

International VIEWPOINT

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SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ISSUE

NICARAGUA

The revolution within
the revolution

SPAIN

A radical and dynamic
women's movement

CHILE

Women against the
dictatorship

BOLIVIA

"We are not all equal"

FRANCE

Fighting for equality

BRITAIN

Lesbian and gay rights
in the class struggle



Nurses' strike shakes
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Moscow Trials
rehabilitations — a
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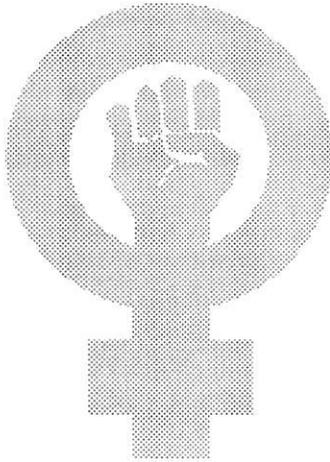
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Sandinistas continue
their hard fight

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International VIEWPOINT

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COMRADES TROTSKY and Sedov, with a small nucleus of co-thinkers and sympathizers, utterly isolated from the international labour movement (with the honorable exception of Friedrich Adler, the then secretary of the Second International), were practically the only ones in the years 1936-38 to denounce the three Moscow Trials as based upon lies, slanders and crude falsifications. They denounced the method of extorting confessions from the accused by whatever means (we know today that torture was used on a wide scale), and then using these confessions as the main basis for condemnation. This is a method that the infamous Vishinsky even elevated to the level of a general theory of jurisprudence taught in Soviet universities for two decades.

It is probable that, in the very long run, truth would have triumphed even without Trotsky's efforts. But thanks to these efforts the mechanism of the Stalinist lies and slanders quickly exposed for all those who were not blind or cynical, so the time for the restoration of historical truth was much shortened.

Khrushchev's "secret report" to the 1956 Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU) prepared the way for the February 4, 1988, verdict of the USSR Supreme Court which cleared all the names of the accused of the third Moscow Trial over 30 years later. That verdict is a vindication of the greatest political importance for the struggle which Trotsky and Sedov started in the summer of 1936, to defend the honour of their comrades, the Old Bolsheviks, who had led the young Soviet state from the days of its creation in October/November 1917.

One million communists died in Stalin's purges

By declaring that all the accusations of "spying", "terrorism", "assassination" and "conspiracy" against the Soviet state and the leadership of the party advanced in the third Moscow Trial were false, the Supreme Court has not only rehabilitated Bukharin, Rykov and their co-accused. It has also branded Stalin, Vishinsky, Yezhov-Beria (the then heads of the GPU) and their accomplices and henchmen as mass murderers. These criminals used the false accusations of the three Moscow Trials for a mass purge of the CPSU, in which probably as many as one million communists were killed outright or died of the consequences of their unjust imprisonment. Stalin will go down in history branded with the mark of Cain, as one of the most sinister figures in the long and tragic story of humanity's inhumanity.

So much blood, so much mud, so much human suffering heaped upon innocent men, women and children — finally all to no avail! Truth has triumphed, in spite of lies spread in tens of millions of books, pamphlets and newspaper articles circulat-

A historical victory

THE PENAL (juridical) rehabilitation by the USSR Supreme Court on February 4 of all the accused of the third Moscow Trial of 1938 — with the exception of the ex-GPU chief Yagoda — represents a great victory for the Soviet people, the Soviet proletariat and the international working class. It is above all a great victory for our movement.

ERNEST MANDEL

ed to suppress it. What a lesson for the cynical-naïve devotees of *Realpolitik*, *raison d'Etat* and opportunism! What a confirmation of our unshakable political and moral conviction that in the long run it always pays to stick to principles, under all circumstances, and against the greatest of odds. The only regret we have is that so many of the courageous handful of 1936-38 have not lived to see the moment of triumph that they never doubted.

Those who, for whatever reasons, have repeated the lies and slanders against the Old Bolsheviks against our movement, against all oppositionists, for years and decades, stand today in the shameful position of apologists and accomplices of murderers of communists. Those who have

continued to educate their members and sympathizers by means of the infamous *Short History of the CPSU*, which codified the lies and slanders of the Moscow Trials, are guilty of poisoning and destroying the critical minds of two generations of communists. The least one can ask of them is a clear and open self-criticism, a clear and public statement that all the epithets like "Hitlero-Trotskyists" — used innumerable times by *L'Humanité* and other Communist Party and Maoist papers — were slanderous through and through.

Campaign must continue for rehabilitations

But this is only the beginning of victory. The Supreme Court of the USSR has only juridically rehabilitated the accused of the third Moscow Trial, not those of the first and second trials.

This is not accidental. The combination of pressure by critically-minded people and of the ideological affinity of the Gorbachev followers with Bukharin makes the rehabilitation of the third Moscow Trial defendants less problematic for the Soviet leaders. But the political identity of the Left Opposition and the United Opposition makes the penal rehabilitation of the first and second Moscow Trial defendants, including Trotsky and Sedov — a rehabilitation which involves the right to reprint, circulate, study and publicly discuss their writings — into a formidable problem for the ruling bureaucracy.

It is true that among those rehabilitated now are Krestinsky, a close friend and co-thinker of Leon Trotsky, a member of the first politburo after the October revolution, although never a formal member of the Left Opposition. Especially relevant to our further endeavours is the fact that among those rehabilitated on February 4, 1988, is our great comrade Christian Rakovsky, who was the closest friend and the second most important political leader of the Opposition, after Leon Davidovitch himself.

In the light of that rehabilitation, we have to pursue with the utmost intensity our campaign for a full juridical rehabilitation of all those indicted by the three Moscow Trials, including comrades Trotsky and Sedov, who were charged and condemned in the verdict of the first trial.

We have to pursue with the utmost energy our struggle to ban once and for all from the labour movement the methods of lies, slanders and unfounded accusations, and the use of violence for settling ideological differences.

We are the only communists today in the world who can proudly say: our banner is clean. In the darkest days of the twentieth century we saved the honour of communism. Let us go forward in the spirit of the slogan of May 1968 of which we shall soon commemorate the 20th anniversary: "This is only the beginning, we will continue the fight!" ★



Sandinistas continue their hard fight

THE REJECTION of Reagan's request for new aid to the Nicaraguan contras was an important political success for the Managua government. Undoubtedly, this success — like the results achieved by Daniel Ortega during his tour of Europe in January — was facilitated by the Sandinistas' determination to respect fully the pledges they made in the Esquipulas II agreement. The US press itself has pointed to this, acknowledging that the other signatory governments, especially El Salvador and Honduras, have failed to demonstrate a similar good will.

LIVIO MAITAN

THE PROVISIONS of the Esquipulas accords can be summarized as follows: the beginning of a dialogue between the governments and the "unarmed" opposition groups; proclamation of an amnesty and release of those imprisoned as members of "irregular forces"; formation of a national reconciliation committee; suspension of military activities; adoption of democratization measures; election of deputies to a Central American parliament in mid-1988 and the subsequent calling of administrative, parliamentary and presidential elections; an end to military, logistical and related forms of aid from other countries; refusal by every signatory country to allow forces hostile to other countries in the region to use its territory; the formation of an inspection commission.

At the beginning of October, the Nicaraguan government had already initiated a dialogue with all the opposition parties — whether or not they were represented in the National Assembly — and even with the various factions into which some of the parties are divided. An agreement in principle was reached on the questions to be considered. The dialogue was interrupted in mid-December, but the responsibility for that fell entirely on the opposition bloc. The latter rejected *a priori* the government's proposal for following constitutional procedures in any revision of the constitutional norms.

It should not be forgotten that even before Esquipulas, and despite the state of emergency, a myriad of parties, factions and groups operated quite openly. Since the accords, some of them have become more aggressive, putting forward programs that involve wiping out the principal gains of the revolution. Likewise, it should be remembered, parties and groupings identify-

ing with with the workers' movement and the left have been able to organize, distribute publications, call meetings and demonstrations and lead trade unions.

Two of these groups claiming to be left, the PSN and the PCN have blocked with the conservative parties in the recent months' negotiations, joining in the Bloc of the 14. Another, the MAP-Frente Obrero, has taken more independent positions, explicitly declaring its defence of the gains of the revolution. Finally, there is a small group, the PRT, which calls itself Trotskyist and is linked to the international Moreno tendency. Starting off from a sectarian line toward the FSLN, it has condemned Esquipulas as a capitulation. It withdrew almost immediately from the national dialogue in which it was invited to participate.

Sandinistas comply with Esquipulas II accord

Barricada and *Nuevo Diario* frequently inform their readers about the activities of the various opposition parties and about their statements, which are generally reported without comment or polemical swipes.

The Managua government rapidly set up a national reconciliation commission, giving the chair to Cardinal Obando, who is certainly not likely to be suspected of sympathy for the revolution. It has granted an initial amnesty, abolished the special anti-Somozista tribunals and said that it is ready to release other prisoners if the United States offers them the right of asylum, as well as projected further amnesty measures.

It is well known that the great majority of those who remain in prison were sentenced for crimes committed under the dictator-

ship, and therefore their cases cannot be compared with those of political prisoners in El Salvador or in Guatemala.

La Prensa, the voice of the reactionary opposition, has been able to resume publication, and a series of radio stations were authorized to begin broadcasting. (In early January, there were in total 20 state radio stations, 21 private ones and three of mixed ownership.) The state of emergency, which in fact was never very strictly applied (for example, the provision suspending the right to strike), has been withdrawn.

Finally, although the military actions continue and are still hitting civilian targets and defenceless populations, the government has agreed, after all, to direct discussions with a delegation from the contras, although with the proviso that this is not political dialogue but an attempt to negotiate a cease-fire.

Proposal for a cease-fire

On January 28, the Sandinista government spelled out its proposal for a cease-fire, which could begin on March 15 and last to April 15, the date on which an international commission would carry out an inspection. The Sandinista army would halt operations, enabling the contras to go to an area assigned to them on Nicaraguan territory, where they could continue to get food, clothing and medicine through the Red Cross. After an accord, the contras would lay down their arms and an amnesty would immediately be granted. Those who so desired would be authorized to go to other countries.

An inspection commission went to Nicaragua early in January. It was able to sound out all the interested parties, even though its composition did not meet the requirements stipulated by the accords and in principle it could have been rejected.

Some have raised the question of whether with Esquipulas and after the Nicaraguan government has not made excessive concessions. In particular, the announcement of direct negotiations with the contras seems to have aroused some disquiet in Nicaragua.

Obviously, a balance sheet can be made only at the end, with the benefit of hindsight. Of course, it may be supposed that even the real application of the accords by all the parties — which so far has not happened — would leave open questions that are crucial for Nicaragua (for example, the accords offer no guarantee against the imperialist blockade and economic sabotage). And still greater problems could arise for the revolutionary forces in El Salvador and Guatemala.

However, the Sandinista government has a perfect right to make every possible attempt to end the contras' attacks, or even to limit their scope by taking advantage of the differences in interests and concerns between imperialism and sections of the Cen-

tral American ruling classes, as well of differences within the United States.¹ In fact, the concessions made and the steps taken in recent months have not involved giving up any part whatever of the gains of the revolution. Nor has there been any indication of an intention to put the revolutionary regime up for discussion.²

"Power is in the hands of the people"

Daniel Ortega has been asked whether, in the event of an electoral defeat, the FSLN could relinquish the government. Probably because of the various ways in which his response to this question was interpreted in the international press, the Nicaraguan president clarified his thinking in an interview at the end of the year. According to him, the hypothesis on which the question was predicated would never come about, but in any case the FSLN could "hand over the government but not the power, because that is in the hands of the people," and the latter "would not permit the structure of power to be altered by dissolving the armed forces, taking the arms from the people, or taking the land from the peasants in order to restore it to the landlords."

This answer was not only tactically adroit, but substantially correct and profoundly educative for the masses. To use a terminology current in capitalist Europe, Ortega accepted, hypothetically, a change of governmental leadership, but only within the framework of maintaining the revolutionary regime. It is precisely in this area, moreover, that it one can gauge how irreconcilable the Sandinista positions are with those formulated by the armed counter-revolutionaries and shared by a good part of the legal opposition. In essence, the contras are demanding the dismantling of the Sandinista army (in addition to suspension of compulsory military service) and dissolution of the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS) — in other words, the elimination of the basic pillars of the regime and the initiation of a process of restoration that would inevitably lead to the elimination of all the other gains of the revolution.

The clashing interests on both sides and the resulting difficulty to overcome the conflict and open up a new era of coexistence and "democratic institutionalization" become even clearer from the international angle. The US ruling class — even its most extreme wing — realizes that the contras have no chance of defeating the Sandinista regime militarily, or even of establishing themselves firmly on a part of Nicaraguan territory. It sees, moreover, that in recent months the armed opposition has been politically undermined by defections, resignations by leaders and internal divisions (to say nothing of the positive results of the Sandinistas granting autonomy to the Atlantic Coast regions).

In addition, the US rulers are not un-

ware that a direct intervention in Nicaragua would not at all be a Grenada-type operation. They know it would run into furious and prolonged resistance, which could create an uncontrollable situation in other areas of Central America and have incalculable repercussions in the rest of Latin America. For this reason, the option that has been taken and will very likely continue to be followed, regardless of conjunctural tactical operations, is an economic blockade and the use of the contras as an element in a strategy of wearing out and gradually suffocating the Sandinista regime.

Esquipulas II has created obvious problems for Washington. But it is not an insuperable obstacle to its policy. The vote in the US House of Representatives itself cannot be overestimated (something that Daniel Ortega avoided doing in his February 4 speech).

The US ruling class has not at all decided to drop the contras. It has any number of ways of continuing to aid them in the face of all of the formal decisions taken by Congress. And this is without even taking into account that there are plenty of private individuals ready to offer even greater aid than the official support that has now been suspended. The strategy of overthrowing the Sandinista regime has in no way been abandoned.

Internal difficulties and contradictions

Unfortunately, the evolution of the internal situation in Nicaragua is not going to induce the imperialists to change their tack. At the end of 1987 and the start of the new year, the government drew a series of balance sheets, which were partially picked up in the international press. To begin with, there is the human cost of the war. In 1987, military operations claimed 6,874 victims (2,491 dead, 3,601 wounded and 782 kidnapped). At the same time, the contras lost 4,832 dead, 502 captured and about a thousand wounded. Since the beginning of the hostilities there have been more than 50,000 victims, with a particularly high toll in the more exposed regions.

