

# WIN WOMEN'S LIBERATION THROUGH REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE!



Selected Articles from  
**GETTING TOGETHER**

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# The Origin of International Working Women's Day



1909 garment workers' strike sparked mass struggles of women against their oppressive working conditions.

March 8th is International Working Women's Day. It is a day to commemorate the history of struggle for women's liberation and to express solidarity with revolutionary women around the world. The historical origin of International Working Women's Day was the great struggle of tens of thousands of women garment workers in this country who, in 1909, stood up in collective and militant struggle against class exploitation and women's oppression.

In 1909, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York, 150 women garment workers joined the Ladies Waistmakers Union, Local 325, and were immediately locked out by the

company. This marked the beginning of a tremendous struggle which, in the course of a few months, spread to three major cities and included more than 100,000 women who joined to oppose the many forms of oppression facing working women.

March 8, 1909 marked the high point of this struggle. By the next year, this date was declared as International Women's Day at the Second International Congress of Socialist Women.

As much as the capitalists would like to suppress the recognition of this day and hide history behind it, progressive women and men

all over the world have continued to celebrate International Working Women's Day each year, taking up the struggle against women's oppression as an indispensable part of making revolution.

### **An historic struggle against oppressive conditions on the job**

The conditions that women worked under were clear examples of the horrors that women faced with the introduction of modern industry in the U.S. The majority of women who were drawn into the expanding workforce in the early 1900's were newly-arrived immigrants from Europe who left the hunger and misery in their native countries only to find similar conditions in the U.S.

These women made up the backbone of the garment industry and many other light industries. They were harshly exploited, paid the lowest possible wages, and were forced to work very long hours on top of taking care of their children and their homes.

The factories where they worked were filthy and located in old buildings which were never cleaned. The factories usually had only one bathroom for at least 150 workers. The noise from the machines was deafening, and fine particles of fabric and thread made the air deadly to breathe.

These places were also incredible fire hazards. This gruesome truth was brought out by the Triangle Fire of 1911 in which 146 women workers died. Many of the deaths resulted when women jumped from the 9th and 10th story windows. They had to jump because cause the company owners had barred the stairway to prevent workers from leaving their machines in case of a sudden work strike.

### **Women workers waged a protracted struggle**

The garment workers' struggle of 1909 added another chapter to the heroic history of women's struggle in the U.S. The fight against Triangle and Leiserson Company grew until 30,000 women garment workers in New York

City alone went out in a "general strike" against all the garment manufacturers in the city. A slogan raised in this strike was, "We strike for justice for all women!"

The strike in New York City lasted 13 weeks. During this time, the striking women were beaten by thugs, attacked by police and dogs and left without money for food or rent in the midst of a cold Eastern winter.

When these brutal measures failed to break the strike, the capitalists had the women hauled off to jail.

These women earned the hatred of their class enemies, the capitalists. The way the District Judge summed up the "evidence" against them when they were brought to trial showed how the women were railroaded through the capitalist courts. He said, "You are on strike against God and Nature, whose prime law it is that man shall earn his bread in the sweat of his brow. You are on strike against God."

Despite all these barriers, the striking women drew wide support from the masses of people and made many advances. They provided inspiration for women struggling against their oppression everywhere.

In New York City, more than 300 garment shops were unionized. In Chicago, the right of arbitration, collective bargaining, and an employee grievance committee was won from a large national company called Hart, Shaffner and Marx, after a 14 week strike of working women. Many other gains were made as well.

But most importantly, working women united to fight for the rights of all women, and put the capitalists on notice that women would remain in the front ranks in the fight against capitalist exploitation. In celebrating International Working Women's Day, we have much to learn from women around the world who are fighting for full equality, and we recognize the important role that women play in struggles against imperialism, class exploitation and all forms of oppression.

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GETTING TOGETHER Editorial:

# Win Women's Liberation through Revolutionary Struggle



Textile workers at Oneita Mills in South Carolina fought to unionize.

Women comprise half of humanity, yet in all but the socialist countries of the world, women are severely oppressed. In capitalist countries worldwide including the United States, women toil for low wages and under bad conditions. In the homes, women are forced into dependence on men and are solely responsible for the raising of children and housekeeping. Socially, women's status is unmistakably lower than men's, and politically women are denied many basic rights.

Where did this oppression of women come from, and why has it lasted for so long? How can women's oppression be ended? Why is it that only socialist revolution and the step-by-

step elimination of classes in society can guarantee equality and liberation for women?

These questions must be answered correctly in order for women to win their emancipation from thousands of years of oppression.

