

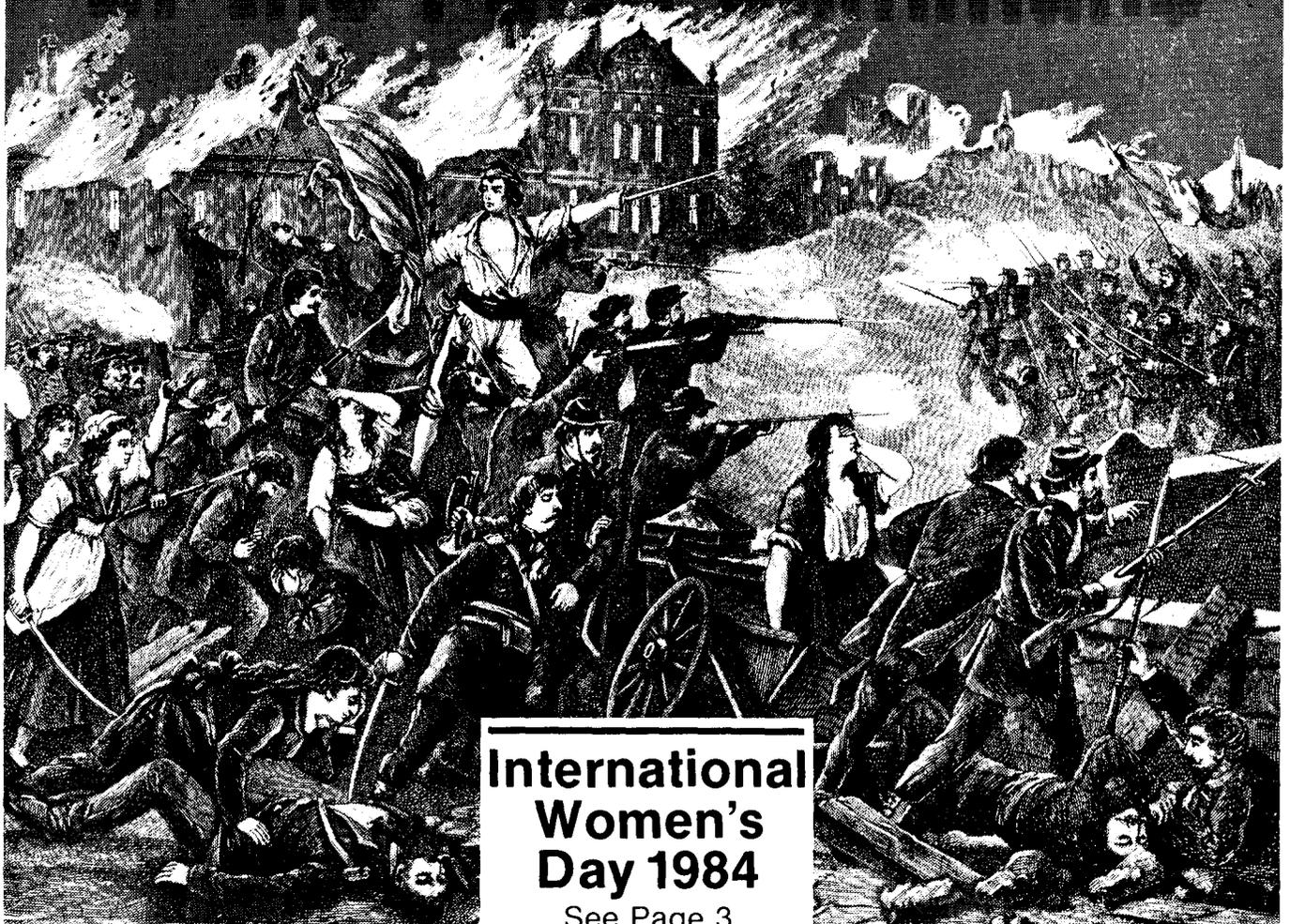
# Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League

50¢

## In Honor of the Women of the Paris Commune



**International Women's Day 1984**

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## Editorial Notes

# A Social and Anthropological Journal

We think our readers will find interesting the following comments on *Women and Revolution* made at the August 1983 Seventh National Conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. by comrade Jim Robertson, a member of our editorial board. We share the aspirations and frustrations expressed below—and hope that these comments may spur comrades and friends toward helping us achieve the potential our journal has.

When you have a title like *Women and Revolution*, that means all of human history and sociology, all the way back. And we're really not limited, except by our own incapacity, in what should appear in that magazine. It ought to be the anthropological and social journal of our party. That's where we ought to take up questions of why Freud is a great man and where he went wrong, and what happened when we got patriarchal society. As well as the kind of questions of what happens to those young Sinhalese women that are sucked into that Free Trade Zone just south of Colombo.

In this country, we've got black and white—the black question has an American centrality for the proletarian revolution, because in America you have a white racist ruling class on top of blacks—but all societies have men and women. Everywhere across this whole planet there's a division between men and women. So as soon as you say "women and revolution" all questions are open.

And I'm just afraid we haven't exploited that magazine the way we should have. The worst question

that was ever asked was "Where do babies come from?" Because that only became a question when property became a question and patriarchal society was coming in. Ten years ago we were raising questions similar to those in the book that appeared recently, *Lucy*, in its last chapters on what sex might have been like a million or so years ago. I don't think that we've ever put that kind of thing in *W&R*. We were asking the same questions and had better answers, but at least the questions are now being raised.

You know, comrades, I remember Murry Weiss said, "You know, young comrades keep coming in and saying, I was looking at some back issues of the *Fourth International* and especially the *New International* in the '30s and they read a lot better than our magazine today, that I edit." And Murry looked at them and said, "Yeah, I know it, but they had Leon Trotsky, Jim Burnham and Max Shachtman and a bunch of other people writing for it then. Now all you got is me—I'm sorry!" He was editor of the *International Socialist Review* then. Well, every national conference I say this, and I always get in trouble, because every feminist in the room always tries to shoot me down: "Even the most beautiful girl in France can give no more than she's got." So I think we have relatively failed to exploit *Women and Revolution*, but it's because of the intellectual limitations of our organization.

But *W&R* ought to be the open journal for every question of human experience, because when you touch the woman question, you touch the being of us all. ■

## Dr. Semmelweis and the Revolutions of 1848

For our International Women's Day 1983 editorial we wrote a piece honoring Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis, the 19th century Hungarian doctor who discovered the cause of and preventive cure for puerperal (childbed) fever, which had caused the deaths of thousands of women (see "A Man Who Saved Millions of Women," *W&R* No. 26, Spring 1983). His discovery—that doctors themselves were spreading the disease because they came directly from the morgue, bearing deadly bacteria, and examined woman after woman without washing their hands—caused intense hostility from his supervisors. As we noted, "His boss finally had him demoted by having it brought to the attention of the medical authorities that Semmelweis had worn the plumed hat of a revolutionary in 1848 (which, if true, is certainly an honorable statement)."

It is true. We recently came across an article from the *Militant* (5 July 1948), the newspaper of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, titled "Semmelweis—Forgotten Martyr," which noted that: "The revolution that swept over Europe in 1848 gave Klein [Semmelweis' supervisor in the Vienna General Hospital] the opportunity he was looking for. In Vienna

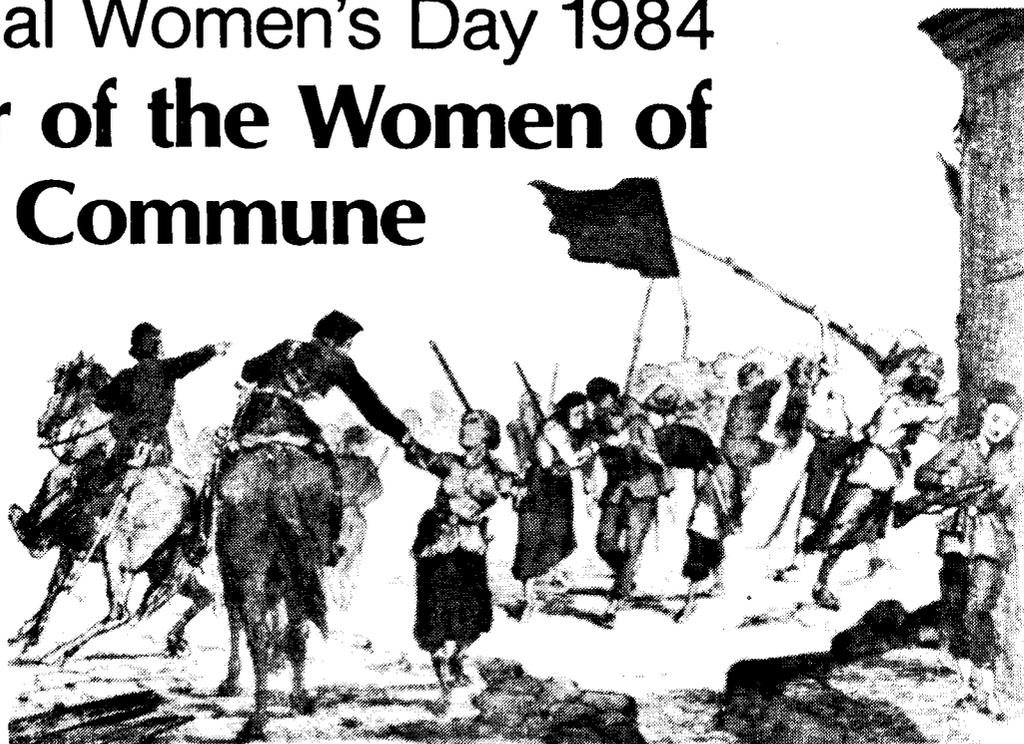
the people drove the Emperor from the city. Semmelweis, an ardent revolutionist, belonged to the famous 'Academic Battalion,' composed of intellectuals, artists, professionals and students. When reaction triumphed, Klein secured his assistant's dismissal and banishment from Austria. Returning to Budapest, Semmelweis found the revolution still in power there; he embraced it with enthusiasm. But this upsurge of the people, too, was defeated."

The revolutions of 1848 were defeated by the rotting absolutist powers of Europe at the time—yet they provided inspiration for new generations of revolutionaries: the Paris Commune of 1871, then the triumphant Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Semmelweis himself, his life-saving discovery largely ignored in his lifetime, died in a madhouse of a massive infection. Yet his pioneering work ultimately won out.

We are pleased to honor Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis again, then, not only as a man who fought to obliterate the death agonies of women he treated in his "professional capacity" as a doctor, but as a comrade in the more than century-long struggle for social revolution. ■

# International Women's Day 1984 In Honor of the Women of the Paris Commune

Fighting to the  
end, Women's  
Battalion defends  
the Commune at  
Place Blanche,  
23 May 1871.



St. Martin's Press

This year on International Women's Day, March 8, we salute the revolutionary women of the 1871 Paris Commune, whose fierce dedication to fighting for the workers' Commune inspired Marx to propose creating women's sections of the First International. At the 19 September 1871 session of the First International Conference a motion, made by Marx, was passed stating: "The Conference recommends the formation of female branches among the working class. It is, however, understood that this resolution does not at all interfere with the existence or formation of branches composed of both sexes" (The General Council of the First International 1870-1871, Minutes).

The Paris Commune was the first modern workers revolution in history, because in Paris for the first time in the world the proletariat not only demonstrated its unquenchable determination to "storm the heavens" and wipe out its exploitation, but proved that it was capable of seizing power, creating new organs of power and ruling society in its own interests. Though they were ultimately crushed after holding out heroically for ten weeks against the counterrevolutionary forces of all Europe, the Paris Communards have inspired generations of revolutionaries. And it was the proletarian women of Paris who were among the most fiery and determined fighters for the new world they were creating, as the following excerpts from contem-

porary reports demonstrate (taken from a collection of documents titled *The Communards of Paris, 1871*, edited by Stewart Edwards):

**Meeting of a women's club:** About two hundred women and girls were present; most of the latter were smoking cigarettes, and the reader will guess to what social class they belonged.

The Chairwoman, whose name we could not find out, was about twenty-five and still quite pretty; she wore a wide red belt to which two pistols were attached. The other women on the committee also sported the inevitable red belt but with only one pistol....

The following point was on the agenda: "How is society to be reformed?"... Next came a mattress-

*continued on next page*

## Women and Revolution

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Commission for Work Among Women

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Our cover illustration is taken from the 1894 German edition of Lissagaray's classic History of the Commune of 1871; its introduction notes that illustrations were done from "materials of the day." This engraving was titled "The Last Hours of the Commune."



Bibliothèque Historique, Paris

**Barricades** spontaneously thrown up by radical National Guards and Parisian citizens to prevent the regular army from seizing cannons assembled on the Buttes de Montmartre. The victorious uprising of 18 March 1871 sent the regular army fleeing to Versailles, thus creating the basis for the revolutionary Commune, which was officially proclaimed ten days later.

maker of the Rue Saint-Lazare who undertook to demonstrate that God did not exist and that the education of children should be reformed.

"What silly women we are to send our children to catechism classes! Why bother, since religion is a comedy staged by man and God does not exist? If he did he would not let me talk like this. Either that or he's a coward!"...

Her place was taken by a little old woman...

"My dear children," she said in a wavering voice, "all this is so much hot air. What we need today is action. You have men—well then, make them follow the right track, get them to do their duty. What we must do is put our backs into it. We must strike mercilessly at those who are undermining the Commune. All men must be made to co-operate or be shot. Make a start and you will see!"

—Report of a meeting in the women's club of the Trinité Church, 12 May 1871, abridged.

