

# THE COMMUNIST FIGHT AGAINST SEXISM



South Africa—1956

**International Communist  
Workers' Party**  
[icwpredflag.org](http://icwpredflag.org)  
**November 2018**



“Women’s March,” Los Angeles, US, January 2017



India—Fight Against Rape

## CAPITALIST ATTACKS ON WOMEN CREATE CLASS FIGHTERS

November, 2018—Capitalism in crisis has created increasing gender-based attacks, particularly against working-class women of oppressed national and ethnic groups.

And these attacks have been answered by increasing fight back. Working-class women, including women of color, have given leadership to these struggles.

\*Marching in Latin America against the murder of women

\*Fighting from El Salvador to Ireland to the US against laws that criminalize abortion and kill working-class women.

\*Building an international #MeToo movement against sexual assault

\*Demanding punishment for rapists in India

\*Demanding an end to racist police murder in the US because *Black Lives Matter*

Because of capitalism’s gender roles, men and women workers are often attacked in different but interconnected ways. To wipe out sexism and the special oppression of women, workers must build a revolutionary movement to end capitalism and build a communist future.

See [CRISIS AND STRUGGLE](#), page 4

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## MOBILIZE MASSES FOR COMMUNISM TO END SEXISM

*Building a society without money or exchange – a communist society – will fundamentally change the way we produce and distribute goods and services. It will allow us to end borders and hierarchies. Workers worldwide, unified by our communist party, will take control of our collective lives.*

*But communism will do much more. It will transform our social relationships at every level, in ways that we can only begin to imagine today. This pamphlet suggests how communist revolution will enable us to end sexism along with racism and every other poisonous aspect of class society.*

*Mobilizing masses of women and men for communism today is the key to ending sexism. Women workers, especially those of super-oppressed “racial” and “ethnic” groups, give important leadership to the whole working class.*

**Communism unifies the working masses.** We will organize production based on solidarity and cooperation of all genders, without prejudice as to “race,” “ethnicity,” “culture,” sexual orientation or ability. We will mobilize masses to create arts and culture that promote respect for all. We’ll mobilize masses to criticize and suppress dangerously sexist and racist propaganda such as that disseminated by capitalists in movies, music, and other mass media.

We will struggle, as we do now and more sharply, against sexist attitudes, insults and practices. We’ll stop the particularly vicious assaults on women of color. We understand that men as well as women workers have a material need to end sexism, which sustains capitalist wage slavery. This understanding is the basis for sharp comradely struggle. However, we also know that sexist violence is an attack on the masses and on the communist society we are building. It will be treated as such.

**Communism will abolish money and markets, buying and selling, including working for wages.** When all work is to meet the needs of the masses, the material basis of sexism will disappear. The capitalist distinction between unpaid “housework” and wage labor will no longer exist.

We’ll reorganize work to end the sexist and racist division of labor. Everyone will learn to do various kinds of work. Everyone will share whatever necessary drudgery can’t be done by machines. No tasks will be labeled as work for one particular gender.

Communism will give everyone an active role in decision-making and leadership. We are not interested in breaking glass ceilings so a few women can join male bosses at the top. We will abolish ceilings, and everyone will work on the floor together, in free association, according

See [ONLY COMMUNISM CAN END SEXISM](#), page 2



## SEXISM IS NOT HUMAN NATURE

In pre-class society, there was mutual respect between men and women.

Morgan's study of Iroquois society in North America which was an important source for Frederick Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, illustrates these gender relations. The work of twentieth-century anthropologists, including women like Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead provides more evidence.

While the roles of Iroquois men and women were different, the society was cooperative and egalitarian. Women's work was valued equally with that of men. Women were honored and lived freely, and family identity was passed on through the mother's line.

Another example is the !Kung San people of Southwest Africa. They lived in nomadic, hunter-gatherer societies until the 1960s. Women gathered most of the food and, of course, gave birth to the next generation. While there was division of responsibility, men and women had equal status and respect.

### How did that change?

This period of pre-class communism came to an end in most of the world about ten thousand years ago. Private property, in cattle herding and farming, created the conditions for class society.

This brought about what Engels called "the world historical defeat of the female sex."

With private property came systems of inheritance through the father's family line. To pass property on to their biological sons, property-owning fathers now demanded that paternity be established beyond doubt. So they imposed strict limitations on female autonomy. Monogamy—at least for women—was the necessary condition for the inheritance of property through the male line.

Men dominated the priestly and warrior roles that defined an emerging ruling class. They imposed their sexist ideology — often framed as religion — on the masses of propertyless men and women.