From the economic standpoint, the war brought a loss of \$376.7 million in a year in which total exports were \$260 million. This is besides the 40% of the national budget devoted to defence, which is expected to go up to 59% in 1988. In these conditions, it is a miracle that overall production has gone up, even if only very modestly (+1.7%).³

In addition, the country has been hit by a severe drought. According to official statements, 75% of the bean crop, 45% of sorghum, 25% of maize, and 10% of rice are going to be lost. Moreover, it seems that the decline in livestock herds has continued. From 1977 to 1987, according to data from the livestock breeders' association, the number of animals dropped from

2,600,000 to 1,400,000 (*Barricada*, December 11).

As for inflation, which was estimated at 1,225% by CEPAL for 1987. In reality it was 1,500%, and the rise is not about to end. There is hardly any need to point out that Nicaragua has continued to be hit by a decline in the world-market prices for some of its traditional products (for example, the increase in coffee production has been virtually wiped out by the fall in coffee prices).

Grave problems for Nicaraguan economy

In the interview already cited, Daniel Ortega defined the Nicaraguan economy not as a war economy but as one of survival. According to him, in a war economy, as in Europe during the second world war, money disappears and workers are remunerated directly with a minimum of consumer goods. This argument is clearly wrong. But, over and above terminological questions, the essential thing is that the Nicaraguan economy had to give priority to meeting the demands of the war. And, as we have seen, it continues to suffer from an unfavorable trend of prices on the world capitalist market.

Moreover, all of this is taking place in a structural context in which the private sector still controls the major lines of agricultural production (decisive for the export trade).⁴ The private sector also controls a very large part of distribution. At the same time, industry — also largely in private hands — far from being able to play a dynamic role has been hard hit by the effects of the imperialist blockade. (In 1987, it registered a decline of 2.1%).

In such a situation, the levers in the hands of the state can function only very partially, and the government has not been able to prevent the abnormal growth of a parallel economy in which the most unbridled speculation prevails.⁵

Such a state of affairs cannot fail to have

1. The Sandinistas do not seem to harbor any illusions about there being any qualitative differences between the Democrats and Republicans. In an interview at the end of 1987, Daniel Ortega stressed that both wanted a Nicaragua "under the thumb of the United States," and had "as a common denominator an imperialist mentality."

2. After accusing the government of having made "monstrous concessions," Bonifacio Miranda of the PRT added, "the only thing that it has not done is yield the power." (*Barricada*, January 6.) That is quite right, the FSLN has no intention of giving up what is essential!

3. This data was dealt with in the Sandinista press from mid-December to the first week of January.

4. According to figures published in the December 7 issue of *Barricada*, the private sector produces 73.6% of export products and 86.4% of the products destined for internal consumption.

5. Denunciations by name of firms that sell their products on the parallel market (rice, sugar and even industrial products) are not uncommon in *Barricada*. In some cases, the unions give their assent to such sales, because the firms claim that that is the only way they can pay their workers. (See *Barricada*, October 17 and 20, November 5, and December 13.)

grave social consequences. Privileged strata — exporters and trading speculators, among others — enjoy high incomes and the high life, while the masses can barely make ends meet from day to day. Imbalances in distribution are showing up also in the public distribution system. There are not enough Workers' Supply Centres (Centros de Abastecimiento de los Trabajadores) and, even where they exist, their stocks are irregularly replenished. In some cases, corruption exists within their own networks.⁶

More lands distributed in 1987

For some time now, phenomena of real social breakdown have been appearing. For example, quite often wage workers prefer to abandon their jobs or practice systematic absenteeism in order to devote themselves to trading activities in the "informal" sector. While these activities are often very modest they frequently earn those involved more than their wages (or at least provide a necessary supplement to what they earn).

Notorious cases of absenteeism have been denounced in important production centers, such as the San Antonio sugar plantation, where about 40% of worktime has reportedly been lost. Out of 653 agricultural workers on the roll, supposedly only 480 actually worked. (*Barricada*, November 27 and December 5). In fact, people register just to have the right to consumer goods, and do not go to work.

Still worse, in several cases, products have been stolen from enterprises to be sold directly on the black market. (For example, the theft of thousands of chickens was reported on a poultry farm.) All these phenomena certainly do not increase the socio-political weight of the working class, which in a country like Nicaragua was very limited at the outset.

The peasants continue to represent one of the bastions of the revolutionary regime, and all the more so since in 1987 more lands were distributed. But some tensions have begun to show up in the relations between peasants and workers, or more generally the urban popular layers. In fact, the peasants are trying to get higher prices for their products, and are thereby fueling the parallel market.⁷

On the other hand, uneasiness has developed within sections of the peasantry as a result of reactionary campaigns for restitution of the expropriated lands and of the prospect that lands will be given to contra elements ready to return to legality. Some Sandinista leaders, Wheelock for example, have felt the need to exclude categorically the possibility of any restitution of land that has already been given to peasants.

In recent months, the Sandinista press, radio broadcasts and discussions in various assemblies (in particular in a national trade-union assembly held in mid-

December) have reflected discontent, complaints and demands from workers and the masses more generally. Recurring themes are the lack of readjustment of wages to inflation and the insufficiency and irregularity of food supplies. In some cases, protests have been made against what are considered excessive disparities in wages.⁸ There have also been denunciations of the failings of trade-union democracy or outright violations of it, and abuses in the workplaces by foremen and managerial personnel, who at times have not hesitated to hit out at anyone who raised criticisms. The demand has been raised for real monitoring of production and management of the enterprises at various levels.

The trade-union assembly mentioned above echoed these concerns in its resolutions, deciding, among other things, to draw up a draft for a new labor code.⁹ If the constitution were modified, the assembly considered, any changes should go in the direction of "deepening the content of the Sandinista people's revolution."

In order to round out the picture, it should be said that since the Esquipulas accords, various opposition forces have been looking for more space to maneuver. On the trade-union level itself, the non-Sandinista trade unions — while still weak and often rent by sharp internal rivalries — can hope to get a certain response to their campaign of raising a hue and cry about real problems and to the demagogic demands they raise without regard for whether or not there are concrete possibilities for meeting them. A strike took place in November in the port of Corinto, and there have been some numerically significant demonstrations. The political opposition has been able to organize other demonstrations that have been bigger and more aggressive than in the past.¹⁰

In the Sandinista camp, criticisms have emerged, for example around the functioning of the FLSN's Base Committees. They have been accused of "not very fraternal" behavior and "failing to concern themselves with the problems of others." (*Barricada*, December 13, 1987.)

Problems of the CDS

As for the CDS, their problems were taken up in a significant interview by the Sandinista leader Leticia Herrera, who recognized the difficulties of mobilizing people. "If people do four-hour tours as vigilantes every two weeks after work and their minds are on the fact that there is no rice in the distribution center, then it is inevitable that they will not concentrate on their task." (*Barricada*, September 9.)

This comment underlines a more general problem — the difficulty of maintaining the necessary revolutionary alertness without people getting worn out by their more and more arduous daily lives.

The conclusion indicated by the picture outlined here is that the Nicaraguan revolu-

tion more than ever needs the solidarity of the international anti-imperialist and workers' movement. There is an urgent need to step up mobilizations to press for an end to all the military actions against Nicaragua and to all threats of aggression, direct or indirect, by imperialism. Even after the vote of the House of Representatives, Ortega noted appropriately, "the war is continuing," and it would be wrong to entertain the illusion that the worst is over.

Solidarity needed more than ever

It is vital to continue mobilizing to press for a halt to the economic blockade and for Nicaragua to be able to get all the economic aid it needs. It is necessary to demand that the workers' states, especially the USSR, increase their aid to meet Nicaragua's needs and drop some of the ambiguous attitudes they have adopted in the past (for example, in Moscow's case, concerning oil deliveries).¹¹ It has to be demanded that in no circumstances can there be any idea of sacrificing the needs of the Sandinista revolution for the sake of an "understanding" between the USSR and the United States.

Finally, the solidarity movements in the various countries have to act with the understanding that even apparently modest initiatives, while not able to resolve the fundamental problems of the Nicaraguan economy, can be helpful in overcoming specific problems (such as the practical problems facing education or medical supplies). In some countries, campaigns like this have already been undertaken. Such actions will be a concrete demonstration to the Sandinistas that their struggles and problems are not being ignored, and that they are not alone in their hard fight. ★

6. See the denunciation of a distribution center for professionals in *Barricada*, December 13.

7. After pointing to this problem, a Chinandega trade-union leader said that the relaxation of price controls decided on by the government had negative effects for the workers and called for an agreement by which the agricultural producers would give at least 50% of their products to the ENABAS. (*Barricada*, December 13).

8. One of the participants in December's national trade-union assembly, a workers' leader, criticized the fact that some functionaries and professionals got incentives much higher than those received the workers, over and above their expense accounts. The recurring egalitarian demands must have seemed excessive to some of the editors of *Barricada*. They were rejected in an article on October 28 with what, at best, can be called an ambiguous title: "Egalitarianism, a populist concept."

9. In particular, the demand for seniority after six months should be mentioned. This is obviously a measure designed to limit turnover.

10. A very aggressive demonstration was held on February 7, called by a so-called Permanent Workers' Committee, made up of four non-Sandinista union federations ("communist", "socialist", "social-Christian" and social democratic). Around 5,000 people were on the demonstration. (*El Pais*, February 8.)

11. At the conclusion of the Comecon-Nicaragua joint commission in October, Minister Henry Ruiz pointed to the vital importance of regular oil supplies for his country. He added that he had explained at the meeting that the Nicaraguans "could not continue to show their accounts to prove that they were able to pay."

The revolution within the revolution

IT HAS BEEN called the "second revolution" and the "revolution within the revolution". In the last two decades, revolutionary movements throughout the world have broadened their conceptualization of what women's emancipation means and how it can be attained in a revolutionary society. In Nicaragua's case, one can trace a historical continuity from the first Sandinista political statements on women (1969) and their actions during the insurrectionary years, through the post-triumph period, including the new constitution and the Sandinista National Liberation Front's (FSLN) 1987 proclamation on women.

The importance of the Nicaraguan experience is that it gives us a model of women's rights being won, not in an adversarial position to the government, but as part of larger political and social changes taking place throughout society. Furthermore, Nicaraguan women have made significant progress in improving their status in the last eight years, a remarkable feat in any context, but even more unusual given the reality of the ongoing contra war.

[This article first appeared in the December 1987 issue of *Envío*; it has been cut for space reasons.]

WHEN THE FSLN issued its first revolutionary political programme in 1969, one point referred specifically to the emancipation of women: "The Sandinista people's revolution will abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men; it will establish economic, political and cultural equality between woman and man". On March 8, 1987, International Women's Day, the FSLN presented its first "proclamation" on the status of women in Nicaragua to the Third General Assembly of AMNLAE, Nicaragua's association of women. These two documents demonstrate the consistency with which the Sandinista Front has addressed the issue of women's liberation and the very real gains that have been made as a result of the revolutionary process.

Many women who became politically active in the fight against the Somoza dictatorship in fact did so from an initial desire to protect their children. Though women have long been criticized as politically conservative and traditional in that they are primari-

ly concerned with caring for their families, women in Nicaragua who wanted to maintain their families found themselves almost inevitably propelled into revolutionary activity. Women who took one initial step to defend their children and families soon realized that nothing less than complete destruction of the dictatorship could ensure that defence. Thus, the horrors of the dictatorship unintentionally gave birth to a tradition of revolutionary motherhood in Nicaragua.

In the 1960s, the short-lived Patriotic Alliance of Nicaraguan Women was formed by women within the Sandinista Front. One of their statements called for women to overcome the traditional timidity and restrictions that kept them from political activity:

"There are great strengths within us that we should use to push forward the revolutionary struggle, a struggle which is necessary to bring about an authentically popular government". In 1977, the Association of Women Confronting the National Problem, AMPRONAC, was organized by a group

of women with close ties to the Sandinista Front and was key in organizing women during the crucial years from 1977 to 1979.

Some analysts have pointed out that in Nicaragua much of the revolutionary activity took place in the reproductive, rather than productive, sphere. In other words, many of the mobilizations against the National Guard were at the neighbourhood level, rather than concentrating in factories or other workplaces. The strategy of "a people in arms" that was so essential to the Sandinista victory over the dictatorship depended on the mobilization of entire communities — and though it is not always stated precisely as such, that of course meant the massive participation of women, as the population was organized, *barrio* by *barrio*, against Somoza's Guard.

Since 1979, women's participation in many public arenas has increased dramatically as the revolutionary process opened up many areas long closed to women. In the legislative elections held in 1984, 13 women were elected to the National Assembly, all of them representing the FSLN. The Sandinista Front is the only party that has seriously analyzed women's issues and taken them into consideration in the formation of its policies and plans. Women make up 31.4% of leadership positions in the government, 26.8% of FSLN regional committees, and 24.3% of the Front's total membership.

Balancing work, domestic and political duties

Though these statistics are very encouraging, they demonstrate that domestic tasks and responsibilities are so demanding that many women, particularly those with restricted economic resources, have a hard time keeping up with heavy political responsibilities as well. The number of women in the FSLN before 1979 — the time of the so-called "second promotion" — was 38%, and the drop can be attributed in large measure to this question of time and balancing work, domestic and political duties. Despite this, women's participation in the FSLN and in political life in general is greater than in other revolutionary societies where women are subject to the same pressures.

Women have made considerable advances in the agricultural sector as a result of legislation that recognizes their essential participation in that area. Both the ATC, the farmworkers' association, and UNAG, the union of small farmers and cattle ranchers, have task forces specifically devoted to incorporating more women into agriculture.

Women's participation in the agrarian sector has undergone several important transformations since 1979. First, the number of women involved in agricultural production has soared, referred to as the "feminization" of agricultural production. Women are now 35% of the year-round salaried agricultural workforce, and 45% of

the seasonal workforce. The largest jump has been in year-round work, as women have traditionally worked mainly as seasonal labourers.

In addition, women are finding their way, little by little, into agricultural tasks long considered the exclusive domain of men. In some instances, the war itself has been the spur for women's integration into certain of these tasks.

In the industrial sector, women tend to be concentrated in traditional female occupations, principally textiles, where they represent 37% of the economically active population. According to a study by the government's Office on Women, women in the industrial sector are also concentrated in the lowest levels of the Ministry of Labour's national salary scale and, though they are the majority of workers in certain occupations such as textiles, men still occupy the bulk of the supervisory positions. Problems of absenteeism among women were found to be directly related to domestic demands — women missed work to care for a sick child, to do the week's shopping and so on.

Various studies have noted that women make up 80% of the population working in commerce (primarily in jobs that the Office on Women has described as public reproductive tasks — market women, food vendors and so on). In addition, they are 65% of the informal sector, and 50% of these women are heads of household. The high

concentration of female heads of household in the informal sector is partly due to the fact that women have more control over their time, though they work extremely long and tiring hours.