**The Times [of London] describes a [Paris] women's club:** We entered the building without knocking, and found ourselves in a filthy room reeking with evil odours and crowded with women and children of every age. Most of them appeared to belong to the lowest order of society, and wore loose untidy jackets, with white frilled caps upon their heads.... None took much notice of us at first, being too much occupied with the oratory of a fine-looking young woman with streaming black hair and flashing eyes, who dilated upon the rights of women amid ejaculations, and shakings of the head, and approving pinches of snuff from the occupants of the benches near us. "Men are lâches [cowardly bastards]," she cried; "they call themselves the masters of creation, and are a set of dolts. They complain of being made to fight, and are always grumbling over their woes—let them go and join the craven band at Versailles, and we will defend the city ourselves. We have petroleum, and we have hatchets and strong hearts, and are as capable of bearing fatigue

as they. We will man the barricades, and show them that we will be no longer trodden down by them. Such as still wish to fight may do so side by side with us. Women of Paris, to the front!"... The next speaker seemed tolerably respectable, wearing a decent black gown and bonnet, but her discourse was as rambling and inconsistent as that of her predecessor at the tribune. "We are simple women," she began, "but not made of weaker stuff than our grandmothers of '93. Let us not cause their shades to blush for us, but be up and doing, as they would be were they living now. We have duties to perform. If necessary we will fight with the best of them and defend the barricades..." Encouraged by the applause which had followed her thus far, she now degenerated into rant, attacking the priesthood generally and the confessional, mimicking the actions used at mass amid the laughter and bravoes of the throng. One old lady became ecstatic, and continued digging me violently in the back with her elbow.... "Ah, the priests!" murmured another from under the heavy frills of her cap, a lady of a serious turn of mind.... "Those priests! I have seen them too closely, *la canaille* [rabble]!"

—Report by the Paris correspondent of *The Times* of London of a women's meeting: *The Times*, 6 May 1871, abridged.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Those sharp jabs in the back that so discomfited the bourgeois gentlemen of The Times were but one small token of the throwing off of centuries of subjugation by the awakened women workers, who knew themselves to be for the first time actually making history. Of all the measures the Commune took in its ten weeks of existence—including getting rid of the hated police and standing army and keeping the citizenry in arms, opening education to all and forcing the State-enriched Church back into a purely private role, establishing that all the members of the Commune government would be paid only workingmen's wages and be subject to recall at any time, beginning plans for*

workers' cooperatives to run the factories—its most signal achievement was its own existence, the world's first working-class government; as Marx said, "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour" (*The Civil War in France*).

In summing up the fundamental lessons of the Paris Commune 20 years later, Frederick Engels emphasized the key question of the state: "From the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognize that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine...."

"The state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap heap.

"Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" (Introduction to *The Civil War in France*, 1891).

The embattled Parisian workers, men and women alike, threw their whole hearts into the work of creating the new workers' society—many have commented on the exhilarating, almost festive, air the Commune had as it prepared for its battle to the death with reaction. Against the old world at Versailles of "antiquated shams and accumulated lies," was counterposed, as Marx noted, "fighting, working, thinking Paris, electrified by the enthusiasm of historical initiative, full of heroic reality." The Parisian paper *Père Duchêne* (originally the paper of the left Jacobins), in its slangy fashion

caught this indomitable spirit—here are some excerpts from Edwards.

**Père Duchêne editorial on girls' education dated "20 germinai, an 79" (19 April 1871):** Yes, it's a true fact, Père Duchêne has become the father of a daughter and a healthy one at that, who will turn into a right strapping wench with ruddy cheeks and a twinkle in her eye!

He's as proud as a fucking peacock! And as he starts to write his rag today he calls on all good citizens to bring up their children properly, like Père Duchêne's daughter. It's not as if he's gone all toffee-nosed, but Père Duchêne is sure of one thing: the girl is going to get a bloody good education and God knows that's important!

If you only knew, citizens, how much the Revolution depends on women, then you'd really open your eyes to girls' education. And you wouldn't leave them like they've been up to now, in ignorance!

Fuck it! In a good Republic maybe we ought to be even more careful of girls' education than of boys'!...

Christ! The cops of Versailles who are busy bombarding Paris and firing their bloody shells right the way up the Champs-Élysées—they must have had a hell of a bad upbringing! Their mothers can't have been Citizens, that's for sure!

As for Père Duchêne's daughter, she'll see to it her children are better brought up than that; when she's grown up Père Duchêne will have got lots of dough together selling his furnaces so he can let her have a bloody nice dowry and give her away to a good bugger, a worker and a patriot, before the citizens of the Commune!

Long live the Social Revolution!

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes, long live the Social Revolution! And we, when it comes, intend to be no less worthy of our revolutionary grandmothers and great-grandmothers than were the women of the Paris Commune. ■



Archives Nationales

Contemporary sketch of a women's club meeting in a church in Montrouge.

# Hamburg: Women Spark Shipyard Occupation



Spill/Stern

Wives of workers at Hamburg's HDW shipyard and the M.A.N. machine works next door fought for months to inspire the workers to wage a struggle against massive layoffs, finally sparking the dramatic September 1983 nine-day HDW shipyard occupation. Women's banner reads: "HDW and MAN wives fight together with their men!" while sign at right says: "German and foreign women fight together with their men!"

Last fall in West Germany strikes and plant occupations broke out in the key Hamburg and Bremen shipyards against massive layoffs of the workforce. The nine-day Hamburg HDW [Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft] shipyard occupation in September was sparked in large part by the militant actions of a group of women, wives of shipyard workers. *W&R*, along with comrades of the Trotzlistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD), section of the international Spartacist tendency, recently spoke at length with Birgit Wojak, one of the main activists of the women's group; we are pleased to print below excerpts from this very exciting interview.

The TLD had raised key demands during the occupation, in leaflets and discussions with workers in Hamburg and nationally, to extend and win the workers' strikes. These included: "For factory occupations in all plants hit by mass layoffs and closings! For a joint national shipyard, steel and mine strike!" Layoffs were hitting the vital Ruhr steel and mining districts. At the same time the Board of Directors of HDW (which is owned by a state conglomerate) announced that in HDW's Hamburg branch one half of the 4,500 workers would be laid off and in HDW's Kiel branch one out of every three of the 9,000 workers. This "hot autumn" of workers' demonstrations, strikes and occupations

potentially posed the most important class battle for the German workers in 30 years.

The Hamburg and Bremen shipyard occupations took place as political ferment in West Germany is greater than at any time since the founding of the Federal Republic in 1948. The deployment in West Germany of the first-strike Pershing 2 missiles, under the command of the anti-Soviet fanatic Reagan, has deeply polarized West German society. The dramatic actions of the North Sea shipyard workers is a further sign that the West German capitalist order, long the relatively stable core of NATO Europe, is now beginning to break down under the combined impact of war mobilization and economic crisis.

But as Wojak graphically describes, not only the "IG Metall" union bureaucracy and the SPD [Social Democratic Party], but even the so-called "leftists" who had control of the Hamburg occupation itself, did everything in their power to undercut the struggle and prevent the workers from carrying it to victory. The main brake on the German working class is the Social Democrats. Though out of power when these shipyard layoffs were announced, they were the architects of the West German bourgeoisie's present austerity program which has meant massive attacks on the working class.

The dramatic Hamburg occupation—and its betrayal—showed above all the need to forge a revolutionary working-class party by splitting the working-class SPD ranks away from the pro-capitalist tops.

The TLD's aggressive propaganda campaign around the occupations presented a broad programmatic alternative for the workers. Its leaflet noted the importance of the foreign workers: "Yesterday and today these foreign brothers are in the front lines of the struggle.... Full citizenship rights for foreign workers and their families!" The TLD further noted: "While the IG Metall bureaucracy wants to stiffen the backbone of the German steel magnates in the protectionist Common Market cartel, the 'left' is mobilizing for a 'National Steel Company,' or a 'National Shipyards Company.' But if the capitalist economy is not done away with, these nationalized companies (like HDW) will serve the capitalists. As opposed to the Rostock Yards only a few miles away [in East Germany], whose order books are filled with contracts for icebreakers, passenger ships, etc., running for years thanks to the Soviet planned economy, the capitalist 'solution' to the crisis in the shipyards is arms production: battleships and submarines for war against the Soviet Union."

Lenin said that the fate of the October Revolution was inseparable from the victory of the German October. The converse of that is that the failure of the German working class, the best organized working class in Europe, to live up to its revolutionary obligations has led to two world imperialist wars. The TLD's leaflet concluded: "A militant strike in steel, the shipyards and coal would show the workers the way to prevent stationing NATO first-strike weapons. By strikes—not 'minutes of warning' against the 'super-powers.' For the Breits and the Loderers the Bundeswehr is a 'peace force.' They hate the Soviet Union and fear a new Bremen Soviet Republic, a new Ruhr Red Army—a German October.

"For the revolutionary reunification of Germany by a social revolution in the West and proletarian political revolution in the East! Smash the anti-Soviet war drive! For unconditional military support of the DDR/Soviet Union! For a socialist planned economy! For the Socialist United States of Europe!"

**W&R:** Can you tell us something about your background that you feel contributed to your becoming an activist in this struggle and occupation?

**Wojak:** The thing that made me just want to do something—I didn't know *what* I wanted to do—was that my mother died, basically because she worked herself to death. Normally she shouldn't have been allowed to work at the job she did because she had asthma. She worked as a presser in a knitting mill and couldn't handle the wool dust. My father had to retire early as a partial invalid. He lost a leg, also worked 25 years at HDW as a welder, and now he can hardly do anything. The only thing my father had was my mother. He's just vegetating. And that was the main thing that made me say, that's not going to happen to me, and I wasn't going to put up with it any longer. And they want to fire my husband from the HDW plant.

**W&R:** Plans were announced for massive layoffs in the shipbuilding industry in early spring and a "warning strike" was called, including demonstrations. How did you become involved in the struggle?

**Wojak:** I was approached by my husband to get involved with this women's group—they were actually all wives of men who were already active in the HDW shipyard and who were also affiliated with one political current or another. I met the women's group myself at a forum and found out that they had gone into the Hamburg parliament, tried to storm the microphone to draw attention to the situation of workers in the entire shipbuilding industry. The mike was cut off immediately so that they couldn't say anything. And because they had counted on that they had written an "Open Letter" to the mayor of Hamburg, the Social Democrat von Dohnanyi, and rained these leaflets from the gallery



**Birgit Wojak (right), 28-year-old activist in shipyard occupation, and wife of nine-year HDW worker.**

down onto all the parliamentarians. And they unfurled a banner reading, "HDW and MAN wives fight together with their men." Two women were picked out and criminal charges were brought for disrupting a public parliamentary session.

I met these women at a forum on this HDW issue, and Klose, the former Social Democratic mayor of Hamburg, was present. What struck me about this forum in particular was the workers; there were a whole lot of workers from HDW there. They were absolutely furious and wanted a complete change. And this Klose, he just tried to channel it into orderly channels that he could keep in hand. In the beginning, when I heard about what they did, it seemed to be a little bit too radical to me. But that Klose wanted to steer the workers in a very definite direction that he could keep in hand seemed even more awful. So I decided then to go to this women's meeting and take a look for myself.

At this first women's meeting I went to, in April, one woman said right away, yeah, maybe we can still see to it that there are a couple of strikes at HDW, and if it all

*continued on next page*



Der Spiegel

**“HDW Occupied!”  
banner at plant gates,  
September 1983.  
Workers’ occupation  
shook the Hamburg  
port, one of Europe’s  
largest.**

doesn’t do any good, then we have to occupy the plant. And I thought, sure, if they occupy the plant, that’s a long way off, and you don’t have to go along with them. But during the occupation, in September, it turned out that some of the workers—I count myself among them as well—that we were the ones who carried out the occupation, whereas the women who had been talking weren’t at all the ones who did the occupying. These women as well as so-called “activists” in the plant saw the plant occupation as a means to put pressure on the government to save jobs. And then when I participated in this occupation and got angry every time I had to leave the occupied shipyard and had to sleep alone in my bed at home, I saw it as if I had seized a piece of this shipyard along with all those workers.

**W&R:** The women’s committee waged a hunger strike that led up to and in some sense precipitated the September shipyard occupation. What motivated it?

**Wojak:** In all our work between the warning strike in the spring and during the occupation in September, we tried to do all kinds of actions to mobilize the workers so that they would occupy or put up any line of resistance against the layoffs at all. Whenever there was any kind of plant assembly or when any new events in the shipyard came up we stood in front of the gates with our banner and passed out leaflets, calling on the men to defend themselves, to do something, offered them our help. The result was that the men laughed at us.

Then this situation came up in a plant assembly where we said, either we’re going to storm the microphone now, just like in parliament, or you guys read these things aloud. And the guys running the meeting were scared to death that we’d storm the mike, because they didn’t expect the workers to do the same thing the parliamentarians did, namely nothing, when the mike was turned off, but that the workers would probably resist. So under this pressure, they read what we had written. And for the rest of the plant assembly we were surrounded by a ring of company cops.

**W&R:** What were your demands?

**Wojak:** Our demands were basically the men’s demands. They were for the 35-hour week, statification

of the shipyard under control of the workforce (we extended it to real control). Then there was the men’s demand for “useful alternative production,” and that filter systems be installed in power plants so they don’t pollute the atmosphere so much. In fact, there was quite a hard discussion with one of the women in the women’s group about this, with the result that the men raised “alternative production” as a very hard demand and we just raised it on the side.

**W&R:** Who were they, and what were the political currents in the women’s group?

**Wojak:** The political people in the plant were primarily from the DKP [pro-Moscow Stalinists], people from the GIM [German section of the United Secretariat], people from the SPD, from the union—in fact all the political groupings were present. In the women’s group there were the DKP, KPD [Maoists], GIM; there were people from *Arbeiterpolitik* [Brandlerites] who got in through women’s groups in the union. It was the same with the Social Democrats who also had influence through the unions and some women’s groups.

This discussion about “useful alternative production” that came up in the women’s group was introduced by me, because I was the only really unpolitical woman there and saw immediately what this “useful alternative production” basically meant for jobs. I told them that it’s baloney and meaningless for jobs, whereas all the others supported it at first. The minute I started this discussion I had the feeling that all these women had a narrow-minded view of the whole situation because of their political orientation. That led me to view everything essentially more critically than before.

