

ERA- WOMEN IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE

At this time one issue that could greatly affect the living and working conditions of women is the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution which, if ratified by just a few more states, will become law throughout the United States of North America. This issue of the Equal Rights Amendment (the E.R.A.) is something that will demand the party's action. Exactly what effect the ERA will have on women will depend to a large extent on whether or not a struggle is waged in the working class around it and if it is, on what type of struggle it is.

The issue of this amendment is being raised at a time of a continuously mounting cost of living and daily moves by the bourgeoisie which take away rights and lay the basis for real brutal attacks on the proletariat. This is rousing the minds of the broad masses and in a real way stirring women into action and exciting their interest in the political movement. The worsening economic situation for the proletariat, and the widespread anger over it as well as the wave of strikes that we have seen, will provide the party we are on the eve of forming with the foundation for uniting the labor movement with the political struggle. That political struggle has developed and will undoubtedly take on new proportions with the indignation over Watergate and the consequences of Nixon's resignation. We will be confronting this situation with a newly formed party whose task it is to truly embrace the vanguard of the proletariat, those workers who are directly confronting the bourgeoisie. Given this objective situation and our tasks at this time, what should be our work around the Equal Rights Amendment?

In "Left-Wing Communism An Infantile Disorder, written in April, 1920, Lenin described this first stage of our Party's growth; "The first historical tasks (that of winning over the class conscious vanguard of the proletariat to Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class) could not be accomplished without a complete ideological and political victory over opportunism and social chauvinism." (Lenin, LWC, FLPH, page 98) Our task, then, is to get into a position where we can expose in a real way the revisionism of the Communist Party of the United States of America and the class collaboration of the labor lieutenants and other agents of the bourgeoisie's line in the working class movement. We must base our party in that section of the working class with the least ties to capital and there provide the conscious leadership

that will insure the independence of the class conscious proletariat from the bourgeoisie. Here we must fight it out theoretically and politically with the CPUSA for the leadership of the proletariat. But our criticism must not be that they call themselves communists and permeate every pore of every face of the working class movement. This should be the responsibility of any communist party. What we do criticize the CPUSA for is that in the name of communism they put forward a program that in every aspect aims at tying the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie. A revolutionary struggle for reforms under the leadership of a communist party leads to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, but the groveling of the revisionist CPUSA for reforms only drags back and burdens down the developing working class movement. In our work we must prove the bankruptcy of the revisionist program.

Lenin showed us that: "History generally, and the history of revolutions, in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more manysided, more lively and 'subtle' than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine." (LWC, page 100) This, of course is being born out today by the fact that the class struggle is handing us many forms which if mastered by the communists, offer us arena after arena where we can take political consciousness to the proletariat. Work around the ERA offers us one such opportunity. The ERA states:
Section 1: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
Section 2: The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.
Section 3: This amendment shall take effect two years after the date of ratification.

What should be our specific tasks around this proposed amendment? First of all, we must say good-bye forever to the times when we could afford to restrict our work to proclaiming ourselves "for" or "against" one or another event in the class struggle. Imagine us going into our union, NAACP, or the Coalition of Labor Union Women, announcing ourselves as "for" the ERA or "against" it. First of all, we should be asked, "So, who are you?" and we will be reminded of the tremendous task we have only barely begun. But, second of all, we will have done nothing to bring consciousness to the movement.

Cont. on p.

WOMEN: Cont. from p. 5

of the working class. It is not the "for" or the "against" proclamation of this or any other complex question that is decisive. No, it is the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie that may be fought out in part over this issue that is decisive. In this period that which is important is that which wins over the vanguard of the proletariat to the cause of communism and that which brings political, class consciousness to the proletariat.

It should be noted here that just as the "new left" and to a certain extent the CPUSA, are arguing amongst themselves about whether to be "for" or "against" the ERA, so too are countless politicians in the U.S. Congress arguing over this amendment, each trying to portray himself as the true defender of the rights of women and claiming his amendment to the amendment to be the best. But issues such as the rights of women are decided neither in the U.S. Congress nor in the left movement but in the class struggle. However, so long as the issue is merely discussed apart from the working class struggle against the bourgeoisie from either the standpoint of the U.S. Congress or of the "new left" we leave the initiative and the gains to the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeoisie in the USNA is stepping up its fascist drive for there is absolutely no reason to think that the bourgeoisie will gratuitously do anything to help women workers or any other section of the working class. In fact, one interpretation of the ERA would be that "equal" means "same"; an interpretation which can lay the conditions for wiping out any protective laws that cover working conditions for women now. Even now, there are already "protective" laws which in name guard the health and safety of women workers, but, in fact, are used both to deny women jobs and to deny men protective benefits. In the same way, the ERA, if ratified by enough states would be used to deny women protective legislation, and most likely, to substitute women for men in jobs at lower wages. But our righteous decrees on the ERA will do nothing to arm the proletariat for its upcoming struggle against the bourgeoisie. Nor will it in any way weaken the bourgeoisie. In fact, our failure to act will actually allow the bourgeoisie to prepare its fascism without opposition. But our task is to mobilize our forces and all class conscious workers for the revolutionary struggle forcing the bourgeoisie to enforce the supposed benefits of the ERA, the Civil Rights Act, and so on. Victories have to be prepared for and won; they are not simply granted by Congress. We have to fight from our source of strength, --from the factories through our factory nuclei--for real protec-

tion for the health and safety of both men and women, for equal pay for commensurate work. Not with a simple "for" or "against" but with the exposure of the CPUSA and through the actual experience of the workers, will we build up our factory nuclei and closely unite socialism with the working class movement.

All workers must be mobilized for the defense of women's rights. Work must be done among working class women (for example work around the ERA) so as to bring them into the vanguard in the sense of bringing them into political action against the enemy. Working women are, of course, part of the working class, and many times part of the active vanguard of the proletariat. Yet, often, they are not involved in the struggle of the vanguard of the proletariat but rather they are involved in bourgeois and petty-bourgeois led reformist struggles.

But, at the same time, working class women must be brought by political education from this position as reserves into the vanguard of the proletariat. The oppression of women affects women of all classes; and a mass women's movement must involve women of all classes. But the only way for this resistance to the oppression of women to be effective is for it to be pointed at the real enemy, the imperialist trusts. It must show that "true emancipation of women is not possible except through communism. (It) must lay stress on the unbreakable connection between woman's human and social position and the private ownership of the means of production. This will draw a strong, ineradicable line against the bourgeois movement for 'emancipation' of women." (Lenin, The Emancipation of Women, Int. Publ., p. 110) In order for the struggle of women to keep this direction and to really challenge the bourgeoisie it must be firmly based in the industrial proletariat. Political education of the proletariat through propaganda as well as through specific struggles is the task of a communist party.

With our party's destiny ahead of us and the history of the international communist movement behind us giving us strength and direction, let us resolve to leave behind forever the period of the sterile and impotent decrees. With our wealth of trained comrades dedicated to Marxism-Leninism, let us march on, without pausing, to really make ours a party that embraces the vanguard of the proletariat, leading those struggles in which the workers are convinced by their own experience that their enemy is capital and that their future is in socialism.

