



# La Obrera

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## Introducing *La Obrera*

February marks one month before International Working Women's Day (IWWD), a working-class holiday that belongs to the woman worker, and all women and people who desire women's liberation and socialist revolution. Originally titled "Woman's Day" when it was first held in New York City in 1909, it was popularized with the current name by Clara Zetkin in 1910 as part of that year's International Socialist Women's Conference. It was Vladimir Lenin who in 1922 gave the date as March 8<sup>th</sup>, and it is this date which working women around the world have commemorated ever since.

In the present day, the struggle of working women remains acute. For as long as there has been social stratification into classes, women have been oppressed under the justification that we are naturally inferior. This is still the case to an extreme degree in countries oppressed by imperialism, where backwards semi-feudal practices are still in use, and women's lives are more or less as property to men. Even in the U.S., the ruling class still pushes women to prioritize having children, reproducing the family, and to serve men. As imperialism increasingly comes into crisis, the various rights and freedoms won through the historical mass movements for democratic rights, like the suffrage movement and civil rights movement, are being threatened.

The oppression of women is inseparable from the development of class society. Women's subordination did not arise from biology or nature, but from definite historical and material conditions. With the emergence of private property and the division of society into classes, the monogamous family developed. In the words of Engels, "*woman saw herself degraded, turned into a servant, into the slave of man's lasciviousness, in a mere instrument of reproduction.*"

The Popular Women's Movement of Peru highlighted Engels main contributions, writing:

"Investigating capitalist society and societies in general where exploitation and oppression prevail, Engels verified that misery, inequality and submission exist among men, and emphasizing the woman question he pointed out, 'The state of affairs with respect to the equality of men and women is no better than their legal inequality, which we have inherited from prior social conditions, is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of women.' And he continued 'Women cannot be emancipated unless they assume a large socially measurable role in production and are only tied insignificantly by domestic work. And this has only been possible with modern industry, which not only admits feminine labor in a large scale but fatally demands it.'"

Under capitalism, this oppression takes on a specific form. Women are integrated into social production as wage laborers, yet they remain disproportionately burdened with domestic labor in the home.

In countries subjected to imperialist domination, semi-feudal social relations are often preserved or reshaped to serve global capital. In such conditions, women may face intensified forms of exploitation and patriarchal control, reflecting the uneven development characteristic of the imperialist system. However, these forms are not separate from capitalism but are articulated with it.

Within advanced capitalist countries, formal legal equality has been achieved in many spheres through mass democratic struggles. However, such gains remain limited within bourgeois society. As capitalism enters periods of crisis, the ruling class seeks to shift the burden of social reproduction onto working-class families, reinforcing reactionary ideologies about gender and the family in order to stabilize the system.

The full emancipation of women cannot be

achieved within the framework of capitalism. Because women's oppression is rooted in private property, class division, and the privatized family form, its abolition requires the abolition of capitalist relations of production. The liberation of women is therefore inseparable from the revolutionary struggle of the working class to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism, wherein socialized production and collective responsibility for social reproduction create the material basis for genuine equality.

This process of rising fascism, or fascistization, will increasingly attack working and oppressed people, especially women, in order to try and stave off economic crisis. For example, with the *Dobbs v. Jackson* Supreme Court ruling in 2022, the right to abortion in the U.S. has been increasingly restricted and attacked, now being illegal in 13 states and functionally illegal in many more through only allowing abortions in a very short timeframe since last period. Fundamentally, this is done to control working women. If we are forced to carry unwanted or unplanned children, we will take a high financial cost and raise a future worker—at virtually no cost to the ruling class. If we are banned from accessing abortion, we will be much more willing to take whatever jobs we can get, just to survive. Our willingness to accept exploitation will be higher. Abortion must be retaken as a fundamental right, by any means necessary.

As part of this renewed offensive of patriarchal policy, attacks on LGBT rights have continued to increase in the U.S. LGBT people, particularly transgender people, are similarly attacked by the ruling class because their rejection of the system of the traditional patriarchal family reduces the rate at which women can be pushed to reproduce the family and assent to further exploitation. In contrast to this, we hold that LGBT people's rights, especially in the domain of healthcare, must be defended. We have seen in the past how attacks on LGBT healthcare, such as the State's attack during the HIV epidemic in the 1970s–1990s lead to mass deaths.

The sexual exploitation of women remains a major global and domestic problem. Both within and without the traditional family structure, women are forced into a variety of forms of sexual exploitation. The sex industry has many domains, some of which are hard to track economically. Nonetheless, some estimates state that pornography is a \$97 billion global market, while stripping and clubs are a \$75 billion global market.<sup>1</sup> So many demographics of women are targeted for the industry. Girls, and children generally, are targeted by the industry to serve the patriarchal and pedophilic preference for virginity. Sex trafficking of minors is incredibly common, with notable high-profile cases in the U.S. including that of Jeffery Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. Less high-profile and more common cases of child sex trafficking or child sexual exploitation come principally from children in or previously in the foster care system.<sup>2</sup>

For adult women as well, there is no doubt that sexual exploitation is a major issue. The overwhelming majority of women engaging in prostitution do so out of poverty. With limited avenues to financially support themselves or escape poverty, they turn to the only option left. This is fundamentally a social coercion which preys on vulnerable women to entrap them in sexual exploitation and systemic rape. There is a direct correlation between higher unemployment rate and higher prostitution rate.<sup>3</sup> Fundamentally, prostitution, the sex industry, and sexual

- 1 Pages 66 & 86, Jeffreys, S. (2008). *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade*.
- 2 Hannan, M., Martin, K., Caceres, K., Aledort, N. (2017). *Children at Risk: Foster Care and Human Trafficking*. In: Chisolm-Straker, M., Stoklosa, H. (eds) *Human Trafficking Is a Public Health Issue*. Springer, Cham.
- 3 Cronley, C., Cimino, A. N., Hohn, K., Davis, J., & Madden, E. (2016). Entering Prostitution in Adolescence: History of Youth Homelessness Predicts Earlier Entry. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 25(9), 893–908.

exploitation generally are problems specific to the working class. We can see how for the ruling class, the “counterpart” to the bourgeois family is infidelity and affairs, as well as engagement with the petty-bourgeois side of the sex industry; on the other hand, the working class’ “counterpart” to the bourgeois family resembles less the intrigue of an affair and more the systematic abuse, rape, and exploitation of women.