## How women are oppressed in the United States

Women in the United States are oppressed in every conceivable way, economically, socially and politically. For example, capitalist customs, laws, institutions, and traditions keep women subordinated to men, bound to the home, and treated unequally in every aspect of their lives.

Capitalist law forces women into dependence upon men, and "legalizes" women's unequal status. In the U.S. insurance policies, property and tax laws, credit bureaus, marriage and divorce laws, welfare regulations and numerous other legal measures all discriminate against women and designate women as "dependents." Even the proposed federal Equal Rights Amendment which would simply grant formal legal equality to women has yet to be passed.

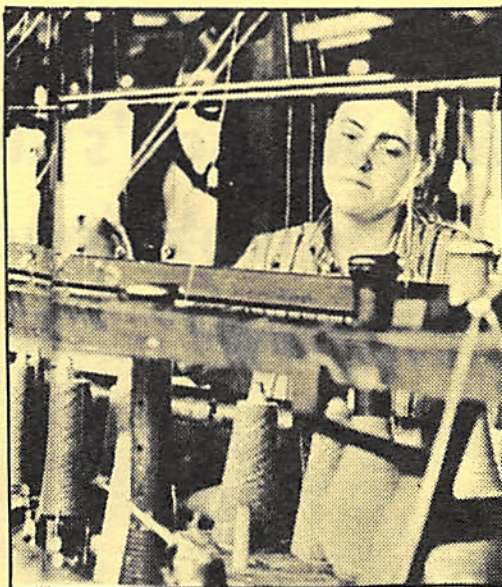
Economically, women are several oppressed as well. A great many women in the U.S. today must work in order to help support themselves or their families. Women now total about 40% of all U.S. workers and are the fastest growing sector of the workforce.

As the U.S. capitalist system's need for an expanded labor force developed in the past decades, it put large numbers of women to work in the lowest paying and most tedious jobs. These occupations are most commonly in light industry such as garment and electronics, in service work such as hospitals and restaurants, and in clerical work.

On the job, women are paid much less than men. In the U.S., working women earn only 61% of what men earn, and the gap is steadily widening. The capitalists justify the lower wages paid to women on the grounds that women's jobs generally do not require the heaviest manual labor, and so they claim that women's jobs are "less difficult" and require less "skill" or "intelligence."

Women are excluded from many fields of employment and from promotions. They have also been systematically kept out of many existing trade unions, so that they have been denied even the minimal right to organize collectively to improve their working conditions. Only about 12% of all working women in the U.S. are unionized compared to about 33% of working men. They receive less benefits and pensions, which the capitalists excuse by saying that women's income is "extra" for the family. Women usually receive no paid maternity leave and are often fired for being pregnant.

In this way, the capitalists oppress the masses



Women have the most tedious jobs.

of working women while reaping huge profits from exploiting their labor power.

Within an individual family, this means that a working woman's income is usually less than the man's, owing to the especially low pay that women receive and the limited jobs open to women. Although she helps to support the family, she is still in many ways dependent upon her husband or the "man of the house" economically, socially and legally.

In addition, whether or not they have jobs, women are solely responsible for the upbringing of their children and for all housework. The capitalist media, educational system and institutions constantly reinforce women's oppression within the home by spreading the backward themes of "a woman's place is in the home" and "a man's home is his castle."

Women who work are expected to carry out their household responsibilities on their own. They must find ways to take care of the children while they are away at work, and must still do the housework when they return home. Mothers who work commonly spend as much as 1/3 of their meager paychecks each month to

pay for childcare. Working mothers who occasionally encounter problems with a sick child or in finding daycare may have their pay docked or even be fired for unavoidable absences from work.

Besides the cost of childcare, there is always the difficulty of finding available space in the few existing childcare centers. Because it is not profitable for the capitalists to take responsibility for childcare, there is only enough government subsidized childcare for 5% of all working women in the U.S. and even this scarce amount is being cut back severely. For the countless women who work on swing and night shifts, there are no childcare provisions at all.

Women who do not have jobs spend day and night caring for the children and doing cooking and cleaning. They usually have no social or political life outside the home except as an extension of their husbands or children.

Black, Asian, Latin and Native American women are the most oppressed of all. They are triply oppressed, as women, as workers and as oppressed nationalities. Evidence of this is everywhere. The unemployment rate for oppressed nationality women is double that for white working class women. Oppressed nationality women are restricted to the worst jobs and shifts, with even fewer promotions and a lower degree of unionization than for white working women. The income of oppressed nationality women who have jobs is only 54% of men's average weekly earnings. Health and childcare facilities, educational opportunities and the general social status of oppressed nationality women are also the worst.