**Rising capitalism made things worse.** Enslaved men and women saw their common interests. Agricultural societies distinguished "women's" from "men's" work but respected both. But capitalism elevated monetary "exchange value" above "use value." So wage-labor (for money) devalued women's unpaid (although necessary) housework.

Twentieth-century bosses converted many tasks historically done by women at home into wage-labor. Examples include making clothes,

caring for children and the sick, preparing food. This allowed capitalists to amass super-profits by paying lower wages to women workers and driving down men's wages too.

Today women workers are super-exploited from maquilas in El Salvador to garment sweatshops in south Asia. Their low wages are "justified" by an ideology that promotes men as "breadwinners" and women as "homemakers." Women's wages, though critical to most households, are labeled as "only supplemental."

A comrade in South Africa tells of working the hard and dirty job of road construction with her baby on her back. Today many working-class women everywhere shoulder a double burden: super-exploited wage labor and primary responsibility for housework and child-rearing.

**Human nature is not static.** The collectivity of pre-class communism allowed humans to survive as a species. The development of private property led to the emergence of class society. The rulers divided us—by tribes, nations, "race" and by gender. When we overcome those divisions we will abolish class society. This will conclude the prehistory of humanity and allow us to consciously choose communist collectivity and realize our full human potential.

## ONLY COMMUNISM CAN END SEXISM from page 1

to the dedication of each one to the working class.

Women, especially women workers of color, already give important leadership in the fight to mobilize masses for communism. Today and in the future, communists fight religion's traditions and capitalist culture that prevents women from giving leadership to the whole working class.

**Communism will abolish private property.** No longer will social relationships be distorted by treating each other as commodities, as things to be used. Children will be the joy and the responsibility of the collective. They will not be treated as their parents' private property.

The family will no longer exist as a legal/economic institution. Households will exist within much stronger communities. The work of feeding, clothing, cleaning and caring for each other will be organized in deeply collective ways. This will end the isolated drudgery of housework. No one will have to depend on another for their survival or social position. Collective work will provide security for everyone.

Families in some form have always been vital for human survival. That being said, people from pre-class societies to the present have organized kinship, childrearing and sexual relationships in many different ways. We can't predict how those relationships will be organized in a fully developed communist society. What we commit ourselves to is the struggle for honest, respectful and comradely relationships that promote the full development of all.

Communism will create the conditions to keep everyone healthy and to care for them respectfully when they are ill. Better methods of birth control and infertility treatment will enable us to make intentional decisions about childrearing. (See page 7)

**The great revolutions of the 20th century**



"Women's March" Los Angeles, January 2017

**help us begin to see how communism can end sexism.** Communists broke with traditional religions to allow divorce. In addition, communists in Soviet Russia created "creches" (to care for small children), "children's palaces" (for older children) and dining halls in factories to reduce the burden of housework and child care on women.

In China, the People's Commune movement of the 1950s introduced free cafeterias, laundry, childcare and more. But these advances were mainly meant to increase production, not to advance communist social relations. These services were still considered "women's work" and women generally earned fewer "work points"

than men doing similar tasks.

While advances were made, the capitalist social relations that defined socialism in both Russia and China undermined communists' best efforts to end sexism. (See pages 5 and 8)

**Communism will end the material basis of sexism — but that won't be enough.** Growing communist party collectives will mobilize mass struggle against sexist ideas, practices and habits left over from capitalism. That must happen from now on, everywhere and in every way we can. Mass mobilization for communism demands it. That is the only way to end sexism forever.

**Join the International Communist Workers' Party! We have a world to win!**



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## Report from El Salvador:

### WOMEN MAQUILA WORKERS GIVE LEADERSHIP TO BUILDING ICWP

EL SALVADOR-October, 2018—Women in the maquilas have given leadership in the class struggle in very concrete ways. For example, when maquila workers found that the water in their factory was dirty, women in ICWP gave leadership to the workers in the whole factory who let the boss know that if the problem wasn't solved immediately, they would stop working.

In the face of this threat, the bosses brought a bag of water to each worker at their work station. They hoped to calm their thirst for struggle, but it didn't. Seeing the anger of the workers, the bosses finally brought technicians to repair the water pump so that the water did not come out so dirty.

The comrades later met with workers to explain that only communism will guarantee the workers' health and end the bosses' constant attacks. This day-to-day work in the factory is helping our comrades to learn how to talk to the workers directly about communism, where there will be clean water for all, since the health of

workers will be the priority. Our main objective is not a better water pump, but a communist society, where water and everything else belongs to the workers..