Nationally oppressed and immigrant women suffer particularly at the hands of the imperialist system. Native, Black and immigrant women suffer elevated rates of domestic violence, sexual violence, sex-trafficking, and so many other forms of patriarchal violence. For example, Black women are reported to be around 40% of trafficked women in the U.S., while only being around 13% of the population.<sup>4</sup> Black women are also disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence.<sup>5</sup> Trafficking and violence against Native women is also exceedingly high, with the term “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women” used to refer to this violence. More than 80% of Native women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetimes, with half of this violence being sexual violence, both from sex traffickers and domestic partners alike.<sup>6</sup> Intimate partner violence rates vary among immigrant groups, but rates have been estimated as high as 93% in some cases.<sup>7</sup> Globally between 700,000 to 2 million people are trafficked internationally

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4 Meshelemiah, J. C. A., Thanises, A. C., & Yeboah, P. O. (2023). Sex Trafficked Women, Drug Dealers, and Men Who Buy Sex: A Look at “Race”. *Violence Against Women*, 31(2), 637-663.

5 Waller, B. Y., Harris, J., & Quinn, C. R. (2021). Caught in the Crossroad: An Intersectional Examination of African American Women Intimate Partner Violence Survivors’ Help Seeking. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(4), 1235-1248.

6 Page 2, Hill M, Anderson MB and King I (2022) Human trafficking as a racialized economy and the exploitation of indigenous socio-spatial (im)mobility in North America. *Front. Sustain. Cities* 4:884195.

7 Morrison, A. M., Campbell, J. K., Sharpless, L., & Martin, S. L. (2023). Intimate Partner Violence and Immigration in the United States: A Systematic Review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(1), 846-861.

annually, over 80% of those people are women, and over 70% of those women are being specifically sex trafficked.<sup>8</sup>

While capitalism and imperialism remain the basis of the global economic system, it is fundamentally impossible to do away with all exploitation and oppression of women. Our oppression originated along with the formation of social classes and exploitation, and it will end along with it too. Unemployment and poverty are not exceptions to the capitalist economy but fundamentally part of it, and as a result the pressure to engage in prostitution and potentially get entrapped in inescapable debt under pimps will not simply go away through legal reforms. Fundamentally, as women our liberation will come from the struggles of working and oppressed people for a new society, free from imperialism and all exploitation. It is the duty of every working person, not just women but men as well, to uphold the necessity of women’s liberation.

We launch *La Obrera* with the hopes of establishing it as a tool for women’s liberation, national liberation, and socialist revolution, three goals which cannot and will never be separated for the women of our class. After years of patient work in our respective organizations and sectors, the contributors and editorial staff of our publication have created *La Obrera* so that we can begin to rectify the theoretical underdevelopment which plagues the women’s movement in the United States. We choose the name *La Obrera*, which means a woman worker or laborer in Spanish, in homage to the original CPUSA publication *The Working Woman*, and because of the inspiration we draw from the revolutionary women’s movement in Latin America and the lines which it has produced.

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8 Green, S. T. (2008). Protection for victims of child sex trafficking in the United States: Forging the gap between US immigration laws and human trafficking laws. *UC Davis J. Juv. L. & Pol’y*, 12, 309.

We aim for a revolutionary women's publication that unabashedly takes the line of our class, the proletariat, the modern working class. We stand against the ideas and theories of the class enemy of the workers, the capitalist class, who through private property and patriarchal social systems keep women in general, and women workers in particular, oppressed and ultra-exploited. We stand for a clear eyed view of the women's question, which so often becomes a second thought for many so-called "revolutionary" groups on the Left. We stand against the prevalence of reactionary misogynist leaders in many opportunist and revisionist organizations on the one hand, and the postmodern liquidationist practices of "call-out culture" on the other hand. Instead we stand for open struggle on women's question and questions of misogyny on the Left, and stand for a revolutionary movement that takes women's liberation as a central component part of its theory and practice which cannot be ignored nor removed. There are two lines within the women's movement, a revolutionary line and a counter-revolutionary line. *La Obrera* is a fervent partisan of the former, of a revolutionary line which will carry all women and all workers and all humanity to liberation from oppression and exploitation.

In this first edition, we focus on establishing some of our basic positions, in relation to what revolutionary organizing in the women's movement looks like, as well as in relation to contemporary positions on the women's question in the revolutionary movement. Beyond our own practical experience struggling with these problems, we look to great women leaders of our class like Anuradha Ghandy, Clara Zetkin, and others, in addition to the ideology of our class, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, for what a correct position in the women's movement looks like. We march towards IWWD, and every day after it, as part of a new push for revolutionary women's practice in our movement, and towards a rectification of failed and incorrect practices and theories which have held us back for decades.

International Working Women's Day is not simply a day to celebrate the existence of women abstractly, but rather a day to celebrate the half of the international working class who faces the brunt of patriarchal oppression. International Working Women's Day must be a day to push for a class-conscious women's movement, one which strikes at imperialism and builds the ground for women's liberation, every single year until we are free.