In addition, Third World women are constantly brutalized, as in the example of the thousands of Black, Puerto Rican and other Third World women who have been forcibly sterilized and kept from having any more children. This criminal act is often performed without their knowledge or consent, or at the threat of cutting off their welfare benefits. But the sterilization of oppressed nationality women in the U.S. is deliberate and shows what lengths the capitalists will go to in order to

suppress and restrict the oppressed nationalities.

Without a doubt, women in the U.S., as in all capitalist countries, are a distinctly oppressed sector whose liberation is an important goal for the entire working class.

### Women's oppression originated with class society

The historical source of women's oppression around the world is the same. As Frederick Engels said, "The first class antagonism which appeared in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male."

Women's oppression originated long ago, after the first division of labor took place between men and women. Women in the most primitive and earliest societies were the main force in production, for the small-scale work done in the home was the primary productive labor of those societies. Women played a dominant role in relation to producing the necessities of life and were respected for this.

Women gradually became relegated to a lower position as men took over more and more complex means of producing and obtaining the basic necessities of life outside the confines of the home. With the emergence of stock breeding and agriculture, and the corresponding tools of production, men's role became primary in producing food and social wealth. A system of private ownership of the tools and basic means of production developed in the hands of men. While women's continuing role of caring for the home and family were indispensable for maintaining human society, these tasks were subordinate to men's in relation to production.

Along with these developments came the first class stratification of society, with some men who had accumulated more wealth enslaving others to work for them. This further increased the wealth and power of certain men over society as a whole.

Thus, the first division of society into exploi-

ting and exploited classes corresponds with the general period in which women's status sank beneath that of men. From ancient times to the present day, social, economic and political life of society came under the domination of men in general and an exploiting class in particular, with women being held in a subordinate status in every respect.

Each system of class exploitation gave way to the next, all the way to modern capitalism. With each successive class system, women's oppression was perpetuated and adapted to the new social and economic system.

### **Capitalism is the source of women's oppression today**

Modern capitalist class society has brought into being an economic and social system in which the smallest class in the history of mankind owns and controls the means of production for the entire society, and dominates the vast majority of both men and women. The capitalists need to maintain the subordination of women, to keep them at the bottom stratum of society. They have retained the age-old traditions and institutions of women's oppression, adapting them to modern industrial society.

Rapid industrial expansion of capitalism has given rise to greater demands for labor. To meet their own needs, the capitalists have brought many women into the workforce. Capitalism, for the first time in the history of human society, has laid the foundations for the emancipation of women by drawing them into the workforce in large numbers and thus beginning to lay an economic basis for women to obtain independence from men.

The participation of women in socialized productive labor has also enabled them to participate in collective social and political action outside of the home. This development in all capitalist countries has led to large numbers of women uniting in struggles against class exploitation and women's oppression.

In the U.S., for example, ever since women were drawn into industry, they have valiantly fought for the right to vote, for decent wages and

working conditions, for the right to unionize, the right to affordable childcare facilities, and for other basic demands for full equality.

These struggles reflect the great potential of women, particularly of working women and oppressed nationality women who have begun to recognize the deep connection between their oppression as women and the existence of capitalist class exploitation and national oppression.

But at the same time that capitalism creates the seeds for women's liberation, it also further relegates women to the bottom of society. While drawing many women into industry, the harsh conditions of work and the household chores under capitalism also burden women more than ever. The increasing numbers of working women are still expected to care for the children and home without assistance. Women are still treated and viewed unequally under capitalism. While their exploited labor power enriches the capitalists, the working class and masses of women become more and more impoverished.

### **Socialism is the only solution to the oppression of women**

Women cannot hope to be emancipated so long as the old property relations exist which keep the monopoly capitalists in power. The socialist countries like China and Albania are living proof that society must first be transformed into the hands of the working class before a qualitative change can take place in the status of women. Only with the elimination of exploiting classes and by bringing women into an equal role in politics and production can women achieve genuine equality.

In socialist countries, the working class, in alliance with the other laboring people, rules society and suppresses the capitalist exploiting elements of the old society. The dictatorship of the proletariat frees women to gain equality step by step.

Under socialism, as a major step toward eventually eliminating all vestiges of women's oppression and class exploitation, women are brought into all fields of production and all levels of political life in a systematic way.