During the last several years, more institutions have begun to take the problem of child-care seriously as an issue that must be dealt with at the institutional level. Some institutions employing a large percentage of women have child-care facilities at the workplace itself. In addition, the development of child-care centers in the rural areas is helping to ensure the continued high participation of women in agricultural work. Lack of resources remains a serious obstacle to making even quicker advances in this area.

AMNLAE marks tenth anniversary

In September 1987, AMNLAE marked 10 years since its formation originally as AMPRONAC. Since 1979, AMNLAE has been able to make the shift from an organization committed to overthrowing the dictatorship to a movement of women committed to consolidating their country's revolution, upon which their own emancipation as women is predicated. AMNLAE has undergone some fairly substantial internal restructuring over the past few years, changes which were institutionalized at their March 1987 general assembly.

AMNLAE representatives have characterized their activity since 1979 as falling into three essential periods. In the first, from 1979 to 1982, AMNLAE's prime focus was on national reconstruction, rebuilding the country after the devastation wreaked by Somoza in the last year before his downfall. Women were very active, as they continue to be, in the country's crucial educational and health campaigns, including the massive 1980 literacy crusade. Women also enrolled in Nicaragua's schools, universities and training programmes in very high numbers.

Child-care centers (CDIs) began to be set up around the country to help facilitate women's continued participation or incorporation into the workforce. One of the most important things that happened after 1979 was that women started to become visible in Nicaraguan society — for the first time taken seriously and given the opportunity to take part in public life.

The problematic that has always accompanied women's political involvement, not just in Nicaragua but throughout the world, resurfaced with a vengeance after the triumph. Women were being asked to give an enormous amount of time to their country and indeed wanted to do so, but they weren't given many tools with which to resolve the contradiction between political or productive work and all the domestic tasks that face them.

Nicaraguan women have had to deal with the harsh reality of a country lacking the economic resources that can help ease women's domestic chores. The war in Nicaragua has meant increasing lines for basic goods and foods. The "double day" faced by women throughout the world becomes a "triple day" in a war-torn revolutionary society like Nicaragua.

Additionally, domestic chores in Nicaragua are far more burdensome than in more developed countries. Laundry is back-breaking work, done by hand. Many women still cook with firewood or charcoal. Supermarkets and stores are closed by 5pm or 6pm, so a working woman must either take time off from work, or be able to count on someone else to do the job for her (a maid or family member, depending on her class status — but almost always another woman).

"As a woman, you are always split in two"

On top of all the domestic work, women now must try to fit in political work as well. One party activist described the situation this way, "As a woman, you are always split in two..."

As an organization, AMNLAE emphasized the importance of integrating women into production as a fundamental step towards their full incorporation into society as a whole. However, when they tried to bring women into the productive workforce, apart from the issue of time, conflicts often arose between women and their husbands or *compañeros*, who did not feel that women should be working outside the home. The problem was compounded by the jealousies many men felt when "their" women were absorbed in AMNLAE meetings. One AMNLAE organizer characterizes the early practice of inviting only women to the meetings as a mistake since it created unnecessary misunderstandings and made it harder on the woman who chose to be active.

Another continuing problem that has confronted AMNLAE is the issue of where a revolutionary activist chooses to make her key political commitment. Most of the top AMPRONAC leadership from before the triumph took up political tasks immediately afterward that were not specifically oriented towards "women's issues". In addition, many of the women who had been activists in AMPRONAC found themselves facing a post-revolutionary dynamic where their



work as members of a women's organization was not very clear.

The task at hand for the entire country was national reconstruction. As women, should they work in their neighbourhood committee (CDS) or AMNLAE? In their union or AMNLAE? One woman stated the long-standing question this way: "How can you have an organization made up solely of women when these women are also organized, and should be organized, in other ways and participating in the revolutionary process, which is our reality here?"

During the second period — spanning the years 1983-86 — AMNLAE (along with the rest of Nicaragua's mass organizations) was oriented primarily toward the defence of the country, with AMNLAE in many ways serving as a key "rearguard" organization. Some women were organized into reserve battalions and women throughout the country received military training.

After the draft law was passed in 1983, however, women were mobilized essentially as mothers — of the young draftees and later of fallen soldiers. This latter group, the "Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs", comprises women who have lost children at the hands of both Somoza's National Guard and the counter-revolutionary forces. AMNLAE's almost exclusive focus on mothers, and particularly mothers of combatants, during this second period meant that it was relatively isolated from a significant number of women. The question was how to broaden the base without losing this important focus, particularly important in the context of the war.

The war has meant a sharp, nearly total, focus on defence. "Women's issues" as such thus had to take a back seat. Just as women who organized around women's issues before 1979 recognized that there could be no liberation for women until the dictatorship was destroyed, many women in this period of revolutionary struggle accept that all gains are predicated on the survival and defence of the country.

Discussion on abortion and domestic violence

Nonetheless, a number of issues came up in a formal way during this period and began to be talked about by women in AMNLAE, with a significant ripple effect on the rest of the country. Two of the issues, notable for the fact that they are often considered private, "non-political" issues, were abortion and domestic violence.

Nicaragua has a very high growth rate, particularly in Managua — a city already strained far beyond its capacity. Managua's population is nearing a million, up from some 470,000 in 1979. FSLN representatives from Nicaragua's Region III (Managua and surrounding areas) have said that the need for a more concerted family planning programme is essential in order to even begin to deal with the many problems caused by Managua's burgeoning popula-

tion. Women themselves, in the grassroots constitutional debates and in other forums, have made it clear that some type of programme is needed and in fact would be welcomed. To date, however, no integral programme has been implemented. Some women speculate that this may be due partly to fear of eliciting a backlash from the Catholic Church, while others point to a lack of understanding on the part of some men in key positions.

"The revolution has dealt with many thorny issues"

Abortion is a much more problematic issue, still extremely divisive — but the number of women who die after attempting to carry out their own abortions has alarmed many women and members of the medical community. A round-table discussion of the abortion issue that ran for several weeks in *Barricada* in 1985 brought the issue out into the open as a legitimate item of political debate for the first time. In a recent all-day *De Cara al Pueblo* (Facing the People) meeting that President Daniel Ortega and a number of government ministers and officials held with women, a female psychologist raised the issue of the number of deaths and injuries resulting from self-induced abortions: "I know it's a thorny issue," she said, "but the revolution has dealt with many thorny issues".

In 1983, AMNLAE opened its first legal office on women, and began to deal with the problems of child support payments, domestic abuse and other legal problems affecting women. By opening the office, AMNLAE and the Nicaraguan government have said to Nicaraguan women that their concerns are concerns of the society at large and that they are not alone. A number of regional legal offices have been opened since 1983.

The legal office has had to overcome women's traditional timidity and fear in publicly discussing problems that have long been considered exclusively "private" and better left unexamined. This has sparked a tremendous process of consciousness-raising among women. One of the principal issues dealt with by the legal office is domestic abuse. Since the office opened, domestic abuse has become, if very slowly, a far more acceptable topic of public discussion — in the newspapers, on the radio and at public meetings.

During the second period, AMNLAE had come to the realization that the rights they are struggling for as women fall into two essential categories: broad legal changes, transformations in the overall structure of education and health facilities and so on; and those that have to do more specifically with daily life. After a good deal of internal discussion based on the type of political activity that AMNLAE should be taking up, they began to make the transition from an organization to a movement, a transition ratified by the Third General Assembly of

AMNLAE in March 1987.

According to AMNLAE members, they can be more effective as a movement with a presence throughout other existing organizations than as a separate or autonomous organization. They argue that because women are part of every sector of Nicaraguan society, it does not make sense to continue to function as a women's organization per se. AMNLAE's energy should rather be focused on raising women's issues in a number of areas, thus avoiding a "ghettoization" of their position. As one AMNLAE activist explained it: "We are a movement because we are not a social class, we are not a social sector, we are women of all classes and social groups, and we work in the context of this revolution, in all the different sectors, to achieve a better situation for women". Though this analysis seems essentially sound, it could be argued that AMNLAE runs the risk of seeing some important issues get swallowed up by this key organizational shift.

Another central issue not thoroughly addressed by this position is the fact that while women indeed come from a variety of social classes (classes determined by their relation to the productive sector), women do share the common denominator of being grounded in, and having primary responsibility for, the reproductive sector. That is to say, there *are* material issues — those having to do with reproduction — which are common to all women, even though the particular ways in which they affect women vary across class lines.

In any case, AMNLAE's shift is essentially pragmatic, as it is grounded solidly in Nicaragua's specific reality. It also addresses the fact that a tremendous amount of political work needs to be done and there is little sense in duplicating it. For example, AMNLAE alone could not have ensured that women's issues would be taken up by the key agricultural organizations.

In the current period, AMNLAE will thus continue to take up women's issues within the context of the country's larger political concerns, and its role will be to maintain an active presence in already existing organizations. AMNLAE representatives at the local and regional levels applaud this shift, and say they feel relieved that their work will now be more closely coordinated with other revolutionary work. The change for them is from isolation to integration.

US aggression and the daily struggle for survival

AMNLAE activists have characterized this new period as one that is defined by the US aggression and the accompanying daily struggle for survival. At the Third General Assembly, AMNLAE called for a focus on four strategic areas.

The first is the economic survival of the revolution, which for AMNLAE means supporting and facilitating women's continued incorporation into the productive

sector.

The second area, child-care, is closely related to the first and illustrates the necessary linking of the productive and reproductive spheres. It is clear that the burden of time which today falls almost exclusively on women must be more equitably shared out. Some of that burden must be picked up by the state, but a significant amount must be taken up by men themselves.

AMNLAE describes the third focus as dealing with the "dignity of women". According to AMNLAE general secretary Lea Guido, "Women's dignity can't only be attended to in campaigns on March 8 [International Women's Day] or May 30 [Mother's Day in Nicaragua] — it has to happen every day". Thus, AMNLAE calls for continued attention to the problem of domestic violence, as "an ideological problem that the revolution must directly confront". They link dealing with this problem to the creation of a strong family, with mutual respect between men and women. The Nicaraguan family is historically very weak, in large part due to the country's economic development, and women feel they have a real stake in strengthening the family.

The fourth area is sexual education. There is an enormous lack of education, particularly among young people, and that, coupled with scarce access to contraceptives, has resulted in a very high pregnancy rate among young women. This area has thus been identified as vital for future work.

The legal arena is a prime area in which the struggle for structural change in women's status has unfolded since 1979, and since that time, an important foundation has been laid from which women will be able to make further gains. The Nicaraguan laws specifically addressing women are far more progressive than most in the hemisphere.

An important legal advance

One of the most important legal advances for women was the signing of the Nicaraguan constitution in January 1987. It overturns the historic legal discrimination suffered by Nicaraguan women and should serve as a catalyst to further social and political change.

After the triumph of 1979, a series of laws were passed in the Council of State (a provisional legislative body between 1980 and 1984) that were crucial in beginning to address some of the fundamental causes of women's oppression. One of the most important, the paternity law proposed by AMNLAE in 1980 as the "Law between Mothers, Fathers and Children", abolished the old concept of *patria potestad*, a direct inheritance from Spanish colonialism under which only children born in legal marriages had rights and the father had virtual

rights of property over his children. In Nicaragua, as in much of the rest of Central America, however, the agro-export economic structure that demanded a mobile and seasonal agricultural workforce in some of the principal cash crops, along with a lack of priests serving the rural areas, helped to institute a tradition of couples living together in consensual, rather than legal, unions.

The issue of paternity and illegitimacy

Although there was not a great deal of social stigma attached to so-called illegitimate children, many women took on almost the entire economic burden for children and were not entitled to any help from the fathers unless they were legally married to them. Matters were complicated by the fact that (as is still common) many men had children with different women and often contributed nothing whatsoever to their social or economic welfare. In addition, many Nicaraguan women, particularly poorer women, commonly have eight or nine children. The 1980 law stipulated that men were responsible for children they fathered; paternity, not legal marriage, became the issue. There are still a number of problems with actual enforcement of the provisions requiring economic support (which varies greatly region by region), but it is nevertheless a significant and essential first step forward for women.

The political struggle around the passage of the law made it clear that women had a long battle ahead of them, most obviously in terms of breaking down a very embedded ideology of machismo. The women working on this law, as well as others, had to confront men from the right-wing political parties, and sometimes within the FSLN itself.

In August of 1979, the law establishing equal rights for all Nicaraguan citizens was passed. This law mandated that women be given equal pay for equal work, and also provided for maternity leave. This law had particularly significant implications for the agricultural sector, as many women (and children) who worked were not formally listed as employees on an employer's roster, but were considered part of a "family wage" package.

In the Council of State, there was one important issue on which the FSLN and AMNLAE formally disagreed — that of women's military participation. In 1981, when the contra forces first began to present a serious military threat, AMNLAE was approached by the Sandinista Army (EPS), then in the process of forming new battalions to send to the mountainous northern zones of the country. The EPS asked AMNLAE for logistical help — with cooking and other maintenance tasks. AMNLAE responded by forming several all-female battalions. However, there were a number of problems, as a national AMN-

LAE leader explained in a 1981 interview: "There were places where at first people said women were not capable of enduring the physical training. There were others where men refused to let their wives go. Then there were women who wanted to join the battalions, but who would take care of their children?... One thing we have noticed with the women's battalions is that the participants are not necessarily young, not necessarily students, but rather *compañeras* from the *barrios*, housewives, members of the Sandinista Defence Committees."

Then, in 1983, with the contra attacks on the rise as a result of their steadily increasing financial and logistical support from the United States, the EPS made the decision to implement a nationwide draft of all males between 17 and 25 years of age. When the law of patriotic military service (SMP) was debated in the Council of State, AMNLAE's representative argued at length that in light of women's military participation in the war of liberation, it would be unjust to exclude them from this new and crucial phase of national defence.

As the debate came to a close, provisions were written into the law to allow for women as volunteers. However, though it was reported that a number of women volunteered to serve, the first women were not accepted until early 1986 — and then in explicitly non-combat positions (most working in communications in Managua). AMNLAE realized the delicate position in which the Front found itself and also recognized that for cultural reasons many families (including the young women themselves) would have been entirely opposed to sending their young daughters as well as their sons off to the military service.

Need for "consciously chosen motherhood"

Apart from the re-organizational steps taken by AMNLAE, 1987 has seen other path-breaking advances for women. Nicaragua's new constitution, signed into law in January last year, addresses itself to a number of issues essential to women's status in Nicaragua. The first constitutional draft, drawn up by a committee from the National Assembly, was presented to a number of *cabildos abiertos*, or open meetings, held by sector throughout the country. The June 1986 meeting held exclusively with women in Managua is pointed to by many women activists here as an important demonstration of women's participation in the ongoing revolutionary process. It was a highly charged meeting, with women representing all walks of life speaking out on the issues they felt to be most important. One that came up time and time again was that of *una maternidad consciente*, consciously-chosen motherhood. The need for sexual education and family planning was also brought up, as were abortion, domestic violence and the need for new family laws. The issue of divorce was specifically

addressed several times.