Maybe one more reason why the hunger strike happened. We wanted to spur the men on to fight. And we had found out that at Hoesch, in the Ruhr, where layoffs in the steel industry are also an issue, there was also a women’s group, and they had waged a hunger strike. We had exhausted all the possibilities—standing in front of the gates; in plant assemblies; we went into the union and meetings organized by the union, where we were regularly thrown out. But the men saw us, and

you couldn't pretend we weren't there. The Hoesch women had videos of their hunger strike and of the men's strike, and they advised us, if you do a hunger strike, there's no way it can fall through—you definitely have to do it.

From the very beginning we said we don't want to starve ourselves to get sick or die or something, but we agreed from the first if we do a hunger strike to limit it to three days. Because we thought, three days: that's enough to get it in the public eye. And if the men haven't gotten it together after three days to pull off a decent action, then even a ten-day hunger strike won't do any good.

**W&R:** So how long did the hunger strike go on before the occupation began?

**Wojak:** We waged a three-day hunger strike right before the occupation. When it got under way there were five women who took part in it from the first to the last day. And there were nine on the last day. We didn't just want to wage a hunger strike without drawing in the men in the shipyard. Because we didn't know that they would publish the list with the mass layoffs at just the same time, we had convinced the men beforehand to carry out an action in the plant as well, if we did this hunger strike. We won them over to boycotting overtime at that point. And then it became known in the yards—that was the afternoon before the hunger strike, right before quitting time—as people found out that 1,354 people were supposed to be laid off, there was a symbolic occupation of the plant gate for two hours, with only 1,200 people taking part.

The first day of our hunger strike, when nobody knew anything about it beforehand, even the men in the shipyard, about 80 percent of the workforce said completely spontaneously, if the women go on a hunger strike then we'll boycott the canteen for the day. That was a very important thing, because you could see that we women were recognized by the men in the shipyard for the first time. The canteen had been contracted out to a private company before the layoffs were announced, and some women who worked in the

canteen were thrown out and rehired for considerably less pay—we wanted to boycott the canteen until the women got the same pay as before.

All the men who were at all political had laughed at us before for this demand, and said that no worker would follow this demand because their own stomachs are more important than other people's stomachs. And the fact that 80 percent carried out this canteen boycott—and they really went hungry, because they didn't know they were going to boycott the canteen and didn't bring sandwiches from home—that proves that they were simply wrong, that the workers forgot their own empty stomachs in their solidarity.

This whole hunger strike was received by all the workers in the shipyard extremely well anyway, although they hardly dared to approach us because of their preconceptions—these poor, weak women, they're standing there and what's more, going hungry for us, and what have we done? They could hardly look us in the eye. And after quitting time that evening, here came all the workers and they brought us flowers. Most of them just kind of shoved them in our hands and walked on by.

**W&R:** So how did the actual plant occupation begin?

**Wojak:** The first one to call for an occupation, or for a massive action, I believe, was me. After the three days of the hunger strike were over, there was a closing rally. We had gotten an enormous amount of solidarity, and over DM 9,000 (\$4,500) in contributions. Several plants declared their solidarity, and it was not only for the women but for solidarity against all layoffs.

We held a rally at the end where each of the women who had taken part in the hunger strike was supposed to say something to the brothers in the shipyard. And I was the last one, and I had lost my notes. So I just called on the men to just do something, and if they didn't fight, that we women would think up something to do to them that would be pretty nasty.

**W&R:** *Lysistrata* meets the class struggle.

**Wojak:** But the effect of that was not that they all got

*continued on next page*

Shipyard workers at AG Weser in Bremen occupied their plant one day before the HDW occupation was criminally sold out. Bremen workers' banner reads "No Closing of AG Weser," coffin symbolizes fate of shipyard, due to be shut down permanently.



Der Spiegel

terribly scared of me or the women, but they applauded it wildly, they cheered it, they picked it up like something they'd wanted to say themselves for a long time. And finally somebody said it. The hunger strike was over on Friday and then came the weekend. The gates were picketed from the outside so that no overtime could go on—organized by the men and some of the women picketed too.

There was a general plant assembly during the hunger strike where the men fought with the bosses and got us the right to speak. A plant assembly is where the whole plant comes together in one room, organized by the union—there's a minimum of four assemblies annually. And the Management Committee [the bosses] and the plant council are there and make reports. Every individual worker can speak. So this plant assembly continued on Monday morning. It ended with a march of the workers through the inner city in a demonstration of 3,000. And after the demonstration all the workers went back into the plant and continued the plant assembly and then voted to occupy the plant. And that was adopted 100 percent.

**W&R:** And who was elected the leadership of the occupation?

**Wojak:** There was a prominent supporter of the DKP, who had worked out this occupation plan just in case. And they were essentially the people who had been working together beforehand—like the DKP, SPD, KPD, GIM, unionists.

**W&R:** What was the relationship of the official union leadership of the Metalworkers [IG Metall] to the occupation?

**Wojak:** Before the occupation the IG Metall didn't look upon it kindly and it didn't look on the women's activities kindly either. A week before the hunger strike somebody from the union put out the word that the HDW women are dead, they don't exist anymore. And then when this demonstration through the center of town took place and afterwards the occupation was voted, they were singing a different tune all of a sudden. Because they probably saw that the workers just couldn't be stopped. So they said, we'll support every action; go ahead, and we'll always be behind you.

Only I'm talking about the local union organization in Hamburg—there wasn't so much as a letter of solidarity from the IG Metall from the rest of the country. During the occupation the union reps didn't behave worse than the "activists" in the plant, which were in all these parties, but they were awful enough themselves.

**W&R:** We haven't discussed the laws that come from the 1950s—the "Factory Regulation Law" (*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*). Can you explain why this law is followed so slavishly, and what it in fact means with regard to workers' struggles?

**Wojak:** The "Factory Regulation Law" is a law the government passed that means limitations on the workers, especially in strikes. It's a terribly thick book that's not easy to explain. But for example it says that in your plant you can't just support strikes in other plants or collect money for them. All the plant assemblies—how they are to be held, whether there are secret or

open ballots, are governed by it. And a plant occupation is a violation of the "Factory Regulation Law" because a worker can't just seize the plant that belongs to someone else.

**W&R:** The fact that the members of the plant council are bound to silence is also laid down in the "Factory Regulation Law" as well, including about layoffs.

**Wojak:** Yes. In the case of this list of 1,354 people to be laid off, for example, the members of the plant council were obligated not to make that public. This law basically just hinders the workers from using their power in any way whatsoever against the bosses. And the unions haven't done anything against it and are therefore complicit.

**W&R:** What was the role of the women's committee during the occupation?

**Wojak:** Pretty pathetic, because we had set as our goal calling on the men to wage a fight. And in fact we reached that goal with the hunger strike. So during the occupation we didn't want to stand on the sidelines, but we really didn't know at all what we ought to do.

I myself concentrated on extending the strike together with two other women. We went to AG Weser, to a shipyard in Bremen where they had decided long before the HDW occupation to occupy this shipyard because there was no more putting the brakes on these workers or holding them back from doing an action like that. So we drove to Bremen and were totally depressed when we got there, because the conditions under which the shipyard was occupied were really awful for the workers. They had one last ship in Bremen which was up for repairs, and then the whole shipyard was supposed to be shut down, closed.

We weren't allowed to speak to the workers there before the occupation was voted. And when they did vote to occupy, you could see that a crime was perpetrated against the workers, because the occupation was coupled with the condition that the necessary repairs for this one ship still had to go on during the occupation. Further, the occupation in Bremen was at an extremely late point in time—one day before the occupation in Hamburg was given up, and it was planned that way.

During the HDW occupation a ship was literally kidnapped from the HDW workers. The cables were cut. One worker was injured, not very seriously, but people could in fact have been killed. We took the brothers in Bremen a cable from this captured ship as a warning that they should keep a close watch on their ship. The workers welcomed us with cheers. We got more applause for what we said there than ever before, although it was just to give them a little courage and really nothing more. Afterwards we also discussed with a whole lot of workers, and a lot of them who had been for going on with these repairs changed their opinion within five minutes and didn't want to do that anymore.

Another guy, the DGB [German trade-union federation] chairman in Bremen, spoke, and first expressed his solidarity and cozied up to them like mad and said, you guys are in an unusual situation; so an unusual situation demands unusual means and you guys have

Spartakist

**TLD contingent in Hamburg, August 1983, demanded freedom for Turkish leftist Kemal Altun. Imprisoned for 13 months, Altun was driven to suicide by West German authorities. TLD slogans included: "From Ankara to Berlin: Defend the Soviet Union!" "Down with the [Turkish] NATO-Murder Junta!" and "Full Citizenship Rights for All Foreign Workers and Their Families!"**



grasped them. And it's right that you have occupied your shipyard and you ought to occupy it a while longer—and then you ought to let the bosses and the politicians decide what ought to happen to the shipyard. And even then the workers applauded. And there was this worker sitting next to me during this speech, and it just slipped out of my mouth: how can this man be allowed to speak here? Why doesn't somebody throw him out? Then he really thought about it, at first he didn't say anything at all, then he said, yeah, that's outrageous, what he's saying here. He can't be allowed to do that. But then the guy up front was already gone. But *before*, this guy had clapped too.

We had these buttons with "Stop the death of HDW in installments—HDW must stand" on them, with the HDW insignia and over that "HDW Occupied" on a red background. And a worker in Bremen just had to have it, and he gave me his helmet. It has a sticker on one side, "AG Weser Occupied," and on the other "HDW Occupied."

When we women came back from this shipyard occupation, we didn't have the feeling that this occupation would be a support for the HDW workers, but that it was something designed to go against workers' struggles. When we got back to HDW, we told the strike committee what was going on, that AG Weser wouldn't be a support for Hamburg and that they would have to extend the struggle in other ways. They said it wasn't right to tell the workers something like that. I did tell the workers that, and I know one other woman—from the GIM—also told it to the workers.

**W&R:** The TLD raised the demand to extend the strike to mining and steel, where there were also plans for substantial layoffs and firings. How do you feel about that demand, and given a revolutionary leadership, do you think it could have been an outgrowth of the

shipyard occupation?

**Wojak:** It would have been possible, definitely. The question of extension was already very close, even without a revolutionary leadership, and only a spark would have been necessary to ignite it. But with a revolutionary leadership there would have been a guarantee for extending it.

**W&R:** How did the occupation end, and what did the workers win or lose?

**Wojak:** The HDW occupation lasted nine days. The mass of workers lost their jobs. The layoffs were carried out just like they had been planned. The layoffs are continuing today. The workers in the plant have worse working conditions than before, there's speedup. There have already been two deaths as a result.

The reason the occupation was broken off then was: yeah, they said we have the chance of getting a decent severance plan. They didn't even get the severance plan they had before the occupation but one significantly worse.

The foreign workers are in a very bad position. They are the ones primarily hit by the layoffs. About 50 percent of the foreign workers at HDW were fired. And they can be deported immediately if they don't get a new job, and they don't have a chance to get a new job either. So they won absolutely nothing, except when one or the other can draw the lessons—that you have to design an occupation differently, that is, not carry out an occupation under such conditions, but from the very beginning set the conditions yourself and not let them be dictated to you.

The occupation ended with a general plant assembly, which includes the lower- and middle-level management. Then the Management Committee has the right

*continued on next page*

to take part; most of the time politicians are also invited—but not to this one. The Management Committee announced that if they didn't give up the occupation then they might fire the whole workforce—in one fell swoop. Without notice. People weren't quite convinced that that would in fact happen. But in the '70s that did happen once, when two shipyards, the Deutsche Werft and the Howaldtswerke fused. They fired the whole workforce because they were on strike, and afterwards they just hired back the part that they needed. So the threat of firings was in the air. Then there was the second thing. The Management Committee had announced that if Hamburg resisted and continued the occupation, the works would go deeper and deeper in the red, and then they wouldn't have any other choice but to split off Hamburg and Kiel from one another, as affiliates or even as two independent companies. But this plan has existed a long time, even without the occupation.

**W&R:** What was the role of the DKP and the KPD and the GIM during the occupation, and in the plant assembly meeting?

**Wojak:** From the first moment they set their stakes all on negotiations—negotiations with the politicians in Bonn and Schleswig-Holstein, since HDW is 100 percent state-owned. Those are both Christian Democratic governments. And their role was precisely to put pressure on these politicians, to say, "Do something about the shipyard please. Don't throw all these people out onto the street, after all." They all agreed completely on that. Those were always the things that kept coming up even before the occupation, in strikes or other actions—apply pressure. You can also see it in this program for "useful alternative production." That was drafted by people from the DKP, from the GIM—in effect a somewhat broader version of the strike committee together with people from the union and other activists. Then the union took it up and printed it as a program. For all practical purposes their aim is to give the capitalists a hand, how to make it, if you can just get a little bit more capital to boot, without having to fire guys.

**W&R:** I understand that in the course of the occupation a GIM supporter in the workforce put up a banner of Solidarność. How was this received?

**Wojak:** This Solidarność banner actually only had a slight meaning for the workforce. It was one banner among many. There were other banners from other plants, for example AEG Schiffbau brought over a huge banner. Such banners were received with more applause and many more workers also crowded around them. Solidarność itself was seen as the shipyard workers there going into the streets, and they stuck together and fought for their rights. Solidarność' real role wasn't seen; most of the workers don't know much about Solidarność.

The thing is, they tried to block every political discussion in the union. There was a band in the yard one evening and they were singing some kind of political things, and a guy from the SPD took the mike away from them and said, look, leave politics out of this; the shipyard occupation isn't a political affair. The

workers who got wind of it were pretty pissed off. And I noticed how they attacked the union bureaucrats pretty hard: what is this, and everybody can say what they want to here, and even if there's political stuff here—there's a highly political situation at HDW. He went away then, but the musicians didn't have the nerve to start again. But that was just the way discussions about Solidarność or issues in a larger context during the occupation were blocked, and the GIM supporters hung the sign up, intervened by doing that, but didn't tell the workers anything about it.

**W&R:** What role did these left groups play in the plant assembly discussion regarding the occupation in the face of the fact that the occupation had spread to Bremen, so that ending the occupation at that particular point in Hamburg was particularly criminal.