Throughout this year women have been part of our ICWP collectives in which our communist line is discussed and decisions are made on future actions. This practice guides the process of organizing. Women's participation is vital in the struggle and political development in the maquilas since they represent a little over half of the work force. It is important to participate in struggles around problems in the factories that occur every day: supervisors' and employers' insults, ridicule, and discrimination of women and men workers.

The central point of this struggle is to mobilize workers to Communism. Our struggle is different from the goals of liberal capitalist feminism, an ideology of the bourgeoisie to keep their privileges and divide workers. We do not fight for re-

forms or laws against sexism and patriarchy. We fight for a new system, a new way of living between men and women in an equitable, respectful and collective way. A communist society.

Women take the struggle head-on against the cause of sexism, capitalist relations of production, and its consequences, in the loss of prestige and mistreatment of women. This happens not just in the maquilas, but throughout the whole social structure, because sexist and patriarchal thinking contaminates all of our lives. We must expose and reject capitalist sexist practices.

As it will be in Communism, women workers are building an important communist leadership in the factories, their homes, and in the streets. They are organizing women and men workers for the ICWP. They are planning the May Day marches, reading and distributing our *Red Flag* newspaper, waging struggles in their workplaces and winning co-workers to fight directly for communism.

Our goal is to build new models of social relations of production between men and women. We want a communist education that teaches children not to discriminate against others for reasons of "race", ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. In Communism, young people and adults will develop a different mentality, far away from prejudices and harmful thoughts against women. Men and women organized in the ICWP will dedicate our lives to establish the communist society that workers deserve.



El Salvador  
May Day  
2016

## South Africa:

### “YOU HAVE TOUCHED THE WOMEN, YOU HAVE STRUCK A ROCK”

Sexism in South Africa is shaped by capitalism, and specifically by the legacy of apartheid. Under that system, black people were assigned to “homelands” in the barren deserts. To survive, men took jobs in mines and factories in the white areas. They had to carry passbooks at all times.

In 1955 the government passed a law to require women to carry passbooks. This meant that unless a woman had a job, she couldn't join her husband in the city. In 1956 20,000 women marched to Pretoria to present their demands.

They stood up and said enough was enough. Things were very bad. Black South Africans had to carry identification everywhere. There were places that were no-go areas for Black women. It is thanks to women that the identification law was lifted. That is where the phrase, “You strike a woman, You strike a rock,” came from.

A male comrade reports:

My mother was involved in the 1956 women's march. She was sixteen years old and went with my grandmother. They marched 20 kilometers

(12 miles) to catch a train to Johannesburg. From there, they marched around 300 kilometers (180 miles) to the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

Women came from everywhere: rural and urban areas. Some of their husbands were staying in places like Johannesburg where they worked in the mines. So the women were directly affected by the system. The women decided to demand an end to apartheid and pass laws.

This was a significant event for women because they had been characterized as objects, weak, fragile, and emotional. The march proved that this was untrue.

My mother laments that it was more than 50 years ago, but we're talking about the same things now. Sexist attitudes and behavior still exist.

Although the apartheid laws and its passbooks were eliminated in 1994, capitalism and its brutal exploitation remain. Capitalism still forces men to leave their families in the countryside to seek jobs in the factories and mines. Leaving their families in the countryside, they live in hostels near their job sites.

This separation of men and women makes the fight against sexism more urgent—and more difficult. Party clubs in South African struggle to include women in the leadership. Comrades know that only a united working class can win the fight for power.



1956

The anti-apartheid struggle could not abolish sexism because it did not fight to end the capitalist, commodity system and create a communist economy and social order. Its goal was to end the system of racial separation known as apartheid. It created a system where capitalism and all its evils, including sexism and racism, remain in South Africa

Sexism cannot be fully eliminated under capitalism. We must abolish wage slavery and create a communist social, economic, and cultural organization of society. Then men and women will be able to live as comrades and to fully develop our human potential.

I tell my mother that what was lacking then is what we are providing now: a communist outlook and leadership to the working class. If they had organized and mobilized around communism, things would be different today.

It is not too late to fight for communism. It is our job in ICWP to organize all workers, especially women, around the world, to fight and defeat capitalism and build a new communist society.



South Africa, 2016



# COMMUNISM AND THE STRUGGLE TO END SEXISM FROM THE CHINESE REVOLUTION TO THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

Mobilizing masses for communism creates the material basis to end sexism.