Some of the laws most favorable to women passed in the early days of the revolution were ratified as fundamental rights with the signing of the constitution. One of the most important sections of the constitution for women is Chapter 4, which deals with the family. Article 73 of Chapter 4 states:

"Family relations rest on respect, solidarity and absolute equality of rights and responsibilities between the man and woman. Parents must work together to maintain the home and provide for the integral development of their children, with equal rights and responsibilities."

Gap between law and reality

The chapter as a whole sets the tone for a new vision of the Nicaraguan family, one which will hopefully be translated into reality step by step.

Clearly, there is always a gap between law and reality, and the situation for Nicaraguan women lags far behind this ideal expressed in the constitution. Laws still date back to the 1904 civil code, but the National Assembly is expected to promulgate a new family code based on the constitution in the coming months, as well as making other legal changes essential to women's full incorporation into society, both politically and economically.

Last March, the FSLN presented its long-awaited "Proclamation on Women". The proclamation continues the tradition begun in the 1969 political programme, but is a much more extensive document. It deals quite directly with the issue of machismo by identifying domestic tasks as the responsibility of both men and women. The proclamation is a unique document, as it commits the party to continue moving forward on women's issues and identifies, once again, the emancipation of women as an integral part of the revolutionary process as a whole.

Since 1979, a foundation — both legal and political — has been set in place that has the potential to affect significant transformations in the lives of Nicaraguan women. Yet, as always, one of the hardest parts is changing people's ideas, particularly with something as deeply-rooted as machismo. Some of the principal problems affecting Nicaraguan women are directly traced to lack of resources, while others are linked to long-held attitudes about women and their problems.

A facile separation between "revolutionary" and "women's" issues has often been made in other historical contexts, with people referring to the emancipation of women as a secondary, distinct element, which must always take a back seat to more "legitimate" revolutionary issues — historically those defined by men and having to do specifically with the productive sphere. But in Nicaragua today many women who



identify themselves as revolutionaries see the situation as more complex. They are women *and* revolutionaries, and their political response and analysis is based in these two, intertwined material realities.

A political programme which denied either reality would be unrealistic, and ultimately unsuccessful in Nicaragua. As part of the revolutionary process itself, women and men have been creating the tools they will need to ensure both the defence and survival of the new Nicaragua and the emancipation of women.

The key burden of women's emancipation, however, will continue to be shouldered by women themselves. Their task will be difficult, in the context of scarce economic resources and a deep reserve of *machista* sentiments, even among male revolutionaries who recognize the need to change their attitudes.

"Without revolution real change is impossible"

At a public discussion sponsored by AMNLAE in celebration of its 10th anniversary, one woman emphasized the importance of bringing out the contradictions and complexities of the many issues affecting Nicaraguan women:

"They're not obstacles to the revolution," she noted, and called on women to be more aware, analytical and assertive, both in working for women's emancipation and in furthering the revolutionary process, because "without revolution, real social transformation is impossible". ★

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A radical and dynamic women's movement

THROUGHOUT the dramatic ups and downs in the mass struggle in the Spanish state over the past 12 years, the feminist movement has remained a permanent radical force. The following article explains its dynamism and staying power.

JUSTA MONTEROS

THE BEGINNINGS of the feminist movement appeared in the last years of the fight against the Franco dictatorship and for democratic freedoms, which lasted until about 1975. It was a movement that assumed a very political form from the outset. And it was to see its hopes, struggles and its fundamental demands shunted aside by the policy of social pacts practiced by the parliamentary political forces.

This is why all the women's organizations called for rejecting the new constitution. In this political process, the movement was to play an important role through its constant, active and intransigent fight for the rights of women (who did not have the right to vote at that time), for the decriminalization of adultery, legalization of contraception, a divorce law and the right to a job. Based on these objectives, the feminist organizations took form, and the movement acquired a real political and social space and — not least important — political and organizational independence.

This was not an easy process in a society where institutions devoted to keeping women in a subordinate role, such as the Church, wielded great weight, where patriarchal values were official doctrine and where there was no tradition of feminist struggle.

The coming to power five years ago of the social-democratic Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) modified the political situation. Many hopes arose in various sectors of the society. But in the feminist movement, reality, and the gravity of the abortion problem, dispelled them. We had been fighting too long in unfavorable conditions simply to stop the fight because of the government's declarations of good will. The movement chose to fight on its own ground — in the streets — to win legalization of free abortion on demand. It organized mass demonstrations with very clear objectives: "Women must decide. Free abortion on demand."

Clearly, the PSOE had to take on a movement that was creating problems for it, an active radical movement in which it had practically no presence. It took a very aggressive attitude, striving by every possible means to marginalize the movement politically and socially. At the same time, it sought to create a more moderate alternative, based on sectors of women linked to reformism. It wanted establishment feminism to expand its role, and serve as an intermediary between women and the administration.

Social democrats set up Women's Institute

The creation of the Women's Institute (a body under the Ministry of Culture) was part of this policy. Its activity was limited by two factors. One was its links with the policy of the PSOE, which it defended either passively or actively. The other was its lack of independence and of any real weight in the administration. Despite all this, it is a useful mechanism for the government, inasmuch as its activity makes it possible to promote a social consensus on the need for formal equality between men and women. It is in the PSOE's interest to do this in order to cover up real inequality and protect men's privileges.

All this has led the social democracy into a head-on clash with a movement whose struggles are aimed at overthrowing the economic and social order, which is the only way to achieve real changes in the lives of women.

The feminist movement is working on many questions, everywhere where patriarchal oppression manifests itself. For many years, the movement's efforts have been concentrated on the fight for the right to abortion. This has shaped its present form, and to a large extent its political role. Even though today the movement has diversified, this question continues to play an im-

portant role.

With the campaign for the right to abortion that began in 1979, women turned this totally taboo subject into a political question of the first importance. Many political forces have supported this campaign, but not the PSOE or the social-democratic union confederation, the UGT. Feminist ideas have advanced, as have women's consciousness and the idea that the state has an obligation to respond to the demands of women.

Abortion shunted off to the private sector

The law partially decriminalizing abortion that the PSOE government approved on July 5, 1985, only covered cases of rape, malformation of the foetus and dangers to the health of the mother. On the other hand, it included an obligation to set up "evaluation committees" in hospitals to examine requests for abortions when the women had gone through all the administrative and bureaucratic barriers, to see if they really met the three conditions. A so-called "conscience clause" was also adopted.

A year and a half after it went into force, the uselessness of this law has been officially recognized. It has enabled only 0.2% of women who wanted abortions to have them legally, while 65,000 have had to have back-street abortions.

The government found itself obliged to approve a royal decree on November 21, 1986, whose main point was to authorize private clinics to perform abortions. In this way, the public health services were relieved of the responsibility for offering this social service. At the same time, the content of the law has been upheld — that is, abortion continues to be a crime. It has been decriminalized only in three very specific cases. Around the same date, on the basis of this law, a Madrid judge ordered the arrest of 39 family-planning center workers. Nine of them were jailed on the charge of performing illegal abortions.

As in the initial period of the law, when the government accused doctors of making the statute inapplicable by interpreting it in a restrictive way, the question is rebounding now against the judicial branch. But both doctors and judges can act with impunity, basing themselves on the social-democratic law.

On December 13 and 14, 1986, a tribunal was held in Madrid to denounce the attacks on the right to abortion. It was organized by the Coordinating Committee of Feminist Organizations in the Spanish state. Some 3,000 women from the various regions attended. The tribunal was made up of 11 women from feminist organizations. Nine witnesses appeared, women between the ages of 17 and 60, who had tried to have abortions in very different circumstances.

The tribunal's judgement summed up the demands that the movement had put forward in its campaigns. After some consid-



erations on the kind of sexist, male chauvinist and reactionary society in which women live, it concluded with a verdict that accused the government of being directly responsible for the death of nine women, victims of back-street abortions after the law went into force, and of yielding to the pressures of private doctors who calculate their moral and ethical principles in terms of pesetas.

The private doctors were accused of being responsible for the trials against women, and of refusing them information on sexuality and contraceptive methods. They were accused of performing abortions in their private clinics for gain, while they refused to perform them in the public institutions.

For all these reasons, the tribunal condemned the Ministry of Justice; all the members of the government; all the institutions of the PSOE administration involved, by commission or omission, in crimes against women's right to choose; the General Council of Doctors; judges who enforce laws contrary to the rights of women in the most brutally misogynous way; and members of the repressive forces, the Guardia Civil and the National Police, faithful defenders of the patriarchal order.

All of those thus convicted were condemned to a series of penalties that involved "being brought by force before a judge, who will read aloud the medical history and sexual habits of the convicts, thereby violating their right to privacy... suffering the same tribulations and anxieties as women when they are forced to go from pillar to post searching for somebody who can help them free themselves from an unwanted pregnancy... experiencing terror,

pain and even death because of abortions performed without regard for their health and their lives."

The sentence was greatly applauded by the 3,000 people present. There is still a long and difficult road ahead to get free abortion on demand. After the private clinics had been in operation for a year, social pressure has diminished. Today, the feminist movement's right to abortion committees are collecting figures in order to make concrete revelations about the problem. The question is not resolved. Thousands of women have to go abroad for abortions — many of them let the deadline for having an abortion here go by because of the lack of information.

A woman's right to work

Few abortions are carried out in the public sector. They are being performed in apartments. Many women fall into the hands of doctors who demand 100,000 to 200,000 pesetas [about \$875-1,750] to perform an abortion. In the most "honest" clinics, the price is 30,000 pesetas [about \$264]. Young women still have no recourse.

From the outset, demands concerning wage labor have been one of the Spanish women's movement's main concerns. But, contrary to what has happened in the case of abortion, it has not managed to make the right to a job a central political question. There are three obstacles to this — the situation of the labor market, the attitude of the union leaderships and the organization of women.

In the Spanish state — for political and social reasons — women started coming into the labor market later than in the rest of Europe, and the economic crisis arrived before this process was completed. The crisis has hit women hard, driving them out of the labor market. Paradoxically, in recent years women have been more integrated than men in economic life — that is, in the black economy.

Today, 700,000 people work in their homes. Some 70% of them are women, 25% under 25 years of age, and 44% are housewives. But working at home is not the only activity in which women predominate. It is also true of marginal jobs. In any "feminine" industries, a large part of production is now done outside the legal economy. For example, 35% of shoes are produced in the black economy. In Catalonia, in textiles, 30% to 40% of production takes place in this way.

Savage increase in exploitation

This kind of work involves a savage increase in the level of exploitation. The bosses save all or a part of their contributions to social security. For their part, the working women are denied the right to a decent and steady job and wage, to say nothing of the better working conditions won in the "legal market."

The dispersion and isolation of the women working in this black economy handicap them in organizing and fighting. Uniting these women and seeking unifying demands for the various industries is one of the objectives of the Women's Secretariats of the Workers' Commissions, the main union confederation. It is led by the Communist Party, but has a strong class-struggle trade-union opposition.

However, dispersion and isolation are not the only problems. In the days of action organized by the Workers' Commissions' secretariats, the unions' positions needed to be clarified. They must recognize the need for policy changes, because the situation we are experiencing today is the result of pursuing a policy of social pacts and consensus.

"You can't say that you are against the growth of part-time jobs, against non-legal work and at the same time negotiate or accept — as the unions are doing — reconversions, factory closures, layoffs, family wages, the pressures on women. All these measures result precisely in swelling the ranks of workers in the home and in sweat shops."

Not only have the union leaderships not maintained a consistent position of defending women's rights, but when conflicts have arisen they have supported male privileges. We have the example of the Hunosa mines in Asturias. Although women raised a demand to work as helpers in the mines and overcame all the obstacles, including the medical ones, none of the 14 women

who met all the conditions got a job.

These women waged a vigorous campaign to back up their demand for these jobs, gaining a broad hearing in the media. They had to stand up to enormous pressures and insults — “The mines are not made for women; They’ll lose their femininity in them; Protests are growing among miners against the hiring of women” and so on. The miners refused to work alongside women.

Campaigning against sexual harassment

The Women’s Secretariat of the Workers’ Commissions, the Women’s Collective of Mieres and the Feminist Association of Asturias organized a big campaign in defence of a woman’s right to work. They also fought to get the union to take up this fight, as it has done for youth, among others. But the UGT made an official statement against bringing women into the mines: “This is not the best sort of work for women.” It even went so far as to distribute anonymous leaflets to incite unemployed men in the region to prevent women from going into the mines on their first day.

The women won, and along with them all women, because they established that all the women, even those working outside the mine, would be considered part of the enterprise.

In addition to the two questions of abortion and the right to work, the movement has participated in other struggles. It has had a very diversified activity, enabling it to offer new perspectives now that the fight for the right to abortion is no longer so central.

In 1988, more effort will be put into the campaign against sexual harassment, under the slogan “No harassment without a response.” This question has been taken up on several levels — from themes that permit mobilizations with precise aims, such as opposing attacks and rape, to questions that require more explanation, such as pornography and prostitution.

The main objective of these campaigns is to give women self-confidence so that they can rebel against individual harassment. They are also aimed at fostering a social conscience rejecting such practices, which involves exposing all open and veiled harassment against women. This means denouncing such harassment by the media, by publications, and through policies of subsidizing magazines with a clearly sexist content. It also calls for concrete measures, such as women’s shelters set up by the administration, change in the divorce law, as well as among other things denouncing the institution of the family. At the same time, it is necessary to demand that the state recognize the right of women not to suffer harassment, while not placing any confidence in the state or its laws.

Likewise, specific collectives are working on questions such as sexuality, health, education and so on — “Women for Health,” the “Collective for Schools Favorable to Girls,” the “Lesbian Feminist Collective.” In the smaller cities and villages, the whole group takes up all the questions according to the priorities it sets. In the big cities, there are specific commissions for every theme, a coordinating committee to decide on campaigns and their objectives, as well as general questions that affect the entire movement, and organizational debates.

Such diversification in organization has made it possible to bring together more women, to establish closer links with other sectors of society, and in the last analysis, to broaden the activity and the influence of the movement.

The existence of a coordinating committee of feminist organizations throughout the Spanish state, which has been functioning for nearly ten years, has made it possible to make progress toward achieving unity on the principles and objectives of the movement, on central campaigns and on tempos of work. This unification has been reflected by a strengthening of all the organizations.

