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WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND IMPERIALISM

PRAIRIE FIRE ORGANIZING

COMMITTEE

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PREFACE

November 1977

This pamphlet is about women's oppression and the struggle for women's liberation under imperialism. Prairie Fire Organizing Committee developed its basic political line on women during the past two years and we published this in our political statement (BREAK-THROUGH No. 1—March 1977). Events in the world, our work in the women's and lesbian movements and the struggle inside our organization for women's leadership and solidarity have moved us to expand and deepen our analysis of women's liberation. The urgency of having an anti-imperialist analysis and strategy for the women's movement has accelerated.

The US ruling class with Carter in the lead has been applying its own strategy aimed at wiping out national liberation movements and women's liberation as well. This strategy centers on increased genocide against oppressed nation peoples in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America and upon Black, Puerto Rican, Native American, Chicano, Latino and Asian people inside the US. The administration has made increasing attacks on all the gains the women's movement achieved, all with the aim of consolidating white and male supremacist control of white working class women.

The reinstitution of the death penalty, the court rulings against busing, Alan Bakke's cry of "reverse discrimination," the mass deportation of undocumented workers, the increasing sterilization of Third World women and the growth of white supremacist organizations like the Klan and the Nazis in the prisons and in white working class communities are all part of renewed assaults on oppressed nations within the borders of the US.

Newspaper headlines also document the breadth and seriousness of renewed attacks against white women. The denial of federal monies for abortion, affirmative action setbacks, open court support for rapists and anti-gay legislation and campaigns are some of the ways that the state is moving to control white working class women's lives.

These assaults on national liberation and women's liberation are not arbitrary flukes. The core of Carter's strategy is to contain revolution. The growth of national liberation movements, especially in Southern Africa, causes the US ruling class to step up its attempts to reinforce its world-wide hegemony.

To fight this reactionary offensive, women must arm themselves with a correct analysis of the imperialist system. We need a political line

that explains the relationship of national oppression and women's oppression and the ways in which white and male supremacy operate inside the white working class.

The battle over politics and political line does not take place primarily in the pages of pamphlets or newspapers. Women and oppressed nation peoples do battle every day in their homes, at their jobs, in the schools and in the US prisons. Political struggle is waged in every city across the country; choices are becoming sharper and clearer. The importance of a revolutionary political line is to explain why such fierce battles are occurring—and point up how to build a movement which can win. This is why we offer our views on the subject in this pamphlet.

Political line makes a difference. Wrong, opportunist politics in the male-dominated left have denied the reality of women's oppression. These lines represent women's liberation as a struggle for "democratic rights" and ignore the special role of women's oppression in imperialist society, reducing women's oppression to a class question and equalizing the situation of working class women with that of working class men. Opportunism denies the reality of male supremacist power and privilege which exist in every sphere of US society. These political lines aid the enemy in assaulting women and undercut women's efforts to fight back.

Within the white women's movement the most dangerous opportunist lines are those which have downplayed the importance of national oppression, viewing the conditions and experiences of all women as the same. These lines ignore and therefore reinforce the brutally different forms of oppression that Third World women face daily. These politics are based on white supremacy. They prevent the development of international solidarity between women of the oppressor nation and women of the oppressed nations, without which a strong women's movement cannot be built.

The International Women's Year Convention (Nov. 1977, Houston, Tex.) will be a testing ground for the effectiveness of the current state strategy against women. It will be a battlefield where the KKK, the John Birch Society and the Nazis will attempt to do the state's dirty work. Opposed to them will be the forces for women's liberation, gay liberation and national liberation mounting a counter-offensive.

We dedicate this pamphlet to a victory at Houston and to the final defeat of US imperialism and all the forces of white supremacy and male supremacy.

OVERVIEW

The history of class society is also the history of women's oppression—the enforced supremacy of one half of the world's people over the other half. Women's oppression cannot be understood outside the context of class society, nor when it is superficially treated as identical in nature and content with the struggles of the oppressed classes and peoples.

Our PFOC pamphlet, written by women of the oppressor nation in the US, deals primarily with what we know most about—the situation and conditions of white women under imperialism. We avoid, as much as possible, generalizing our own experiences as if they were the experience of all women. This has been an all-too-often practice among white women and it is national chauvinist because it masks the critical distinctions between women of the oppressed nations and white women. Chauvinist attitudes like these are a major obstacle to the unity of women of the oppressed and the oppressor nations.

White supremacy in the women's movement limits our knowledge and understanding of Third World women's history and struggles. We need to study and learn from women of the oppressed nations so that we can support their struggles for national liberation and against their special oppression in the most effective ways possible. This is the heart of our fight against white supremacy among oppressor nation women.

The fight for women's liberation is a central part of the revolutionary struggle in the US. A correct political line on women is a necessary basis for building revolutionary communist organization in the oppressor nation. PFOC is committed to building a party which recognizes the centrality of women's liberation and the formation of a women's movement based on internationalist politics. Our task now is to deepen our understanding and analysis of women's oppression and how it is rooted in the entire imperialist system. This is the necessary basis for building a self-consciously anti-imperialist movement of women in the oppressor nation. To do this requires that we expose the impact of white supremacy among white women, and the critical differences between women's oppression in the oppressor and oppressed nations. It also means that we must identify and attack the prevailing practices and institutions of male supremacy everywhere.

US IMPERIALISM

We live under the most developed form of capitalist class society—imperialism. The US has pushed the system of imperialism to its extreme limits. Everywhere the impact of US imperialism is evident. In response, from Viet Nam to Southern Africa, Wounded Knee and Attica, oppressed nations and their peoples are launching wars of national liberation to loosen and forever destroy imperialism's hold on their lands, lives and destinies. Those who battle against women's oppression must analyze the entire system of imperialism in all its manifestations if they are to be victorious.

Separating women's oppression and liberation from the struggle against imperialism means chopping up reality. It will not provide a foundation for building solidarity with the armies of national liberation who are fighting the imperialist system world-wide. For a true picture of the interrelationships of national, class and women's struggle, the science of Marxism-Leninism has to be applied to history so that present contradictions can be understood.

Imperialism is the highest stage of the capitalist system. Capitalism rests on competition. Workers are forced to compete with other workers so that they can sell their labor power to make a living. Capitalists compete with other capitalists for larger shares of the market, cheaper labor, new sources of raw materials and resources, and for ever greater profits. As an economic political system, capitalism depends on continual expansion. Its need for new markets, untapped supplies of land, minerals and resources, and increasing need for the cheapest labor compels capitalism to multiply its spheres of control by leaps and bounds.

The fact that capitalism is compelled to expand was the motive for the colonial conquest of North and South America, Africa and Asia by the capitalist countries. It was the motive force behind WWI—a war which resulted in the re-division of the entire world into a small handful of *oppressor* nations and great numbers of *oppressed* nations. This re-division of the world marked the fact that capitalism had become cramped within its own boundaries. "Free competition" had led to a high stage of concentrated production and capital (monopoly), bank capital had merged with industrial capital to become finance capital, monopoly established trusts and consolidated its control over the government (state). As a culmination of all these contradictions, WWI

resulted in victorious revolution against capitalist imperialism. In Czarist Russia the Bolsheviks overthrew the old state and set themselves the task of building a socialist society.

These events provoked further large-scale changes that shook the whole world. The most characteristic change that imperialism brought forth was the fact that a small section of the world's nations enslaved the majority of the world's population. The world became divided into oppressor and oppressed nations. This division also gave birth to a further development in the world-wide class struggle—revolutionizing the content of the national liberation struggle worldwide.

In the days of rising capitalism, national struggles were part of the anti-feudal bourgeois democratic revolutions that ushered in the collapse of the feudal system and the advancement of capitalism. This is no longer the case in the era of imperialism. Today, the road towards socialism is not contingent on one country or one struggle. Instead, it is pushed forward on many different fronts—the most leading is the national liberation movements. The liberation struggles of oppressed nations and peoples, when organized and led in a revolutionary way, now contribute to the defeat of imperialism and national liberation becomes a road to international socialist (proletarian) revolution.

Modern empires, in their push for expansion and in their rivalries, break up pre-capitalist social boundaries. This not only breaks up old state lines, it also produces new combinations of resistance. Nation-forming in the course of revolutionary wars of national liberation occurs. Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau are nations which were forged in struggle from tribes which had formerly had different languages and separate economies in varied regions.

For the US, the concept of oppressor and oppressed nations has particular significance. US imperialism has its historic roots in the violent conquest of whole nations of peoples, their lands and their riches. The systematic murder of Native Americans, the theft of their beautiful and plentiful lands, resulted in the enforced captivity of Native American women, men and children on reservations. Treaties were made and broken to suit the newly-immigrated white settlers' drive for more land and money. 400 years ago, Black Africans were brutally kidnapped, bound in chains and dragged with much resistance onto slave ships bound for the US colonies. In the British colonies of North America, Black Africans were held in chattel slavery to provide plantation labor and servants.

The capital necessary for early US industrial development was obtained by this *forcible expropriation of whole nations of peoples, land and*

labor. It is a history of enslavement, robbery, destruction and genocide.

This history is not a collection of obsolete facts for the scholar. Its real meaning can be seen in the qualitatively different life that Black, Native American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Latino and other Third World peoples experience daily. The peoples of these oppressed nations, internal to the US, live under the constant domination and control of the imperialists, enforced by the white US oppressor nation as such. From the early revolts of the Black liberation and anti-slavery movement for freedom, land and independence; from Native peoples' wars for sovereignty and self-determination and the Mexican wars of resistance; to the decades-old battle for Puerto Rican independence—oppressed nations directly colonized by the US state are leading the war internally against the US imperial monster.

CONTRADICTIONS IN THE WHITE WORKING CLASS

A direct condition of the imperialist exploitation of internal and external colonies has been an extremely high rate of profits. This has meant that the US ruling class also used these super-profits (extracted from the sweat and blood of Third World nations) to materially bribe the white working class of the oppressor nation. These bribes take the form of real privileges for all white people: better housing, better working conditions and access to higher pay, and real power over the lives of oppressed nation peoples.

The material privileges conceded to the white working class and all members of the oppressor nation are institutionalized in white supremacy, the system of relative privileges for white people over peoples of color, and they go hand-in-hand with myths of white superiority and US arrogance. In some of their most extreme forms, these material privileges can be seen operating in the case of Dessie Woods, a Black woman who defended herself and a friend against a white rapist. Dessie's defense of herself saved her life and got her 22 years in the Georgia Women's Institute of Corrections. The courts, laws and prisons all say Dessie as a Black woman had no right to fight back against the 400-year old white colonial terror against Black women and their people. KKK headman David Duke's recent announcement of his intentions to mobilize Klansmen to patrol the border area to keep out "illegals," is another expression of the power and privileges that white people exercise over peoples of color. Privilege for white working people and the enforcement of white supremacy permeates the institutions of imperialism—its prisons, courts, schools, hospitals, welfare and armed forces. They have

all functioned as a powerful source of social control, blunting the objective contradictions that exist between the ruling class and the white working class. Privilege blunts the objective class contradictions by tying the white working class to empire. Privilege blocks solidarity with the oppressed by promoting competition of white workers against the colonized nations and thus uses the white working class to maintain the empire. You can't defend a stake in the system and fight it at the same time.

It is true that the ultimate collective interests of the white working class lie in making anti-imperialist revolution and in creating a socialist society. Nevertheless the white working class, as such, has failed to move as a revolutionary class, in solidarity with the national liberation struggles. White supremacy, based on the material stake of the white working class, has outweighed the class duties of proletarian internationalism. The dominance of opportunism means that the interests of narrow, small exploiter ruling class sections of the population are being pursued at the expense of the most oppressed. In the US, the dominance of opportunism means the continuation of white supremacy and male supremacy. Opportunism still permeates the revolutionary and working class movements of the oppressor nation. Opportunism still postpones the defeat of imperialism and deters victorious revolution.

A hard, long struggle confronts white revolutionaries committed to making anti-imperialist revolution. The history of the white working class, with its many and often cited examples of hard, militant struggle, nevertheless has always carried within itself the counter-revolutionary worm of trying to hold onto white privilege, as in the Boston school bus struggles. When the white working class and the white left move to confront the deep grip of white supremacy and fight in unbreakable solidarity with the oppressed nations, then, and only then, will the white working class be able to fully realize its historic potential as an exploited and revolutionary working class.

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION UNDER IMPERIALISM

The super-exploitation of women was also a source of early capitalist accumulation and women's oppression continues as a pillar of US imperialism at present. Women's labor, waged and unwaged, is directly and indirectly profitable and socially valuable to imperialism. The historical basis for the oppression of women throughout class society has been rooted in women's role as the reproducers, socializers and maintainers of the labor force.