But will ending the wage system automatically end sexism? No. Even after communist revolution, ending sexism will take a conscious, committed long-term political struggle against the ideas and habits inherited from class society.

That struggle starts now.

## The Chinese Revolution: Fighting Sexism by Mobilizing Masses

William Hinton's book *Fanshen* is a report on the communist-led struggle for land reform in Long Bow, China in 1948. In the chapter "Abuses of Power" he wrote about a group of Party members who had become militiamen based on their heroism in the revolutionary struggle. However, they used that power in corrupt ways. Their "rascal behavior" included rape.

The militia leader and the Party collective tried

half-heartedly to stop them. Key male Party leaders also felt entitled to privileges, including sexual "favors." They hit on many women, single and married. Their power was political, not economic. For example, when a former landlord's daughter rejected him, Yu-hsing arrested her on charges of spreading false rumors.

Hinton relates how these cadre eventually had to stand before mass meetings where they criticized themselves and heard the criticisms of the masses. Hearing these stories, we can understand better the importance of both mobilizing the masses and practicing criticism and self-criticism today. We can't build communism without them.

Hinton reported on his return to Long Bow in 1971 in another book, *Shenfan*. We learn that the "criticism and struggle" process didn't always work.

For example, during land reform, the militiaman Man-hsi had raped many women, most from landlord or dispossessed rich-peasant families. Others were daughters of hated collaborators. He was criticized sharply and promised to change his ways. But four years later he raped the daughter of a neighbor. Only then was he expelled from the party, although he remained a leader in production.

Hinton found that the communist-led movement for land reform and social-

ism, including the Cultural Revolution, had struck a blow against sexism. For example, young men told him that "in the old days there was no way of making a living. People like us could not afford a wife. Therefore we did questionable things. Now we would be ashamed to do anything disgraceful." Women said, "Now that divorce is possible there is no need to die."

We don't agree with Hinton's 1971 analysis of the Cultural Revolution. But there is much to learn from his stories about Chinese communists' pioneering efforts to address sexism, crime and other anti-social behavior with the "mass line." And he recognized that the socialist line "to each according to work" was intensifying economic inequality, not ending it.

## Sharp, Principled, Open Political Struggle: Now and Always

Sexism was clearly an ongoing problem in the Chinese Communist Party in spite of its line that "women hold up half the sky." Are there remnants in the International Communist Workers' Party today in spite of our best efforts to understand and fight it? Yes. Can we defeat it? Yes.

That conscious, committed long-term political struggle against the ideas and habits inherited from class society starts now. We can't walk away from it. We won't be able to walk away from communist society when we inevitably encounter reactionary or even corrupt behavior. We and our friends have to see, in the practice of our party now, that open and honest criticism and self-criticism will make it possible to defeat sexism in the process of mobilizing masses for communism.



Women engaging in ideological struggle during the Cultural Revolution in China

## CRISIS AND STRUGGLE from page 1

### Two sides of the same coin

In India, at least five Dalit women per day are raped. But they're not alone. Lower-caste women, Muslim women, and poor women of every caste and religion are raped daily in India.

At the same time, a dozen Indian farmers per day commit suicide. Capitalist agriculture—the Monsanto monopoly on seed combined with global warming—forces millions of farmers into bankruptcy. Capitalism teaches men that they must provide for their families. Then capitalism makes it impossible. And millions of men are killing themselves.

Women have led many demonstrations demanding punishment for rapists. They've joined men in mass demonstrations and a general strike protesting discrimination against Dalits (people considered below the lowest caste). Reformers

have pushed for laws to lessen the burden of debt on farmers.

These issues are linked. Men and women in India are joining and building ICWP to get rid of the capitalist ideas of sexism and caste discrimination that divide us and to fight for a communist society.

In the United States, young black men are four times as likely as young white men to be killed by the police. US cops kill people at a higher rate than any other industrialized country, including hundreds of mostly poor and working-class white people. They kill 20 times more men than women.

Racist police terror and health care for profit impose a special burden on black mothers. They are almost four times as likely to die after childbirth than white women in the US. Part of this is that the US health care system is racist, anti-working class and based on private profit. The US has a higher maternal death rate than any other industrialized country.

But that's only part of it. Think about Erica Garner. In 2014 the cops murdered her father while he protested, "I can't breathe!" Erica, a young black mother, took up the fight against racist police terror. She joined a movement led in large part by black women who have put millions on the street to protest police terror. She, like every other woman and family who have survived the epidemic of police terror, was faced by the daily stress of racism. In December 2017, Erica died of a heart attack at the age of 27, just weeks after giving birth.