**Wojak:** It was criminal. The political groups were all straining to reach the same goal, told the workers, yes, under these conditions where we have to take into account that the whole workforce will be fired, where there's no sort of severance plan at all, and then the poor foreigners will be fired and won't even be able to take home any severance pay at all if they're deported—at such a point we can't call on you guys to continue the occupation, although we would have really liked to. That was what was said during the occupation, during the vote, by all the political groups.

And Bremen. The workers in Bremen were of course terribly disappointed. They probably did see it as criminal, what happened in Hamburg. Only the strike committee (which was the same as the plant council in Bremen) said, what's so bad about that? Hamburg and Bremen don't have anything to do with each other.

**W&R:** Let's return to the question of the foreign workers. It's my understanding that the foreign workers also supported the end of the occupation even though they had the most to lose by the layoffs. Why was that?

**Wojak:** It was essentially Turkish workers who supported ending the occupation. Not because they were Turkish, but simply because the Turks speak the least German, and because they were absolutely not properly provided with information. Hardly anything was translated. There was one Yugoslavian woman in our women's group and we were the first ones in the



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shipyard to have leaflets and placards in Turkish and Yugoslavian when we went into the plant assembly during the hunger strike, and a lot of foreign workers stood up. They applauded us and brought us chairs, because finally somebody in the shipyard was thinking of the foreign workers. I believe that without the women, the foreigners wouldn't even have known what was going on at the beginning of the occupation.

There was one Turkish guy in the yard who could speak good German. They told him, this is the way things are, and then it was up to him the extent to which he passed on the information to his brothers, or not. He handled it by saying, listen, the next vote is going to be about this or that, and if I raise my hand, that's correct, so you guys do the same. Of course, in this vote on the occupation that wasn't possible—it was secret, and nobody raised his hand. Most of the Turks had no idea what they should do and were totally unsure of themselves.

I heard that a couple of days beforehand there were also people in the yard who had threatened the Turkish workers. There was almost a physical fight. They threatened that if the Turks continued to participate actively in the occupation they would beat them up, or they threatened them in other ways. As far as I could find out these were people that came from the [Turkish fascist] Grey Wolves.

**W&R:** Did the workers in the shipyard occupation take any measures such as forming workers defense guards to defend against the fascist Grey Wolves or other fascist groups that might attempt to break up the occupation?

**Wojak:** No, none at all. There was no defense, neither against the fascist groups, nor against the scabs, nor against the police attacks that had been threatened.

I have to add that there were a whole series of scabs during the occupation: almost all the white-collar workers worked during the occupation, and after a couple of days parts of the machine shop started working—in the end I believe it was half of the machine shop that worked, first secretly and then openly.

First the workers said, look, they're working. They can't do that. We're going to throw them out. And then there were discussions with the strike committee, and they said, no, that would disturb the "peace and quiet" in the yard, and peace and quiet and order [*Ruhe und Ordnung*], that's the one thing that you have to maintain in such a big occupation, and you ought to go to the people and talk to them and try to convince them not to work. When I came onto the yard the next day I asked, well, did you guys throw out the white-collar workers? And the workers said, no, we have to keep it quiet, and all that creates an uproar, and we can't do that either. That's the way they manipulated the workers' opinion in practice.

I ask myself how these people in the strike committee wanted to convince people to continue the occupation or not to work, when they themselves had made a deal with the management about painting the bottom of a ship and sent the workers off to work. The painting has to be done in two coats—if the second coat isn't done, then the first coat is ruined too. And for doing that they

got from the management deliveries of food to the canteen for one more day.

A number of times in the Social Democratic daily paper there were two-page spreads: HDW will be cleared; police attack; police intervention threats—in order to confuse the workers about what they ought to do. When the first article came out I was in the yard too, and the workers said—a lot of them anyway—what do they think they want, the police? They won't even get in here; the gates are shut tight, and right behind the gates is the fire station. We have water cannons, we have helmets, we have clubs, we have everything here. They won't get in here at all; we'll know how to defend our shipyard for sure. And the next day I asked, what are you guys doing now, and they said, well, when the police come, then we'll let them carry us all away. We won't offer any resistance. And so that's another sign how the opinion was manipulated by the strike committee.

**W&R:** One of the points made in the TLD's leaflet directed at the HDW occupation was the comparison between the Rostock shipyards in East Germany, where the order books are full—a demonstration of the power of a planned economy—and HDW, which is even turning away work from the Soviet Union at the same time it's laying off thousands of workers. Did this contrast have any impact on the workers during the occupation?

**Wojak:** This discussion definitely existed in the shipyard, this comparison between the DDR yards in general and shipyards in the Soviet Union, and here in West Germany—simply because these orders to build ships were refused. The workers said, sure, build ships—if it was a question of what kind of ships we need, we could be booked up too. The thing is whether we want to build them—or whether our bosses want to build them. And they just don't want to. And that's whose fault it is that we aren't getting any more work in the harbor.

**W&R:** After the occupation you put out a leaflet in which you call for a study of the lessons of the occupation. What do you think those lessons are?

**Wojak:** The lessons of the occupation are that the workers' interests were not represented during the occupation at all, otherwise they would have had something to take home with them from such a large-scale occupation. The people who are responsible for this are the strike committee, who belonged to all the political parties. It would have definitely been possible to extend a strike to all the shipyards, to the mines and to the steel industry, like it says in the TLD's leaflet. That was the least that could have happened. Such an extension into broad areas would have paralyzed a large part of the West German economy. At that point the HDW occupation would have been just one point of a massive campaign.

But of course you can't carry out such an extension if you basically don't want to win but only want a couple of concessions from the capitalists. If you lay the basis for things like this, then the consequence is that the workers take the power. And you have to want that,

*continued on next page*

There was criticism of a lack of solidarity from other plants. Well, if you don't offer me something to fight for, then what am I supposed to go running off and fight for?

During the occupation I saw what would have been possible, and I saw what all the parties and political groupings did. I saw what the social democrats of the SPD did. They said to the workers, we are the party; we'll do everything for you; we'll save your jobs, but we're going to do it together with the capitalists. And together with the capitalists means against the workers. That's not a party that can be the leadership of an occupation or of strikes, or of the workers' interests.

The DKP did nothing different from the SPD. Maybe there was a little bit more leftist touch in their speeches, but looking at what they did, they are indistinguishable. The GIM was in the shipyard, and they hardly opened their mouth. But the one guy from the GIM that was in the strike committee was also indistinguishable. It's exactly the same with the KPD, and the people from *Arbeiterpolitik* didn't have any different program either.

The first thing the workers have to have, that's a decent party that represents their interests. When you read the TLD's leaflet, you saw that they did represent the workers. The other political groups, parties—they wanted to keep the TLD out of the shipyard as far as possible. And discussions they had with individual workers were also not looked on kindly.

All the political groups except the TLD said, the workers—they're not that advanced; they can't do all that yet; and they don't understand all that yet. But I'm a worker myself. If somebody asks me, do you want to determine what's produced in your plant, I'll say of course I want that. And if he asked me, do you also want to determine how much you earn, then I'll say, of course I want to determine that. And do you also want to determine your hours and your working conditions? Then of course I say I want to determine that too. I don't have to be so all-fired advanced for that; every worker understands that. And that's what the TLD said. And it's simply necessary to have a party, one you can really turn to with your interests and doesn't turn right around and betray the workers again. ■

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# Labor Black Leagues Formed

We reprint below the initial statement and program of the Labor Black League for Social Defense in Oakland, California, published in the first issue of the group's newsletter dated 24 August 1983. The Spartacist League undertook efforts to cohere local leagues of labor/black defense among black activists and union militants following our 27 November 1982 labor-backed mass mobilization which stopped the Ku Klux Klan from marching in Washington, D.C. These groups are intended as transitional organizations of struggle whose focus reflects the central question of the American revolution, the fight for black liberation through socialist revolution.

## What We Stand For

The Labor Black League for Social Defense stands for mobilizing the masses of black working people for militant integrated struggle against the brutal system of racist oppression that is capitalist America. Initiated by and fraternally allied to the Spartacist League, a multi-racial revolutionary Marxist organization, the Labor/Black League for Social Defense is part of the revolutionary movement of the workers and oppressed against the bosses and for socialism.

From their arrival in this country black people have been an integral part of American class society while at the same time forcibly segregated at the bottom. It took the Civil War to emancipate black people from chattel slavery. But the Civil War was not carried to its completion, and black people were freed from slavery only to be stripped of political rights and economically subjugated. The civil rights movement, sold out by liberal reformism, failed in its attempts to confront the unfinished business of the Civil War.

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# Silkwood: A Review



New York Times

**Karen Silkwood (above). The movie, starring Meryl Streep as Silkwood, has resurrected the controversy over her mysterious death and government/nuclear industry cover-ups.**



ABC Motion Pictures

By Amy Rath

The long-standing controversy over the death of Karen Silkwood is being debated yet again, as the release of the movie *Silkwood* brings the case into the public eye. Silkwood has long been embraced by feminist and ecology groups as a heroine and martyr to the atomic power industry—the “no-nuke” Norma Rae; many believe she was deliberately poisoned with radioactive material and murdered to shut her up. Now, the movie, starring Meryl Streep and directed by Mike Nichols, has been seized upon by such bourgeois mouthpieces as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* to propagandize for the nuclear energy industry and smear her name.

“Fact and Legend Clash in ‘Silkwood’,” cries the *Times*’s science writer William J. Broad, masquerading

*Silkwood*. Directed by Mike Nichols. Written by Nora Ephron and Alice Arlen. ABC Motion Pictures. A Twentieth Century-Fox release.

as a movie critic in the Sunday Arts and Leisure section. “Chicanery,” “meretricious,” “a perversion of the reporter’s craft,” blasts a *Times* (25 December 1983) editorial. That same day the *Washington Post* printed a piece by one Nick Thimmesch, a free-lance journalist with ties to Silkwood’s employer, the Kerr-McGee corporation, charging “glaring discrepancies between the known record and the film’s representations.”

These are lies. In fact, *Silkwood* sticks remarkably close to the documentary record. If anything, it is surprisingly devoid of politics for such an alleged propaganda tract. Frankly, it’s a little dull. It includes a lot of material (some of it made up, presumably for dramatic interest) about Karen Silkwood’s unremarkable personal life. Like most people, she had problems with her lovers and roommates, didn’t get along with her ex-spouse, was often troubled, and drank and took drugs. The bulk of the movie is a retelling of the last few weeks of her life, and raises more questions than it answers. How were Karen Silkwood’s body and home contaminated with plutonium? Was Kerr-McGee deliberately covering up faulty fuel rods, which could lead to a disastrous accident at the breeder-reactor in Washington state where the rods were to be shipped? What happened on that Oklahoma highway on 13 November 1974, when Karen Silkwood was killed in a car crash, en route to an interview with a *New York Times* reporter?

The ending of the movie shows Silkwood blinded by the headlights of a truck on the highway, then her mangled body and car, seeming to imply that she was run off the road, as indeed independent investigators have concluded from an examination of her car and the tire tracks on the road and grass. Then a written message on the screen reports that Oklahoma police ruled her death a one-car accident and found traces of methaqualone (Quaalude) and alcohol in her bloodstream. The conclusion is left for the viewer to decide.

We may never know the answers to these questions. As we noted in *Workers Vanguard* (No. 146, 25 February 1977) in an article titled "Conspiracy and Cover-Up in Atomic Industry: FBI Drops Inquiry in Karen Silkwood Death":

"The abrupt cancellation of the second Congressional investigation into FBI handling of the case of Karen Silkwood has added to a widespread belief that the facts surrounding the death of the young trade unionist two years ago are being covered up at the highest levels of industry and government.

"...her documentation of company negligence and falsification of safety records was damning to powerful interests and as long as the bourgeois courts and commissions are running the investigations of her death, the only results will be successive cover-ups of the cover-ups."

In the fall of 1974 Karen Silkwood had been working for two years as a laboratory technician at the Cimarron, Oklahoma plutonium processing facility owned by Kerr-McGee, one of the largest energy conglomerates in the U.S. She became interested in health and safety issues at the plant. She brought her worries to the union, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), and was elected as a union safety inspector. The movie makes this appear to be her first interest in the union. In fact, she had been one of the few die-hards in a defeated strike the previous year; she never crossed the picket line and she remained in the union even when its membership went down to 20. Along with fellow unionists, she traveled to union headquarters in Washington, D.C., where officials assigned her to gather documentation of company cover-ups of faulty fuel rods, as well as other safety violations.

Early in November 1974, Silkwood was repeatedly contaminated with plutonium, one of the deadliest materials known to man, in circumstances which have never been fully explained. In the Hollywood movie Meryl Streep ends up with raw pink patches over her face from decontamination scrubdowns. Her panicked expression when she knows she has to face a second one imparts the horror of it. Yet it is only a pale image of the reality. Silkwood's first scrubdown was with Tide and Clorox; the two others which occurred over the next two days employed a sandpaper-like paste of potassium permanganate and sodium bisulfate. Despite this chemical torture (try scrubbing yourself with Ajax sometime), her skin still registered high levels of radiation. Worse yet, three days of nasal smears (to monitor inhaled radioactive contamination) increased to over 40,000 disintegrations per minute (dpm)—normal background radiation from cosmic rays and naturally occurring isotopes is roughly 30 dpm.

Silkwood's house was contaminated as well; it was stripped and her belongings were sealed and buried—one scene poignantly portrayed in the movie. An examination conducted at the medical facility at Los Alamos showed that she had received internal contamination possibly as high as 24 nanocuries of plutonium (about 50,000 dpm). The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC, now Nuclear Regulatory Commission) has set a lifetime limit of 16 nanocuries; many specialists consider this hundreds of times too high. The fact is that

plutonium is an extremely potent carcinogen, inhalation of which is virtually certain to induce lung cancer at levels where other radioactive nuclides can be tolerated. And Silkwood was particularly susceptible—she was female, had lung problems (asthma) and was small; under 100 pounds. In short, the plutonium she received chained her to cancer and a painful, slow death.