Women in socialist countries hold up half the sky and play an active role in continuing the revolution as the only path to achieving full equality and liberation. Special attention is paid to the recruitment and development of women to the Communist Party, and care of the children is taken up collectively in society so that women are freed to participate in politics and production.

Only when classes are finally eliminated will the struggle for women's equality be completed. But this stage of human society can only be reached through socialist revolution and socialist transformation of society.

### **The working class must struggle against women's oppression**

The struggle against women's oppression is a mass question which concerns the whole working class. Women are unequal, and feel their oppression deeply, in the home, at work, and everywhere they turn in capitalist society. A great majority of women can and will be won to join the ranks of revolutionary forces as their special demands against women's oppression are linked to the necessity to overthrow capitalism and build a socialist society. A majority of workers can likewise be won to support the struggle against the oppression of women.

Only the monopoly capitalists actually benefit and profit from women's oppression. It is in the interests of all workers to take up concrete struggles against women's oppression as one of the foundations of monopoly capitalist society which in turn helps to keep the working class as a whole in chains.

Struggles of women in the workplace for equal wages and treatment, for unions and for equality in hiring practices must be supported. Women must be organized into workers' unions alongside the men they work with, and workers must not allow the lower wages paid to women to be used by the capitalists to depress the wages of all workers.

Workers must fight for the well-being of women. Demands for special protection of women workers such as weight regulations for



Women workers in China organize spare-time study groups.

pregnant women and for paid maternity leaves must be upheld in recognition of the capitalists' squeezing of labor out of women without a thought for their health and safety.

Women's demands for adequate childcare must be upheld as part of the struggle against holding women solely responsible for the upbringing of future generations and against keeping women bound to the home. Women must have the right to participate equally and fully in political and social activities outside the home, and in revolutionary struggle.

Struggles against the triple oppression of Third World women must be supported not only as part of the struggle against women's oppression and class exploitation, but also against monopoly capitalist oppression of nationalities. Large numbers of Latina, Chinese and Black women are concentrated in U.S. garment factories, yet denied the right to unionize. Their struggles to unionize these factories is simultaneously a struggle against national oppression and women's oppression.

These different forms of struggle against the unequal status and abuse of women bring the



Women participated in every aspect of Mozambican liberation struggle.

masses into direct conflict with the capitalist system and the monopoly capitalist class. Firm class unity must be forged in the struggle for socialist revolution, which is the only path to fighting all oppression of women. Fighting for the demands of women is a component part of the socialist revolution and will draw increasing numbers of women into the revolutionary movement as active participants.

#### **Women must overcome obstacles to participate in revolution**

Women must take part in their own liberation. They must take part in socialist revolution. As Lenin, leader of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 noted, "There can be no socialist revolution unless very many working women take a big part in it. . . There can be no real mass movement without women."

But in order for women to take full part in the revolutionary movement there must be serious struggle against women's oppression and male chauvinist ideas, wherever they exist.

For example, working women have to struggle against the age-old image and role perpetuated by

the capitalists that the primary function of women is in the home raising children, and that the realm of social and political issues belongs exclusively to men. These ideas are generated anew each day by capitalism, and exist among the masses of people.

At work, women must take up the struggle to play an equal role in economic and political battles against the capitalist class. In order for women to participate fully, they must struggle against the labor aristocracy and labor bureaucrats who do everything in their power to promote male chauvinist ideas and male supremacist practices on the job and to keep women out of struggle. Women must participate fully in the struggle against these agents of the capitalist class inside the workers' movement, for they are the enemies of the masses of women.

At home, women must struggle against male chauvinist ideas and practices of their husbands, fathers, brothers, and male friends which hold women back from struggle and divide men from women. In this way, struggle can result in concretely arranging for shared household and family responsibilities, so that both men and

women can engage in political activity outside the home.

It is important for women to make a clear distinction between friends and enemies of the cause of women's liberation. In fighting for their emancipation, women must unite with the majority of men against the monopoly capitalist class and its agents and build the unity of all working men and women in support of their special demands.

### **Expose deviations on the woman question**

As in all revolutionary mass movements, there are numerous incorrect ideas and practices within the women's movement itself which are obstacles to the struggle for the genuine emancipation of women. The masses of women and workers must expose and defeat these deviations in the women's movement in order to be victorious.

One such incorrect view is the bourgeois feminism. Bourgeois feminism, represented by groups such as the National Organization of Women (NOW), pursue the goal of "equality of the sexes" outside of the context of class and class struggle. They view the struggle for women's liberation as the struggle of all women against all men, regardless of class. They believe that the contradictions between men and women can be resolved under capitalist class rule and that there is no need for revolution to liberate the masses of women.