Racist police killings and maternal mortality are two sides of the coin of a racist profit system in which black men and women in the US are murdered by capitalism. So are rapes and suicide in India.

Gender roles mean that these attacks take different forms, but the cause is the same. So is the solution. We must fight harder to build ICWP to fight for communism.



India—protesting gang rape of a 12-year old girl



Erica Garner protesting police murder of her father



# COMMUNISM – NOT FEMINISM – WILL END OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

Women and their male allies have been fighting women's subordination and special oppression since these arose at the dawn of class society.

Since 1852, many anti-sexists have called themselves "feminists." Feminism, like all ideas that arise in class society, has a class character.

"First wave" feminism was openly bourgeois. Women from the capitalist and professional classes struggled against gender stereotypes. They fought to win the same privileges and legal rights as their brothers and fathers. They wanted to vote, to inherit and own property, to get the best possible education, to enter the professions.

From the US to Persia, from Germany to Japan, from England to New Zealand, feminists (suffragists) saw the right to vote as the key to winning other legal reforms. While their protest tactics were sometimes militant and even illegal, bourgeois feminists were (and are) firmly committed to reforming capitalism.

The feminist slogan "equality for women" is appealing – as are calls for racial equality, economic equality and more. But it can't paper over class antagonisms – for example, between a plantation mistress and female slaves.

Working-class women's brothers had no property. They didn't go to college and become professionals. Not all working-class women (slaves and wage-slaves) saw the vote as the key to their liberation.

Some – especially in England – did. The international socialist movement demanded "universal suffrage for women." But others, like the dressmaker and radical labor organizer Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, saw the suffrage movement as a bourgeois diversion from the struggle against the super-exploitation of women workers.

Black women like Ida B. Wells Barnett fought hard against lynching and other racist attacks. They also fought against sexism in that period. But white suffrage leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton openly appealed to racism, using slurs to refer to black men and describing them as rapists.

The 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which granted women the right to vote, passed after World War I amidst an anti-immigrant, anti-communist onslaught. This racism continues to haunt bourgeois feminism.

Meanwhile, socialist women and men tried to articulate a working-class line on sexism (which they called "the woman question.") Their efforts were flawed by capitalist aspects of socialist theory. These included a "stages" theory

that led them to support bourgeois democracy. Another was the "theory of the productive forces" that led them to believe, mistakenly, that women's participation in wage labor was itself a step toward liberation.

After 1917, many working-class (and other) women worldwide saw in the new Soviet Union a radically different road to ending sexism. As socialism emerged as another form of capitalism, this too proved disappointing. (See article, page 8.)

"Second wave" bourgeois feminism emerged after World War II with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It attacked gender stereotypes more broadly, including within personal relationships and the family.

Like the socialists, one of their main goals was for women to play a larger role in wage labor (mainly in the professions) and in electoral politics. By 1950, however, over a third of all US women (and a significantly higher percent of black women) were already in the labor force. By 1990, a majority of the women almost everywhere in the world (except the Arab world and Latin America) worked outside the home.

Women workers were super-exploited everywhere; even women in the professions earned less than men. No wonder, then, that when the US-based National Organization for Women (NOW) formed in 1966, its main demand was for an "Equal Rights Amendment" to the US Constitution (never ratified) that would have banned gender-based job and other discrimination.

But even as NOW committed itself to liberal reformism, "second-wave" feminism was profoundly influenced by revolutionary upsurges. These included national liberation movements sweeping Asia and Africa and the movement against Soviet-style revisionism (expressed most powerfully in the Chinese Cultural Revolution).

The result was the growth of a wide range of feminist groups with very different programs and ideologies. These included consciousness-raising groups, black feminism, lesbian separatism, "difference" feminism, Marxist-feminism and much more. These often had little in common and we can't analyze them in detail here. In particular, some pushed the divisive idea that men in general are "the enemy of women" – but most did not.

We can say, however, that the defeat of pro-communist forces in the Chinese Cultural Revo-



lution left even the most revolutionary-minded, pro-working-class feminists (along with other radicals) without a clear ideological way forward.

**Third-wave feminism (and in some views a fourth and even fifth wave) emerged in the 1990s.** It was based largely on the idea of "intersectionality" introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw. It recognized that women's experiences are not universal. Instead, they are shaped by race, class and other factors.