## Organizational Trends In The Women's Movement

For the past decade, working-class women in the United States have experienced a furious assault at the hands of the ruling class. As the process of fascistization intensifies, hard won victories achieved in the class struggle such as the right to abortion are continuously overturned. Violence against women and prostitution/sexual exploitation remain incredibly common, and the gender pay gap has in fact widened for two consecutive years.<sup>9</sup> The triply oppressed section of women who simultaneously experience class exploitation, gender oppression, and national oppression are increasingly subject to heinous acts of patriarchal violence, such as the forced sterilization and systematic sexual assault which have been reported from inside ICE detention facilities. In order to combat this renewed war upon women, it is necessary to construct a revolutionary, class conscious women's movement along correct organizational lines, based on and lead by the women of our class and those who hold the stand of our class.

The contemporary women's movement can be broadly broken down into three organizational trends: 1) the bourgeois women's organizations, 2) the mutual aid/book club trend, and 3) the trend of crude separatism, that is, treating the work of women's emancipation as organizationally independent from all other forms of work. While each of these trends has its own particular problems, they share the common thread of holding back the development of a revolutionary women's movement based in the class line of the proletariat.

The bourgeois women's organizations include those Democratic Party-formed or controlled organizations, the state union caucuses or

departments and organizations within women-dominated trades, and the numerous "feminist" NGO's who pay lip-service to the cause of women's liberation while ideologically, politically, and financially backing the patriarchal, capitalist dictatorship which keeps us in bondage. These organizations' practice is limited entirely to what the bourgeois state deems appropriate; they are arms of the same party that refused to codify *Roe v. Wade* into law for years; the same NGO's who collaborate with imperialism; the same state unions, who lobby for decrepit, rapist imperialists in the Presidential elections. In the face of a declining liberal-democracy, an imperialist society in the process of fascistization, they seek not to develop a combative movement capable of establishing a new society free from all forms of exploitation, but merely to restore political power to the representatives of the traditional liberal-democratic order which has led us here in the first place. Revolutionary proletarian women have no choice but to view these organizations as part of that "enormous pile of garbage" which must be swept away in the course of building our own organizations.

Intimately connected to this first group of organizations are a slew of revisionist and class-collaborationist organizations masquerading as "revolutionaries" and "socialists" who conduct their work in the women's movement either exclusively through, or in close collaboration with, these state-sanctioned organizations of our enemy. These organizations dress themselves in Marxist language, rhetorically acknowledging the principal contradiction of capitalist society as that between labor and capital, while simultaneously asserting that we must unite with these bourgeois women's organizations to fight for the particular demands of women, such as access to abortion, an end to the gender pay gap, etc. They use this collaborationist logic to justify entryism into the bourgeois organizations, and to uncritically unite with the political actions of these organizations at

9 Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2025). *IWPR's New National Annual Women's Wage Gap Analysis Shows Second Consecutive Year of Decline*. <https://iwpr.org/iwprs-new-national-annual-womens-wage-gap-analysis-shows-second-consecutive-year-of-decline-2/>.

every turn, thus betraying any semblance of independence for the working class and its women in political struggle.

Among those who generally consider themselves more “left” than the out and out bourgeois women’s organizations and the class collaborationists who engage in entryism within them, it is common to build structures dedicated to mutual aid and/or study around the women’s question. These forms of practice and organizational structure became “common sense” practice throughout the revolutionary movement in general from the late 2000’s–late 2010’s, and the women’s movement was no exception.

It is still common today to see women’s organizations whose pinnacle of practice deals mostly with handing out free food, groceries, and period packs in the name of “improving material conditions under capitalism,” and “survival pending revolution.” Oftentimes, there is a coinciding justification that the charity work these organizations engage in politicizes and educates the people being served by the programs either by demonstrating that the masses of oppressed and exploited women cannot rely on the imperialist state for the resources being provided, through the flyers or pamphlets being distributed alongside the materials, or a combination thereof. The intention for many organizations is that the women serviced through these distributions read the political pamphlets provided during the distribution, see the flyers for follow up events (usually study groups), and are then stirred to action. This line of logic has been followed innumerable times all across the revolutionary movement over the past two decades with basically the same results; the women’s movement is no exception here.

There is certainly a place for mutual aid work in the women’s movement, just as there is a place for study groups in the women’s movement, however these organizations cannot and should not be the main basis of activity for the revolutionary women’s movement. The real fruit

of this style of work is often nothing more than a lesson. Countless dedicated, well-meaning activists have burned themselves out on years of fundraising, logistical coordinating, packing, and distribution with little tangible victories to show for it. Volumes of summations and self-criticisms have been produced as a result of this mutual aid/study group style of work which all distill the same basic lesson: class struggle is what mobilizes the masses and builds a movement, not charity and book clubs. The bulk of the activity of a revolutionary women’s movement must occur in the class struggle, whether that be in independent women’s organizations or as departmental work within already existing organizations of masses in the labor struggle, the neighborhood defense movement and among the youth.

The mutual aid/study group style of mass work necessarily seeks not to mobilize the masses against their political enemies for demands, politicize them through propaganda and summation, and then organize them for power, but instead to engage the broad masses only through providing them with an abstract intellectual understanding of their oppression and/or provide services which fill gaps which exist in bourgeois social programs; this is the practice of conducting mass work at the margin of class struggle rather than within it.

The tasks of the revolutionary women’s movement is more than developing a conceptual understanding of our exploitation, oppression, and the necessity of revolution, and it is certainly more substantial than doing the job of the bourgeoisie for them (i.e. making capitalism more comfortable)! We share the historic task with our entire class, irrespective of gender or nation, to defeat imperialism, and usher in an era free of class distinctions and exploitation! The limits of the mutual aid/study group organization are not conducive to this end; we must go beyond the confines of these structures, to the lowest and deepest sections of proletarian women, uncover their basic demands, and mobilize, politicize, and

organize them along these lines towards political power.

Finally, outside of the NGO and mutual aid trend, there are those organizations which push for women to be organized, perhaps along revolutionary lines, but separately from all other sectors of struggle. The most classic example of these organizations were the “women’s collectives” that appeared throughout the country during the New Communist Movement. The origins, activity and structures of these groups vary, but their separatist format binds them.