It is for this contamination, which an Oklahoma jury ruled the responsibility of Kerr-McGee, that \$10.5 million in punitive damages was assessed against the company for the Silkwood estate. On January 11 the Supreme Court ruled the court had a legitimate right to assess this penalty; however, the case has been returned to a lower court where Kerr-McGee may challenge the award on new grounds. Kerr-McGee has held that the contamination was "by her own hand," as a plot to discredit the company, a contention repeated by the *New York Times* in its editorial, which doesn't even mention that a jury had ruled this imputation *not proved*.

Since then, theories about Silkwood's contamination have included such slanderous tales as that put forth by alleged FBI informer Jacque Srouji, who claimed that Silkwood was deliberately contaminated by the union, to create a martyr. This is a telling indication of how far the capitalists will go to discredit the only thing that stands between the workers and total disregard for any safety. In the movie the International union representatives are made to appear as a bunch of slick bureaucrats who push Silkwood way out front without anywhere

*continued on next page*

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Workers Vanguard

**January 25: Bay Area unionists march in outrage over scab murder of striking OCAW worker Gregory Goobic.**

near sufficient backup. Certainly the OCAW is as craven before the capitalists as any other union in the U.S. But it has fought, however partially, for safer conditions for the workers it represents.

In the movie, Silkwood posits that someone purposely contaminated her urine-specimen jar with plutonium while it was in her locker room, a jar she later accidentally broke in her bathroom at home. This explanation is plausible, but we can't know for certain. We do know that Silkwood had been a straight A student in school, the only girl in her high school chemistry class, a member of the National Honor Society. She had studied medical technology. She knew that tampering with plutonium was death. The idea that she would deliberately contaminate herself could originate only in the sick and vicious minds of a profit-mad industry like Kerr-McGee.

Even the *New York Times* had to admit that Kerr-McGee was "a hellish place to work." Between 1970 and 1974 there were 574 reported exposures to plutonium. Dr. Karl Morgan, formerly a health physicist at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, testified at a Congressional investigation that he had never seen a facility so poorly run. The plant was constructed in a tornado alley; the tornado warnings were so frequent that the company never bothered to remove the plutonium to a safe place. Yet the hazards of the plant get barely a nod in the film. Only one other instance of contamination is shown, Silkwood's friend Thelma. But when Silkwood is shown leaving off her urine sample at the lab for analysis, the audience sees many such samples lined up, thus many more contaminations.

Yes, nuclear power is dangerous. An accident such as almost happened at Three Mile Island could kill thousands of people. But the only "solution" to this problem provided by the movie *Silkwood*—and shared in real life by the OCAW union tops—is, ironically enough, the *New York Times*! Get the *Times* to publish the damning evidence, and the AEC will make Kerr-

McGee straighten things out. The crusading press will save America by publicly exposing wrong, and the government will step in and perform justice. Sure. This is a liberal pipedream: the AEC serves the interests of power conglomerates like Kerr-McGee, and the *New York Times* worships money, not justice.

The "no-nukers" hail the name of Silkwood in their campaign to abolish nuclear power. But the problem is that you have to replace it with something, and in this capitalist society there is no such thing as a danger-free source of energy. For generations workers have died miserably in coal mines and suffocated to death with black lung disease. Like any technology, nuclear power can be used and abused. It is not so much a question of a special technology, but the irrationality of the capitalist economy which makes all industry in the U.S., including the nuclear industry, hazardous. Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan threatens to blow up the world hundreds of times over to save American profits. Over 90 percent of the nuclear waste in this country is military. And that's nothing compared to the global nuclear holocaust plotted in the Pentagon. That is the real danger of nuclear power.

The no-nuke movement is part of a middle-class ecological concern that the disastrous conditions which workers have faced for generations might spread to the suburbs, perhaps even onto a college campus. Anti-nuke groups actively publicize and collect funds for the Silkwood lawsuit but not a peep is heard in protest against the murder of Gregory Goobic during a two-week strike by OCAW Local 1-326 in Rodeo, California last January. Goobic, a 20-year-old union member, was run down by a scab truck while picketing a Union 76 oil refinery. A company boss, with arms folded, stood in the dead striker's blood as cops kept the other picketers away. The capitalists and their government are not interested in the lives of their employees, particularly when adequate wages, working conditions and safety precautions stand in the way of profits. Obviously one thing militants in unions such as OCAW must do is fight for safety committees with the power to close down plants. But equally necessarily is the struggle to replace the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy with a leadership that will break with both bourgeois parties and build a workers party. The world will be safe to live in when the ruling class has been expropriated by a workers government that runs society for the benefit of all, not the profits of a few.

*Silkwood* has been denounced by corporate spokesmen at the *New York Times* for portraying Karen Silkwood as "a nuclear Joan of Arc" when she was really "a victim of her own infatuation with drugs"; it has been denounced by anti-nuke fan Anna Mayo of the *Village Voice* for portraying her as a dope-smoking "bad girl" when she was really "beloved daughter, sister, friend, union martyr and heroine of the largest, most viable grass-roots force in the U.S. and Western Europe, the anti-nuclear movement." Actually, Karen Silkwood was simply a union militant fighting the best she could for a better life for herself and her coworkers against one of the least safe, most powerful, biggest price-gouging capitalist enterprises in the country. And we think the movie did a nice job showing it. ■

# Fight the New McCarthyism!

The Partisan Defense Committee is appealing to all of you for financial help in fighting "McCarthyism with a drawn gun." If there is a simple, practical lesson to be drawn from the terrible times of Senator Joe McCarthy, it is this: better to organize and fight. When facing government set-up and fascist provocation, it is time to defend our rights and our lives with every resource we can muster. The PDC, founded on the principles of class-struggle defense work, is raising funds for the Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth League lawsuit against the FBI's new "Domestic Security/Terrorism Guidelines" (see "Spartacist League Sues FBI," *Workers Vanguard* No. 340, 21 October 1983). These "Guidelines" are a mandate for new COINTELPRO-type operations of "disruption," set-up and outright murder against political opponents of the government, targeting particularly Marxist organizations and black groups.

The deadly new McCarthyism flows straight from the poisonous climate of anti-Soviet war preparation and rampaging racist terror. As the witchhunters' machinery is retooled, Marxists and others are branded as "terrorists" and violent criminals, as an excuse for them to be shot first and questioned later. The PDC calls on all those concerned about civil liberties, on black activists and defenders of black people's rights, on unionists and socialists to take a

stand in their own defense by supporting the Spartacist lawsuit against the FBI.

The PDC backed the SL lawsuit and public campaign which in 1981 forced the California Attorney General to retract the characterization of the SL as "terrorist" in his "Organized Crime" report. Financial support raised by the PDC helped build the Labor/Black Mobilization of 5,000 which stopped the Ku Klux Klan in Washington, D.C. on November 27, 1982. The SL and PDC are still raising money to pay for the over \$30,000 spent in the successfully concluded campaign which forced the *Washington Times*, sinister daily newspaper of the Moonie cult, to retract its libel of the Labor/Black Mobilization and its organizers, falsely portrayed as seeking violence against the cops—a libel which fit right in with the FBI "Guidelines" defining Marxists as terrorist criminals (see "Moonies Forced to Retract Deadly Libel," *WV* No. 345, 6 January 1984).

The PDC is proud to have helped secure these important victories for the democratic rights of the working class and the oppressed. We urge each of you to do your part with a generous contribution now. Send your contribution to: Partisan Defense Committee, Box 99, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.



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# Women and Permanent Revolution in China



China Photos, Peking

**"The revolt of women has shaken China to its very depths.... In the women of China, the Communists possessed, almost ready made, one of the greatest masses of disinherited human beings the world has ever seen. And because they found the keys to the heart of these women, they also found one of the keys to victory over Chiang Kai-shek."**

—Jack Belden, China Shakes the World (1951)

*This is the conclusion of a two-part article. Part One (Women and Revolution No. 25, Winter 1982-83) covered the interrelation of women's liberation and social revolution from the emergence of a modernizing nationalist movement in China in the late nineteenth century through the defeated revolution of 1925-27.*

## PART TWO OF TWO

That women cannot achieve elementary democratic freedoms in the countries of the East without overthrowing capitalism is perhaps nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in China. The Kuomintang counter-revolution in the late 1920s was directed with especial savagery at the radical women's movement. Tens of thousands of Communist and other women activists were raped, tortured and killed for the "crime" of

wearing short hair or men's clothing. During the 1930s the Kuomintang militarists sought to reimpose traditional Confucian subjugation upon Chinese women.

This mass of oppressed women would provide much of the social dynamite which blew away Kuomintang China in the civil war of 1946-49. In the rural areas liberated by the Red Army, women were mobilized to fight for their emancipation. While these measures would not have been radical in Shanghai or Canton with their modern industrial proletariat and Westernized intelligentsia, Communist "woman-work" had a radical impact in the primitive tradition-bound villages of Kiangsi (Jiangxi) and Shensi (Shaanxi).

However, between 1937 and 1946 Mao's Red Army entered into an alliance with the Chiang Kai-shek Kuomintang regime, one of the conditions for this being that the Communists stopped the confiscation of

the landlords' property. This policy basically froze the old social order in the countryside, perpetuating the enslavement of peasant women to housework and husband. Only when the civil war forced the Chinese Stalinists to place themselves at the head of the agrarian revolution did the mass of peasant women achieve the basis for social emancipation. And it was only after the Communists conquered state power in 1949 that the feudalist garbage suffocating Chinese women (arranged marriages, foot-binding, female infanticide) was swept into the dustbin of history.

Yet the People's Republic of China was the product of a *bureaucratically deformed* social revolution, and that deformation imprinted itself on all aspects of social life, not least the woman question. Like its counterpart in the USSR, the Chinese Stalinist (Maoist) regime has perpetuated and defended the most basic institution of women's oppression—the family. The Stalinists' conservative attitude toward the family was further reinforced in China by the peasant-based nature of the revolution. For unlike the urban proletariat, for the peasantry, the family is the existing unit of small-scale agricultural production. And this continues to be the case today on the collective farms.

The gradual replacement of oppressive family functions by social alternatives (communal laundries, childcare facilities, etc.)—the precondition for the complete equality of women—is not a matter of voluntarism and cannot be achieved within an isolated, backward country like China. It requires a level of economic productivity far above even the most advanced capitalist country. Thus the liberation of women—a basic condition for a genuinely socialist society—demands the *international extension* of proletarian revolution, i.e., the heart of Trotsky's program of permanent revolution.

### Women Under Red Army Rule

To escape the white terror which followed the crushing of the 1925-27 revolution, armed Communist bands retreated to the more inaccessible reaches of the vast Chinese countryside. In 1931 a number of these Communist-led forces consolidated into the Kiangsi Soviet Republic in south-central China under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh.

In abandoning the cities to take the road of peasant-guerrilla warfare the Chinese Communist Party changed not only the environment in which it operated but its own nature. In the 1920s the CCP had been a revolutionary proletarian party supported by the radicalized urban intelligentsia. That is, it was based primarily on the most advanced, Westernized sections of Chinese society. During the 1930s the Communist Party became essentially a peasant-based military force with a declassed petty-bourgeois leadership.

In September 1930 the Bolshevik "International Left Opposition" led by Leon Trotsky issued a "Manifesto on China" which warned against the Chinese Stalinists' abandonment of the urban working class. The Left Opposition, which included a substantial number of Chinese Communists, recognized the need for a period of retrenchment following the brutal crushing of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution and the strategic nature of

an alliance with the desperately poor peasants of China. But as the Manifesto correctly insisted:

"When the Stalinists talk about a soviet government established by the peasants in a substantial part of China, they not only reveal their credulity and superficiality; they obscure and misrepresent the fundamental problem of the Chinese revolution. The peasantry, even the most revolutionary, cannot create an independent government; it can only support the government of another class, the dominant urban class. The peasantry at



Agnes Smedley

**Guerrilla leaders responsible for organizing and educating civilian women.**

all decisive moments follows either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.... Soviets are the organs of power of a revolutionary class in opposition to the bourgeoisie. This means that the peasantry is unable to organize a soviet system on its own.... *Only the predominance of the proletariat in the decisive industrial and political centers of the country creates the necessary basis for the organization of a Red army and for the extension of a soviet system into the countryside. To those unable to grasp this, the revolution remains a book closed with seven seals.*"

The social transformation of the CCP had a highly contradictory effect on the CCP's approach to the woman question. On the one hand, the most basic measures (e.g., teaching women to read and practice basic hygiene, elimination of foot-binding) had a profoundly radical impact on the backward villages of Kiangsi and Shensi. At the same time, the Mao leadership was concerned not to affront the traditional social mores of the peasant men, especially those serving in the Red Army, upon whom they depended for their very survival. Thus, "woman-work" in the liberated areas was cautious and conservative in comparison to the radical Communist-led women's movement which had been a major force in the 1925-27 revolution.

If the Kiangsi Soviet did not actually experience "a sexual revolution," the condition of women certainly improved, in some ways radically. Slavery, concubinage

*continued on next page*

and prostitution were outlawed. The war against the Kuomintang in itself tended to break down the traditional role of women. While few women served as combat troops, many were attached to the Red Army as nurses, porters, couriers, laundresses, etc. Perhaps more importantly large numbers of women were encouraged to work in the fields for the first time in order to free up men to fight in the Red Army. The Kuomintang reactionaries hated and feared the signs of women's liberation which they saw in Kiangsi. The accusation that the Reds practiced "free sex" and "debauchery" was a major focus of anti-Communist propaganda.

In late 1934 the Kuomintang armies, advised by a German general, finally broke through and destroyed the Kiangsi Soviet. The core of the Red Army retreated in the heroic Long March of 6,000-8,000 miles. A year later the survivors reached the relative safety of the Yen-an area in northern Shensi province. This region, near Mongolia, was one of the poorest, most backward in all China. Almost all women were illiterate, modern medicine was unknown, foot-binding and female infanticide were common practices. The participation of women in agricultural production (based on winter wheat and millet rather than rice) was lower than in almost any other region of China. Thus, the contradictions which had characterized the CCP's "woman-work" in Kiangsi were reproduced in a more extreme form in Yen-an. The commissar of education, Hsu Teh-lih, explained to American journalist Edgar Snow:

"This is culturally one of the darkest places on earth. Do you know the people in north Shensi and Kansu believe that water is harmful to them? ...