One example of how the bourgeois feminists see struggling for women's equality is the San Francisco NOW chapter's "Women's State of the Union Address." This is their response to the State of the Union Address delivered by the President of the U.S. each year. NOW promotes the incorrect idea that the main problem with the U.S. is that a man is president, and not that the U.S. is an imperialist country. NOW never says that the inequalities of women are rooted in monopoly capitalism. They say it depends on which sex is in power rather than which class.

This feminist perspective appeals especially to women from bourgeois and petty bourgeois backgrounds, who rely on capitalist legislation and piecemeal reforms within the system to

resolve the problems of women.

The bourgeois feminists liquidate the role that working women must play in leading the movement for women's liberation in a revolutionary way. Bourgeois feminists see working women as too "uneducated" and "backward" to lead women's campaigns against their oppression. Instead they rely on themselves, the "educated" women, and the politicians.

Although bourgeois feminists are sometimes quite active in struggles for free daycare, affirmative action hiring and so on, they actually help perpetuate women's oppression by directing women's struggles and anger away from the capitalist system and away from socialist revolution. Bourgeois feminism is in direct conflict with the goals of the working class and the working women's movement. It represents the influence of bourgeois reformist ideas within the women's movement. It is no accident that groups like NOW are so widely recognized and promoted by the bourgeoisie itself as representing "women's liberation."

Another incorrect view within the women's movement is the revisionist view promoted by the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA), which in reality is not for women's liberation. The CPUSA is especially dangerous because it masks its fundamentally bourgeois standpoint with Marxist sounding words.

The CPUSA's own statements reveal its revisionist and counter-revolutionary stand on the woman question. For example, in published documents from its 21st National Convention in 1975, the CPUSA promotes the idea that struggling for more jobs under capitalism is a solution to the problems of the masses of women, without even once mentioning revolution as a necessity to liberate women.

As if this were not bad enough, the CPUSA also preaches insidious bourgeois stereotypes of women as being passive by nature and fearful of struggle. By doing their utmost to promote this degrading image of women, the CPUSA tries to reinforce their lie that women are the major force supporting "detente" between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the name of "recognizing women's desire for peace," the CPUSA uses the women's movement as a platform for their phony "detente" line, which promotes conciliation with the warmongering Soviet social-imperialists and their superpower rivals, the U.S. imperialists. Both imperialist superpowers are the enemy of the masses of women. By advocating such a view, the CPUSA proves that it, too, is an enemy of the movement for women's liberation and socialist revolution in the U.S. The CPUSA is nothing but a mouthpiece for the Soviet Union, which has restored capitalism and women's oppression.

One more incorrect line on the woman question which hides behind Marxist sounding words is that by Workers Viewpoint Organization (WVO) and other groups. They claim that the solution to the inequality of women is simply to get more women out of the home and into production.

The fact that capitalism draws so many women into the workforce does not in itself liberate them. In the U.S., there has been a 100% increase in the number of women who work over the past 25 years, yet women are still obviously oppressed.

WVO denies the objective fact that so long as the monopoly capitalists control production and society, women will be oppressed. The elimination of women's oppression is a question of revolution and cannot be reduced to simply fighting for more jobs for women under the existing system.

When it comes to fighting for the special demands of women, WVO is on the other side. They attack all immediate struggles for women's rights such as the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment as "sham reforms" which they say the ruling class would automatically grant just to pit women workers against men and divide and weaken the working class.

This line, though seemingly "left" is dangerous and destructive. WVO's line creates a false distinction between "sham" and "real" reforms, without recognizing that all reforms are granted by the capitalists to try to divert the struggles of the working class along the path of reformism.

Whether a reform benefits the working class and working women is not dependent on the intentions of the capitalists, but on whether it objectively advances the revolutionary interests of the working class.

Using "left" sounding words, WVO is in effect saying that women have no right to raise special demands against their oppression as women, and that the working class should not support them because they are "devisive" and "weaken" the "working class struggle." WVO liquidates the need for the working class to fight for any demands that actually move the women's struggle forward.

The views of the bourgeois feminists, the CPUSA revisionists, and the opportunist Workers Viewpoint Organization are some of the most serious incorrect views that objectively harm the women's movement. Each of these incorrect views holds back the full participation of working women in the struggle for socialist revolution. They represent obstacles within the women's movement which the masses of women and workers must struggle against and overcome in order to advance.