Under imperialism, women's oppression has become defined within the framework of their double function: as unwaged reproducers, socializers and maintainers of the labor force in the home; and as super-exploited members of the wage labor force, primarily in the reserve army of labor. These oppressive functions are maintained and reinforced by male supremacist institutions, ideology and privilege which extend into every area of women's lives: political, social, cultural, psychological and sexual.

The principal contradiction of imperialism is between oppressor and oppressed nations. This means that the nature of women's oppression is determined by their position in oppressor and oppressed nations and has a qualitatively different content and meaning for oppressed nation women than for white women in the US. The ways that colonized women are oppressed by male supremacy is defined by their position in an oppressed nation. Oppressed nation women reproduce a nationally oppressed labor force and are the subjects of imperialist, genocidal attacks on their peoples through forced sterilization, prisons and the destruction of their families. They are the most super-exploited and oppressed sector of the wage labor force.

In contrast, white women share in the relative power and privilege accorded to all white people in a white supremacist society. Although white women are oppressed as women and the great majority are oppressed as part of the working class, their complicity with the institutions of white supremacy and the ideology of national chauvinism presents a most formidable obstacle to solidarity with women of oppressed nations and the creation of an anti-imperialist movement of women within the oppressor nation.

Within the oppressor nation white working class, women have the most to gain by overturning the institutions of white supremacy and male supremacy. Resistance to oppression by white working class women under imperialism gives them the potential to lead in the fight against white supremacy and male supremacy. The common aspects of all women's oppression under imperialism as reproducers of the labor force, as participants in the reserve army of labor and as victims of male supremacist institutions and ideology provides a special basis for the development of solidarity between women of oppressor and oppressed nations. Based on a firm commitment to uphold self-determination for oppressed nations, white working class women can lead in the development of international solidarity and revolutionary movement within the oppressor nation working class.

Male supremacy is a system of privilege to ensure the power of men over women. It is an enemy to the liberation of all oppressed peo-

ples. It institutionalizes economic, legal, political, psychological and sexual privileges for men and facilitates women's oppression, national oppression and class exploitation. It is one of the major props of empire within the oppressor nation working class. Male supremacy bribes men with privileges to enlist their support in the suppression of women. It comprises one of the strongest material divisions within the working class which must be destroyed to advance class and national struggle against imperialism and to accomplish the liberation of

women.

For too long, the left and revolutionary movement in the oppressor nation has refused to take up the struggle against male supremacy and for women's liberation. That is, it refuses to attack one of the strongest bulwarks of imperialism. Within the oppressor nation the struggle for women's liberation is a basic part of the struggle for socialist revolution and a new political order which will eliminate the material basis for all forms of oppression and exploitation.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Women's oppression is as old as class society. Male supremacy and the suppression of women developed historically as a means of insuring private property and the maintenance of ruling class power. In order to fully understand the specific nature and function of women's oppression under imperialism, it is necessary to take a historical look at the transformations which have occurred in the structure of women's oppression and male supremacy in different stages of class society.

The first division of labor in human society was between women and men. It was based on women's reproductive and nurturing capacities, which centered in the home. In addition to their work in bearing and raising children, women developed agriculture, architecture, medicine, weaving and other crafts. Women's work was recognized as socially valuable work, central to the life of the whole community. Women's role in reproduction as the center of the community was recognized through the institution of mother-right which meant that descent and inheritance were defined through the mother.

The domestication of animals and the further developments in agriculture provided the communities the capacity to produce surplus goods beyond what was needed for immediate survival. It was the existence of surplus that created the basis for private accumulation and the acquisition of private property and made possible the economic survival of individual families apart from the tribal clan. Private property thus laid the foundation for the transformation of society, creating whole new divisions and power relationships among the people. With the emergence of economic inequality came the beginning of class society—the division of people into propertied and unpropertied classes based on their relationships to the means of production.

MALE SUPREMACY AND CLASS SOCIETY

It is not fully understood how men first assumed control over the accumulated surplus and private property. We do know that the separation of the family from the clan and the development of the institution of monogamy were social expressions of the rise of private property. Herding and animal husbandry — men's work — were the main ways that surplus was accumulated. As the cattle and tools for herding and tending the animals belonged to men, in turn the commodities, riches and slaves received in exchange for surplus cattle, etc. became concentrated in the hands of men. Conflicts arose between men as heads of individual families and the clan; between wanderers and people with more fixed locations. Increasing wealth made men's positions more important than those of women.

This much is clear, that in order to insure that power stayed within the hands of the propertied men, a means had to be developed to control women's role in reproduction — a role that had been held in awe by men until that time. With the advent of private property, inheritance assumed a role of new importance. Under the system of mother-right (descent through the mother), men could not assure themselves control over the generational continuity of property rights to surplus goods and commodities. So it was that the system of mother-right was overturned, and patrilineal descent was established in its place, a system which has continued to this day. Patrilineal descent could only be assured if women's sexuality was controlled and tied to one man. To accomplish this, severe sexual restrictions such as virginity, monogamy, fidelity, and bans against homosexuality were placed upon women.

These taboos, designed to insure paternity, bound women's sexuality to reproduction.

Women's powerless role was enforced by the patriarchal family. Women, once independent within the clan, were now forced into total dependence in the monogamous family, and became servants of families controlled by men. This was backed up by the political, legal, ideological and military domination of ruling class men. Before class society the whole population had banded together to use weapons and arms for the common defense of the clan or tribe. While there was an existing division of labor (old, young, women, men), all were able to make contributions to the common defense. This all changed with the need to control and protect private property. The propertied classes disarmed the general population, and established small standing bodies of armed men to uphold their own power over all the others. From that time on, women have been almost totally excluded from the more direct forms of power and control, including the use of arms. This has assured women's physical dependence on men for the well-being and defense of themselves and their children.

As class society developed, male supremacist structures were built, and privilege among men of all classes was cultivated. This was the only way that the ruling class could insure that women of all classes would reproduce and rear children according to the needs of the propertied ruling class and its new system.

The system of privilege for men of all classes contained contradictions. While the majority of men were disarmed and powerless on the whole, the institution of the patriarchal family gave men real power over the lives of women. This contradiction, between the exploitation and oppression of men as part of a lower class on the one hand, and their relative power and privilege over women on the other, has continued to operate over the centuries and is a central contradiction under imperialism today.

The oppression of women and the rise of private property did not occur all at once or easily. There was resistance on the part of women. Much of what is known about women's resistance to their forcible subjugation is chronicled in early mythology which tells the story of strong independent women like Artemis, Medea and Athena and the women of Lesbos. These myths portray a period of conflict and contention over power and control.

CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT

Before capitalism, women's role in production and reproduction among the lower classes was mainly located within the family. The feudal family was the unit of production in

agriculture, and women worked in producing goods in the home and in the fields directly for use inside the family and for their overlords.

The collapse of feudalism, and the rise of capitalism as the dominant world system, was based on the fact that capitalism was a more productive economic system compared with feudalism and slavery. Capitalism is based on the private accumulation of capital by the capitalist, bourgeois ruling class through the extraction of surplus value from the workers during the labor process. The labor power of workers is sold in the labor market on a competitive basis and, as Marx said, "wage labor rests solely on competition between the workers." The compulsory labor of the serf on the land or of the slave owned by the master is replaced by free workers who are driven by necessity to sell themselves on a competitive basis in the labor market. In this way, the value of labor power came to be defined by its price in the labor market.

Under capitalism, women's labor in the home, as reproducers and producers, became devalued as it has no direct exchange value — no sale value — to the capitalists. Women's labor in the home became economically invisible in market terms because it didn't produce objects which could be exchanged for a tangible economic equivalent. Women's primary work, their work/in reproducing and in producing use value in the home (goods to be directly consumed at home and not offered for sale) remained outside of the capitalist market economy. This definition has degraded the real social importance and value of women's work in the home and enforces upon women a competitive disadvantage within the labor market.

CONQUEST AND THE CONQUERED

Capitalist development rests on and fosters expansion — the conquest of lands and peoples. The civilization and culture and the enormous wealth and productivity of modern imperialism is situated mainly in Europe and in the settler colonies which imposed European colonization upon huge parts of Asia, Africa, Oceania, Australia, and the Americas. All this imperial wealth and affluence is derived from its origin in the seizure of lands and resources and the genocide and enslavement of millions of human beings who were part of the conquered, oppressed and enslaved nations. US capitalist accumulation and development was itself based first and foremost on the conquest of Native American lands, the genocide of Native peoples by European settlers, and on the kidnap and enslavement of Black African women and men.

Most of the European settlers came to the North American colonies as indentured ser-

vants, poor farmers, transported convicts and as religious dissenters. At first these positions provided a significant basis for establishing unity of white servants with Black slaves. But the developing bourgeoisie found ways to divert the poorer European settlers into protecting and ensuring the rule of the slaveowners and merchants. The bait of land and property was used to enlist the settlers to aid in the suppression of Native peoples. Slavery was legislated into a permanent, perpetual condition for Blacks. At the same time, white indentured servants were allowed to work out fixed terms of service which were not passed on to their children. Laws were instituted which punished any alliance between whites and Blacks. Poor whites were armed to serve as vigilante slave catchers. This destroyed the developing unity between Black slaves and white indentured servants and tied the lower classes of whites into maintaining the property and rule of the slaveowners and bourgeoisie. This blunted the contradictions between the lower classes of whites and their own rulers and exploiters.

The nature of the oppression which women faced developed according to whether they were part of a conquering or conquered people. White women, mainly from Europe, came to the United States as bond servants or as wives of free settlers. In both cases these women were subjected to heavy male supremacist oppression through the exploitation of their labor, and their lack of legal, economic and political rights. But the fact that they were white meant that they could often times earn their way to freedom, while Black African women, forcibly kidnapped from their countries, were consigned to permanent servitude.

As wives, white women settled and developed lands robbed from the Native Americans. These land-thefts were based on the armed repression and destruction of Native women, men and children in which white women participated. White women's conditions of powerlessness and dependency on men bound them tightly to white supremacist society. The well-being and freedom of women and their children depended on their white supremacy. Laws, which subjected white bondswomen who bore Black children to extended

terms of service, are a clear example of how the oppression of white women was made to serve the white supremacist system of Black slavery.

18TH AND 19TH CENTURY DEVELOPMENTS

The development of the US as a capitalist, oppressor nation was also consolidated through the male supremacist super-exploitation of white working class women. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, white working class women and their children were the mainstay of the new industrial work force at a time when the majority of men were primarily working in crafts and agricultural production. Women's super-exploitation under terrible, unsafe working conditions was an important factor in the accumulation of capital and in the development of US monopoly capitalism/imperialism.

Looking at the conditions of Black women as slaves, it is strikingly clear that white supremacy and national oppression defined the oppression of Black women in brutally different ways than white women's oppression. Black women, bound in slavery, were subject to vicious forms of oppression along with Black men and children. It was the labor of Black slaves which provided the basis for much of the early capitalist accumulation in the US and around the world. Black women, reproducers of a slave labor force, were bought and sold for their "breeding capacities," and their children were sold to the highest bidder. Black slave families were deliberately torn apart for profit and in an effort to split up any unity of Black resistance to the master. Black women were raped and sexually assaulted as a form of terrorist counter-insurgency. But Black women turned their special forms of oppression into a basis for resistance in the slave community whenever possible. In the master's house, where women held positions of trust, and in the slave-quarters, away from the eye of the master and the overseer, Black women devised particular forms of sabotage, resistance and insurgency which played an invaluable role in overthrowing the institution of slavery. Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman are two of the countless examples of heroic Black women leaders in this period.

THE STRUCTURE OF WOMEN'S OPPRESSION UNDER IMPERIALISM

IMPERIALISM

The transition from capitalism to imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, is marked by the complete division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations, the consolidation of huge monopolies and the rule of finance capital. These changes transformed the role of women's oppression within the economic and social institutions of society. The production of most goods for family consumption became totally incorporated into the market structure of expanding monopoly capitalism/imperialism. For example, the production of food and clothing stopped being centered in the home. Instead they were produced, sold and bought as commodities within the market structure. Women's labor in the home lost the last remains of its directly visible economic function and value.

The elimination of chattel slavery as an economic institution changed the relationship of Black women and men to the economy. Black people were forced into the role of a reserve army of labor — a permanent pool of super-exploited workers who are shifted in and out of the labor force depending on the immediate needs of the imperialist economy. Black women began to get paid minimal wages for the same jobs they had done under slavery: servants, cooks and laundresses in white homes.

Women's work within oppressor and oppressed nations began to be defined by the double shift: one shift of work in the home and one in the regular labor force. We will examine the double shift in some detail since it is the material basis of women's oppression under imperialism.

THE DOUBLE SHIFT

The first half of women's double shift is their work as unwaged reproducers and maintainers of the labor force in the home. This work is

made to seem like a natural, inseparable extension of women's biology, a private service she does for her children and her husband. In fact imperialism must have this reproducing, training and maintaining of its workers.