These organizations might be created because of a so-called “radical feminist” political line, as a spontaneous separatist reaction to misogyny and other problems of chauvinism in a male-dominated political space/organization, or because of a misapplication of the correct desire for distinct organizations in the women’s sector. They are often more short-lived and spontaneous than the other two dominant types of women’s organizations, although that is not always the case. Some are struggle-oriented, although many are more eclectic or cultural and life-style focused.

Some of these organizations have the potential to be play a progressive or class-conscious role in certain situations, especially if they are struggle-focused, but ultimately in most cases these organizations play an almost entirely negative role in the revolutionary women’s movement. They promote the illusion that our liberation can be won without the participation of and leadership alongside men, that our struggle can be separated from working-class revolution. The institution of private property, the origin and main sustainer of patriarchy, cannot be defeated without socialist revolution and without the participation and leadership of all members of our class, united as one.

Really these organizations are quick politically incorrect shortcuts to the very complicated problem of developing women's organizing as

part of a larger cohesive revolutionary strategy, and organizing existing revolutionary organizations such that they deal with the problems of misogyny and abuse within their ranks in a correct and consistent way.

What then, does a revolutionary movement and organization of women look like in a US context? In *Marxism, Mariátegui, and the Women’s Movement*, the Popular Women’s Movement of Peru state that when conceiving of a “movement generated by the proletariat among the masses of women” we must consider two problems:

1. “Ideological-political construction, which necessarily implies providing it with Principles and Program;
2. Organizational construction, which we can serve by forming cores or groups of activists for carrying the Principles and Program to the masses of women—workers, peasants, professionals, university and secondary school students, etc.—They would work toward the politicization of women, mobilizing them through their struggles and organizing them to adhere to the political struggle, in harmony with the orientation and politics of the proletariat.”

Considering these two problems, we begin with the first: in a US context there is not yet a real and tested program any group can put forward on the woman question. There are, however, basic principles we can put forward. The provisional principles of class-conscious and revolutionary women's organizing *La Obrera* upholds are:

1. Anti-imperialism
2. Anti-reformism and anti-electoralism
3. Anti-chauvinism, in all forms
4. We, the revolutionary women’s movement, must be based on a working-class perspective

5. We must be based on the struggles and problems of the female masses
6. We must construct our movement in support of and as a central part of the broader socialist revolution

On the basis of these political principles, we at *La Obrera* have united on a provisional line of organizational construction in the revolutionary women's movement.

- ◆ Revolutionary women's organizing should not be a side thought or an entirely separate initiative, but an important component part of the broader plan and activity of revolutionaries in a given area or sector. Thus, the forms, the activity, the goals and organizations of such work should be determined on the basis of a revolutionary line, which we attempt to elaborate in this edition, in combination with an assessment of the particular conditions and array of forces of the site of struggle in question. Revolutionary organizations must place a particular emphasis on training up and developing women leaders and activists within all our organizations and our broader movement, as part of this work.
- ◆ We support a mix of organizationally distinct women's sectoral organizations as well as formally organized women's sectoral work within organizations conducting work in other basic sectors (e.g., labor, neighborhood, student and youth, national liberation). Departmental work, whether it be on the basis of the particular demands of women or the nationally oppressed or the LGBT masses, should be already organized and

incorporated into the work of the existing mass organizations in a given area or sector. Whether or not organizationally distinct women's organizations should be created in a given sector or area should be determined as part of the broader work of revolutionary planning and assessment.

- ◆ Regardless of its form, revolutionary women's organizing should be based on the same basic set of class-conscious united front principles and program that other mass organizations are united upon. Within this common program of struggle basic points on women's liberation must already be present, and on the basis of this common program additional demands and particular programmatic points made, by publications and organizations like *La Obrera*. All revolutionary women's organizations should base themselves on the participation and leadership of working women, and should be partisans of our class.
- ◆ Above all else, revolutionary women's organizing must take class struggle as its key link, as its central focus, and needs to be sharpened in the struggle against opportunism, revisionism, and reformism. There are many incorrect lines in the current women's movement and many incorrect positions on the problem of opportunism on the women's question. It is our difficult but necessary task to forge a revolutionary path within the swamp of capitalist and reformist feminism, to fight against the den of rapists and misogynists that characterizes the political organizations of the capitalists and false "revolutionaries" without falling into either anarchism or separatism.

## May Day Call to the Working Women of America

*Foreword from the Editorial Board of La Obrero*

The editors of *La Obrero* have chosen to republish this article, printed nearly a century ago in the Communist Party USA's women's publication, *The Working Woman*, as an example of the best period of working-class organization of women that used to exist in the United States. *The Working Woman* first appeared in 1929, the beginning of the Third Period of the Communist International, which marked the best years of the Communist Party USA's work. This was the beginning of a period of great capitalist crisis, marked by the Great Depression, and a decade later, by the Second World War.

Our conditions today echo the situation of the working class described in the article: a worsening capitalist crisis marked by speed-ups, wage-cuts, intensification of labor, police and military terror, and a "bitter war of repression." This is all too familiar to the American proletariat today, whose wages are shredded by inflation, who are terrorized by ICE raids, kidnappings and street executions, who are subjected to lethal speed-ups at work that have killed numerous workers.

We see imperialists vying, not just for *financial* control of countries, but *open political control*, too, as in the case of Venezuela. The workers

today see, now more clearly than ever, that the so-called "international courts" and the United Nations, who are perfectly happy to allow the genocide of Palestine by the Zionist state, who cover up imperialist proxy wars and war preparations, are hollow institutions meant to fool them. We see the imperialist US bourgeoisie preparing to mobilize the American workers to support its imperialist invasions and the coming inter-imperialist world war by pushing nationalist and imperialist propaganda in the capitalist monopoly press and social media harder than ever before.