In the last two years, we have seen an important development — young women coming into the feminist movement, and the formation of women’s groups in the high-schools and neighborhoods. In Euskadi and Catalonia, gatherings of young women have been organized.

Young women organize

“Consciously or unconsciously, we give priority to work in the study centers and streets as the only way to start working as young people, because today we cannot base ourselves on any previous experience that might offer a model. Recently, thanks to better coordination and greater numbers, we have done better work. We have had to respond with force against harassment against young women and in the referendum on NATO. In the first case, we organized a big street demonstration and also debates and discussions in educational establishments. On the second problem, we intervened with our own discussions of anti-militarism, with rallies in the high schools and by organizing a demonstration in front of the Star arms factory in Eibar [a Basque-speaking industrial city].”

Subsequently there was the upsurge in the student struggle, making the greater participation of women’s collectives possible on other questions, and stimulating a greater awareness by women of their problems.

In many places, there are already organizations that have been functioning for more than two years. In others, they are barely starting to take form. The perspective today is to maintain specific young women’s organizations so that they can coordinate both with each other and with the rest of the movement.

The women’s movement has a lot of work ahead of it. In the general political context, the situation is hardly easy. But in confronting the future it can rely on major experiences and organizations that have maintained themselves over all these years and which are firm in their objectives and in their fighting spirit.

There are real limitations in this movement, but the constant concern that exists for broadening and extending it provides a good starting point. ★



THOUSANDS of women demonstrated on October 30, 1985, demanding that Pinochet get out. These women were united despite differences of class and political opinions. They had decided that they should join in a single opposition front in order to confront the dictatorship more effectively.

Some political parties demanded that their women members follow the line of their organization and not that of the women's movement. Many women refused to obey these orders and decided to stand by their call for the demonstration, which ran up against severe repression by the police. Although many women were arrested even before they got to the site of the demonstration, the action was a success that had a major impact on the population in general.

These women, like thousands of others throughout the country, were demanding not only democracy, but a new type of democracy. Today, as before, their protest is going further than other types of protest that are taking place throughout Chile. The new type of democracy that they are demanding would mean the end of oppression and exploitation based on sex, class or race differences.

Their slogan, "We want democracy now, in the country and in the home" is part of a big campaign that is being waged to try to raise consciousness on this question. Almost every day, a new form of public protest arises demanding the end of the tyranny that has been established in Chile since 1973. The women's struggle today is part of this, the product of a long political process that began well before the coup.

Since the beginning of the century, women have participated in political life in accordance with the social classes to which they belonged. Around 1900, two women's movements arose. Although they existed simultaneously, there was absolutely no link between them. One of them was a feminist movement very much influenced by the European and US women's movements. Its main demand was around education.

History of the Chilean women's movement

In 1919, this movement transformed itself into a political party called the Feminine Civic Party, one of whose main objectives was to fight for women's suffrage. At the outset, it was made up mainly of women from the upper classes. In the 1920s, many middle-class women started joining in the struggle. This was a result of the rising educational level, which was achieved mainly thanks to the feminist movement.

The other women's movement was made up of working-class women. It did not have any special name. Those involved in it fought within the political parties as members of the workers' mutual aid societies that existed at this time, or as wives of

Women in struggle against the dictatorship

ONE OF THE RICHEST experiences of feminist organizations participating in mass struggles has been in Chile during the fight against the Pinochet dictatorship. The first public demonstration after the terror that followed the 1973 coup was appropriately a rally for Women's Day.

The following article outlines the history of the feminist movement in Chile, particularly in recent years. It is from *Cuadernos de Sociologia*, a magazine published by the Central American University in Nicaragua.

MARTHA FUENTES

workers, peasants and miners. Miners' wives participated politically to a high degree in the class struggle. Working-class women who lived near the saltpeter factories formed the Belen de Zarraga Centers, and were later recognized as the precursors of the left feminists.

In the mid-1930s, the Women's Emancipation Movement of Chile came into being. It was formed by women coming from the middle layers and from the working class. It can be characterized as a left feminist movement. This movement was to lose a good deal of its importance for a long time, but it revived in 1983. One of its main features is that it united the class struggle and the fight for women's emancipation, while remaining independent of the political parties.

In 1945, after the second world war, the Feminist Party was formed. It focused on the struggle of the suffragettes. In 1949, after many divisions caused by a scandal, the Feminist Party disappeared. The other political parties took advantage of this and tried to eradicate the women's movement completely. For some years, they succeeded, and women turned to being active in the political parties, mainly those of the center and the left. This activity reached its height during the Popular Unity government (1970-73), when the class struggle was very sharp. Under the Salvador Allende government, women fought almost exclusively within their respective classes.

A lot has been written on the fight of the right-wing women who helped the other right-wing groups bring down the Allende government, but their role has often been exaggerated. The bloody coup of September 1973 that put an end to the Allende government also resulted in the destruction

of all the left women's groups.

In recent years, the women's movement in Chile has taken on a new life. In Chile, as in the other Latin-American countries, feminist women are fighting to find their own identity, whether as socialist feminists or simply as third-world women.

Radical and socialist feminist influences

There are two major currents that have influenced Chilean feminists until now. The first is radical feminism; the other is socialist feminism. Having arisen in the United States in the 1960s, radical feminism does not perceive certain basic features of Chile. While there is no doubt, for example, that Chile is a patriarchal society, it is also a marked class society, like all the countries of the third world, where class divisions are stronger than in the imperialist countries.

Upper-class women dominate lower-class men, and they can only emancipate themselves through exploiting other women, notably through the labor of domestics. The imperialist struggle, especially American imperialism, subjects third-world women to intense exploitation.

Thus, like upper- or middle-class women who get their "emancipation" at the expense of proletarians through domestic labor, many American and European women also owe a part of their emancipation to the imperialism and the neo-colonialism that have contributed to the development of Europe and the United States. Many European and American women have no need to struggle for their daily bread, for water or for a roof over their heads.

At present, Chilean women's organiza-

tions can be divided into two broad groups. The women who support the military junta, who are for the family and against abortion. For example, the National Secretariat women [a government-sponsored organization] are active members of the anti-abortion campaign. These women were at the head of the struggle against the Allende government.

In recent years, many women's organizations have come into being. Middle-class Chilean feminists have been influenced to a large extent by the radical feminists, but they have never gone to the extreme positions, they have never forgotten the dependence and class society that mark the country. In recent years, some working-class women have turned toward feminism, including it among their demands. Many Chilean feminists have also brought with them their experience of activism in left parties or groups.

Combining these experiences with a strong opposition to the violent repression and male chauvinism of the Pinochet regime, Chilean feminism is acquiring its own identity.

From the start, the junta repressed all those who had supported the Unidad Popular (UP) government. The brutality employed against the left is well known. Thousands of people were murdered (more than 30,000 in the first months after the coup). Some were executed. Many more were murdered. And others were declared "missing" (more than 3,000), after having been held in prisons or concentration camps. In the first months of the dictatorship, almost 30 per cent of the political prisoners were women. The tortures inflicted on them were in a way worse than those the men had to suffer. The women had to endure sexual torture, and a lot of them were raped in the prisons.

Patriarchal ideology of the military

In October 1973, the government established a new National Secretariat for Women, whose principal objective was to disseminate the patriarchal ideology of the military. What is more, a whole series of advances for women have been done away with. One of the main ones was the mothers' centers established under the UP. They were totally democratic, with members electing their representatives, and so on.

Under the military junta, the centers are administered by a hierarchy headed by Lucia Hiriart, who is married to General Pinochet. The administrative director is a lieutenant colonel, and then come the vice-presidents, who are in general the wives of provincial governors. The controller is a man, a military officer of course. And then come the volunteers, middle-class women, the great majority of whom are wives of members of the armed forces. There are 5,664 of them; they wear uniforms and swear to serve the fatherland and the mili-

tary government.

There is a strong similarity between this body of volunteers and the *fasci femminili* of Mussolini's Italy. The volunteers run the Mothers' Centers (CEMAs), and the members of these centers are under their direction. One of the main occupations of the Cemas is to sell craft items. There are 232,000 women in the centers, most of them are women who have no other way to survive. They earn very little, but the poverty reigning in the country is such that they are obliged to work in the centers. The CEMAs are not only a commercial concern but also serve as an ideological transmission belt for the junta.

Junta's economic policies hit women hardest

The junta's economic policy is the opposite of that under the two previous governments. Producing for the domestic market does not interest them. For example, they have started a policy of export substitution, non-traditional exports, especially agricultural products, such as fruit.

It is thanks to big capital and the policy of opening up to the international market that the dictatorship has managed to maintain itself all these years. The American private banks and the World Bank have opened lines of credit to the junta. Chile's foreign debt, which was \$5,000 million in 1973, reached \$25,000 million in 1984.

On the other hand, the situation of the masses has deteriorated at a dizzying rate. In 1973, workers' wages were readjusted by 600%, while inflation was 1,200%. The junta established an economic policy based on monetarist principles.

In 1975, a new plan for cutting the budget deficit, called "shock treatment", reduced spending by a third. The national health service was the hardest hit, and with it women, both as health service workers and patients.

With its free enterprise policy, the junta opened up the doors for international traders to compete with Chilean industry. The traditional industries were hardest hit, especially textiles, food, electronics. All these industries were drastically reduced or even wiped out. This happened precisely in those industries where the majority of workers were women. They made up 60% of workers in textiles, 70% in food, 90% in electronics.

This economic policy not only hit working women, but more broadly all working-class women. Many of them who had stayed in the home were obliged to seek work. They began to do so when the job supply was shrinking sharply. Unemployment rose from 3.8% of the economically active population under Allende to 20% under the dictatorship — 30% if you include the under-employed. So, in order to find a job, women were often obliged to accept anything, at any wage, and this is leaving aside the fact that the junta threw out a

lot of social laws.

The military know that women have been come worst off under their policies. Unemployment and poverty were such that early on the junta decided to create a Minimum Employment Scheme (PEM). It involves working for the government, either national or local, but with no social protection. It is really slave labor, with people being fired for the slightest protest. It is interesting to note that the junta has boasted that there is no sexual division of labor in the PEM, and that women have access to all the kinds of training offered.

However, what the military fail to say is that since the PEM offer barely a subsistence minimum, a lot of men do not want this slave labor. Many poor women are heads of families and are obliged to work in the PEM. In 1977, two years after the setting of the PEM, women made up 22.2% of all the workers.

On October 11, 1978, turning its back on the policy followed by the previous governments, the junta opened up a period of introducing capitalism on a grand scale into the agricultural economy. What interests the government economically is to produce for the international market. Agribusiness arrived in Chile with a great fanfare. The country was divided up into three export production zones — fruit, lumber and livestock.

The *latifundia* had been eliminated by the expropriations carried out by the governments of presidents Frei and Allende. In 1973, some big landholdings reappeared. The land was given back to its former owners. The junta also gave land individually to 37,000 small farmers, but half of these parcels were sold between 1978 and 1982 because the occupants lacked the economic resources to get them to produce.

The turnabout in agricultural policy hit peasant women hard. They were never considered producers in their own right; they did not even consider themselves as such. Their work was regarded as a part of the work of reproduction. The new agrarian policy led to a growing pauperization of the small peasantry. Peasant women had to work for wages, since the family could not subsist on what the work of the men brought in.

Women move to agricultural sector

A large part of the women became agricultural workers, especially in the fruit-growing areas. In some areas, a third of the income of families came from the labor of the women. Furthermore, it has to be remembered that all the work of reproduction falls on peasant women.

This new tendency toward employment of women in agriculture affected the migration of young women to the cities. What is more, agribusiness has gone hand in hand with the appearance of a new type of settlement, called the *campalla*, which differs

from the pattern of the 1970s. Now the shantytowns are around the villages and no longer around the big cities. They are inhabited by people who work off and on in the countryside every year. They no longer migrate to the cities for three reasons: the repression is worse there, it is more difficult to find work and they do not have enough money for such a move.

Shortage of domestic workers

Women find jobs in the new agricultural enterprises more easily than men. The bosses say that they prefer female labor because women are more dextrous and docile. The availability of such jobs for young women means that they no longer migrate to the cities.

What is more, despite the high level of unemployment in the country, it would seem that wages of domestic servants have held up. Domestic workers' wages are very much linked to the vicissitudes of supply and demand. In Santiago, for example, in 1984, the minimum wage for a household worker, over and above food and lodging, was 9,000 pesos, compared with 4,000 for a PEM worker.

It seems, therefore, the decline in the exodus from the land of young women has resulted in a relative shortage of domestic workers in the big cities. This situation, compounded by the economic crisis, which is also hitting the middle classes, is reflected in the fact that many middle-class women can no longer afford servants. An indirect reflection of this is a new rise of feminism, since many of these women have to do two jobs, doing their housework on top of an outside job, like women in the

industrialized countries.

As already mentioned, the junta started privatizing state services, including the National Health Service, which had existed since 1920. The only institutions that did not fall into private hands were the Family Planning Clinics. Some 40% of the total health budget was allotted to these clinics. It seems that at first the junta wanted to reduce poverty by lowering the birth rate.

For example, in the early years of the dictatorship, from 1973 to 1976, many poor women were sterilized without their consent. Some think that nearly 19.5% of women of child-bearing age were sterilized in this way, most of them without knowing it. In those years, the government campaigned on the theme that the only people who should have children were those able to raise them properly.

The underground press of that period is full of cases of young women who were sterilized during minor operations. In addition to sterilizations, some women had coils implanted or were given injections of depo-provera, which had long been withdrawn from use in Europe and the United States because of its secondary effects. In 1976, this policy of discouraging population growth was stopped, and the junta adopted a totally opposite one.

At the beginning of 1976, the small international upturn reached Chile, and the country started exporting non-traditional products, including agricultural ones, on a large scale. This economic revival brought down unemployment and, to a certain extent, reduced poverty. So, Pinochet no longer needed to get rid of the poor by drastic measures, and in 1976 he declared that "the law protects the life of the unborn child." This draconian ban on abortion improved his relations with the Catholic

Church, which had badly deteriorated because of his anti-population growth policies.

Not only was abortion banned, but the budget of the Family Planning Clinic was cut. Today, contraceptives are sold at market prices, and a lot of poor women cannot buy them. As a result, more and more of them are being forced to resort to backstreet abortions, with all the consequences of this for the health or even the lives of these women.

It is evident that the Pinochet government does not give a damn about the lives of unborn children. The lives of tens of thousands of women, men, children and old people matter so little to it. Why should it be suddenly worried about the lives of foetuses? On the other hand, the drastic ban on abortion and the change in the policy on population growth is linked to the junta tightening its control over women. It is a response mainly to the active participation of a large number of women in the political protests against the junta. It is easier to have women burdened down with children than to have them fighting the government.