At the same time, women have a distinct relationship to the labor force. They form an important part of the reserve army of labor. Increasingly as imperialism has developed, women have also been incorporated as a stable, super-exploited section of the regular labor force, in occupations set apart and segregated for women.

The exact character of the double shift has undergone changes as imperialism itself has changed and gone into crisis. But still, it is this double function which is the basis for imperialist control over women and their labor. The double shift acts as a double bind on women. The responsibility which women have for work in the home and their central role in caring for children materially limits women's capacity to hold jobs on a full time basis. Lack of childcare and medical care for children helps place women at a competitive disadvantage in the labor market, keeping them in the most transient, super-exploited areas of work. Ideologically, women's work in the home is used to justify women's super-exploited position in the labor force. Popular explanations are that "women don't have to work" or that they aren't reliable workers due to their home responsibilities.

Thus, because of the super-exploited nature of jobs available to them, women are forced to depend on men and marriage in order to survive and raise children. Thus the double bind which women are placed in helps assure the reproduction and production of the labor force according to imperialist needs and at the same time provides the basis for the extraction of super-profits from women's work in the labor force.

Within the oppressor nation, the traditional nuclear family is structured to institutionalize the double shift. But the double shift is an economic and social structure which shapes the oppression of all women inside and outside families, with and without children. Under imperialism, women cannot escape the impact of

the double shift. They can only organize to overthrow its source: the imperialist system.

WOMEN OF OPPRESSED NATIONS AND THE DOUBLE SHIFT

National oppression and white supremacy mean that the double shift has a qualitatively greater impact on women of the oppressed nations. In the home, oppressed nation women struggle to bear and raise children in the face of sterilization campaigns, brutal white supremacist school systems, and armed repression in their communities. They labor to maintain their families against constant attacks by the state through welfare laws, imprisonment, forced migration.

Chronic high levels of unemployment and extremely low wages for oppressed nation men due to their position in the reserve army of labor, has placed great pressure on colonized women to try to work for wages to insure the survival of themselves and their families. Economic pressures to find jobs have split oppressed nation families apart as one member goes to look for work.

Third World women have historically had a higher rate of participation in the labor force than white women, and their jobs have always been the worst in the society. National oppression violates every aspect of colonized women's lives. The impact of the double shift on oppressed nation women must be understood from this perspective.

THE DOUBLE SHIFT AND CLASS CONTRADICTIONS IN THE OPPRESSOR NATION

Within the oppressor nation the double shift has the most direct impact on working class women. However, to some extent the double shift affects women of all classes, shaping their life experience and tying them to men. In order to understand this, we have to examine how white supremacy and male supremacy affect women's class situation.

White women's class position cannot be viewed outside of the relationship between class and national struggle under imperialism. From the beginning of US history, white working class women have participated in the privileges of white supremacy. They have helped white men enslave, suppress and exterminate Black peoples and Native peoples. In auxiliary capacities, white working class women have supported imperialist, colonizing wars of aggression. While they have participated in and led movements in solidarity with oppressed nations (see history sections), their overall role

has been successfully controlled by white supremacy and empire. A class analysis of women in the oppressor nation must always take into account the negative impact of white supremacy on revolutionary class consciousness and struggle.

It is also impossible to define white women's class situation outside of an understanding of women's oppression in male supremacist society. In male supremacist society, women's class position is mainly defined through that of their fathers and husbands. For instance, women who have petit-bourgeois husbands (professional jobs, small business owners) receive privileges as part of the petit-bourgeoisie in their roles as wives and mothers. Their own relationship to the labor force is not usually the main issue in determining their class position, because women's primary job is still defined as their work in the home. Women who hold working class jobs but have petit-bourgeois husbands, are in a different position from women workers whose husbands are members of the working class.

Women's class position can change through individual relationships with men, mainly through marriage. Working class women can "work their way up" by marrying a man of the petit-bourgeois class. This possibility has an important effect on women, even if it doesn't actually occur that often. It defines the way women see "advancement" in society as being tied to men and marriage. And it influences how they compete with each other.

On the other hand, women who break away from petit-bourgeois husbands are usually forced into the working class. Only a small percentage of women can maintain petit-bourgeois positions independently on the basis of their own schooling or training. Working class women who leave their husbands are forced into lower, more oppressed sectors of the working class.

The double shift as an institution most directly affects working class women. Pressures on women of the petit-bourgeoisie to work are not the same. When these women do work, they can afford to hire domestic workers to help with housework and child care. However, the existence of the double shift as an institution designed to maintain women's super-exploitation and oppression, affects petit-bourgeois women as well. The scarcity of jobs for women and their super-exploited nature helps keep these women dependent on their husbands. Their role in the world is still mainly as wives and mothers, dependent on men. There is a contradiction between their stake in the imperialist class system and their interest in changing the oppression they experience as women. The interest which petit-bourgeois women have in overthrowing the institutions

of male supremacy provides a basis for building a cross-class women's movement in the oppressor nation.

Wealthy, bourgeois women are also affected by male supremacist definitions of women's role. However, the extent of their power as part of the imperialist ruling class severely limits their potential to participate in any revolutionary movement. Although few women independently own the means of production, they get immense wealth, power and privileges through their fathers and husbands. Even when they break away from individual men, they can usually maintain their wealth through inheritances or large divorce settlements. Although wealthy women have some reasons to give up their power and position to fight male supremacy, their stake in the class system is the dominant aspect of their relationship to imperialism.

Among oppressor nation women, working class women are the leading revolutionary force. Their subjugation to all the institutions of male supremacy gives them the clearest interest in overturning male supremacy, white supremacy and the whole exploitative class system of imperialist society. Their central role in reproducing and producing the white working class, and their work in key areas of the imperialist economy put white working class women in a strategically powerful position. A revolutionary cross-class women's movement will be led by working class women committed to anti-imperialist, internationalist politics.

WORK IN THE HOME

The fact that women's labor in the home tends to be individualized, isolated and seemingly outside the framework of the imperialist economy, is a block to the collective consciousness among women of the social and economic importance of their work in the home.

Part of the ideology which supports women's labor in the home is the myth that housework and childcare are easy and fulfilling jobs for women. The image of the perfect mother/housewife succeeds in making many women blame the frustrations of their situation on their own inadequacies rather than on male supremacy.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE OPPRESSOR NATION

Women's relationship to reproducing and raising children is usually analyzed from a

totally male supremacist point of view. In order to develop a strategy for women, we must also analyze the contradictions surrounding women's central relationship to children from the same revolutionary, women's liberationist perspective that we apply everywhere.

Consciousness is shaped by people's relationship to the means of production and reproduction. Women have the main responsibility for supporting the everyday development of new human beings. Much of women's relationship to their children centers on providing for their survival and preparing them for the future. Under imperialism, this responsibility can be understood in one of two ways. The first, and dominant one for white women at this time, is to teach children to compete on the basis of white and male supremacy. The second is to be committed to revolutionary change for future generations of all children. This means choosing collective and international solidarity over individual security and privilege for your own child.

The power of white women's relationship to children has been institutionalized by imperialism to serve its own ends. The entire system of white and male supremacist institutions — the family, the schools, the welfare system, the mental hospitals, the health system, the prisons — deforms white women's relationship to their children. Women's commitment to their children is locked up within the framework of white and male supremacy. The economic, psychological and physically violent power which individual men exercise over women and children in the family further chains women to the needs of imperialist society.

White women's relationship to children can provide a basis for understanding the stark oppression which women and children of oppressed nations face. But white women have to grasp the enormous impact of national oppression on motherhood in order to struggle in solidarity with oppressed nation women.

REPRODUCTION AND RESISTANCE AMONG WOMEN OF OPPRESSED NATIONS

Centuries of US national oppression and colonial domination have meant that Native American and Black women, and more recently Chicana and Puerto Rican women, have a very different relationship to the reproduction and raising of children. For these women, the raising of children is an act of resistance. All the pressures of imperialism are employed to force colonized women to have only so many children as the imperialists want; furthermore the system wants to control the ways in which the children are raised and taught.

Women of oppressed nations have fought consistently for the survival of their peoples against vicious population control programs, schools which mutilate and destroy their children's history and future, health care systems which perpetuate disease and use oppressed peoples as experimental guinea pigs, and the armed force of the state which is brought to bear on oppressed nation youth through police brutality and the criminal law system. Native American women have waged a determined battle against forced sterilization practices and have fiercely opposed government policies which tear Indian children away from the reservations and their people. Black women have waged a relentless battle to keep their history, culture and future alive against all the destructive forces of slavery, lynching, forced geographic dispersal, and against the all-out offensive on the part of the US criminal law system to contain the power of Black liberation. Puerto Rican women have had to resist the devastating impact of the forced migration of half the Puerto Rican population in the past 25 years and the terrifying effects of the sterilization of 1/3 of all Puerto Rican women of childbearing age. They have led in struggles to end forced sterilization, for community control of education and for the liberation of Puerto Rico from US colonial domination to assure the future of their people and their culture. Chicana and Mexicana women have led in preserving their culture and history despite the conquest of their lands and peoples by the US imperialists and the efforts to force their assimilation into dominant Anglo society. They have fought for bilingual education and against repressive immigration and deportation policies which have split up their families.

Dominant bourgeois ideology defines motherhood on white terms. It sets up norms and standards which compound the obstacles that women of oppressed nations face in bringing up children. Imperialism deforms and mutilates the relationships of all women to children. It traps white working class women into white and male supremacist definitions of motherhood and severely punishes those who attempt to rebel. But women of oppressed nations are faced with daily life and death choices about their children which white working class women do not have to face.

WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHILDREN AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Under imperialism, the relationship of white women to children contains a basis for building revolutionary consciousness and international solidarity but there is also a basis for reactionary white supremacist consciousness and ac-

tions. The ferocity with which women can be led to fight white supremacist privilege for their children has been shown in the ways white working class women have engaged in anti-busing struggles around the country in recent years. For most white women involved, their stake in white supremacist and male supremacist privilege for their children has been the dominant aspect.

But over the past ten years there has also been a growing movement among white women in solidarity with the struggles of colonized women and their children. Under Third World women's leadership, white women have fought in anti-sterilization struggles, education and childcare battles, and for community control of healthcare. The increasing efforts on the part of the state to more thoroughly control white women's relationship to children (anti-abortion legislation, anti-busing campaigns, anti-gay attacks, welfare policy) indicates how much of a challenge white women's role in these struggles represents to imperialist society.

The struggle for women's liberation within the oppressor nation must build on the progressive aspects of white women's relationship to children; their potential to understand that the future of all children and peoples depends on the victory of national liberation, women's liberation and anti-imperialist class struggle.

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION AND WAGED LABOR

Women's labor at salaried jobs is the other side of women's double shift. The maintenance of this aspect of women's oppression is crucial to the imperialist system. Women of oppressor and oppressed nations are used as a central part of the reserve army of labor — a pool of workers who can be shifted in and out of jobs as the economy expands and contracts. This means that women are available for super-exploited work which is an enormous source of super-profits for imperialism. The current rate of women's participation in the labor force represents a steady increase over the course of this century and particularly since 1945.

Almost half of the total US labor force is now women. Approximately 90% of women have held waged jobs at some time in their lives. The double shift has become a daily reality for more and more women, and women's relationship to the political economy of the imperialist system has been assuming new significance. These

changing factors in women's relationship to the means of production have heightened the contradictions of women's oppression under imperialism and opened up new potential for revolutionary movement among women.

WOMEN'S JOBS AND THE IMPERIALIST ECONOMY

Traditionally, most women's work was an industrial extension of their work in the home, defined by clear sex roles: mill work and clothing manufacture, food preparation, nursing, teaching, secretary, etc. Now wage-earning women are concentrated in the two sectors of the economy that have expanded most rapidly since 1945: the finance industry (banking and insurance) and the state (public sector) institutions such as schools, healthcare, welfare, government offices. The growth and expansion of these sectors reflects the tendency of the imperialist economy to transfer an increasing amount of industrial production to the super-exploited labor of oppressed nations outside the US borders. At the same time, the development of a massive state apparatus has become necessary to contain the growing contradictions within the borders of the US which inevitably result from the resistance of oppressed nations throughout the world to imperialist domination. Women's labor in the finance industry and the state sector is of key strategic importance within the imperialist state.

Waged labor is segregated on the basis of sex. Limitation on the jobs which women can hold is enforced to maintain super-exploited wage levels and the oppressive working conditions of women. This super-exploitation causes women to be dependent on individual men and the welfare system. Thus, the economic privileges of white working class men in the labor market are based on preventing women and oppressed nation peoples from competing for their jobs.

Women suffer many other forms of sexual oppression in the labor force. Women usually bear the economic responsibility for childcare while they are at work. They rarely receive paid pregnancy leave. Women are frequently the victims of sexual molestation at work, an inevitable result of male supremacist power relationships and ideology at the workplace.