In response, working women are called to meet the capitalist imperialist offensive by preparing for a bitter struggle, by "[rousing] the masses of the working women to a realization of the impending danger and a determination to fight it."

Against the pessimism of the capitalists and their running dogs, the working women in every country, side by side with the other members of their class, will rise like a mighty fire that will burn down the abusive, predatory and chauvinist organizations of the imperialists. Women workers are always in the front ranks of the bitter and bloody class struggle, showing their proletarian sibling the way forward to the great future of communism, when all people will be united in the international working class.

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*Editor's note: The scan referenced to transcribe the following text was made using a damaged copy. Some parts of the pages on which this article was printed are missing. Where partial or whole words from the text are absent, we have done our best to fill in the most likely word. Entire missing words are indicated in [brackets]. Larger portions of text are simply marked (missing). Partial words are not marked. The original scan can be viewed on the Marxists Internet Archive at marxists.org.*

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## **The Working Woman, Vol. 1, No. 2. May 1929**

### **May Day Call to the Working Women of America**

May Day, 1929, finds the working class of America deep in the throes of a great struggle with the forces of capitalist imperialism. Millions of workers are walking the streets without a job, with starvation staring them in the face. Millions are slaving their lives away in mines, mills and workshops. Toiling under the lash of the capitalist speed-up, the workers of America and all other capitalist countries are driven beyond endurance in the race of their bosses to capture the world market. Wage-cuts, lengthening of hours, intensification of labor, the open-shop drive of the bosses to smash every attempt to organize and strike, police terror against militant workers, so the employers are conducting a bitter war of repression against the working class, which today in America is taking up the struggle against capitalist rationalization.

Women workers are in the forefront of these struggles of the working class in America. Today in the Southern textile strike as in New Bedford and Passaic they are fighting in the front ranks, braving police brutality and soldiers' bayonets, enduring starvation rather than the slavery of the mills, struggling against the speed-up and capitalist rationalization. The needle trades workers are building a new militant union in the face of the attacks of the bosses allied with the police and the right wing bureaucracy. The women millinery workers have resisted the efforts of their corrupt officials to destroy their union. Everywhere in the mines and factory districts the women of the working class are fighting side by side with the men workers against the open shop drive and capitalist reaction.

Today on May Day, 1929, the great imperialist powers are rapidly mobilizing for another great war. War preparations are being carried on on a gigantic scale in all capitalist countries, feverish construction of new air fleets are greater navies,

manufacture of munitions of war on an unprecedented scale, propaganda of nationalism and imperialism through every channel of capitalist influence, the schools, the churches, press, movies, radio.

While they are preparing for war the capitalist powers seek to delude the masses with gestures of peace. Peace pacts, arbitration treaties, leagues of nations, world courts, disarmament conferences, pacifist congresses, are heaped on each other in an effort to throw a smoke screen over the imperialist war preparations.

The great powers of the capitalist world are preparing for the inevitable conflict for world domination. They are at each other's throats in the struggle for profits, for colonies, for markets, for mastery of the sea, for financial control and exploitation of all countries. At the same time they stand together waiting to spring upon Soviet Russia and attempt to destroy the first Workers' Republic.

The imperialist war plans are maturing rapidly. The new American empire has thrown aside the mask. Wall Street only and brazenly dictates to Washington and the world. Morgan, Lamont, Morrow, Young, and all of the house of Morgan, represent Wall Street and Washington all over the world today, in China, in Japan, Mexico and Europe, and extend the rule of the mailed fist and the Yankee dollar in every corner of the world.

May Day, 1929, sends out a call especially to the women of the working class, to millions of toiling women, slaving for a mere pittance in the factories and workshops of America, borne down by poverty and drudgery in the home. Working women are the worst sufferers under capitalist imperialism. They are the cheap and easy subjects of exploitation in capitalist mass production with

its speed-up, low wages and long [days]. They toil the longest hours for the [lowest pay]. They work in the greatest numbers in the (*missing—textile?*) industry and others especially subject to capitalist rationalization. They are being drawn [into] the heavy industry to replace men workers. [And] in time of war they are forced to man the factories and produce the munitions and materials of war.

Mothers as well as workers, the working women in America today along with the (*missing ...*) in the hideous slums that capitalism gives the [working] class for a home, must see them driven [from] the factories and conscripted for capitalist [wars]. The women of the working class suffer as mothers as well as workers from the hideous exploitation of capitalism, the high cost of living, starvation wages, and from war, the inevitable accompaniment of capitalist imperialism.

The imperialists today are trying to delude the women workers with false hopes of peace. Through the schools, the churches, and the pacifist women's organizations they try to make working women believe that peace is possible and that the capitalist world is striving for peace. This hollow sham must be exposed by working women. They must organize for a bitter and determined struggle against the war danger, must penetrate the workshops and the homes with the message of the class struggle, must rouse the masses of the working women to a realization of the impending danger and a determination to fight it.

Working women must organize, must build the new unions, must build nuclei in the factories and plants manufacturing war material, must prepare for the moment when they are called to man the factories in war-time, must prepare side by side with the men workers to crush the hideous capitalist system under its own war machine, and build a new workers' society free from war and exploitation.

On May Day, 1929, working women must rally to the banner of the Communist International, the

world organization of the working class, which is the only force able to meet and fight against world imperialism and world war. American working women! Join the Communist International, born out of the last world war to organize the working class against the next world war. Join its American section, the Communist Party of the U.S.A., leader in all the struggles of the workers and of working women.

Fight together with the men and women workers of other countries against the international attack upon the working class, against the speed-up and long hours, against low wages and the high cost of living, against the strike-breaking and union-smashing schemes of the employers, against the white terror and the imperialist war preparations. Fight against the misleaders of labor, against the leaders of the A. F. of L. and the Women's Trade Union League, against the Socialist Party, all of which, like their ilk in other countries, are the enemies and betrayers of the revolutionary labor movement.