Women first to organize after the coup

Although most of the present mass movements are defensive it is important to note that it is women who have taken the initiative in organizing. In the first months after the coup, female relatives of political prisoners were the first to organize. They did so in defence of human rights, forming the Defence Federation of Relatives of the "Disappeared."

This organization came into being in the lines that the women formed in front of the



police stations, stadiums, prisons and even the morgues, trying to find out where their relatives were. They were mothers, wives, sisters of people who had been jailed and of whom they had no news. This organization was able to find some of the missing persons, to expose the dictatorship and to teach women that if they united they could stand up to the dictatorship. Many of them were persecuted, some of them were jailed. Other organizations of the same type existed, such as Wives of Executed Persons, Relatives of Political Prisoners and so on.

The economic policy led to profound poverty for most of the population. In 1974, another organization arose, the Common Soup Kitchens. Aid was channelled to it through religious institutions, notably the Catholic Church. The soup kitchens became a very important community organization. There is no poor neighborhood or shantytown in Chile where there is not at least one canteen of this sort. In recent years, the organizers of these kitchens have not only devoted themselves to finding and preparing food communally, but have also served as relays for organizing *protestas* against the junta.

Various committees exist inside this organization. In discussing the problems of feeding people, clothing, housing and others that the poor people of Chile have to face, some of the soup kitchen committees have been transformed into organizations raising more advanced political demands, including feminist ones.

For example, a former shantytown dweller, a political refugee in France, said at a meeting of Chilean women in exile: "In the shantytowns, women very often question the role of the family as the basic unit of society. The inhabitants of these neighborhoods have learned that the solution to their problems lies in communal life. They cannot cook and look after their children individually; many of them are alone, without steady companions, both because of the repression and the economic situation. They have to leave their homes in order to find work; so the children are left in the care of other women, who also prepare the meals. In other words, the household work is done communally."

Extended families in the shantytowns

The shantytown women know that the nuclear family barely exists in the environment in which they live. At present, in the big cities, there is a new sort of extended family made up of people who live permanently in the house, plus the "extras." The latter are relatives or friends who cannot find a place to live. This problem is so vast that now nearly 40% of the present population of Santiago are living as "extras." Between 1973 and 1975, women's organizations devoted themselves particularly to the problem of human rights and direct aid to families in need. In 1976, other kinds of organizations began to appear, made up both of working women and feminists.

About two years after the military coup d'etat, the National Trade-Union Committee (CNS) began to reorganize. The initiative came from members of the old left parties and the trade unions, which were now banned. The unemployed were among the first to form committees in which both men and women participated. The CNS has a Women's Department (DF), as do all the parties. This department began to function in its own right in 1976. Its principal task was to organize working women and the wives of working people.

In 1978, the CNS Women's Department organized the first public rally under the dictatorship for March 8, International Women's Day. Nearly 7,000 women took part in this demonstration. But the number of participants did not begin to reflect the enormous impact that this event had on the people. You have to remember that propaganda was illegal, and that the rally was called by word of mouth.

At that time Chile was experiencing a slight economic upturn, unemployment was falling and wages rising. This econom-

ic upturn was accompanied by a very limited political opening. That can be seen from the large number of papers and books that were authorized for publication at that time. The government started to gain self-confidence and talked about an "economic miracle." But this miracle and the democratic freedoms were only skin-deep. Moreover, they were accompanied by an increase in repression against women. It was at this time that abortion became strictly illegal.

In 1977, the first feminist group was formed under the dictatorship. It was called the "Study Circle on Women." At the outset, it was a small group of professional women, whose main occupation was study and discussion. Later, they started publishing a monthly bulletin. The group's objective was to fight for women's rights. The Study Circle on Women meant a renaissance of the Chilean feminist movement after being absent from the scene for 25 years.

This group arose under the dictatorship as a direct result of the role that the military imposed on women, that is, the reinforcement of the patriarchal system. For example, one of the group's most important actions was circulating a petition against the 1978 legislation that eliminated the maternity leave that had existed since the 1930s.

The activities of the circle between 1978 and 1983 can be divided into two major categories. One had to do with knowledge, that is research and studies on women. The other had the objective of raising the consciousness of the population as a whole on these questions. It involved education, theater, consciousness-raising groups and so on.

Feminism and the political parties

In 1980, the consequences of the economic recession that spread out from the imperialist countries between 1979 and 1982 began to make themselves felt strongly in Chile. Many production and financial enterprises were thrown into bankruptcy. There was a new increase in unemployment, with all its disastrous effects on women. A new development was that many middle-class women who had been spared by the crisis until then were hit and joined in the mass struggle, which gained a new momentum.

The left parties had learned their lesson, and integrated feminist demands into their respective programs, at the request of their female members. The woman question appeared in the underground press, such as the MIR's magazine *Vamos Mujer*, or the Socialist Party's *Furia*. These magazines reflected the presence of feminist ideas in the mass movement over recent years.

Other organizations arose. For example, there is the Committee to Defend Women's Rights (CODEM), a people's organization



that arose in Concepción in 1980, a big industrial city to the south of Santiago. In a short period of time, it spread to the entire country. Its units devoted themselves mainly to defending the workers, while also injecting a feminist perspective into this work. In 1981, various women's groups started functioning. The biggest of them were the Women's Popular Movement (MOMUPO) and Women of Chile (MU-DECHI). Both are active in the opposition and in the fight for women's rights.

The year 1983 saw a period of intense struggle by the opposition in which women played a very important role. In this period of recession and despite the increase in unemployment, the population organized itself better, and began to confront the dictatorship in a more systematic way. In the popular neighborhoods, it was the women involved in the common soup kitchens who first came out in the *protestas* of 1983-84. They were often the ones to take on the task of stockpiling stones and sticks to defend demonstrations against police attacks.

Organizing against repression

When the armed forces invaded the shantytowns and arrested the men, once again it was they who organized defence for the prisoners. "In December, the police surrounded the Silvia Enriquez neighborhood with armored cars, and all males above the age of 13 were arrested. Two hours later, the women had prepared a complete list of the names of those arrested (several thousand) to give to foreign journalists." (*El Pais*, February 24, 1985.)

The population, and especially women, learned how to organize, and today the repression cannot wipe out what women have learned over all these years of brutal dictatorship. The women's movement really took form in Chile after 1983, the year when it became more active and grew massively.

Since the start of the century, women have acquired a certain experience in political parties and/or in independent movements. The Chilean case shows that being part of the workforce in the classical sense is not a precondition for participating in organizations of this type. Women have also organized in their neighborhoods in order to get food and housing for themselves and their families, when the situation of their husbands has made this necessary.

Middle-class women have also joined the women's movement. Not being able to afford domestics, they were forced to take on the household work, and this personal experience made many of them conscious of women's oppression. Women have also risen up against the reinforcement of the patriarchal system, or the use by the military of the ideology of European fascism or the US anti-abortion movement. ★

International VIEWPOINT



1987

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“Just because we are all women, we are not all equal”

SINCE THE 1952 revolution, Bolivian women have been part of all the struggles, often creating their own organizations. In the past few years these organizations have sprung up in every sector, from the peasants to domestic workers.

Has this been due to repercussions from the Western feminist movements? Or to the money which has been flowing in for women's organizations in Latin America since 1975? A bit of both. But above all it is a consequence of the unprecedented economic crisis that has squeezed Latin America — with women naturally being the most affected.¹

Lastly, it is due to the reaction of a society where the role of women is not at all similar to countries where movements for women's liberation have been established for the last 20 years.

CÉCILE MARQUET

“JUST BECAUSE we are all women, we are not all equal...In Bolivia, there are three classes of women: upper class, middle class and lower class. Peasants are in the lower class.

“Upper-class women live in luxurious houses, and they have their maids, nannies, cooks, servants for washing their floors and even their toilets. These women spend their money in beauty parlours. They tint their hair and paint their nails, mouth and even their eyes. Clowns is a word that springs to mind.

“Middle-class women also live in nice houses and go to hairdressers, but less often than the others; some of them have jobs. But they are all agreed on one thing: that is their contempt for peasant women. They treat them all as if they were their maids...”²

That was a *campesina* talking, a “peasant” — a word in reality that is synonymous with Indian in the Andean countries. It is used most frequently to avoid saying “Indian”, which has many derogatory connotations in these countries. She explains, with perfect clarity, how the “women's question” is raised in a country like Bolivia.

Radical feminism has not succeeded in

crossing the foothills of the Andes. Imagine the reception that some naive *gringa* would have had in the good old days of “Women's Lib”, coming to preach “sisterhood” in the Bolivian highlands. Perhaps it's because of the altitude, but in Bolivia one is obliged to weigh up a certain number of ideas and ask if it is worth taking them up to such heights.

No American- or European-style women's movement

In this country it is difficult to claim that all women are sisters. It is a tricky business bringing up the double work-day in meetings where half of the room precisely avoids this burden by giving it to the other half, thereby gaining the freedom to devote their time to...the struggle for their common liberation! It is risky to go back to origins because all along the way, in their history and mythology, there are men and women, the masculine and feminine. They seem indissociable, bound together since the creation of the world.

So it is not surprising that Bolivia is one of the rare countries in Latin America that, over the past 15 years, has not even seen the beginnings of a European- or North

American-style women's movement. Despite the growth of groups and institutions that “deal” with women, the word “feminism” has until recently been carefully avoided in meetings. If some “personalities” have declared themselves feminist they have always done so as individuals, and more in reference to a personal evolution than to the analyses of the liberation movements in the “developed” countries.

Indeed, that on which “they are all agreed” is to reject these analyses because they do not correspond to Bolivian reality. “Bolivian feminism must reformulate its demands without plagiarizing or copying those of feminist movements abroad.”³

It was only on August 8, 1986, that the Women's Coordination called a public meeting for the first time on the theme of feminism. But Bolivian women certainly did not wait until then to get involved in struggles. Domitila's book⁴ publicized the courage of Bolivian women to the whole world.

Long tradition of women's organizations

But what is not generally known is that there is a long tradition of autonomous women's organizations in this country. They can be traced back to the 1920s with the Women Workers' Federation, to the 1952 revolution and, now, to the organizations of housewives, women in the mines, peasants, domestic servants and so on.

Bolivia seems at the same time to be a country where a feminist movement strictly speaking has never existed, and where women's movements are undoubtedly very numerous and very active. It is this contradiction that one of the participants to the August 8 meeting underlined: “I maintain that there was and is an important women's movement, a massive movement, which differentiates us from all the other Latin American countries. But these massive movements have never raised demands around the specific subordination and oppression of women.”⁵

The problem is that at present a feminist analysis of these “massive movements” does not exist, for the good reason that they are solely composed of women from the “lower class”, while women who lay claim to feminism and could elaborate this sort of analysis belong to the middle class and, as such, are completely outside these movements. So it is very difficult to assess what happens inside these mass organizations, and to what extent they raise women's consciousness.

1. For a general picture of the situation of women in Latin America, see “Feminism to the tune of the cumbia...” by Heather Dashner in *International Marxist Review*, Vol.2, No.4, Winter 1987.

2. *Las Hijas de Bartolina Sisa*, Hisbol, La Paz, 1984.

3. *Feminismo y política*, Coordinadora de la Mujer, La Paz, 1986.

4. *Si on me donne la parole*, Domitila, Maspero, Paris, 1987.

5. *Feminismo*, op.cit.

However, some testimonies on this subject have presumed that there is little difference between these organizations and any other autonomous women's organization, whether or not they declare themselves feminist. For example, here is what was said — not by a *gringa* feminist in the 1970s — but by a Bolivian woman, Bartolina Sisa, from the Federation of Women Peasants:

"In a meeting with men, we cannot speak properly: men are always louder and we are afraid to talk in meetings where they are present. But when we meet as women we have good discussions, we are not afraid to throw out ideas, we understand quicker with less talk, and we also discuss women's problems that cannot be raised when men are there. Now that we know what we would lose if we went back to mixed meetings, we are going to struggle to keep this gain".⁶

The situation in Bolivia could therefore be summed up as follows: on the one hand, we have numerous and combative mass organizations, and on the other hand institutions where middle-class women work who "support" these organizations. The former are generally anti-feminist, and the second raise problems in completely different terms from the first. It is therefore difficult to see how they could co-exist in a movement similar to those that arose 20 years ago. The gap between the two seems very difficult to overcome, as shown by the clear and violent statement of another woman from the peasant federation:

Striking new awakening of Indian women

"We were invited to a seminar on women organized by bourgeois ladies. I didn't see any 'housewives' (from the housewives' federation of the popular neighbourhoods of La Paz), nor women working in the mines, and still less industrial workers.... On the third day, a bloke talked about the situation of women in the rural milieu. He just said one stupid thing after another....



"You should know that we don't expect anything from institutions that just take our name and make money on our backs. If it wasn't for us, how would you live? What money would you earn? How would you be able to go to conferences about women, to appear on the TV? Don't you get all that from us? From our political surplus value? Do you by chance produce anything? You don't produce even intellectually. We produce; we feed you. You live off us and you don't even want to recognize that we're your equals, that we have the same rights, that we are people.

"If you want to work with us, be in solidarity with peasant women, come and work in the countryside. We won't push you away, but we won't go looking for you like we did before. We're no longer the peasant women of 1952. We're the peasant women of 1980."⁷

The most striking new political fact in the Andean countries is certainly the awakening of the Indians, which is particularly obvious in Bolivia. On May 1, the brilliant red of the *polleras* (skirts) and *ponchos* temporarily reconquers the streets. Discussion wells up, from seminars to meetings, and it is difficult to go around the cultural reality of the Andes. Discussion is lively among



women. Indian women reject feminism with the following argument:

"As far as the Andean model is concerned, we think that Western feminism is not applicable. In Europe and in the USA, women are in competition with men in waged work, while here the immense majority of the population is not wage-earning.

"What is more, the cultural tradition is not competition, but mutual aid. In the West, there can only be one single system of values — that of men. Women, in order to liberate themselves, try to do what men do in a system based on competition, where there must always be one who is above the other.

"In the Andean world the allocation of roles means that men and women benefit from an equal respect."⁸

Complementarity — the key word of the Aymara world, which excludes the possibility of women's oppression by men because neither can exist nor play a role in the community without the other. (In order to be considered as a "person", and to be given responsibilities, for example, one has to be married.)

Middle-class non-Indian feminists obviously challenge this analysis of women's situation in the Andes. The discussion is just beginning. ★

6. *Las Hijas*, op.cit.

7. *Las Hijas*, op.cit.

8. *La Mujer en el Mundo Andino*, Ediciones Chitakolla, La Paz, 1986.