COMPETITION FOR JOBS AND WHITE SUPREMACY

The limitations of women's job possibilities aggravate competition between women for work. For white women, being white is their main competitive advantage over women who are not. Increasingly, women of oppressor and oppressed nations work in the same job areas,

although there are still areas of work in which oppressed nation women are more highly concentrated: the lowest paid, lowest status jobs, primarily in service fields such as domestic work and the food industry. Within the sectors where women of oppressor and oppressed nations work together — finance and the state sector especially — white supremacist competitive structures are built in and enforced at every turn.

The expanding field of clerical work is approximately 75% women. More than 1/4 of wage earning Black and Latina women and almost 40% of wage earning white women are clerical workers. White supremacy has been enforced in this field through the increase of middle-level supervisory positions which are usually given to white women. White women hold the jobs which have more prestige, more salary and more job security, such as secretary compared to clerk. Job assignments are set up on a calculated basis to block international solidarity between women of oppressor and oppressed nations in a situation where the potential for developing this solidarity is strong.

PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS

The growth of the state institutions of white and male supremacist control has brought women of oppressor and oppressed nations into new, contradictory relationships. New forms of soft-core "professional" police jobs such as welfare worker, social worker and counselor have been developed which are mostly filled by white women. The purpose of these jobs is to control peoples of oppressed nations, women, and in part, working class men. These jobs offer higher pay and more power to white working class women than most available jobs. The privilege and security of women having these jobs depends on their supporting national and women's oppression. The white women on these jobs are pitted against oppressed nation women and peoples and against other, less privileged white women.

Increasing numbers of oppressor and oppressed nation women occupy lower echelon jobs within these state institutions and are also victimized by them as recipients of their "services." The schools, welfare system and health institutions not only affect women of different nations but their children as well. This forms a potential basis for international solidarity against the common oppressor.

THE CONTRADICTIONS MOUNT

As the crisis of imperialism grows, pressures on all women increase. The impact of the double shift on working class women's lives gets

greater. Ever-mounting inflation pushes more women to look for waged jobs. But a contracting economy means fewer available jobs and less money for social services, to childcare in particular. The competition among women for the available jobs and services heightens. Under imperialism, the greatest burden of unemployment and service cutbacks falls on

women of oppressed nations.

The choices before white working class women become clearer and sharper. They can compete on white supremacist terms for whatever jobs and services still exist or they can organize solidarity with oppressed nation women.

INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

From the beginnings of class society and male supremacy, the ruling classes have developed social institutions to maintain their control. The state is the principal instrument of ruling class power. It seemingly stands outside of class antagonisms, but in reality its over-riding function is to perpetuate the domination of the ruling class. The state in turn supports all the other institutions and bodies which reinforce its own power.

Under imperialism, the armed forces, the laws, courts and prisons, the welfare system and the press and media are all institutions designed to control oppressed nations, women and the working class. Bourgeois ideology represents them as neutral institutions which function to maintain democracy but in reality they all exist because they are required as props for the imperialist ruling class and its system.

Imperialism maintains control economically, socially, ideologically, and through direct or threatened armed violence. Direct and crude armed violence has always been a principal means of imperialist control over oppressed nations. But that violence could not suffice without imperial social control over the oppressor nation working class, which is accomplished by granting privilege and power to white people over people of color and to men over women. This system of social control is built into every institution of imperialist society.

social grouping. This distorted image hides the true social and power relationships of the state and ruling class to the family and so conceals the qualitative difference between the state's strategy for oppressor nation families and its strategy for families of oppressed nations.

Changing conditions of US imperialist society in the past thirty years have weakened the family as an institution. The growth and victory of national liberation struggles has caused strains and tensions in all the institutions of social control. The increasing participation of women within the labor force and the development of the women's liberation movement have caused significant changes in the family structure, including a mounting divorce rate and an increasing number of women-headed households.

In order to assure that the functions of the family in upholding white and male supremacy are maintained, imperialism develops new strategies. It strengthens the role of other institutions like schools, TV, and the welfare system to take over the functions which the family is no longer adequately fulfilling. However, the state also makes an increasing effort to exploit women's traditional role in the family by restricting women's basis for independence. Abortion cutbacks, elimination of affirmative action for women and of pregnancy disability, tightened welfare laws and anti-gay campaigns are all aimed at reinforcing reactionary aspects of women's traditional role in the family. However, these programs to re-entrench outdated nuclear family concepts and structure from the past also backfire on the imperialists. When women have children they can't afford or don't want, and when they have less access to better jobs, the pressures of women's double shift increase. The conditions of the entire family become more oppressive. The contradictions already tearing the family apart intensify. These explosive contradictions impact especially on white working class

THE FAMILY

Within the empire, the white nuclear family (husband, wife and children) is a strategic institution of white and male supremacy. The fact that the family is a social institution of class society is hidden by bourgeois mythology which depicts the nuclear family as a "natural"

women, opening up new potentials for building the anti-imperialist women's movement in the oppressor nation.

HOW EMPIRE TREATS THE FAMILY WITHIN OPPRESSED NATIONS

From the time that Black, Native American and Mexican families were subject to ferocious attack during the years of conquest and slavery, the imperialists have continuously tried to destroy oppressed nation families. The oppressors' aim is to frustrate their resistance to colonization and their persistent role in supporting national liberation.

During slavery, African families were forcibly torn apart, and the threat of separation was used to intimidate all slaves. Since the Civil War, Black families have been undermined by chronic unemployment and poverty. Husbands and wives have been forced to separate in order to search for work. The white supremacist program of violent rape of Black women and the lynching of Black men on phony rape charges has been a frontal attack on family and sexual relationships between Black women and men. The welfare system was established to substitute a white and male supremacist institution for individual male financial support. Repressive regulations which obstruct relationships between women and men have frustrated the efforts of Black families trying to stay together in the midst of economic crisis. Bourgeois brainwashing projects such as the Moynihan Report have attempted to blame Black women for the fact that Black families have been deliberately torn apart by imperialism. In the face of these attacks, Black people have built strong social groupings including extended families to resist national oppression.

Native peoples have fought to maintain traditional family structure and customs in the face of attacks ranging from genocide and the sterilization of 1/4 of Native women, to the forcible removal of Native children from the reservations into foster families and government schools. The institutions of Native society, including the family, are essential in the fight to preserve the Indian nations and in keeping alive their struggle for sovereignty in defiance of the state's attempts to destroy Indian people.

In addition to massive forced sterilization programs, Puerto Rican, Mexicano and Asian families have had to fight the effects of repressive immigration laws. Exclusionary immigration laws and deportation policies have functioned to split families apart, permitting male workers to enter the US only if they left their families behind.

The continuing efforts of oppressed nation peoples to maintain families in the face of imperialist attack have been critically important to their actual physical survival. The national movements have provided leading examples of political responsibility for children and youth. Schools which educate youth politically, health and food services for children and political collectives for young people are some of the ways in which national movements are fighting to assure future generations of their peoples.

The US imperial state is stepping up its attacks on oppressed nation families in the form of population control programs, more restrictive welfare laws, repressive immigration legislation and outright genocidal campaigns by the police, the courts, and the prisons. The white women's movement must join with the oppressed nation peoples in solidly resisting these wars of extermination.

In the past, the white women's movement in attempting to analyze and expose the reactionary features of the nuclear family in the oppressor nation, has liquidated the differences between oppressor and oppressed nation families, thereby imposing white supremacist definitions on colonized peoples. Understanding the importance of oppressed nation families in resisting imperialist attacks is a necessary part of building international solidarity between women of oppressor and oppressed nations.

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

Within the oppressor nation the family is legally defined by the marriage contract. The institution of marriage was originally established to assure ruling class men paternity rights in order to pass property from generation to generation. Under imperialism, marriage not only functions to perpetuate the ruling class, but it also gives the state legal and social control over relations between women and men, enforcing the material basis of women's oppression: the double shift. It ties sexual relations to the reproduction and production of the labor force by making sexual intercourse within marriage the only legal form of sexuality. It legalizes men's economic, sexual and physical power over women.

CHILDREN AND THE FAMILY

Children are powerless in the family and in society as a whole. Their very survival is dependent on conformity with their parents' expectations and values. As future generations of workers, they are subjected to society's system of rewards and punishments from birth. They are taught to expect privileges based on white

the world outside. White children are trained to identify with the demands of the dominant white oppressor nation and its empire. Boys and girls learn the difference between the social roles and power of women and men. Daily exposure to the myriad forms of inequality between women and men, mother and father, parent and child, has a powerful impact on how children come to understand their own position and the nature of the world they live in. Schools, television and the movies ensure that this indoctrination takes place.

On the other hand, no working class child grows up without attempting to struggle for their own needs and world outlook, which to some extent or another is in opposition to imperialist society, and their own family. The new generation's potential for challenging the oppressive rules and structures of imperialism is enormous. Children are not born automatically accepting the framework of imperialism or the bribes of white and male supremacist privilege. This is why the imperialists pay such close attention to the family and the school system.

In the 60's and 70's, increasing numbers of white children and youth, responding to the leadership of youth of oppressed nations, began rebelling against these institutions of social control. As the strains and contradictions of the imperialist system increase, the imperialists desperately try to prop up these institutions of social power, and women, who are primarily responsible for raising and training children, become the main targets of the repressive counter-measures.

LESBIAN AND GAY OPPRESSION IN THE OPPRESSOR NATION

Under imperialism, the oppression of lesbians and gay men is based on the imperialists' need to control women's role in reproducing and producing the labor force. That role can only be effectively enforced if women's sexuality is tied to their reproductive function within the institution of the family. When heterosexual relationships are made the only permissible channel for women to fulfill both their sexual needs and their desires to raise children, women's dependency on men within the family structure is tightened.

Homosexuality is a serious threat to these forms of male supremacist control and domination. It demonstrates that sexual relations need not be based on the reproductive function. It exposes the myths of biological determinism which are used to maintain the sexual division of labor and women's dependence and powerlessness in the society.

Because gay oppression is rooted in imperialism's need to maintain women's oppression lesbians as women have a very different relationship to male supremacy than gay men. Lesbianism directly challenges the structure of male domination and women's dependency in the family, by proving that women are capable of loving each other and that women do not have to depend on men for sexual or emotional relationships. By demonstrating that it is possible to live and raise children outside of the nuclear family structure, lesbians challenge the power of the nuclear family as an institution of social control. In their struggles to build committed relationships with other women, lesbians oppose the competitive structure which imperialist society erects between women. By showing that there are alternatives to oppressive dependency on individual men, lesbians strengthen the struggles of all women, gay and straight, against male supremacy.

Although they live outside of one particular male supremacist institution, the family, lesbians are in no way exempt from the impact of male supremacy and women's oppression under imperialism. Lesbians' lives are shaped by the double shift, and are hit particularly hard by super-exploitation in the labor market because they don't have sources of male financial support. Lesbian mothers must fight to raise children under the enormous stigmas which an anti-gay society places on them and are faced with the constant threat of losing custody of their children. Lesbians who are open about their sexuality commonly suffer job and housing discrimination, and police harassment.

The oppression of lesbians is used not only to suppress lesbians but to intimidate all women to make them stay in their place and accept their oppression. Independent women, gay or straight, are baited by being called lesbians. On the other hand, the freedom and right to be a lesbian is something which builds all women's struggle against male supremacy and women's oppression.

The oppression of gay men is also based on the imperialists' need to maintain the oppression of women. By challenging the need for sexuality to be linked to reproduction within the family, male homosexuality threatens the division of labor based on sex. Gayness in men undercuts the idea of fixed roles for men within the family, demonstrating that men can care for themselves and each other physically, emotionally and sexually. Open gay men suffer from discrimination on jobs and in housing and from police harassment. Faggot-baiting is intended to insure men's compliance with male supremacist roles in society and to deflect tendencies for men to identify with womanliness and femininity.

However, gay men are still men in a male

from white supremacist and male supremacist privilege. It is this privilege which has enabled sectors of gay men to rise within the framework of the imperialist system to become petit-bourgeois entrepreneurs. The ruling class has encouraged co-optation of the gay movement by fostering definitions of gayness and gay culture which bolster white supremacy and male supremacy rather than tear it down. Woman hating, objectified male supremacist sex roles, and the commercialization of sex are specific tendencies which have come to dominate parts of the gay men's movement. The ruling class and the media focus on the most reactionary sectors of gay society to spread mistrust and dislike among the oppressor nation working class.

The unprecedented movement of lesbians and gay men over the past ten years developed through the impact of the struggles of oppressed nations and peoples worldwide for their liberation. The changing conditions in the situation of women in imperialist society and the growth of the women's liberation movement provided the particular basis for the development of the gay liberation movement. The gay liberation movement, led by the lesbian movement, has had a profound effect on people's consciousness of gay oppression and has built a base of support for gayness on a more massive scale than ever before under imperialism.