Working women of America! On May Day, 1929, stand shoulder to shoulder with the toiling masses of women workers in all other capitalist countries, with the women of the colonial lands Nicaragua, Mexico, China crushed under the heel of Yankee imperialism, in a common struggle against capitalist imperialism.

March side by side with the working women of the Soviet Union, your victorious sisters, who have freed themselves from the yoke of capitalism through their glorious revolution and are building a new workers' society. Working women! Defend the Soviet Union! Defend the working women and children of Soviet Russia from the war plots of the imperialists.

[Forward], March! on May Day! [Down your] tools! Come out of the factories! Show [your] strength and fighting spirit!

For the emancipation of the working class!

For the destruction of the capitalist system, its  
exploitation, and its wars!  
Long live the Soviet Union!  
[Long live] the union of the workers and peasants  
(*missing*) all over the world!

COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE U.S.A.,  
NATIONAL WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT.

(*missing – possibly Juliet Stuart*) Poyntz,  
*Secretary.*

## Centrism and Eclecticism in the Women's Movement

No large-scale existing organization in the United States today claiming to fight for the liberation of women is free from the influence of the imperialist bourgeoisie, whose way of thinking dominates in society. Beginning in the 1960s there were many unsuccessful attempts to contest this influence in the women's movement, attempts which began to decline in the 1980s and 90s.

The influence of the bourgeois "women's movement" is declining with the worsening crisis of US imperialism. But the philosophical justification for imperialist intervention in the women's movement that underpins the many women's organizations that rely on state funding has been developing steadily in the philosophy and women's studies departments of capitalist universities since the 1970s. Many prominent contributors to this philosophy are unable to avoid the truth of Marxism and so lay a claim to it, but in reality they oppose Marxism by attacking or undermining Marxist philosophy in an attempt to categorize it as "just another system." Decades without a correct proletarian opposition have allowed this way of thinking to leave its mark on every part of the women's movement today.

Generations of activists and revolutionaries in the United States, from the "New Left" and the "New Communist Movement" to today, have been unable to oppose the ideological influence of imperialism on the women's movement and creatively apply Marxism to the women's question. This led them 1) to allow male chauvinism and the abuse and rape of women to persist in their ranks, or to fail to fight them; 2) to abandon the struggle of LGBT people and even attack them on phony ideological grounds, especially at a time when US imperialism has targeted these groups even more violently; and 3) to bring us no closer to a correct understanding of the tasks of the women's movement today.

This theoretical underdevelopment has led to a profound confusion and eclecticism within the women's movement. Comrades grasp each and every way trying to grab hold of a theorist or concept they think will help them make sense of the women's question in a revolutionary way. Oftentimes this has meant either a complete dogmatic insistence on only using a handful of revolutionary texts to understand the women's question in modern times, or a completely eclectic approach wherein every writer and thinker, usually from academia, is imported into supposedly "revolutionary theory." This theoretical anarchy is something that should be fought against, and in the final analysis it is a product of our own lack of good theoretical production as revolutionary women, and on the part of the revolutionary movement as a whole. This dangerous mix of dogmatism and theoretical anarchy then in turn often results in a kind of ideological-political centrism: taking positions while at the same time undermining them.

How do we avoid this eclecticism and centrism? To answer this, we should review those fundamentals of a good theoretical line in the women's movement as laid down and developed by our predecessors in the struggle. First, we must recall that only a dialectical materialist approach will produce a correct line. Dialectical materialism takes material reality as a process or product of development, on which is constantly being made and remade under new conditions. Humanity and society are a product of development, not handed down by God. We can see this in the text *Marxism, Mariátegui, and the Women's Movement*:<sup>10</sup>

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10 Pages 18–19, *Marxism, Mariátegui, and the Women's Movement*.  
<https://www.bannedthought.net/Peru/Mariategui/About/Mariategui/ElMarxismo-Mariategui-y-el-Movimiento-Femenino-MFP-1975-OCR-sm.pdf>

Marxism, the ideology of the working class, conceives the human being as a set of social relations that change as a function of the social process. Thus, Marxism is absolutely opposed to the thesis of "human nature" as an eternal, immutable reality outside the frame of social conditions; this thesis belongs to idealism and reaction. The Marxist position also implies the overcoming of mechanical materialism (of the old materialists, before Marx and Engels) who were incapable of understanding the historical social character of the human being as a transformer of reality, so irrationally it had to rely on metaphysical or spiritual conditions, such as the case of Feuerbach.

Just as Marxism considers the human being as a concrete reality historically generated by society, it does not accept either the thesis of "feminine nature," which is but a complement of the so-called "human nature" and therefore a reiteration that woman has an eternal and unchanging nature; aggravated, as we saw, because what idealism and reaction understand by "feminine nature" is a "deficient and inferior nature" compared to man.

For Marxism, women, as much as men, are but a set of social relations, historically adapted and changing as a function of the changes of society in its development process. Woman then is a social product, and her transformation demands the transformation of society.

When Marxism focuses on the woman question, therefore, it does so from a materialist and dialectical viewpoint, from a scientific conception which indeed allows a complete understanding. In the study, research

and understanding of women and their condition, Marxism treats the woman question with respect to property, family and State, since throughout history the condition and historical place of women is intimately linked to those three factors.

Material social relations do not come from nowhere, but are the result of continuous development. Before the evolution of primate into human, the social aspect of the contradiction between biological and social was secondary. However, with the evolution of humanity through labor came the growth and qualitative leap towards "eusociality." Humans are social in a way like no other animal as a result of our species' need for social labor to produce the necessities of life. An ant colony may have complex social relations, but their social position in society is biologically determined and cannot be readily changed through social practice alone. Humans can change our social role through social practice.

