Woman and Socialism* by the German socialist August Bebel, which set forth the classic Marxist position of women's full equality in every aspect of life, based on their full and equal participation in social production. Bebel pictured the status of women in a socialist society thus:

. . . The complete emancipation of woman, and her establishment of equal rights with man is one of the aims of our cultured development, whose realization no power on earth can prevent. But it can be accomplished only by means of a transformation that will abolish the rule of man over man, including the rule of the capitalist over the laborer. . . . Class rule will forever be at an end, and with it the rule of man over woman.

Bebel's work was probably the most influential book on this question ever published. It ran into 52 editions and was translated into more than 20 languages. The philosophy and conduct of a whole generation of European Marxists and progressives was influenced by it. The American translations by Daniel De Leon in 1902 and

by Meta L. Stern in 1910 helped introduce the book to American workers and thinkers. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn mentions it as the basis of her first public speech in 1906. (*I Speak My Own Piece*, Masses & Mainstream Publishers, New York, 1955, p. 42.)

Lenin never tired of stressing that there can be no successful revolution without the masses of women taking part. It was logical that equality of women was written into the whole body of law of the young Soviet republic. All opportunities for education, work training, the professions and political leadership were opened up to women, and the government made special provisions to help solve the problems of child-rearing. Today the progress of women in the socialist countries—from the Soviet Union to Cuba to Vietnam—is perhaps the most widely known and admired of all socialist achievements.

In the developing struggles for women's full equality in the United States, the Communist Party has a proud record behind it and a challenging responsibility before it.

In the Party's early history, at the Workers Party convention of 1921, a resolution was adopted which declared: "The Workers Party recognizes the necessity for an intensified struggle to improve women's conditions and to unify them in common struggle with the rest of the working class against capitalism." (William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, International Publishers, New York, 1952, p. 193.)

Many of the militant women from the farm, labor, peace, suffrage, nationality group and socialist movements were among the founders of the Communist Party. Later, when the Party began to move on behalf of equal rights for the Black people, and especially during the depression years in the struggles for unemployment insurance, for "work or wages," for organization of the unorganized, for relief and housing, many Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano women joined the Party.

In 1929 the Communist Party started publishing the monthly magazine, *The Working Woman*, which appeared regularly for some ten years, reporting on and guiding work among women.

The Party and its women members were extremely active in the 30s in the consumer movement against the high cost of living, in support of the Republican forces in Spain, in the student movement, in the fight against war and fascism.

Much of the good work initiated by the Communist Party among women was later disrupted by the incorrect policies of Earl Browder who started his liquidation of the Party by disbanding the National Women's Commission. The McCarthyite attacks followed after World War II and through the 50s. The U.S. government, aiming to jail "dangerous thoughts," used the Smith and McCarran Acts in an effort to illegalize and decimate the Communist Party first of all, and to destroy it and all progressive and even liberal organizations as well. The Communist Party and its supporters put up a stubborn and courageous struggle. Hundreds of people were arrested, dozens of leaders were imprisoned. The Party suffered severe reverses. What is more, the whole country was reduced to a deadly conformity, with most trade union leaders and liberals falling into the red-baiting mold.

The Communist Party survived. But among the reverses it suffered was temporary termination of its work among women. Both Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Chairman, and Claudia Jones, Secretary, of the reconstituted National Women's Commission were convicted under the Smith Act. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was sentenced to a 3-year prison term. Claudia Jones was also sentenced to prison. After her term she was deported and later died in exile.

But even in the depths of the McCarthyite period, Communists were outstanding among the handful of American historians who attach due importance to the role of women in history. Notable among them, as we have noted earlier, are the late William Z. Foster and Dr. Herbert Aptheker.

It was not until the 19th Convention of the Communist Party U.S.A., held in the spring of 1969, that the Party began anew to meet the challenge of today's problems among women, especially working women. During that convention the panel on women's freedom was one of the liveliest. Its report signaled a fresh and vigorous start in this long-neglected field. A National Women's Commission was at long last re-established.

In addition to its own direct experience over the last half century as part of the American working class, the Communist Party is heir to the 120-year history of the world Communist movement, summed up in Marxist theory. Besides, it has the advantage of frequent interchange with Communist parties in other parts of the globe.

The Communist Party seeks to share this wealth, to place it at

the disposal of activists, Black and white, in the midst of the strife that is American society today.