"Such a population, compared with Kiangsi, is very backward indeed. There the illiteracy was about 90 percent, but the cultural level was very much higher, we had better material conditions to work in, and many more trained teachers....

"Here the work is very much slower."

—*Red Star Over China* (1937)

However, the slow pace of the social transformation in Yen-an was not due simply to its extreme economic and cultural backwardness.

As it became increasingly clear that Japan was about to invade China from its Manchurian base, Mao raised the call for a "National Anti-Japanese Front" based on cooperation between the Kuomintang and CCP. Chiang at first rejected this overture, but pressure from his fellow militarists (one of whom kidnapped the Generalissimo until he relented) forced him to negotiate an agreement with the Communists in September 1937, a few months after the Japanese imperial army crossed the Marco Polo bridge and invaded China.

Central to the CCP-Kuomintang agreement was a ban on the confiscation of landlords' property in the areas under Red Army control. The Communists would henceforth limit themselves to rent and interest reductions and similar palliatives. This policy was codified in a 1942 CCP document whose counterrevolutionary intent is entirely unambiguous:

"Recognize that most of the landlords are anti-Japanese, that some of the enlightened gentry also favour democratic reforms. Accordingly, the policy of the Party

is only to help the peasants in reducing feudal exploitation but not to liquidate feudal exploitation entirely, much less to attack the enlightened gentry who support democratic reforms....

"The guarantee of rent and interest collection and the protection of the landlord's civil, political, land, and economic rights are the second aspect of our Party's land policy."

—"Decision of the CC on Land Policy in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas" (28 January 1942), reproduced in Conrad Brandt et al., eds., *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (1966)

The policy not to liquidate the landlords' exploitation of the peasantry had a profound and negative effect on the position of women. Since women could not own land (the major source of income in Yen-an), they remained economically dependent on their husbands, fathers, brothers, etc. If her husband ordered her to stay home and take care of the house and children, a peasant woman had no practical recourse. For women, the legal right of divorce was meaningless without an alternative means of livelihood. Thus, during the popular front period the mass of women under Red Army rule remained tied to housework as they had for centuries. In her scholarly study, *Woman-Work* (1976), Delia Davin concludes that "it was still unusual for them [women] to work on the land on any scale until the time of land reform." The Mao regime did promote home industry, especially for textiles, and to some degree this provided women with an independent income. But as long as property relations in the Chinese countryside remained unchanged, the mass of Chinese women would remain unliberated. The manifest gap between communist, and even democratic, principles and social reality in the misnamed Yen-an Soviet Republic would soon produce dissension within the Communist camp.

### Debate Over the Woman Question in Yen-an

Following the Japanese invasion large numbers of radical student youth and leftist intellectuals made their way from the cities to Yen-an. In part they were escaping Japanese and Kuomintang repression and in part they wanted to fight Japanese imperialism. Chiang's armies were notoriously corrupt and incompetent, and the Red Army was widely seen as the only effective anti-Japanese force in China.

Prominent among the newcomers to Yen-an was Ting Ling (Ding Ling), the best-known leftist woman writer in China. As a teenage girl she had been a family friend of Hsiang Ching-yu, the founding leader of the Communist women's movement, who was killed in the white terror of the late 1920s. Later Ting Ling became a protégé of Lu Hsun, universally regarded as China's greatest modern man of letters. Ting thus represented the avant-garde of China's radical intelligentsia.

Many of the newcomers, like Ting, were disappointed when life in Yen-an did not measure up to their idea of what a Soviet Republic should be. They gradually developed into a dissident current or milieu, which one commentator termed the Yen-an "literary opposition." They criticized the sterility and dogmatism of official Communist propaganda, the tendencies toward bureaucratic commandism and the exceedingly



Yenan 1937: Peasant woman with bound feet publicly denounces landlord.

Military Museum, Peking

slow pace of social transformation. But basically the dissident intellectuals objected to certain effects of Mao's peasant-guerrilla strategy and the alliance with the Kuomintang but did *not* challenge these underlying policies.

The Mao regime crushed the "literary opposition" in the so-called "rectification campaign" of 1942-44. A major target for "rectification" was the views Ting Ling expressed in a 1942 essay, "Thoughts on 8 March" (International Women's Day). (This essay was reproduced in translation in *New Left Review*, July-August 1974, from which we quote.) Here she criticized the Mao leadership for retreating from the struggle for sexual equality. Ting contended that women in Yen-an, while certainly better off than in the rest of China, remained unemancipated. Despite the "free-choice marriage" laws, social pressure forced most women to marry anyone who would have them:

"But women invariably want to get married. (It's even more of a sin not to be married, and single women are even more of a target for rumors and slanderous gossip.) So they can't afford to be choosy, anyone will do...."

Once married, Ting went on, women were pressured into having children whether or not they really wanted to. In this way they were forced back into a life of housework, curtailing their political activity and education. Then they were accused of "backward-

ness," a standard ground for husbands suing their wives for divorce:

"Afraid of being thought 'backward', those who are a bit more daring rush around begging nurseries to take their children. They ask for abortions, and risk punishment and even death by secretly swallowing potions to produce abortions. But the answer comes back: 'Isn't giving birth to children also work? You're just after an easy life, you want to be in the limelight. After all, what indispensable political work have you performed?'... Under these conditions it is impossible for women to escape this destiny of 'backwardness'."

The Maoists reacted strongly to these bitter barbs. Ting Ling was banned from writing and sent to "study" with the peasantry in order to overcome what they called her "outdated feminism." In 1943 a new CCP document on "woman-work" criticized "tendencies to subjectivism and formalism which isolate us from ordinary women" (reproduced in Davin, *op. cit.*). This document presents increased economic productivity as a cure-all for women's oppression. The actual retreat from the liberating goals of authentic communism expressed by this rather abstract document was spelled out in a speech by Kai Chang, a leading Maoist spokesman on "woman-work": "Our slogans are no longer 'free choice marriage' and 'equality of the sexes'

*continued on next page*

but rather 'save the children', 'a flourishing family', and 'nurture health and prosperity'" (quoted in Davin, *ibid.*).

While condemning the bureaucratic way in which Ting Ling and her co-thinkers were treated, how are we to judge the substance of the debate? The Maoists argued in Yen-an that a more radical policy on the woman question would have alienated the peasant



**Left: Chiang Ching (Mrs. Mao Tse-tung) when she was an actress. Right: Ronald Reagan in his Hollywood days.**

masses, women as well as men. However, when a few years later the Maoists under the pressure of civil war confiscated the landlords' property and gave peasant women an equal share of the land, these women responded with unbounded enthusiasm. The agrarian revolution laid the basis for a revolution in sexual relations.

If the Maoists were guilty of opportunism, then Ting Ling can be convicted of idealist voluntarism. She appears to have been blind to the economic obstacles to social transformation in this most backward province and to the fundamental difference in social outlook between workers and peasants. Working-class and professional women were potentially in a position to be economically independent of their menfolk, and this shaped their consciousness. But the peasant women of Yen-an had no independent means of livelihood. How could a young woman who left her father's home and chose to remain single support herself? How could an older woman with young children survive if she abandoned an abusive husband? Ting expected and demanded for the Yen-an area full sexual equality *in advance* of the nationwide political and social revolution which alone could bring this about. Some of the policies advocated by Ting in 1942 were in fact carried out after the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (a bureaucratically deformed workers state) in 1949. But this required that the Maoists break their alliance with Chiang and place themselves at the head

of an agrarian revolution which they had previously sought to suppress.

### Women Under Kuomintang Reaction

Whatever the limitations, contradictions and retreats of Communist "woman-work" in Kiangsi and Yen-an, the difference between that and the policies of the Kuomintang was like day and night. The inability of the "national bourgeoisies" in the colonial countries to shatter the feudal past and carry through a bourgeois-democratic revolution was conclusively demonstrated in China. Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, the dominant bourgeois force, depended on relics of the feudal past (the corrupt warlords, landlords, gangsters). The native bourgeois classes in the colonial world are unable to separate themselves from the entanglement with imperialist domination for fear of setting off forces—principally the anti-capitalist struggle of the workers, in alliance with the peasantry—which will sweep them from power as well.

While the immediate target of the Kuomintang counterrevolution was "the Red menace," anti-Communism was soon extended to attacks on "decadent" Western liberalism in all its manifestations, especially on the woman question. In 1934 Chiang launched the New Life Movement based on an amalgam of Neo-Confucian, Christian and European fascist ideologies. The New Life which Chiang prescribed for Chinese women was the Kuomintang equivalent of the Nazis' "Kinder, Küche, Kirche" (children, kitchen, church).

Here is how the leading ideologue of Neo-Confucianism, Lin Yu-tang, defined the role of women in society:

"There are talented women as there are talented men, but their number is actually less than democracy would have us believe. For those women, self-expression has a more important meaning than just bearing children. But for the common people, whose number is legion, let the men earn the bread to feed the family and let the women bear children.... Of all the rights of women, the greatest is to be a mother."

—quoted in Elisabeth Croll, *Feminism and Socialism in China* (1980)

A leading inspirer and organizer of the New Life Movement was Madame Chiang Kai-shek, one of China's wealthiest women and a Wellesley graduate, who declared that "virtue is more important than learning." It is poetic justice that some of the hoary Neo-Confucianists around Chiang's court criticized Madame Chiang herself as too Westernized and attacked her public political appearances as "immodest" (sort of the Phyllis Schlafly of her day)!

The moral climate in Kuomintang ruling circles is well depicted in the memoirs of writer Han Suyin, who was trained abroad as a doctor. Han returned to China in the late 1930s to marry an officer on Chiang's staff, who constantly admonished her that "a woman of talent is not a virtuous woman" and that "to contradict your husband is a sign of immorality" (*Birdless Summer* [1968]).

If this is how the women of the educated elite were treated, one can imagine the situation facing women of

the lower classes. Behind a façade of bourgeois-democratic laws, a carryover from the revolutionary upheaval of the 1920s, the subjugation of the mass of Chinese women was fundamentally unchanged from the days of the Manchus or, for that matter, the Mings.

### Deformed Social Revolution and Women's Liberation

It is now widely recognized that the American nuclear bombs that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, even though Japan was ready to surrender, were dropped mainly to intimidate the Soviet Union. An even more immediate target for the American imperialists were the Chinese Communists. Having fought and defeated Japanese imperialism in large part to dominate and exploit China, the U.S. was not about to let Mao's Red Army stand in its way. With the guidance and support of Washington, Generalissimo Chiang was supposed to physically annihilate the Communist-led forces. For a year following the Japanese surrender the Generalissimo consolidated his position while spinning out phony negotiations with the CCP for a coalition government. Then in mid-1946 Chiang struck, initially with great effect. The Red Army was driven out of central China entirely and had to retreat on all fronts.

Stalin, as usual, was prepared to sacrifice his foreign "comrades" for the sake of "peaceful coexistence" with U.S. imperialism and its allies (in this case, Chiang's China). The Great Helmsman in the Kremlin later told Yugoslav Communist Eduard Kardelj that he advised the Chinese comrades to "join the Chiang Kai-shek government and dissolve their army" because "the development of the uprising in China had no prospect" (quoted in Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* [1966]). Stalin's advice to the Chinese "comrades" was in effect that they commit suicide.

With their survival at stake the Maoists finally unleashed their most potent weapon: the mobilization of the Chinese peasantry against the landlords. A powerful wave of agrarian revolution carried the initially smaller Red Army, with its greater combativity and discipline, to victory over Chiang's forces, totally demoralized and grotesquely corrupt (Kuomintang generals sold food on the black market while their men went hungry).

Integral to the agrarian revolution and Red Army victory was the liberation of women from their previous total economic dependency. The Agrarian Reform Law promulgated by the CCP in 1947 divided the land equally between men and women. Women were given their own certificate of ownership, if they so chose, or joint ownership with their husbands. The impact of this revolution in property relations on the women of the Chinese countryside was electrifying. American journalist William Hinton, an eyewitness to these events, reported some typical responses: "When I get my share, I'll separate from my husband. Then he won't oppress me any more." "If he divorces me, never mind, I'll get my share and the children will get theirs. We can live a good life without him" (*Fanshen* [1966]). Particularly strong partisans of the Communist land

policies were widows for whom the traditional Confucian code prescribed suicide at the death of husbands and providers.

The civil war itself reinforced the agrarian revolution in radically changing the position of women in society. The transition from guerrilla to large-scale positional warfare drew masses of men into the Red Army and so created a labor shortage in many villages. Large



Edgar Snow Collection

**In Yen-an, Ting Ling, China's best-known woman writer, criticized the Mao leadership for retreating from the struggle for women's equality.**

numbers of women were thus drawn into agricultural production out of sheer economic necessity. According to Teng Ying-chao (Deng Yingzhao), a leader of the CCP-led Women's Association and also Chou En-lai's wife, whereas in 1945 it was still unusual for women to work in the fields, by 1949 in the older liberated areas 50-70 percent of women worked on the land. In some villages peasant women were the main activists in confiscating the landlords' property.

More than any other aspect of CCP policy, it was the mobilization of women which shocked the Chinese ruling class as it was being destroyed. In her memoirs, *Birdless Summer*, Han Suyin recounts the absolute horror with which the Kuomintang ruling circles in their last days viewed the revolt of women in the liberated areas:

"They actually had women in the Red armies, girls  
continued on next page

dressed as boys and carrying guns! They encouraged slave girls and concubines to revolt against their masters! Their widows remarried! They did not insist on 'chastity'! They incited the peasant women to stand up and denounce their husbands misdeeds."

For China's rulers, these were among the worst of the "crimes" of the Communists.

A social system which had oppressed women for millennia was overthrown in the course of a few years of civil war. The first years of the People's Republic of China saw the effective elimination of foot-binding, the general establishment of free choice in marriage, mass campaigns to overcome illiteracy and the drawing of most women into work outside the home.