Equality remains a snare for some and a struggle for others



THE CAMPAIGN in support of Pierre Juquin for the presidential elections in France has taken off since the beginning of the year. Juquin is the leader of the "rénovateurs" current that recently broke away from the Communist Party, and the campaign around his candidacy has brought together a number of left organizations and a wide range of independents. Over 600 Juquin support committees are now active up and down the country, in localities and workplaces, presenting a political alternative to the bankrupt policies of the Socialist and Communist parties.

Pierre Juquin's proposal that women should make up at least 50% of national and local publicly elected posts has sparked off a heated debate both outside and inside the campaign. The following article on the debate is from the February 11 issue of *Rouge*, newspaper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, the French section of the Fourth International.

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“WOULDNT it be normal to have 50% women in all the elected assemblies, from the municipalities to the National Assembly?” Pierre Juquin introduced a new issue by making this a central proposal in his campaign. If this appears as a bright new idea, it is indicative of blind spots in egalitarian thinking up until now which has ignored this problem.

However, the facts are particularly shocking. Some 5.5% of members of parliament are women (less than in 1946); in the general councils, it is 4%, and in the municipal councils 14%. In this area, France comes at the bottom of the list in Europe, just before Greece.

For a long time, this situation did not seem to bother anyone. The idea that women were not interested in “public affairs” has been one of the most widely shared of notions. The “apolitical” attitude of women was considered by the right to be congenial and by the left to be a social reality. The rigidity of the institutions poses the problems more sharply today because the social status of women has changed, with the result that their electoral behavior has become very similar to that of men and their centers of concern have shifted.

The gap between this reality and the place of women in the so-called “representative” assemblies is becoming scandalous. Women are appalled by this situation, and are telling the pollsters that. In this way, they are reflecting the manifold repercussions of the feminist struggles in recent years. Whether they get a hearing is another matter, since the institutions and political parties are the most unassailable of male bastions.

Right wing offensive on woman's role

The absence of women from the political scene inevitably raises the problem of their place in society. The multiplication of various artifices, distorting mirrors, whether they are called “women's posts,” or the “age of women winners,” has changed nothing. Equality remains a snare for some and a struggle for others. The sexual division of labor, without which the system could not function, has in no way been changed; and the “woman as mother of the family” is again becoming a major theme of the right.

The fact that the responsibility for household tasks and childcare is put on women is not without consequences (“it takes as long to cook for an activist as it does for a bourgeois”). One of the main problems for women, the quandary they face every day, is how to manage in the time they have. In this framework there is not much time for participating in political life.

Moreover, the spectacle given by politics is not the sort of thing to arouse women's enthusiasm, being a thousand miles from

their lives and their aspirations.

The last 20 years have shown how much the independent mobilization of women involves a challenge to society as a whole. Very rapidly, those women that participated in such action came to a new understanding, summed up in the statement "the personal is political." This conception harked back to Marxism. It linked up radical criticism of bourgeois democracy, which is based on the separation of political citizenship and social existence. It talked more about destroying the institutions than getting into them.

When the declared objective is "50% women in the institutions," this stakes a claim on democratic territory. But it would be absurd to see this as a retreat pure and simple, or a sign of a revival of parliamentary illusions. As long as political life is seen as something for men, women will be the losers..

Equality at all levels is a right, full stop. Wanting such equality is not in itself creating illusions about the role of the institutions. No one, or almost no one, today advocates a thoroughgoing refusal to participate in the municipal councils or in parliament. Why should this possibility be denied to women?

Broad debate on political equality

The first effect of proclaiming an objective of 50% women in all elected bodies was to expose the social situation of women. Moreover, it is not unimportant to note that the women activists involved in Pierre Juquin's campaign have drawn another conclusion from this — the need for having "50% women at all levels of the electoral campaign." This is a matter of feminist coherence and militancy!

The fact remains that a broad debate has been opened up on the means for achieving political equality, for achieving the objective. Whether or not the constitution should be changed is not the root of the problem.

Should a law impose equality in the institutions from above, without the causes themselves of women's marginalization being attacked? Everything here depends on the involvement of women in this process, on their determination whether or not to make use of such measures in order to advance and collectively reinforce the struggle against their oppression. That is difficult to prejudge.

Feminist activists themselves are divided about the opportuneness of such a law. Some of them see it as a demagogic measure. At the same time, others fear that, in the name of balance, it will prevent all-women's slates from being proposed. The arguments are often well founded.

It seems, however, that such a law would make a lot of waves in the political parties, shake up the male bastions a bit, and allow women to "get a foothold." This

would undoubtedly not be such a bad thing, and one should not see this either as a diversion from the struggle, or conversely as a major instrument of feminist struggle.

Decisive battlefield is outside the institutions

The decisive battlefield lies elsewhere, outside the institutions, in the mobilization of women themselves. And the only grave illusion would be to fail to recognize that the problem is to change the daily lives of women, as well as to change political life so that they can take their rightful place in it. "I am well aware that a law will never solve such a problem," Pierre Juquin rightly said.

In this regard, a massive reduction in worktime and the creation of quality creches and social facilities are necessary

milestones on the road to real equality. The problem remains that politics as they are today exclude not only women but the majority of the population.

The rules of the bourgeois constitutional game are based on the lack of power in the hands of the "citizens," who are supposed to remain mute between elections for the benefit of uncontrolled "experts." It is these rules that have to be changed. It seems hard to talk about "50% women" without confronting this problem, without proposing rotating posts (as the German Greens do, for example), or the monitoring of elected officials.

At the same time, the idea needs to take hold that in order to achieve "full" equality it is necessary to end the oppression of "real women," who are consigned socially to their place in the family, as well as the oppression of female "citizens," who are perceived as pale copies of their male counterparts. ★

Juquin campaign women's festival

On February 28, the Women's Commission of the campaign to support Pierre Juquin for the presidential elections is organizing a day-long festival at the Cirque D'Hiver in Paris. The event, entitled "Ten Hours for Women", will kick off with a panel of speakers from France and abroad — both well-known feminist activists and women involved in struggles.

Four forums will be held: on work; violence; racism and sexism; and women, politics and power. In addition, throughout the day there will be videos, exhibitions and women entertainers. Food and drink will be available all day, as well as a creche for the kids. The festival will finish with a concert by two all-women groups — Les Girls (Antillian music) and Les Goulues (rock music).

The Women's Commission, who are hoping that about 5,000 people will attend, describe the event "as a rally to bring together experiences, struggles, and different generations for a broad discussion around our aspirations" ★

10 HEURES
POUR LES
FEMMES

Lesbian and gay rights in the British class struggle



DURING THE ERA of Thatcherism, the struggles of lesbians and gay men for their rights have come to occupy a position of new prominence and significance for the British labour movement. From the mass popular hysteria against lesbians and gays around AIDS generated by the Tory media to the substantial moves by sections of the labour movement to defend and promote the interests of lesbians and gay men, the question has moved into the centre of the political arena. It featured prominently in attacks on the Labour Party in the June 1987 election.

Today, the reaction to the introduction of an amendment to the Local Government Bill by the Tory right — which could not only undo the gains of the last five years but set the clock back much further — demonstrate both the strength of the lesbian and gay movement and the fragility of some labour movement support for our rights.

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THE SINGLE most dramatic illustration of these developments occurred during the historic miners' strike of 1984-85. As often in the past, lesbian and gay activists organized to win solidarity for the embattled mining communities. For the first time, the striking miners opened their hearts and their homes to Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners activists and established links that were historic for the labour movement and dramatic in the effect they had on the advance of the lesbian and gay rights struggle.

In a period when support for the miners was the dividing line throughout the working class and the whole of British society, the espousment of this cause by the miners' union, the NUM — from the rank and file through to the national leadership — massively boosted the struggle of lesbian and gay militants to win recognition for their rights within the ranks of the labour movement. The following year, similar Lesbian and Gay Support Groups were set up to build solidarity with other industrial struggles, the most impressive being the work done for and with the printworkers in their year-long struggle for jobs.

The NUM's support had immediate and potent consequences. In 1985, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) debated and carried a resolution for the first time opposing discrimination on grounds of homosexuality. A few weeks later, amid great excitement and enormous media coverage, the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) engineered a historic debate at the Labour Party's annual conference. The vote to support a firm lesbian and gay rights policy was won with the backing of the block votes of many national trade union delegations and against the recommendation of the Labour Party leadership. At the following year's conference, there was a four to one vote to reaffirm the policy.

Organizing inside the labour movement

The events of 1985-86 represented a culmination and acceleration of a process which had begun in the 1970s, when lesbian and gay rights campaigners turned their attention to the labour movement. Following in the trail of women's rights campaigners, activists began to organize inside the trade unions and the Labour Party for the issue to be recognized as a valid question for the labour movement and not just as, at best, a personal question of individual choice.

Slowly and falteringly, lesbians and gays began to organize themselves in some major trade unions — such as the local government workers' union, NALGO, and among teachers in the NUT — to fight for discrimination against lesbians and gays to be recognized and combatted both in negotiations with employers and among fellow members.

The new breed of left social-democratic

leaders also took the question on board as they broadened their political horizons. The most charismatic and influential achievement was that of the Greater London Council under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, who succeeded in popularizing dramatically issues of equality. Although the actual changes were small, they set an example, gave a boost to the self-organization and self-confidence of lesbians and gay men and also succeeded in confirming for many the need for an orientation to the labour movement. On the negative side, this novel sponsorship fostered illusions in the ability of municipal socialism to short-cut the necessity for a long-term and vigorous campaign among the working class.

Self-organization in the trade unions

Backing has continued to accumulate. Trade unions continue to debate the issue, to resolve anti-discrimination positions and, in a few cases, to take real steps to educate their membership. In some, lesbian and gay self-organization has begun to be effective. Local Labour councils in many areas have recognized the need to incorporate lesbian and gay rights into their equal rights policies. Although they have always been buffeted by hysterical media attention — and often vicious resistance — and have in many cases retreated from their original commitment, definite advances have been registered in policy, employment practices and funding for lesbian and gay organizations.

It was not surprising that the Tories and the SDP/Liberal Alliance should have chosen to exploit popular prejudice, and the bigotry engendered by AIDS, in the 1987 election campaign. For the first time, the lesbian and gay rights issue featured in television and press electioneering, and on the doorsteps in many constituencies where it was thought that capital could be made out of it. In those places where the Labour response was to retreat, to downplay or deny the Labour Party's or local council's policies, the result was often a further blow to the party's already weakened chances. But in the Islington constituency in north London, where Labour defended its policies openly, no such damage was done and the first ever openly gay candidate, Chris Smith, was elected to parliament.

In the aftermath of the election, lesbian and gay rights is one of the policy questions under attack from the Labour Party's right wing. Across national and local organizations, attempts are being made to conceal from public view any policy that, by confronting discrimination and oppression, seems likely to stir up reaction. On the other side, LCLGR has ensured that all the organizations that claim to be on the left of the labour movement have, at least officially, adopted firm support for lesbian and gay rights in their platforms, and in

some cases this support is genuine and public.

Also important in maintaining the public profile of the issue has been the alliance built up through mutual struggle and mutual support with the campaigns for women's rights and in solidarity with anti-racist struggles. In the Labour Party this has taken the form of an important alliance with the Black Section's campaigns. Outside, links are being forged with campaigns against deportations and against the reactionary onslaught of the right, who have increasingly linked up the questions of race and of lesbian and gay rights in their attacks on the progressive policies of some Labour councils, especially in London. In this respect, the first ever demonstration organized jointly by Black and lesbian and gay organizations in London in May 1987 was a significant step forward.

Why the rapid rise to prominence of the issue, and of organizations such as LCLGR, which is recognized as the authoritative voice of lesbians and gay men in the Labour Party? The answers to this question raise important issues of socialist strategy, necessary for socialists to understand if they are to combat effectively a growing threat from the reactionary right and for revolutionaries to take on board in broadening Marxist understanding.

In Britain, as in all capitalist countries, homosexuality is repressed either legally, or socially, or both. The state and legal repression in Britain is particularly violent, if often inconsistent. The total illegality of male homosexuality introduced in 1885 was only partially liberalized by the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, with provisions which make it possible for gay men to be criminalized under many different conditions, a discriminatory age of consent being only the most obvious.

Raids, harassment and intimidation

Similarly, while lesbianism is not officially illegal, it is also severely repressed by the state, the regular denial of child custody being the most blatant form of discrimination. Both lesbians and gay men suffer from a very biased use of many old public order laws, some of which are now used solely to control the lives of men and women who do not conform to the heterosexual norm. The police often use their increased powers to raid pubs and clubs, to harass, to intimidate. The courts back up the police, and institutions such as industrial tribunals or the immigration authorities refuse to accept the validity of homosexual relationships and life-styles.

Existing legislation designed to outlaw discrimination does not include lesbians and gays in its provisions; indeed, it is the "public policy" of the law that homosexuality is inferior and therefore appropriate grounds for discrimination. Despite obvious and overwhelming evidence that abuse

of young children is disproportionately caused by heterosexuals, it still remains the case that lesbians and gays are particularly vulnerable to persecution in any situation where contact with children is concerned. Young lesbians and gays themselves are particularly penalized, often being placed in social service care, with the argument that, unlike heterosexuals, they are unable to decide their own sexuality and are vulnerable to being "recruited" into homosexuality.

Roots of lesbian and gay oppression

The outlawing of discrimination in employment, custody, housing, immigration, social services and all other areas in which it is institutionalized — as well as the repeal of all laws that discriminate against lesbians and gay men — is the immediate goal of campaigners. It is also now the official policy of the Labour Party, and even if its implementation will clearly be a matter of some time and probably of an even harder struggle than winning the policy in the first place, that gain has given a respectability to the demands and enables ongoing work to be done in educating the labour movement.

At the same time, these demands lead socialists to argue an even more fundamental reason for labour movement support other than the basic issue of equal, democratic rights that is raised by the institutional oppression of homosexuality. There are many people now who are willing to argue that discrimination is wrong and must be opposed, but that sexuality is a purely private matter — everything will be solved with a few legal changes. This is a fundamental error, shared over the years by many Marxists. Such a view completely fails to address the roots of the oppression of lesbians and gay men. In the process, major issues of social oppression and socialist strategy are abandoned.

In the first instance, it is obvious that the historic and deeply-rooted prejudice against homosexuality cannot be an accident. The law and the state serve as a prop for popular prejudice and bigotry — they justify it, and their removal would strip away its veneer of respectability — but they do not cause it. Instead, the different social and legal status enjoyed by homosexuality in different historical periods and differing social structures is clear enough empirical evidence of this. The main oppression suffered by the vast majority of lesbians and gay men for most of the time is the social oppression which denies them the right to live their lives as they wish, and leaves them with a permanent terror of discovery at home, work or socially. Changing the law will help to dispel this terror; it will not remove its source.