We don't want to over-generalize about the class outlook of second- and third-wave feminists. However, the dominant theme is "identity politics" and "diversity." This puts individuals and a variety of social groups – but not classes — at the center. Together with a practice based on reformism, this betrays its ideology as essentially bourgeois.

**Revolutionary-sounding calls to "tear down patriarchy" mean little without an understanding that the material basis of this racist and sexist system – dominated by privileged white males—is the capitalist system of private property and wage labor.** Some Marxist feminists recognize this. However, their commitment to core political errors of the historical communist movement (see above) lead them too into a practice based on reformism.

Only mass mobilization for communism – including an intentional fight against sexism in all its forms – can finally end the subordination and special oppression of women.



**READ OUR MANIFESTO  
MOBILIZE THE MASSES FOR COMMUNISM  
AT ICWPREDFLAG.ORG /MMCE.PDF**





Comrade distributing *Red Flag* to union workers in the May Day March, Mexico City, 2014.

## MORE ARTICLES ABOUT THE COMMUNIST FIGHT AGAINST SEXISM ARE ON OUR WEBSITE:

[ICWPREDFLAG.ORG/SEXE/](http://ICWPREDFLAG.ORG/SEXE/)

### An Injury to One is an Injury to All

## FIGHT AGAINST ALL ATTACKS ON LGBTQ MEMBERS OF OUR WORKING-CLASS FAMILY

\*In South Africa, dozens of lesbians are raped every month, justified by the claim that this will “cure” them.

\*While comrades were distributing *Red Flag* in an auto factory in South Africa, a gay worker wanted to know our position on same sex relationships—will they be legal or will they be banned like in other countries now.

\*A comrade in Mexico wrote to *Red Flag* that a fellow worker said that there were no homosexuals where he comes from, and if there were any, the people would kill them.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons are our relatives, our friends, our neighbors, our co-workers. An attack against one member of our working-class family is an attack against us all.

Mobilizing the masses for communism involves taking on all the ways that the ruling class has divided us, weakened our unity as a class, kept us from respecting and trusting each other, and kept us fighting amongst ourselves.

Attacks on members of our class family based on their sexual orientation are the result of an ideology of sexism/machismo which is closely tied to gang rape. Groups of men rape vulnerable girls (and sometimes boys) in a group demonstration of their “masculinity.”

Transgender men and women also suffer violent attack. In the US, 29 transgender people were killed in 2017 alone, disproportionately transgender women of color. The cumulative impact of racism, sexism, and prejudice conspire to deprive them of employment, housing, healthcare and other necessities, making them especially vulnerable.

**No more traditions chains shall bind us**  
Class society controls women’s sexuality to

control private property. This enforces strict adherence to male and female gender roles and discriminates against behavior that does not conform to those gender roles. All of us are held back from developing our full humanity by strict gender role definitions.

The Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—have historically condemned both male homosexuality and lesbianism as threats to the traditional view of women’s subservience in monogamous families.

Communist society will allow us to have more collective responsibility for each other. Housing and child care arrangements will be more collective. They won’t be tied to the question of “who can have sex with whom.” This is more like the way most people lived in pre-class societies, before the rise of “the family, private property, and the state.”

We will consciously fight the gendered division of labor and the sexist ideas connected to it. Almost all the psychological and social differences we see (or think we see) between men and

women come from how capitalism treats us differently and from the sexist ways that capitalism teaches us to see and treat ourselves and other workers.

Once communism destroys the material basis of sexism by putting an end to class society and private property, we’ll be able to win the fight to end all discrimination and divisions based on gender or perceived gender. Communist society will value each person as a comrade within a huge interconnected social network.

Starting now we must fight against the reactionary ideas that we have inherited from class society about gender roles and sexual orientation. This will be more difficult in some places than in others. But lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer members of our class are just that—members of our class. We must not let the bosses’ ideology divide us, nor allow the chains of tradition to keep us from defending our working-class family. We need to mobilize the masses—including the LGBTQ masses—for communism. United we will win!





# COMMUNISM, ABORTION, AND WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

## ILLEGAL ABORTIONS—WOMEN FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN PRISON AND DEATH

EL SALVADOR— “I’m very happy to be back with my family,” said a young woman, just released from ten years in prison for a spontaneous abortion (miscarriage). She had originally been sentenced to 30 years, but her lawyers had finally managed to prove that she had suffered a miscarriage rather than having provoked an abortion.

But that’s not the situation of hundreds of women who are still in prison. The people who make the laws that condemn women for abortion say nothing about the situations of extreme poverty in which working-class women live or the violence and abuse many suffer in this capitalist system.