Yet Mao's China was the product of a *bureaucratically deformed* social revolution, and that deformation imprinted itself on all aspects of social and political life. The popular enthusiasm and authority which the Maoists gained by overthrowing the old order was dissipated through the insane economic adventurism of the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) and the bureaucratic delirium of the Cultural Revolution (1966-69). The deeply *nationalist* character of the Maoist regime eventually led it into an alliance with U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union, dramatically signaled in 1971 when the Chairman embraced Richard Nixon as American B-52s bombed Vietnam. And today the "People's Liberation Army" is the main instrument by which the American ruling class seeks to wreak vengeance against the heroic Vietnamese people, who inflicted upon U.S. imperialism the most humiliating defeat in its history.

The deformed character of the Chinese revolution has naturally also affected the condition of women. To take but a few of the more glaring manifestations: the policy toward contraception and abortion has zig-zagged between extremes, from practically eliminating any means of birth control during the disastrous Great Leap Forward to the present policy of pressuring women to have abortions they do not want in order to reduce the population. Official puritanism has the force of law, making premarital sex a crime. Many jobs are still typed by sex, and there is unequal pay for equal work, especially on the collective farms.

*Women and Revolution*, in an article on Maoism and the family (subtitled "In China, women hold up half the sky—and then some," W&R No. 7, Autumn 1974), wrote of both the historic achievements and fundamental limitations of Maoist-Stalinist China in furthering the liberation of women:

"The revolution has, among other things, given women legal equality, freedom of choice in marriage, greater access to contraception and abortion, a greater role in social production and political life and, for some, child care centers, dining halls and schools. It is indisputable that the lives of Chinese women, who in pre-revolutionary times were barely recognized as human beings, have been radically transformed and that Chinese women are less oppressed in many ways than are women in bourgeois democracies.

"But while we note such gains and therefore call for the unconditional military defense of China against imperialist attack, we are also aware that China has not achieved socialism—a historical stage marked, among other things, by the withering away of the state—and that the

Chinese bureaucracy sabotages those measures leading toward the emancipation of women which could be undertaken by the dictatorship of the proletariat in even a poor and underdeveloped healthy workers state. Chinese women, therefore, continue to be specially oppressed."

The key to understanding the interrelationship between the Chinese deformed workers state and the family lies precisely in the fact that while the bourgeoisie has been smashed and the means of production nationalized, the working class does not wield political power. The state is administered by a bureaucratic caste which, in order to maintain its undemocratic rule, must, among other things, rely upon and foster the nuclear family as one more point for reinforcing respect for authority.

Only a proletarian political revolution which ousts the Maoist-Stalinist bureaucracy, establishes workers democracy and places the resources of the Chinese workers state fully in the service of world socialist revolution can open the road to fulfilling the struggles for women's liberation which have been integral to the tumultuous history of China in the modern era. And only the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution offers the enslaved women of the East—from India to Iran to Sri Lanka and Indonesia—the path to emancipation. ■

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Incest portrayed in two movies. Below: Lolita with her stepfather in Stanley Kubrick's 1961 movie based on Nabokov's classic novel Lolita. Right: French director Louis Malle's touching movie Murmur of the Heart (1971).



Minerva Films



MGM

## Something About Incest...

(continued from page 32)

an a 1980 state law was passed forcing therapists, teachers and other non-medical personnel to report cases of child molesting to the police, even if counseling has been voluntarily sought. So the therapist called the cops—though neither Amy, her mother or her stepfather wanted it—and the stepfather was brought up on a charge of performing a lewd and lascivious act on a child under 14, a felony carrying an eight-year prison sentence. It came to trial. Amy refused to testify in court. Though the judge asked her five times, five times she refused. So he charged the girl with contempt and threw her into a 4-by-8 foot windowless cell for over a week, refusing her mother rights to visit her on the grounds she was “influencing” her daughter. The prosecutor defended Judge John A. DeRonde’s vicious punishment: “She is a member of society. She is not being beaten. She is not being tortured. She has been told to go to her room, as society

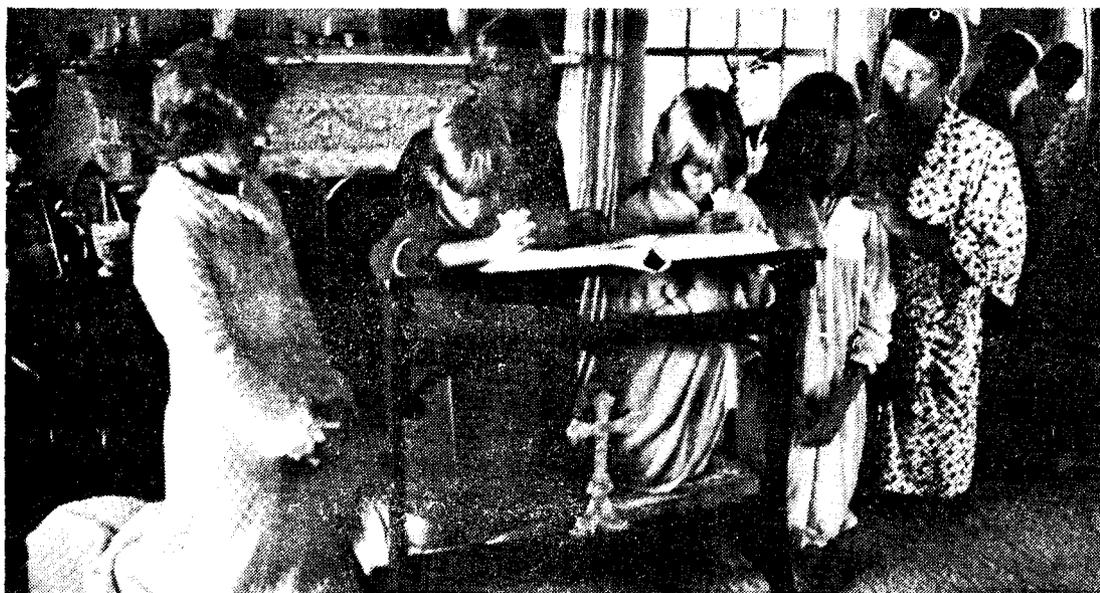
requires of her, until she tells the truth” (*San Francisco Examiner*, 8 January). A higher court finally brought her out and put her in a foster home. Again Amy refused to testify. The case was dropped, but they aren’t done with Amy and her family: she is still officially a “ward of the court” and the family must report back June 14 to see what the state in its infinite bureaucratic cruelty will do to them then.

A child-welfare worker in the San Francisco Department of Social Services, though expressing shock at the judge’s monstrous handling of the child, laid out the standard way they do things: “When pressure is suspected, the mother is admonished. If it continues, the child is placed in a foster home, and parental visits and in some cases, phone calls, are ‘monitored’ by investigators” (*San Francisco Examiner*, 15 January). That’s supposed to be the “humane” version! No wonder incest is widely “under-reported”—it’s not only the guilt and shame enforced by society, but legitimate fear of state terror.

### Incest

It appears that incest is far more common than even official statistics indicate. For every case reported, it is estimated at least two are not, while the American Psychological Association estimates that 12 to 15 million American women have experienced incest with 50 percent of the cases involving either the father or the stepfather. Dr. Alexander G. Zaphiris, associate dean of the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Houston and self-proclaimed “leading authority” on incest, estimates that 125,000 to 187,000 children in the U.S. are “sexually abused,” 90 percent of them as a result of incest. In an article for the *New York Times* (15 June 1981) Dr. Zaphiris indicates that incest occurs in families of all races, religions and incomes, generally in

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Sherman/Camera 5

**"The family that prays together stays together": So says Anita Bryant (left), and Moral Majorityites who glorify the "sacred" family.**

larger families, generally where the parents' sex life is unsatisfying. One of ten instances only involves incest with sons. Far from the stereotype of the drunken husband who beats his wife senseless and then rapes his daughter, the father is often "selfish, jealous, timid, passive, overprotective and of above average social awareness." The mother "is usually passive, has a poor self-image, feels hostile and jealous and is overly dependent on her husband."

Certainly incest has been around for a long time. Joel T. Rosenthal, in his book about ancient Anglo-Saxon England, *Angles, Angels and Conquerors*, noted that "Too many people in a household tended to spread disease and keep up the level of incest, which primitive people loudly taboo but often seem to practice with impunity." Yet the incest taboo as such is a more recent development, corresponding to the development of private property and the monogamous nuclear family. This is not synonymous with the primitive practice of exogamy, where women were required to marry outside the clan to ensure the extension of human society. The incest taboo in class society relates to the intermarriage of consanguineous people. Several years ago, a brother and sister who had been brought up apart met, fell in love and were prohibited from marrying. This is a classic example of incest. The term has now evolved to cover sexual interactions between an adult male with familial access to a legally underaged girl. So that a man who has sex with his stepdaughter—not a blood relation—is accused of incest.

When social workers and statisticians talk about incest, they uniformly lump it together with "child abuse" and refer to the "incest victim." But not all incest is rape, and cases of rape by incestuous fathers are relatively rare. In the film, when asked by her counselor if she had been scared, Amelia said, "I wasn't afraid, not of him. I mean, he wasn't hurting me or nothing." At a "Victims of Incest" meeting reported in the *New York Times* (9 January), one woman described her experience: "... I idolized my father and gave him power," she said, "And it was convenient. It was easier

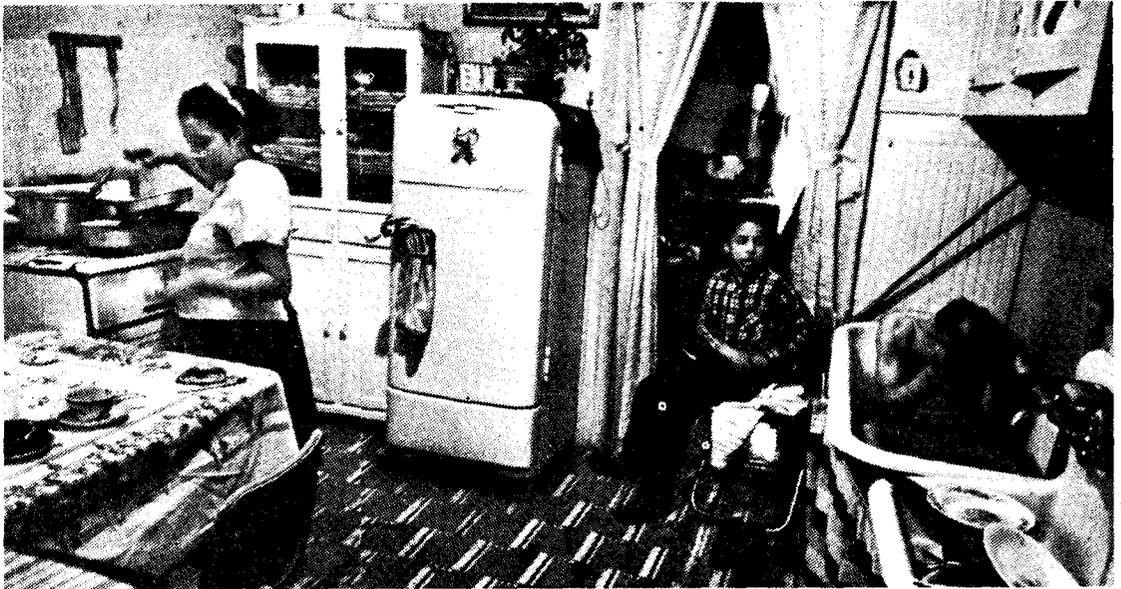
for him to do it in the house with me than to go outside." Furthermore, the mother was at least com-  
plaisant. "I was a substitute mom and a substitute wife. My mother pushed me into those roles because it made life easier for her.... I understood somehow that I was a big little girl and that if I did what I was told, no one in the house would get hit, and if I didn't, everyone would get hit." And in some instances, the child may actually like it. The *New York Times* (15 June 1981) interview with Dr. Zaphiris is explicit:

"The victim—From a young age the victim has associated sexual stimulation with fatherly love. Overt sex usually begins when the child is about 5 years old. About age 9 the child may find out from friends that sex with father is taboo. Typically, she says, 'I hate sex, I hate my father,' but she is only echoing her peers. 'She really loves her father and enjoys the sex,' Dr. Zaphiris said."

Incest covers an awfully wide territory: just about anything any relative does sexually to any other, from brother-sister sex play to cousins and uncles, and the more rare mother-son relations; most of these kinds of sexual interactions are relatively harmless. The French film "Murmur of the Heart" depicts a mother who seduces her adolescent son. The movie is sweet and amusing, and there are no adverse consequences for those involved. It is father-daughter relationships which create the most deep emotional impact, often leave the most lasting wounds. Sigmund Freud well described the nexus of the relationship:

"All the strange conditions under which the incongruous pair continue their love relations—on the one hand the adult, who cannot escape his share in the mutual dependence necessarily entailed by a sexual relationship, and who is at the same time armed with complete authority and the right to punish, and can exchange the one role for the other to the uninhibited satisfaction of his whims, and on the other hand the child, who in his helplessness is at the mercy of this arbitrary use of power, who is prematurely aroused to every kind of sensibility and exposed to every sort of disappointment, and whose exercise of the sexual performances assigned to him is often interrupted by his imperfect control of his natural needs—all these grotesque and yet tragic disparities distinctly mark the later development of the individual

Harbutt/Magnum



**In reality the family under capitalism is an economic and sexual prison house of frustration and oppression.**

and of his neurosis, with countless permanent effects which deserve to be traced in the greatest detail."

—"The Etiology of Hysteria," April 1896 address to the Society for Psychiatry and Neurology, Vienna, reproduced in *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1984

The problem, as Freud described, is that father-daughter sex occurs in the context of the patriarchal nuclear family: the young child's first overt sexual contact is tinged not only with darkest secrecy, so that sex is associated from the beginning with something that must always be hidden, but most importantly it occurs with a partner who has life-and-death control over *all* aspects of the young girl's life. It's no wonder that as the young woman grows up in patriarchal society, with the model of the monogamous (practically sexless) nuclear family before her, so at variance with what she's experienced, her earliest emotional ties so at cross-purposes, there's trouble. One woman, interviewed by the *New York Times* (9 January) described the long-term effects on her: "We spend most of our adult lives being overwhelmed. We are distrustful of everyone, especially people with whom we are supposed to be close, even spouses. We tend to have extreme emotional mood swings. We are overwhelmed by a sense of worthlessness, by absolute dependency on secrecy to maintain our identity."