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On the occasion of International Working Women's Day and in solidarity with revolutionary women around the world, we must renew our commitment to the struggle of women for liberation as an integral part of fighting for socialist revolution. We must arm the masses with a correct understanding of the source and solution to women's oppression, and actively recruit more women into the ranks of revolutionaries.

**WORKING WOMEN UNITE TO FIGHT CLASS  
EXPLOITATION AND WOMEN'S  
INEQUALITY!**

**BUILD THE UNITY AND SOLIDARITY OF  
REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN AROUND THE  
WORLD!**

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## Lack of Childcare in the U.S.

# Mothers Go To Work Exhausted

A big problem for any working mother in the U.S. is finding decent affordable childcare while she is away at work. The burden of finding childcare arrangements in the U.S. and in all capitalist countries is the individual responsibility of the mother.

Finding childcare is not easy either. A mother who cannot find a good babysitter or childcare that she can afford cannot go to work and cannot participate actively in the social and political life of society.

In the U.S. today, subsidized public childcare centers are extremely scarce. Of the few that do exist, the federal income guidelines make it all but impossible for anyone but a single mother to enroll her children.

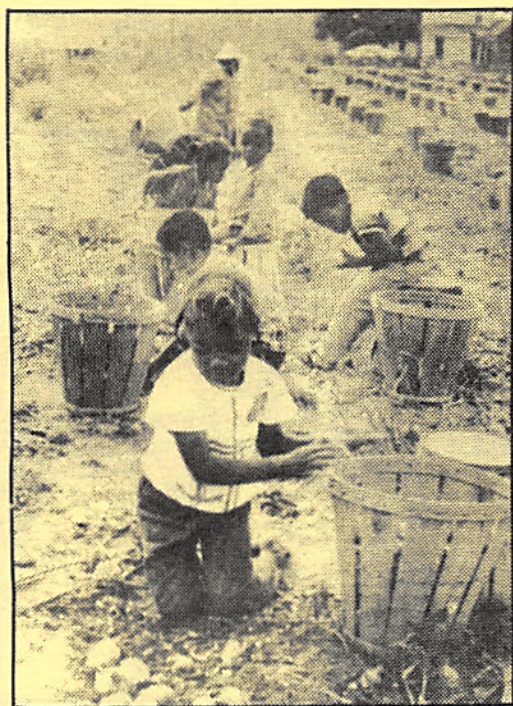
Because of the glaring lack of facilities, many mothers sign long waiting lists as soon as they become pregnant, hoping that by the time the child is of age, a space will be available. Unfortunately, by the time the space is open, the child is usually too old.



Working women all across the U.S. have taken up the struggle for childcare.

The facilities that already exist, are poorly staffed and inadequate. This is especially true in oppressed nationality communities. Many centers often have one or two women caring for 20-30 children. During lunch hour, only one woman is available to care for the children. The amount of money allocated by the government for each child is not enough to provide them with wholesome snacks or basic play supplies like crayons and construction paper. The staff workers often buy their own supplies out of their own pockets.

This lack of decent, low-cost childcare puts an extreme burden on working mothers. For example, a large percentage of working mothers have night shifts doing clerical sorting in big banks or the Post Office. When these mothers return home in the morning, they are expected to cook breakfast for their husbands and take care of the children.



Mothers are forced to bring young children into the fields.

Because the cost of childcare is too high, many of these women keep their pre-school children home all day. They only get to sleep when their children are napping and go to work the same evening without adequate rest. One woman in such a predicament explained, "We can't afford a private sitter and my mother is too old to care for the baby everyday. I go to work exhausted with only a few hours of sleep. Our family is rarely together and I seldom have time to do anything else."

The scarcity of childcare facilities also forces a great number of oppressed nationality women to bring their children to work with them such as in the garment industry and agricultural field labor. This increases the already extreme pressure on the women on the job and exposes the children to dangerous working conditions and machinery.

The raising and care of children is an important and vital part of the functioning of the whole society and should be the concern of the society as a whole. Nonetheless, in capitalist countries like the U.S. which are based on private property and individual profits for the monopoly capitalists, each individual woman is responsible for the raising of her own children.

The demand for more affordable and quality childcare is thus part of the overall struggle to fundamentally change this society and to uplift the status of women.

Although fighting for more childcare will not in itself solve the contradiction between the private nature of women's role in the home and the need for women to participate actively in economic, social, and political life, it is one concrete step in addressing that contradiction in a sharp way.

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# Free Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd!

For bravely resisting a rape attack by an armed white man, two Black women – Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd – have been convicted of murder and robbery charges in Georgia. The two women's struggle for the right of Black women to defend themselves against sexual assaults has brought to light the harsh oppression of Black women in the oppressed Black nation in the South. A movement to win their freedom is gaining widespread mass support.