It is for this reason that we must reject the vulgar metaphysical/mechanical materialism promoted by the bourgeoisie, which attempts to hide this history, instead ascribing particular social relations to "human nature," "Black inferiority," "women's inferiority," etc. Returning specifically to the question of women, the authors of *Marxism, Mariátegui, and the Women's Movement* state that:<sup>11</sup>

the condition of women is sustained in property relations, in the form of ownership exercised over the means of production and in the productive relations arising from them. This thesis of Marxism is extremely important because it establishes that the oppression attached to the female condition has as its roots the formation, appearance and

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11 Page 21, *Marxism, Mariátegui, and the Women's Movement*.

development of the right to ownership over the means of production, and therefore that its emancipation is linked to the destruction of said right. It is indispensable, in order to have a Marxist understanding of the woman question, to start from this great thesis, and more than ever today when supposed revolutionaries and even self-proclaimed Marxists pretend to have feminine oppression arising not from the formation and appearance of private property but from the simple division of labor as a function of sex which had attributed less important chores to women than those of men, reducing her to the sphere of the home. This proposal, despite all the propaganda and efforts to present it as revolutionary, is but the substitution for the Marxist position on the emancipation of women, with bourgeois proposals which in essence are but variations of the supposed immutable "feminine nature."

The social inferiority of women is not an inherent one, but a product of a particular history. It is the result of the origin of the family and the maintenance of private property, and originated around the same time as the first class system (i.e., slavery) did. Yet the assumption that the social realities of men and women are simply the result of biological differences is incredibly common, and it crops up in many forms which must be done away with. For example, obviously those "revolutionaries" who claim that women are oppressed because of our sex are counter-revolutionary, for if our oppression is inherent how can we overcome it?

We can also see this erroneous trend in those who try and isolate the biological and social, pushing the line that biology is an unchanging substrate that exists in isolation from society. While obviously biology predates our society and history, our eusociality means that it is social

relationships which determine and society which develops sex and sexuality.

This is why LGBT people have an objective existence, rather than being simply "ideological phenomena" of the modern day. There is a history of such phenomena in some form or another dating back through the primitive commune, slave society, feudal society, and capitalism today.<sup>12,13,14</sup> LGBT people have always objectively existed in one form or another throughout history, even if they were denied liberation or proper self-understanding.

To digress, we can understand how each person can change their sex only within a species such as ours. Men and women as social beings as well as the basic facts of male and female biology form a contradiction, whereby the social aspect is determinate in the final instance. This is why, for example, intersex people can simply be men or women in society despite having biology which is often neither clearly male or female. In the case of transition, it is the result of any person growing and developing the social positioning and biological characteristics of the sex opposite to that which they were assigned at birth, while negating their original social positioning and biological characteristics. As a result, quantitative changes lead to eventual qualitative leaps to join the opposite sex.

In sum, our collective understanding of sex and sexuality has itself developed over the course of history, to the point that we can now understand these things as material and natural phenomenons. Harnessing these understandings is tied as well to our development of production, with new scientific developments relating to biology and reproduction in the modern era. Our new understanding allows us to see that our oppression

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12 Feinberg, L. (1996). *Transgender Warriors*.

13 Sigal, P. (2017). Queer Náhuatl: Sahagún's Faggots and Sodomites, Lesbians and Hermaphrodites. In *Indigenous Religions* (pp. 321–346).

14 Lang, S. (1998). *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures*.

is not inherent, but something we can change, remolding society and ourselves towards socialism and eventually communism.

With a better understanding of the Marxist line on women's liberation, we can now turn our attention to an example of what a centrist or eclectic position might look like. We can take as a notable example that of the Red Star Communist Organization (RSCO) in their document "Half the Sky." This article has been widely circulated among revolutionary women's circles in the United States, and because of the lack of good theoretical production in our movement, it has played an influential role among some comrades almost by default. This article claims to take the left line in the Women's Movement, and in many ways it does. But the RSCO also smuggles in several concessions to the right and ultimately their article holds a centrist position. Holding a centrist line is unacceptable because it paves the way for the imposition of right onto left.

First, we can see that RSCO has taken many solidly left positions. For example, they claim that the fundamental contradiction in the Women's Movement is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and that women's liberation can only come from proletarian revolution.<sup>15</sup> They claim that the liberation of LGBT people is inherently linked to women's liberation, and that the struggle against patriarchy includes LGBT people as well.

We can identify the RSCO's first mistake when they outline their position on the political economy of women's oppression. They quote quite extensively from Friedrich Engels, for example his delineation of patriarchy and women's status in society as being the result of a concrete historical development and transformation of social relations to create what we know as the monogamous family, and his discussion of the emergence of the bourgeois family and love marriage (as opposed to arranged

marriage), which is a continuation of this understanding of the development of the family and family relations in class society by Engels.

All of this is correct, but unfortunately RSCO hides their own analysis in their "summing up" of Engels' words. They claim that Engels describes the family as "an apparatus," an echo of the anti-Marxist Michel Foucault and pseudo-Marxist Louis Althusser rather than Engels.<sup>16</sup> And this apparatus is one they claim is "deployed" through "ideological reproduction." In much the same way that Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses" are used to smuggle in postmodernist lines, RSCO transforms the family from a real social relation that people enter into spontaneously under the material demands of class society and a material part of the superstructure of society, to a mere ideological apparatus that can be deployed by thought alone. Indeed, RSCO actually finds that work of Althusser's compelling.<sup>17</sup>

This is clearly wrong. The family exists materially. When we as women are abused, attacked, beaten, and killed by men in our families, this is a material reality and not an ideological one. It reproduces itself *not* by ideology but by material political economic relations. The bourgeois man who does this is clearly doing it because it favors his material class interests. The family is what helps him maintain his power and wealth in a private domain, and to accumulate it and pass it down to his heirs. There is a clear *financial* incentive for a bourgeois man to participate in the worst patriarchal abuses to ensure his wealth is stable.