Women of our class are dying every day from abortions in clandestine clinics. This is a product of a sexist society that capitalist has promoted. Any girl or woman should have access to a safe abortion. This is not a “moral” or religious issue. Many times the mother’s life or well-being is at risk if her pregnancy is not interrupted. Many babies have no chance of remaining alive when they leave the uterus.

In Latin American countries such as El Salvador, a woman can be imprisoned for up to 50 years even if her abortion was spontaneous. Sex education is almost nonexistent. Many girls and women do not have the resources to go through a medical check-up. This is what capitalism offers: jail or death.

Many of these women are sexually abused from an early age. Girls as young as 12 or 13 become pregnant, sometimes by rape. Many are not prepared physically or mentally to face everything that comes with motherhood. Abortions, especially those done illegally and on women this young, can do irreparable harm.

With the triumph of the Soviet revolution the lives of women and girls changed. They were no longer sold as wives or servants, prostitution largely disappeared, child marriage was abolished and abortion was legalized in 1920 and was safe and free.

Although socialism soon reversed all these gains (see page 8), these are examples of how things can be different in a system that guarantees the health of people.

The victory of the communist revolution led by the ICWP will guarantee a full life for all. We will wipe out the sexism that hurts so much of humanity. People will learn about sexuality and know how to prevent or choose pregnancy. Birth control and abortion will be free and available to all who need it like everything else.

No one will be forced to have or abort a child and everyone will learn a new type of sexual education.

## COMMUNISM WILL ALLOW US TO DECIDE MORE FREELY ABOUT HAVING CHILDREN

Capitalist regimes have long denied millions of women the ability to decide whether or not to give birth. Abortion is illegal in many countries and increasingly restricted in others. Forced sterilization of poor women, especially targeting those from racial and ethnic minorities, has been the tool of racist regimes around the world.

Capitalism has never valued the lives of the babies—or the adults—of our class. It places the responsibility of childrearing on individual women, their partners and immediate family. It replaces the “village” that we need to raise a child with what Marx called the “cash nexus.”

Masses of women around the world are unable to provide for the basic needs of their children. They are forced to make hard choices when they get pregnant.

Women without access to affordable and safe contraception and legal abortion often take the desperate alternative of an unsafe, illegal abortion. Thousands of women die each year due to botched and unsafe abortions. The attack on women’s access to safe abortion is the leading edge of an attack on the health of working-class and other poor women around the world.

### Communism and Abortion

What will we do about abortion, and birth control in general, in a communist society? Communism will not treat women’s social and health concerns as less important than men’s health or that of a fetus. We’ll develop better methods of birth control and infertility treatment, and make them available to all.

Health will be more important, period. And the masses will be directly involved in healthcare. We’ll do away with money, wages, rent, and bills to pay. We’ll get rid of the stresses and poisons that kill so many of us now. People will choose freely whether or not to commit to loving partnerships. No one will face the responsibility of feeding, clothing, educating and loving a child on their own.

**Communism will also allow us to make the decisions about conceiving children more freely.** When we look forward to that communist world, we can begin to think about birthing and raising children in new ways.

The fundamental principle of communist society will be: From each according to commitment; to each according to need. That means that we will not use material incentives or legal strictures to force people to participate in socially necessary work. We reject coercive social relations, and rely on political struggle for everything, from who washes the dishes and takes out the trash, to who changes the baby’s diaper.

If someone refuses to work or to do a particular task, we will not lock them up or make them go hungry. The vision that everyone is both an individual and at the same time a member of a collective suggests a communist answer to questions about birth control and abortion.

Children will be the joy and responsibility of the collective. Thus, having a child will be a decision that involves the collective. Political struggle is the tool for resolving disagreements and decision making. But in the end, no woman will be forced to bear a child, or prevented from bearing one. Neither will she be shamed or punished because of her choice.



Young women guerrilla fighters in El Salvador



Soviet Day Nursery



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## Women in the Soviet Union:

### BUILDING SOCIALISM: RETREAT FROM STRUGGLE TO TRANSFORM DAILY LIFE

In the Soviet Union and elsewhere, communist parties have made the biggest advances when they actually fought for communism. When the Bolsheviks retreated from the goal of communism, they necessarily retreated from the fight against sexism.

Women played key roles in the Russian Revolution. They rejected patriarchal marriage and male dominance. They anticipated that the family itself, removed from its economic base in production and consumption, would wither away in communism along with the state.