The development of this movement has been in direct opposition to imperialism's need to maintain the structures of women's oppression. The mounting offensive against gay people over the past year represents an important front in the ruling class strategy to contain the changes which the women's and gay movements have brought about in the structures of women's oppression.

The struggle for gay liberation is part of the overall struggle for women's liberation and against US imperialism. Lesbians in particular have given strong leadership to both the women's movement and mixed anti-imperialist movement, in spite of the enormous anti-gay pressures that have been placed on them. It is a crucial time for the anti-imperialist movement and the women's movement to take a strong stand in solidarity with lesbian and gay liberation. Only such a stand can really push forward an anti-imperialist movement which can genuinely fight against white and male supremacy.

CHANGING CONDITIONS IN THE FAMILY

Over the past few decades increasing numbers of white working class women have been

experience within the family and in society as a whole. Women have taken up the fight to control their own reproductive capacities and their own role in child rearing. They've fought for their right to define their own sexuality and be lesbians. They've exposed and struggled against the male supremacist power of individual men. Women have taken up these struggles within the family and outside of it. They have brought about changing roles within the family structure and have also increased the possibilities for surviving and raising children outside of it.

As white women challenge the definitions and roles which male supremacy has forced upon them, they break a link in the chain of imperialist control. A commitment to fight white supremacy does not automatically grow from a challenge to male supremacy. But taking up the struggle against women's oppression opens women to examining the nature and sources of oppression within the society as a whole.

The imperialist state has clearly recognized the threat which this movement of women represents to the whole system of white and male supremacy and has been rapidly moving to suppress this challenge. Tightening other institutions of social control is an important part of their strategy.

OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

The family, while basic, is just one of the many oppressive imperialist institutions. We don't have the space in this pamphlet to analyze any of these other institutions in depth, but we want to include their most important aspects in our conclusions.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The public school system is responsible for training a labor force divided on the basis of white and male supremacy. Most Third World children and the majority of white working class children are channeled through the public school system. Children of oppressed nations are tracked into inferior schools, classes and courses. They are bombarded daily with white supremacist lies about their history and trained for menial jobs. One of the tasks of the school system is to identify oppressed nation rebels early. In many schools, drug therapy is used as a control to "rehabilitate" "troublemakers" which to the school authorities mostly means youth of the oppressed nations. The school

system and the juvenile "justice" system work closely to regulate and control the lives of children and young people, which often results in jail terms before many of them finish adolescence. In schools, girls are trained to be wives and clerical or service workers. They are taught to be passive, to not do as well in academics as boys, and to accept sexual inferiority as biologically determined fact. Girls are taught to compete with each other for boys, whose approval is the means of life's success. Women's role in history and the world is ignored or distorted. Girls of oppressed nations are assaulted by the combined force of white supremacist and male supremacist indoctrination and control.

Imperialism could not continue to function without the systematic social control of the US public schools. The overwhelming majority of teachers are white women; many are single mothers. Teaching is "women's work," a segregated occupation which is an extension of women's work in the home. Most women teachers work under the male supremacist domination of male principals and administrators. The job of teachers is to indoctrinate the children with the ideology of male and white supremacy; training them to take their part in the next generation of workers. A teacher's job is dependent on her willingness to support the structures of imperialism.

HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS

Healthcare is a basic human need and right. In the hands of the imperialists, it becomes a weapon. Western medicine is based on conquering symptoms with dramatic cures rather than preventing and curing disease; it is a method of healing which is by definition out of the hands of the people. Highly specialized and technical, it is designed specifically to isolate medical knowledge in the hands of a small number of highly privileged white male technicians, close to and serving the interests of the ruling class.

Healthcare institutions are the agents of forced sterilization campaigns which attack oppressed nation women in the effort to exterminate whole peoples. Oppressed nation peoples are used as experimental guinea pigs and denied medical care entirely.

The healthcare system is designed to rob all women of the control of their own reproductive systems. Childbirth is treated as a disease. The entire system of gynecological/obstetrical care reinforces the male supremacist ideology of sexual denigration of women's bodies.

The job hierarchy within healthcare institutions also reflects white and male supremacy. Oppressed nation peoples and women work at super-exploited, menial jobs in medical institu-

tions and are at the same time victims of those institutions as patients.

POLICE, LAWS, COURTS, PRISONS AND SOCIAL CONTROL

The controlling function of these and other imperialist institutions is backed up by the armed might of the state, which is brought to bear on people's lives through the criminal legal system: the police, the courts, the laws, the prisons. This system is based on genocidal forms of control against the peoples of oppressed nations.

Women's crimes reflect the position of women in this society. The overwhelming majority of women in prison are doing time for crimes of survival — non-violent crimes like forgery, shoplifting, welfare fraud and prostitution. The number of prisons being constructed is growing for women and men. As the pressures on women increase, as women move out of the home and their survival becomes more difficult, they come into increasing confrontation with the laws and rules of imperialist society. Their resistance grows. In the US today more women than ever before are being sentenced to prisons and to juvenile detention centers. As always the greatest burden of repression falls on oppressed nation women who are the majority of the women's prison population.

Many women who are not put into prisons are committed to mental institutions where they are forcibly drugged, electro-shocked and taught to believe their problems are their own fault. This form of social control has a particularly heavy impact on women. 60% of the mental patients in the US today are women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The almost total exclusion of women from access to arms is one of the clearest ways in which women are kept powerless in imperialist society. Women who do step out of line are locked up in prisons or mental institutions.

Outside of the official state violence against women, there is the state-condoned violence brought to bear on women in the home and in the streets. The threat of physical violence has a constant, terrorizing impact on women's lives. Women are trained *not* to be aggressive physically, *not* to use physical force as a means of defense or offense. Because women are literally disarmed, women are pushed to limit their activities or to depend on men for protection from other men. Women who do defend themselves, particularly colonized women, are punished for injuring their attackers.

Rape is a violent sexual institution used to terrorize and control women. Rape is a legalized part of the marriage contract. Rape is

encouraged by TV, movies and books and is commonly seen as a natural extension of male biology. In reality, rape institutionalizes sexual aggression for men as another means of enforcing passivity, fear and dependency among women.

Rape is also used as a specific form of white supremacist terror, a means of controlling the women and men of oppressed nations. From the time when Black slave women were raped by white men as a counter-insurgency tactic, white men have used rape to assert their power over Black people. At the same time, falsified charges pinning rapes of white women on Black men have been historically used to frame Black men and set them up to be lynched or put on death row. This historic use of rape and the charge of rape is one of the most searing examples of the use of white and male supremacist violence to control oppressed nation peoples.

SEXUAL REPRESSION OF WOMEN

The sexual repression of women is a powerful material force which is used by the imperialist system to control women on a very deep, physical level. Historically class society had defined women's bodies and sexuality in relationship to men, to tie sexuality to reproduction and to enforce passivity and dependence on men. The limitations on women's free exercise of their sexuality have been historically defined through rules enforcing virginity, monogamy, sexual passivity and heterosexuality. While thoroughly restricting women's relationship to their own bodies and their sexuality, women's worth has been defined largely on the basis of their sexual relations to men. The pervasive sexual objectification of women under imperialism places constant emphasis on women's ability to attract, please and keep a man through their physical appearance and sexual performance. Women who do not meet the white and male supremacist norms of physical attractiveness, including older women, are taught that they are worthless as women. Women's conformity to this systematic exploitation of their sexuality is enforced by male supremacist ideology and culture which teaches that women's physical, sexual pleasure is totally dependent on aggressive male sexuality, through myths that women like to be raped and that they must be penetrated vaginally to get any sexual pleasure.

The alienation of women from their own bodies and their sexuality is a powerful means of enforcing their dependence on individual men and their acceptance of male supremacist society. The women's movement's exposure of the role of sexual repression in controlling women has had a far-reaching impact in uncovering the lies and mythology of biological

determinism and in unleashing fighting energy of women against these controls.

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION IN THE FAMILY

The nuclear family is conditioned to reinforce the material basis of women's oppression: the double shift. Women's role in reproducing and producing the labor force is controlled through the family by making it extremely difficult for women to survive or raise children outside of the family structure. Inside the family, women's dependent, suppressed role is compounded by their loss of economic, sexual and legal rights and by the physical power which men hold over them. The isolated, private nature of the nuclear family structures also builds psychological and emotional dependence on individual men as the main source of security and support.

The nuclear family structure materially encourages competition between women. Each woman is pushed to define herself through her husband and children, not through other women. The advancement of the needs of each family takes place in competition with other families and in competition with other women. In these ways the structure of the nuclear family blocks the development of solidarity between women which is the basis for the development of a strong movement for women's liberation.

MALE AND WHITE SUPREMACY IN THE FAMILY

The power and privilege which individual men gain from their legally sanctioned position in the family gives them large stakes in the continuation of women's oppression and the system of male supremacy. Within the family the privileges they get from women's oppression are very real and materially affect their lives in millions of concrete ways. Women are held responsible to provide for the physical, emotional and sexual needs of their husbands. Through their position in the family, men maintain power over their children and their training without assuming major responsibility for childcare on a daily basis. Men are not accountable to anyone for their treatment of their wives and children. Any threat to their individual power in the family can be met with physical attacks on women or children; in nearly all cases men can count on being backed up by the state.

The nuclear, privatized structure of the family seemingly sets it apart from the openly competitive and oppressive relationships of working class life and work under imperialism. On a personal, individual level the family ac-

tually does sometimes provide a refuge. But for white working class people, and especially for men, this type of refuge really functions to promote white and male supremacy.

The family is a competitive economic unit of imperialism. Competition occurs between families of the oppressor nation working class, but primarily it consists of maintaining a competitive advantage over peoples of oppressed nations. The degree to which white working class families have privilege and security in their housing, schooling, health care, jobs, etc. is based on the structures of white supremacy and national oppression in the society as a whole. It is the struggle to maintain these privileges which have made the fight against bus-ing, integrated housing and neighborhoods a "family affair." In these mass reactionary struggles each nuclear family has the potential to function as a reserve armed unit of the imperialist state.

The white and male supremacist functions of the family cannot be separated. They act together as an integrated whole. Both white working class women and men have an objective interest in overturning the present functions of the nuclear family because they help perpetuate the imperialist system. However, women have a very different relationship to the total white and male supremacy of the family because women are the victims of male domination inside the family and in the society as a whole. The reality of women's oppression has meant that women have led in exposing and attacking the oppressive functions of the nuclear family. Although there are growing exceptions, men have largely resisted this threat to their privileges.

MALE CHAUVINISM

Male chauvinism is the ideology which reflects and reinforces the material structures of male supremacy and the oppression of women. At a time when the structures and institutions of women's oppression are being strained and weakened, the imperialists step up their use of ideological controls as a means of enforcing women's exploitation and oppression.

The ideology of male chauvinism is rooted in biological determinism. It assigns psychological, sexual, physical and social characteristics and potentialities to women based on their biological or "natural" characteristics. Women's biological role in bearing and nursing children is defined as the natural basis for passivity, nurturing role, and dependence on and inferiority to men. This is the ideological justification for the division of labor based on sex in the whole society and for the power which individual men have over women. These

ideas of women's natural dependence on men and definitions of their lives exclusively in relationship to men and children, are drummed into women from an early age in the family, in the schools, through the media. These ideas seem to be substantiated by reality: women are in fact dependent in many ways on men under imperialism. But the real sources of this dependence are hidden or explained away by the ideology of male chauvinism, blocking women from understanding the true roots of their oppression in the imperialist system.

Women's unhappiness and rebellion against their dependency and powerlessness are turned against them through the lie that their problems are their own fault. Because women are cut off from other women through the structure of the family as well as other competitive structures which are set up to keep women apart, this lie has historically had a powerful impact on women. It provides the ideological and psychological basis for controlling women through mental hospitals and the psychiatric profession.

The possibility of developing collective consciousness and resistance among women is thwarted by male chauvinist ideology which defines relationships between women on the basis of competition for men. This idea reinforces the material reality that under imperialism, women do compete for men to survive and to raise children. Here again, the role of male chauvinist ideology is to provide a wrong explanation for the reality of women's oppression in order to impede the development of women's liberation.

These are general patterns of dominant male chauvinist ideology. They affect the lives of all women because they are pushed by all the institutions of imperialist society. Male chauvinist ideology is reinforced by national chauvinist ideology to create a special assault on women of oppressed nations. Biological characteristics are assigned to oppressed nation women on the basis of their nationality as well as their sex. Lies about colonized women also serve to bolster white supremacist practice and thinking among white women. They act as one more block to the development of international solidarity between women of oppressor and oppressed nations.