Marxist theory and practice have much to offer to the struggle for American women's freedom and equality. The basic principles of Marxism on women's status still hold true: woman is man's equal. Male supremacy is the ideology of the capitalist class, used primarily for capitalist profit. The real enemy of woman's liberation is not the male but the ruling class. The woman's chief ally in the struggle for her freedom is the working class. Special measures must be taken to enable woman to develop her full potential in social, economic and political spheres of life. Special steps must be taken to destroy the ideology of male supremacy. Womanpower is indispensable for the victory of the working class. And finally, woman's complete and lasting freedom will be won only under socialism.

But to apply these general basic principles to the specific conditions of the United States today requires an intimate understanding of crisis-ridden monopoly-controlled America plus the collective effort of the working class, the Black people, the majority of the women, and the Communist Party.

The outstanding characteristic of U.S. society is the deep-rooted hold-over of racism from our shameful history of slavery. Without the alliance between the dynamic initiative of the Black people and the working class, any progress toward socialism is unthinkable. Without the Black woman, especially the working woman, who holds a unique place both in the Black community and among American women, the liberation of U.S. women is impossible.

Communist women are to be found today in all struggles of the people.

American women are fighters. They are proving it at every turn today—in trade union struggles, in the fight for peace, in welfare actions, on the campuses, for community control of the schools and for child-care centers. American women are capable of making a powerful impact upon current American history if they can unite behind a program of common demands.

In the spirit of such unity, we offer the following 12-point program:



# A PROGRAM FOR U.S. WOMEN'S FREEDOM

## 1. *Peace*

End the brutal war of aggression in Vietnam. Bring the G.I.s home alive without delay.

## 2. *Equality on the Job*

Equal pay for equal work.

An end to discrimination in hiring, job training and promotion, especially for Black, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Indian and other minority group women.

Maternity leave with pay and with no loss of seniority.

Organize the unorganized, with special attention to women.

Lower the retirement age for women to 60 years.

## 3. *Liberation of Black Women*

Conduct activity and education against racism in unions, parents' groups and other organizations, especially those in which the majority are white women.

Compel unions to take all necessary steps to organize Black and other minority women workers and to open up training opportunities for them.

Promote Black and other minority women workers to leadership in unions and community organizations, also as candidates for public office, in areas of white as well as Black majority.

Organize domestic workers into *bona fide* unions.

Stop the assassination and jailing of Black Panthers.

## 4. *Defense of Home and Family*

Guarantee an annual wage and annual welfare allotment sufficient to provide comfort and decency to every family.

Provide universal, free, unsegregated child care centers for all children from 6 months to 12 years, under union and/or community control, to be funded by a federal appropriation on the order of \$20 billion a year.

Assure freedom for family planning. Rescind all abortion laws and all restrictions on dissemination of information and means for contraception.

Assure normal family life to the Cleaver family and others whose family lives are similarly disrupted. Guarantee safe-conduct and security of home and person.

### **5. *Fight Against Male Supremacy***

Expose the roots and consequences of male supremacy.

Challenge all male supremacist practices, attitudes and expressions.

### **6. *Freedom of Education***

Open all courses in all universities and trade schools to women.

### **7. *Equality in Political Life***

Double the number of women in Congress in each election starting in 1970 until full representation is attained. Greatly increase representation of women in state legislatures, city councils and other governing bodies.

Promote the candidacies of the best women representatives of the working class, the Black people and other minority groups for political posts at all levels.

### **8. *Leadership for Women***

Advance women to leading positions in trade unions, community organizations, student and professional groups, in proportion to their membership.

### **9. *Political Prisoners***

Release all women political prisoners, especially mothers.

### **10. *Mass Media***

End the degradation of women in mass media. Compel full dignity in the treatment of women.

### **11. *International Relations***

Work for international friendship among women, especially between U. S. and Vietnamese women.

### **12. *Socialism***

Educate and work for socialism as the only assurance of women's freedom.

## SOCIALISM

Communists pride themselves on being the bearers of the dream: socialism. This dream is not a distraction from reality. It is not a visionary consolation for the grimness of reality. It is reality in one-third of the world. It will become reality here, too.

What will socialism mean to the American woman? It will mean that she will no longer be condemned to a half-life, that she will for the first time have freedom to live a full life, with a real choice as to education, work, family. If she wishes to devote her major energies and time to science, education or skilled craftsmanship, she can do so with the assurance that her children will receive the best of care. If her talent is administration or political leadership in the service of society, the door is wide open to her. Or if her choice is full-time motherhood, it is a free choice and not a social or economic imposition.

The new dignity, confidence and healthy pride woman will acquire will not only make of her a new woman but will add to the stature and dignity of all humankind.

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