What happened to Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd?

In 1975, the two women were hitchhiking through rural Georgia to visit Todd's brother in prison. They were picked up by a white man, Ronnie Horne, who attempted to rape them. The two women bravely struggled against this attack, and Horne was killed in the struggle by his own gun.

The capitalists, infuriated that Black women would resist their oppression, attempted to railroad the two women on charges of first degree murder.

A fair trial for Black people is impossible under the rule of monopoly capitalism. Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd's case was no exception.

They were tried in Hawkinsville, Georgia, a small rural town like many in the South. The judge was descendent of the slaveowner class. In a previous case, he freed two white policemen who had castrated and murdered a Black man.

The court ruled that the prospective jurors could not be dismissed if they admitted that they would automatically believe the word of a white person over a Black. At the same time, the prosecution was allowed to dismiss all young Blacks from the jury pool.

As the trial began, the Black community around Hawkinsville mobilized support for the two women and demanded their freedom. The Black masses of Hawkinsville are mainly sharecroppers who toil on peanut and cotton plantations. Many work for 16 hours a day and \$10 a week. They saw that Woods and Todd's act of self-defense was a direct challenge to the criminal system of national oppression and the special oppression of Black women. They saw the struggle to free them as part of their overall struggle for liberation from national oppression.

The local landowners, police and white supremacists tried to terrorize and intimidate the masses of supporters. For example, two Black workers were fired and Black high school students were threatened with arrest and expulsion for participating in a demonstration at the courthouse. Yet, mass support continued to grow, and the judge was forced to drop his ban on all public demonstrations at the courthouse.

This militant mass support prevented the Georgia court from sentencing them to death. The jury – as biased as it was – announced a deadlock, but the judge flatly ordered them to reach a verdict. Thus, Dessie Woods and Cheryl

Todd received so-called compromise verdicts.

Today, Dessie Woods is serving a 12 year prison sentence for manslaughter and armed robbery, and Cheryl Todd is out on bond pending appeal of her 5 year sentence for theft.

Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd's experience is not just an isolated incident. Brutal sexual abuse of Black women has been an integral part of the national oppression of Blacks in the U.S. Since slavery, rape and other assaults on Black women by white men have been systematically promoted by the slaveowners and capitalists..

As in the Woods and Todd case, when Black women have risen to defend themselves against such attacks, they are treated as the criminals. Men like Ronnie Horne, who had a well-known history of assaults on Black women, are not punished at all. The experience of Black people in the South shows that while many Black men

have been falsely accused and punished for raping white women, white men can freely rape Black women.

Throughout the South and the whole country, a mass movement in support of Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd is growing. The aim is to win their freedom and dismissal of all charges against them. Mass support has already prevented their deaths in the electric chair, and will certainly be the only way they will be freed.

In waging the struggle to free Dessie Woods and Cheryl Todd, we should learn from the dauntless spirit of Dessie Woods. Since her imprisonment, she has been stripped and thrown into isolation cells, forcibly drugged and often beaten. She remains determined to struggle, however, and she told visitors recently, "Tell the people that victory is sure and Dessie Woods is strong! strong! strong!"

Vol. VIII, No. 9, September 1977



Black women in the South are superexploited and oppressed.



## Life Story of Chinese Immigrant Woman

# Chinese Women, Stand Up!

*This article was based on an interview with a Chinese immigrant working woman. She came to the U.S. from China, and has lived and worked in the San Francisco Chinese community for many years. (Translated from Chinese)*

### Her Life in Old China

I was born in China, and I come from Hsin Hui district in Kwantung Province. That was many years ago. My people lived off the land, and orange peel was our main product. Our district was very poor . . . In China to bear only girls was very unfortunate. Girls could not receive an education and could not express their minds. Women were viewed as inferior to men because they could not perform the duties of ancestor worship.

A woman's main responsibilities were to the husband and to bear boy babies. Wives and daughters were bought and sold at will. Many of my friends who suffered ran away to Hong Kong but were captured and returned branded to the village. Thousands of girl babies were murdered in the rivers and the number of suicides among wives and daughters would make your heart grieve.

Mother did not care about these traditions. She loved us very much and set out to care for us as well as she was able. She taught us responsibility, self-reliance, common sense and independence. How else could we ever be able to survive in impoverished China?

Mother paid particular attention to giving us personal freedom, explaining to us that, "My daughters, while you are young and unmarried, you should be able to do as you want and go where you like, for when you get married you

will never taste personal freedom again. You will be chained to your husband, your responsibilities and your in-laws."

