

But already there are a number of cases where clinic owners have shut down their clinics at the first sign of pressure from the "pro-life" forces or even threatened to arrest both sides. RCP does not explain to the activists what they should really expect from the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois sections of the medical community.

The efforts of the RCP to curry favor with the liberals is not just some minor flaw. It undermines the whole orientation of the movement. It obscures who the movement should target and the tasks necessary to strengthen the struggle. No amount of militant phrases can cover up this political cowardice. ■

Will PL support choice?

The right-wing attack on abortion rights has aroused the anger of progressive people across the country. Naturally, one would expect that groups that consider themselves progressive would support the movement to defend the right to choose an abortion—right?

Well, not every left organization. The Progressive Labor Party, the self-described "egalitarian communists," is still missing in action. They have had virtually no coverage of the movement in their newspaper, *Challenge*, no organized presence in the movement, and no explanation of their position on the question. Their self-imposed exile from the movement has even bothered some of their own followers who began to write letters to *Challenge* questioning PL's boycott. Today, while the movement forges ahead, PL is still mired in a debate amongst themselves over whether to support the pro-choice struggle.

PL Condemns the Mass Movement

What's behind PL's abstentionism is revealed in a *Challenge* article of Dec. 6, 1989 entitled "Pro-life or choice?: Where should the party stand on abortion?" This article was "offered as a kick off point for the formulation of the Party's line on abortion." Despite the headline, which makes it appear that PL isn't even sure whether they support abortion rights, so far all the articles *Challenge* has published seem to recognize them. But PL isn't sure they should have anything to do with the struggle to defend these rights. The article shows that PL's sectarian stand toward the struggle is based on the idea that the movement should be condemned because the bourgeois liberals are influential in it.

The article states: "The absence of a Party stance on the abortion question is harmful because it leaves a choice between the pro-choice movement, which is broadbased only among the middle class in the U.S. and does not address the problems of the working class, especially minorities, or the pro-life (anti-abortion) movement which has the potential of turning into a mass fascist movement." (*Challenge*, Dec. 6, 1989, p.9)

This statement demonstrates that PL equates the abortion rights movement with the bourgeois stand of the liberals such as the NOW leaders.

Now it is true that the liberals only pay lip service to the demands of working class and poor women. And true again that the liberals oppose a militant fight against the anti-abortion forces.

But PL is unable to see any further than the bourgeois misleaders. Thus they falsely contend that the "pro-choice movement...does not address the problems of the working class." They ignore the fact that the working class and poor women will pay the heaviest price if abortion rights are curtailed. Moreover, the anti-abortion crusade is part of the whole capitalist offensive of war, racism and profit-grabbing.

The workers support abortion rights not because some liberal bigshot told them to, but because they know banning abortion will simply add to the cruelties capitalism heaps upon them. The PL article itself concedes "the soundness of the premise that a woman in a modern capitalist society is entitled to an abortion on demand." But then, pray tell, what is wrong with a struggle to obtain this entitlement?

Running From Politics

PL's stand reflects their inability to deal with politics, which involves the stand of all classes on how society is to be run. PL is bankrupt in face of the fact that different class forces participate in the pro-choice movement. Evidently, they feel that cursing the whole movement because of "middle class" participation is sufficient.

But different classes in society inevitably express their stand on all important issues. One would think that so-called Marxists like PL would understand this ABC of political life. After all, the women's movement is not the only one with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois influences in it. The anti-racist struggle has its NAACP's and SCLC's. Bourgeois influence is carried into the workers' economic struggle by the sellout trade union bureaucrats. And the powerful movement against the Vietnam war had to contend with many liberals who sought to keep the masses from breaking with imperialism.

Following PL's logic, all political struggles would have to be dismissed as worthless while the activists sit on their hands waiting for the immaculate "pure" workers' struggle to magically appear. Of course PL isn't completely consistent, and they haven't abandoned agitation on all political

issues. But PL's inability to deal with political trends in the mass movement explains why, even when PL does decide to grace the mass movement with their presence, they are notorious for their sectarianism. For one thing, they usually boycott the general movement even on the issues they are concerned with, and typically restrict their participation to those actions which they themselves have organized or dominate.

The fact that various classes appear in a movement should not mean running away in horror. The revolutionary proletariat must take its own class stand into the movement. It should use the presence of different classes in the movement to gain experience in fighting the hostile stands of the bourgeois leaders and strata.

As well, the workers must take into account, that capitalist oppression adversely affects various non-proletarian strata and pushes them into struggle. PL implies that there is something awful about this. But class-conscious workers need experience in rallying other oppressed and exploited elements around themselves. It is necessary to gain experience in judging the stands of other sections of the masses, to learn which sections are serious and how far they will go, and to gain a picture of their vacillations in the face of the bourgeoisie. This is vital political experience, and it provides the workers an opportunity to influence whatever other elements are honest and alive in this country.

PL Undermines the Workers' Political Experience

PL cloaks their sectarianism behind the rhetoric of defending the interests of the workers. But building a revolutionary workers movement requires that in addition to fighting for their particular economic demands, the workers must learn where they stand in relation to all other classes in society. They must learn how to lead all the oppressed sections of the population to victory over the capitalists. PL's attitude actually hinders the necessary political training of the workers. It betrays a very narrow notion of the workers' movement.

This political experience is never more important than in a revolution, itself. When a revolutionary crisis matures, will the liberals and reformists and bourgeois elements magically disappear? On the contrary, all the classes will

express their political stands even more insistently. If PL can't deal with such a relatively straightforward issue as combating the bourgeois liberals while working within the pro-choice movement, then how will they deal with the far more complex questions posed during a revolution?

It seems that PL doesn't know how to fight opportunism. Sectarian screams against the movement, no matter how blood-curdling, have nothing to do with undermining bourgeois influence and fighting opportunism. It is necessary to be able to counterpose the politics of the working class on women's rights to that of the bourgeoisie.

In this light, PL's complaints that the workers are not sufficiently present in the pro-choice movement ring quite hollow. They complain that the workers' don't dominate this political conflict, instead of helping to rally them into political activity. The MLP too wishes the weight of the workers in the pro-choice movement was stronger. But we don't believe the issue is solved by stomping one's feet up and down until the other strata go home. Instead we advocate agitation among the workers to bring them into the battle, and we encourage the movement activists to orient themselves toward the workers and poor.

It should be noted that PL's statements like the pro-choice movement "is broadbased only among the middle class" creates a false impression. Numbers of workers and poor participate in the movement. And there is wide interest in defending abortion rights among the workers who are not yet active in this struggle. PL's description of the movement merely serves as another excuse for their own inaction.

PL Plays into the Hands of the bourgeois liberals

PL presents their policy as the fiercest opposition to the liberals such as NOW. But in fact their sectarian stand toward the movement plays right into the liberals' hands. If it were adopted by class-conscious workers and revolutionary activists, it would help the Democratic Party appear before the masses as the champion of women, and provide the bourgeois women's leaders a free-hand to push their rotten views against any militancy. It means doing nothing to utilize the mass interest in this struggle to organize an independent political movement of the working class separate from and against the bourgeois politicians. ■