FIGHTING MALE SUPREMACY IN THE OPPRESSOR NATION WORKING CLASS

The system of male supremacy has been an important part of class rule in all class systems. It assures some level of power and privilege for all men over women. This differential privilege is built into the economic, legal, political, psychological, physical and sexual spheres of life

and activity. Male supremacy serves the class interests of the imperialist ruling class. As a form of economic control it insures the super-exploitation of women. As a key social control it bribes men of the working class with power and privilege to enlist their aid in the suppression of women. Male supremacy is ultimately not in the interest of oppressor nation working class men because it is a major prop of the imperialist system which is responsible for the exploitation and oppression of whole nations, women and the working class. But male supremacy does give white working class men an immediate material stake in women's oppression. Those who assert that male supremacy is merely a "bad attitude" are deliberately blinding themselves to the hundreds of thousands of ways in which men benefit from the system of male supremacy. The jobs which white working class men have, the wages which they get, their authority and power over women and children in the family are all based on the system of white supremacist and male supremacist privilege.

White and male supremacist privilege reinforce each other. The privileges which white working class men gain from being white give them a basis to exert power over women in the family. Their ability to find jobs and make enough money to be the primary wage earner lays the basis for their power and women's dependency in the family.

On the other side, the fact that male supremacy enforces women's economic and social dependence on men, fosters a continued reliance on white supremacist privilege. All forms of collaboration with national oppression can be justified as part of the role of providing for women and children.

As a system, male supremacy and white supremacy are the principal blocks to revolutionary consciousness and struggle among men of the oppressor nation working class. Revolutionary class struggle cannot develop in the oppressor nation unless it is based on international solidarity with national liberation struggles. Likewise, no successful revolutionary movement can be built which doesn't attack one of the strongest bulwarks of imperialism — women's oppression and male supremacy.

This means concretely taking a stand now against all the pervasive forms and effects of male supremacy and women's oppression. It means fighting the operation of individual male privilege on jobs, in sexual relationships, in relation to children, in political work. The power of the women's liberation movement

has forced changes in the consciousness and practice of white men in all these areas. But the development of a revolutionary movement of women and men committed to women's liberation is in its infancy. The growth of such a movement depends on the continued strength of women's role within the white working class in leading the exposure and attack on the whole system of male supremacy and women's oppression

WOMEN LEAD WITHIN THE OPPRESSOR NATION

The nature of white working class women's oppression under imperialism places us in a position to lead the development of anti-imperialist struggle within the oppressor nation working class. Imperialism's principle hold on the oppressor nation working class is the system of white supremacy. But as we have seen, male supremacy reinforces white supremacy throughout all the institutions of imperialist society. As victims of male supremacy, white working class women have a different relationship to these institutions of social control and a stronger interest in overturning them.

Those aspects of women's oppression which affect both oppressor and oppressed nation women also give white women a particular basis for developing an understanding of and solidarity with the struggles of colonized women and oppressed nation peoples as a whole.

Both these factors put oppressor nation working class women in a position to lead international solidarity and revolutionary struggle within the oppressor nation working class.

This analysis of women's leading role in anti-imperialist class struggle is in sharp contradiction to most lines on women within the white left. The most common opportunist definitions of women's strategic role are based on a view that women's class consciousness is more backward than men's, because of the isolated marginal nature of their labor within the home, and their exclusion from the industrial proletariat. These male supremacist, economist definitions liquidate the central role of white and male supremacy as competitive structures within the oppressor nation working class. They deny the importance of women's relationship to the means of reproduction and production. And they suppress the true role which women have played in progressive struggles throughout US history.

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STRUGGLES IN THE US

An Overview

In the history of the US there have been strong militant movements of women. Women of oppressed nations have led struggles for the liberation and freedom of their peoples. They have taken up demands for women's rights and have led in building international solidarity between women of oppressed and oppressor nations. The white women's movement has fought against women's oppression and the institutions of male supremacy and has at times acted in solidarity with the struggles of oppressed nation women. However, at critical points, white women have acted on the basis of white supremacist interests and have abandoned international solidarity politics.

The first half of the 19th century was a high point for women's struggles in the US. Women, scorned in the Declaration of Independence (mentioned only as victims of the "merciless savages", as Thomas Jefferson called Native Americans), were denied legal and political rights. They were driven into exploitative social production in the early textile factories; and these factors pushed on the rebellion of white women.

As capitalism developed in the US, the impact of the double shift increased among white women. White working class women, at the core of the new industrial workforce, worked 14-16 hours a day under extremely unsafe conditions for meager wages. Children had to work under these conditions for even less pay. Rebellious white working class women were major figures in the early labor movement.

White working class women battled for higher wages and decent conditions. They led strikes and formed mutual benefit associations. Women were prohibited from joining unions, which refused to recognize their struggles. In order to organize, working class women formed separate unions. Many of these labor organizations started by women took progressive stands in support of the abolition movement.

THE STRUGGLES FOR ABOLITION AND FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

22 White women were active leaders in the abolitionist movement. Here, they found that

their oppression as women obstructed their struggles for the freedom of Black slaves. Abolitionists like Lucy Stone and the Grimke sisters began to struggle for women's rights as well as for Black freedom from slavery. Connections between the abolitionist movement and women's struggles were formed.

Black women, like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman led both Black and women's struggles. Black men like Frederick Douglass were strong supporters of the women's movement. Many Black conventions went on record opposing sex discrimination, and several issued special invitations for women to participate. Early women's rights meetings were attended by both Black and white women. Leaders of the women's movement supported Black abolitionists and protested against racial discrimination in their statements about women's rights.

During the Civil War, anti-slavery white women threw their energies into the war effort, suspending the activities of the white women's movement. The National Women's Loyal League, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone, collected 400,000 signatures in support of the 13th Amendment which outlawed slavery. They also passed a resolution in support of equal rights for women and Black people; having struggled hard for emancipation, feminists expected to be included in suffrage legislation.

After the Civil War, the Republican Party pitted women's suffrage against the struggles of Black people. The 14th (due process) Amendment proposed in 1866 was explicitly limited to male citizens. The 15th Amendment, outlawing suffrage discrimination on the basis of race, also excluded women. White feminists retaliated by opposing these amendments. Black women and men argued that the passage of both the 14th and 15th Amendments were necessary first steps in Black people's struggle for equal rights. White women responded by organizing against these amendments on explicitly racist grounds.

The women's movement deserted its Black allies, taking its stand with white supremacy. As Elizabeth Stanton put it, "... are you willing to have the colored man enfranchised before the women; I say no: I would not trust him

with my rights; degraded, oppressed himself; he would be more despotic with the governing power than ever our Saxon rulers are . . . If women are still to be represented by men, then I say let only the highest type of manhood stand at the helm of the State."

Before long, the National Women's Suffrage Association began to campaign for women's right to vote on the grounds that it would keep oppressed and other immigrant peoples out of power. At the same time that the genocidal slaughter of Native peoples was at its height in the final battles of the Indian Wars, the white women's movement failed to give any support to the cause of the Native peoples as did the majority of white liberal and radical movements.

When the oppressor nation women's movement betrayed the national struggles of Blacks and Native Americans, it also sold out the class interests of white working class women. By narrowing its concern to women's suffrage, the women's movement abandoned women's super-exploitation as a major issue. Although many white women supported strikes and raised money for strike funds, they generally placed their hopes in education and suffrage rights. Furthermore, by shunning the issue of women's right to control their own bodies and sexuality, they failed to attack the historical roots of women's oppression.

Individual white women did raise these issues. In 1877, Annie Besant lost custody of her daughter because she published an inexpensive version of a book on contraceptive methods. Margaret Sanger struggled from the early 1900's to the 1960's for women's right to birth control. Except for the IWW, Sanger's views were rejected by the dominant left forces and women's movement alike.

WOMEN'S STRUGGLES IN THE ABSENCE OF AN ORGANIZED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The women's movement lost almost all organizational form shortly after suffrage was finally granted in 1920. Again, white women refused to support the struggles of Black women, when Black women were systematically denied voting rights. White women *argued that since Black men were being discriminated against in the same way, they had no obligation to defend the rights of Black women as it was not a question of women's right to vote.*

The early 20th century labor movement offered opportunities for unified action and struggle by Black and white women although few Black women entered industrial employment until after World War I. The 1909 uprising of 30,000 shirtwaist makers in New York

City was initiated when 53 Black women walked off the job.

The AF of L, which was organized in the second half of the 19th century on a narrow craft, white and male supremacist basis, ignored the struggles of working women and tried to divide women from different nationalities.

As a result of the AFL's white supremacist, male supremacist and labor aristocratic forms of organization, many white working class women allied with petit bourgeois women to organize unorganized women workers as early as 1903 with the formation of the Women's Trade Union League. Many of these organizations have continued to the present but have lost their original progressive character.

A world-wide economic crisis broke out in 1929. The CP-US led unemployed and social security struggles and labor organizing drives. The CP-US also conducted vigorous anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist propaganda and education. The early and middle 30's were a period of growth in revolutionary consciousness and organizing that was greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution. These struggles prepared the way for organizing the workers of the basic industries by the CIO.

The CIO took relatively progressive stands in solidarity with the struggles of Blacks and women. It combatted racism and sexism in some degree to facilitate its organizing drives. Membership in the CIO was generally open to all workers, but only token leadership positions, which had no real power, were open to non-whites and women.

Nevertheless, during the 30's and 40's millions of women struggled first around unemployment and relief, and then around organizing into unions. Women worked on defense committees to aid the families of the victims of the struggle and of the capitalist courts, and against the Scottsboro frame-up of nine Black young men. Women were active in defense of Republican Spain against fascist attack. Communist women gave leadership in many of these early battles and numbers of them became well-known mass organizers and leaders.

During World War II, when women were called out of the reserve army of labor to fill jobs vacated by men who were leaving to fight in the war, unions tolerated the influx of women. *However, the unions made no special effort to organize women, and saw them chiefly as dues-payers. Internal discrimination against women war workers was practiced widely. After the war, the trade unions joined with the employers to drive women workers out of industrial jobs back into traditional "women's jobs," into the reserve army of labor, or back into the home.*

The post-war expansion of clerical work has 23

been almost entirely ignored by the trade union movement, even at the cost of a declining percentage of union members in the labor force. Since the 1960's, women in public employment have been organized to some extent, but the organization of clerical workers has barely begun. Despite the AF of L's neglect of women workers, white women have begun to struggle for union organization, in part following the leadership of oppressed nation women in farm, hospital and textile workers' struggles.

The revolutionary left has never adequately acknowledged the importance of the oppression of women, male supremacy, and male chauvinism. The Socialist Party, the CP-US, and especially the IWW in its earlier days, had strong women members and leaders. However, they usually reduced women's oppression to an economist question about the terms of wage labor.

In the 60's, the contradictions of the left's male supremacy exploded. A powerful women's movement within the oppressor nation began to develop which demanded that the issue of women's oppression be dealt with inside the white left and by society in general.

THE MOVEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE 1960's AND 70's

In the 1960's the movement of women within the oppressor nation once again became a leading social movement. White women took up struggles in support of Black people in the Civil Rights movement, and began to play leading roles in the Viet Nam anti-war movement. Pushed by the examples of women in China and Cuba, many white women learned that the struggle for women's liberation must be an integral part of the general fight against imperialism. The heroic actions of Vietnamese women demonstrated what oppressed nation women meant when they said that they were fighting for their liberation as women in the course of waging wars for national liberation for all their peoples.

At the same time, the women's movement began, in the early sixties, to make women's sexual oppression a major issue. Beginning in 1959 with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, and continuing with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the National Organization of Women (NOW) which she founded, the women's movement became a strong political force which pushed many women to recognize and reject the system of male supremacy. Ultimately, this sector of the women's movement fell into reformism — and attempted to fight for women's equality without challenging the exploitative class society and relationships which have institutionalized the structures of women's oppression.

Growing numbers of women came to realize the contradictions between their strength and creativity, and women's subordinate place and function under imperialism. As white women on the left began to demand recognition and equality, they faced strong male supremacist opposition within the sexually-mixed left. At every turn, men blocked the full, leading participation that women were capable of giving to the movement. The resulting struggles were so sharp that masses of women made the decision to withdraw from activity and organization with men so that they could address the nature of women's oppression. Although this withdrawal was portrayed by the white male-dominated left as an abandonment of left politics and solidarity with the struggles of colonized peoples, this was not the case. This wing of the women's movement was more active in solidarity with the struggles of oppressed nations than those who were criticizing them.

The formation of an autonomous women's movement in the oppressor nation unleashed women's energy to analyze and organize around the basic forms of women's oppression — national, economic, social, psychological, sexual and cultural. Women fought for control over their own bodies, for the right to define their own sexuality. They organized against rape and physical abuse, and fought for abortion. The lesbian movement, in particular, led in pushing the understanding that sexual taboos and repression maintain women's passivity and dependence on men, and their competition with each other. Women fought against their super-exploitation in the workplace, organized unions and struggled for affirmative action programs.