There is an old saying, "The thread controls the needle, a husband controls his wife," and "When a woman is angry, her husband beats her. When he is angry, he also beats her." And if the son did not beat the wife, the father and mother-in-law could, forcing the daughter-in-law to work the fields like the cattle and oxen.

. . . You know, in Chinatown so many older women cannot read or write their names. While I was in Toisan, husbands and wives were separated for years at a time, with letters as the only tie to each other.

My relatives told me that families were often cheated out of a lot of money because the wives could not read. They had to rely on translators to read their letters from the U.S. or wherever. Many of these "translators" stole their money and withheld vital information if packages of goods were being sent to the family.

### Comments of Life for Women in New China

Today the lives of women in China have improved. Husbands and in-laws are not beating their wives. Women can develop their minds. Feelings about child-bearing and marriage are all different now. It's because of the Communists in China.



San Francisco Chinese garment workers struck at Jung Sai in 1974 against Chinatown sweatshop conditions.

I know. When the Japanese invaded China, it was the Kuomintang (KMT) who pushed our faces into the mud and trampled over our hungry bodies. But the Communists, they truly loved the Chinese people. I saw them, they changed everything. When people ask me, I say, "Yes, I like the Communists! Look at what they have done for the Chinese people! I, as a woman who grew up in feudal China, I know the changes that have been made!"

#### Coming to the U.S.

I married an overseas Chinese who was a soldier in the U.S. Army. When we got married, it was after the Japanese war and the men came home to the village to marry.

Young girls ages 13 and 14 were betrothed because there weren't many older women available. Why? During the war thousands of girls starved to death or were abandoned and left to die. These girls would have been of marrying age if they had lived. Ah, the war took its toll in many ways.

I came to the U.S. by boat. My husband was discharged from the Army and left New York to join me in San Francisco so I could be near my sister.

Finding a job here was hard on him because Chinese could not join the labor unions and he didn't know anybody in San Francisco. I went to look for a job.

I heard of a job opening at -----Brothers garment factory. This sewing factory was previously owned by white people, but because they hired white workers, the salaries paid out were too high for them to receive enough profits.

They sold the factory to a Chinese owner who hired all Chinese workers. They advertised in the newspapers and on Chinese radio.

They said they paid by the hour, but that was a lie. The factory set a piece rate quota of say 8 pieces per hour, so if we stayed in the shop 8 hours and sewed 40 pieces, the boss marked 4 hours on our time cards!

When we disagreed, he would just say, "Oh, O.K. Go home! You're fired!"

Those who were able to meet the quotas were paid by the hour, and those who sewed too slowly were paid by the piece.

#### Later Experiences in the U.S.

Later I got hired at a cannery on Sansome and Sacramento Street. The assembly line was all third world women. We sorted olives, garlic and peppers. The job seems simple enough, but after constant standing for 8 hours with no rest, our legs were aching.

... This cannery hired Latino, Pilipino and Chinese workers. One of the methods the company used to control the line was to separate the women according to nationality. He favored one nationality over the other, keeping them at permanent posts with stable daytime hours, while shifting the other nationalities around to different posts with intolerable schedules.

This really angered me because the Chinese were always working under unstable conditions. Sometimes our pay checks made me cry, they were so small. This cut deeply into me, and it took me a long time to understand what happened to the Chinese at the cannery, and not to vent my hatred at the other nationalities.

I returned to the garment industry and worked at Jung Sai. The boss who was white hired a Chinese-speaking floor lady who could monitor

all our activities and oppress us.

She wouldn't allow us to have coffee breaks and rest from the strain of sewing. She allowed only one roll of toilet paper per 100 women on the floor per day. She tried to break us into submission by oppressing us in these ways.

... I say the boss, in his eagerness to make a lot of money, paid for it greatly by hiring this floor lady. When the women and men of Jung Sai rose up against the floor lady and the boss, all of Chinatown witnessed the strength of the workers and gained valuable experience.

#### Thoughts on International Working Women's Day

Today, I try to be active. I'm an old-timer, you know, since the late '40's. Look, there is so much to do for the Chinese community.

... Chinese women, stand up and break with those old feudal ideas that keep us from being active and effective! If we want our home life, our families, our working conditions, our community to improve, we have to come forth, stand up, speak out, unite collectively with other women and men. When we go home, dare to explain to our husbands, family, relatives and friends what we feel, and be active.

This is all I have to say for International Working Women's Day.

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