What happens when the truth comes out? Even without brutal state intervention, the impact is often shattering. Another woman in "Victims of Incest" finally "blew the whistle" on her grandfather, who had played sexually not only with her but with her mother. As the *Times* described it: "She wonders what she has done with her revelation. 'It's destroyed my grandparents' marriage, it's destroyed everybody's relationships with my grandparents, even that of people who live near them,' she said. 'There's blame going on all the time. People ask each other, 'Why didn't you watch her when she was a kid?' My mother did watch my father all those years, she just never watched her own father. Now she is flagellating herself all over the place.'" This *Times* article was called "Helping to Heal the Scars Left

by Incest"—some "cure." Worse still is the "treatment" recommended by Dr. Zaphiris, a regimen reminiscent of "cures" for homosexuality:

"Treatment—If reported early, successful treatment may take up to two years. If the child has fully adjusted to the relationship, successful treatment may be impossible, Dr. Zaphiris said. His customary procedure is to undo the father's conditioning and resolve the child's guilt by encouraging the child to discuss it and by making her aware that many others have had similar traumas. To help break the incestuous bond, her guilt for having enjoyed the incestuous sex must be strengthened."

It's clear that incest makes trouble. But all fathers have sexual feelings toward their daughters; and it ought to be understood that if they don't screw them, they have to ruthlessly cut them off as soon as they reach puberty, and that's trouble too. Everybody who went through it surely can remember those bizarre jealous rages about "boys"—the intense scrutiny, the endless rules, the agony and suspicion that "Daddy's Little Girl" might just be "betraying" her dad by screwing someone else. The classic urbane pattern for fathers is to take their sons out when they reach puberty to some classy whorehouse, to initiate the kid into the privileges of adult male promiscuity; but the daughter must be kept locked up in the house (that's why the elaborate ritual about the father "giving away the bride"). Boys are given signals early on that they are supposed to be sexual, aggressive human beings; girls are taught to feel shame and guilt about their sexuality. Here sexual passion intersects the patriarchal understanding that women and kids are the man's property to do with as he will.

Culturally, there is a great deal of relativism here as well. The Koran holds that a girl may be married when she turns nine. In medieval society, children were considered adults at puberty. Most countries today have lower age-of-consent laws than does the U.S. (including England, where the most vicious and degrading sex practices are *forced* on young boys as part of their initiation into the ruling class). There is the

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standard American joke: "What's the definition of a virgin in the Ozarks?—A three-year-old who can run faster than her papa." And though people marry considerably later in this society, a large percentage of girls are "doing it" at 13.

The core of the problem is the nuclear family, the main social institution oppressing women, centrally and historically because her role as wife and child-bearer has been used to keep her isolated, chained to endless drudgery, a slave to her husband, without access to general social labor and the world men inhabit. The rigid monogamous structure also becomes a sexual prison house for men and women alike (although men have found other outlets—as Marx and Engels noted in the *Communist Manifesto*, the complement of the bourgeois family is public prostitution). This stultifying monotony led a magazine, probably the *New Yorker*, to quip "Incest is better than no cest." For children, too, the family is upheld as the ultimate authority, to control and instill submission and respect for "authority" on the inherently anarchic young human being.

The trouble with incest is *not* that a young child has had a sexual experience—children are sexual beings. We are not talking here about outright and clear-cut coercion and violence, beatings, rapes, but about the more complex and sexual relationships. The problem is how this sexuality gets expressed and deformed in a world of patriarchy, sexual repression and enforced monogamy for "adults" only. The question is one of effective consent. One might say that a girl of 11 is too young, whereas one of 14 is able to decide for herself what she wants to do. But in a situation as embroiled and sensitive as the family, mechanical guidelines break down. The most one would want to venture is that a lot of the more egregious problems would not exist in a sexually open family.

### **The Bourgeois State: Upholder of Patriarchy and Violence**

What is absolutely clear is that, whatever the situation at home, state intervention is worse. Most Americans are familiar with The Three Great Lies: the check is in the mail; I'll only shove it in a little bit; hi, I'm from the government, I'm here to help you. Amy's case is ample testimony to the falsehood of the third. Thus we are categorically opposed and utterly hostile to the mandatory reporting laws in cases of incest because they ensure the *maximum* devastation of all parties involved and deter those who need counseling from seeking it.

The capitalist class built up its state apparatus to keep the proletarian and oppressed masses in order. But that does not mean that it does not cut across class lines, particularly in a formal democracy. The state upholds every way it can the inherently oppressive nuclear family, including enforcing sexual repression and fear, with untold results of increased human misery. Of course the state *does* intervene all the time into "the sacred family," but only to instill further fear and respect for its *own* authority.

Under Reagan's Moral Majority reaction, this

tendency has become a monstrous and vicious full-scale assault. Not only are they trying to wipe out any chances for sex education, for birth control, even for education in basic biology (it's back to Genesis now, no more "Darwin theories"), but they want to abolish abortions and to outlaw any sort of sexual activity except for "one man on one woman for life" (married, of course). Sexual activity in general is already bound by a host of idiotic and peculiar state laws (in some places, you're not even allowed to go down on your own spouse) which reveal more about the sadistic and repressed character of capitalist government than anything else. The bourgeoisie can't provide any alternatives to the nuclear family; they depend on it. So what they give is, basically, terror and prison.

A few searing examples: in the *Times* "Around the Nation" column on 27 January there was a little item: "Woman Jailed in Florida For Having 2d Baby." The stark lead sentence was "A woman forbidden to bear children for 15 years as a condition of parole after her son died of malnutrition has been sent to jail for giving birth." The father of her first child got the same penalty, but he appealed and the penalty was ruled unconstitutional; the woman didn't appeal and was put in jail. What's going to happen to her new kid? Another "ward of the state" behind bars, like the 21-year-old mother, no doubt. The *Daily News* (31 January) reported that in Michigan an heir to Upjohn Co. was sentenced to "chemical castration" as punishment for "sexually abusing" his 14-year-old stepdaughter for a seven-year period. The drug (made by Upjohn) is an *experimental* birth-control pill with a reported "side effect" of diminished sex drive. Prison doctors in Britain have routinely injected similar drugs into "sex offenders" which caused the men to grow breasts, experience nausea and intense pain in stomach, chest and testicles. Two died of breast cancer. And we are not even talking here about a psychopathic rapist but a man who couldn't keep his hands off his stepdaughter (who's been removed from his clutches, in any case). And then there's the case some years ago in Utah where a Mormon fundamentalist father pulled his kids out of public school to teach them himself. State troopers surrounded him on snowmobiles and shot him dead. That sure taught the kids a lesson!

If you are black, and especially if you are an interracial couple, your children are practically hostages to the state because this racist ruling class will not let a black man get away with any sort of control over white children. Both in Georgia and Florida, children of white mothers who had relationships with black men were taken away by the state. If you are a communist or a lesbian, they will try to get your kids too. They did it to Tina Stevenson, a supporter of the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party, whose daughter was given to her ex-husband simply because they said her politics made her an "unfit mother." They tried to do it to Margareth Miller who had to fight for two and a half years to retain custody of her daughter simply because in the eyes of the law her sexual preference made her an "unfit mother."

There are some situations where we can see that it might be necessary to call for state intervention, though

Spartacist contingent marching under our banner "Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!" at 1981 Boston protest against anti-abortion "Human Life Amendment." SL signs demand "Government Out of the Bedrooms!"

W&amp;R Photo



we would do so only reluctantly and without any illusions that they're really going to make things better. For example, in a case of immediate and explosive deadly violence in a family, realistically the only thing to do is call the cops. But we warn that the alternative to being beaten at home is often not much better. Children do not fare well in bleak state orphanages which are little different from reform schools. Moreover, this government's ideological outriders, the Moral Majority, whose pious concern for poor abused children is nothing more than hypocrisy, was exposed in the February 1982 *Penthouse*, in an attack on them titled "Have You Whipped Your Child Today?" The Moral Majority are bitter opponents of child abuse laws. Fundamentalist ministers marched in Terre Haute, Indiana two years ago in support of a father who had beaten his nine-year-old son to a pulp. Moral Majority leader Rev. Greg Dixon has stated, "If you haven't left any marks, you probably haven't whipped your children," citing the Bible that "the blueness of a wound cleanseth." And we are not talking about spankings: another favorite defense case of the fundamentalist preachers was "Brother" Lester Roloff, an evangelist who ran homes for delinquent teenagers in Texas and Mississippi until he was brought up on charges of "gross physical abuse, negligence and violation of the individual rights of children." The charges were brought by parents of a girl at his "Rebekah Home for Girls." They "heard shrill, hysterical shrieking. The father investigated and in another room found 'three male subjects holding a girl and slapping her. One of the subjects was holding the girl by her legs, upside down, with her head on the floor.'" At the hearing, testimony came out that "the staff would climb into bed, sit on the youngsters, and batter them without mercy because they were 'witches, demons, whores, etc....'" These "chaste" defenders of the "right to life" who abhor the "molestation" of "incest victims" get their rocks off by beating children and in doing so commit a greater crime and do more damage than the openly sexual caresses of an

affection-starved father.

The most savage indictment against this vicious state is that it is probably better to stick with your Bible-belt drunken violent father and your pathetic family life than to fall into the clutches of the law. It is particularly bitter to have to say this, because the child abuse, the wife-beating, the endless humiliations of children and women that happen within the family are utterly abhorrent to us, and we understand the terrible oppression of women which the family represents. In Europe just before the rise of industrial capitalism, at a time when loving care and attention to children was unthinkable, it was common practice for French women of means to farm out their unwanted babies to peasant families. The mortality rate was approximately 75 percent, making this substitute for birth control a quiet form of infanticide. The fact is, under contemporary capitalism, in the absence of an alternative, the family structure is about all a kid's got.

As socialists, we work to undercut the economic and legal basis of the nuclear family as part of our struggle for socialist revolution. We demand a radical lowering of the legal age of adulthood with free housing, food and a stipend provided for youth who do not wish to remain at home. Our goal is a society in which the family can be replaced; in which sexual relations can be truly loving and voluntary, among any consenting individuals; in which the deforming guilt and shame pounded into all of us, not only those who have had sex inside the family, can be lifted; in which the constraints of economic necessity which force families together and often break them apart are gone. No doubt, as Isaac Deutscher once noted, the tragedies of sex and death will still pursue socialist man. But at least future generations under socialism will be better equipped to deal with them, without the cruel tortures of prison cells, barbed wire surrounded orphanages, the need to uphold ancient oppressions. We don't pretend to know how future generations will look back on us: as barbarians we suspect, but we hope also with great pity. ■

# Children, Family and State

## Something About Incest

Liberty, justice and above all freedom are indivisible. We in the Spartacist League have stuck our neck out in protection of freedom more than once: our call to "Free Squeaky, Sally!" in protest against semi-monarchical rights for the president; our opposition to the witchhunt of film director Roman Polanski for having sex with a consenting 13 year old; not least our defense of the victimized advocates of "Man-Boy Love." And here we go again.

Incest became a national topic of discussion in early January when TV for the first time presented "Something About Amelia," a movie dealing with the emotion-charged question of father-daughter sexual relations. Meanwhile, in real life a 12-year-old girl named Amy was brutally dragged through the California courts, thrown into solitary confinement for eight days, ripped away from her family and temporarily put into a foster home, all because her family had sought private counseling after she told her mother that her stepfather had "fondled" her. Both cases reveal a tangle of thorns: there are the relations of kids and parents, all the longing and need bundled up into the rigid confines of the monogamous nuclear family with its necessarily dependent relationships, a mixture of love and frustration; at the end of the line the bitter tragedies of broken marriages, shattered lives, prison, grim state orphanages.

Viewed by more people than the TV coverage of Kennedy's assassination, "Amelia" prompted an outpouring of interest, discussion and revelations about a subject that has been called America's "last taboo." Reviewers labeled the film "tasteful" by which they meant there's no sex in it. While it portrays a very narrow section of society, the movie's unrelieved grimness aptly catches the qualities of humiliation, despair and decomposition engendered by the disclosure of a father's two-year incestuous relationship with his daughter.

It is the story of a fairly classic middle-American, socially conservative, church-going family: the father has a white-collar management-level job; the mother works part-time; they have two girls. The marriage isn't a happy one—he resents his wife's job, she resents his lack of attention to her; they haven't screwed in four weeks. The movie shows Amelia, a sullen 13 year old, on her first date and her father's abnormal jealousy toward the young boy. Amelia's grades are dropping, and she picks a fight when told to do the ironing for her younger sister—"Maybe she's old enough right now; not just for helping around the house, either." The action of the film begins when Amelia confesses to her school counselor that her father "has been messing around" with her since she was 11. The counselor makes her obligatory phone call to the cops, who come



**Incest—called America's "last taboo"—hit prime time with ABC's TV movie "Something About Amelia," which dealt with father-daughter sexual relations.**

and take a scared but willing Amelia to a fairy-tale version girls' home, while her mother simultaneously screams at her for lying and at the cops for taking her away. The father moves into a motel, because the state has threatened to keep both children locked up if he doesn't. Amelia is lovingly treated by a tender social worker. Mother, father and daughter all go to therapy sessions to work things out. The father finally admits that Amelia was not lying, and the movie ends on a note of hope that this shattered family may someday come together again.

All well and good, except we have the real-life case of Amy before us. Her torment at the hands of the cops and courts is a searing reminder that intervention by the bourgeois state only makes things a hundred times worse. Amy's ordeal began last summer when she told her mother that her stepfather was "fondling" her. The mother made him move out and they went for therapeutic counseling. But this was in California where under then-attorney general George Deukmeji-

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