For working-class men there is a similar but slightly different reality. On the one hand, bourgeois outlooks including patriarchy are promoted through schools, media, and ruling class propaganda. On the other hand, working-class men have a minor financial incentive to uphold patriarchy and the family as it still provides them

15 Page 11, Red Star Communist Organization. (2024). *Half the Sky: Preliminary Materials for a Proletarian Feminist Politics*.

16 Ibid, page 5.

17 Ibid, page 13.

individual benefits. However, it must be noted that this is generally more common among the upper strata of the working class, such as the labor aristocracy, rather than among the poorest and deepest sections of the masses where it is an absolute necessity for both men and women in the family to work for income. In any case, we must affirm that principally the interests of working-class men and women are as a class first.

It is perhaps a little disappointing that our friends took such a centrist position on this important question. Attacks on women are only increasing every year in our own country and around the world. In some countries, the term *femicide* is used to describe the extent of the brutality perpetrated on women. Not an inch can be given in concession to the absolutely backwards idea that women's oppression, the family, and patriarchy, are simply or mainly ideological.

Indeed, upholding this line actually has several alarming implications. For example, they claim that "gender 'exists' insofar as it serves to organize certain ideological constructions."<sup>18</sup> Despite their claim to reject bioessentialism, this is essentially a way of sneaking it back in. By taking "gender" to mean all social aspects and "sex" to mean biological sex, and then claiming that "gender" is simply ideological.

This is perhaps the actual broader problem with the so-called "sex-gender distinction," which first emerged fully in the USA during the 1970s and 80s and served to push for a broad and accepting understanding of transgender people in order to eschew decades upon decades of strict medical industry restrictions on the ability of such people to access their healthcare. We can see today how it has turned on its head, and in some countries there exist "anti-gender" movements which use this particular understanding for anti-feminist and anti-LGBT purposes, claiming to just be "against gender, but in favor of recognizing biological reality." Indeed, this framing itself did not come

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18 Ibid, page 14.

from working-class LGBT people themselves, but rather from postmodernist academics and petty-bourgeois LGBT activists. For example, Gayle Rubin in her 1984 essay *Thinking Sex* stated:<sup>19</sup>

Catherine MacKinnon has made the most explicit theoretical attempt to subsume sexuality under feminist thought. According to MacKinnon, "Sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism . . . the molding, direction, and expression of sexuality organizes society into two sexes, women and men." This analytic strategy in turn rests on a decision to **"use sex and gender relatively interchangeably." It is this definitional fusion that I want to challenge.**

There is an instructive analogy in the history of the differentiation of contemporary feminist thought from Marxism. Marxism is probably the most supple and powerful conceptual system extant for analyzing social inequality. But attempts to make Marxism the sole explanatory system for all social inequalities have been dismal exercises. Marxism is most successful in the areas of social life for which it was originally developed — class relations under capitalism. In the early days of the contemporary women's movement, a theoretical conflict took place over the applicability of Marxism to gender stratification. Since Marxist theory is relatively powerful, it does in fact detect important and interesting aspects of gender oppression. It works best for those issues of gender most closely related to issues of class and

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19 Page 33–34, Gayle Rubin. (1984). *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. [https://www.ipce.info/library\\_3/pdf/rubin\\_thinking\\_sex.pdf](https://www.ipce.info/library_3/pdf/rubin_thinking_sex.pdf).

the organization of labor. **The issues more specific to the social structure of gender were not amenable to Marxist analysis.**

[Emphasis ours –Ed.]

This is an explicit rejection of Marxism as the ideology of the proletariat, all-powerful because it is true. Indeed Rubin actually goes on to promote “theoretical and sexual pluralism,” which poses sexual analysis as equivalent to Marxism.<sup>20</sup> She proscribes analysis of the political questions of women and LGBT people as beyond the bounds of Marxist analysis. This is one of many examples of postmodern academics promoting alternative understandings which reject dialectical materialism, and imposing them onto working-class people from the towers of academia.

RSCO seems to claim that gender was created by the origin of the private family and class society. The implication that men and women did not materially exist before class society is frankly absurd. While clearly the social relations and ideologies present in society changed through each stage of the development of history, this does not mean that the development of our own understanding of ourselves as men and women (situated in a particular social context in a particular point in time) and our own understanding of the relations between ourselves are themselves synonymous with the very material existence of men and women as a whole.

While RSCO alludes to the New Communist Movement’s notable homophobia and anti-gay practices, it is notable that the NCM justified their practices *on the same theoretical grounds that RSCO uses to describe any non-biological aspect of gender*. Under their theory, gender transition is simply ideological rather than a material reality which predates class society and which has developed in practice over millennia as society itself has grown and developed. Under their

theory, when the “ideological basis” for “gender” is done away with, the question remains what happens to all of us: men, women, gay, trans, and others?

What we can see from looking at our RSCO friends is exactly how not to uphold women’s liberation. When it comes to the details, they reject the Marxist position or at minimum make major concessions to reaction. This cannot be allowed, as this will inevitably lead to liquidation of revolutionary practice in the women’s movement.

Women’s oppression, and the particular oppression of working women, is a material, not ideological, fact. It results from a concrete historical development (emergence of the family and class society) rather than being inherent in some metaphysical way. While the origins of male and female are from the realm of biology, humanity’s principally social character means that our social reality is defined around social relations rather than biological aspects. While modern medicines can and will continue to change biology and reproduction, this is itself actually quite secondary to the social problem of women’s oppression. We can change our social status/role through social practice, revolution being the pinnacle of practice. It is through revolution, not “accepting biological reality” or postmodernist “oppression is due to ideology,” that we will be free.

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20 Ibid, page 34.

