

A Program to Guide Us

The Struggle Against Sexism

Communists must fight sexism wherever and whenever it appears, both as a practice and as an ideology. We understand that it must be attacked primarily at its roots — discrimination by the capitalist class. Capitalism has a direct interest in maintaining this discrimination for three reasons: 1) the “free” maintenance and reproduction of labor power (housework); 2) superprofits from super-exploitation of women workers; and 3) a class divided because of sexist ideology — a division which helps prevent the working class from developing the kind of unity necessary to win its emancipation.

While the capitalist class directly benefits from sexism, it is the working class which pays for this discrimination. The reserve army of female labor means lower wages for everyone and the constant threat of unemployment. Furthermore, the divisions within the class lead to fewer women being unionized, undercutting the strength of all unions.

Because sexism, like racism, is one of the mainstays of the capitalist system, we focus our struggle for the emancipation of women on the capitalist class. The struggle against sexism is a classwide concern and must be approached on the basis of class struggle.

Finally, we understand that the basis for the liberation of women lies in the degree to which they are brought into the process of social production. The isolation of women in the home can only have a retrogressive effect on their consciousness. We therefore focus our energy on facilitating the trend of women to enter the labor market, and we focus our organizing on these women. We also recognize the need to end the particular discrimination suffered by women on the basis of age, and marital status.

We must be very clear that the struggle for democratic rights for women cannot be separated from the struggle to end racial oppression suffered by national minority women and men. In particular, Black women face the triple oppression of class, sex and race. While they represent the largest and most active sector of the female labor force, they hold the lowest paying and least desirable jobs. Only by consciously attacking racial discrimination will the struggle for the emancipation of women be moved forward.

Further, while we must constantly maintain our focus on the primary contradiction between the struggle for the emancipation of women and the needs of the capitalist class to maintain their oppression, we cannot ignore the secondary contradiction of sexist ideology within the working class.

We are confident that truly progressive reforms can be won by a class determined to fight for the democratic rights of women. The cost of these reforms must be borne by the corporate ruling class, not by more taxation on working people.

We are clear, however, that fully socialized production and full equality can only be won with socialism. Ultimately, the liberation of women is integrally bound up with the struggle for socialism. It is imperative that the leading elements in the fight for the democratic rights of women consciously link their movement with the overall revolutionary struggle of the working class for socialism.



Women in North Carolina prepare tobacco for hanging.

Credit: Chip Berlet/LNS

1. END DISCRIMINATION ON THE JOB. Women, especially oppressed nationality women, are channeled into the most menial, unskilled, marginal and low-paying jobs. In all spheres of industry and service, sex discrimination must be ended. We need:

- An end to all forms of direct and indirect job-related discrimination.
- Affirmative action programs to promote equal employment for women and national minorities in both the public and private sectors, with a special focus on national minority women.
- Union-run, federally funded vocational training and job placement centers focusing on the needs of women and national minority workers, especially in providing training for areas previously closed to them.
- Extension of workers' benefits to all workers — including household workers, migrant workers, part-time workers.

2. GUARANTEE OF JOBS OR INCOME. Because of systematic sex discrimination women are paid so low, or have so little access to better jobs, that they cannot support themselves and their families. We need:

- Jobs for all who are willing to work, coupled with a massive training program at full pay, union scale. Unemployment compensation available to women and youth entering the job market.
- Guaranteed minimum annual income with protection for the individual rights and dignity for the recipients. Oppose all forms of “workfare” which force poor women to slave and scab for an income.

3. FULL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AS MOTHERS. Because women are childbearers they are denied the right to maintain seniority, return to work and develop stable working situations because of the discrimination they face. We need:

- Pregnancy/maternity leave guaranteed for as long as medically recommended — at full pay with no loss of seniority. Childbirth or adoption leave available to either parent for up to six months full pay with no loss of seniority. One month paternity leave available at full pay.
- Federally funded quality childcare available from the age of six weeks on a 24-hour basis for all guardians regardless of ability to pay. Development of workplace based nurseries to facilitate contact between infants and parents, especially nursing mothers.



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4. QUALITY HEALTH CARE. Soaring health care costs and sexism in the medical system have a special oppressive effect on women. We need:

- Federally funded health insurance and services, available to all regardless of ability to pay.
- Legal right of all women to control their own reproductive systems:
 - Free, safe and widely available contraception.
 - Free safe abortion on demand.
 - Protection from forced sterilization; an end to the systematic attack on national minority people.
- Federally funded research into drug and medical procedures which have particular significance for women. Special focus on occupational health and safety hazards which endanger the reproductive capacity of all workers. Elimination of health hazards on the job.

5. FAMILY LAW. The marriage law maintains the oppression of women within the family. We need:

- Low cost, no-fault divorce available to either party, guaranteeing the rights of women and children to support as necessary.
- Equitable consideration of both parents' rights and responsibilities in care and custody of children.

6. END PHYSICAL ABUSE. Because of the history of women as chattel and as sex objects, they are victims of abuse both in their families and in the broader society. We need:

- Absolute protection for women against physical and sexual abuse. This includes reform of rape laws; protection against rape by fathers and husbands; shelters available to battered women and children regardless of ability to pay.

7. EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN ALL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY. Women must gain equality in every sphere of this society. The problems are particularly acute for national minority women and there is a historic link between the struggle for the democratic rights of women and the struggle for the democratic rights of national minorities. The struggle against sexism must proceed hand in hand with the struggle against racism. We need:

- End discrimination before the law; end sex bias in all state and federal legislation; pass the ERA; extend protective legislation.
- End discrimination in housing, insurance, credit requirements.
- End discrimination in the criminal justice system.
- Equal access to all educational, vocational, athletic programs and facilities. An end to sexist curriculum in all such programs and facilities.



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Demonstration in NYC, Int'l Women's Day 1977.