Communist women advocated the socialization of household labor, freeing women from isolated housework and involving them in collective labor. They saw child-rearing as a social responsibility and looked forward to the day when people would choose their partners freely, unfettered by economic dependence or inequality.

#### War Communism – and the Retreat from It

The massive disruption of the Russian Civil War forced immediate solutions to the problems of survival of children and families. During the period of war communism (1918-21) the Bolsheviks established public dining halls, free food for children, wages in kind and state rationing of commodities.

While some comrades saw this as a foretaste of the free family of the future, Party leaders saw it as an emergency measure. They agreed with Marx that socialism was a necessary stage in the development of communism. They believed that advancing to communism had to wait for industrialization and abundance.

The 1918 Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship was the most advanced of its day. But it assumed a continuing temporary need for the family as an economic unit.

It abolished the inferior legal status of women. It undercut the backward influence of the Russian Orthodox Church by giving legal status only to civil marriage. It allowed divorce at the request of either spouse, and alimony for both men and women. It abolished illegitimacy, declaring that all children were entitled to parental support.

Abortion was legalized in 1920, free of cost and performed only by doctors, and birth control in 1923.

#### The New Economic Policy (1921-28)

The Bolsheviks didn't build a mass base among rural workers, the vast majority of the country. They had fought for "peace, land, and bread," not communism. These errors prevented them from overcoming divisions between rural and urban workers.

By 1921, they faced starvation in the cities and uprisings of workers, peasants and soldiers. Hundreds of thousands of children were starving, homeless and abandoned.



St. Petersburg, International Women's Day, 1917

The Bolsheviks responded by retreating to the New Economic Policy (NEP). Over the next two years, they instituted capitalist relations of wage slavery, markets and banking.

Capitalist production relations included unequal wages and high unemployment for women. Children's homes and daycare centers were closed. Children were sent to relatives or fostered out to peasant families. Many single women resorted to prostitution to survive.

By 1925 the party had officially retreated from collective childrearing and the collectivization of socially necessary labor of cooking and laundry. By 1927 the society no longer offered women contraception, children's homes or employment. They were thus dependent on men within the traditional family or for alimony and child support.

Still, the Zhenotdel, the Bolshevik women's organization, struggled for the transformation of family life. It was an uphill battle against the realities imposed by the New Economic Policy and the resistance of male Party members at every level. The traditional family remained the basic



1926 Poster  
"Emancipated Women Build Socialism"

societal institution.

#### Five-Year Plans Bring Women into Industry

The Five-Year Plans (1928-32 and 1933-37) ended the NEP with a massive State-sponsored campaign of rapid industrialization and collective agriculture. Some 6.6 million women entered the wage-labor force. The largest influx was in 1930, when the wives and daughters of industrial workers were recruited to largely male-dominated heavy industry.

Largely female industries (garment, textile, laundry) became entirely female. Women in male-dominated industries entered the lowest-paid jobs, especially janitorial and unskilled work. Skilled jobs and professions like medicine, typically lower-paid, became largely female.

Communal laundries, socialized dining facilities, child and baby-care facilities were built to make women workers available for industry. They became part of the social wage. Access to them became part of labor discipline, rather than liberating women to participate in social life. The Zhenotdel became an organ for winning women to rapid industrialization before it was abolished in 1930.

Real wages fell by half. Families now needed two incomes to survive. The socialist state relied on the family to intensify capital accumulation, realizing the surplus from two workers' labor for the price of one.

The wage system – even in socialism – made it impossible to replace the traditional family as an economic unit with a working-class family that takes care of all.

#### 1936: Socialism is Declared as Women are Celebrated as Mothers

By 1936, the international communist movement was responding to the rise of Nazi Germany by retreating from communist internationalism and proletarian revolution to the United Front Against Fascism. In the Soviet Union this meant:

\*Intensifying the program of industrialization begun in the Five-Year Plans.

\*A new constitution that declared that socialism had been achieved, "from everyone in accordance with his abilities, to everyone in accordance to the quantity and quality of his labor." The class struggle was declared to be over. The "defense of the fatherland" was called "the holy duty of every citizen of the USSR."

\*An ideological campaign to strengthen the traditional family.

The 1936 legal code strictly limited divorce. It outlawed abortion and homosexuality. Women were offered incentives to bear more children. Maternal clinics and childcare institutions were expanded. But women had to assume the double burden of work and constant motherhood. They increasingly encountered harassment in the workplace

Most important, the Soviets abandoned the goal of the transformation of everyday life. Today we are fighting to do that – and by mobilizing for communism we will win!

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