The white women's movement began to expose the function of the white nuclear family as an instrument of imperialist control and exploitation. Numbers of women examined and restored to the women's movement and the left the early Marxist analysis of women's oppression especially from Engels. The social importance and value of women's unwaged labor in the home was affirmed by the white women's movement in ways that affected the consciousness of millions of houseworkers. The male chauvinist ideology which assigned women a "naturally" inferior place in society and forced women to accept this view of themselves was denounced. The use of consciousness-raising groups was developed as a means of analyzing and exposing the connections between women's personal oppression and the reality of women's oppression in US society as a whole. White women all across the country began to express poetry, music and art which spoke aloud their long-suppressed experiences as women, and transformed an experience of oppression into a strength-giving women's culture of resistance.

THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT

Within the women's movement, women were rapidly changing their consciousness of sexuality and sexual oppression, and building a commitment to develop strong women's solidarity. As a result, there was a tremendous growth and strengthening of the lesbian movement. Lesbians led in many of the struggles against male supremacy. They challenged white and male supremacist notions dominant in the white left, such as the sanctity of the white nuclear family. Lesbians were viciously attacked by the white left, and portrayed as men-haters, as decadent and/or sick, and as reactionaries who could never become communists because they were homosexuals. More conventional women, often threatened by the definitive strong stands that lesbians made for a total commitment to women, and against male supremacy, also engaged in these attacks. Through much struggle, many women came to realize the strength that lesbianism gives to all women's struggles against male supremacy and began to act in solidarity with lesbians.

By demonstrating that women can live, work and make love with each other; break out of the passivity, dependence and competition among women that is fostered by male supremacy, lesbians have reinforced the entire women's movement's capacity to develop women's leadership and be self-reliant.

WHITE SUPREMACY WITHIN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The women's movement of the 60's contained all the contradictions of a social movement within the oppressor nation. These contradictions were not unique to the women's movement, as the male supremacist white left has attempted to portray them, but were in fact manifestations of the white supremacist privilege and national chauvinism that have infected the entire white anti-imperialist movement.

National chauvinism caused white women to analyze their own experiences and generalize it as the experience of all women, wiping out the qualitative differences between the oppression of white women and women of the colonized nations. While racism was identified as a contradiction, the national and women's struggles being led by Black, Chicana, Puerto Rican, Native American, Mexicana, and Asian women were ignored and even attacked.

White women organized for the right to abortion on demand without recognizing the absolute necessity of struggling against genocidal forced sterilization of women in the oppressed nations. White women criticized Black women who were struggling to build solid families to resist the attacks of US imperialism and in-

structed Black women to smash the nuclear family. When anti-war women met in Vancouver with Vietnamese women, some lesbians criticized the Vietnamese sisters because they did not see the relevance of lesbianism to the Viet Nam struggle. Many white women's groups worked for affirmative action in national chauvinist ways that made the struggles of people in oppressed nations for affirmative action more difficult. The women's movement also practiced the national chauvinist error of tokenism, which meant that Third World women were often asked to join white women's organizations so that it would appear that white women were uniting with women of the oppressed nations. In actuality, white women remained in control of the activities, decisions and money of these organizations.

These examples expose the depth of white supremacy and national chauvinism within the white women's movement. White women committed to women's liberation through anti-imperialist revolution must wage a total struggle against white supremacy in order to build solidarity relationships with women of oppressed nations.

The leadership which women of the oppressed nations have given has helped some white women understand the need to put international solidarity in command of the women's movement. In struggles for community control of education, daycare, and health care; in prison support and defense of political prisoners; in fighting police repression and building militant and armed resistance; in labor struggles to organize the unorganized at Farah, Oneita, and Jung Sai; in fighting against genocide and sterilization and for the right of self-defence against colonial and sexual violence, women of the oppressed nations have consistently challenged the imperialist oppression of women and have weakened imperialism's hold on all women. National liberation struggles around the world and in the US have exposed male supremacy and the oppression of women as a prop of the imperialist system. Women and men of oppressed nations have fought for the understanding that their strategy for revolution must be based first and foremost on overturning their oppression as entire nations of peoples. Women of oppressed nations have consistently played leading roles in the development of national liberation movements and, within that context, the fight against women's oppression and male supremacy.

OPPORTUNIST LINES IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

White supremacist privilege and national chauvinism was fostered by the petit-bourgeois politics and leadership which dominated many sectors of the white women's movement.

These politics not only eroded international solidarity but downplayed class differences between women in the oppressor nation. One of the forms through which these opportunist politics took hold in the women's movement was the concept of universal sisterhood. While defining all women as sisters superficially helps to build women's solidarity, it completely liquidates national and class differences among women. Radical feminism went further to identify only men and male supremacy as the enemy. Lines which defined all women as a single "caste" or "class" obscured real class and national contradictions.

Socialist feminism attempted to introduce a Marxist definition of class into the women's movement in order to link the struggle against sexism to the struggles against racism and class exploitation. But socialist feminism failed to identify the totality of imperialism as a system. It could not build women's international solidarity because the centrality of national oppression and the leading role of national liberation struggles in the anti-imperialist movement were not recognized.

Socialist feminism put forward idealistic conceptions of socialist revolution which liquidated the necessity for armed struggle. The need for a communist party was denied, and instead reformist, economist strategies were in command in their organizing efforts among white women.

Lesbian separatism was another wrong political line, which developed partly in reaction to the anti-gayness of the mixed left and women's movement. Lesbian separatism made sexuality the determining factor in people's lives, and limited political organizing to lesbians. Within this narrow focus, class contradictions were often reduced to questions of psychological oppression. The dogmatic and opportunistic use of class by most of the male-dominated left was identified as "academic" and was rejected. They replaced the left's opportunist definitions of class with a formulation which targeted middle class women instead of the ruling class and state: "Class keeps women down and divided through middle class women's oppressive behavior towards lower class women." (from the Furies, "Class Beginnings")

Opportunist definitions of class have not been confined to lesbian separatists, but have also been wide-spread in the women's movement and still exist. Many wrong definitions of class focus totally on class background, taking no serious account of class stand. Class gets defined on white and male supremacist terms. Differences between women of oppressor and oppressed nations get left out. All that counts is your "class". Definitions of women's class are based on what their fathers did for a living.

These views of class have often served to set other women ("middle class women") up as the enemy. They've perpetuated competition among women and have undermined women's solidarity.

In reaction to predominant white and male supremacist control and power, ultra-democratic and anti-leadership conceptions have developed in the women's movement. Women who are leading political struggles need to challenge wrong definitions of leadership by building collective and responsible forms of leadership and organization, not deny or neglect the necessity of organization and leadership.

Most dangerous to the women's and lesbian movements are the opportunist lines that liquidate struggle against national oppression and white supremacy. Since women's oppression is rooted in the imperialist system, the fight for liberation must be based on international solidarity — upholding the right of self-determination for oppressed nations and fighting against white supremacy.

Based on these understandings and commitments, white working class women can give leadership to building a cross-class women's movement.

The activity of white women in solidarity struggles, prison support work, daycare, anti-sterilization campaigns, support for self-defense and in party building, all show the potential to unite women around anti-imperialist politics. White working class women are oppressed under imperialism by the total system of class exploitation and male supremacy. This is the material basis for white working class women to lead the development of anti-imperialist consciousness which can build revolutionary women's struggles within the oppressor nation.

Since the oppression of women cuts across class lines, women of all classes experience the effects of male supremacy to some extent. Even women of the more privileged strata and classes have some basis for joining an anti-imperialist women's movement. This is the basis for the development of socially progressive cross-class alliances. However, women tied to exploiting classes and more privilege in general will not join anti-imperialist causes in massive numbers and their support will often be weak and wavering. Their tendency to try to take charge of the movement needs to be resisted firmly.

The women's movement is not the only place where there is a need for strong anti-imperialist women's leadership. Women's leadership must be built and supported in all areas of work and organization within the oppressor nation if we are serious about making revolution.

WOMEN AND THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEFT

The strength and power of the women's movement within the oppressor nation have forced changes in the entrenched male supremacy and chauvinism of the white left. When first confronted by the politics of women's liberation and women's demand for real political power within the white left, the male response was a vicious attack on women who were fighting for these politics. Men intimidated women with sexual power, political power, threats, and contempt.

When masses of women left the male-dominated mixed organizations and began to organize autonomously, men seized on the oppression of Third World people to deny women the right to struggle against their own oppression. Men acted as if only the women's movement, and not the entire white left, was infected with national chauvinism. Men pitted national liberation and the need to fight white supremacy against women's liberation by accusing the growing women's movement of deserting national liberation struggles. Men promoted the token leadership of women who would front for and support these attacks, playing on competition among women and on women's ties to male supremacy. These men exposed the depth of male chauvinism and the large stake men have in maintaining women's oppression.

Many women stayed in the mixed left. Some, tied to male supremacist definitions and relationships, supported the white left's attacks on women's liberation. Others drew strength from the women's movement to fight male supremacy from within the left. Men of the left were forced to take women's liberation seriously when the women's movement built a mass base and power, demonstrating women's political, psychological, and sexual independence of men.

Change in left male consciousness and practice had been painfully slow and incomplete. The power of the women's movement has forced political recognition of women's presence and role, but the dominant left forces continue to resist change.

The white left, as a whole, has refused to recognize the importance of the oppression of women as a central pillar of imperialism. It has ignored the material basis of women's oppression in the double shift, and the institutionalization of women's oppression in male supremacy. It has sabotaged and undercut the development of revolutionary women's leader-

ship.

The white left has not acknowledged the importance of white privilege in supporting the imperialist system among the white working class. The left has refused to deal with the role of male supremacist structures in reinforcing white supremacy; it still rejects the leading role of white working class women in the revolutionary struggle against white and male supremacy in the oppressor nation. These failings have blurred the distinctions between oppressed and oppressor nation women, and have liquidated international solidarity — the essential basis for building an anti-imperialist movement of women.

Many left organizations have failed to present even a pretext of fighting male supremacy — the RCP, the CLP, the OL — the list is endless. But these errors have been particularly damaging when they have come under the cover of pretended support to anti-imperialism and women's liberation. The Weather Underground, through its political journal *OSAWATOMIE*, promoted this brand of opportunism. (Which is a line that dominated PFOC also up to the time we overturned it early in 1976.) The WUO had published the book *Prairie Fire* in 1974. The revolutionary anti-imperialist contents of this book, coupled with the WUO history of actions in solidarity with national liberation struggles, had a tremendously positive effect on the white left, especially upon young people. The subsequent desertion and betrayal by the WUO of its earlier roles has been thoroughly exposed. (See the documentary: *The Split of the WUO*.)

THE WUO

The WUO never had a revolutionary line on women, although some women struggled for a more positive position. As it liquidated its support for national liberation struggles, the WUO consolidated a thoroughly male supremacist politics which was used to suppress all independent initiatives among women towards international solidarity or women's liberation.

The WUO liquidation of the importance of national oppression and white supremacy meant, in practice, an approach to organizing women which liquidated international solidarity. Women's health care programs, abortion and anti-sterilization work, and work with women prisoners was stopped. Women

were discouraged from working in solidarity movements, and in anti-rape and defense cases, such as Joan Little, Inez Garcia, and Yvonne Wanrow. The interconnections of white and male supremacist structures under imperialism, such as in the welfare system, the white nuclear family, the schools, etc., were entirely ignored.

A wrong definition of class is opportunistically used to cover these errors. The women's movement is identified as an adjunct of the working class movement, and a multi-national working class women's movement, which would find "allies" among women of other classes, is called for.

Inside the WUO this male supremacist line was reflected in a structure which pushed the opportunist line on women and on the national liberation struggle. Women were both suppressed and promoted to leadership on the basis of the wrong line; women's leadership was not defined by political line, but as ability to take responsibility for the whole, willingness to build organization, influence over and respect of cadre.

Although the WUO as an organization has been exposed, many of the same opportunist political forces are actively organizing once again. Their phony self-criticisms cannot hide the fact that they are pushing the same white supremacist, male supremacist politics under new covers.

THE GUARDIAN

In the end the political line of the WUO leaders wasn't very different from the Guardian's line which the WUO originally denounced. The Guardian also carries an anti-imperialist, pro-women's liberation cover, although of a different kind. Unlike the WUO it has no history of solidarity with internally colonized nations, but it is the only nationally circulated oppressor nation newspaper with coverage of anti-imperialist struggles outside the imperialist borders. As such, it has much influence and credibility in the anti-imperialist white left. The Guardian's recent bid for leadership of the party-building movement has led it to publication of its "Marxist-Leninist position on the Emancipation of Women." This position is another male supremacist attempt to co-opt women's politics and struggle, and to subsume it into a narrow definition of "class struggle" for the US white working class. The Guardian describes both women's liberation and national liberation as struggles for "democratic rights." It ignores the function of women's oppression under imperialism, going no further than to cite the conditions of women's oppression as the basis for women uniting with the "multi-national work-

ing class." The Guardian puts forward that "petty privileges" and "illusory rewards" are the only stakes men have in male supremacy.