Much lies behind the sheer scale of resistance to any steps towards the presentation of homosexuality as an equally valid way

of life. The Tory government has responded to such moves with legislation aimed specifically at outlawing such a presentation and ensuring that the education system continues to promote "traditional moral values". There are also many sections of the labour movement that have accepted that they should oppose discrimination, but draw the line at the "positive images" policy of some Labour councils, who attempt to portray lesbian and gay relationships as being of equal worth. In so doing, they are acting as agents of the ruling class, because in practice you cannot combat discrimination unless you argue that there is no basis for it. And if homosexuality is not of equal worth, then it is rational to discriminate!

The dangers of just such an approach were demonstrated graphically in the initial response of the Labour front bench to the Local Government Bill amendment proposed by Tory reactionary Jill Knight. Because they were in such a framework, they did not understand that this attack goes much further than undermining initiatives by left Labour councils, and could lead to a level of censorship in the arts, for example, which is completely unprecedented. It was only the pressure of the movement that has forced them to reconsider and adjust their position.

This does not mean that a campaign to challenge the legal discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men is unimportant. Such a campaign would only be successful if it mobilized the labour movement behind lesbians and gays in mass action. The very process of achieving this would in itself be a powerful tool in combatting the prejudice that exists within the working class, and giving the lie to media hypocrisy and distortion. A campaign which challenged the "public policy" of the law that homosexual relationships are inferior, and which made discrimination illegal, would be a vital step on the road to lesbian and gay liberation and socialism. It would heighten the awareness of lesbians and gays, and of the labour movement as a whole, of the extent of legal and social discrimination, and of the role of the state and the leadership of the labour movement in upholding and reinforcing this.

Why are the ruling class so hostile?

In this respect, it is unfortunate that the "Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights" campaign — launched by a number of organizations in 1986 and very successful in winning broad-based support — has now become a general campaign. While general movements are important, there is a key role for specific organizations focusing on legal discrimination and fight for labour movement action against it.

But why are the ruling class so violently hostile? If lesbians and gay men are a tiny, fixed minority of sexual deviants, what possible threat can they pose that generates

such fear among the "moral majority" right wing? It is precisely because they see homosexuality as a threat to the social order through its challenge to "normal family life" and its associated morality. Are these petty-bourgeois fanatics wrong? Liberal and social-democratic campaigners tend to answer that they are, and to assert that lesbian and gay rights are not a threat to the existing order. This attempt to appease the right wing is foredoomed to failure, because actually the morality campaigners have a better understanding of the challenge being posed to traditional norms. If big capital has often stood aloof from the social questions in its search for ever greater profits at whatever social cost, the depth of the present social crisis is such that government is beginning to take a hand.

The reality is that the struggle of lesbians and gay men for their liberation from social oppression, alongside the similar struggle of women, is a direct challenge to the crucial social prop of capitalism — the heterosexual family. The liberation of sexuality is completely incompatible with the alienated human relations brought about by the family structure of capitalism. The struggle not only demonstrates that there are alternatives to the family. It also shows in practice that sexuality itself is not a fixed category (in fact, only created as the counterpart to the consolidation of the heterosexual identity in the last century), but that people's sexuality is historically and socially determined and can change. The liberation struggle, waged at this stage through the fight for elementary equal rights, threatens the social structure of capitalism — and indeed of the degenerated workers' states, where the family unit has been reimposed or reinforced — both ideologically and materially.

The centrality of "family values" (that is, all the repressive aspects of the family) in Thatcherite Tory thinking is a recognition of the depths of the crisis that has wracked social institutions in the western world in the last two decades: divorce rates; youth rebellions; women's liberation struggles; the fact that the traditional family unit of husband, wife and children is now a minority of households in Britain and so on.

The growing and ever more public movement around lesbian and gay rights has become part of this social upheaval. With the exception of its extremist wing, which now wants to ban homosexuality altogether, the Tories have always been prepared to allow homosexual behaviour its place — in private. Tory toleration of sexual activities that fly in the face of their published values is well known and long established. But the public presentation of homosexuality as an acceptable way of life, which has become prominent in the last two years as the struggle moves to new levels, is something that they cannot permit, precisely because of the challenge it makes directly to their cherished and necessary social order.

It has only been through the self-organization of lesbians and of gay men

during the last fifteen years, and the developing political maturity of sections of the lesbian and gay movements in Britain, that these advances have been possible. Small in number, disparate in ideology and divided organizationally, the movement has made real gains in the last five or six years which have compelled sections of the labour movement to recognize the legitimacy of the struggle.

A rich variety of groups in the movement

The movement has thrown up a rich variety of forms of self-organization, from theatre groups and Lesbian and Gay Centres, student societies and groups for older lesbians and gays to self-defence clubs. There are a number of national magazines that act (however inadequately and commercially) as a network of communication. Many new organizations have come into being in recent years to campaign on AIDS and to organize social support for sufferers. The largest and best known have finally received reluctant and grudging recognition from the government, caught in a quandary by the spread of the disease and unable to restrict its counter-measures to an appeal for chastity!

This self-organization has been effective also in the labour movement. We have already indicated the achievements of bodies such as the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights. But the work over many years of small groups of lesbians and gays in their trade unions has also been significant. Without the existence of such groups it would have been less likely that policy would have been adopted in so many trade unions. But the groups themselves could not have survived without the larger movement, from which they have drawn both inspiration and support.

In many ways, the most significant has been the group in NALGO, one of the largest white-collar unions which organizes local government workers. Nor is it surprising that such developments have also taken place, to different degrees and at different tempos, among Black workers, workers with disabilities and women workers in the same union. It represents the coming together of a number of fortuitous circumstances. On the one hand, the local branches of NALGO have a large degree of autonomy from the national union. The national conferences are very large and take political debates on a whole range of social issues, and the union has a long history of work on women's rights, in particular involvement with the National Abortion Campaign. Since the mid-1970s, there has also been an effective stewards' [workplace representatives] organization.

This has meant that it is much easier for the demands of lesbians and gay men to be heard than in unions with less democratic structures. It is also much easier for lesbians and gay men to be open about their sex-

uality in local government than, say, in an engineering factory. This has been even more the case where Labour councils have implemented equal opportunities policies that make specific reference to lesbians and gay men.

At present, there is a National Steering Committee of lesbians and gay men in NALGO which has semi-official status — that is, although not formally part of the structure it is consulted by the national executive on a range of issues. There have been five national lesbian and gay conferences resourced by the union bureaucracy. This is not to argue that what has been achieved is adequate, or that prejudice does not exist, or that setbacks have not been encountered. But it is a way to register some significant gains that slightly changed the face of British trade unionism.

Elsewhere, the gap between rank-and-file organization and the official structures has not been bridged. This is a distinction between the pattern on lesbian and gay rights and women's rights, and, to a lesser extent, the rights of Black workers. This is not surprising, given how much harder it is for lesbians and gays to recognize each other in the workplace, and more dangerous precisely for this reason for us consciously to do so. So, groups exist at different levels, some social and support networks, others coming together around victimization campaigns, policy debates or local groups within particular workplaces or union branches. The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights has recently decided to put more resources into work in the unions, especially to prioritize some major unions from which it seeks affiliation.

Since the beginning of the 1970s, the relationship between lesbians and gay men has often been uneasy. The politics of the early movement were dominated by libertarian ideas that emphasized freedom of the individual, and therefore underestimated the material nature of oppression, including that of women. Such attitudes were summed up by arguments such as "gay men don't fuck women, and therefore can't oppress them".

Not surprisingly, the prevalence of such attitudes led to a series of splits, with women leaving mixed organizations and setting up lesbian-only groups. At the time, the women's movement was also unresponsive to the needs of lesbians and retreated in the face of a lesbian-baiting media into the idea that there was no connection between feminism and lesbianism. Nevertheless, for many lesbians the women's movement seemed more hospitable and a more important site of political struggle. Lesbians were often in the leadership of key campaigns of the women's movement for abortion and

women's refuges and against racism and fascism.

In the last ten years, there has been a flowering of lesbian groups around different focuses and political positions. Both from that strength and self-confidence and from the sense that there is a need to unite against a common enemy, we are moving to a situation where lesbians are working more both within the women's movement and with gay men. At the same time, the women's movement and at least the more radical wing of the gay movement have begun to understand that if these alliances are to be sustained, there is a need for lesbian self-organization within them, and the



movement as a whole has to take up the needs of lesbians.

Self-organization is not limited to lesbians. Black lesbian and gay groups and centres have begun to flourish, as have groups of lesbians and gays with disabilities, older lesbians and gays and younger. Each of them presents challenges to the movement as a whole that we take up their demands and make space in our organization for their voices to be heard.

As we said earlier, in spite of — or perhaps because of — the advances outlined above, new attacks are being launched against lesbians and gay men. On December 7, 1987, Tory MP Jill Knight announced her intention to introduce a new clause into the Local Government Bill. This would prevent local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality, or publishing material which would do so; prevent the teaching of homosexuality as a "pretended family relationship" in schools; and prevent any financial aid being given to any person for any of these two purposes.

Before the general election, a bill along similar lines had been introduced first into the House of Lords and then, by Jill Knight, into the Commons. It fell because not enough members were present at the vote. Occurring the week before the election, it received little attention.

After December 7, lesbians and gays had to contend not only with Jill Knight and the Tory right. The immediate response of the Labour front bench was to support the amendment, and only the Liberals totally opposed it. This frontal betrayal came as a shock, despite the equivocation of the leadership already known by many in the party. Why did it happen?

Over the past year, the question of lesbian and gay rights has been used increasingly by the Labour leadership as a stick to beat the so-called "loony left". While they claim to support civil liberties and equality, they have sought to discredit what they portray as more extreme positions. So it was with some confidence that Jeff Rooker, Labour home affairs spokesperson, was able to say that "no sane person would support the promotion of homosexuality in schools".

The hundreds of angry phone calls and letters, and the big mobilizations in the hours and days following his statement, proved him wrong. The anger of lesbians and gays was profound, swift and united. An unprecedented range of people united to call a lobby of parliament on December 14 when the clause was to be debated. It was clear that it would mean the end of local authority funding for lesbian and gay help-lines and groups, the end of the lesbian and gay books in libraries, challenges to the licensing of lesbian and gay clubs. It was also clear that the fire-bombing of a lesbian and gay newspaper on December 12 was encouraged by the amendment.

Faced with hundreds of supporters of lesbian and gay rights flooding into parliament on December 14, the Labour leadership had to rethink somewhat. They agreed to put some amendments making it clear that anti-discrimination measures would still be allowed. But while the Liberals' amendment negated Knight's and positively permitted the teaching of different sexual orientations, the Labour leadership stayed in Tory framework. It seems they would rather distance themselves from the left in a hunt for mythical votes than stand on principle.

On January 9, in the biggest lesbian and gay rights demonstration in British history, 12,000 people marched through London against the bill, and the mobilizations will continue.

Whatever further attacks it may herald, this bill certainly gives a green light to bigotry and violence. In this situation, it is critical that the left as a whole, and revolutionary Marxists in particular, understand the strategic importance of the link between the fight for lesbian and gay liberation and the fight for socialism. ★

Nurses' strike shakes up Tories

THE NURSES' STRIKE on February 3 was a warning sign to the Tory government that 500,000 nurses and midwives are no longer prepared to be the underpaid "angels" of the British popular press. The nurses deliberately limited their strike so that it would not harm patients, but many other nurses and healthworkers joined the picket lines and protest demonstrations, including members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which has a no-strike rule.

PENNY DUGGAN

NURSES' DEMANDS are essentially on the question of pay. They want a 20% increase now so as to be paid in line with their training and responsibility, at similar levels to other skilled employees in the public services.

The Department of Health and Social Security is quick to point out that at £147 per week nurses earn slightly more than the median earnings of non-manual or manual women workers at £142.20 or £108.20 respectively. But women's wages in Britain are on average 30% lower than men's. A student nurse who has already done three years training and is often taking responsibility for an entire ward of patients at night is paid £5,170 per year, while predominantly male fire or police officers are getting over £8,300 on entry.

For many nurses, particularly in London where the cost of living has risen dramatically in the last few years, a second job is



vital to covering the basic expenses of somewhere to live and something to eat. Some nurses work as barmaids or waitresses on their evenings off. Others continue their work as nurses through private agencies, often coming back to the same ward and same hospital they left a few hours previously. The National Health Service (NHS) is forced to spend thousands of pounds on bringing in agency nurses to compensate for its unfilled posts.

Nurses regarded as "handmaidens"

Nurses suffer from the discrimination facing all women workers in an even more exaggerated form. Nursing as a profession is 90% female, but 50% of the "top jobs" are filled by men! One leading doctor only recently stated that he regarded nurses as "handmaidens", yet these women have at least three years training behind them and a great deal of practical experience. Not surprisingly, the NHS is unable to recruit sufficient young people to fill its nursing requirements and over 30,000 trained nurses left the NHS in 1986. They give the low pay and the lack of recognition for their long training and the responsibility they shoulder as their reasons.

Limited strikes by nurses in a single hospital have already proved effective but this was their first nationally-coordinated strike action. Although just over half the nurses in Britain are members of the RCN — which is not affiliated to the national trade-union federation, the TUC — reports indicate that nurses are leaving it to join the two health service unions NUPE and COHSE because they see no other option for pressing their case than to use traditional forms of workers' protest.

However, the RCN agrees with the two unions that the wages and working conditions for nurses are intolerable, primarily because it is a predominantly female sec-

tor. Not only are there low rates of pay, but nurses are forced to do additional work because of the privatization of cleaning services in hospital. Cuts in the number of beds available have led to a situation where 90% are occupied by seriously ill patients, greatly increasing the work and stress for those taking care of them. Too often patients have to leave hospital before they are fully recovered in order to free beds for other patients.

Over the last few months British newspapers have been headlining the lack of money in the NHS. The whole country was shocked to learn of the case of a four-year old child who died after his life-saving heart operation was postponed five times because of the lack of the necessary facilities. A consultant heart surgeon recently estimated that 5,000 people a year are dying because of the inadequacies of the NHS.

Opinion polls show that, for the first time for seven years, the health service has topped unemployment from the number one spot as the issue most concerning the electorate.

Healthworkers' unions fight government policy

The healthworkers' unions have launched a month of action to continue to press the case of specific sectors of healthworkers and to protest against general government policy on the NHS. The government has added fuel to the fire by "deploring" the nurses' actions and making clear that there will be no substantial pay rise for them this year.

The NHS is the largest employer in Britain and hospitals are the biggest workplaces in a majority of parliamentary constituencies. A concerted fight-back by NHS workers, led by nurses who enjoy broad support from the public, could make life difficult for Margaret Thatcher and her government in the months to come. ★