The real problem, as the Guardian sees it, is the women's movement's "go it alone strategy." The Guardian uses this same phrase to put down national forms of organization, and deny people of oppressed nations the right to determine the form of their struggle. It is a denunciation of women's right to an autonomous women's movement, and is accompanied by a clear denial of women's leadership. Men will cement class unity between women and men, according to the Guardian, by taking up the fight for women's special demands and democratic rights.

This is an economist formulation which denies all of the structures of male supremacy outside of the workplace. The Guardian's "real" story of women's struggles is to be found in labor struggles, rather than in legal reforms or "sensationalist 'sexual liberation' themes" for sexual preference. With this anti-lesbian slur, the Guardian wipes out the revolutionary content of women's struggles for control over their bodies and sexuality in male supremacist society.

THE STRUGGLE IN PFOC

We of PFOC also began our history with wrong white supremacist, male supremacist politics dominating the organization. After the January 1976 Hard Times Conference in Chicago, we began a process of rectification, a process which is ongoing. The last year and a half has been a period of intense struggle within our organization to root out and overturn opportunist politics and to develop a revolutionary political line and strategy.

Struggles to build women's solidarity and leadership, in our organization and in the world, are central to our rectification. The rooting out of ties to male supremacy and competition between women is essential in building solidarity among women and as a basis of revolutionary women's leadership. The political growth of all women is also a major focus, in particular through the development of women's and lesbian caucuses, the women's commission (to lead line and strategy development) and the women's organizing collective (to lead in implementation throughout the organization.) This pushed forward our struggles for women's liberation in every area of our work. We have begun to develop revolutionary line on the oppression of women under imperialism, and strategy for organizing an anti-imperialist women's movement. We are combatting all

forms of male chauvinism and privilege within the organization more actively.

Rectification means taking responsibility to overcome our own opportunist history and tendencies, struggling within our organization, within the white left, and within the women's movement for a revolutionary analysis of women's oppression, liberation, and solidarity with national liberation. It means struggling to implement this analysis through revolutionary leadership by women.

PARTY BUILDING

Building revolutionary organization of women and men within the oppressor nation united around an anti-imperialist revolutionary line is the primary task for us at this time. The formation of a truly revolutionary communist party or parties in the US at this time is absolutely critical. Unorganized mass political struggle cannot overcome an organized enemy.

The struggle for revolutionary line within the left is a requirement for successful party building. Line struggle is not just a matter of debate over political approaches. It means defining a strategic approach to what we do. In particular, it must include active material and political support for oppressed nations' struggles for self-determination. Revolutionary political line is also necessary to provide leadership and direction to the anti-imperialist movement of women within the oppressor nation. For the party-building movement to achieve the necessary anti-imperialist analysis and practice, women must lead in it. Revolutionary oppressor nation men have to take responsibility to give concrete support for women's leadership and women's struggles.

An autonomous women's movement is essential to the struggle for women's liberation, and will be until women's oppression is completely overthrown (taking power is only the beginning). In the oppressor nation, the women's movement must stand in solidarity with the struggles of women and peoples of the oppressed nations. Defending the privileges of whites only reinforces the imperialist power which enforces women's oppression. Working class women, who are the hardest hit by male supremacist attacks on white women and who benefit less from the privileges of white supremacy have to give leadership within the white women's movement to the struggle against both white and male supremacy.

Women's oppression under the institutions and ideology of male supremacy provides a special basis of solidarity with women and peoples of the oppressed nations. An anti-imperialist women's movement is a necessary base for building women's leadership and solidarity. This is necessary to provide overall

direction to white workers as a class in the struggle against the imperialist system.

IMPERIALISM IN CRISIS: CARTER'S STRATEGY

The victories of national liberation and socialism have brought US imperialism into economic and social crisis. Oppressed nations, inside and outside the imperial borders, are leading centers of revolutionary struggle and war. Carter's plan for salvaging imperialism is based, first and foremost, on smashing national liberation struggles. To do this he has developed a two-faced strategy. He establishes a neo-colonial policy using members of oppressed nations to front for imperialism. But he also promotes genocidal attacks aimed at totally repressing revolutionary struggle.

His approach to the oppressor nation working class must be different. At a time when the white working class is also experiencing the effects of economic, social, and political crisis, the ruling class must strengthen those institutions and material structures which tie white workers to the system. The effort is to build more loyalty to the system at a lower cost whenever possible. White working class women have been selected as special targets because they are the potentially leading force against imperialism within the oppressor nation.

White women, like Anita Bryant and Phyllis Schlafly, front for white and male supremacy in leading mass mobilizations such as the anti-ERA campaign, the Right to Life Movement, and the anti-gay crusade. These campaigns directly attack all women living outside of the family structure, especially single mothers and lesbian mothers. They are part of a major effort to terrorize women into adherence to male supremacist roles. Recent court rulings supporting rapists make the message clear: stay at home or accept the brutal consequences.

Basing itself on the forces of social change and revolutionary advance world-wide, the women's movement has done battle with male supremacy and has somewhat loosened the hold which male supremacy has on white women. Carter's sermons about the old family virtues may be very far from present day reality, but they serve his main purpose: They reinforce the reactionary role of the nuclear family and isolate as much as possible those women who are pushing the women's movement in a socially progressive way. This is necessary if imperialism is to maintain its supportive base and control within the white working class.

The Houston International Women's Year conference is seen as a testing ground for this strategy used by the administration, which

wants to put forth a liberal image while actually containing the women's movement. The openly white and male supremacist forces, including many associated with K.K.K., American Nazis, and the anti-busing movement, are organizing under the banner of "save the family from the feminist radicals and the lesbians." It is clear that the families they are talking about are exclusively those that conform to their own notion of "respectable" and well-off white families. Their program for oppressed nation peoples is genocide. The Administration is avoiding openly racist postures and the extreme attacks, but its real position is quite compatible with that of the right. The forces close to the White House are setting out to compromise by verbally supporting a few reforms, including ERA, but will not push for action on anything Carter doesn't want, which is most of what women do want. By contesting the right wing and reactionary White House forces at Houston, progressive women can sharpen the lines between a reactionary, bourgeois movement and a potentially anti-imperialist women's movement.

BUILDING THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

As the crisis of empire deepens, repressive attacks against oppressed nation women escalate; the choices become clearer and harder. White women, also under attack, can either fight for liberation in solidarity with oppressed nations and against white and male supremacy or they can try to preserve some individual privilege and security by jumping on the white and male supremacist bandwagon; a course that is ultimately self-destructive.

In this period we must struggle hard for an analysis and practice which identifies the role of the state in these attacks upon women and the qualitative difference in their effect on women of oppressor and oppressed nations. The state constantly manipulates white and

male supremacy to hang on to its power and uphold its system. Building the anti-imperialist movement of women is a major strategic task of the left — it must be supported. We seek to unite with all women who move into struggle in a progressive way and especially with revolutionary-minded sisters. We also see it as our task to combat opportunist political lines which liquidate the importance of struggle for national and women's liberation and against white and male supremacy. We need to deepen our understanding through study and investigation, practice and self-criticism, and to reach out with this anti-imperialist analysis to broader masses of women. In the future we want to help build a mass anti-imperialist organization of women which will act in solidarity with women of the colonized nations, taking up the struggle to overturn this white and male supremacist system in the interests of national liberation, women's liberation, and proletarian revolution.

These times of crises and chaos for the monster system can be turned into times of rebellion and advance toward victory for our peoples.

The resolution of the evils and contradictions of capitalism requires the overthrow of the ruling class and the seizure and destruction of its state power by the working class on behalf of all the rest of the people. . . . Then it will be possible to build a new and human society upon the ruins of the old. Socially produced wealth will then be socially appropriated, owned and utilized by society as a whole. . . . The contradictions inherent in a society that proclaimed equality 200 years ago but has always rested upon human slavery, women's oppression, land piracy and genocide have ripened to the bursting point. The social fabric is ripped and torn. . . . It is a time for change and acting.

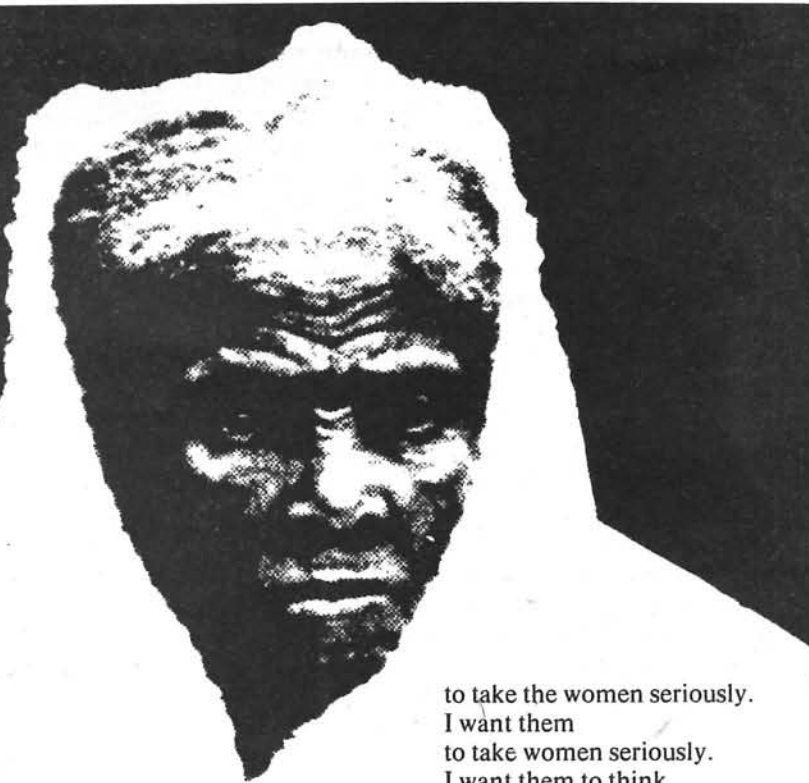
From the Provisional Political Statement of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. BREAKTHROUGH Vol. 1, No. 1.

PFOC publishes a political journal, **BREAKTHROUGH**. BT No. 1 is our Provisional Political Statement; BT No. 2 includes a critique of the Guardian and its line on women; BT No. 3-4 includes materials from the history of Black and Native American liberation struggles and a reprint of the PFOC pamphlet, "The Meaning of Miami," about attacks on women and on lesbians and gay men. Also available is "The Split of WUO," a collection of documents.

Single copies of **BREAKTHROUGH** are \$1.00 plus 25c postage. Six issue subscriptions are \$6.00 including postage, and can include "The Split." Bulk rates available. Free to prisoners. Make checks payable to John Brown Book Club.

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I LIKE TO THINK OF HARRIET TUBMAN



I like to think of Harriet Tubman.
Harriet Tubman

who carried a revolver,
who had a scar on her head
from a rock thrown
by a slave-master (because she
talked back), and who
had a ransom on her head
of thousands of dollars and who
was never caught, and who
had no use for the law
when the law was wrong,
who defied the law. I like
to think of her.

I like to think of her especially
when I think of the problem of
feeding children.

The legal answer
to the problem of feeding
children
is ten free lunches every month,
being equal, in the child's real
life,
to eating lunch every other day.
Monday but not Tuesday.
I like to think of the President
eating lunch Monday, but not
Tuesday.

And when I think of the
President

and the law, and the problem of
feeding children, I like to
think of Harriet Tubman
and her revolver.

And then sometimes
I think of the President
and other men,
men who practise the law,
who revere the law,
who make the law,
who enforce the law
who live behind
and operate through
and feed themselves
at the expense of
starving children
because of the law,
men who sit in paneled offices
and think about vacations
and tell women
whose care it is
to feed children
not to be hysterical
not to be hysterical as in the word
hysterikos, the greek for
womb suffering,
not to suffer in their
wombs,
not to care,
not to bother the men
because they want to think
of other things
and do not want

to take the women seriously.

I want them

to take women seriously.

I want them to think

about Harriet Tubman,

and remember,

remember she was beat

by a white man

and she lived

and she lived

to redress her grievances,

and she lived in swamps

and wore the clothes of a man

bringing hundreds of fugitives

from

slavery, and was never caught,

and led an army,

and won a battle,

and defied the laws

because the laws were

wrong, I want men

to take us seriously.

I am tired, wanting them to think

about right and wrong.

I want them to fear.

I want them to feel fear now

as I have felt suffering

in the womb, and

I want them

to know

that there is always a time

there is always a time to make

right

what is wrong,

there is always a time

for retribution

and that time

is beginning.

—Susan Griffin